

Running Head: UNDERSTANDING OF LITERACY

Stories of an Evolving Understanding of Literacy by a Teacher, Mother, and Researcher

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**Abstract**

A teacher's understandings of literacy have an impact on the pedagogical decisions that the teacher makes. Such understandings of literacy may evolve through professional learning, experiences, and reflective practice, but this evolution is seldom documented and therefore not often considered as a systematic means for improving practice. Similarly, educators are rarely able to document the longitudinal literacy life of one learner. This autoethnographic study explores and documents how the researcher's understandings of literacy have changed over time. The researcher is the primary participant in the study, but her daughter's literacy learning (from early childhood into adolescence) informs the three eras of the researcher's teaching life. These three eras are named: teacher, teacher-mother, and teacher-mother-researcher. In each era the researcher interprets her daughter's literacy learning through the theoretical lens of literacy as social practice. The study draws upon documents, interviews, and artefacts from both the researcher's life and from her daughter's literacy life in order to construct stories that express the lived experience of an educator in the act of examining her own literacy theory-practice evolutionary process. Findings from this study can inform educators of the need to challenge their understandings of literacy theories in relation to their past and current literacy practices, enabling them to effectively construct their future practices.

*Keywords: literacy as social practice, pedagogical decisions, longitudinal, autoethnographic, parent researcher, teacher.*

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**Stories of an Evolving Understanding of Literacy by a Teacher, Mother and Researcher****Chapter 1: Introduction***Waiting until the credits finish rolling*

*It is customary for my family to stay in our seats in the movie theatre until the playing of the movie credits is complete. We watch the credits roll by, discuss the movie, linger, and talk over the information provided by the scrolling credits. We are always the last to leave the movie theatre and are constantly surprised that others do not do the same.*

This is an observable family event and as an observable event its component parts (the participants, setting, activity and written artefacts) (Hamilton, 2000) remain the same overtime, and have over the many years since we began attending movies with our daughter at the theatre and watching full length movies at home. What has changed for me, regarding this family event, is the way that I understand it and am able to talk about it as a literacy event. When my main identity was as a teacher, I would have seen this family event through a skills and language based lens. When the child is *watching the credits roll by* she was learning to read the written text and when the three participants *talk over the information provided by the scrolling credits* the child was strengthening her oral skills by engaging in conversation with the adults. My teacher self would say that all three participants used these skills to enhance their relationships with one another. From within my identity as a mother and teacher and as a participant in the scenario, I can view

this scenario more deeply as I have the specific knowledge that, we are a movie loving family in which the child's father works in the local film industry, and knows that it has value for all of us, and that is why we stay. It is a family value. Looking at this scenario now, through a broader vocabulary and understanding of literacy that I acquired as a researcher I now ask, why? Why do we all stay? It does not seem sufficient to me now to think that reading skill acquisitions, or conversational and family values, are sufficient or sustaining enough reasons to explain this. There is something more going on here that sustains this simple activity over time in our family. Through my newly acquired theoretical lens as teacher-mother-researcher I now view this as a literacy event and practice that represents literacy as social practice, which includes the ideas of literacy as ideological, multimodal and involving power relationships.

The purpose of this study is to use stories, such as this one, to explore my changing understanding of literacy. I will structure this exploration of self by referencing three distinct time periods in my life as an educator which I have named: *teacher*, *teacher-mother* and *teacher-mother-researcher*. I will identify *disorientating dilemmas* (Mezirow, 1997) within each era; treating them as signposts of times in which I can explore my evolving and deepening understanding of literacy. Mezirow (1997) calls this kind of noticeable and conscious attention to tension or discomfort “disorienting dilemmas”, and states that when “individuals cognitively reflect on their own fundamental understandings (formed through their biographies of experience), they transform these basic knowledge structures or meaning perspectives to become more

inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 14).

The story “Waiting until the credits finish rolling” is an example of how I will illustrate my evolving lens and broader understanding of literacy across each era. Due to the methodology that I have chosen for this study, it is important that the reader has an understanding of my three identities as teacher, mother and researcher.

### **The Researcher**

I began this thesis with a story directly from my lived experience. I am personally and professionally invested in this topic and due to this investment; the following information is relevant as it provides the reader with an understanding of how I am positioned in relation to the study.

Readers need to keep this information in mind and remember that I am analyzing the data from a position of self-study. While I seek to provide an informed interpretation, it is possible that others may interpret the same data differently because of different perspectives and experiences.

In 1978, at the age of twenty, I began my professional career as a grade one classroom teacher. I started my career in what I remember as a very progressive, forward thinking school culture. I was surrounded by many colleagues I admired and from whom I could begin to learn my craft as a teacher. I honed my craft as a teacher for five years in this setting, and then taught for one year in a Primary 3 classroom (equivalent to Grade 2 in the Canadian system) in inner city Glasgow. Most of my class were of Pakistani,

Chinese or Indian descent, with only two other children who looked like me, Caucasian, and of Scottish heritage. My one year teaching position in Glasgow achieved my goal of getting out to see the world and I returned to the school that I had taught in when I left, returning to teach Grade 1 and 2. During this period, I was mentored by the school teacher librarian, who introduced me to Jon Stott's (1987) *Spiraled Sequence Story Curriculum: A Structuralist Approach to Teaching Fiction in the Elementary Grades*, and set my sights on getting the requisite training to become a teacher librarian. While I worked on my teacher librarian training through the post baccalaureate program, I taught in a Grade 4 classroom at a new location.

After three years teaching Grade 4 at a different school and upon the completion of my teacher librarianship training, I secured a position as teacher librarian in a large inner city school, remaining there for 10 years building my skills and practice. It was during this 10 year period, that I married and became an adoptive mother at the age of 41.

As I was now a teacher-mother and had been teaching full time since I was 20 years old, I decided to secure part-time work as a teacher librarian so as to have balance in my life. This need for balance was achieved by changing schools twice during this period. At age 50 and as a mother of a 9 year old, I decided to reconfigure my career. I pursued a Master's degree and became an instructor and faculty advisor in an education faculty in a large urban Manitoban center.

I decided to divide the expanse of my career by what I perceived to be the dominant role I played in each period. There were many other possibilities and many other identities that I could have selected as dividing markers, but I have chosen these

with the following purpose. I knew going into this project that my view of literacy had been transforming as I reflected upon my teaching through my identity as a mother, and that a similar shift was occurring again when my researcher role was added to mother and teacher. These demarcations of my career came out of my lived experience.

Guided by Mezirow (1997), each era is defined by how I as an individual reflect on my own fundamental understandings formed through my *biographies of experience*. Each era was forged around a basic knowledge structure or meaning perspective of literacy, and as my life role changed, for example as mother who had a longer direct observation of a child's literacy development, I began to see that there were transformations of these basic knowledge structures or meaning perspectives as they relate to literacy. Through the lens of researcher, with a broader view of literacy, I have become as Mezirow (1997) stated, "more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience" (p. 14). For each of the following eras I will establish my basic knowledge structures and meaning perspectives that I held in each time period.

**My era as teacher.** For purposes of this study it is important to state that during this era, I was not a parent, which means I did not have the kind of close-up knowledge of a child immersed in literacy in out of school settings. During this teacher era, the decisions I made centered around my understanding of the development of the language arts, inclusive of the strands of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. My language arts practice during this era was based upon my experiences as a student in K-12, my undergraduate and BEd training, Post Baccalaureate training, professional in-service

training, and my interpretation and implementation of the Manitoba English Language Arts Curriculum (1978-1996).

It is my memory that the term literacy was not generally in my vernacular or the vernacular of my colleagues during this era. I do not recall conversation in or out of the classroom regarding our students' literacy needs or abilities. The teacher talk of the time was around the nurturing and assessment of the child's reading, writing, listening and speaking abilities. My English language arts teaching practice was structured around the teaching of the language arts with a focus on ensuring my students developed proficiency in all four strands of the language arts curriculum. The curricular documents were clear that each strand was of equal importance in the development of children's language arts abilities and were important in the structuring of my practice. By referring to the parts of the English language arts as strands it is implied that I was to interweave each of these threads of learning. In reality, however, there was a dominant view held by me and by many members of my teaching community at the time that these strands were hierarchically weighted. Reading and writing activities and assessments were given greater time and importance, far beyond attention to the development of a child's speaking and or listening proficiencies. It would be some time before the curricular document included the strands of viewing and representing.

It was my job as a teacher to immerse the children in the rich and wonderful world of literature and print, and in so doing to advance their reading and writing abilities by using speaking and listening as a means of solidifying the required skills and attitudes needed to be proficient in reading and writing. This was, as I remember it, accomplished

within a joyful atmosphere which in my mind was child-centered and rich. It was also my job to instruct and then assess a child's English language arts proficiencies by using demonstrable and measurable evidence of reading and writing improvement against an expected level of proficiency. As a practitioner, I used tools such as miscue analysis, Dolche word tests, and the Schonell spelling test as my tools of assessment. As a consequence the teaching and assessing of a child's proficiency in speaking and listening seemed to pale against the more demonstrable and measurable applications of reading and writing.

Through my current lens, vocabulary, and understanding of literacy I can look backwards and analyze my practice as it relates to literacy. I have selected stories from this teacher era that provide me an opportunity to reflect on my fundamental understandings of literacy, which were formed through my biography of experience. I will examine the story of Kelly who, although silent in class had a rich written vocabulary, recall the story of David, the boy who was a cartoonist, and the story of Carrie who could sculpt. Each of these stories are created as composites, as there were many Davids, Kellys and Carries who challenged and taught me that I was not fully seeing or appreciating their broad literacy abilities. They taught me that my vocabulary and understanding of literacy required broadening.

**My era as teacher-mother.** During this era, 1997-2008, I am a teacher and mother. For purposes of this study it is important to state, that during this era, I was teacher and mother, but not yet researcher.



The decisions I made, during this time, regarding my language arts practice and my parenting of my daughter as they relate to her literacy learning, were based upon my accumulated knowledge and experience while in practice from 1978-1997, professional in-service training, the “new” Manitoba English Language Arts Curriculum (1996) and now the unique perspective I brought to my practice from the firsthand observation and lived experience of documenting my child’s development as a literacy learner from birth to age 13 years. All of these factors continued to guide my interpretation of my role as language arts teacher in practice and was influenced by my role as parent.

I was becoming acutely aware of how I was encouraging my daughter’s literacy development and was giving viewing and representing invigorated attention as I saw them displayed in her everyday life and development. I was becoming acutely aware of the variety of texts she was interacting with while developing all of her strands of literacy. I was aware that my knowledge of her literacy development was affecting the quality and variety of engagements with students in the classroom. For example, I recall that my daughter’s use of viewing and representing to achieve her receptive and expressive literacy needs were ubiquitous, providing me a richer understanding of these two new strands that were added to the “new” Manitoba English Language Arts Curriculum (1996). In my previous era I did not have a full appreciation of how powerful viewing and representing as English language arts strands could be to my students. Interaction and direct observation of my daughter provided this deepening of my understandings.

Through the use of the English Language Arts Curriculum (Manitoba Education, 1996), I continued to outline the parameters that would guide my pedagogical practices so as to ensure the development of children's abilities in the language arts which were and still are represented by the General Learning Outcomes that state: "Students will read, write, listen, speak, view and represent, to explore thoughts ideas and feelings, comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, literary, and media texts, manage ideas and information, enhance the clarity and artistry of communication and celebrate and build community" (p. 10).

As a mother, I was now privy to the day-to-day workings of one child's (mine) language arts development, first at home and then through formal schooling. The addition of viewing and representing to the previous four strands of the language arts had an effect on my school practice and worked upon my perceptions of my child's literacy learning at home and then into formal schooling.

The changes in both my role and to the document guiding my practice affected my interpretation and implementation of the language arts curriculum. The Manitoba English Language Arts Curriculum (1996) in its introductory pages introduces the idea of literacy, a term not found in the previous documents (1978-1996). This resulted in my teacher talk beginning to center around the idea of literacy as a concept which required a shift in my practice which centered now on ensuring that there was a "balancing of literacy learning" in the classroom inclusive of the six strands of the language arts. A balanced literacy approach recognizes that students need to use a variety of strategies to become proficient readers and writers. It encourages the development of skills in reading,

writing, speaking and listening in particular, for all students. A balanced literacy program includes: modeled reading (reading aloud), modeled writing, shared (and interactive) reading, shared (and interactive) writing, guided reading, guided writing, independent reading, and independent writing. The prospect of creating and maintaining a balance to the literacy learning of my students is meant to address the literacy learning needs of all students and this act of “balancing the literacies” was central to my practice until most recently. As a teacher-mother I began to feel some unease, in this foundational belief as an educator. As a result, my pedagogical drive to balance the language arts strands and be guided by a balanced literacy approach did not seem to fit with how I saw my daughter Lacey (pseudonym) engaged in her literacy events and practices at home. In working to create a school pedagogy that attempted to balance all of the strands of the language arts for the learners in my classroom, I was in many instances beginning to sense that I was in some way limiting the literacy learning of my students. Although conscious of this unease, I lacked a vocabulary or understanding of how to address this. It was from within my role as parent; one who had an insider’s perspective of how, when, and why a young child uses the resources at hand at home and then at school to develop her language arts and literacies that my shift in thinking began. I was bringing into my teaching role my close observations of one literacy learner at home who appeared to be driven by her desire to make meaning and that her pursuit and “mastery” of her various literacies abilities were not always “balanced”. While I was aware of a new and enlarged understanding of children’s literacy learning, and that my own child was profoundly

driven by the desire to make meaning in her life, using various language arts strands, I lacked the theoretical language in which to articulate this understanding.

During this period it was a slow and arduous process for me in my practice to act on balancing these six strands of the language arts. Part of my growing feelings of unease had to do with the reality that I still privileged reading and writing over the other strands. The new curriculum which included viewing and representing as another strand in the language arts was distinctive enough from its predecessor to account for many of the varied literacy practices that I could see my daughter, Lacey, utilizing at home. This shift in the curricular focus and my becoming a parent came at the same time, at the beginning of this era. I brought to my role as parent this new and fresh view of the language arts and my literacy pedagogy, which now included viewing, representing, listening and speaking as equal strands among the others.

I was aware as a parent that by being immersed in my daughter's day-to-day life I could see clearly how one aspect of literacy development related and interacted with another. For example, in Lacey's early years I observed how she had used drawing and writing as one of her most favoured past times, and that many of the images that she produced were repeated over and over again in various contexts. Many of Lacey's drawings included reference to the relationships that she held most dearly: specific friends, her dog and relationships with her birth family. I could see that most of her writing was accompanied by drawings and many times little "icons" were added to the text. These practices seemed very connected to one another and were sustained in all of her at-home literacies. Because of this intimate involvement, which is unique to a parent

child relationship, I could see how her literacy practices were entwined and engaged with her identity development. This awareness and attention to the power of the connections between different aspects of her literacy development and literacy forms was something new that I brought into my teaching practice, and which I had learned by observing my child at home. It is through my role as mother that the importance of identity and a deepening understanding of how power can be wielded over children's literacy choices became foregrounded. Observing my own child engaged in literacy over this period of time heightened my awareness of the power I had as teacher in regards to who decides the form, function, and source of texts used by children in the language arts program. I began to query who has the power to decide when and why a particular form of literacy is used and by whom? I began to articulate to myself more deeply the question of how to honour a learner's at-home literacy, interests, and drive for meaning-making in the classroom. The question of bridging the divide that I perceived between at-home literacy and at-school literacy was becoming a dilemma for me. Something was amiss in my thinking about this, but lacking a deeper theoretical language in which to consider this divide I continued on with my drive to balance the literacy strands used by my students through my lens of the time.

Through direct observation of my child engaged in her own literacy learning at home, I began to become more frustrated with the disconnect I was feeling in the schools. I wondered how I could make room for choice of text, and "allow" children more control over the time they spent on various literacies as choices while still maintaining my role as literacy leader in the classroom who was guided by the English language arts curriculum

expectations and my drive to balance the six literacy strands. I was wondering how I might create a space for the children in my language arts classrooms to bring more of their at-home literacies into school in an effort to foster the kind of literacy identity development I was seeing in Lacey over time.

My long held hierarchical view of the language arts strands coupled with new tensions around the children's need to make choices with respect to their use of the six language strands for their own purposes, was becoming a dilemma. I was conscious of the digital tools that Lacey used to communicate, and these were very different from the ones I spent time on as a teacher with my students (such as printing, handwriting and keyboarding).

I was conscious of my teaching of technology from my lived experience as a "digital immigrant" and not fully seeing that my students and daughter were "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001). During this time I did not know of Prensky's work, and I did not have a way of naming my dilemma but knew there was something missing in my stance on technology.

Looking back at this era through the collected data of Lacey's literacy events and practice, and through my new lens and understanding of literacy, discussed in detail in Chapter 2, I will identify these *dilemmas* which provided me with a means of advancing and challenging my understanding of literacy. I will do this by examining the artefacts collected from my child's literacy events and practices collected over thirteen years and these will be examined in the section titled teacher-mother stories.

**My era as teacher-mother-researcher.** My teacher-mother-researcher era spanned 2008-2011. During this time I began to teach Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment courses at The University of Winnipeg, became a faculty advisor to certifying teacher candidates and pursued my Masters of Education Degree which introduced me to the current research in Language and Literacy. I continued to interpret the Manitoba English Language Arts Curriculum (1996) in my practice. All of these factors continued to guide my interpretation of my role as teacher, now practiced at the university, and guide my parenting as it relates to the literacy learning of my daughter.

As part of my coursework towards my Masters of Education program I took a course entitled Research in Language and Literacy Development (Summer Session 2010), which required that I examine the most current scholarship in the field. Examination of the work of such scholars as Barton and Hamilton (2000); Cope and Kalantzis(2000); Dyson (1986, 2003, 2008); Gee (1994, 2003, 2004, 2005); Heath (1982, 1983); Kress (2000, 2003,2005) ; Lankshear and Knobel (2003); Lave & Wegner (1991); Mackey (2007); Pahl and Rowsell (2005); Street (1993, 1995) and the New London Group (1996), opened up a world of scholarship previously unknown to me. Throughout the aforementioned coursework and further reading in the field of Research in Language and Literacy I noticed that I was retrieving boxes of my daughters literacy artefacts that I had stowed away for an indeterminate reason, unexamined, and unsorted. During my coursework (2010), I was constantly pulling out these artefacts as a means of exploring and illustrating some of the ideas discussed in the scholarship. For example, at one point I considered the corpus of Lacey's collected artefacts against Lindfors (2008) distinction

between “authentic” and “inauthentic text”. Lindfors defines “authentic text” as having a “genuine communication purpose for the text by the child,” (p. 17), while “inauthentic text” has a purpose distinct from the genuine communication purposes of the child. I sorted all of my gathered literacy artefacts into two piles, using Lindfors’ distinctions. I noticed that the “authentic text” pile was significantly smaller but more interesting and dynamic than the “inauthentic text” pile. It was in the “authentic text” pile that I could see the Lacey I knew at home as her mother. I was thinking about what possible context had been provided at school for Lacey that allowed for these “authentic texts” to be produced. I knew that they had to do with Lacey being provided enough space and time to construct the meaning she desired, and because that space was being provided she was able to establish this identity in the literacy activity at school. Lacey and I embarked on the aforementioned task together and she noted that she had so much more fun talking about and looking at the smaller pile of “authentic text” than the “inauthentic text”, which was mostly comprised of practice sheets and worksheet type school tasks. The work of Clay (1998) would call the kinds of literacy activities that were found in the authentic pile “tasks with scope”. Through this preliminary look at Lacey’s artefacts I could see many instances when Lacey was able to attend to and extend her own knowledge and know-how and include aspects of her own identity formations that were taking place at home. Exploring Lacey’s various texts made at home and school seemed like an interesting opportunity to explore and broaden my understanding of literacy.

The scholarship I was introduced to in the spring of 2010 captured my attention, and I was beginning to see that I was acquiring a language that I could use to address



some of the dilemmas that had been forming in regards to my English language arts practice, while in my teaching practice and busy parenting. I saw quickly that this new lens and framework for considering literacy; explained, informed, and required that I look more deeply at my interpretation of literacy and how I approached the implementation of this interpretation in practice with my students. I learned that there was an entire theoretical framework, that provided the language and ideas that could broaden my talk about and understanding of the literacy practices I was witnessing with my own child and the children in our schools. This new lens pushed me past the boundaries of the language arts strands that had dominated my practice to date, and past my central drive to balance the literacies in my class and those of my daughter.

From this teacher-mother-researcher perspective, I now had a way of talking about the very things I had been witnessing and documenting in my child's literacy development. It provided me with a means for looking at a telling case of one child's literacy practices and events. With this added knowledge as a researcher, I can also talk about and examine my view of literacy from my teacher era and my teacher-mother era. I will look at the data collected and identify opportunities in which I can consciously pay attention to and reflect on my own fundamental understandings formed through my biography of experience. I will use these opportunities to explore my transformation of some of my basic knowledge structures or meaning perspectives in order to become more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of my experience (Mezirow, 1997).

In Chapter 2, I will explain the expansion of my thinking about literacy, which includes thinking about literacy as social practice; wherein, literacy is viewed as related to power, as multimodal, and where literacy events and practices are the unit of analysis.

In Chapter 3, entitled Methods and Methodology, I will explain the research design for this study, explain the role of the researcher, parent as researcher, the core settings and data sources, along with the procedures for data collection and analysis and address methods for verification.

In Chapter 4, I will communicate my findings through the presentation of Teacher Era Stories, Teacher-Mother Era Stories and Teacher-Mother-Researcher Era Stories and will consider these stories, inclusive of three themes that arose out of the data, while interrogating these stories against the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 5, I will summarize what I have learned from the study and give my interpretation of the meaning of my findings and their implications and limitations, as well as indicating directions for further study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Over the past several years I have immersed myself in professional reading in the field of literacy. Certain things resonated with me and have become part of my dominant lens. Now that I am researcher, my new lens has transformed many, but not all of my basic knowledge structures around literacy. This study of self, and my evolving understanding of literacy, positions me to explore literacy learning through the theoretical lens of literacy as social practice. I will examine the central ideas of literacy as social practice, and I will provide definitions for the most prominent terminology relevant to this study of self.

### **Literacy as Social Practice**

When thinking of literacy as a social practice, literacy is seen as being situated in many contexts, applied with many purposes and is practiced throughout a learner's life. The "New Literacies Studies" (Barton, 1994; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1990; Street 1996) identifies scholarship that positions our understanding of literacy very differently from the approach that had dominated the field of literacy for many years. The scholarship referred to in the literature as New Literacy Studies (NLS) began in the early 1990s. It looks at literacy from the starting point or the perspective of the local or everyday use of literacy within particular and specified communities that practice it. The main epistemological stance of the NLS is based upon a key principle that, "literacy only has meaning within its particular context of social practice and does not transfer

unproblematically across contexts” (Papen, 2005, p. 55). The context and purpose of literacy is central to understanding literacy as social practice.

**Literacy events and practices.** NLS researchers use the terms *literacy events* and *literacy practices* (Heath, 1982) (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) and have created a scholarly language in which one can examine and describe literacy work in context.

Operationalizing these approaches as a basis for research purposes and for practical applications provides a way to look at what people do with literacy. Literacy events as a unit of analysis serve NLS researchers as concrete evidence of literacy practices. Heath (1982) developed the notion of literacy events as a tool for examining the forms and functions of oral and written language, describing a literacy event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes” (p. 93). Barton and Hamilton (2000) furthered Heath’s work by describing literacy events as events that are, “observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them. The notion of events stresses the situated nature of literacy that it always exists in a social context” (p. 8).

Literacy events and literacy practices are key to understanding literacy as a social practice. Thinking of literacy as an event gives the researcher an opportunity to describe moments of engagement with literacy which can be found in formal (i.e. in-school settings) and informal settings (i.e. outside school and or at home). Literacy events and practices are the work horse of this scholarship, and are used as the units of analysis in the current field of literacy as social practice. From this viewpoint literacy practices and events are viewed as situated in social, cultural, historical and political relationships and

are embedded in structures of power (Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Street, 1995, 2003).

Literacy as social practice considers all literacy events and practices as situated, applied, and practiced, recognizing that a skills-based approach to literacy has its limitations. Scholars have questioned the relevancy of reading and written skill acquisition without the concomitant application of these skills by learners; including learner's determination of how and when such particular practices are used. By seeking to determine the purposes, interpretations, awareness, and values around literacy events, a broader understanding of the literacy event results and it is called "literacy practice".

**Literacy as ideological.** For the most part school literacy has been viewed through the lens of a developmental/cognitive psychological ideology in which attention is primarily paid to individual development against a set of uniform technical skills to be mastered by the individual. Street (1984) refers to this as an *autonomous* model of literacy. Through the autonomous lens of literacy an individual's literacy development is viewed as moving along a "carefully traced trajectory and assumes for the most part that "all children progress in similar ways and acquire specific literacy skills in sequence" (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 5). Street (1995) writes that the autonomous model "isolates literacy as an independent variable and then claims to be able to study its consequences" (p. 29). Advocates of an autonomous model of literacy are seen by those from a literacy as social practice lens as having an understanding of literacy that is too narrow, which results in ignoring of the incredible diversity of literacy events and practices that are used in many contexts.

Dissatisfied with the autonomous model, Street (1984, 1993, 2002) and other New Literacy Studies researchers (Barton, 1994; Brice-Heath, 1983; Gee, 2002) argue for a socio-cultural view of literacy, which rejects a view of literacy as a set of decontextualised skills predominantly learned in school. From this perspective researchers have come to view literacy as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society and to recognize the variety of cultural practices associated with reading and writing. Street (1993) and Gee (1996) criticise the autonomous model for concealing the cultural and ideological assumptions that underlie it, and for its lack of critical consideration of how people from various cultures view literacy, often privileging certain types of people and certain types of literacies.

An ideological view of literacy accepts that literacy varies from situation to situation and has various uses and functions in each situation. Gee (1996) also argues that there is no such thing as reading and writing only, but that reading and writing has to be about something. That is, what is being read or written will influence the kind of reading and writing that takes place.

Street (1993) argues that most of the research on literacy has tended to focus on the literacy activities and output of the intellectual elite. In the ideological view of literacy, people are perceived as using literacy in various ways depending on their social context. Following from this then, there is thus no single literacy programme which can be applied to all learners without a regard of the social context in which the learner find themselves (Street, 2002).

Therefore viewing literacy as social practice through an ideological lens positions the autonomous view as a “normativizing” and exclusionary view, which may contribute

to some learners (for social and cultural reasons) being set apart from other children who are not developing along the same singular, “carefully traced trajectory”. Literacy learning and competence viewed through the lens of literacy as social practice, demands that learners’ literacy skill acquisition and progress be more broadly considered by viewing their literacy competencies in school in relation to socioeconomic situations, less privileged or less dominant languages, and/or life experiences that may not be representative of the majority of learners in a class. This view of literacy as ideological also requires that one take a broader view of an individual’s literacy development by being inclusive of their range of literacy practices that may be outside of the school based context. An ideological view of literacy and an autonomous view of literacy are epistemologically different starting points from which to view literacy.

**Literacy as discourse.** Literacy as social practice involves seeing people as members of particular discourse communities in which shared literacy practices are valued and supported. Students’ out of school literacies promote processes of learning that are “deeper and richer than the forms of learning to which they [students] are exposed in schools” (Gee, 2004, p. 107). Viewing literacy as a social practice therefore, positions school literacies as one of the many literacies in a learner’s life. Street (2003) argues that educators need to “bridge the divide” that tends to separate school literacy learning from the lived experience of students in their communities. Discourse practices are best understood by examining a learner’s domain of practice.

***Domains of practice.*** Viewing literacy as social practice positions literacy as functioning within *domains of practice* which refers to the fact that there are different

literacies associated with different domains of life. These domains of practice make up parts of a student's lived experience in the community, and therefore position the researcher to look at literacy practices in context and determine how they are patterned by social institutions and power relationships. For example, social institutions such as schools and homes can support certain literacies while repressing others. Scholarship examines how various domains affect the literacy events and practices of the learner. Barton and Hamilton (1994) state that, "It is a useful starting point to examine the distinct practices in these domains, and then to compare, for example, home and school, or school and work-place" (p. 10). Researchers (Dyson 2003, 2008; Heath 1982, 1983; Kress 2003, 2005, 2010; Lankshear & Knobel 2001; Pahl & Rowsell 2005, 2007) broaden the understanding of literacy by examining the choices literacy users make in contexts that are inclusive of the learners various domains of practice.

***Discourses.*** Gee (1996) defines discourses as "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artefacts' of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network' or to signal that one is playing a socially meaningful role." (p. 131). He states that discourses are a kind of "identity kit" acting as a kind of costuming of ourselves, which allows for individuals to take on the activities and beliefs of a particular discourse community, and make these recognizable by others. By taking a broader view of literacy, inclusive of discourses and domains of practice, the researcher's view of literacy broadens and moves away for a solitary focus on learning and language as something learned and used predominantly in school settings. By



considering domains of practice, the researcher is positioned to understand learning and literacy (along with identity construction) in and out of schools, and across life spans.

In keeping with Street's (2003) call to "bridge the divide", Hamilton and Barton (1994) make it clear that, "domains, and the discourse communities associated with them, are not clear-cut, however and there are questions of the permeability of boundaries, of leakages and movement between boundaries, and of overlap between domains" (p. 10). Therefore, this permeability is in fact essential to understanding literacy as social practice for as they state:

Domains are structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used and learned [and] activities within these domains or discourse communities are not accidental or randomly varying: there are particular configurations of literacy practices and there are regular ways in which people act in many literacy events in particular domains or discourse communities. (p. 10)

Viewing literacy as a discourse practice results in a larger lens in which a researcher can look at literacy, resulting in the learner or meaning-maker becoming central to the discussion.

The impact of new information and communication technologies has also changed the nature of literacy, impacting what needs to be learned. As literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2001; Street, 1995), the impact of the everyday use of technologies in one's literacy events and practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is part of a larger cultural

practice. The use of technology is then part of these larger domains and discourses of a learner's literacy life.

**Literacy is multimodal.** The impact of the growing use of technology in one's everyday life makes it "undeniable that students right now require a repertoire of both print and digital literacy practices for their future workplace and life" (Rowse & Walsh, 2011, p. 54). Therefore, terms such as "new literacies" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003), "multiliteracies" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), and "multimodality" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) entered the scholarship to conceptualize the ways new communication practices are impacting literacy and learning. The use of such prefaces as "new" or "multi" in front of words such as language, literacy and mode evidence the changes, "that have occurred with digital communication and are attempts to describe the multiple devices and media texts that are ubiquitous in our world" (Rowse & Walsh, 2011, p. 54).

Leading scholars (The New London Group, 1996) coined the term "multiliteracies". The introduction of this term shifted the focus away from the dominance of print text, in order to acknowledge the many varied ways that literacy is practiced in the new millennium. The term multiliteracies moved the scholarship forward by articulating the need for a new literacy pedagogy that would address the rapid changes in literacy due to globalization and the ubiquity of technology use, as well as the increasing cultural and social diversity in the world. The scholarship of The New London Group (1996) shifted the discussion of literacy by arguing that, "the multiplicity of communications channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today call for a broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional

language based approaches” (p. 16). This changing scholarship argued for recognition of the proliferation of technologies and the ability to read and create varying text types and that understanding literacy as multiliteracies would create a need for a different kind of pedagogy, in which “language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes” (The New London Group 1996, p. 16). Additionally, they argued that, “the increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial and the behavioral” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5). This is particularly important as “new” communications media are reshaping the way we use language stating that with, “technologies changing so rapidly, there cannot be one set of standards or skills that constitute the ends of literacy learning, however taught” (The New London Group 1996).

From this beginning in 1996, the work of Kress (2003) and Lankshear and Knobel (2003) have dominated much of the theoretical understanding of how technologies are transforming the foundational understanding of literacy. These researchers argue for an understanding of literacy that takes into account not only traditional print and oral literacies, but also visual and multimodal representations.

Multimodality literacy or a new literacies approach focuses not only on how the reader responds to printed texts, but also how that same reader’s understanding of texts is constructed and how meaning is conveyed through multimodal representations. Kress (2000) writes about digital and multimodal texts that take into account changes in the

forms of text, uses of language, and modes of communication beyond that of conventional texts. Kress (2000) states that learners are no longer consumers and producers of texts in a single form, but are seen as individuals who are "the remakers, transformers of sets of representational resources—rather than users of stable systems" (p. 160). He argues that young people need to be conversant with design and with visual forms of representation as active shapers and makers as well as viewers. This enlarged view of literacy includes the capacity to read and negotiate images and textual representations of all kinds.

The term *multimodality* in literacy study refers to the combination of two or more modes in the representation of meaning, and can be communicated by written words, visual images, audio, gestural and/or spatial meaning making (New London Group, 1996). For example, if we considered a person's meaning-making taking the form of a PowerPoint presentation it might include the multimodalities of written words, visual images, and perhaps audio excerpts. This is a multimodal text created to communicate meaning through each mode and in modal combination.

The term *mode* in the area of literacy study refers to the manner or form of doing something, or the form in which something exists. In the creation of a PowerPoint for example, it is the meaning-maker's choice as to the number and or forms of modes to include. This choice for the most part is socially contextualized, which means it is dependent upon the purpose and context within which these decisions are being made. The study of multimodalities establishes that there is a certain "logic" to decision making

by the meaning-maker, who decides upon which mode to use when making meaning. For example, if speech is the chosen modality the communicator selects to communicate her or his message, and then inherent to this choice is the meaning-maker's conscious or even unconscious knowledge that sequence in time is characteristic of speech. The logistics of speech are based on the understanding that one sound is uttered after another, one word after another, one syntactic and textual element after another, and that these are streamed together to create a communicative whole. In the PowerPoint example, which by definition is multimodal, the choices made by the meaning-maker whether conscious or unconscious reflects their understanding of the "logics" behind the selected modes. Another example of the "logics" behind modal decisions is illustrated by considering the creator's choice of still images. When selecting still images for a PowerPoint presentation there are conscious or unconscious decisions that are governed by the logic of space and sequence. Kress (2000) would say that the individual is making decisions around the mode and the affordances of that mode.

***Affordances.*** The term *affordance* has its origins in the work of the psychologist Gibson (1979) who defines affordances as all "action possibilities latent in an environment, where the potential uses of a given object arise from its perceivable properties and always in relation to the actor's capabilities and interests, because perception is always selective." Norman (1988) added social context to this term so that it does not just refer to an object's physical capacity, but also to how it has been used socially, historically, and contextually.

Within the study of literacy, Kress (2010) expanded the term affordance to *modal affordance* which has particular currency in this discussion of multimodality within literacy. Modal affordance refers to the potentialities and constraints of different modes, requiring the meaning-maker to decide what is possible to express, represent or communicate easily, given the user's perception of the affordance of a mode. This kind of decision-making by the meaning-maker does not remain static, but requires constant negotiation within changing social contexts. From this perspective, the term *affordance* is not a matter of perception, but rather refers to the material, cultural, social and historical ways in which meaning is made using particular semiotic resources, and requires the user to be part of the decision-making. Decision-making becomes central to this act of meaning-making. Support for such decision-making can reside in a pedagogy that takes notions of contextualized affordances into account. Rather than viewing modes of communication other than speech and writing as "add-ons" in theories of learning, a multimodal approach begins from a theoretical position that treats all communicative modes as potentially equal modes for learning (Kress, Jewitt, & Carey 2003).

A multimodal view of literacy considers technology as embodying many modes and affordances that do not simply replicate traditional literacy practices. The affordances of various hardware and software need to be understood and utilized effectively so as to produce a range of multimodal texts (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Technology then is seen as one of the many tools that a meaning-maker could use in both in-school and out-of-school literacies.

***Semiotic systems.*** The act of meaning-making may employ one or more *semiotic systems* (sign, symbol, code) in order to create or decipher meaning. The meta-language (a language or system of symbols used to describe or analyze another language or system of symbols) of these new literacies involves the identification of semiotic codes. The term semiotics, in its simplest form, stands for the “study of signs” or the construction and communication of meaning by drawing upon systems of signs. Semiotic systems are referred to as grammar for different modes of communication (sign, symbol, codes). A sign is something that represents something and is found within varied text modes, expressed in whatever conveyance is chosen. The use of sign, symbol and codes facilitates the making of meaning intended by the creator or designer.

Discussions in the early days of The New London Group (1996) resulted in a Design Theory (Cope & Kalantzis, 1996) in which six design elements used in the meaning-making process were identified. These design elements were: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and multimodal patterns of meaning-making that are combinations of the above mentioned semiotic codes. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) delineate each code of their Design Theory in the following ways: a) Auditory semiotic codes are inclusive of music, sound effects, and silence; b) Gestural semiotic codes are inclusive of facial expressions and body posture; c) Linguistic semiotic codes are inclusive of linguistic grammar, punctuation, and alphabets; d) Spatial semiotic codes are inclusive of the organization of objects in a setting; e) Visual semiotic codes are inclusive of still images, moving images, page or screen, layout and colour (p. 7). These elements of design are seen as patterns of semiotic codes that have been explored over time in the

literature in an effort to explain the activities of individuals as they identify, read, and create new texts using a variety of these semiotic codes.

Cope & Kalantzis (2000), along with the New London Group, introduced the idea of the pedagogy of design pointing out the importance of design in the construction of meaning. These scholars portray this pedagogy of design as “an active dynamic process whereby meaning is constructed through accessing the resources of “available designs” (p. 205) which involves the “designing your own meaning based on your interaction with these resources and then producing the redesigned” (p. 205). Available designs include the grammars of language, various semiotic systems such as film, photography, and gesture. The meaning-maker draws upon these available designs as creators and consumers of meaning and design. Design in this theoretical view refers to how we use the existing designs to make meaning and how we create by using the “the redesigned” which refers to the finished product of our work. This thinking further underlines the idea that young people can be complex meaning-makers who draw upon a variety of design forms and redesign these forms (“remix”) to create new designs and new meanings.

Kress (2003) has written about multimodal literacies by drawing a distinction between the visual modes of image with what is popularly called visual literacies. He established that scholars used to think of writing and images as two distinctly different resources for meaning-making, requiring different competencies in their use and design. Increasingly, Kress has shown that both modes (i.e. images and writing) are becoming more linked with new technologies. This has implications for pedagogy in that “to use both modes, image and writing, together, as is ever more frequently the case with the new



technologies, is to be involved in the use of the resources of visual composition (layout), in the use of the visual mode of image, the mode of writing, and all in ways which both draw on the existing knowledge and resources and yet are also quite new.” (Kress, 2003, p. 24).

Kress and others within a multimodality theoretical framework critique those who focus only on print literacy, suggesting that this semiotic mode may be overly privileged in Western societies. Schools have traditionally focused on print-based texts; however, the texts children encounter outside of school are increasingly multimodal in nature. Therefore, researchers and teachers of literacy need to understand key concepts of multimodality. Learners need to develop skills in relation to the design, production, and analysis of multimodal text (Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003).

**Literacy as identity.** Literacy as social practice integrates the concept of *identity*, asking us to think about the purposeful ways in which individuals endeavor to position themselves through, for, and in conjunction with literacy practices in social and cultural contexts. James Paul Gee (1994) distinguished *identity* as a key component of the study of literacies. Whatever forms of reading, writing, viewing, representing and speaking and listening are used, they are all associated with certain social identities. Gee describes literacy as a set of *discourse practices*, which are ways of using language and sense making in both speech and writing. Discourse practices are tied to the particular world views (beliefs and values) of particular social or cultural groups and are integrally connected with the identity or sense of self and or of the people who practice them: “A change of discourse practices is a change of identity” (Gee, 1994, p. 168). Gee continues

to broaden this definition of discourse practices by referring to all learning which “requires taking on a new identity and forming bridges from one’s old identities to the new one” (Gee, 2003, p .51). His theoretical perspective has broadened to include not only the effect on identity, but also the essential element of bridging our ideas from varying discourses in order to learn effectively in this new millennium (Gee 1994, 2003). Pahl and Rowsell (2005), in exploring the changes of identity through the use of different types of literacy practices, state: “We are who we are and who we are allowed to be is shaped in part by the way we use literacy” (p. 23).

Literacy as social practice broadens the view of literacy by challenging what it means to be “literate”. In today’s highly mobile and interconnected world, the definition of “being literate” might entail being communicatively competent across multiple discourse communities (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; 2001.) This broader lens challenges the researcher to consider the many identities, discourse communities, and domains of practice the learner brings to the communicative act in order to determine literacy abilities.

**Literacy is about power.** When looking at power as it relates to literacy scholars raise such as: Who has the power to access and regulate the text explored or generated in any given context? Whose literacy values are dominant in these contexts? Who decides the type, content, and format of the text forms studied or produced? What structures are in place to regulate, maintain or promote these varying text forms?

Viewing literacy as social practice requires that the researcher understand the ways in which power relationships determine which literacy practices are available to a

given community, which are dominant and privileged, and which are marginalized. (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1984). For example, Street's (1984) work demonstrates that the written practices associated with schooling are only one type of the many literate practices available, yet they are the practices that are both dominant and valued by those in power, and thus privileged. Kress (2000) would extend this claim even further, by arguing that a focus on written texts and practices (and not the full range of semiotic modes) further privileges some practices and modes at the expense of other meaningful and valuable modes. Literacy practices involve the social regulation of text, that is who has access to such texts and who has the "license" to produce them (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

A focus on power also offers an understanding of the agentive ways in which dominant literacy practices are adopted, appropriated for new purposes, or rejected (Brandt, 2001, 2009; Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005). In fact, this perspective raises awareness that individuals are indeed agentive, whereby they may appropriate or reject practices in purposeful ways that meet their needs—or in some instances, even challenge the practices of those in power.

Social inequalities based on race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and other inequalities structure access to participation in literacy events and practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Literacy events and practices involve the social regulation of text, that is, who has access to them and who can produce them (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

Janks (2010) in her book *Literacy and Power* provides a useful framing of these questions of power as they relate to literacy when she writes:

How does one provide access to dominant forms, while at the same time valuing and promoting the diverse languages and literacies of our students in the broader society? If we provide students with access to dominant forms, this contributes to maintaining dominance of these forms. If, on the other hand, we deny students access, we perpetuate their marginalization in a society that continues to recognize the value and importance of these forms (p. 24).

Power has much to do with privilege. Teachers can consciously and unconsciously privilege certain literacies over others thinking that they are acting in the best interest of the children. A broader and conscious awareness of the act of privileging can create space in a classroom that invites a child's many interests and accumulated skills that have their origins from outside of the dominant context of the classroom. Inclusion of the questions of power and privilege are central to a broader view of literacy as social practice.

In the next section I return to the story that opened this thesis. I place this "returning" here so as to demonstrate the use of literacy events and practices as a unit of analysis (Hamilton, 2000) and as a kind of foreshadowing for the reader as to how I will use story in chapter 4 to communicate my understandings of literacy.

**Returning to the Story “*Waiting until the credits finish rolling*”**

Literacy events have a tendency to be iterative, as is the opening story, happening over and over again in somewhat systematic and or ritualistic ways over time. Examples of the iterative aspect of a literacy event can be as far ranging as liturgy in a church setting, prayers in a mosque, and or family based traditions such as sending thank you cards, or staying to watch the credits roll after a movie. These represent literacy events embedded within concurrent literacy practices. Literacy events happen iteratively within literacy practices providing a context in which one can become comfortable and proficient in their use. Over time literacy events become tied to our identity and practices. These events and practices take place in varying domains such as home, school or workplace and in varying degrees. By viewing literacy events and practices as social and cultural practice, we acknowledge that school is just “one setting among many” in the service of a person’s literacy advancement and that the resources or texts used in each setting vary not only in form but also in accessibility and acceptance among a range of communities.

By looking at Lacey’s literacy events and practices and the situations in which they occur, the lines between home and school and her literacy practices become blurred and demonstrate this moving back-and-forth from one situation to another. As teacher, mother, and researcher I will be able to examine literacy with this larger lens. This exploration provides a means to consider how this knowledge affects some of my long held literacy views. Reference will be made to Lacey’s literacy events and practices as

she moves back-and-forth from home to school and back again. If literacy practices are “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives,” (Barton and Hamilton, 2000 p. 8), and if literacy practices are what people “do” with literacy, then as a teacher it is incumbent upon me to challenge some of my own long held views of literacy and literacy instruction that for most of my career were situated only in the school context.

Literacy practices involve values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships. They have to do with how people in a particular culture construct literacy, and how they talk about literacy and make sense of it. These processes are at the same time individual and social. There are abstract values and rules about literacy that are shaped by and help shape the practices of people within diverse social and cultural literacy communities. Thus, the values, beliefs, and models that are portrayed through the literacy events, evidenced by written language as undertaken by Lacey in my study, are classified as Lacey’s literacy practices.

Hamilton (2000) discusses four basic elements of an observable literacy event and the non-visible elements of literacy practices as “constituents of literacy”.

The four basic elements of an observable literacy event are:

- Participants - Who are the people or person(s) who are seen interacting with the written texts?
- Setting - What is the immediate physical circumstances in which the interaction with text takes place?

- Artefacts - What are the material tools and accessories that are involved in the interaction with text, including the foregrounded text, and
- Activities or the actions - What are the activities or actions that are performed by the participants in the literacy event? Hamilton (2000, p. 17).

The non-visible elements of literacy practices as “constituents of literacy practices” require the onlooker to question the observed literacy event. Hamilton (2000) uses the following questions to seek out a deeper understanding of an observed literacy event, when she asks:

- Who are the hidden participants? What other people or groups of people are involved in the social relationships of producing, interpreting, circulating, and otherwise regulating the texts found in the practice?
- What are the domains of practice? What is the domain; be it, social, linguistic, cultural or historical in which the literacy practice takes place, giving it social purpose?
- What are all the other resources that are brought to the literacy practice, apart from the observable text? What are the non-material values, understandings, and ways of thinking, feeling, skills and knowledge surrounding the event?

- What are the structured routines within the practice? Are there pathways or routines that facilitate or regulate the actions of the participant, such as rules of appropriacy and eligibility, which means, can we determine who does/doesn't, can/can't engage in these particular activities? (Hamilton 2000, p. 17).

Applying Hamilton's observable elements of a literacy event to the particular literacy event in the opening story, it is clear that the participants are two adults and one child sitting in theatre seats look at a screen; the setting is a movie theatre; the artefact is the credits scrolling down the screen; and the activity is observed as three people remaining in their seats looking at the credits until they are finished, while they speak to one another at various intervals. Determining the elements of an observable literacy event would seem to be straightforward and depends upon discerning the observable attributes of the event. But, deciphering the constituents of literacy practices would be much more complex.

Literacy practices are comprised of various literacy events and demonstrate how people in a particular setting construct literacy, how they make sense of it, and how they use it for their own purposes. For the most part these processes are internal to an individual and invisible to the onlooker. What are visible though are the practices that seem to connect people to one another and to the literacy event. In order to fully understand a literacy practice one must pay attention to the observable elements of the literacy event and also act ethnographically, investigating a literacy event in order to find out the values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships that go along with the event.



While the elements of literacy events are observable, those of literacy practices may not be. One is required to move beyond inference and study these practices in a more contextualized manner.

If I now examine the family literacy event of staying until the credits have finished as a literacy practice using Hamilton's (2000) "non-visible elements of literacy practices", I can demonstrate how by questioning the event with "insider information" about its context, I can build a more complex picture. I can explore, for example, what other social relationships might be at play that gives reason and meaning to these three people staying behind in their seats until the credits have finished rolling. I can ask myself: what is it about this particular group's social and historical context that gives them a social purpose for staying? How often do these people participate in this kind of literacy activity, and are there any governing structures or rules within this small group of people for this kind of behavior?

By using Hamilton's (2000) non-visible elements of literacy practices questions I am able to reveal what is hidden from the purely observed event. I can reveal that the two adults are parents of the child and that the father has been filmmaking for over two decades in the local film industry and brings to this family culture dialogue, knowledge, and experience that he has shared with them regarding the numerous jobs, people, organizations, producers, directors, and locations for film-making. We stay and watch because we might see his name, a friend's name, one of his colleague's names, a director or other person he has worked with or mentioned. We read the text carefully to make connections with the industry about which we have some "insider" information. We pay

attention to this detailed text in the credits in anticipation of conversation and dialogue with each other about what we are watching. Because of our “insider” information, we stay to the end to affirm or disaffirm our many guesses as to the shooting location(s) of the film. We all gain much pleasure from this literacy practice, and see it as an essential part of the movie watching experience.

Without going beyond the immediately visible aspects of this particular literacy event, it remains three people staying in their seats until the credits stop rolling, and that is all we know. It is why they stay that makes this a literacy practice, one in fact that is very iterative for this particular family. In Lacey’s early years of attending movies with us, if we did not stay until the end we were admonished to stay, invoking the question by her father to me, “She can’t even read yet, so, why does she always insist on staying to the end?” Even before Lacey could “read” the text, she had learned that this was a family ritual that provided purpose, the potential of family conversation, a practice that afforded her opportunities to learn more about her father’s work. She had also learned that this was a family value that needed to be adhered to and so she would consistently insist that we stay, even though at times as the adults in this event we were done with the experience. Lacey was engaged in a literacy practice that was part of her family culture; she was utilizing written language because of “values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships” (Hamilton, 2000, p. 7).

Because I am an “insider” to the context of this literacy event I can respond to Hamilton’s (2000) questions, in this story and all of the stories to follow. I will use similar stories to investigate my evolving understanding of literacy and will use

Hamilton's (2000) non-visible elements of literacy practices as a means to analyze and then discuss these elements in relation to my evolving understating of literacy.

Literacy as social practice and the selection of literacy events and practices as the unit of analysis provides me with a broader lens and vocabulary to traverse the divide between home literacies and school literacies. By viewing literacy as events and practices which move back-and-forth from home to school and back again I am interrogating some of my long held views of literacy. As Pahl and Rowsell (2005) have noted, "When children's texts cross site and move from home and school, teachers are facilitating learning spaces that can be opened up further" (p. 8). This study of self and my evolving understanding of literacy allows me to examine literacy learning through a powerful lens in which to examine the space between home and school literacies, so as to address the overriding research at the heart of this study which investigates how and why my understanding of literacy has been changing overtime.

### **Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology**

Over the course of my career as an educator I have had the pleasure of connecting with over 1500 literacy learners while I was a teacher of the language arts and literacy in several public school settings. As their teacher, my involvement with these literacy learners was for only ten months of their lives. Using a broader lens through which I view literacy (as established in Chapter 2) I have chosen to position my study of self by looking deeply and in a sustained manner at one literacy learner who happens to be my daughter. Throughout this study I have referred to her as my key informant. The term key informant is frequently used in qualitative research and in this application refers to the important role Lacey plays in this study of self. By exploring her literacy events and practices over an extended time, it informs me of how my understanding of literacy and my theorizing has changed. My daughter was selected as the key informant of this study because she provided access to a literacy learner, who has been engaged in literacy learning over a long period of time, was engaged in literacy events and practices that take place in and out of school and of which I had a deep understanding of the context. This is a perspective not available to teachers of literacy who are only observing their students' literacy events and practices in a school setting alone.

Therefore, the lens through which I view literacy as social practice (described in chapter 2) positions me to explore my understandings of literacy by considering deeply this key informant's literacy use. As such, this study explores broader notions of literacy.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to investigate my changing understanding of literacy by exploring three distinct time periods in my life as an educator. I have named each time period as teacher, teacher-mother, and teacher-mother-researcher. I will explore each era through my newest and broadest understanding of literacy, and will identify disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1997) in each era; treating them as signposts of times when my understanding of literacy during that era was somehow inconsistent with the situation or context in which I was applying it. I will use these internal challenges that prompt my reflective process in order to examine how my understanding of literacy has changed because of this broader theoretical lens and language.

**Research Questions**

I will investigate my overall research questions, which are: “How has my understanding of literacy changed as I transitioned from teacher to teacher-mother and from teacher-mother to teacher-mother-researcher?” And, “What are the events (disorienting dilemmas) in my professional and/or familial life that prompted the changes in my understanding of literacy?” I will investigate this question by using the design methodology explained in this chapter.

**Research Design**

In this study I chose to use the qualitative research methodology of *autoethnography* which has been referred to by Ellis (2004) as both a process and product. Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically document and analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to

understand a sociocultural (literacy) experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004). In this approach a researcher uses principles of autobiography and ethnography to conduct and write an autoethnography. Ellis (2004) defines autoethnography as “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (p. xix). Maréchal (2010) defines autoethnography as “a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing” (p. 43). Ellingson and Ellis (2008) point out, “the meanings and applications of autoethnography have evolved in a manner that makes precise definition difficult.” (p. 449). Sheridan (2013) in his blog article “Autoethnography, An Unusual Research Method, With the Researcher as a Participant” describes autoethnography as follows:

Autoethnography is a relatively new research method that includes the researcher's personal experience and his or her observations about the group or individuals who are being researched. These observations and insights are not always possible with the more conventional empirical research methods.

Autoethnographers write narratives about what they experience, and are themselves a primary participant and/or subject of the research.

Autoethnographers generally reject the idea of research as an objective and neutral process which requires a detachment of the researcher from the subject.

Autoethnography is a form of self-reflection that explores the researcher's perspective on the dynamics of the research scenario, often from a diary or journal that they keep.

According to Bochner and Ellis (2006), an autoethnographic researcher is first and foremost a communicator and a storyteller. The researcher shows people in the process of personal discovery, making choices, and interacting with other humans. In so doing, this provides insight into the meaning of their struggles. Recording thought processes are paramount to this methodology, which requires the inclusion of the researcher's personal thoughts, feelings, and observations as a way to help understand what they are researching. Autoethnographers provide the reader with insights into their thought process that typically may not be measured with conventional research methods.

Autoethnography relies on a more subjective approach to the research variables and is widely used in a variety of academic disciplines. In light of this study's theoretical framework of literacy as social practice, it was useful for me to use this research methodology in order to investigate my research questions.

Autoethnography has been chosen as the primary research methodology, however, I acknowledge that there is an intersection of case study methodology in that I study one learner (Lacey) over time. The implications for this kind of methodological intersecting results in not only a longitudinal look at myself but also offers the reader a longitudinal view of one literacy learner (Lacey). In summary, the autoethnographic approach as the primary methodology is used in this study as a means of systematically analyzing my personal experience, so as to more fully understand my sociocultural experience of literacy over time.

**Role of the Researcher**

My positioning as researcher is explored in this next section by describing how I gained access and informed consent from the key informant, how I positioned myself within the research tradition of parent as researcher, and is followed by a description of the core setting and main data source for this study.

**Gaining access and informed consent.** I sought and secured assent from the key informant (Lacey) and consent from the other parent, her father. The key informant of this study is both a child and my daughter and therefore is a member of a vulnerable population. The following ethical considerations were undertaken. I structured the data collection across three phases so that I could ensure that she could withdraw from phase three (which involved her direct participation) if for any reason she decided that she did not want to continue her participation. I made this provision so that I could assure her that I would be able to proceed with my study by restructuring it around the components detailed in data collection phases one and two only. I wanted her to see that I had an alternate and viable plan if she decided to opt out of phase three data collection. This decision making process demonstrates the care and thought that I have given to her well-being. At no time during the 4-week data collection period did she communicate any discomfort or stress. On the contrary, she seemed to enjoy the process, and appeared to appreciate the focus and attention I was giving to her literacy choices.

I enlisted a third party to represent me in the presentation of the assent and consent forms to Lacey and her father and to be available to Lacey if she needed to seek any clarification during the 4-week data collection process of phase three. This was done to



assure Lacey that she need not have to ask me any uncomfortable questions about the process. The third party was selected to take on this mediator role as she had known Lacey since she was born and Lacey and her father knew her well. A relationship of trust already existed.

I have acknowledged in the assent and consent forms that although the final study will be written using a pseudonym, people who read my study will be able to deduce that the child named in the study is in fact my daughter. The data collection took place while Lacey was thirteen, and the publications of the results will be published when she is aged 16. Both Lacey and her father were made aware through the assent and consent letters that full anonymity is not possible under these conditions.

Currently at the university in which my thesis research is being conducted, parents as researcher are a contested notion. One of the questions involved with this concern is around the “voluntary” notion of the participant and the concern that a child of a parent researcher/investigator can clearly be identified even with the use of a pseudonym. Human Ethics approval was granted for this study and this is documented in Appendix B.

Through the procedures discussed above I am endeavouring to demonstrate my paramount commitment to the well-being of my daughter. First and foremost I am approaching this study from the point of view of mother and if I ever thought that Lacey was uncomfortable with her participation I would have withdrawn her from participation in phase three of the data collection.

**Parent as Researcher.** There has been a long tradition of parent investigators in the field of educational and social science research who have written about their own children, and in so doing have extended our understanding of children and how they learn. They have deepened our understanding of the learning process within highly situated contexts. I position myself among these researchers.

For example, Glenda Bissex (1980), in her work *Gyns at Wrk*, documented her son's journey as he taught himself to write and read. Her book documents in detail her son's journey in learning to write using notes and journals she kept. She writes that, "Although grounded in sound educational theory, the goal of this qualitative research was not to generalize the findings to other students, but to encourage the educational community to look at individuals in the act of learning and to tailor instruction according to those individual needs" (Bissex, 1980, p. vi). By exploring my own child's literacy activity over time I intend to look at her as an individual in the act of learning and to look at her learning and her literacy artefacts within a highly situated context, following from Bissex's lead.

Similarly, Michael Halliday (1975) a significant language/linguistics educator in the 20th century, provides an example of someone who documented his own child's (Nigel's) language and linguistic development. He became one of the first researchers to look at the interpersonal functions served by a child's early utterances. Michael Halliday worked as a participant observer, using pencil and paper to document Nigel's utterances at 6-week intervals from age 9 months to 2 1/2 years old. Halliday aimed to document Nigel's progress as an individual, across each stage of his linguistic development.

Halliday argued that humans develop language because we are creatures who need to mean, and that language, above all else, is our primary resource for generating meaning.

Prisca Martens (1996) provides another example of parent/researcher/investigator in her book *I already know how to read: A child's view of literacy*. In this book Martens conducts a three-year observation of her daughter's understanding of reading and writing processes and her ways of being literate. She observed Sarah's (her daughter) reading and writing from ages 2 through 5 years and documented how Sarah, through meaningful literacy experiences in her social community, understood literacy and invented reading and writing theories and practices for herself. Numerous reading and writing samples were organized around broad literacy learning questions. Sarah was presented in this study as an inquirer who actively constructed her understanding of literacy and ways to be literate. Martens recognized that children's opportunities and experiences with print differ, but by looking closely at one child's literacy development, she was able to help us observe and understand the literacy development of others.

David Schwarzer (2001) wrote *Noa's ark: one child's voyage into multiliteracy* which is based on an in-depth longitudinal study of his daughter (Noa) a multilingual (Hebrew, English, and Spanish) first grader studying in a traditional English/Spanish bilingual classroom. Schwarzer followed Noa's early literacy development in her community, in her household, and in her school. His research goal was to show the complexity of a young student's multiliteracy development in the context of her daily life in which three languages are presented in different formats, for different purposes, and audiences. His practical goal was to show the pivotal role teachers play in multiliteracy

development and provide some of the tools they need to promote it. Schwarzer also addressed many of the misconceptions about early multiliteracy development and offered clear, manageable advice on how a monolingual teacher can create a learning community in which multiliteracy will flourish.

Clara Claiborne Park, known as a pioneer in the study of autism, is best known for her two books, *The Siege: a family's journey into the world of an autistic child* (1982) and *Exiting Nirvana: a daughter's life with autism* (2001), in which she described raising her daughter Jessica. Her books provided families and professionals with a greater understanding of what it can be like to bring up a child with autism. These are powerfully moving books that chart a journey of discovery as the author-mother-researcher/investigator documented the challenges and rewards of the first eight years of Jessie's life in *The Siege* and then describe Jessica's life as a teenager and young adult in *Exiting Nirvana*.

**Core Setting and data sources.** There is one key informant in this study; my daughter who was 13 at the time of data collection. My daughter was selected as a key informant because she provides a rich data source over a long period of time (thirteen years) and represents an excellent example of a child engaged in literacy events in-and-out-of school. Due to the methodology that I have chosen for this study, which includes the collection of memories and a collation of artefacts from my child's literacy life it seemed important that the reader have some background about her.

Lacey lives with her mother (a teacher and graduate student, and University Instructor), father (a former graduate student in English and a self-employed filmmaker) in a highly literate home in which reading, writing, conversation, and many forms of artistic expression are naturally interwoven in the texture of everyday life. From infancy Lacey daily observed her mother and father engaged in authentic literacy events and practices such as reading various forms of print text, notes, newspapers, recipes, and mail, as well as writing grocery lists, checks, letters, and papers for graduate school. She watched her mother chose fiction as her favorite form of reading and her father chose science journals as his favorite choice. Each parent reads the daily newspaper in print form and online, and dinner times usually contain family discussions of local, federal and world news. The arts are celebrated and are participated in at home.

Lacey as a young child had free and easy access to paper, pencils, crayons, and markers, and the freedom to choose if, when, what, and how to write. She was always encouraged, praised, and treated as a competent writer, not as a child whose writing was considered to be of lesser quality in relation to the “adult” writing forms. At an early age Lacey had easy access to computer technology. She would engage in computer time each day.

Lacey came to our family through open adoption, and we began to parent her at 1-day old. She has sustained a relationship with her birthmother, brother, and grandmother. Because of this reality a culture of curiosity and openness has been a guiding principle in our home. Lacey was encouraged to be curious and ask questions, with a commitment from us that all of her questions would be answered truthfully. The fundamental

questions around her origins came early and thus her experiences of the freedom to ask and an assurance that answers would be provided.

For the first six months of Lacey's life I was her primary caregiver. At that point I returned to my work as a teacher-librarian in an elementary school, her father continued his work in the film industry, and Janet (pseudonym, not her real name) became Lacey's caregiver daily in our home. Janet's interactions and sustained relationship with Lacey during her pre-school years are substantive. At school age (Kindergarten) Lacey began to attend daycare and public school in a French Immersion school setting.

Lacey is a competent student. She has been successful in meeting the requirements of the school and sees herself as a good student, competent in reading, writing, and understanding of English and French. She has many friendships in and out of school, and just prior to data collection she self-identified as a lesbian girl. She has a girlfriend with whom she communicates in Europe online and is completely out to all of her friends and family.

Lacey is a child of the technological era, referred to by Prensky (2001) as a "digital native" (p. 1). Technology use was integrated into her everyday life, and was seen by her parents and herself as a tool for learning and creating meaning. It is a tool among many tools in the home. As a young child she had supervised access to the family computer, and now that she is older and in middle school, she has her own laptop computer and is fully in charge of her files and access. Lacey's school experiences involved her in the use of print and non-print text production and consumption, and from

Grade 3 onwards technology was part of her literacy learning and was used as a creative tool at school.

I live with two filmmakers. My daughter is a filmmaker. Her father is a filmmaker and I am a lover of films, and so, we are all enveloped in the language and discourse of film in our home. Lacey played with filmmaking with her father and then branched off to pursue her own interests in this art form through school and independently. She taught herself Movie Maker. Her dad and I both thought that she learned this program at school and were surprised when she said, “Oh no. I taught myself.”

Lacey is a musician. She moved toward the family piano early and often, picking out little tunes by ear before any formal instruction took place. She received piano instruction for a few years, sang in the school division honour choir for six years, and now that she has entered middle school, plays trombone in the school orchestra and jazz bands. She has also pursued the guitar, as an instrument that she is teaching herself.

Lacey is a dancer. Lacey was encouraged to participate in physical activity outside of school, and after a few dismal attempts at soccer, where she was more interested in lying in the grass and looking at the clouds than the pursuit of the ball, she tried dance. Dance was it, and she has continued in this art form and physical activity since she has been 7-years-old.

### **Procedure**

In this next section I will outline the procedures used in this study. I will first discuss the data collection in three phases and then specify how data was collected and analyzed in each phase.

**Data collection in three phases.** My data collection process was heavily guided by Adrian Holliday's (2007) work entitled *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*. She divides data collection, analysis, and writing into four steps. I adapted these four steps for this study and describe them here.

The "corpus of raw data" collection is the first step in the research process which is described as the "rationalized sections of a messy reality." Holliday (2007) advises that the researcher gather all these "messy realities together with the purpose of becoming wholly familiar with what the researcher sees and hears," (p. 90) , and what the researcher finds, "to be important and significant" (p. 90). I collated data from the three collection phases as "parts of a messy whole" because after gathering and analyzing data in three parts this approach supported my return to my overarching research questions.

The "data analysis" is the second step, and is described as the process of "looking at the overall character of the corpus," (p. 90), with the goal of "searching for natural divisions" (p. 90) which provided a means of "determining the character of each division" (p. 90). The data was first sorted into two categories, which I selected for their simplicity. I initially sorted all of the data from all three phases by using my definition of expressive and receptive language. Literacies that are used for the main purpose of communicating expressively, and literacies that are used for the main purpose of being receptive of communication, allowed me to deal with the large volumes of data.

According to Holliday the next step is the "creation of themes" (p. 90), in which the researcher finds headings that suit the divisions found in step two. The purpose here



is for the researcher to see “how far the headings help make further sense of the data” (p. 90). I sorted and resorted the data against my definitions of expressive and receptive language and determined that three themes; “Making your Mark,” “Finding your Voice,” and “Claiming your Place,” emerged from the data as a whole. These themes will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The “text of data discussion” (p. 92) is the fourth step in which the researcher utilizes “themes as headings,” (p. 92) so as to formulate their “unfolding argument,” (p. 92). The researcher then “extracts evidence from the data to support these arguments,” (p. 92) and then uses “discursive commentary” (p. 92) by telling the reader which bits of the data are significant. I selected from the sorted data moments and stories that I identified as “disorientating dilemmas” (Mezirow, 1997), and created “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) by using the set of questions for observable and unobservable constituents of literacy event and practices posed by Hamilton (2000). I then reexamined the data against the three emergent themes. The findings from this investigation of data will be told through the use of story in Chapter 4.

In summary, my adaptations of Holliday’s (2007) four steps of data collection, analysis and then writing, served my research purpose as it supported my return to my overarching research questions. The next section will describe the specifics for each of the three phases of data collection. Readers need to keep in mind that as data was collected, analyzed and written about, my research questions required that I continuously return to the larger “corpus of raw data” and consider the data as a whole. The Data

Collection in Three Phases which is described below, are the parts of the whole, so to speak.

***Phase one.*** In order to situate the data collected in phase two and three it was necessary for me to construct a picture of who I was as a teacher and how this came to life in the classroom. These data took the form of composite stories that were supported by journals that I kept during my teacher era which triggered memories. Journals were used as a generative tool for memories which I wrote as composite stories. Additionally classroom pictures were pondered; memories were evoked and stories were written.

***Data collection.*** I selected particular incidences in this examination by identifying the “disorientating dilemmas” I experienced so that I could show how my understandings of literacy have been impacted and how this relates to the shifting theoretical frameworks within the field of literacy studies and education.

***Data analysis.*** I organized the series of disorientating dilemmas and analyzed the data for its overall character. I searched for the natural divisions of expressive and receptive language, examined the stories for the three emergent themes and then added this to the “corpus of raw data” of all three phases.

***Phase two.*** In phase two of this research process, two specific questions guided my data collection and they were: What have been Lacey’s literacy events and practices over a period of 13 years? And what are some of these events and practices that have impacted my evolving understanding of literacy?

*Data collection.* In phase two I collected and collated data from accumulated artefacts I had gathered from Lacey's earliest years until she was 13-years-old. I investigated my phase two questions by collecting data as outlined in Table 1.

*Data analysis.* I studied the collated data and looked for the overall character of the data collected. I searched for the natural divisions of expressive and receptive language and determined the character of each of the divisions. After having sorted the data into natural divisions of expressive and receptive language I examined the collection of data by questioning the observable and non-observable elements of them as literacy events and practices (Hamilton, 2000). During this phase the key informant did not participate apart from giving me assent to study the already collected evidence of her past literacy events. This analysed data was then returned to the "corpus of raw data of the whole."

Table 1

*Phase two data collection*

Lacey's age	Location of literacy events	Researcher action	Literacy events	Literacy event explored as literacy practice. Phase two questions.	Main research questions.
Birth to Age 3	Home literacy events	Collecting, collating, analyzing, identifying themes	Photographs and video taken (of Lacey engaged in literacy events) music shared/listening drawing/mark makings stories/listened to/told	What are Lacey's literacy events? What are Lacey's literacy practices? How does Lacey's use of literacy impact my understanding of literacy?	How has my understanding of literacy changed as I transitioned from teacher to teacher mother, and from teacher-mother to teacher-mother-researcher? , What are the events (disorienting dilemmas) in my professional and/or familial life that prompted the changes in my understanding of literacy?
Age 3 -6	home daycare kindergarten		lists made calendars kept family traditions menus etc. writing/ mark making/drawing reading to self reading with others stories/listened to/told computer use music shared/listened to/made imaginative play outdoor play indoor play		

Age 7-12	home and in-school		communication technology used -telephone -email -chat rooms -letter writing making wallpaper music making art appreciation/creation imaginative play outdoor play indoor play		
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Note. Hamilton's (2000) observable and non-observable constituents of literacy events and practices were used.

***Phase three.*** In Phase three of this research process the following specific questions guided my data collection process: What are Lacey's literacy events and practices over 4 weeks? What are some of her most enjoyable literacy events and practices and why? What is her perspective of her literacy events and practices and how does she make decisions around how she portions her time around them? These questions are posed specifically during this phase in order to answer the main research questions which are: How has my understanding of literacy changed as I transitioned from teacher to teacher mother, and from teacher-mother to teacher-mother-researcher? , and what are the events (disorienting dilemmas) in my professional and/or familial life that prompted the changes in my understanding of literacy?

***Data collection.*** In the phase three data collection I chose to be bounded by a 4-week collection period, governed by the Ethics Protocol #E2011:034. I chose 4 weeks as I am in prolonged relationship with the key informant as her mother and I felt that it was

important for Lacey's comfort that I restrict this period to 4 weeks. I found that this was sufficient time for me to gather data in order to conduct a self-study. Table 2 outlines the plan used for data collection during this phase. I investigated my phase three research questions by collecting data as outlined in Table 2.

During phase three data collection the key informant co-wrote a tracking list with me, monitored and recorded her own literacy events and practices, and engaged in a series of interviews around her literacy events and practices that she found most enjoyable. See Appendix for interview protocol.

I transcribed all of the interviews and collated materials and artefacts that were referenced by Lacey within the interview process. I studied the collated data and looked for the overall character of the data collected. I searched for the natural divisions of expressive and receptive language and determined the character of each of the divisions.

Table 2

*Phase three data collection*

Lacey's age	Location of literacy events	Researcher action	Literacy events	Literacy event explored as literacy practice. Phase three questions.	Main Research questions.
Age 13	Home and school literacy events	Lacey tracking her own literacy events at regular intervals over a 4-week period	Checklist of anticipated literacy events co- created. Items of interest selected and investigated through an interview process.	What are Lacey's in-school and out-of-school literacy events over 4 weeks?	How has my understanding of literacy changed as I transitioned from teacher to teacher mother, and from teacher-mother to teacher-mother-researcher? , What are the events (disorienting dilemmas) in my professional and/or familial life that prompted the changes in my understanding of literacy?
Age 13		Exploration of items of interest from those tracked above.	Collected field notes. Scheduled, weekly interview.	What are some of her most enjoyable literacy events and why? How does she understand and make decisions around the different affordances of her literacy events?	
		I explored with Lacey using an interview process so as to investigate this literacy community and	I am interested to learn how she sees all of this and how she understands and chooses the different forms		

		the affordances and discourse events within it.	and functions at her disposal (affordances, text modes, semiotic aspects, etc.) I am interested in her long and detailed following of Tegan and Sara (a popular culture musical duo). This interest has permeated most aspects of her life (playing a large role in her current identity, and literacy identity; an identity quite distinct from her peer group)		
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Note. Hamilton's (2000) observable and non-observable constituents of literacy events and practices were used.

*Data analysis.* After having sorted the data into natural divisions, and working with the three emergent themes, I examined the collection of data by questioning the observable and non-observable elements of literacy events and practices (Hamilton, 2000). In this way I generated some "thick description" of these artefacts and interviews. This analysed data was then returned to the "corpus of raw data of the whole."

Once all data were collected and analyzed (differently in each phase as described above) the "corpus of raw data" was then looked at as a whole. Using an emergent design process, I followed Holliday's (2007) next steps, which involved the selection and writing of the stories.



I considered the data across all three phases that by definition are inclusive of my entire career as teacher, teacher-mother, and teacher-mother-researcher and determined if the initial three themes that I saw emerging still represented the data as a whole. I looked at the data as a whole in order to determine those moments and stories that triggered my reflective process and signaled disorientating dilemmas which could return me to my main study's purpose. Based upon these research actions, I wrote the stories that found their way into the final document.

**Methods of verification.** As an autoethnographer, I used the methodological tools of this approach to analyze my experience and consider ways in which the data generated illustrates facets of my sociocultural experience of how my understanding of literacy has evolved. In so doing, this approach made the cultural characteristics of a post-graduate mother and teacher educator visible, as I examined some of my own long held views and understandings of literacy. This was achieved by examining my own child's literacy events and practices over time through my new theoretical lens of understanding in the field of literacy.

This methodology supports my research intentions and design which have been structured by my research questions, and is accomplished by analyzing my personal experience against my new language and lenses described in chapter 2 of this work and the data generated in all three phases of data collection. I now turn to an explanation of methods I employed that were consistent with an autoethnographic methodology.

**Peer debriefing.** Peer debriefing was used as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling analytical sessions and for the purpose of

exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308) My purpose for debriefing in this manner, was to ensure that the terms, ideas, and arguments that I was putting forward "made sense" to someone outside of this particular field of study. This process helped to uncover any of my taken for granted biases, perspectives, and assumptions. I used one of my faculty colleagues who has a background in current language and literacy theory to provide feedback as to the clarity of my thinking and writing about the theoretical framework explained in Chapter 2. I used another graduate student in my field to read some of the stories in order to provide me with feedback as to whether these stories were demonstrating my inner dialogue about my evolving understanding of literacy, and to see if the three themes I had identified were found in the stories that I selected. I used one of my adult undergraduate students to give me feedback about the use of stories to get at my underlying story of my evolutionary process. Debriefing was an opportunity to test and defend emergent hypotheses, and to see if they seemed reasonable and plausible to a debriefer. Debriefing also provided me with an opportunity for catharsis.

***Member checks.*** Member checks were used during phases two and three of data collection, and during the writing process. Member checking was grounded in a well-established rapport with the key informant and was spread over, but not limited to 4 weeks. Although data collection in phase three was confined to 4 weeks, member checking took place as needed while analyzing and writing up the data. If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). Four weeks was persistent enough for my purposes. I was able to generate

enough of a picture of Lacey's literacy events and practices without impinging on her time more than I needed to. Additionally because I am mother-researcher, I had easy access to the key informant for member-checking purposes or for follow-up questions as needed. Close proximity to Lacey during the data collection process and during the writing of the stories provided opportunities for clarification. Additionally, returning to Lacey during the writing of the stories was an essential component for me so as to be as sure as possible that I had told the story as intended by Lacey. Member checks were conducted informally as opportunities for member-checking arose during the normal course of observation, conversation, and writing. Again, as a parent researcher I needed to be careful not to overstep and make too many demands of Lacey in this regard. Member checking is used here in its typical form, which is a technique for establishing to the trustworthiness of an account. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that this is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. It was a positive methodological technique to use in this study because it provided an opportunity to understand and assess what Lacey intended to do through her actions; and it also provided her the opportunity to correct errors and challenge what might have been perceived as "wrong" interpretations. It additionally provided the key informant with another opportunity to volunteer additional information which, at times, was stimulated by the playing back of the original data collection/selection process.

Sandelowski (1993) offers a comprehensive and critical view of the use of member checks for establishing the validity of qualitative research. She warns that member checking can rely too heavily on the assumption that "there is a fixed truth of reality that

can be accounted for by a researcher and confirmed by a respondent” (p. 6). For my purposes, member checking was used as a way of checking my understanding, and for pursuing clarification and clarity, so that I could look more closely at my own self. The goal of member-checking was not to seek objective truth or reality so that it could then be compared to the results of another study, but to as accurately and honestly as possible analyze myself. In my experience, Lacey was always very open to my seeking of further information or clarification.

***Internal audits.*** The use of internal audits helped me become clearer about my own understandings of the data. As there is no objective truth or reality to which the results of this study can be compared; its sole purpose is to push me as a researcher to be cognisant of how fully I have let the data teach me what it says. A different researcher may find some things completely differently, but as this research study is about me, it is my interpretation that is of value. In order to provide structure to the many parts of this study I kept an audit trail of the research steps I had taken from the start of the research project to the development and reporting of the findings. My attention to this audit trail provided a record of what was done in this investigation. Based on Halpern’s (as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) categories for developing an internal audit trail, I kept a trail that included: raw data; (including written field notes, and a list of documents); data reduction and analysis products (including summaries such as condensed notes); data reconstruction and synthesized products (including the structure of categories - themes, definitions, and relationships); findings and conclusions; and a final report including connections to existing scholarly literature and an integration of concepts, relationships,

and interpretations. I kept process notes—including methodological notes (procedures, designs, strategies, rationales), and audit trail notes; (materials that relate to intentions including my inquiry proposal, personal notes, reflexive notes and motivations, expectations, and predictions).

***Thick description.*** Clifford Geertz (1973) established that “thick description” which specifies many details, conceptual structures and meanings is an essential requirement of anthropological study, and superior to “thin description” which is a factual account without any interpretation. According to Geertz, thick description is composed not only of facts but also of commentary, and interpretations of those comments. By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail I was able to evaluate the extent to which the details of the artefacts and interviews could be considered against my own view of literacy as it changes.

Within autoethnography, thick description is used as a technique for establishing transferability. Thick description refers to the detailed account of field experiences in which patterns of cultural and social relationships are put into context and made explicit (Holloway, 1997). I looked explicitly at one child’s literacy events and practices, using Hamilton’s observed and unobserved constituents. Questioning these literacy events and practices in this way provided me a means to generate thick description and to evaluate how it impacted me. My purpose was not to generalize to other children, or other graduate students who are mothers and/or teacher educators, but rather provide one voice that could have an impact on another’s understanding of literacy in children as it “butts up” against some of their own held views.

***Establishment of credibility.*** I established credibility by using the technique of prolonged engagement which is defined as spending sufficient time in the field to learn or understand the culture, social setting, or phenomenon of interest. I spent adequate time observing various aspects of the setting and developing a mother-researcher relationship which established rapport as a member of various literacy cultures. Development of this kind of rapport and trust facilitated understanding and co-construction of meaning between the member of my case and me. In phase two of data collection my engagements with Lacey's literacy events and practices over thirteen years, required that I recall details in many contexts. As mother-researcher my prolonged engagement enabled me to describe the contexts fully. As a parent researcher, I am fully aware that I bring bias to this investigation. That is an accepted part of the autoethnographers role. As I am the primary participant in this study, my positioning against my new language and lens as described in chapter 2 establishes my credibility and acknowledges this bias.

***External audits.*** In terms of techniques for establishing confirmability, external audits were used as a technique that involved having others examine both the process and product of the research study. I included a few colleagues in this capacity and my thesis advisory committee members. The purpose of this was to evaluate whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions were supported by the data. The positive aspects of external audits are that when conducted they can foster validity of a research study. External audits provided an opportunity for an outsider to challenge the process and findings of a research study. Sandelowski (1993) articulated that external audits share many of the same problems as member-checking. External auditing relies on the

assumption that there is a fixed truth or reality that can be accounted for by a researcher and confirmed by an outside auditor.

It is important that this qualitative method of research uses a range of methods for verification. It is important to have a clear description of the research path, including: research design and data collection decisions, and the steps taken to manage, analyze, and report data. Wherever possible I included a rationale for these decisions.

## Chapter 4: Findings

I considered the data across all three phases of the data collection process that are inclusive of my entire career as teacher, teacher-mother, and teacher-mother-researcher. I created themes from the data that would help me investigate my overall research questions.

I determined three themes when considering the data across all three eras. These three themes are: “Making your Mark,” “Finding your Voice,” and “Claiming your Place”. Each of these themes resonated strongly with me as I read, re-read and analyzed the data and as I wrote the stories presented in this chapter. With each theme, I transformed the infinitive form of the verbs; make, find, and claim by adding the suffix –“ing”. By changing these simple verbs (make, find, and claim) into their present participle form my intention was to connote that these actions were still in progress ([www.oxforddictionaries.com/words/verb-tenses-adding-ed-and-ing](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/words/verb-tenses-adding-ed-and-ing)). Transforming make, find and claim into making, finding, and claiming supports the intention of my stories to capture my evolving understanding of literacy over three eras and into the future. As well, these “ing” verbs capture the essence of Lacey as a future actor in her own literacy development, as Lacey herself continues in the act of making, claiming, and finding her literacy abilities.

Each of these themes are useful to me as the researcher because they demonstrate my theoretical understanding of literacy as social practice (inclusive of literacy events and practices), literacy as discourse, and literacy as ideological. Additionally, each of



these themes provides a specific way to express literacy as multimodal, literacy as involving power, and literacy as inclusive of identity. Each theme is stated succinctly below establishing the connection I have made to my broader understanding of literacy.

I identified three themes that emerged from the data. The first theme I call “Making your mark”. This phrase refers to the literacy actor who uses a variety of tools in order to make meaning, which I link specifically to my broader understanding of literacy, including that literacy is multimodal. The second theme is named “Finding your voice,” which refers to the literacy actor who finds and secures a variety of opportunities to voice her or his thoughts, ideas, and opinions, which I then link to my understanding of literacy as deeply connected with identity. The last theme is called “Claiming your place,” referring to the literacy actor who establishes for themselves a context in which she or he can establish meaning making through literacy, which links to my broader understanding of literacy as involving agency and power.

Each of these three themes will be interwoven throughout the stories told in this chapter.

This chapter will be organized by era. I will communicate my findings in each era through the use of story and will make links to my new lens and to my new ways of discussing literacy in order to demonstrate my evolving understanding of literacy over time.

**Teacher Era Stories**

Before reading these stories, I remind the reader of some of my “long-held knowledge structures” that I will be interrogating through the use of these stories, and which were introduced in Chapter 1. These long held “knowledge structures” from this era are reiterated here.

Recall that during my era as teacher I made decisions that centered around my understanding of the development of the language arts, inclusive of the strands of reading, writing, speaking, and listening and that the term “literacy” was not generally in my vernacular or the vernacular of my colleagues during this era. My teacher talk of that time revolved around the nurturing and assessment of the child’s reading, writing, listening, and speaking abilities. My English language arts practice was centered on the idea that it was my job to give each of these strands equal importance in the development of children’s language arts abilities. I was conscious of the dominant view of literacy that I held during this era; with the strands being hierarchically weighted so that reading and writing activities and assessments were given greater time and importance, over the development of a child’s speaking and/or listening proficiencies. It would be some time before the provincial curricular document (1996) included the strands of viewing and representing and this was nowhere recognized in the language arts document of this era. During this era, my thinking about my English language arts practice and the language arts learning of the children entailed their immersion in the rich and wonderful world of literature and print. Speaking and listening were seen as a means of solidifying the required skills and attitudes necessary to be proficient in reading and writing. It was also

my job to assess a child's English language arts proficiencies by using demonstrable and measurable evidence of reading and writing improvement against an expected level of proficiency. I was conscious that as consequence of this view, a child's proficiency in speaking and listening might fade against the more demonstrable and measurable applications of reading and writing, and that there was no curricular focus for considering viewing and representing.

Through my current lens and new literacy language, I can look backwards and analyze my practice as it relates to the development of instruction in language arts. I have selected stories from this teacher era that provide me with an opportunity to reflect on my fundamental understandings of literacy, formed through my biography of experience and summarized above.

I will begin with three stories that I have constructed. Each story focuses on the literacy learning of a child who is a composite construction, based on a combination of different children I have taught. The story of David, (pseudonym) is about a boy who was an artist and cartoonist. I will tell the story of Kelly, (pseudonym) who although silent in class had a rich written and oral vocabulary; and I will end with the story of Carrie, (pseudonym) who could sculpt. During my teacher era there were many Davids, Kellys and Carries that challenged my thinking and taught me that I was not fully seeing or appreciating their more broadly defined literacy abilities. These stories teach me that my language and understanding of literacy required broadening. The three principal themes discussed earlier are interwoven throughout the stories.

*David makes his mark*

*David (pseudonym, a composite construction based on a combination of different children I have taught) constantly doodled and drew in my early years classroom; it seemed that whenever he had a free moment he would be at it. He would bring drawings, doodles, and little comic book type stories that he made at home into the classroom. David was rambunctious, talkative, and full of great ideas that he shared willingly. He did though have difficulty getting down to any of the writing tasks and working within the structures that I had planned as part of my language arts practice. Instead of writing, he would draw; sometimes making boxed cells in the form of a comic strip or creates a picture as if he had the entire image in his head before his pencil touched the page. If not engaged in these pursuits, he would wander about the classroom inquiring into the writing that the other children were pursuing. David was very social.*

*David's full page drawings fascinated me. For example, I would watch him draw a horse. He might begin drawing the horse by placing his pencil deliberately in the bottom right hand corner of a blank 8" x 11" paper. He would begin to form the hooves of the horse and then meticulously drag his pencil upwards on the page to fashion the horse's legs. He might pause and look around the paper and then put his pencil on the top left hand side of the page, where he seemed to know that the horse's nostrils were positioned. From this new position on the paper he would slowly and methodically draw the horses lower jaw; drag the pencil to make the horse's front chest and legs; and end by joining these parts of the horse with the markings he had made of its hooves.*

*I observed David's keen concentration when engrossed in this kind of drawing action. I was fascinated by the way he maneuvered around a blank piece of paper. He chose varying sizes of paper and seemed to have a clear plan for how his drawing would be positioned and proportioned on the page; using most of the space afforded him by the size of the paper. He always preferred that the page was blank and without lines and he drew with such confidence as he consistently produced perfectly proportioned and centered images on the page. I recall how he amazed me. It seemed to me that David had visualized his complete drawing before it appeared on the paper. David undertook these kinds of drawings as if they were a meditation, and he would create them whenever he had some free time, causing much frustration for me as his teacher; for this "free time" that he created for himself was usually at the expense of attending to the work requirements that I had planned for him. If he was not drawing on blank pieces of paper, he would fold up little bits of paper into folded boxed frames and begin to draw what appeared to be a visual story or storyboard.*

*I would greet these creations with fascination, but little more. I recall my inner struggle at the time. Should I "let" David draw during class time, especially when these drawing seemed unrelated to what was going on in the class, or "make" him attend to the assigned language arts tasks I had planned? I knew that his way of expressing himself was important to him, and I knew that it might afford him a means to communicate with others. I knew that at some level his attraction to drawing was representative of one of his many ways of making meaning for himself and others. But, I recall that I had decided that this kind of activity was better done at home. I decided that I needed him to focus on*

*the important activities of the class. He made his mark, but I did not truly honour it in the classroom.*

Looking through my current lens causes me to see that the story about David had to do with my view of literacy as not being multimodal. “Rather than viewing modes of communication other than speech and writing as ‘add-ons’ in theories of learning, a multimodal approach begins from a theoretical position that treats all communicative modes as potentially equal modes of learning (Kress & Jewitt, 2003, p. 1). On a “gut” level I knew that supporting David in his pursuit of his comic and drawing creations may have provided him with a point of mark making access that might move all of his literacies further, but I was acting from the dominant view of literacy at the time and did not see David’s drawing activity as a legitimate pursuit of communication or as embodying what I would now consider as a literacy equal among all others. Through my broadened current lens, my classroom decision now would center more on David as a meaning maker in the language arts classroom. I would pay more attention to why David was so passionate or driven by his drawing and comic strip creations. I would investigate *with* David, his conscious and unconscious perceptions regarding the affordances of comic strip storyboarding or drawing; hence, shifting my role as teacher, to one who helps him to use his love and skill in drawing and storyboarding as a good choice among many to communicate his ideas. By placing David at the center of the meaning making process, I could then help him to enhance and move his skill set forward in literacy with respect to the other language arts strands (i.e., by perhaps talking about and labeling his drawings or writing speech balloons and captions for his comics). Instead, my decision at

the time was to not give up valuable class time for this form of David's self-expression. Put bluntly, David's drive for meaning making on his own terms was trumped by my professional view of literacy and the dominate view of school literacy at the time, which left no room for the meanings David was making in this context.

*Kelly finds her voice*

*Kelly (pseudonym, a composite construction based on a combination of different children I have taught) became increasingly "mute" over the first months of the school year. She was so quiet and meek in class it was if she had begun to disappear, unlike David who was very visible. I encouraged Kelly to stay close by me in class, becoming my shadow of sorts. She seemed to like the safety of this spot and while in class we were inseparable. On the advice of others, I tried to get her to "open up" and speak about anything that she might have to say. We (my fellow teachers and I) were concerned that Kelly was burdened by something and was unable to get past it.*

*I recall my inner struggle. Should I push her to vocalize her understandings and learning? She was so unwilling and seemingly unable to speak or contribute to our class goings on. I was aware that it was hard for me do my job of assessing and advancing her language arts skills and strategies, if she rarely ventured out of herself in voice or with pencil. How could I assess her, or plan to teach her, if she did not provide evidence to me of her learning? This all changed one day.*

*I had been reading aloud a variety of story versions of "Jack and the Beanstalk" and following this immersion into many "Jack" stories, I enticed the children's imaginations by placing a dried bean in each of their hands, encouraging them to*

*conjure and write a magic bean story of their own. The only “criteria” set for this task was that it had to be written as a story, which included a magic bean in some way. After some time of whole class talking and listening to each other about their intriguing magic bean ideas, the children noisily and excitedly skipped off with their little bean clutched gently in their hands and got busy with the task of writing their story.*

*Kelly was silent as usual, and as usual very hesitant to get started. But on this particular day, clutching her little bean, she quickly gathered her papers together, found a comfortable place in the classroom, and began to write and draw. From the pencil of a silent child came a story, fully realized, and almost word perfect.*

*Who knew that she had been really taking in, and really listening to all of those “magic bean” stories? I didn’t, because Kelly never responded in class, and never indicated to me through her facial expressions or body language that she was engaged. But, engaged she was, for I now had evidence of this from her written story.*

*Who knew, that she had copious skills for taking ideas from her head and putting them into print? I didn’t, because for most of that term, she rarely, if ever “wrote” down anything in print, unless it was “copied down” text that was not original to her. But, now I had evidence that Kelly had many literacy skill-based abilities. She knew how to use the alphabetic code to express herself.*

*Who knew that she had something profound to say, and that if not through verbal articulation, through a written story format? I didn’t. But, on this day Kelly managed, somehow, to find a way to give her story voice with a pencil.*



*After her story writing debut, Kelly was still not vocal in class, but her story was evidence of a child who's listening, reading, and now writing abilities were superior for her age. Kelly ventured more often after this day into the goings on in the language arts class, but remained virtually mute for most of the time.*

*It turns out that Kelly was a very literate young person, amid the "goings on" of my language arts practice of the day. Kelly changed, in that she had found a way to say (through writing), what she could not somehow say out loud. Importantly though, I changed too; I had learned that, if you wait long enough, and provide enough safe space and opportunity, a child's drive to make meaning and communicate will be made evident. It just so happened that Kelly used a pencil and a written story form to do it that day. Other children may use another form, but they will find a way to express their meaning, if we have a broad enough lens to see it, name it, and act on it. As a teacher, I can move on with the teaching and learning of the child through whatever evidence they can present to me. My hope for a child such as Kelly would be that her "voice" continues to find a form and a place from which she can claim it, and be heard.*

There were many Kellys in my language arts practice during this era. Looking back through my current lens causes me to see that the story about Kelly has to do with my problem or "dilemma" of measurable evidence as it relates to the assessment of the English language arts. It demonstrates the struggle I had in aligning what I knew was "right" with what I knew was "right to do". I knew it was "right" to stay close to Kelly, and to try to help her find a way to express herself. I sensed that she had a deep sadness (or obstacle) that seemed to be the cause of her silence. I knew it was right not to push

her, trying to keep her engaged in the goings on of my language arts class. But, I did not know “what was right to do” in terms of her literacy learning. If she did not demonstrate any observable evidence of her reading, writing, speaking or listening, how would I assess her and teach her? Put bluntly, reading and writing proficiencies were easier to measure than listening and speaking strands, and Kelly was not demonstrating any of the latter.

Pahl and Roswell (2005), exploring identity over different types of literacy practices, state: “we are who we are and who we are allowed to be is shaped in part by the way we use literacy (p. 23). Kelly had a literacy identity that turned out to be very rich in written vocabulary and in her ability to hear and represent the phrasing of written language. For whatever reason, she could not or would not express this linguistic facility in the verbal form. Up until the day she wrote in the classroom, I was unable to assess her written language abilities, using my dominant lens from this era. Without evidence of her literacy abilities it was easy to place Kelly into a dichotomous position of being “illiterate” when in fact she was highly literate in many strands but the verbal. Literacy as social practice questions the validity of designations that position literacy as an either/or proposition such as “literate” or “illiterate”. In today’s highly mobile and interconnected world, the definition of “being literate” might entail being communicatively competent across multiple discourse communities and in multiple modes (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; 2001).

In terms of literacy as power, Kelly came into my world of privileging written over verbal literacies and taught me to look deeper—past my current definition of

literacy. Looking for evidence of literacy required that Kelly show me who she was as a listener to stories read aloud and to story ideas discussed and as a writer. This experience and others like it taught me that privileging reading and writing in the ways that I had been required a reexamination of my definition of literacy and literacy practices. Kelly's breaking through to me through the observable evidence displayed in her almost "word perfect" story also taught me that I not only had to look for evidence of learning in the conventional text-dominated culture of the language arts practices of this era, but that there are many other Kellys who struggle to express themselves and who do not take up literacy learning in a singular manner or in a way that fit the dominant view of literacy learning of the day. In the next story, "Carrie claims her place", I am challenged once again, to look for meaning-making wherever the child may choose to provide it.

*Carrie claims her place*

*Carrie like Kelly was one of those students who were somewhat invisible in the classroom; unlike David, who was very visible and constantly busy in what interested him. All three children were disengaged from my instructional plans for them, and each of them for very different reasons.*

*I could see that Carrie had a desire to part of the goings on of the classroom, but would often times pull back, like Kelly, maintaining a kind of invisibility. It seemed that she did not believe she had anything of importance to contribute. I could see she wanted to be part of the creative efforts within the class; to write a story, draw a picture, contribute an idea, but like a frightened fawn she would come up to the edge of the water but would not drink. Her forays into class conversations, written tasks, and reading and*

*talking about what she read were tentative, meek and seemed very hard for her.*

*Positioning herself at the edge of the classroom seemed to remain her place of comfort and refuge, until mid-autumn when a clump of clay found its way into her hands.*

*All of the students, as was my practice of the day, were participating in a cross-curricular language arts immersion of sorts into the study of mammals. The children selected a mammal they were interested in learning about and were posing questions and finding answers through the use of many kinds of texts and visuals. (This all predates computer technology.) They were to fashion a kind of written report or booklet of their findings by the end of the week and then as a kind of culminating event make a clay sculpture of their chosen mammal.*

*While the other children were well into posing questions, reading text and pictures about their chosen mammal, I recall that Carrie was hesitant to choose her mammal for study. She moved from text-to-text, not engaging with the other children, and not moving towards making a decision about the mammal she wanted to study. I was aware that Carrie was floundering and that as usual she was staying away from the “hub-bub” of the other children, which was consistent with her refuge stance. I was busy interacting with the other students who were caught up in their excitement of this unfolding project. I pushed these observations of Carrie aside and made a mental note (one of many in the busy “in-the act of teaching”) to try and spend some one-on-one time with Carrie, so as to help her chose a mammal to study and to ease her into the task at hand.*

*Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her go over to where the clay was being stored for later use. I watched her open the sealed container, pull out a hunk of clay and hold it gently in her hand, turning it over and over. I saw her move off to the side of the classroom away from the other children and collect up some of the tools put aside to use with the clay later in the week. I observed her as she began to work on this hunk of clay, with an uncharacteristic determination.*

*I recall that I struggled with whether I should let her continue with this activity (being out of order with how I had planned it). My brief internal struggle centered on the fact that it was my expectation that this language arts activity was to be predominantly text based. The clay activity was to come at the end of the children's process, since I had made a decision that my students needed to have acquired a body of knowledge through the use of the print and image based texts before they were "allowed" to craft their mammal in clay. Part of my thinking also included the idea that somehow the crafting of the mammal would be a kind of celebratory "pay-off" for doing the important literacy work of the day. This kind of teacher self-talk that goes on in a classroom is very common, and in my case went something like this: If I "allow" Carrie to pursue the clay crafting portion of the activity before she has done the important text based language arts work I had planned, it will go against the pedagogical plans I had for this language arts study. If I "let Carrie break the rules" and "let" her act on her desire to use the clay right now, I may have to "let" everyone, and then, where is my order of things, that I had spent time thinking so much about? So, do I let her carry on with her decision to*

*craft the clay now, or do I require her to put it away until her reading and writing portion of the project are complete? No wonder, teachers are tired at the end of the day.*

*I decided to let her be, to be patient and to see what unfolded and to deal with the “complaints” of the others if they arose—which they didn’t. Once I had made this (“in the moment and “on the fly”) decision, my attention went to the others, and Carrie was left to be with the clay. As Carrie’s place in the classroom was frequently “on the outside” of the other children, they did not even notice that she was somehow being “allowed” to engage with the clay; and, hence, the lack of reprisals from the other children.*

*It was a substantial time later that Carrie returned to her classroom desk with a fully-fashioned wolf sculpted from the hunk of clay. I did not notice her return to her desk until I had noticed a large crowd of children hovering around Carrie and her wolf. Carrie was in the center of the classroom action. “How unusual,” I thought. I made my way over to the gaggle of children and could see that Carrie’s wolf sculpture was spectacular. I could see how fine it was, but more importantly, her classmates could see how fine it was. Carrie’s place in the classroom had been found, and she had claimed it. Slowly, but surely, from this day forward Carrie began to find her place amongst all the children in the class. She began to take bigger risks in everything, including with print and image texts that previously I had been encouraging her to engage in. Carrie had found her own way into the dominant literacy culture of the class. More powerful than my own way of now seeing Carrie, her peers could now see her unique talent and she*

*became the “go-to” person in all things three-dimensional after that day. I had learned a lot.*

This story about Carrie speaks to the importance of being as inclusive as possible in our invitations to literacy learning, by extending this invitation to include multimodal literacies. It was through the multimodal three-dimensional expression of Carrie’s knowledge of wolves and her skill in making that shape real, in the clay, which positioned her squarely in the middle of the more traditional literacy events of the classroom.

Through her participation with the clay Carrie was able to also forge her own identity amid the dominant identities in the classroom. I have come to learn that it was Carrie’s determination and courage to follow her meaning-making desires, and that my “letting” her stay with the clay was by chance rather than being a pedagogical decision I made based on a purposeful pedagogical design. Now that I have a broader understanding of literacy that is more inclusive of the importance of multimodal expression, my future decision would be an informed one, rather than one based on chance. This has to do with Carrie’s ability to claim the affordance of clay as an expressive material. Denying Carrie’s access to multimodal materials in this context would have denied Carrie a place in the classroom that allowed her to express herself and make visible a meaning-making proficiency distinct from the other children, whose ways of learning, supported by me, dominated the goings-on in the classroom. To deny Carrie access to the clay would have led to a continuation of her marginalization (Janks, 2010) in the classroom. My current recognition of how this decision would have marginalized Carrie and her ways of

learning speaks to my new understanding of the dynamics of literacy education power relationships.

The dominant actors in the classroom were the majority of the children in the class, who were able to “claim their place” in the classroom and fully participate in the language arts activities, that were planned by me. I now know that by limiting the access and expression of knowledge to print, I was “privileging” one modal expression at the expense of others and that my stance as teacher in this instance was not as “neutral” as I had once thought. I have a new appreciation for Carrie’s determination to seek out and use the clay, in spite of her knowledge that she was going against my established ordering for the events in the classroom. Carrie “claimed her place”, and in so doing she taught me a lot about power. Much of my pedagogical decision making was less neutral than I once thought. Viewing literacy as social practice requires that the researcher understand the ways in which power relationships determine which literacy practices are available to a given community, which are dominant and privileged, and which are marginalized. (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

In each of these stories, the child had a unique and powerful means of communicating meaning. These acts of communicating would remain as something of an “add-on” in my teaching practice and not wholly related to or causing me to make a change in what I understood to be my responsibility of teaching and learning reading and writing using the traditional print and visual texts of the time. My current view has shifted by placing the learner’s drive for meaning-making as central to my pedagogical decision-making. I have learned that acts of literacy are about the person using them



within a social and situational context and that whether the means for meaning-making is easily accessed or claimed with some struggle, literacy is nevertheless always about making meaning.

There are many more stories that could be looked at through this lens back to my days as teacher, but these are the few that I have chosen in order to demonstrate my deepening and broader understanding of literacy. Kelly, Carrie, and David were literacy actors who were trying to make their mark, find their voice, and claim their place in my classroom.

I move from these reconstructed stories of my time as teacher with a sense that I did not really know these children as the unique learners they were in a highly contextualized language arts classroom. I have explored these stories and have stated how with my current broadened lens I might have given more thorough attention to each of their drives for meaning-making as literacy learners.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on one literacy learner (Lacey). Through a deeper exploration of one learner over a long period of time I can demonstrate my evolving understanding of literacy; specifying how my understanding changed and was broadened throughout this study. In my telling of the stories of the next two eras, I will pause and consider what I have learned as a consequence of my focused study of Lacey as one literacy learner.

**Teacher-mother Era Stories**

These stories were selected because I have identified them as my literacy education signposts of the times, and because they provide me with an opportunity to reflect on my fundamental understandings of literacy (and contribute to the biography of my experience as an educator). I have selected stories from my data that also provide me with an opportunity to investigate my transformation of my literacy education knowledge structures. This process will serve the pursuit of my overall research questions.

I remind the reader of the three themes that I determined while considering the data across all three eras, and which will be interwoven, once again, throughout the stories from this era. It is my intention to draw the reader's attention to the themes—"Making your Mark", "Finding your Voice", and "Claiming your Place"—as they appear in the stories, and I will also discuss them further at the culmination of my data sharing from this era. Additionally, before introducing these stories, I remind the reader of some of my long-held knowledge structures from this teacher-mother era, which I subsequently interrogate. These knowledge structures were set forth in chapter 1, but are briefly reiterated here.

Before I wrote these stories I was aware that I was becoming acutely aware of how I was encouraging my daughter's literacy development and was giving viewing and representing invigorated attention as I saw these literacy strands displayed in her everyday life and development. I was also becoming aware of the variety of texts she was interacting with, while developing all strands of her literacy learning. This awareness was affecting the quality and variety of my engagements with students in the classroom, and

with the advent of the new curriculum (that added viewing and representing as additional strands); I began to take a fresh look at which language arts strands had dominated my practice until now. Privy to the day-to-day workings of one child's (mine) language arts development, first at home and then through formal schooling, accompanied by the addition of viewing and representing to the previous four strands of the language arts was having an effect on my teaching practices at school. My consciousness of the shifts in my perceptions of how children's literacy learning developed presented "disorientating dilemmas" (Mezirow, 1997) that caused me to engage in critical self-reflection.

The new English language arts curriculum (1996), brought new language about literacy education into the teacher discourse of this period of my life, setting me on a new instructional course, requiring that I balance the literacy strands and the corresponding classroom structures, with the goal of "balancing the literacy learning" lives of the children in the classroom. Hence, balancing these literacies became the new watchwords of my language arts practice, during this era.

So, in addition to being a teacher with an expanded view of the language arts strands to consider, a new view of balancing the literacy learning in the classroom, I was also now a parent who had an insider's perspective of how, when, why, and with whom a young child uses the resources at hand at home and then at school to develop her literacies. I was bringing into my teaching role my observations of a literacy learner at home who appeared to be driven by her own desire to make meaning using literacy processes that were not always "balanced", or at least not balanced in the ordered ways that I had previously come to expect of children at school.

During this teacher-mother era I was bringing to my daily work literacy learning insights and discoveries I was making at home, but as I did not fully have the language or knowledge to make sense of what this new lens was bringing to my practice as teacher, I struggled, as all learners do, when adjusting to new knowledge. As stated in chapter 1, I was aware that even though I was striving to balance the literacy strands in my practice, I was aware that my engagement with my own child's literacy development on a day-to-day basis caused me to begin to question this idea of balance. My engagements with Lacey's literacy development caused me to wonder if my "teacher drive" to balance the various literacies used at school, while methodical and predictable in approach, and were in many ways positioning the learner at the margins of the process.

In my role as mother I delighted in Lacey's developing personality and identity, but did not have an understanding of how this related to her literacy development and pursuits. Lacey's literacy pursuits were very iterative, and at times did not seem to be broad enough from my current literacy understanding. Much like David, I think she knew what she liked to pursue and those pursuits were not always honored because they didn't seem to fit into my theoretical view of literacy development. I lacked the language to describe or fully understand how her contextualized drive for meaning making was at the centre of her pursuits as a literacy learner. Additionally, with the added perspective of mother I was gaining a new set of questions regarding the relationship of "at-home" literacy in relationship to "at-school" literacy. I knew that my teaching practice at school was not addressing this "divide" that existed between home and school literacies. My past decision, for example, that had blocked David from bringing his home literacies into

the classroom, is illustrative of this point. As a teacher, I had a professional, but distant understanding of how important children's home literacies were. As a mother-teacher I knew there were some "disorientating dilemmas" afoot in this respect. I knew that something was amiss in my thinking about the home and school divide, but again I lacked a deeper theoretical language in which to consider this divide, and so it continued. As a final reminder to the reader, the use and inclusion of technology was also on an upswing in schools and in the world during this era, and I was conscious of my students being several steps ahead of me in their proficiency with technology. This technology movement was going to be a learning curve for me, and I knew that I also needed to find a pedagogical language to come to terms with its reality.

And so, my research study and interrogation of my theorizing by collecting and analyzing Lacey's literacy events and practices provides me with the means to advance and challenge my understanding of literacy. I will do this by examining several artefacts selected from Lacey's literacy events and practices from a host of items collected over thirteen years. These will be examined in this section named teacher-mother stories.

**Lacey makes her mark told in five vignettes.** There are five short vignettes discussed in this section that illustrate the theme of "making your mark" as a very young literacy learner.

#### *Vignette 1*

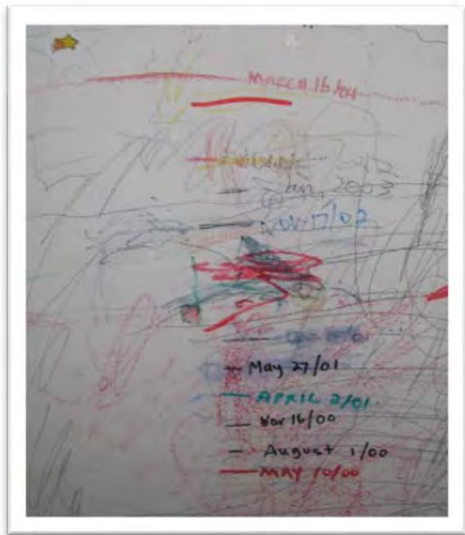
*Pre-arranged child care for Lacey was a problem one day and so it was decided that her dad would work at home and parent. Lacey at age 2 found one of his felt tipped*

*pens (something I didn't leave lying around) and made vertical lines (all 35 of them) connecting the tassels along the bottom edge of a tapestry hanging on the wall, from its lower edge down to the baseboards. This began a period of drawing/writing/mark-making on the wall and I concluded that she had learned this from me, when I had sketched and painted a large tree on her bedroom wall as decoration a few days before.*

### Vignette 2

*When Lacey was 3 years old, I decided to mark her height starting May 2000*

*right onto her bedroom wall. The various scribbles shown in Figure 1, was yet another way of Lacey seeing that I had used her wall as a “canvas”, and I think that she saw that she could do this too. The large red scribble in the center of the figure is Lacey deciding to mark her own height on the chart. Sometime after 2001 which makes her about 4 years old. I can see that her markings certainly did not fit into my kind of neat and orderly plan for this chart. There were many instances that were occurring which taught me to let*



**Figure 1.** Lacey's height chart.

*this be, as she was taking some ownership for this kind of measuring and mark-making and well—it was on her bedroom wall and I simply thought that it made sense for her to claim this space in her bedroom as her own.*

*Vignette 3*

*When Lacey knew that I was into one of my cooking frenzies she would stay close by, in anticipation of the steam building up on the window. Lacey was a climber. She would climb up onto the kitchen chair and then onto the kitchen table to get at her “canvas”. Climbing on the furniture? This question was the mother-thought in my head, but I decided to just stand close to her (safety first) and let her create. This happened many times, in the kitchen, in the bathroom, and on the front door (which had a floor to near the ceiling window). She had come to know that if the glass was exposed to the cold outside condensation would happen and her canvas would appear. She had us so conditioned that we would call her to “her canvas” whenever one appeared, and we worried less about the climbing in that she had proven to us that she was very good at*

*Vignette 4*

*Lacey continued to make her mark on the world as seen in Figure 2, which*

*captures this young artist and writer at work.*

*Clearly my shade of lipstick (available to her in the absence of my full attention) seemed to have just the right affordances to create shapes (emergent writing) on the floor and prepare herself for her adoring audience. She was claiming the world as her canvas; she was making her mark.*



**Figure 1. Lacey makes her mark.**

*Vignette 5*

*Lots of children like sidewalk chalk, but Lacey went through loads of it. Luckily we have a very long concrete driveway, which provided some unimpeded space. Because we live in home on a quarter acre lot, the hours that it took for me to cut the grass (grass cutting is my job in the home and snow clearing is her dad's job) gave Lacey the uninterrupted time (my supervision was at a distance) to create her markings, on our long cement driveway. For several years she went through boxes of chalk, spending lots of time whenever she could making her mark outdoors.*

What have I learned from these vignettes? Each of these vignettes reveals to me that Lacey required large untouched surfaces and expanses of time “without interruption” (although supervision was required), and she sought them out. Beginning in her early years and still to this day Lacey enjoys uninterrupted time with or without an adult nearby. Interactive time with a caring adult was something that was afforded to Lacey in her early years. We were able to provide in-home child care (while we worked) for Lacey until she went to Kindergarten and daycare. She had the same caregiver, Janet (pseudonym), over this period of time, while her dad and I were at work during the day. Janet had special qualities that brought an engaging adult who (in our absence) provided sustained and special attentions to Lacey in some ways better than even her dad and I could provide. Janet maintained a consistent and slower pace (than either of us could sustain), providing Lacey with many opportunities to “thrive in a slower-paced discussion, where (she did) not have to work so hard to get a conversational turn” (Genishi & Dyson (2009).



This sustained engagement with an attentive adult provided Lacey with long supervised periods of alone time, in her own home, when she could explore. I believe this situation played a vital role in Lacey's ability to focus on her choice of activities then and into the present. Lacey made use of the resources at hand to make her meanings. All of these vignettes depict Lacey's literacies before school age, and show her without many constraints in terms of time and place to make her mark; claim on her time and space were much less confined during this period than when she becomes older. In many ways Lacey explores her ability to use literacy and make meaning as play—freely using objects like chalk or lipstick as tools, and the walls and driveway as a canvas in which to express herself. Throughout this period I can see Lacey as fully following her desires to make meaning. Over time she learned where it was appropriate to make her marks.

Looking at how Lacey thrived having been afforded many opportunities for collaborative talk and engagement with a caring adult underlines for me how important it is to provide to children in the school language arts classroom with the same kind of time and space for their own pursuit of literacy.

The next series of stories further document Lacey making her mark and continuing to claim her place by using some of the more conventional tools and spaces for meaning making by using her enhanced literacy development. These stories also demonstrate how I interact with the choices that she makes. You will see Lacey and I negotiating with each other while she creates her literacies in the story involving the magnetic sketcher board. You will also hear how in the story of the "Take me along

Sketchbook” that I learn that my teacher-mother self can overstep my welcome into the literacy places and spaces that Lacey claims for herself.

**Lacey finds her voice and claims her place.** Several short stories are told in this section that capture the themes of “finding your voice,” “claiming your place”, as well as “making your mark.” In addition to the availability of conventional means for mark-making (paper, crayons, and felt markers) and the unconventional ones described in vignettes 1-5, I carried around with me a small, purse-sized magnetic sketcher board, illustrated in Figure 3.

I am convinced that it was through this little “toy” that Lacey learned early on how powerful and engaging written and drawn markings were as a means of interacting with the adult world. This little toy was very transportable (unlike the walls, floors, windows, and driveway she had used as her canvas in the earlier stories) and could be carried around by Lacey and me wherever we went. Lacey wore out several of these toys over her early years.

This little toy afforded Lacey and me hundreds of interactive conversations and opportunities for “half thought out” ideas to be drawn, scribed, and talked about. She interacted freely and used it as a means of self-expression and as a means to request interaction with others. At this time in her life (ages 3-5) her requests for interaction using this toy were with the adults in her life. She would request names of letters, help



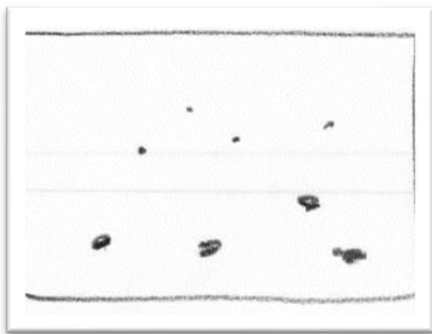
**Figure 3. Lacey’s “Purse sized magnetic sketcher board.”**

with how to spell words, or just share her drawings wherever and whenever she wanted.

She sought out and seemed to enjoy the collaborative talk, the learning, and the adult-interaction. I am convinced that this interactive toy provided a means for Lacey to make significant connections and communications about her thinking. One of my most memorable interactions is illuminated in the story that follows which I call “Buffalos Far Away”. I vividly remember this one, and it represents well, one of the many collaborative talks around the images made by Lacey using this little toy.

### *Buffalo far away*

*While sipping coffee after a meal in a restaurant with Lacey, I looked over at the*



**Figure 4. Buffalo far away**

*image that Lacey had created, redrawn by me from my memory (see Figure 4). “What could this be?” I asked, pointing to the image using a higher inflection in my voice with the word “this”. She replied with great confidence, “These are buffalo far away.” I was intrigued, anticipating one*

*of our great conversations while I enjoyed my coffee. Leaning in towards Lacey and the toy, we got busy discussing this image. I investigated using a sequence of “mommy-teacher” type questions, so as to draw her out. From this exchange I learned from Lacey that these buffalo live on a “big land” and it is “winter” and that is why the background is “all white”. I learned that the dots at the bottom are larger “because these buffalo are close to me” [Lacey points to the dots at the bottom of the image] “and these dots*

*[pointing to those at the top of the image] are smaller because they [the buffalo] are far away.”*

What have I learned from this story? These few simple marks on a blank surface are a story, and represent a body of knowledge that Lacey knows and uses such as: buffalo prefer to live on large expanses of land, that they can live out in the frigid cold (represented by the white background), and that when viewing a landscape those things that are closer to our view are larger than those far away.

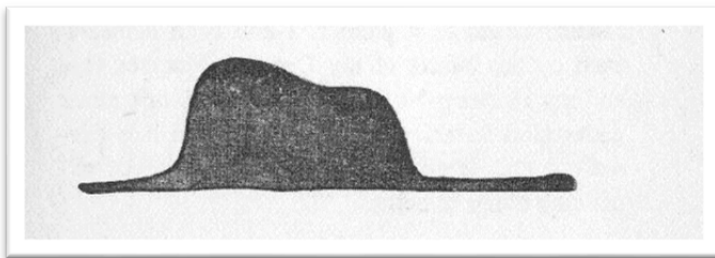
I recall this particular image and the subsequent conversation as if it happened yesterday, and have retold it many times in my classes at the university to my teacher candidates because it was so powerful for me as teacher-mother; providing me with an example of the power of collaborative talk. I name this feeling humility because as a teacher-mother, I surrendered in this moment to, “a way of behaving that shows that you do not think that you are better or more important than other people” (Humility (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humility>.) By connecting humility to sharing power with a child, I tell this story to create meaningful connections for my undergraduate students. By surrendering to the power of the story and the power of the storyteller I am humbled, and so I should be. I think that I experienced this same kind of humbling feeling when I first saw Carrie’s spectacular wolf, David’s drawing of the horse, and Kelly’s “word perfect” story. My teacher-self, and my now teacher-mother-self had had a “gut-level” appreciation for all of these moments. But, now with my new understanding of literacy, worn under my now teacher-mother-researcher “hat”, I

can now say that the humility came from my sharing power. Literacy is about power, and when small children claim it they can be powerful teachers.

Not only do I share this story to demonstrate the importance of honoring a child's creation, but as a testimony to the invaluable knowledge and insights I gained as a mother-teacher. For, it is not only Lacey who found her voice and place with this mark-making, but I found my place too. I will use this next story to explore this naming of humility. It reveals to me that our place (as adults) when interacting with children requires a kind of humbling on our parts and a sharing of power.

*My teacher-mother self finds my place through humility*

*I felt humbled in the presence of Lacey during and after her creation and sharing of her “Buffalo Far Away” story. It caused me to go to my “comfortable place”, which is “the land of fiction”. In that moment of engaging with Lacey around her creation “Buffalo Far Away” I was feeling as “fully adult” as the character in The Little Prince (de Saint-Exupery, 1943), who when presented with Drawing One (see Figure 5) and Drawing Two (see Figure 6) is unable to see how scary the drawing really is—without explanation from the child.*



**Figure 5. Drawing Number One in *The Little Prince* (de Saint-Exupery, 1943)**



**Figure 6. Drawing Number Two in *The Little Prince* (de Saint- Exupery, 1943)**

*The Little Prince* presents these drawings to the adult as a kind of yardstick for measuring the adult's capacity to perceive his world. Antoine de Saint- Exupery reveals the adult as one who demonstrates a,

“grown-ups” response, (who) this time, was to advise me to lay aside my drawings of boa constrictors, whether from the inside or the outside, and devote myself instead to geography, history, arithmetic and grammar. That is why at the age of six, I gave up what might have been a magnificent career as a painter. I had been disheartened by the failure of my Drawing Number One and my Drawing Number Two. Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them. (de Saint- Exupery, 1943 p. 4).

Luckily (or maybe not by luck), Lacey seemed happy enough to respond to my query—“What is this?” of her “Buffalo far away” drawing—and she did not find it a tiresome question from a grown-up. She, unlike the Little Prince, seemed secure enough at this point in her life with me (having had many opportunities to engage in this kind of

*conversation about her mark makings) to trust in my role as an adult in her life. At the age of 4, Lacey had not yet become weary from having to explain too much and did not have to “test” my “capacity” to perceive her world.*

What did my learning about humility teach me? What appeared to be dots on a page was a story; a story that could have been “lost” to the adult in her world if Lacey did not have the trust to share it. From my teacher-mother perspective the mark-making on this little toy was also one of the main places that Lacey learned about the written code that we call the alphabet. My teacher-self knew this activity and these exchanges related to the strands of the language arts. Lacey was using reading, writing, listening, speaking, and representing in these exchanges. My teacher-mother self could revel in the fact that these exchanges, which came often and more deeply over this period, were providing Lacey with the security and the chance to explore her ideas and renderings with her mother and other trusted adults. But, now through the use of my larger lens that moves beyond understanding literacy as merely evidence of the six strands of language arts, I also see Lacey’s use of literacy in this instance as a social practice. I can now name this as a literacy event (inclusive of written language), wherein a child and an adult engage in an iterative literacy practice.

The transportability of the little toy and the manipulations by the child with the stylus, allowed for the creation of images, letters, words, and opportunities for conversation and interactions in varied settings. Lacey had an appreciation of the affordances that the transportability of this toy had, and so did I.

I can now see this as a literacy event which is embedded in a literacy practice. I could use this situated literacy practice learned from Lacey to reframe such experiences as opportunities to engage in collaborative talk with children as they create their literacy renderings, rather than seeing myself as one of those “weary grown-ups” determined to devote class time to our learning agendas for our students and failing to make time to ask the right questions or heed the direction in which the child (or university student in my current context) wants to take things.

I had been such a “grown-up” in the stories of Carrie, Kelly, and David. I now believe that I did not often enough allow for the time required to honor the learners’ own meaning making. But, as teacher-mother I did spend the time engaging with Lacey in reference to the many images she created on this little toy; and look what I gained from these interactions. Without this kind of engagement with my own child and with the students in my classroom their images would remain, as Lacey’s would have, just a collection of dots of varying sizes on a plain background. Only by asking, “What could this be?” were these marks revealed to me as a story. For a young child it is the story that is most important, now told orally, later perhaps made visible through writing and/or through more drawings, and/or through other modal affordances that work for the child in her/his current context.

This story has taught me about time as it relates to a young child’s meaning-making. By making their mark and claiming the space wherever it resides; the adult in the equation is best able to slow down and follow where the learner wants to take us. If one



really wants to know what the child is expressing, as Lacey did with those few dots on the tablet, one must fully engage with the child in that moment.

I moved forward from this event with a renewed sense of responsibility as a grown-up in Lacey's life committed to just how important the affordance of time and space was for her meaning making. It is my impression or hunch that Lacey was well aware of her images being temporary in nature, and therefore she secured and/or invited interactions with others when she wanted them. The temporary meaning-making of the chosen toy was an affordance that she could control. Many an "adult" would collaborate with Lacey in a drawing or a tic-tac-toe type of game or word creation. I wonder if this form of interacting was in some ways liberating for the "grown-ups" who felt free to engage in this "play" with Lacey and not to be bound by the limitations of their own drawing abilities. We "grown-ups" are so tiresome in this accord. With a simple swipe on this magnetic board evidence of the adult's limited drawing abilities could be swiped away.

I have purposefully called the purse-sized magnetic sketcher board a "little toy" because in so doing, it took me back into the work of Gee (2005b), in which he poses the question:

How can we make learning in and out of school, with or without using games, more game-like in the sense of using the sorts of learning principles young people see in good games every day when and if they are playing these games reflectively and strategically? (Gee, 2005b, p. 37)

This little toy is just one of many examples of the “game-like” playful engagement that Lacey and I “practiced” every day. I am convinced that Lacey entered school with a solid foundation of the sound-symbol connections among letters and words and was fully engaged with her drawings as a form of communication because of her persistent use of this toy.

Lacey continues to engage in out of school game-like learning and she brings this way of learning to her in-school literacy development within its current setting in middle school. These stories will be shared later in this study.

Lindfors (2008) deconstructs the language competencies of a kindergarten-aged child, stressing that the child has not yet mastered language. This time of language development from birth to age 5 can be seen as a kind of linguistic apprenticeship. In this light, Lacey and I and the other adults in her life (such as her dad and Janet) played an important role in her apprenticeship into conventional literacies. We were her students too—learning to pay greater attention to her other ways of expressing meaning. Lacey’s most important ways of expressing meaning were through drawing and list making. These modalities broadened to writing and other forms as she developed as a literacy learner.

This next story relates to Lacey receiving an 8.5” x 11” “Take Me Along Sketchbook”, and an artist pencil and eraser for her fifth birthday. This sketchbook became a formalized and respectful place for her to document her meaning-making through drawings. Lacey went to this particular sketchbook at varying intervals over a 6-month time frame. She seemed to see it as her special place in which to draw and record

ideas. I cherish this sketchbook among the many artefacts that I had accumulated unsorted over the years and have looked at it many times. For my purposes in this study I surveyed it for patterns or moments that would trigger my reflective process, and I have decided upon the following series of entries as a means to explore and interrogate my understandings of literacy. My interrogation of these selected images is expressed in the following story:



*This sketchbook is mine!*

*Lacey and I attended a dramatic performance based on Maurice Sendak's (1963) book Where the Wild Things Are at a local theatre company for children. It was a birthday outing, as Lacey's birthday is in December. When we returned home from the theatre that day, the*

**Figure 7. Lacey's drawing of Max's** *sketchbook was lying on the coffee table in the living room, along with the artist pencil and eraser. After the requisite snack and "the this and that" of meeting a 5 year olds needs after an outing; she found her way to the Take me along sketchbook and art materials, and began to make use of her new gift. I left her to own devices, went on with my mother tasks, and later returned to see what she had been working on so intently.*

*She had already made several entries in this cherished sketchbook, and on this day she made the drawing and words seen in Figure 7. I noticed that she had written a phrase at the bottom of the page (she had made sure to write Max's name onto the hull of*

*the boat), which was in keeping with the illustrations in Sendak's book and also evident in the stage performance we saw together.*



*On the next fresh page, she drew a picture of Max in his wolf suit complete with the large buttons choosing to draw three not four, as in the original Sendak drawing. Around her drawing appeared to be a sentence which said: "MAKS in HAS HASU A FhASDUM" (Max in his*

**Figure 8. Lacey's drawing of Max in his wolf's suit.**

*wolf suit), which I couldn't understand. I asked Lacey to read it to me, and then scribed, Max in his wolf suit, placing my text in brackets, seen in Figure 9. My teacher-mother self was thrilled with the way that Lacey chose to use this sketchbook on her own, how she used the pages to document what I thought was a memorable event that we had shared, and how she was also adding print text to the drawing. I was also delighted that Lacey had chosen, on her own, to continue this literary connection, by bringing the experience to the page in the first place.*

*I was so pleased that my mother-teacher-self, called up the gift giver, who was also a mother-teacher, to tell her that it was such a thoughtful gift, and that Lacey was making use of it in such wonderful ways. In this phone call, the gift giver and I discussed the merits of providing this kind of space for young children. She had made one of these "Take me Along Sketchbooks" available to her kids when they were Lacey's age (age 5) and she was "pleased as punch" that Lacey was enjoying it too. As the gift giver and I*

*are both teachers of young children, and hence both mother-teachers, we discussed the merits of using such a coiled sketchbook with young children both at home and in our classrooms. She remembers engaging with her children over their creations in their sketchbooks and regaled incidences of rejoicing in what they had created. We spoke at length about the many opportunities we had as mother-teachers to also teach them something about letters and writing and the like. In anticipation of further episodes with the sketchbook, I hung up the phone and moved on with the busy life of a mother-teacher. There are several entries that show my handiwork within her sketchbook. I loved Lacey's sketchbook so much that several months later I purchased one for myself. But before I had my own sketchbook, I would invite myself onto the pages of Lacey's sketchbook. One such entry is shown in Figure 8. On this page I sketch, sign, and date my entry. Lacey adds her own sketch and adds additions (in the form of words and speech bubbles) to mine.*

*All of the sketches up to this point were Lacey's. This page shows how I imposed myself into her sketchbook space and place. There is evidence of a kind of interplay between my drawing and Lacey's drawing by claiming some of my drawing as her own. She seems to have added a love life to my cat, as he/she ponders a love interest of sorts. This kind of interplay tells me that I have not overpowered her completely by intruding into her sketchbook.*

*It is in the January 3 entry seen in Figure 10 that I see a kind of overpowering intrusion into Lacey's sketchbook. The composition of Lacey's entry is starkly different*

*from her creations in all of the other entries preceding this one. I remember that day, as if it was yesterday, because on that day I learned that I was “butting in” where I did not*



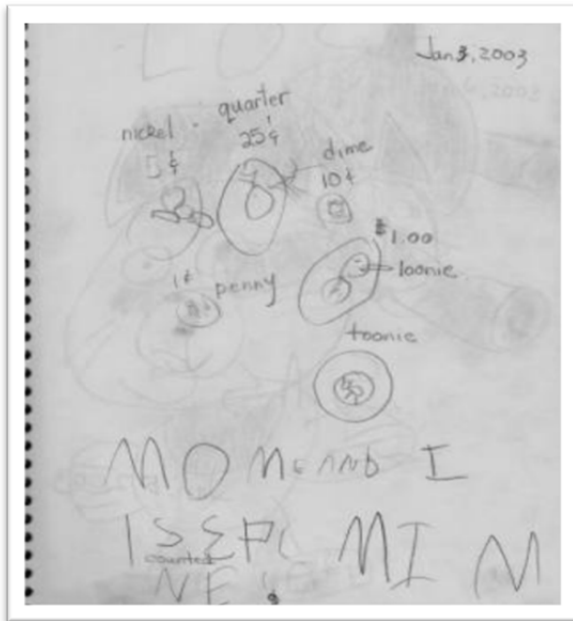
*belong?*

*What is different in this entry? I remember that Lacey and I were counting her piggy bank money together. I remember that I suggested that she write this experience up in her sketchbook, and I was the one who took over the page, showing her how to label her drawings and telling her how to spell the words and such. My*

**Figure 9. Our collaborative entry.**

*mother-TEACHER self was in full swing. It was the nuanced way that Lacey reacted to my “butting-in” into HER sketchbook that told me to “back off”. I recall that this interchange was so much different than the one in Figure 9. Lacey and I were playing together in Figure 9 while in Figure 10, I am imposing my agenda onto the mark making. Lacey adopted a demeanor that was more school-like; this was an activity that had a beginning, middle, and end and was something that required completion, not unlike a school based literacy event. I learned that day that my mother-teacher actions of making the money counting activity into a learning experience inclusive of language was a good one, but it did not belong in HER sketchbook. I recall that Lacey “played along*

*with me” that day, attending to what her mother was “teaching” her, but looking at these drawings now I can name this episode as one in which I over-powered Lacey’s drive to make meaning. I had “butted-in” where I did not belong.*



**Figure 10.** Illustration showing me “butting” into Lacey’s sketchbook



**Figure 11.** Lacey’s drawing of Sassy.

*The next two entries show how Lacey reclaimed her sketchbook and how she represented creations that she chose to include, on her own terms. It is interesting to me that the SASC (Sassy) drawing (see Figure 11) of one of her little “stuffies” (named*



**Figure 12.** Lacey’s drawing of “I’m angry”.

*after her cousin's cat) is full of shading and displays quite a competent use of this drawing technique for someone so young. I remember that she had observed me using this drawing technique (shading) in my sketchbook, but it was her choice to claim a page in her own sketchbook to try this out. I think that the ease of the drawing and the "personality" projected in her characterization speaks to Lacey not having an adult "butt-in" into her drawing/labeling process.*

*The next entry I enjoy on many levels, as it shows me that the precise drawing that she rendered of SASC (inclusive of perspective, detail, and shading) is not evident in the "I'm angry" entry seen in Figure 12. In this figure Lacey is clearly using a few well-chosen lines to express herself. The clenched tooth in her sketch seems to stand for anger. She was angry, that is very clear. Why she was angry, I cannot remember. Oh well, it is her sketchbook.*

What have I learned from this story? I can see now that I over stepped my welcome and pushed myself into Lacey's meaning-making. The drawing of Sassy (Figure 11) shows sophisticated perceptual skills that Lacey brought to her renderings of one of her loved "stuffed toys". In this example, though, I see evidence of an "apprenticeship relationship" at work that is discussed in Lindfors (2008) writings. Lacey was modelling her drawing of Sassy on sketching that I had been doing at the time, as I played with shading. I recall vividly Lacey's interest in what I was doing and shortly thereafter her drawing of Sassy appeared in her sketchbook. The picture of Sassy appears to show Lacey exploring her new-found drawing technique in her sketchbook (without any "butting-in" from mom) on the following day.



Lacey returns to “the heart” of her expressive drive when she draws and writes “IM ANGRE” (I’m Angry) (see Figure 12). In this instance, the words support the emotion that is expressed through her sketching, but the sketching can also stand alone as an expression with personal meaning for Lacey.

These sketchbook entries (in this particular sequence) provide a window into Lacey’s use of drawing and writing as a means of expressing herself and of naming her identities as a participant in her world. The teacher in me saw the sketchbook as a place in which I could engage Lacey in conversation, develop her oral and written language, and informally support her learning in other areas (i.e., counting, drawing and shading, etc.).

In these entries readers can also witness my own struggles with my identity as a teacher-mother. I was the one, for example, who initially added the date to Lacey’s entries (which I see in this context, as a teacher act of dating “student work”). But as I continued to observe Lacey as her mother, I learned that for her “dating your work” was not a school act at all (she wasn’t even in school yet when she started to do this), but was an act that had meaning for her at that time and which she continued to do as she grew older, following in the tradition of creators who date and sign their work. In later stories, you will see Lacey continuing to date and title her work, using the broad range of modalities that she pursues.

Generally Lacey had claimed this sketchbook as her own place, appearing very free, and doing just fine in her use of pencil to explore her own ideas and thoughts, but

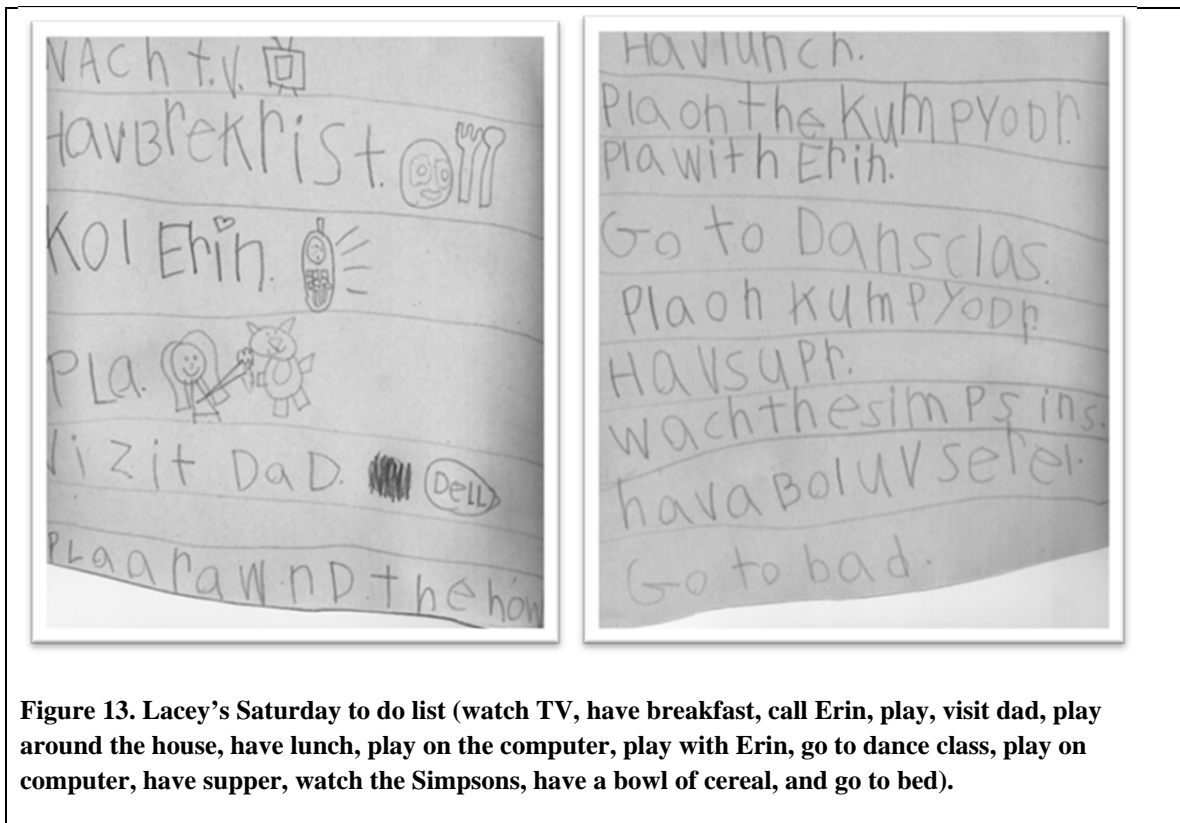
“the heavy hand” of her teacher-mother was an unnecessary and unwelcome interruption of my agenda into her space.

Lacey is at her most “authentic” self when she is in charge of her own meaning making. This study of self makes me aware of the many times as teacher I may have overstepped my boundaries and entered into her own meaning-making realm—disrupting her own intentions. I ask myself “what is required in this kind of mother-daughter (versus teacher-student) collaboration? Is the home in particular a place where the child should have greater freedom to drive the advancement of her meaning-making? In the counting money/currency instance I don’t believe it was wrong to try to teach my child to write and read using this particular language, but did it belong in her personal, creative space for which she ought to have been able to claim direction and purpose? I would suggest that it did not.

**Lacey’s literacy as social practice in the home told in four vignettes.** Apart from her dalliances in her take along sketchbook and interactions with her magnetic sketch board and the other large spaces that Lacey saw as her canvas, she did spend some of her “at-home free” time engaging in literacy events that can be seen as being tightly linked to the social and literacy practices of our home. The following vignettes show Lacey’s literacy at home, imbedded in the comings and goings of familial traditions and practices.

*Vignette 1*

*Making lists and checking them twice ... or more ... was something that Lacey did constantly, in her early years and now in her teens. When looking over the accumulated artefacts I had saved from Lacey's early childhood (unsorted, and thrown into a box ...until I undertook this study) there were samples of her many lists. Her dad and I are list- makers, and so I am pretty sure that she learned this from us (perhaps among others), but Lacey's lists were so much more fun and interesting than ours. They found their way into "the box" because Lacey's dad and I said often, "We gotta keep this one." Figure 13 shows one of the many Lacey lists that were saved.*



*I can tell Lacey's approximate age because of the content; such as dance class, her friend's name and the vintage of her dad's computer at the time (a Dell computer). Lacey is a documenter of her life. The content of the list also tells me that this was one of her lists that she made for a Saturday, because Saturdays provided her long expanses of time that she controlled, except of course for her scheduled "dansclas" (dance class). Her dad and I were always fascinated by how she consistently added little pictures and "icons" to her lists.*

*The list making continued. Eventually Lacey claimed and used a scribbler from her leftover school supplies, and used it to make herself a "Book of Lists". Figure 14 shows the cover of her "Book of Lists". The first list housed within it can be seen in Figure 15.*

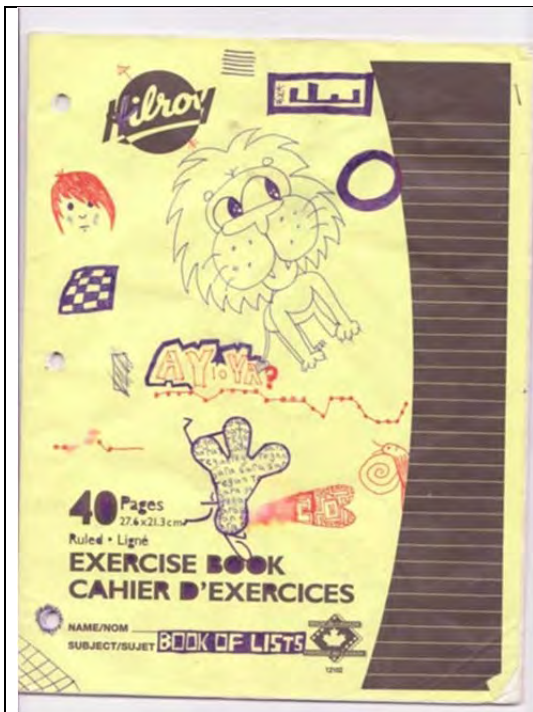


Figure 14. Lacey's Book of lists.

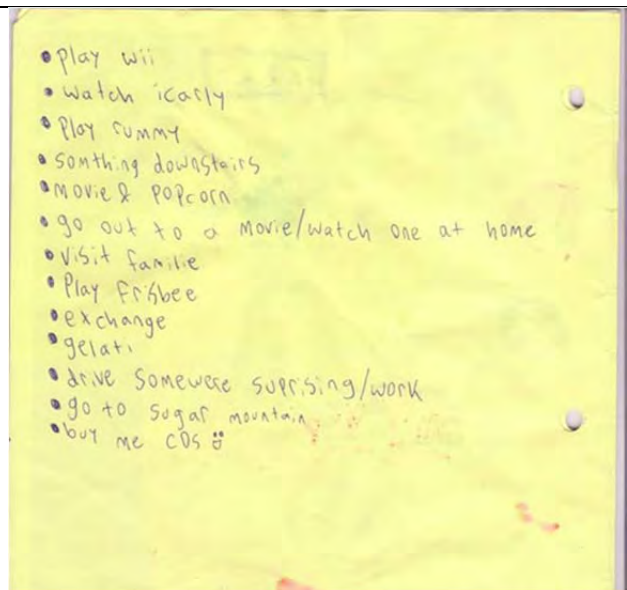


Figure 15. Lacey's "to do" list at age 12.

*This list shows how Lacey has now moved onto things like “wii”, which makes her about age 12. One of the items on her lists states “exchange” and I know that for her that “to do” item, is all about going to a historic and “cool” location in our city. Going to “the Exchange” is not something Lacey can do on her own at this juncture in her life, suspect that “this item” found its way onto her dad’s or my list of “to dos” for that day.*

### *Vignette 2*

*Lacey’s dad and I have large, involved extended families and host family dinners often, especially to celebrate holiday events. Perhaps it was when Lacey was about 6 or 7 that she asked me while I was setting the table, “Can I help?” I learned early as a mother never to turn down such an offer from your child. But I was pretty much finished setting the table; pondered what I could get Lacey to do, and then suggested, “Sometimes people put little name cards to show where to sit, do you want to do that?” With that suggestion Lacey was on a mission. She found some cardstock, gathered some felt pens, scrounged around for some stickers, and set to work in her room. Sometime later she presented the following place cards (see Figure 16). I saved them by stashing them among the “fancy company dishes”, thinking that maybe we/she could use them again. Use them again and again and again was exactly what Lacey did, and still does into her teens.*



**Figure 16. Sampling of place cards made by Lacey.**

*She reuses them by adding stickers that represent the holiday of the day. She has made additional ones, as her older cousins start to bring dates to these events. Everyone who sits at our table receives a place card; even Sammy gets a card beside her dog dish (not at the table). Everyone has a place at our family dinners, thanks to Lacey.*

### *Vignette 3*

*Lacey learned her tradition of making homemade greeting cards from her dad. It was something he always did as a kid, and encouraged Lacey to do as well. Over the years, family and friends have come to expect a homemade card from Lacey. They began in printed form and gradually transformed into digitally created printed cards. As yet, she rarely uses an electronically sent card which is something that her dad does and something that I do not do; I still prefer to send paper cards through snail mail, if I am not able to deliver them in person. Lacey, like me, prefers to hand make and hand deliver her cards in person.*

*Vignette 4*

*Lacey has a similar tradition of making her own invitations for birthday party guests. I know I was the instigator on this one. She and I made her first birthday party invitation together and then after that Lacey took over. Every year she designed a new one. As with the card making, she has transformed this process into now using the computer to generate her invitations.*

What have I learned from these vignettes? These vignettes are evidence of Lacey using creative literacy events imbedded in larger literacy practices in order to meet a social purpose. For the longest time, I enjoyed these practices of Lacey's on a purely teacher-mother level, but now as a teacher-mother-researcher I can name them as literacy events, embedded in literacy practices, that evidence a literacy learner/literacy user acting within the context of literacy as a social practice. These vignettes represent for me that I am now viewing them through a "literacy as ideological" theoretical lens, which means I can view them by focusing on their social purpose, rather than limiting myself to seeing them through my previously dominant "literacy as autonomous" theoretical lens. This is a theoretical shift for me, as I move forward.

**Lacey claims her place and makes her mark using technology at home.**

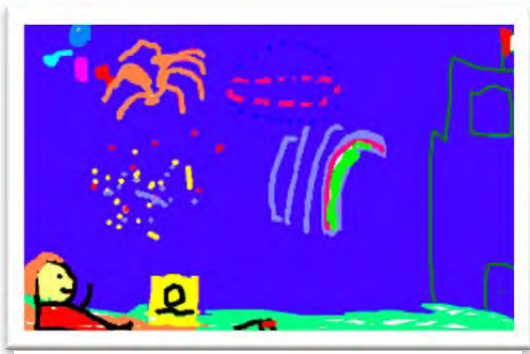
Lacey's early forays into using the family computer technology centered on several CD



books and games she was able to load, manipulate, and "play" on her own. I decided to give her a short introduction to the "Paint Program" that was

**Figure 17. Image made by Lacey.**



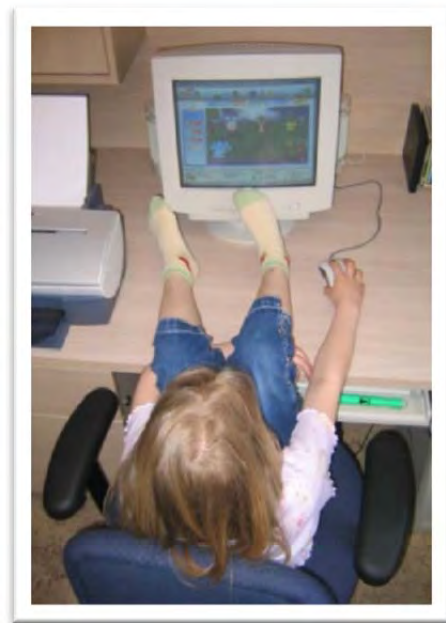


**Figure 18.** Image made by Lacey on Paint Program.

available to her on the family computer because I knew she was interested in it for producing drawings. She spent most of her “allotted times” on the family computer playing with and learning to manipulate the functions of the Paint Program. After some time experimenting and learning to use the functions of the paint

program, I noticed that she was creating beautiful images and was getting better and better, at producing images much like the ones shown in Figures 17 and 18.

At this point I thought that it would be good to teach Lacey how to save and file her creations so that they could be looked again and again. She learned quickly to maneuver within the technology, which is an attribute not only common to Lacey but one common to “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001). Once Lacey had been shown this function she began saving and then filing her creations on the family computer. Figure 19 shows Lacey, my little “digital native”, quite comfortable at the family computer. Lacey has clearly claimed her place at the family computer, has



**Figure 19.** Lacey at the computer.

enjoyed, and still enjoys her time using technology for her own purposes. The following story takes this claim one-step further. It demonstrates that not only has Lacey claimed



her place at the computer but that she has done so for multiple purposes that have become integral to her literacy life as a social practice.

*Lacey's art gallery*

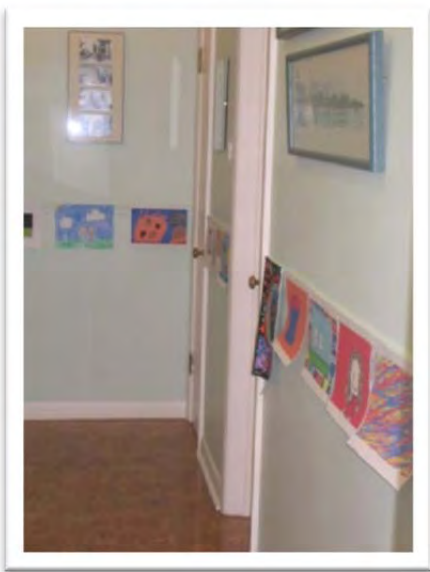
*It turns out that Lacey had quite a collection of images collected in her folder on the family computer. I recall that on this day, I was busy doing my mommy tasks around the house, when Lacey asked, "Mom can I print some of my pictures?" Without giving a*

*thought as to what "some pictures" might mean, I said, "Sure, do you know how to use the printer?" "Of course," she replied, and we both went on with our own business of the day.*

*Sometime later, Lacey proudly presented me with a stack of pictures she had printed. "That's a lot of paper and ink". I said out loud to Lacey with exasperation in my voice. Well, the deed was done, and I knew going forward that I would have to query deeper with Lacey, the next time she asked if she could print something. I moved on and asked, "What are you going to do with all those?" and she replied, with great purpose,*

*"I'm going to make an art gallery."*

*This time she and I negotiated where she would create such a gallery. Together, we selected the hallway leading to the bedrooms in our house. As Lacey had moved on from direct mark-making right on to the walls (she was now about age 7), and as she was accustomed to being "allowed" to use cello tape on the walls (no need for new*



**Figure 20. Lacey's art gallery.**

*permission for that), she went about her business of creating her art gallery (seen in Figure 20). This art gallery remained for some time in our hallway. In addition to it being a place to hang her “art” (as they were no longer referred to now by Lacey as “just pictures”), this place also became a place for “playing out” a somewhat common family practice of going to art galleries. When Lacey had decided she was “all played out” with the art gallery, the art was taken down. She stapled the pages together, put a blank piece of paper on top, as a cover, and these 13 pieces of art then became a book, to which she added written titles, and descriptive passages to the left side blank spaces. As Mom, I was pretty happy with this choice, as she sure made a lot of use out of all the paper and ink she had used.*

What have I learned from this story? In this story Lacey demonstrates how she moves seamlessly from one mode of expression to another. She saw her computer drawings as art that could be hung on the wall as part of an art gallery, and then when she was finished with them in that form they became illustrations that were part of a book.

The stories in the previous section represented dimensions of who Lacey was as an early literacy learner at home. This next section examines documentation I have selected that demonstrates a bridging from home to school and back home again in her literacies.

**Lacey’s home literacies meet her school literacies.** The stories and vignettes in this next section were selected because they provide a means for me to explore Lacey’s activities as they “bridge” home and school. The discussion in this section will focus on

her writing journal, which she kept as part of a school-based writing activity in her Grade 1 class. This journal is an artefact that dates from September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2004 to May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2005; there are 50 entries contained in this journal. I begin with a close look at her first formal entry in her Grade 1 writing journal dated September, 21, 2004 (see Figure 21).



**Figure 21. Grade 1 Journal September 27, 2004 (Lacey age 6 and 8 months).**

This drawing not only illustrates the written text “I WOK TO SKOOL WITH MI MOMMY”, but also includes so many more details worth talking about. Not only is it a pleasant day replete with butterflies and sunshine, viewers may also notice the bird looking at the worm (perhaps to give to her chicks in the nest in the trunk of that evergreen tree). I wonder who the baby carriage and baby rattle belong to. Is there a baby in there? Whose baby is it? And who is the person happily driving away in the grey car. They are obviously good drivers as they are correctly confined to their lane in the divided roadway (see yellow markings). The teacher deemed it necessary to write underneath

Lacey's text. The written text is "readable" and therefore there is no obvious reason based on the text to require this action. I know, however, that I would have done the same thing during my teacher and teacher-mother eras, and I think that it would have had more to do with recording for the parents and or other interested parties that I know and am demonstrating the "proper" writing conventions. Interestingly enough, the teacher continued to re-scribe and make fine edits to Lacey's writing until about January, and then Lacey's teacher stopped doing this. Also missing, though, were any interactive written comments (which would definitely be something I would have done as the teacher). I see this as a lost opportunity (by her teacher) to interact with Lacey about the meaning and purpose of her writing.

Around the same time as Lacey created this entry, I was learning from Barbara Reid about appreciating Lacey's artwork, as is told in the following story.

*A mother's appreciation*

*On a cool day in October, 2004, which was about a month after Lacey's first in-school journal entry, Barbara Reid (the renowned Canadian children's writer and illustrator) made a presentation to the students at the school in which I was the teacher-librarian. Her newest book, The Subway Mouse (2003) was in the publication stage, so she had much to tell the students about that, and about her own writing and illustrating processes. To "score" such a renowned author illustrator as Barbara Reid was a delightful happenstance for me as a teacher-librarian. Suffice to say, I am a fan of Barbara Reid's prolific work, and so when I heard her speak about her drawings as a*

*young child I was especially intrigued as a mother. I gave her my full attention and was fascinated with how she explained her illustrative process using plasticine. However, it was the slide that she showed of one of her drawings as a young child that resonated profoundly with me as a mother. She explained to the children and to me, that in looking back at one of her early drawings (see Figure 22), she could see that her early drawings were not only drawings but that they told intricate stories. She said that she noticed that there was always action in her drawings, pointing to the many subtexts within the drawing. She said that there was a foregrounded story and a background story or “the other story” taking place within her drawings.*

*I was very moved to such a degree by Barbara’s comments regarding her*

*drawings as a child that I wrote her an email as a follow up to her presentation for my students using the subject line “a mother’s appreciation”. I told her in that email that, “During your presentation you showed a picture of one of your drawings as a child and spoke about how in your early drawings you*



**Figure 22. Barbara Reid’s childhood drawing.**

*always seemed to include a narrative and that there was always some kind of “action” within them. I am the mother of a child who does that. I wanted you to know that I will*

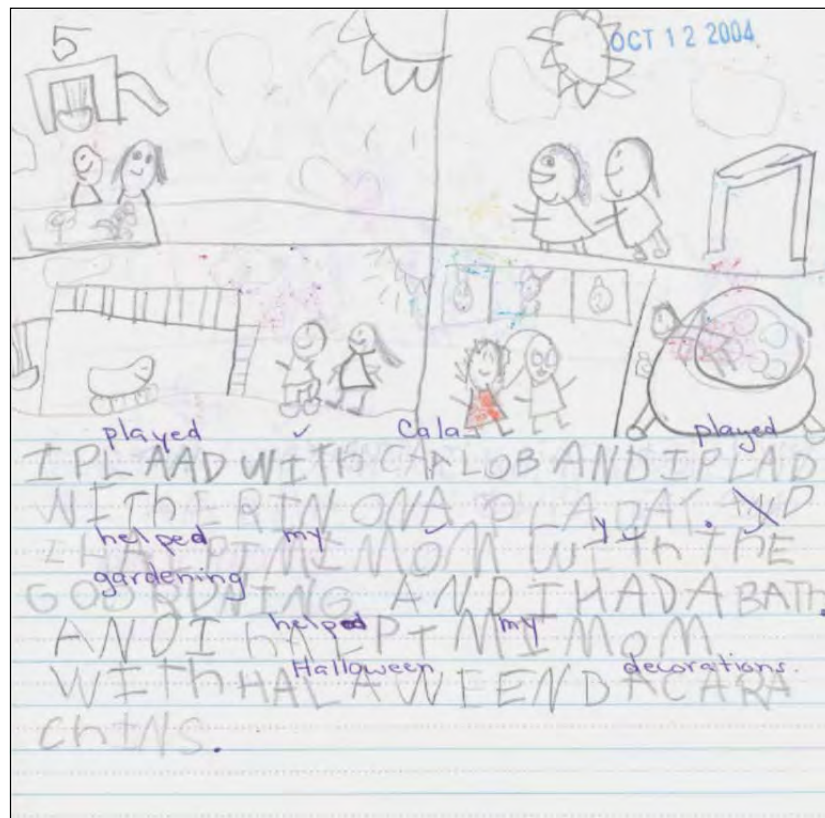
*always remember this comment and it helped me appreciate my daughter's relationship to drawing in a more deep way."*

*Barbara replied right away, and among other things said, "I think I was about eight years old when I did it, using pencil crayons and ballpoint. It's my version of Santa's workshop, with a fair bit of eight-year-old slapstick humour" (Barbara Reid, personal communication, July 5, 2014).*

*Barbara Reid's observations came to me at "just the right time", expanding the way I then accepted and appreciated Lacey's "drawings/writings".*

*I had been appreciating Lacey's drawings/writings immensely as the "product" of my own child's creativity, but now I was also appreciating them squarely under my mother-teacher "hat" as well. I was happy that Lacey was giving her school writing tasks as much thought*

*and attention as those at home (she was a competent student), but after my exchanges with Barbara Reid I developed a more thoughtful eye. There was so much going on in Lacey's artwork*



**Figure 23.** Lacey's October 11<sup>th</sup> grade 1 journal entry. I played with Calob and I played with Erin and I played and I helped my mom with the gardening and I had a bath. And I helped my mom with Halloween decorations.

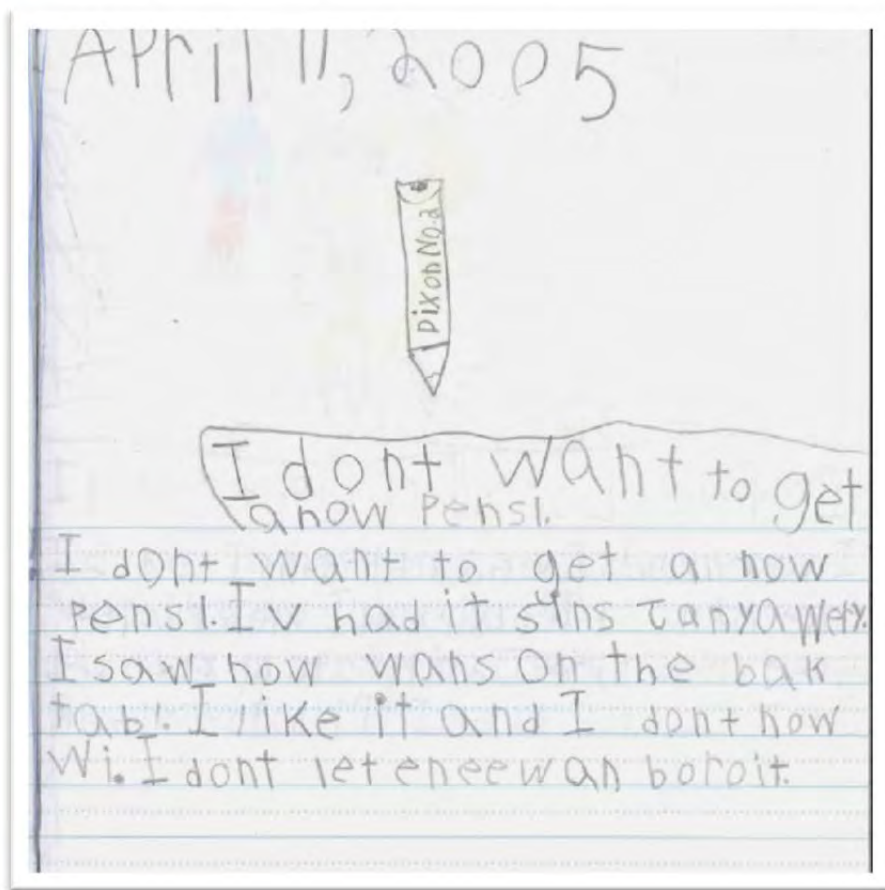


*than was expressed by the text alone.*

What had I learned from these stories? I continued my thoughtful appreciation of Lacey's school-based journal entries and saw her continue her attention to using drawing to tell many levels of story (foregrounded and back grounded), as Barbara had taught me, as well as in terms of the interplay between the illustrations and the print text. This led me to thinking more deeply about which comes first: Is it the text, which may or may not be a story? Or is it the drawing, which may or may not be simply an illustration, and

which may or may not be a story?

For Lacey image-making and text-production were in play together. There was beautiful consistency of effort and attention to detail expressed in her drawing and writing in her school-based texts, which also told me as mother-teacher that Lacey enjoyed this school-based activity.



**Figure 24.** Lacey's April 11<sup>th</sup> grade 1 journal entry. (I don't want to get a new pencil. I don't want to get a new pencil. I've had it since January. I saw how once it was on the back table. I like it and I don't know why. I don't let anyone borrow it.)

By October Lacey was adding more written text to her entries, but she was also doing something in the October 11 entry (see Figure 23) that I had been seeing at home. She had portioned off the blank space above the lines supplied for written text and was creating sequenced cells (similar to a comic strip or storyboard) and adding more text to her pieces. I accepted the heavy pen of the teacher, correcting and clarifying Lacey's text, as the "appropriate" act of a teacher (demonstrating conventional form), knowing that I would have done the same thing in my practice as a language arts teacher. Thinking that if the "correct" spelling was not presented then the learner's incorrect spellings would be reinforced and hence the error needed to be eradicated.

In Lacey's entry in April nearing the end of Grade 1, (Figure 24) I relished in the voice that Lacey brought to this entry. I still have the DIXON pencil she hung onto for so long. This hanging onto "things", ideas, and feelings is "oh, so Lacey"; (and apparently as evidenced by this study is "oh so Lacey's mom" too). In fact, I have hung onto the very DIXON pencil shown in her illustration. To this day, it is stored in my jewelry box with other treasures and is waiting for me to archive it in a special way, but as with all busy parents it hasn't happened ... yet.

Lacey is one of those children who don't lose things. She hangs onto things, feelings, and ideas concretely and figuratively. As her mother, I have learned that this can be an asset. She always knows where HER DIXON pencil is. But, it can also be a liability: Can she move on without HER DIXON pencil that she loves? This strong sense of purpose, and her "dog with a bone" sensibility, seen in her early years continued into the teen years (which will be revealed in the stories from that era).



I find it interesting to note that in Lacey's April 5, 2005 journal entry (see Figure 26); this was the first of her entries that she gave a title. Every entry after April 5<sup>th</sup> had a title. It appears that once Lacey saw the value in giving her entries titles she continued this practice consistently until her last entry in May. Her April 11, 2005, makes use of this "new" skill of titling her work. The title—"I do not want to get a now (new) pensl (pencil)" — makes the point of her entry very clear. Lacey cannot tell me if creating a title for her entries was something her teacher had taught or required of her in this school-based text, but it is clear to me that in true Lacey as "a dog with a bone" style, she grabbed onto this as a practice for herself and ran with it right to the last entry in her school-based writing journal.

**Lacey's at home literacies when she has time to fill.** I think that I have established by now that Lacey is a child who was afforded long periods of time, without

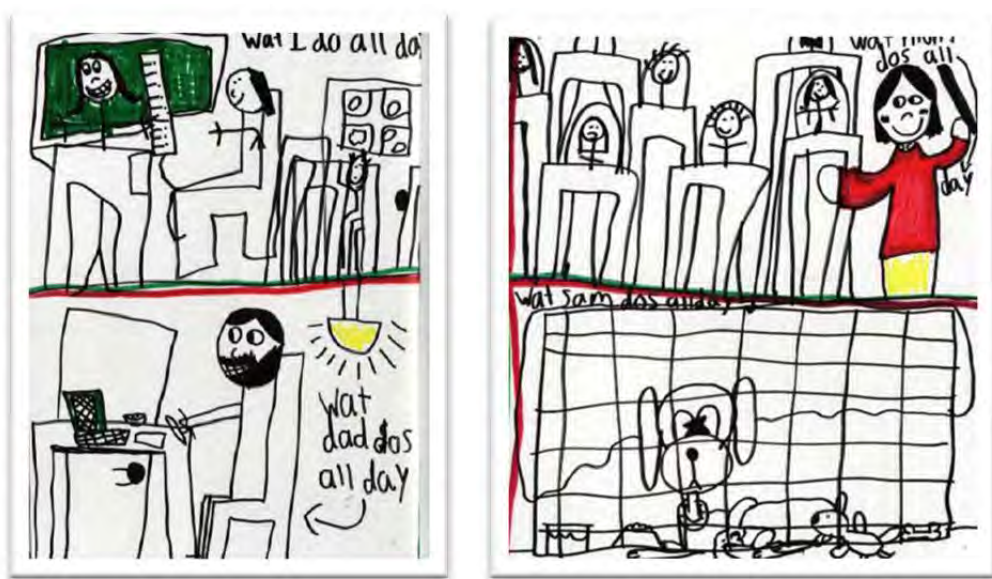


Figure 25. Lacey's at home creation: What mom, dad, Lacey and Sam do all day.

too much adult intervention, throughout her early life. During this time, she also continued to teach us (her dad and me) that she loved to have unplanned time where she could figure out what she would do with it.

Figure 25 represents an at-home piece of “work” that had no agenda other than to “fill some time” that had been provided to her through necessity, due to child care arrangements again. She had to “keep herself busy” at her dad’s office while waiting for him to finish up his work.

In this drawing it is interesting to note the uniformity of style, the consistent perceptions of “depth” in the drawings and the equal sized renderings of each setting: Mom, Dad, Lacey and Sammy (the family dog) all have equally important things to do

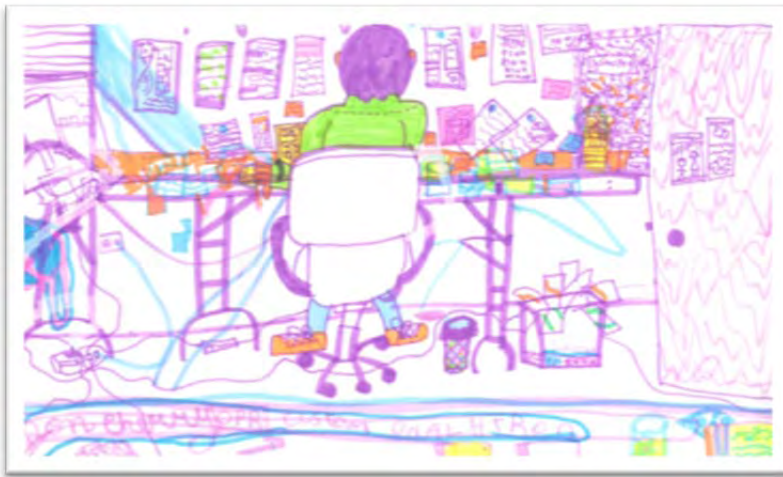
during their respective days. Note that it is only Sam who is feeling sad about her fate; that day she is confined to her kennel regardless of all of the toys provided for her enjoyment. Although upon closer inspection I notice that there is one other character that is sad about her/his day and that seems to be a child in my class.



Figure 26. Lacey’s drawing of her dad reclining.

With ease Lacey is able to express emotion with barely a mark. With very few lines she is able to express quite a lot. This drawing was rendered on a folded up piece of cardboard that she scavenged from her dad's office recycling bin, and the colour choices are limited to black, green, and yellow because those were the felt pens that were available to her, as she filled time waiting for her dad to finish up his work.

Lacey is the “queen,” in my view, of filling time. She has taught us over the years that expanses of time with nothing “scheduled” is perceived as a gift by her, and we are usually gifted back with some kind of creation such as the one in Figure 26. The detail expressed in her drawing of her dad reclining at home shows another of those, “How can I fill my time” sessions, in which Lacey's careful noticing, complete with the many remotes on the coffee table, the disordered bookcase, and light emanating from the tall lamp, end up in a drawing. I suspect that Lacey had decided in this case no written text was required.



**Figure 27** Lacey's drawing of dad at work.

The drawing in Figure 27 is again another one of those “filling time” creations, and in my view evidence of the close time that she spends with her dad. Her drawing shows how much Lacey takes in visually from her world and how she chooses to express it through drawing. Figure 27 “blew my mind” when it came home that day. Any of my busy-mother guilt was minimized when I saw this. Lacey’s parents were both busy working and clearly she was very busy too.

Lacey has an uncanny ability to make the best of the now, using whatever is at hand. She demonstrates over and over again that she has considerable visual acuity and is happy with whatever materials are available to her (except of course back in Grade 1 when she seemed so beholden to her DIXON pencil). I think that Lacey had been learning since she was very young that it is important for her to work with what she had to work on what she loved. I revel in the ease with which she traverses the complexities of the many modalities of expression she has at her disposal, and have come to appreciate in a renewed and “timely” way the focus, concentration, and passion she quietly brings to the things that make sense to her. David, from my teacher era did the same thing, and I did not sufficiently honour this. I will close this sequence of stories that have depicted Lacey as someone who claims free time for herself with a final story.

*Who knew? A blank piece of paper could be “a little piece of heaven.*

*I recall that Lacey thought it was “a little piece of heaven” that I had left a clean, fresh 11” x 17” blank piece of white paper lying around (I am sure it was in the house, originating from my school practice of the day). Upon her request, it was made*

available to her. Off she went with this “fine piece of paper”, looked for her collection of felt pens (she loved to use felt pens) and skipped back a short time afterwards with the creation seen in Figure 28. I am sure that the reader is familiar with the components of a well-drawn and executed comic or storyboard. I would say that Lacey’s creation succeeds at both, and I come to this conclusion by noticing the following components of this creation. Lacey chooses her colors effectively, ensuring that there is consistency throughout. Notice that Lacey is blond and her friend is brunette, so that it is easy to follow each character right to the end. She helpfully establishes the two characters in the first cell and establishes as well that they are talking on the phone with each other. In film-making I have learned that this is the establishing shot. Lacey is an avid Saturday morning comic page reader and I think she has learned much from that literacy practice and chooses to make storyboards and comics often as evidenced by this artifact



**Figure 28.** Lacey’s storyboard for fun.

What have I learned from these images and this story? When I was investigating this data, what I found by exploring these artefacts was that Lacey was a child who seemed to be a “dog with a bone” kind of kid, and it was showing up in many of the artefacts. This metaphor of Lacey as a “dog with a bone” continued to resonate with me and so I was wondering if anything could be found in the literature that spoke to the use of artefacts as text that children created at home or at school and how that might address the creator’s identity. I found that my documentation and analysis of Lacey’s literacy events and practices resonated with the work of literacy researchers Rowsell and Pahl (2007). In their work titled “*Sedimented identities in texts: Instances of practice*, they provide language to name what I was seeing in my data. In this work they state that, “text making is a process involving the sedimentation of identities into text, which then can be seen as an artifact that reflects through its materiality, the previous identities of the meaning maker” (p. 390). Their use of the word artefact resonates with my study of Lacey as they use the term artefact “to describe an historical aspect to the making of texts” (p. 392), and then argue that the text “becomes an artefact of identities as much informed by social practice, habitus, and content as it is by the material choices made during its creation” (p. 392). In their work with this notion of sedimented identities they state that, “It is through our continual interactions with meaning making events that we come to solidify identities in practice” (p. 401).

I have established that Lacey is a “dog with a bone” kind of kid who sticks with her favorite choices for making meaning (drawing and storyboarding) and that they find

their way into her school literacies and back again into her home literacies; as in the example of storyboarding in her journal entry, storyboarding as a free time activity when she creates the cartoon of What Sam does all day, and finally in her storyboard about herself and friend missing each other for a play date. In all of these stories Lacey likes to use humor, and she captures the humor through the visualization of character, plot and setting in her drawing, much like Barbara Reid's example. Humor is central to many of Lacey's creations, and is evidence of one of her many identities.

In the stories in this next section you will see Lacey again traversing her at-home literacies with her at-school literacies. In this next section of stories I will explore several artefacts that function in my view as representations of sedimented identities. To reiterate, Rowsell and Pahl (2007) describe various forms of text making which involve the sedimentation of identities into text, which then can be seen in an artefact as the previous identities of the meaning maker. In these stories I document how Lacey weaves her identities across many places and spaces to make meaning for herself, and in so doing she broadens my understanding of literacy.

### **Teacher-mother-researcher Era Stories**

These stories were selected because they have been identified by me as signposts of times which afford me the opportunity to reflect on my fundamental understandings of literacy, which were formed through my biography of experience. I will select stories from my data that provide me with an opportunity to transform my basic knowledge structures or meaning perspectives, so as to become more inclusive, differentiating, and



integrative of my experience. This process will serve as my investigative response to my overall research questions: How has my understanding of literacy changed as I transitioned from teacher to teacher mother, and from teacher-mother to teacher-mother-researcher? , and what are the events (disorienting dilemmas) in my professional and/or familial life that prompted the changes in my understanding of literacy? “How has my understanding of literacy been changing over time?” Additionally, each of the themes explained at the beginning of this chapter will continue to provide a specific way to express literacy as multimodal, literacy as involving power, and literacy as inclusive of identity. I remind the reader that the three themes are:

The first theme I call “Making your mark”. This phrase refers to the literacy actor who uses a variety of tools in order to make meaning. I link this idea specifically to my broader understanding of literacy, which includes literacy as multimodal. The second theme is named “Finding your voice,” which refers to the literacy actor who finds and secures a variety of opportunities to voice his or her thoughts, ideas, and opinions. I link this to my understanding of literacy as deeply connected with identity. The last theme is called “Claiming your place,” referring to the literacy actor who establishes for themselves a context in which they can establish their meaning making through literacy. This links to my broader understanding of literacy as involving agency and power. Each of these three themes will be interwoven throughout the stories and discussed at the end of this chapter.



Before reading the stories in this section, I will take the time also to remind the reader of some of my long-held “knowledge structures” from this era as explained in Chapter 1 and reiterated here.

I remind the reader that it is during this era that I became an instructor of future teachers at the university and pursued my masters of education degree (which introduced me to the most current research in language and literacy development). I continued to work with the Manitoba English Language Arts Curriculum (1996), using it to guide my instruction of teacher candidates at the university, and also to guide my parenting as it related to my daughter’s literacy learning. Throughout the aforementioned coursework and further reading of research in the language and literacy field, I noticed that I was retrieving boxes of my daughter’s literacy artefacts I had stowed away for an indeterminate reason, unexamined, and unsorted. The scholarship I was introduced to in the Spring of 2010 captured my attention and I was beginning to see that I was acquiring a language I could use to address some of the dilemmas that had been forming in regards to my English language arts understanding and practice while I was also busy parenting. I saw quickly that this new lens and framework for considering literacy explained, informed, and caused me to look critically at my current understanding and interpretation of literacy and how I approached my own literacy teaching practices and the practices I had engaged in with my child over time. I learned that there was an entire theoretical framework that provided me with the language and ideas to talk about the literacy practices I was witnessing in my own child, children in our schools, and with my current teacher candidates. This new lens pushed me past the boundaries of the language arts

strands that had dominated my practice to date, along with my central drive to balance the literacies in my class and those of my daughter. With this teacher-mother-researcher perspective, I now had a way of thinking and talking about the very things I had been witnessing and documenting in my child's literacy development. It provided me with a means for looking at a telling case of one child's literacy practices and events. With this new knowledge as a researcher, I could also talk about and examine my view of literacy from my teacher era and my teacher-mother era.

In the following stories I will examine the data I have collected and identify instances that caused me to consciously pay attention to and reflect on my own fundamental understandings formed through the biography of experience. I will use these opportunities to explore my transformation of some of my basic knowledge structures (or meaning perspectives) in order to become more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of my experience. (Mezirow, 1997)

The stories in this section come directly from the data I collected over 4 weeks *with* Lacey, as I have explained in Chapter 2. It is important to note that these stories are the longest of the collection, as they represent the opportunity I had to directly to engage interactively with Lacey, as opposed to drawing upon artefacts and remembered contexts from a time long ago. The reader should note at this juncture that many of the stories in this section explore writing. I was not that surprised that most of the data collected during the 4-week data collection period seemed to revolve around Lacey's writing. If you recall, she was able to tell me which literacy events and practices she enjoyed the most. As I suspected, writing and visual expression would probably outweigh any talk about

reading and this was foregrounded in my mind when Lacey declared early in this research process that, “I think that I am a better writer than reader, because I don’t read very much. Well I read, but not the sort of stuff that Dad (and I guess you too) would want me to read.”

Another interesting factor that may have played into Lacey’s preference for writing in these stories could be that Lacey’s teacher’s syllabus (which was provided to the parents in September, one month prior to the data collection period) indicates that during the data collection period of this study, the teacher’s in-school ELA instruction was focused on paragraph writing.

**Lacey writes.** I will address Lacey’s relationship to reading later in this section, but for now I will begin with a few stories in this section titled *Lacey writes* which will explore writing as an enjoyable self-identified literacy event and practice for Lacey. The three stories in this section are: *Writing in 29 chapters*, *It didn’t take me very long either* and *Taking charge of her writing*.

Lacey has had a devoted interest in the musical duo Tegan and Sara since she was 7 years old. As a mother-teacher I have observed how she sediments and integrates this devotion into as many of her literacy events and practices at home and school as she can manage. Using my broader theoretical lens, I can now name this as her accessing one of her main discourses. This discourse is not confined to just home or just school, but is a discourse that permeates her identity in all of her domains. In these particular stories Lacey teaches me that she determines many ways to sustain this identity that is important

to her using discourse—a “socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and ‘artefacts’ of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’ or to signal that one is playing a socially meaningful role” (Gee, 1996, p. 131). In taking a broader view of literacy that is inclusive of discourses, I am positioned to view these written artefacts as evidence of literacy as social practices embedded in relationships of power. Additionally, the exploration of these written artefacts has prompted me to relook at how I used the writing process (Graves, 1983) as a teaching structure during my teacher years. Throughout the exploration of the data generated in this phase I have developed a new found understanding of how Lacey functions as a writer, using as many resources at hand to make meaning and to find her place and voice.

[All of the stories in this section titled “Lacey writes” were created from assembling numerous conversations that were audio recorded and later transcribed.]

### *Writing in 29 chapters*

*Lacey was sitting cross-legged on the living room couch opposite to mine, and was writing intently in a “Hilroy” notebook. She was writing using a pencil and would pause, erase, and continue on. I was busy working on something on my laptop and from time to time she would engage me in conversations that went something like this, “hey mom,” she would say, “I know going down the stairs is descending, what is that word that says going up the stairs and it sounds familiar to descending?” “Ascending,” I*

*replied. With a quick little, “thanks”, her eraser come out from beside where she was perched, and with a quick flick of the hand, whatever word she had there was gone and the new word “ascending” was placed there.*

*I know that Lacey does not like to be interrupted when she is writing, but I couldn’t help myself, and well, she was asking me word selection type questions, so I asked, “What are you working on?” She explained to me that she was working on her third entry in a journal she had to write for school. Ah, I thought, journal writing again, something that she had been doing since Grade 1. “Do you want to hear it?” she asked. “Of course.” I replied enthusiastically. She had offered and I accepted. She read aloud her first entry which can be seen in Figure 29, and then proceeded to read her second entry and as far as she had gotten into the third entry.*

*A copy of the first page in this journal of “29 chapters” is presented below. I invite you to read it now, as it will acquaint you with my reaction which follows.*

*My reaction was, “wow” And I may have used the words “I’m flabbergasted”. I listened to her read her entries out loud and felt that this was a different kid than the one I knew. This writing had voice, presence, style, proper syntax and the subject matter was an eye-opener. From my mother perspective I could see that this writing was so different from the writing she had been doing last year. This was evidence that her writing had taken a huge leap. How did this happen? What was her thinking about this? And where did she learn this? She stated in a forthright manner, “I learned to write better by reading fan fiction this summer.”*

*When I had first asked her if she thought that her voracious reading of fan fiction over the summer had an effect on the quality of writing, her initial response was “Yeah a bit, I guess”. She wasn’t ready to talk about it. I was thinking that perhaps this reaction was because she had met with much disdain from me over reading IT this past summer. I let some time pass before I asked her about it again. I suspect Lacey had had sufficient time to think about this line of questioning, and I wanted to pursue the topic with her, and so when I asked her about this again on another occasion, she seemed more open to discussing IT (fan fiction) with me.*

*This time around she said, “Yes, definitely (my reading of lots of fan fiction effected my writing this fall) because it’s pretty much all the little interesting ways of putting together sentences or sentence structure that’s come from there.”*

*“How did you learn that from fan fiction?” I asked, and without waiting for a response, “How did you get it from your eyeballs, read it in your mind, and think about how you might transfer this (appreciation for sentence structure) to your writing?” I was now “the dog with a bone,” and I wanted to know.*

*“I just think about it (my writing) a lot and I think about how I could apply it ... so I think about things before I write them.... Instead of just writing them ... I think about ... how I could word it.” “It (reading lots of fan fiction) changed my writing because I began to think about how I could make it (my writing) better and different.”*

*My “wow,” upon hearing her entries was a declaration of my mother-teacher self who knows that this writing is substantially “better” than say a year ago, but I wanted to*

*get at what her perception of this “change” might be. I reminded Lacey that earlier in our conversation she had said that she felt like her “writing is better after reading a lot of fan fiction.” This time she was ready to talk, and talk about it she did.*

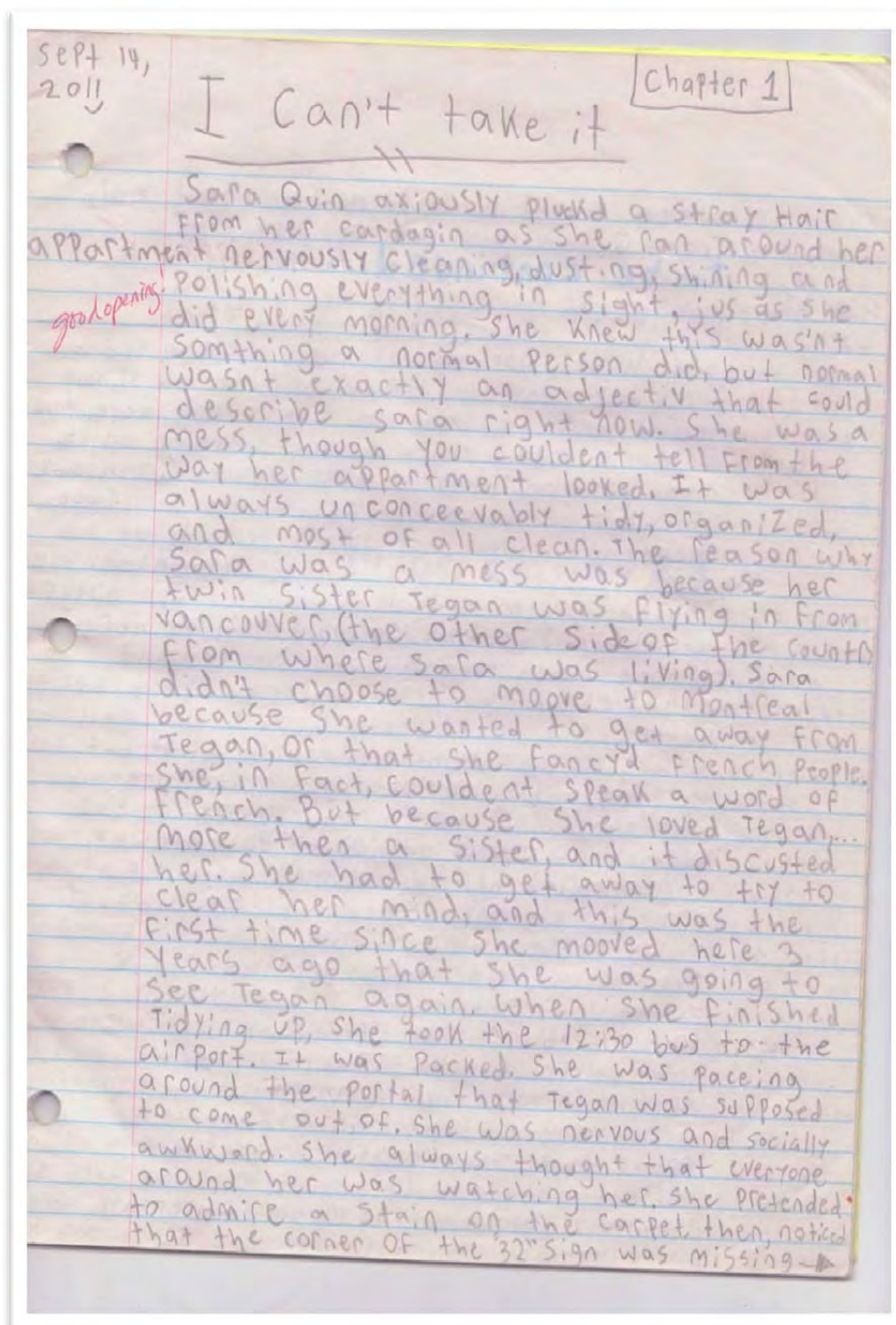


Figure 29. First journal entry in school journal writing assignment.



*“Over the summer I read a lot of Tegan and Sara stories, where they would date other people and they would date each other. I also read a lot of “I Carly” (a TV show that she liked) fan fiction. I heard about fan fiction from my friend (name) who is on the Tegan and Sara fan site and she told me about it. I am on the fan fiction site. I am just a reader... I never post any stories ... I just ... I liked going to this site as a reader because they sparked my interest, and they were from other fans ... some of them I knew from the Sara and Tegan site ... I liked the topics and you could choose exactly what you wanted to read about. There are no books published about bands or music you like and so ... on the fan fiction site ... I can be specific to my interests. I keep going back there because reading was fun, giving me more of an appreciation for reading. I open the fan fiction site and I open the search engine and I search Tegan and Sara or I Carly and then I find a story where the description interests me. For every story there is a short introduction that tells me how many words the story has, what rating it has K (everyone) K+ which is like PG (parental guidance) and then there is M which is mature. When people post their stories it is the writer’s decision about the rating. The introduction also tells you what kind of story it is telling you ... like the plot. Based on this intro... I decide which story I want to read. I am free to select any story that I want to read. I usually pick Tegan and Sara stories.... I have been picking from a sub-genre ... one which is called “Quincest”... I read a lot of those because they were interesting.... I know they wouldn’t happen in real life.*

*[Aside for the reader: Quincest stands for “Quin”; Tegan and Sara’s last name and “cest,” which refer to incest. Therefore this sub-genre of stories that Lacey is*

*interested in, sets the “characters” of Tegan and Sara into an incestuous attraction for each other (they are twin sisters in their real life, each lesbian, and are a very popular musical duo.)]*

*[Aside as a mother: She’s reading about incestuous relationships between two sisters and she is using this to write her “29 chapters” in school. What will the school think? As a parent I was ready for a call from the school—which did not happen ... but that’s another story. Back to Lacey and fan fiction].*

*“I read a lot of fan fiction this summer. It helped my writing ... I learned that I needed to show what the characters are doing, or feeling, and not just telling. For example, instead of just saying she was sad, I could say “tears streamed down her face” and then you would know she was sad. I learned ways of making sentence structure different ... like instead of always having the same sentence structure; I learned about ... reversing sentences. Instead of writing it the way it came into my head ... I think about it and mess with it ... until I think it is better than it was before. This goes on inside my head. If you write on paper you will just have to erase it. I do the rough drafts in my head. Writing them down just seems a little redundant. I can write about what I really want to. I get to write about Tegan and Sara and I don’t have to write a whole other set of characters. I write about them because that’s what interests me. I like their music, their personalities, and their looks. I have been a fan of Tegan and Sara since I was six or seven. I know a lot about their life. These fan fictions incorporate lots of facts about their lives that just the fans of Tegan and Sara know. I like that because I know all this ... the fact that I know so much about them gives me a purpose for all of that, and then when*

*I read a fan fiction story about them, I know what's going on. The fact that I could write about what I want made my writing better. Then you are not writing about what others want you to write, and then you are more passionate."*

*While listening to Lacey speak so enthusiastically about this, it has become clearer than ever to me that her interest in Tegan and Sara and her interests in the craft of writing are passions that have been undeniably interwoven into her identity, which is inclusive of being a lesbian girl, and of being a writer.*

*I am learning, through these examples that from Lacey's perspective, she does not have much access to literature or text in schools that are inclusive of "sexual orientation and the like" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Lacey's voracious reading of this fan fiction site in particular has to do with her taking charge of her own access to what interests her by circumventing the dominant and privileged literacies of the school. Lacey had claimed her place.*

*As this writing task was one set by the school and was a requirement of her ELA class—"for marks"—I asked her about the purposes of this writing task as she understood it. She told me that, "The criteria for the journal entries was that you could write anything you want ... they could be lists, or rants or what you do on the weekend. The teacher gave us a list of suggested topics. I loved lots of things on the list, but I wanted to do a story instead. I thought that I was better at writing stories and sometimes when I write on smaller topics ... I tend to write too long and include too many details. We have to write in our journal every Friday and we are given the whole class time to write. I decided that I wanted to write a story and that each journal entry could be like a*

*chapter. I thought that then I can stop wherever ... and so then ... I wouldn't have to take it home to finish. Everyone has to write for the whole period (about 40 minutes) and everyone is supposed to write silently. Some kids are finished it seems after about 10 minutes, but I write for the whole class because I want to get it finished. I enjoy this time because I like getting a good mark in school and I enjoy writing in my journal because I can write about what I want. I like that I decided to write in chapters about Tegan and Sara because I don't get bored of it. I look forward to writing my next chapter. It is so much better than working on worksheets about verbs and stuff like that."*

*She adds that, "The journal is worth about 10% of the year's final ELA mark, and we have to hand it in at the end of each class ... then she (the teacher) hands them back to us. Lots of kids weren't finishing their journal entries each week and so she told us that if you completed your journal entries once a week you could get bonus points for completing them. I think that she did that because many kids didn't get their entries in and so she decided to give the kids who were meeting expectations bonus marks." Lacey sure knows the currency of the classroom as it relates to marks, but she also knows what she likes as a writer.*

*I learned from Lacey that she was not happy with the suggested format the teacher proposed. She said that, "The teacher wanted us to write in this weekly journal assignment, changing up their selection of topics each week." Lacey explained to me that she wanted to write a continuing story in her journal, name each entry as a kind of chapter of a larger work. "I had to go and ask her (the teacher) if I could," and her teacher agreed. I took notice of this, as this action by Lacey was so not the school-Lacey*

*I knew. The home-Lacey had a lot of experience negotiating and making proposals about how she wanted to use her time, but the school-Lacey had been very hesitant over the years to take on that kind of negotiation with teachers and other people of authority. She knows and respects the authority of the teacher (maybe that's the consequence of being the child of a teacher), and even though over the years I would encourage her to speak with the teachers about what she may or may not want to do with school assignments, she was always reticent. Not this time; writing in chapters was all Lacey's idea, and she made it happen for herself. ”*

*The first few entries that she read to me proceeded as she had hoped. She handed them in, and she got the marks. Lacey relays that “about half way through my journal entries, she (the teacher) would giggle with me and say I don't know where this is going ... it sounds a little bit weird ... and I would say (to the teacher) ok ... I'll eventually do something else.” Lacey continues by saying, “She (the teacher) didn't talk to many of the kids about their writing ... and by chapter twenty-nine I wasn't in the mood to do a lot of writing so I thought ... I will just make a list and she will like it.” It appears that Lacey is conscious of the teacher's view of this kind of writing in her journal, and Lacey felt that the teacher always wanted her to “change” things up. Lacey persevered and continued to write in the journal the way that she wanted. Looking over the 29 chapters of this continuing story, there were only a few brief and singular comments such as: “good”, “sounds like a cute outfit”, “nice alliteration” etc., but most teacher notations were just check marks, indicating task completed or “bonus marks” earned. Lacey commented upon one of her teacher's markings that simply said, “yay! Lacey explained that she*

*thought that the teacher's "yay" was because she was glad that I had finally changed up the format (of a continuous story for 29 weeks running) and I had finally "chosen to write about something different."*

*Returning, now, to my first "wow" when Lacey read aloud her entries to me, I must truthfully state that on one level I was so surprised that this writing was so good that I began to worry that Lacey had just copied this writing from somewhere else. Is she the queen of plagiarizing or has something happened to cause such a great effect in her writing abilities? I had to find out, so I went to the fan fiction site that she had been talking about so much lately and to which she had been glued incessantly all summer. I looked for the exact text that I saw in her writing, and I could not find these passages anywhere. What I did find, though, was a community of writers who wrote and shared their fan fiction creations with each other, and the quality of writing was impressive. I set aside my worries of a clandestine plagiarizer in my home, recalled the scenario of Lacey working on her journal entry with pencil and eraser right under my nose, and relaxed my plagiarism thoughts.*

*She was learning some of this art of writing from fan fiction, which I had dismissed as an inferior kind of reading all summer. I now say, "You go-girl with a bone" and I say to "this old dog" (myself) that I am thankful that through Lacey, I have learned a few "new tricks" about her appreciation of reading, in all of its forms.*

What I learned from this story? Prior to this study, I knew nothing about fan fiction. I was game now, because I have an understanding of it gleaned from Lacey's

highly situated and contextual renderings, and because I am curious as a teacher-mother and researcher.

Lacey found stories to read on the fan fiction site that satisfy her interests in Tegan and Sara as a musical duo and as human beings. As a lesbian girl, she sought out these stories on her own and through her own initiative, in an effort to find something enjoyable to read that could not be found in the literature privileged in her school. I explored the literature on this topic and settled on the work of Rebecca Black (2008). I found her book *Adolescents and online fan fiction* and an article she had written, *English-Language Learners, Fan Communities, and 21st-Century Skills* (Black, 2009). I determined that this would be a good place to explore this topic as a novice. It was through these two texts that I was led back into Gee's (2004) work on situated literacy. As stated in Chapter 2 of this study students out of school literacies promote processes of learning that are "deeper and richer than the forms of learning to which they (students) are exposed in schools" (Gee, 2004, p. 107). Lacey's forays into fan fiction did just that for her (they provided a deeper and richer form of learning). Her sharing these forays with me led me to learn not only about fan fiction but also to a new idea as a researcher that had to do with what Gee (2004) refer to as *affinity spaces*. I have learned that affinity spaces are locations where groups of people are drawn together because of a shared, strong interest or engagement in a common activity (Black 2008, 2009; Gee, 2004). Affinity spaces oftentimes, but not always, occur online, functioning as spaces that encourage sharing of knowledge or participation in specific areas of interest for the participants, and through which informal learning is a common outcome. Gee (2005a), in

*Semiotic social spaces and affinity spaces: From the age of mythology to today's schools* plays with the notion of participatory cultures and reframes this concept so as to see these participatory cultures as “spaces”. For Gee (2005a), what is happening in these online cultures is not merely a “culture” or a “community”. In Gee’s view, the word “community” conjures up images of belongingness and membership. Instead, he has defined these worlds as “spaces” because this is a term that allows for the “robust characterization of the ebbs and flows and differing levels of involvement and participation exhibited by members” (p.71).

Lacey apprenticed herself to a group of people who share a certain set of literacy practices and she picked up these practices through reading the texts of more advanced peers. In so doing, she advanced her abilities to carry out her own writing practices.

The next story in this section is called *It didn't take me very long*. In this story I listen to Lacey tell me in more detail about her own writing process. As I listen to her “tirades” as I call them, I am wondering how I might have imposed too rigid of structure on my language arts practices that may not have honoured the way that a child had already forged for themselves in terms of their process.

*It didn't take me very long either.*

*Lacey and I made ourselves cozy so that we could talk about some of her school writing that she had been doing lately. She was eager to do this, but, in Lacey style, negotiated a payback which was, “How about we do this first and then you and I can play scrabble after. “ I agreed.*



*In response to my question “Is there anything there in your school writing that you are happy with?” she produced a descriptive paragraph assignment titled “Dangerous Weather” from her ELA notebook. She immediately expressed that she wasn’t too thrilled about having to do this writing assignment for class, but now that she sees it she tells me that, “ she is kind of happy with it. “ Upon request, Lacey reads her submitted descriptive paragraph aloud. I invite you to read it now, as it will help you experience, perhaps, what I experienced. (see Figure 30)*

*“Oh, wow.” Was my immediate response, much like my response to her journal writing, followed by, “I can see why you are happy with that.” She smiled content, in her mom’s positive response, and declared, quite forthrightly, “And it didn’t take me long either.”*

*I was intrigued by this statement which was made so confidently that I steered the conversation so that Lacey could tell me about the process that she used in this assigned writing. I was interested in finding out what her perception of the “writing process” was as it relates to this assigned writing task, as my teacher -self had used the structures of the writing process as defined by Graves (1983) for many years in my language arts practice.. I was thinking that this was an opportunity to explore the writing process with Lacey. She launched into a kind of “stream of consciousness” ramble about her “Dangerous Weather” piece of writing by saying,*

*“ At first I had a whole bunch of introduction before the blizzard came and then I had a couple of sentences of blizzard and then that’s it,...which was kind of weird*

*because the whole point was the blizzard and not a lot of anticipation,... so then ...,I added stuff.... like in my rough draft. (see Figure 33) I had one sentence and then I added a whole bunch (of sentences) after .....and when I could type it...well....'cuz I am not a big fan of rough drafts. I like just jotting down ideas and then start typing....like my good copy, or just start typing with ideas in my head I guess. “*

*She took a breath and added that, “In my class, you can’t just start typing; you need to write the rough drafts in class and you need to have it written on the paper.” “Yup”. I am thinking to myself, this would have been my teacher practice and this kind of sequence of process that I would have expected my students to move through and use. The exasperation in her voice did not go unnoticed when she said again, “I’m not a fan of rough drafts”.*

*I query on, wanting to find out more about how the school “imposed” requirements for writing process were working or not working for her, and she replied, “I don’t know, it just seems kind of natural (the school practice) so I don’t really know anymore because, we have always had to do that way.” I take note, that for Lacey this is the expected process of the classroom (like mine) but that it is not her preferred process, as she said “I just like jotting down ideas and then start typing...like my good copy.” I continue my line of queries with her, because of my interest in knowing more about her school-based writing process.*

### Dangerous weather

It was five o'clock P.M, and the tumbling sky threatened to turn a deep shade of black within the next hour. It was the 4<sup>th</sup> season of the year, it was winter. The driest, coldest winter since what seemed like the ice age. The sky was a thick, pure shade of white, as was the crisp snow that coated the dyeing ground. From what I remember, the forecast didn't predict anything out of the ordinary, but I could sense something coming. Something dangerous. Something dry. Something frigid. And then, without warning, it arrived. A terrible blizzard came tearing through our helpless little city. It furiously rattled the old, dingy windows, shook the loose doors until they couldn't bare it anymore, tore trees and power lines down, swept up whatever it could; unattended bikes, garbage cans, even pets. It toppled over cars, trampolines, plastic toys, and encircled the frail, defenceless houses. It lasted for 26 brutal hours until finally, it went rolling away, and the dark sheen of the night sky made itself visible once again.

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Figure 30. Lacey's final copy of her descriptive paragraph submitted for marks.

*She goes on to explain that, “I don’t really do much editing at all in my rough draft. It is just more like ...getting the outline down, then, when I go on the computer to do my final draft; you can edit and get it (the computer edit functions) to do most of the work for you. After I type things, I print it out and he (dad) looks it over with a pen, and corrects everything he can. The last time (the Dangerous Weather writing assignment) it was only one or two mistakes.....I fixed them and then I printed it out again.”*

*I was learning about how Lacey liked to write and how her preferences “bumped up” against the in-school process that was required of her. I was becoming aware of how this conversation was provoking me to rethink, my classroom language arts writing process practice, and I was beginning to see that I just may have been somewhat entrenched in my view, which I think revolved around my view that ALL of my students should or need to go through the same sequenced order of writing steps. Hmmm, I am beginning to think that the writing process as defined by Graves (1983) which is made up of the .....is a kind of “holy grail” from my language arts practice of my past. Now, I am hearing from Lacey, a teen writer, that she has determined some of her own processes and am able to state them so forthrightly. I am conscious of the fact that some of her strongest views on her own process do not mesh with what I might call “a one size fits all” classroom practice for the writing process. This is something that I will have to look at.*

*So far our conversation was not getting at her declaration that “it didn’t take me too long either, so the conversation continued. Remember that Lacey was none too thrilled when she heard about this writing assigned by the teacher that she repeated it*

*again and added, “I hate getting started on things but once I get started, it’s kind of hard to stop, then I edit and make it better. “ From my mother point of view, who has watched Lacey write since infancy, she was not only “making it better”, so as to meet the criteria set out as an expectation of the school assignment , but I could see it was better than last year’s writing submissions ,and Lacey seemed to think so too. My mother-teacher –self could view this profound change in the quality of her writing because of my sustained interaction with it over many years.*

*To get at what she meant by “better” , my queries continued, “Last year , there were more mistakes....and ...I think my sentence structure is a bit better because it varies, like before (last year) it was da, da, da,da, it was like boring, sometimes.” She went on enthusiastically explaining that,*

*“My paragraph is about our favorite, umm .....well ....our favorite from a list of topics to choose from (suggested by the teacher), like the weather. Mine (my choice) was weather, the weather that you like....but the weather that you like is too...you can’t really use a lot of adjectives (with weather that you like) so I chose instead dangerous weather, because it is more brutal ....so you can add more adjectives,. It is more severe and intense, I guess, and so I wrote about dangerous weather.”*

*I’m thinking to myself, that Lacey seems to know what the assigned writing criteria are (especially the importance of using adjectives in a descriptive paragraph), and she seems to have put a lot of thought into how she could achieve this goal, by changing her topic around. It appeared to me that she was anticipating my next set of*

queries, and so reached over to her school book bag, and pulled her ELA notebook, out of it, showing me the requirements of this assignment. (see Figure 31)

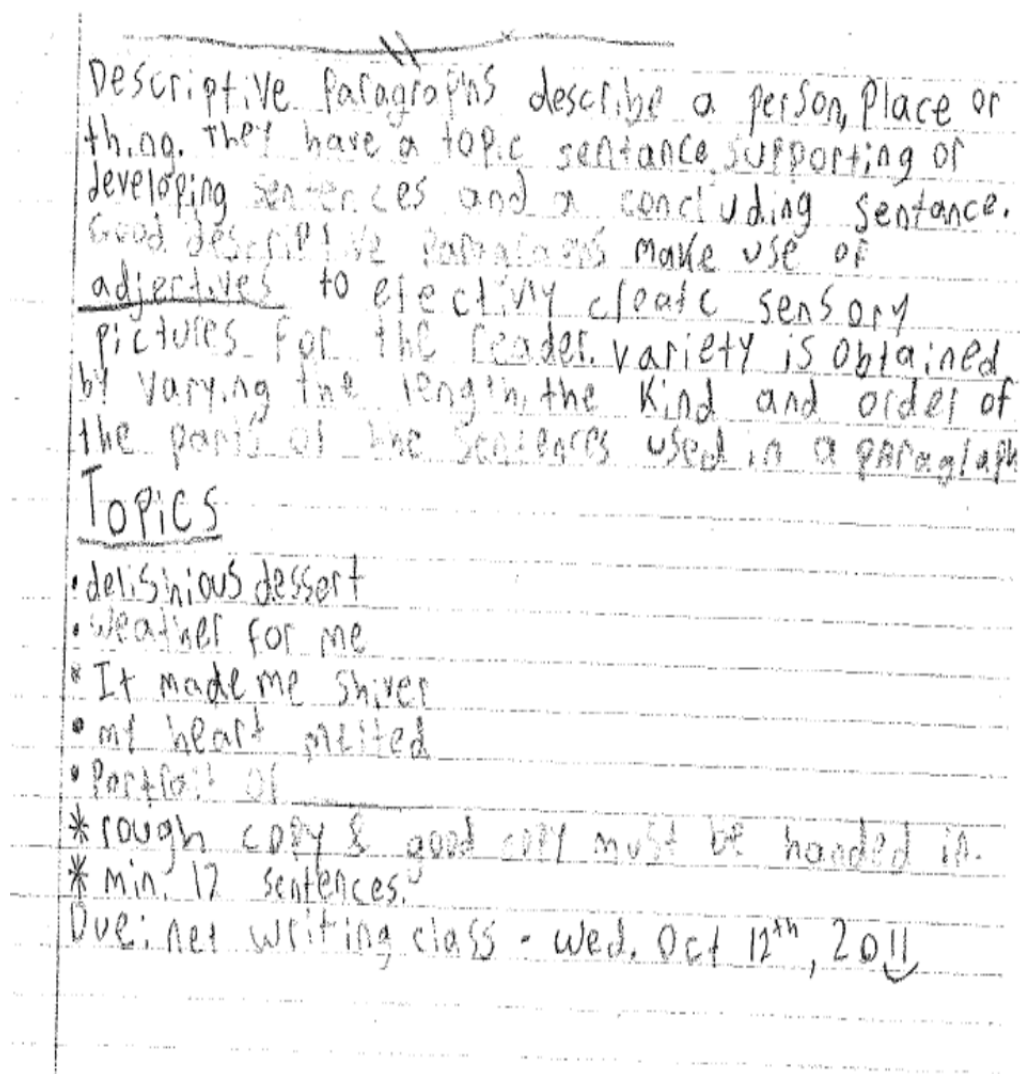


Figure 31. Lacey's in-class notes written in her ELA notebook.2

She was very clear about the fact that “it had to be 8-15 lines and it had to use a lot of adjectives and you have to have a rough draft sometimes a second draft and a good copy.” She reiterated that “After we picked our topic,” we had to jot down a list of adjectives we would use. Figure 32 shows her list of adjectives, the crossed out ones that she incorporated into her rough draft and her first rough copy of her paragraph.

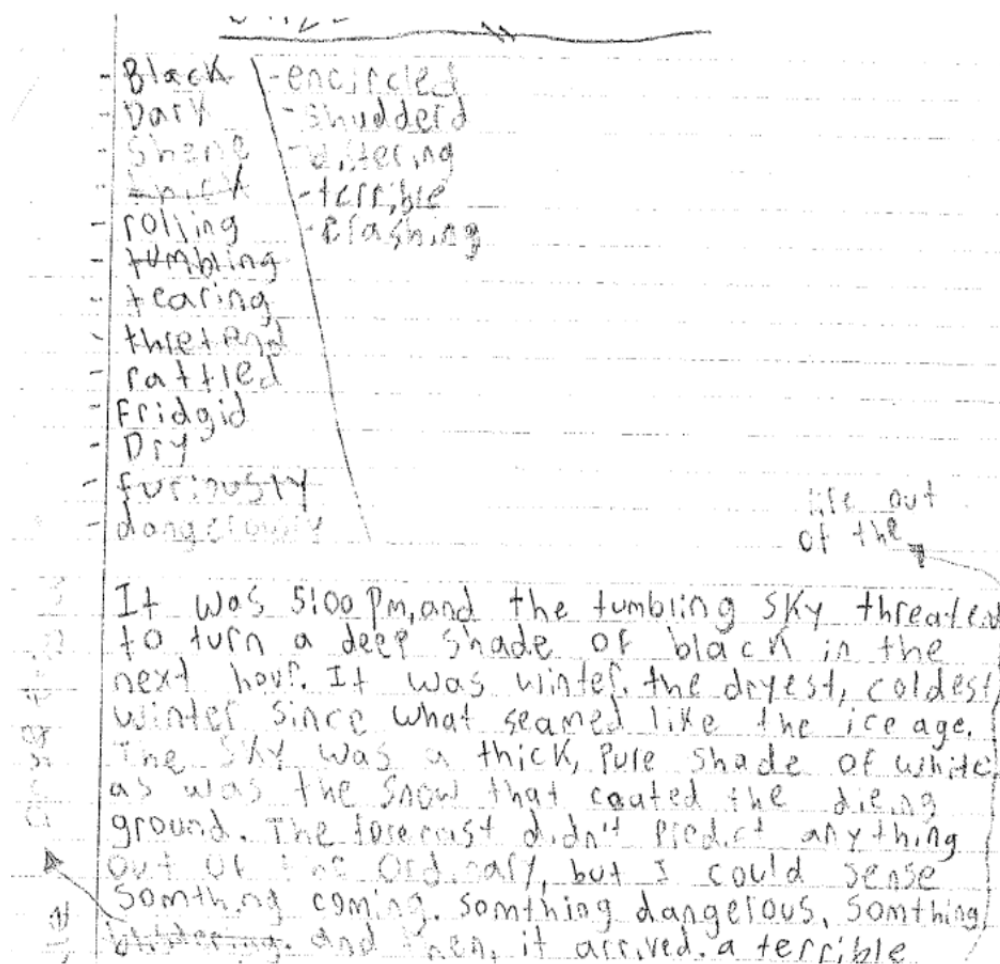


Figure 32. Lacey's adjective list and rough draft written in class in her ELA notebook.

*From her perspective she was now set to write in the classroom, having done all of the requisite steps and fully aware of the criteria of a good descriptive paragraph. Interestingly, she then made it very clear, to me, that she “wanted to write alone.”*

*During my teacher era I used the work of Donald Graves (1983) to guide how I taught my students about writing as process. Graves had broken down the “writing process” into stages which were: planning, drafting revising, editing and publishing. Each of these steps seem to be working for Lacey as per own account, but what was not working for her was the tools she was “allowed” to use in class. She has a strong preference for choosing a word processing program to act on her writing ideas and would prefer to have access to this tool in class. My remembrance of the Graves writing process (as applied in schools) is that the conferring ritual between child and teacher, and child to child was an important aspect of the writing process pedagogy of the day, and so I know that it was part of my practice during my teacher and teacher- mother eras.*

*Lacey’s statement that she “wanted to write alone.” Let’s me in on her perspective, that the this conferencing expectation of the “writing process” structure in her class (similar to my expectations for and of my students while in practice) was not working for her, as she had wanted it to. Lacey tells me that, “(name) would not stop talking to me and it wasn’t helping my writing...most kids talk to other kids because ....I think they want feedback,...I don’t like that because...I already know what I am going to write about. I don’t like to share my rough copy because I know that my final draft will*



*be much better. I don't like to hear praise,... before I am done my final draft , because I know my final will better,.... and I don't like to hear criticism for the same reason,.... because I know that my final draft will be better. I just want to get on with the writing so that I can finish it and get onto other things.” With a twinkle in her eye, which is so Lacey, she adds, “Plus, I like finishing so I can plant the seed of envy in them (the other students) ...I can say.... I am finished and they still have theirs to do.”*

*I am thinking, this is kind of cheeky of Lacey, but I am also thinking that this is what motivates her as a competent student, and as a writer. She likes to get her work done, so that she can do what she really wants to do. It seems that this is her way at school and I know it is her way at home. Her “rant” about getting this writing assignment done is not finished and she goes on to say, “I don't want to talk to the teacher about my writing because I want it to be a surprise when I hand it in.”*

*This “tirade of sorts “ was to my ears, a young teen (mine) who seemed to know what her writing process was; at least for right now and in this school context. To me, Lacey was being very clear that the conferencing part of the process was something she didn't really like, at least in this instance and in this context. Lacey was telling me, that conferencing, did not serve her writing process. I wanted to get at her perspective on this and she seemed very happy to get a chance to explain. It turns out that she had more to say. I was learning a lot by listening and thinking all the while about my own writing process as an adult and I wondered if I had a tirade in me, about my own writing process, like Lacey?*

*She went on to say, “Usually everyone starts talking with each other; everyone asks each other for ideas. I talk to other people but I don’t ask for ideas, because I already know what I am going to write about. The girl that sits next me (name) always reads everything that she writes, to me, and..... I’m not always listening. I don’t like reading (my stuff out loud to others) ....cuz I’m pretty self-critical and kind of introverted in some cases , and so yah,... I don’t read it out loud unless it’s to one of my best friends. I read to (name) and (name) and sometimes they read there’s to me.”*

*You seemed pretty happy to read your finished writing to me, I reiterated to her with a questioning tone and she replied, “cuz it uses a lot of adjectives (her definition of success, I suppose) and it’s like ....well....last year... we had to write descriptive paragraphs too and mine sucked so much and I didn’t know how to write one and then....well.... I have been reading a lot of fan fiction this summer.... and then this year ...they (my paragraphs) are so much better because I have been paying attention to different things....like last year they (my descriptive paragraphs) didn’t even make sense and it wasn’t following the structure and this year it is actually pulling the structure.”*

*Hmmmm, “pulling the structure” that sounded like an intriguing phrase that Lacey was using, and “fan fiction reading this summer”? I had remembrances about all of the fan fiction that she had been reading this past summer and wanted to explore this with her (and I will ) but, it was time to play scrabble.*

This next and final story in this series builds on my previous new knowledge about fan fiction as affinity spaces and continues to addresses Lacey’s strong opinions

about conferencing in terms of her writing process. What I didn't expect was that Lacey had much more to teach me about another kind of affinity space that she uses.

*Is Love an emotion or an action? Persuade Me.*

*One Saturday morning, (not too early for a teenager) I went into Lacey's room to awaken her for the day, as I usually do with the temptation of waffles (a Saturday morning treat). I look over at her lap top on her desk and find an 8x10 typed letter in hardcopy (see Figure 36) lying on top of it. As it is addressed to, "My Dear Parents", I sleepily inquire, "For me? For me and dad to read?" "Yes." she replies "Read it over with your coffee mom, and get back to me." I invite you to read this letter, now and it is found in Figure 33 on the next page.*

*I am intrigued, and happy to have a hard copy personal letter to read; a nice change from so much email communication that I have to deal with in my job. I gather Lacey's dad, since it is addressed to both of us, pour a couple of cups of coffee and read it aloud. The letter that Lacey's dad and I read that morning is included in its entirety on the next page.*

*What a hoot. Not only does she have her reasons and arguments ready to go so as to "persway" (persuade) us to let her spend her own money, but she knew how to relate her arguments to her intended audience, who she knows want a soaker tub, a Caribbean holiday and need to save for retirement. Suffice it to say that this letter was convincing enough to persuade us to allow her to spend her own money on what we considered to be an "extravagance" against her "preposition" that it is an "investment".*

*Of course I shared this letter with friends and family, finding it to be charming and hilarious- just the kind of story a proud mom shares with others.*

My Dear Parents,

I was browsing through the marketplace thread on saraandtegan.ca for new Eps when I found 4, yes, 4 Eps which I don't already have and are usually extremely expensive. The reasons why I think you should let me purchase them are as follows:

1. They are considerably cheaper than the shoes that I wanted to buy recently, and I didn't go through with buying them because I thought they were way too expensive and I would much much rather have these, that's why I was being a bit hesitant before.
2. I want them a 99% more and will get more use out of them and won't get them dirty or grow out of them like I would the shoes.
3. You wouldn't have to contribute anything like you were going to with the shoes, that saves you a total of 50 dollars that you could spend on something better like a Caribbean cruise, soaker tub, or just store into retirement funds. It's basically like winning 50\$!
4. I have nothing else that I want to buy more... think about it; I'm only 14. I have food, cloths, I get junk food occasionally without me having to pay for it, and for the past 4 years or so, these Eps have been the only thing that I've been really interested in investing in.
5. The Eps are on average selling from 100-400 dollars, and if you divide their total cost - 98.00 by 4 because there are 4 Eps, that makes only 23 dollars. And I will buy them all eventually so this is a major saving for me.
6. I will only be pulling 6.57\$ out of my bank account for this purchase because I have the other 91.43 at home in allowance money (again, that is separate from charity money; I don't know how many times I will have to tell you this.)

But there's a catch, it only has an option to ship to Australia, but I will get a hold of the seller and ask him if he would be flexible to ship to Canada and what that would cost, and I think he will consider it for various reasons that I won't get into now. But all in all, those are my best efforts to try and persway you into letting me buy more of the things I love; Tegan and Sara Eps.

P.s. sorry for the bad quality of writing, it's 2:00 am on the dot and I was having a hard time trying to get to sleep, so I defaulted to throwing together a preposition letter out of lack of anything better to do.

~~Love,~~ over and out.

**Figure 33. Lacey's persuasive letter written to her parents.**

*This letter prompted me to think about the following: How did Lacey know how to write a persuasive letter like this? She has proven to me over the years that she is proficient and efficient at researching on the internet; using it to find out how she might do this or that. In fact the internet has been her go to conduit to find resources and tools to teach herself guitar but, that is whole other story. Then it struck me. She didn't access the internet for this task; she had learned to write persuasively at school. As in the descriptive paragraph instruction that she had received earlier this month, she produced once again the in class notes, criteria and final product of a school based persuasive paragraph written for marks, housed in her ELA Notebook.*

*My hunch was right; the genesis for Lacey's home-based "Dear Parents" persuasive letter had a connection to her school literacies. Once again, Lacey and I browsed through her ELA notebook, finding the notes she had taken down in class regarding the writing of a persuasive paragraph, and her final draft of her persuasive paragraph that was submitted "for marks" and evaluated by the teacher (See Figure 36). I found out from Lacey that her in- class writing process preceded much the same as the one that unfolded in the "Dangerous Weather" writing assignment, but this one had an interesting and unique element to it. The fact that Lacey had used an in-school writing assignment in clearly an out-of-school way for an at-home purpose, was interesting enough I thought, but what I learned next, intrigued me more.*

*In order to let you in are the intrigue I will get you to read ,her final, edited typed copy of her persuasive writing that she submitted "for marks", on the next page.*

Love – An Emotion or An Action?

Love is an immensely complicated topic, and has a very different and personalized meaning for almost everyone. So is love simply an action or is it something bigger? Some feel that "love is more like an action than an emotion" - [REDACTED] But I believe that the feeling of love and acting on love are two different things, not completely separate, but the line between the two is big enough.

First of all, you can't say that the feeling of love simply doesn't exist because it most definitely does, and a very large amount of other people would agree with me. For example, at least 85% of music being written today is about love, in some shape or form. Even certain asexual people might feel the same way. Typically the first thing that enters your mind when you think about the idea of love is that it is something you feel.

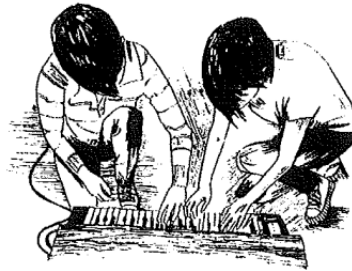
Secondly, the feeling of love and expressing love may be two different things, but they do go together. For example the feeling of love (or lust as the case may be) will make you act more affectionately. I believe that you couldn't act on love without feeling something first. It's like speaking without thinking; it usually ends up making no sense.

Thirdly, love is an emotion, but it's not exactly like any others. I find love to be the most powerful of all the emotions; it can lead to depression when someone gets their heart broken. Because you don't just walk into love like you would any other emotion, you fall in, and that's why it's so hard to get out.

In conclusion, I truly feel that love is more of an emotion or a feeling than an action, the word 'love' is merely an abstract noun for the otherwise inexplicable connection felt by one being towards another.

[REDACTED]  
8-5

Oct 30, 2011



**Figure 34. Lacey's final copy of her persuasive paragraph for marks.**

*She told me that the topics suggested by the teacher, I liked but, I chose to write about something I knew about., “I didn’t know what I wanted to write about and it was due the next day, so I just picked the topic, “Is Love an Emotion or an Action?” because....well... I was writing so much about it already and thought that I could turn this into a persuasive paragraph and it could actually be useful for marks.” Here is the final copy that Lacey submitted to her teacher “for marks” inclusive of those marks, She “did- ‘er” and got it done, on time.*

*Once again, Lacey’s motivation for marks and getting ‘er done, wins the time contest. Lacey explained that “she was writing so much” with her texting friends on her Sara and Teagan .ca chat room. Lacey always refers to this chat room site as just “.ca”. As her mother, I have come to learn that to Lacey, there is only one chat room in the world and so of course she only needs to call it “.ca”. Remember that Lacey is a kid who like a “dog with a bone” hangs onto the things she loves for a long time and with much passion. She has been more than your average fan (just ask her friends and family) since she was 8 years old, and was taken to one of their concerts by her older cousins-now-back to “.ca”.*

*Not being familiar with fan sites I asked her to “give me a tour” of the site. I learned a lot, from Lacey’s long and quite articulate explanation; and that she was pretty pumped to tell me all about it. She explained that, “This is a fan website. It is the main Tegan and Sara fan site. I am a member of this fan site and have been a member since 2009. As a member I can make topics and post things and can talk to everyone on the site. The administrator (name) sets the topics and within the topics there are threads.*

*Threads are basically sub topics; when I go on “the site I usually go to areas that interest me such as, the picture thread or the Sara fan club thread or the super jibber jabber thread and I usually see what other people have posted.....then I decide if I am going to add to what they are saying, or post something of my own. These days I check this site, at least once a day. I have three friends on the site.”*

*She continues to explain that, “These three (names) are on the site a lot these days and so they were the ones I talked to that day. (The day preceding the in school writing assignment) “Me and (name) were having a text conversation... and kind of an argument. We had been discussing and arguing about this topic (love) and with lack of a topic to write about, (for school), I had decided against writing on gay rights... I decided to... and used my discussion (with my .ca friends) and all of my texting as part of my assignment. “*

*Lacey is very animated when talking about this site and her .ca friends, so she goes on, and I continue to be fascinated.*

*“My friends, (three names) and I had been talking about this topic of love for some time. It was a real slow moving conversation cuz ....well....it’s just every time we logged on we would add something to it. It (the texting conversation) lasted for about 12 hours, but if you put it (time spent) all together I probably t spent ten minutes.”*

*What? I needed to pause and think about this. Pause... (that’s me thinking). Then, it dawns on me, “Oh, I get it”, Lacey is very patient with her digital immigrant mother, “this texting “conversation” spanned over a 12 hour period of a day, but your part in it probably added up to ten minutes.” My slow uptake on understanding how time*



*works on fan site chat room, has much to do with the fact that I am defiantly a “digital immigrant”.*

*Lacey and I talked about “text chatting” and who these friends were in her .ca chat room, and she told me that they were all Tegan and Sara fans. When I enquired about their ages she told me that” (Name) is 16, (name) is 31 and oh yeah (name) is 24.” When I commented upon the fact that they are all much older than her (something that I was aware of -I am not a completely un-supervisory mom), she said they, “sometimes call me “the baby of .ca” and “sometimes when I come into the chat room they change what they are talking about ...if they think I am too young. (Name) once said “you are quite wise for a little one, Lacey.” “It bothers me when they call me baby, but it felt good to be called “wise for a little one”. She explained to me that she had been “talking (texting) about this topic yesterday” and so she thought that she would use it to do the writing assignment for her teacher.*

*I wanted to be able to see the texting conversation she had been having that day, which she says found its way into her school assignment, so I asked her sheepishly for a copy;(not wanting to reveal that I really had no idea if these texts conversations were saved or not) and she replied “Sure mom, I can send it to you, no problem” Lacey sent me (by email- text only included) - the following excerpt, seen in Figure 35 on the next page.*

**(Name 1: a regular blogger and friend on the site -31 year old-male):**

Hello, I like telling everyone to love me, especially girls. They never say they won't and then the idea fixes into their heads. Mwa, ha, ha, haaaa...

**Lacey:**

But if you tell them to love you it's not true love, its just guilting them into fake love, dontchathink?

**(Name 1: a regular blogger and friend on the site -31 years old-male):**

Love is more like an action than something you feel. Love isn't like happiness or sadness. Love doesn't feel like an actual emotion. You act on love. True love sounds kind of fluffy to me. Fake love also sounds questionable. When I tell them to love me, I'm telling them to act out love. That action becomes manifested when they say they will. You can try to fight it if you want to, but it's still there in your head. The more someone acts out love by doing things to love that person, they cement their caring for that individual. When you tell someone to do something, they usually do it. I learned that from advertising on Google. Everybody's looking for someone to love and love them in.

**(Name 2: a regular friend on the site -24 year old-female ) :**

A few posts before you were saying you wished that someone loved you and now you're saying that you make people love you and it works so... confusing. I also feel love, definitely. Love is something you feel, an overwhelming emotion (as far as I'm concerned anyway)

**Lacey:**

sorry to drag this convo on but... the feeling love and acting on love are 2 different things, you can't say that the feeling of love simply doesn't exist because it does. the feeling of love (or lust as the case may be:P) will make you act, you couldn't act on love without feeling something first, that's what i think anyways.

**(Name 2 a regular friend on the site -24 year old-female):**

You are very wise for a young one baby Lacey!

**(Name 1: a regular blogger and friend on the site-31 year old-male):**

For me 'love' is merely an abstract noun for the otherwise inexplicable connection felt by one being for and/or towards another being or object in .return. I switched from loving someone first to making them love me initially. The results seem to work.

**Figure 35. Transcript of Lacey's text conversation on .ca**

*This excerpt demonstrates that; for Lacey, her on line conversation about love, was important to her and that many of “the ideas”, she collected and formulated for herself had found their way into her school based writing assignment, and they came directly came from this authentic text chatting she was doing with her friends, on line. I was impressed that she even referenced (Name 1: a regular blogger and friend on the site -31 years old-male) in her school based writing submission. Lacey went in and blackout his name for me (ethics and all that).She used his full name (first and last) in her submitted school assignment, and because of that this “supervisory” mom looked up his “digital footprint” on this chat room and his own blog. It was with concern that I began thinking: Lacey met her first girlfriend, who lives in Europe, on this site, and with whom she still Skypes. Lacey is text chatting with a 31 year old male and females in their 20”s, on this site. It is clear that the responsibility of being a parent (and teacher) in this 21<sup>st</sup> century has broadened in scope, with the ubiquitous of the internet world. But, my responsibilities for ensuring my child’s safety remains as it ever was, and in this case I have been cognisant of who she has been talking with, I refer to them as her friends, and in that context. In this case, as Lacey’s parent I found out who her .ca friends are and supervise things from afar as best as I can by also teaching her about internet safety. That’s all any of us can do as parents. This is a different age from my predigital days, and there are many demands a greater array of, places for parents to supervise. I would say though that Lacey’s pursuit of these on line communities serves the same purpose as other communities and the skills required to supervise may be different, the supervisory*

*role stays the same. She wants to make meaning and communicate with other like-minded and different-minded folks and I want her to have friends that she can talk to and be safe. Lacey finds that the community of peers at school is limiting.*

What have I learned from these stories? First and foremost they taught me that Lacey is a writer. I always knew Lacey was a huge fan of Tegan and Sara and knew that she chatted with and exchanged information about this passion with folks on the internet, but I had never considered it before as a place to learn and apprentice herself as a writer. Gee (2004) posits that, "online affinity spaces represent the cutting edge of effective learning environments in several respects" (p. 81), which are evidenced in looking at Lacey in her highly contextualized learning situations and spaces. From Lacey's perspective she was learning about the cadence of sentence structures, when she said she was "how to pull the structure" and how to use descriptive language, something she felt she didn't really learn in school, but did so by immersing herself in the reading of fan fiction.

Lacey has spent many years interacting with folks on this .ca site, because it serves many purposes for her. It functions as an affinity space, as it is a location for Lacey in which there are groups of people that she is drawn to because of shared or strong interest. Initially her communications with this group centered on their shared love of all things Tegan and Sara, but has moved beyond that one topic. Her .ca site is an online community to Lacey that encourages sharing of knowledge or participation in a specific areas of interest for the participant and in which informal learning is a common outcome. To Gee (2004), what is happening in these online cultures is not merely a

“culture” or a “community.” In Gee’s view, the word “community” conjures up images of belongingness and membership. Instead, he has defined these worlds as “spaces” a term that allows for the “robust characterization of the ebbs and flows and differing levels of involvement and participation exhibited by members” (p. 88).

Throughout my conversations with Lacey about this site, it was clear to me that Lacey has a strong feeling of belonging on this site. Many of her lists that she incessantly makes included references to spending time on “.ca “ including on her to-dos; making a certain number of posts and checking in to see what folks were talking about. She refers to the people that she engages with on this site as her friends and within this affinity space she is not only consuming texts that are posted there but she is also contributing and engaging interactively. Whereas she goes to the fan fiction site to read, she goes to her .ca site to engage in community. She finds here a community to talk with that is more diverse and interesting to her than the community she finds at school. She sees these as relationships with some of her recurring chat friends, and in fact the girlfriend that she emails and Skypes with in Europe, found each other on .ca. In Lacey’s world this is a sustained romantic relationship, although they have never met in person, but have plans in the works to do just that. Lacey’s feelings of belonging within this community is so strong and imbedded as part of her everyday life that the content of these interactions found their way into her school writing. Gee (2004) establishes and discusses eleven “hallmarks” that make a fan fiction site an affinity space different from being a participatory community. Some of these characteristics apply to Lacey and her use of the

fan fiction site and her participation on her .ca site. For example one of the characteristics of an affinity space is that they are organized around a shared passion or a common endeavor. Lacey accesses Teagan and Sara and I Carly fan fictions and participates in the activities available to her on .ca. Lacey's participation on her chosen affinity spaces provide to her opportunities to share and make connections with others who have common interests without being bound by geographic proximity. For Lacey this has been an important aspect that draws her there as she does not feel that she has that kind of community connection say in her school culture. She enjoys very much talking with folks who do not live close by and have other experiences. These affinity spaces for Lacey provide access to people that differ in gender, race, class, age, ability, sexual orientations and education level. Lacey held this as one of her favorite "reasons" for reading on the fan fiction site as it is inclusive of spanning difference as it relates to sexual orientation and age, and likes to communicate and contribute her ideas on .ca for the same reasons. Lacey functioned as a reader on the fan fiction site and spoke about how she could read simple and more complex stories from varying authors who post them and on the .ca site, even though she is referred to as the "baby of .ca" she sees herself and functions as an equal among its members. The meeting up of "newbies", "novices" and "experts" share who share the activities and participate in the same site, is something that draws Lacey to these sites. In affinity spaces the novice and others are afforded the same access to the same resources and forms of participation. Lacey is able to take advantage of the reading opportunities on the fan fiction site and on .ca uses most all of the features available to her there, without anyone limiting her access.

Black (2008) says that, “Approaching fan fiction as a space rather than a community, then, is a way of focusing attention on the interplay among engagement, active participation, a sense of belonging, and the production of social space.” (p. 47) Black’s work is especially relevant to me as I move forward as mother and teacher. In her book titled, *Adolescents and online fan fiction*, there are many case studies of adolescents in action in these spaces. My work in this section which shows Lacey participation in two of her favorite affinity spaces and how they find their way into her school based literacies contributes to the research in this area of study.

While exploring and writing these long stories that document Lacey’s seamless movements between her in school writing and her out of school reading and writing on affinity spaces, I saw this as an opportunity to tackle one of my “issues” regarding her as a reader, and I will explore these in the following section and stories called “Lacey reads.”

**Lacey reads.** In this next section I will deal with “my issues” of Lacey as a reader. I use the words “my issues” here purposefully, as it encapsulates the struggle I have had for some time around my concerns regarding Lacey as a reader. It may be in this area that I have the most to learn, for which my new vocabulary and understanding in regards to literacy may provide me the context in which to grow. I will use story once again to get at “my issues” regarding Lacey as a reader. There are two stories in this section and they are titled, *Harriet the Spy is the best book I have ever read* and “*How come I don’t get to read what I want?*”

[All of the stories in this section called “Lacey reads” were created from assembling numerous conversations that were audio recorded and transcribed.]

*Harriet the Spy is the best book I have ever read.*

*“I think that I am a better writer than reader, because I don’t read very much.... well I read, but not the sort of stuff that dad would want me to read. Because (like, at school) we are reading Edgar Allen Poe in English class and a whole bunch of popular novels, just on our own. They (the popular novels) are kind of boring, but they are OK...I guess. Mostly I read a lot of fan fiction that I think is written better than most of the novels that I am reading... except for the Edgar Allen Poe ones, which are kind of like classic- classic ones. No one can top that ...and so I read a lot, but not the sort of things you would expect me to be reading I guess. Edgar Allen Poe is well written, yeah, well he’s famous.” So says Lacey.*

*The one book that I do love says Lacey is Harriet the Spy (Fitzhugh, 1964). Like most things that Lacey involves herself in, she has had a long standing dedication to this particular novel. Her reading and rereading of this novel bound by a spine in which you can turn pages, place a bookmark in and tatter the pages you love; is the definition that most fits MY cherished view of reading. Remember that I am a fiction reader by choice and her father chooses science magazines to read. I rarely have experienced Lacey get lost in a book (by my definition of what a book is) and I can say forth rightly, it breaks my heart. I have several teacher friends who have heard these laments from me, and admonish me to be patient, but patient; I am not, when it comes to my child-who never seems to “ get lost” in a fiction book. So far, getting lost in a fiction book is not Lacey,*



*except of course when it comes to reading Harriet. What I am learning from Lacey is that she is a reader, but chooses to read only and until she can immerse herself in the text full heartedly and integrate it into the many other goings on in her life. If the reading selection does not fit this criteria or it isn't a required text is assigned by the school she is not that interested. One of my teacher-self views of the benefits of reading is that it introduces the reader to alternative worlds and language and expands the reader's use of vocabulary resulting in a positive effect on their writing. In this way written language then functions as a model for one's own writing. This view that reading was a catalyst for writing was one that was central to practice as a language arts teacher. Upon considering Lacey's statement that she learned to write, really write by reading fan fiction, my new learning is summed up by the following message to self which says, "Step back mom, from trying to control what your kid reads ,and let her follow her own purposes." OK. I get it but, what about her continuous interest in rereading Harriet?*

*The book Harriet the Spy is about a young girl who lives in Manhattan with her family and nanny named Ole Golly. Harriet has a passion for writing, and spying helps her to do that.*

*"I loved the movie and then I read the book. I really love the book and I don't know why. It's just something about it. I guess I like Harriet the character and also Janey and Sport. ...and of course Ole Golly....I love it so much that I started earmarking pages and underlining things in pencil cuz... that's something Sara Quinn (remember she is one of Lacey's big time role models) said which was "If a book is really good, I earmark pages and underline things in pencil." Lacey started doing that. Her copy has*

*been read over and over again, and in fact there are several passages that she has underlined and has added a few little illustrations to the bound text.*

*I recall a time that we were doing laundry together, and were talking about the various little conflicts that happen at school among her friends. Lacey's contribution to the conversation was a most fascinating paragraph that sounded like a recitation. I was so surprised by this that I remember asking, What? Where did you get those ideas from? It turned out, that what sounded like a recitation was; as it was a direct quote from Harriet the Spy. Sometime later, Lacey and I reconstructed that moment, by browsing through her copy and she settled on the following quote as the one she recited that day in the laundry room. Lacey had recited from memory the following passage which is the form of a letter written to Harriet by Ole Golly. The quote that Lacey recited that day from memory was,*

*Little lies that make people feel better are not bad, like thanking someone for a meal they made even if you hated it, or telling a sick person they look better when they don't, or someone with a hideous new hat that it is lovely. Remember that writing is to put love in the world, not to use against your friends. But to yourself you must always tell the truth. (p. 275)*

*Lacey is not sure that this quote is remembered from reading the book or from watching the movie (although it is underlined in her bound copy) but I do know that few children (and adults) can direct quote passages from a novel as Lacey did that day and integrate it so seamlessly into this everyday conversation. This was impressive to her mother who covets fiction. She was walking my love of fiction walk, and I could relate.*

*Lacey's continued interest in the book Harriet the Spy is consistent with Lacey's commitment and focus upon things for which she is passionate. The main character in this novel is Harriet who is 11 (almost like Lacey) who lives in Manhattan and is an only child (like Lacey) and who reads avidly. (Not so much Lacey, yet). Harriet writes constantly in a notebook that she carries around with her everywhere. Harriet observes the other kids at school, her parents; and has a spy route after school with several houses she watches regularly. (This is oh, so Lacey) Lacey has read and re read this book*

*several times, shows the (1996) movie to anyone and everyone who will watch it with her, and kept a Spy Notebook clearly marked PRIVATE. (see Figure 36.)*

*Lacey kept her Spy Notebook going over several months, writing at home and as it turns out at school during what was to be silent reading class. In her Spy Notebook dated June 15, 2011, she spies on her classmates and writes, "There are 6 people*



**Figure 36. Lacey's Spy book.**

*reading right now, 2 are missing, 1 is picking a scab, 3 are drawing, 2 are playing with each other, and I am writing. OMG, that ecvels (equals) 16! We have 16 people in our class, & there is 11 days of school left. Yoy. Still waiting for the bell to ring, I can't wait to get home and onto .ca, I'm dying in here, HELP!" ...the entry continues,*

*"I have growing pains, AND a canker sore which hurts like scat! Put numbing stuff on it last night, but it got all over my tongue so I couldn't talk. Wow, I seem really broken down\*. But I'm not that bad. Whoa, I've been writing for 15 minutes!! I hope the*

*bell rings soon! The other class has a big party and we don't. I think (name)! is awesome the one from .ca. I hope I'm like her when I'm 14. She's so funny \*bell\**

*A footnote is added at the bottom, which indicates that the phrase "really broken down" \* comes from "Where does the good go?" (A Teagan and Sara song lyric)*

In this next story Lacey shares an episode that happened in school regarding her wanting to read a graphic novel during silent reading. I will explore whether I have learned anything new that will help me broaden my understanding of Lacey as a reader.

*"How come I don't get to read what I want?"*

*Lacey took to school to read in her grade 6 silent reading class her copy of Essex County that she had bought using some of her Hanukkah gift money she had squirrelled away since last December. She had squirrelled this money away, waiting for just the right things to spend it on, and after having watched the Canada Reads 2001 on CBC television in February she knew that the just right thing to buy was her own copy of "Essex County." Her idol Sara Quin was one of the celebrity panel members on Canada Reads that year. Lacey and I watched the first show together and were impressed with Sara's defense of the book, all the while knowing that she was an underdog in this race. Essex County was the first book to be cut on the grounds that it was a graphic novel, didn't have enough text in it and several other reasons, as Lacey and I had predicted.*

*Lacey and I continued to watch the series, interested to hear of Sara's opinions of the remaining more "traditional" novels as Sara called them.*

*This is the context for which Lacey brought her copy of Essex County to read in silent reading class at school. So, Lacey explained to me what happened that day in grade 6. She said, "We had to read silently, and I don't remember that the teacher ever told the class specifically what we could read. The day that I brought Essex County into class... I asked her if I could read it....because I wanted to hear her opinion on this book...and ...I thought she might say no- you can't read that in class, I didn't want to read it behind her back...so " I asked if it was OK to read in class and I showed her the book. The teacher flipped through the pages and said , "No, you can't read graphic novels in class" Lacey felt that she had already given her reasons why she wanted to read it and felt that there wasn't much else to say.*

*Lacey told me that. "I went back to my desk and didn't read anything. The next day I brought in Carol Shields book Unless to read in class. I didn't ask her permission to read this cuz it was just a normal novel. I chose "Unless" to read cuz it was also nominated for Canada Reads this year and also because once Essex Country was cut from the Canada Reads list, Sara began to defend this book by Carol Shields as her second pick. I read it for a long time in silent reading and almost finished it...but it was kinda hard to read...my concentration for it was a little low.*

*What have I learned from these stories? Lacey's interest in graphic novels does not surprise me, nor does her grade 6 teacher's dismissal of it as an inappropriate text to be reading during "silent reading" in her language arts class. My earlier teacher-self may*

have done the same thing, and my earlier teacher-mother, would perhaps have applauded the teacher's demand upon Lacey that she read "traditional books", because that would align with my beliefs. Now, as teacher-mother-researcher, I am able to look at these stories as evidence that my framing of "real reading" has in fact come a long way. Well Lacey has benefited from my learning to not marginalize her reading choice, there are many who may be marginalized at home as readers and then again at school, which makes it necessary for all teachers to think about this. Through my broader lens, I would investigate more fully with Lacey her interest in graphic novels in general and why this particular title rather than dismiss the child's choice so cavalierly. I would use this conversation to understand Lacey as a reader, who is also a writer and an artist. Lacey was unable to really tell me why she is drawn to graphic novels in general (she has read several, that she has taken out of the public library). In the case of Essex County it is a pretty sure bet that it is because Sara Quin likes it and is defending it on Canada reads. I still lament that Lacey is not a reader, like I am, reading the paper bound text heavy in narrative, but am developing an appreciation of her as a reader different, but as valuable as my way.

**Lacey's many other modalities.** I will end my teacher-mother-researcher stories with a series of vignettes that "get-at" Lacey, who traverses many kinds of modalities in order to make meaning for herself. These vignettes are grouped under the sub heading, *Taking charge of her room and what goes on there*. It is so named, because Lacey's room is where she acts on most of her different modal creations. It is her sanctuary of sorts. You will see in these vignettes how Lacey creates a sanctuary for herself, and as in all the

other examples I have documented you will see a learner who takes on what interests her with great passion and sustains that interest over long periods. You will also see in the vignettes how Lacey uses movie making, animations and Power points to make meaning for in-school assignments and just for fun, demonstrating once again some of her “sedimenting identities” that find their way into her literacy practices.

*Taking charge of her room and what goes on there.*

### *Vignette 1*

*At onetime Lacey’s bedroom door used to have taped to it a singular sign which read “Plees Do not DastrB.” (Please do not disturb) which can be seen in Figure 37. That simple singular message is long gone and over the years this same door has transformed into a collage of sorts that Lacey works on at regular intervals. The current manifestation of her bedroom door can be seen in can be seen in Figure 38. Remember the very young Lacey who sought out many conventional and unconventional places and spaces to make meaning? Well, the early teen Lacey continues to do the same thing. I recall “allowing” her to tape that first sign on her door, and after that, she did not seek permission. I think that she thought: what’s the difference, one sign or many. She had claimed her door as her canvas .When guests come to our home, they are usually shown “the door”, and are curious to notice how it may have changed since their last visit to our home. Well, this door leads somewhere so ....into Lacey’s room we go.*



**Figure 37.** Lacey's bedroom door (Do not Disturb)



**Figure 38.** A later version of the same door.



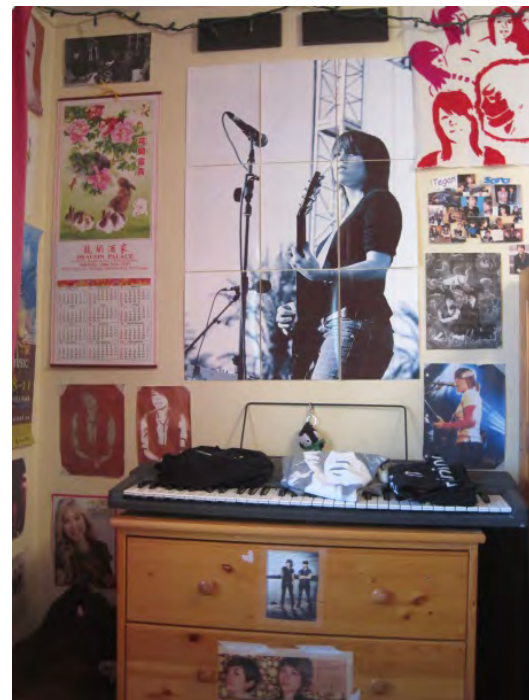
## Vignette 2

*"I really like to see things, not just having a plain wall. I like to have interesting, different things and I like to make my room as different and as terrifying as possible ... like a sanctuary, but sort of sanctuary-ish or terrifying-ish. I want to add a black light in my room to make it cool and teryfying-ish. Dad was like ...you won't be able to read and what if you want to clean you room? I told him that, I'll just open the window and light will come in and he's like.... what if you want to*



**Figure 39. View 1 of Lacey's room.**

*clean your room in the night and I'm just like ....I don't need to clean my room in the night, and if I study I'll just go to the kitchen...I'm getting off topic." And so, regardless of the unsolicited advice of her dad, and in keeping with the sentiment of the Little Prince who said, "Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to*



**Figure 40. View 2 of Lacey's room.**

*them. de Saint-Exupery, 1943 p. 4.), Lacey hung up the black light anyway. I asked Lacey to take some photos of her room and select the ones that would capture the “essence” or the “sanctuary-ish or terrifying-ish” aspects. She selected the ones that she is most comfortable including in her mom’s “study”. Her selected photos can be seen in Figures 39, 40, and 41. In this figure 40 you can see Sara Quin, the rock star, several of the stencils she had been making, her hand-me-down keyboard from her grandma, and assorted other things of importance to her. “My walls, OK.... my walls! There are fairy lights or what do you call them... all over the lining – where the roof and the wall meet. Then there is a whole bunch of pictures and some little puppy pictures and cat pictures and awards for different things and melt-y beads, tickets, and ummm valentines. There is*



**Figure 41. View 3 of Lacey’s room.**

*whatever I have, and there is also this metal piece I found in recycling that looked kind of like a torture device and it looks kind of cool....and so I put it on my bulletin board.” She goes on to tell me that, “There is more space to fit*

*other things, if I squish things in I could fit a whole lot more, especially compared*

*to the average person. There is at least 110% more (stuff up there) than the average person. I put up all kinds of things like...there is an interview they (Teagan and Sara) did*

*a while ago. On my door there's newspaper articles about them and concert dates, and stuff that I have cut out of the newspaper.*

*Heartbreak was around the corner for Lacy as the wee little kitten hiding on the bunk (see figure 41) named by Lacey as Harriet, had to be placed for adoption as her mom (me) became very allergic to cats.*

*On my bookshelves she tells me, "There is a whole bunch of my albums. My albums are on display and Harriet the Spy (the book, the vhs and my spy book) and Tegan and Sara magazines that have them on the cover and ummm oh, little quotes from them....little quotes in little boxes." she says. We have a conversation about these "little quotes in boxes" and she tells me that they have a "backstory". She loves the idea that, "there is a backstory to everything in my room." and adds, "These quotes are very little, and they are stuck up high on the wall... so high that you have to get up on the top bunk to read them. I read them sometimes," she tells me, and "some of them I haven't looked at in two years. ...they are just weird little texts that I printed a long time ago...they are random things that they (Tegan and Sara) have said. Like ...one of them says... "What's that noise? I hate those monkeys." It (this quote) has a back story, but to the normal person (a person who does know as much about Tegan and Sara as I do) it's like...that's hilarious Lacey." Lacey tells this with much sarcasm in her voice. "They don't know the back story."*

*I am thinking that she seems to take great pleasure in the fact that she knows the backstory and others (including me) do not. I am curious about her use of the word "backstory" so I ask, "Is that a word that you and your friends use or is that a Lacey*

*word?” and she replies, “I think it’s a Lacey word...it’s part of my life because.... I like to say really random things all the time that are related to Teagan and Sara and they (others) don’t have any idea of what I’m talking about... today I said something like “Let’s move it bear, she’s sitting on the speaker phone.” I say those things a lot and it’s kind of... Yeah well, it has to do with Ted (a Tegan and Sara band member) and Ted was on the ...it’s not important...so you see there is a backstory and the other person doesn’t know the backstory.” She is smiling wide and long “yeah it’s just like my own.”*

What have I learned from these vignettes? It is clear to me that Lacey has claimed her space and made her mark and found her voice within her sanctuary. Her unconventional use of space as her canvas has been seamless from her early emergent days of writing on steamy windows to now creating a living collage on her bedroom wall in her early teen years. To Lacey a blank space is space that she can claim to express herself and to have agency over her own domain. Not only is she using the visual affordances of the text and pictures that she chooses to place, but she is also claiming an important aspect of herself which she refers to as her “backstory”. Lacey’s humorous and mischievous side, seems to revel in knowing things that others don’t.

Once Lacey became an early teen, and we had seen how committed and responsible she had become regarding technology, she inherited her dad’s hand me down laptop, and she could , now work on her technology pursuits in her sanctuary-with the door open and parental supervision, close by but from a far. It’s hard to be a responsible parent. I will end this section with three stories that “get-at” the many other ways that Lacey uses technology in her present life to make meaning. She pursues these interests in

her room where she takes charge of the things that matter her. The first story is called, *Her room as her movie making studio* the second is called *Animation making for marks* and the third is called *Making PowerPoints can be handy*.

*Her room as her movie making studio*

*Lacey and I discussed one of her many short videos that she makes for fun. We talked about the one titled “What Sammy does all day”. Figure 42 shows a screenshot from this video.*

*Based on my knowledge of filmmaking gleaned from living with two filmmakers*

*(her dad and Lacey) I can only*

*state a few filmmaking*

*techniques that she used and*

*they are: an establishing shot;*

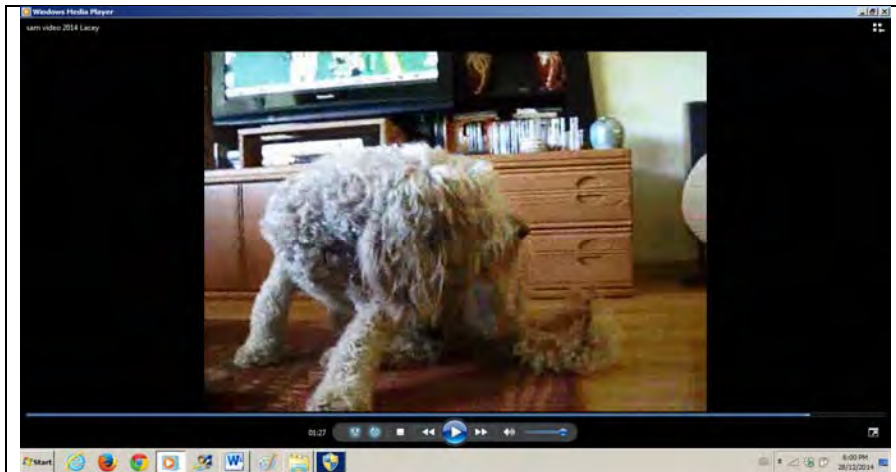
*fast motion; cutting and editing*

*and the long shot. So, I asked*

*Lacey to let me in on her*

*techniques used in the making of*

*this video and about some of her*



**Figure 42.** Sammy video for fun (Lacey at age 11).

*“behind the scenes” decision making and she shared the following:*

*“I made it for fun on a Saturday afternoon. I know it was a Saturday, or maybe it was a Sunday, cuz the football game in on the TV in the back ground. Sammy was my only subject cuz... she’s really cute. I used fast motion cuz I thought it would make the movie*

*go faster (it wouldn't take a lot of time to watch) .....It would be less boring...and funnier. I like the effect of speeding it up cuz ... I knew the sound would be high pitched and quick and funny ....and cuz the TV sound was on in the background, it would kind of seem like Sammy was talking. I decided to use eat, lie down and scratch cuz that's what she was doing in the house. (I might add here, that is what Sammy does every day. Lacey goes on to state that, "I didn't want to take her outside where she does lots and lots of other fun things, so I just stayed in the house and filmed what she does in the house."*

*As her mother, who has seen several other of her little films, I took the opportunity to ask her a few more questions regarding the final look of the film. In this film I noticed some techniques that she had used in others she had made and so wanted to know why she reuses some techniques more than others for instance: font selection, font colour, and black background choices.*

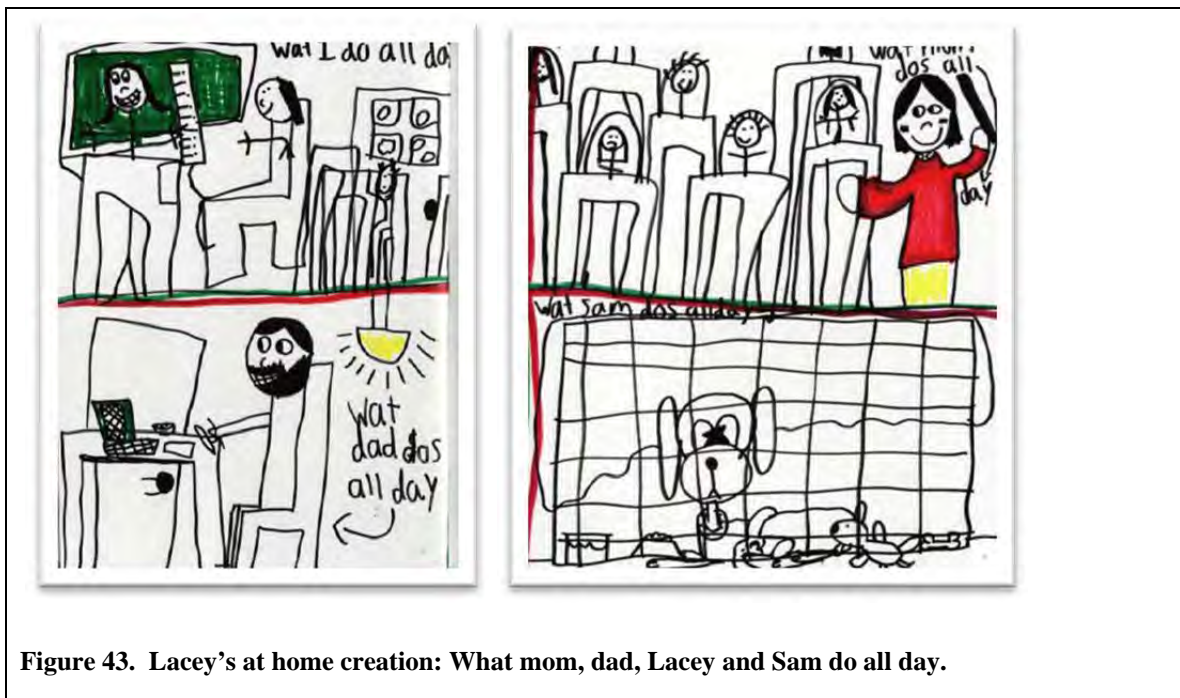
*Who doesn't like to talk about their work with an adoring audience, and so she told me that," I used title overlay on black screen as a kind of caption. Red and black is my favorite combo of colors. I like how the red stands out. I think close ups is a cool way to see a dog eating. If you look at Sammy from underneath and real close it's not an angle you get to see very often. Sometimes I shot it from underneath the couch, because from the normal view..... it would be boring..... I got the shot by lying under the couch. Another time I moved the camera back cuz... I was bored of the same shot and I was wondering (if I did this) Sam might follow me... but she didn't. In another shot, she adds, "I filmed myself tapping on the floor to see if Sam would stop just laying down which would be interesting....but she didn't stop laying down. Why did I put myself in front of*



*the camera? ...well, because kids like to be in front of the camera. At the end of that scene I pretended that I was eating the camera, and stopped filming right then.... I knew that it was going to speed up and so I knew it would look funny....like I was going to eat the camera."*

*I have watched her video, several times, and each time I can see these, and many more aspects of filmmaking there, but I don't necessarily have the right language to name them. If I had asked Lacey's dad (which I didn't), I am sure that he could point out and name a few more. I invite the reader to remember back to an artefact discussed in an earlier story, which is seen again here in Figure 43. Looking back provides means to examine how Lacey uses and reuses many of her favoured techniques over time and also illustrates just how imbedded some of these identities are in her texts.*

*Lacey's younger self and older- self have a fascination with the goings on of her dog Sam. Younger Lacey expressed herself using a print form of story boarding (with*



**Figure 43. Lacey's at home creation: What mom, dad, Lacey and Sam do all day.**

*humor) and she's doing it again in the video example. This time, though, she is using different modalities, and from a later time period of her evolving self-identity. I'd say it is the same story, but at a different time, using different modalities and in differing combinations. This is an example of what Rowsell and Pahl call "sedimenting identities". Because I am teacher-mother-researcher in this context, I have the great privilege of taking this longer view which allows me to move back-and-forth documenting her evolution as a literacy learner. Sammy is a dog with a bone who; like most dogs, stays with the bone, as long as she remains satisfied with the pleasure of it. Sammy literally loves her bone. Lacey is figuratively my little dog with a bone, who stays with her bone - "the story" until (like Sammie) she is satisfied enough with the pleasure of it. Based on past and present evidence, I suspect this Sammie story line will reappear again, sooner than later. I am humbled in the presence of Lacey's tenacity.*

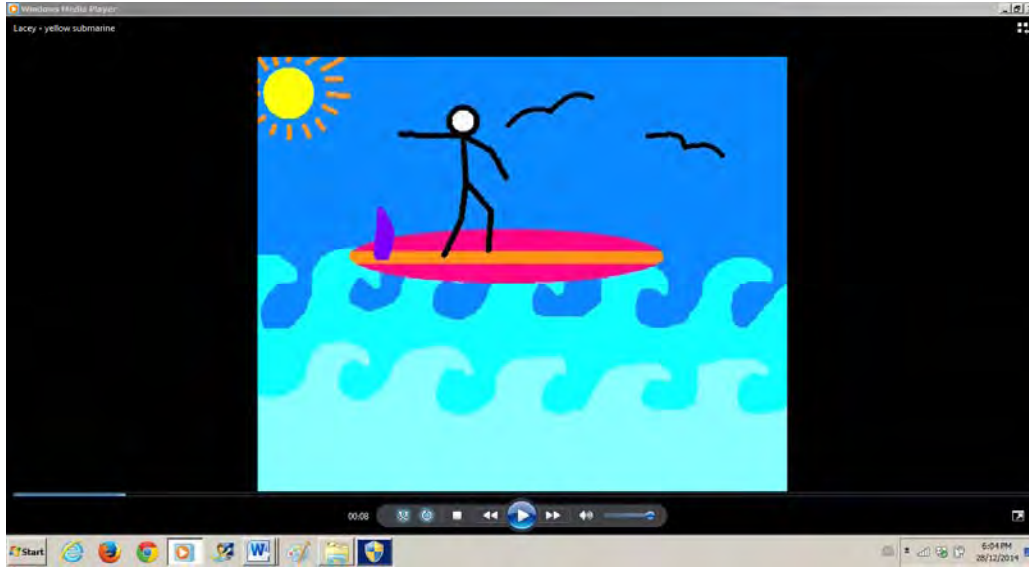
#### *Animation making for marks*

*Lucky Lacey (or maybe not just lucky, as she choose to take a graphics course as an option in school), was taught some animation skills in her graphics course at her middle school. Lacey chose this course as an option; over art and I remember her enjoying it very much. The animation titled Yellow Submarine was created as an in-school assignment "for marks", which distinguishes it from the Sammy video that was done for fun, at home.*

*I asked Lacey once again to talk to me about this video creation, so that I could learn about her "behind the scenes" decision making. Lacey told me that, "I made it in*



*graphics class. We had to make a stick figure video and we had to use “Paint Program” (something Lacey had been using since early childhood, if you recall)... to make the background ...we had to use stick figures to make the people. It didn’t have to have*



**Figure 44. Animation making for marks.**

*music.... the music makes it better and more interesting and ....you can get the feel for what you are going for...plus... it was about musicians...so that’s why I used music. We were able to pick our own topic... some of my friends did an explosion in the library, one did a person in a skate park and lots of kids did fighting scenes.”*

*I have watched this video several times ( see figure 44 for a screenshot of this video), and each time I see something that I didn’t see before, which led me to ask Lacey whether including a storyline was an expectation from her teacher. She replied by saying, “It didn’t have to be a story...but.... I wanted to do a story...cuz then it was more structured and I knew where I was going (with it) and wouldn’t have to think of new ideas. So, I asked, “If you could tell me in as few words as possible what the story line of*

*your animation is, what it would be?” She answered my specific question by saying, “It is about the Beatles. All 4 are in their yellow submarine, playing music. Then three of them leave the submarine and go to a Teagan and Sara concert....to find shelter, and it’s free. The End”, she states emphatically.*

*During my numerous viewing of this animation video, I noticed that I could identify a number of Lacey’s various identities represented within this animation. She is a musician, so it was not surprising to me, that she would incorporate this love of hers into this creation. She is a dancer (now embarking on competitive hip-hop) and so I can recognize that the movements of the surfer in the first scene are in fact hip hop moves that Lacey is learning in dance classes. Lacey has a clear identity as a writer and so chooses to create a storyline into her animation. She is a filmmaker and so there are several definite scenes played out over this short animation. She is funny and so there is humour in the last frame as the three Beatles find shelter in Tegan and Sara’s free concert!*

*Our conversation ended with Lacey telling me that, “I enjoy their (Teagan and Sara) singing of “Walking with the Ghost” and ... because I only had a limited time to make this animation (cuz I had other assignments to do in this course.)I got it done mostly in class time. It took me a long time to make this, which ended up to be a one minute and a few seconds long! I think I worked on it less than a month and I did it all at school in class time.” I have chosen to give Lacey the last word in this vignette when she says, “I enjoyed it cuz ...I was making an animation about something that I liked and.... there were not too many criteria.”*

What did I learn from this story? Here is a child once again being driven by the desire to tell a story, using the animation skills she was learning to manipulate. She quickly figured out what the minimum criteria were for this assignment “for marks” and then just proceeded to get on with what it was she wanted to create. She used it as an opportunity to incorporate many of the things she loves which represent aspects of her “sedimented identities”. Once again, I see her as a “dog with a bone”, who once clearly establishes for herself what is required of her to get “the marks”, she has power over her own agency (an action, medium, or means by which something is accomplished) to incorporate the things that she hasn’t quite finished “biting on’. She chews away at her love of music, dance and story until she is satisfied. Because this is a task required of her from school and she is someone who is motivated to be a “good student”, she makes her mark, finds her voice and claims her place in this assignment. She is happily aware and thankful that the limited criteria set out by the teacher afforded her this luxury.

*Making PowerPoint can be useful*

*I didn’t know how to make a Power point until the year 2008, when I had to learn quickly how to make one, for a presentation that I had to make at the University in one of my Masters courses. I learned how to do it, by soliciting one of my classmates in my Masters class who was at the time a technology teacher in the schools. She was a great pick for the job, as she knew what she was doing, and she was a great teacher too! My husband, during that time was usually my go to technology person, but in this case branching out and learning from a classmate worked well. Lacey over the years has*

*become my other “in-house-go-to-person” in all things technology; almost superseding this role over her dad. Lacey knows technology; knows how to quickly find out what she needs to know via the internet, and is a patient teacher for her mom. Below are four PowerPoints that Lacey made during or close to the data collection period. I asked Lacey to self-select these from her vast catalogue housed on her computer. She has been maintaining this catalogue since way back when she learned to save her first “Paint Program” creations. When Lacey was younger she was able to access her catalogue easily, when she used her printed creations to make her “Art Gallery. Now, she is able to do the same because of solicitations from her mother.*

*Each Power point, (see Figures 45-47) was made for differing purposes, and the purpose for each is indicated in the caption for each of the figures.*



**Figure 45.** A PowerPoint made by Lacey as a self-assessment for an in-school assignment titled “Portfolio”.



**Figure 46.** A PowerPoint made for an in-school Social Studies project and presentation, Grade 7.



What have I learned from these power point creations? Each of these Power point creations represent a learner making meaning for differing purposes within differing social contexts. The study of multimodalities establishes that there is certain “logic” to decision making by the meaning-maker, who makes many decisions as to which mode to use when and for what purpose. Lacey’s work in these examples shows her to be both a consumer and producer of texts. She uses

and reuses images from her catalogue and she uses and reuses images found in the public domain to express her ideas. I notice in these examples that Lacey rarely keeps her text choices to a singular mode. Kress (2000) talks about digital and multimodal texts which take into account changes in the forms of text, uses of language and modes of communication in addition to the use of conventional text. It is my view that Lacey is as Kress (2000) states one of “the remakers, transformers of sets of representational resources-rather than users of stable systems” (p.160). Lacey is conversant with design and with visual forms of representation and actively shapes and makes meaning by employing many modes. An enlarged view of literacy then considers Lacey’s meaning-making as inclusive of her capacity to read and negotiate images, and textual representations of all kinds. Lacey constantly navigates the changing social contexts in

which she finds herself making meaning. When she is producing text for school-based purposes she demonstrates that she is cognizant of the requirements and is very clear of the criteria required of her in that context. When she is making these creations for fun, she creates her own criteria to satisfy her own goals.

What I have learned from Lacey's creations using multi modalities? Throughout the many examples of Lacey's in-school creations, she demonstrates that "marks" and the meeting of criteria set by the teacher is almost always her main motivator in that context. A strong motivating force for Lacey in the school context, is to get it done, using as many of the means that she is happy with as soon as possible so that she can go on to do the things that she really wants to do, without constraints. The fact that the teacher or the other kids think it is interesting and more importantly funny, is a bonus for Lacey. Once she has satisfied this main motivator for school based text productions, she then negotiates the inclusion of other forms and modes to satisfy her desired results. When she is free to determine her own criteria as seen in her creations that she made for the sheer pleasure of it she makes her decisions on how these modal choices meet her needs best. For example, Lacey set her own criteria and chose her own modalities for her movie "What Sammie does all day". In this context, she has decision making power over her time, place and choice of modalities. She is free to choose how best to capture "what Sam does all day" and in the school-based animation assignment, she was able to carve out her own agency because in her mind; there were "not too many criteria".

Lacey and I have discussed this idea of criteria, as she used that word often in our discussions. From Lacey's perspective, she doesn't mind the teacher establishing criteria,

as long as there are not too many. “When there are too many, “she tells me, “they get in my way, and I can’t just do what I want to do. Also, I hate it when the teacher keeps talking about the criteria all of the time...I just want to get started” She also shared with me, that she is aware that this isn’t necessarily true for all of the kids in her class. “Some kids, want the teacher to tell them how to do everything....I hate that!....Just let me get started.” she adds.

Lacey demonstrates an appreciation of the various affordances that are available to her. Whether consciously or unconsciously Lacey’s meaning-making employs many semiotic resources. Her knowledge of how to use these semiotic resources plays an important role in her decision making process. Lacey has expressed quite clearly to me that; it is her active engagement in this decision making process that makes learning the most satisfying for her, whether in-school or at-home.

This study of Lacey has moved my interpretation of literacy teaching and learning beyond a language arts program that moves my students become a being proficient in each of the six language arts strands to one that also includes teaching my students to be “remakers”, “redesigners” and “transformers” of sets of representational resources as well as a “user of stable systems” (Kress 2000. p.160).

I have learned by studying Lacey that I require a view of literacy which includes “an active dynamic process whereby meaning is constructed through accessing the resources of “available designs” and involving “designing your own meaning based on your interaction with these resources and then producing the redesigned” (Kress, 2000 p.

205). Arising out of this highly personal and situated context I have used story throughout to demonstrate how I have evolved in the naming and applying of my new language and framing of literacy.

In chapter 5, I will summarize how my understanding of literacy has evolved, establish the limitations of this study and will make recommendations for practice.



**Chapter 5: The post teacher-mother-researcher era**

“Narratives are truthful fictions, but fiction is itself linked to interpretation in that all interpretation (even scientific explanation) involves human fabrication: the making out of what happened and the making up of what something means.  
(Sandelowski 1991, p. 161)

As all learners, Lacey is a unique child who grows and makes uses of her literacies within distinctive circumstances and contexts. Throughout the writing of this thesis I have pondered Lacey’s literacy life, which cannot be separated from the life she lives. She is surrounded by many forms of literacy, and has parents who encourage and challenge her to be “fully herself”. As a self-study, I tell this story from within this privileged context, and have struggled all along with how I might address this issue of privilege in order to move this discussion beyond just the specifics of Lacey and my interactions with her as a literacy learner.

My understanding of literacy has been deepened and broadened by examining the literacy learning details of this one learner, who like all learners, can never be characterized in just one way. Lacey can be “thinly” described as a white middle class kid, who has many privileges that have provided her with rich contexts in which to develop her literacies both at school and at home, but she can also be “thickly” described additionally as a dancer, a film maker, a writer, and an artist, among many other descriptors. We have seen a number of these identities revealed through an examination of the artefacts of her literacies. Additionally, a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of

Lacey also reveals that she navigates her worlds of home and school as somewhat of an “outsider” from her many contemporaries; as she is an adopted child, a lesbian girl, and an “only child”. I do say somewhat of an outsider, because Lacey has always been taught to embrace each of these different identities even though they are different from many of the identities her friends and peers claim.

Throughout the writing of this thesis I have discussed each of these “outsider” positions with Lacey at different intervals, and it is interesting but not surprising to me that her “only child” moniker is the one that causes her to feel the most different from others. I can’t tell you how many times folks (many of them teachers) who ask me probing questions about these three “outsider” identities of Lacey’s. Generally, the questions originate from a place that considers each of these outsider identities as somehow embodying aspects that depict Lacey as having to cope with them from within a deficit position in relation to others. These questions often imply that it must be hard to be adopted, to be an only child, or to be a lesbian in the world as it is. It seems to me that inherent in these questions is the idea that in inhabiting these marginalized identities Lacey has lost something of value rather than having gained something. This privileging of a dominant societal perspective suggests that children “should” be raised by their biological family, with siblings, and with heterosexual developmental expectations.

Once when Lacey was quite young I overheard her respond to such a query from a classmate who said to Lacey, “It must be hard to be adopted. It is so sad that your mother gave you away.” To which Lacey replied, “It isn’t sad. I know my birth mother and I have a birth brother and I also have a mom. It isn’t sad. My birth mom picked my parents

and that's cool." I also recall a drawing Lacey created, as a school task, in the early days of Grade 1. The children were to draw a picture of their family. Lacey's drawing included a drawing of me with the word "mère" (mom) beside it, a drawing of her dad with the word "père" (dad) beside it, as well as a drawing of herself, a drawing of Nancy (pseudonym) with the word "birthmother" beside it, and a drawing of James (pseudonym) with the word "birth brother" beside it. The teacher happily accepted Lacey's rendering of her family, but as this was created in a French Immersion class, the teacher had to scramble to provide the translations for the words birthmother and birth brother so that Lacey could complete the school task as required. Lacey made her mark, claimed her place, and found her voice in this context, which also had the added benefit of contributing to the class's understandings of the diversity of families and extended everyone's French vocabulary. There is no deficit positioning here if the child's out-of-school identities are welcomed into the literacies of the classroom.

When Lacey first came out to me she said, "Well mom, I guess I am one of those people who the world likes to hate". I was heartbroken that this was her first formalized statement to me about this aspect of her identity. There were many smaller hints along the way before this declaration was made in this form. Her comment reveals that she knew that she identifies with a group of folks who have not yet won full societal acceptance. Once out at home, it was not long before she claimed her place, made her mark, and found her voice in her larger community that included kids at school, her friends, and extended family. Again, rather than perceiving herself from a deficit perspective, being from a societally marginalized group, Lacey has had to learn to claim her place, make her

mark and find her voice. This has resulted in her becoming highly critical of the intolerance she sees it around her, and it has also made her a student of human and gay rights. Our conversation about her newly declared identity continued that day, and after many probing questions from me and her dad such as, “How do you know that you are a lesbian girl?” “How do you think you will be treated at school and by your peers, coming out so young?” She stated quite forthrightly, “Mom, don’t worry. I am more than a lesbian you know ... I am a dancer, a trombone player, and I am a writer, and I’m funny”

Yes, Lacey grows up in an economically privileged home, which has allowed her parents to support her in her endeavours and teach her to live her life positioned with a thickly appreciated identity and to seek out discourse practices, affinity spaces, and texts that speak to her reality. In seeking her place Lacey is making meaning in and of her life. She is someone who does not and will not see herself as marginalized, or as an outsider. As documented in the stories called “Lacey writes”, we saw her take action and find her place. If she can’t find what she needs in the literacy power structures of the school she seeks them elsewhere, and remains privileged to do so, without concerns for food, clothing, and safety issues at home.

Additionally, through writing this thesis, I have also thought about many of the teacher candidates in my classes within the ACCESS program at my university and whose lived experiences are very different from my own and my child’s. For many, the dynamics of poverty, violence, racism, sexism or tragedy have not always given them the privileged, economically secure life of my Lacey, but a life of rich experiences nonetheless. It is from within this life that they could write their own story of their

evolving understanding of literacy from a teacher, possibly mother/father, and/or researcher perspective. In many cases my students have firsthand knowledge of what it means to be a student whose literacies have been marginalized during their own schooling and life experiences. They could write about the ways that poverty; racism, violence, and sexism have or have not impacted their configuring of their identities as literacy teachers in the classroom. Many of my students in the ACCESS program are mothers and fathers before they become teachers, which is a reverse trajectory from my evolutionary genesis. They could write their own evolutionary understanding of literacy stories from their perspectives, asking perhaps: “How has my role as mother/father impacted my understanding of literacy as I become a credentialed teacher?” Perhaps they could write a highly contextualized exploration of their own child’s navigation of literacies within a home that is rich in political activism, sports, or positioned from within their resilient struggles as newcomers or as First Nation persons on a day-to-day basis. Their stories would be rich and thick and different from mine. Their stories could position them to broaden their understanding of literacy while exploring it through the framework of literacy as social practice, as I have done in this thesis. Perhaps they are raising numerous children and could offer insights into the interesting interplay of literacies among siblings at home and at school.

This is what I invite the reader to do: explore a highly contextualized literacy life, struggle with the dilemmas that arise out of considering such a contextualized life as these dilemmas “push up” against understandings of literacy that require renewed thinking based on a more current theoretical literacy framework—and learn from that.

**My Evolutionary Story**

The genesis for this study began with my bringing in artefacts of Lacey's early literacy learning into my master's class; using them to discuss new ideas with my classmates that we were collectively studying, while at the same time attempting to bring my own literacy scholarship up to date. I quickly saw that these artefacts from my daughter's literacy life could provide me with a means to explore my changing understanding of literacy. As a preliminary exercise designed to explore the use of these artefacts, I wrote a paper titled "My timely dance with a symbol weaver and sign maker." This exercise taught me that:

What I am learning right now is that my definition of language and literacy is too limiting and needs to be expanded to include all aspects of the world that develops its participants. The children in our schools and in our homes are diverse. This understanding of diversity, which includes a child's out of school literacies, must become "the new normal". The tools at a child's disposal have also become diverse requiring from us as educators and parent a broader definition of just what a fully literate person in this "new literate" citizenry requires. Lacey is one such child who requires a respect for this larger toolkit as she symbol weaves and spins her webs of literacy" (Shearer, 2010).

Through story I have documented how my inner dialogue has changed over time as I examined the various artefacts I selected and how I viewed them through my different roles as teacher, mother, and researcher. This changing inner dialogue has been evolutionary, which means there has been a gradual development of my understanding of

literacy and stance as a teacher, mother, and researcher. This is an evolutionary process because it has been a gradual development of my understanding and practices into more complex or “improved” forms; not surprising, there are no absolute demarcations that indicate that this is how my thinking and practices were “then” and are “now”. What is clear to me is that as my framing of literacy has broadened to view literacy as social practice, this viewpoint has impacted the way that I contemplate my actions as they intersect with literacy events and practices.

I have not abandoned my conceptions of the six literacy strands that dominated my practice in my early days as teacher, nor have I completely abandoned my view of literacy through the lens of a developmental/cognitive psychological ideology in which attention is paid to individual development against a set of uniform technical skills to be mastered by the individual. What has changed is that I have added an expanded view of literacy that positions the learner as a meaning-maker in a more central position, where meaning making is understood to be taking place over a lifetime, inclusive of out-of-school literacies and in-school-literacies. Therefore, the boundary between in-and-out-of-school literacies has become more permeable for me. I see my role as teacher is not just about supporting the child’s acquisition of proficiency in the use of the six strands of the language arts within a school context, but rather in positioning the child at the educational centre—in an agentive position to make decisions about how and when to use these strands to make meaning in-and-out of school.

My study of myself has shown me that this one learner has much agency over her decision- making for meaning-making outside of the classroom. So, the question remains,

how can that same kind of agency be invited into the classroom, so that all learners can envision themselves as a language arts learners and meaning-makers across many contexts?

I was able to look back to my era of teacher and learn through the story of David, for example, that,

Rather than viewing modes of communication other than speech and writing as “add-ons” in theories of learning, a multimodal approach begins from a theoretical position that treats all communicative modes as potentially equal modes of learning. (Kress & Jewitt p. 1, 2003)

Therefore, my broadened theoretical lens caused me to shift my thinking so that classroom decisions would center more on David as the meaning-maker in the language arts classroom. Paying more attention to why David was so passionate or driven by his drawing and comic strip creations and investigating this with David, led me to better understand his conscious and unconscious perceptions regarding the affordances of comic strip storyboarding or drawing and opened up an avenue for these literacy practices to have greater prominence in the language arts classroom. This story documents my shift in thinking about my role as literacy teacher. By placing the many Davids in my future practice at the center of their meaning-making process my role as a teacher is to help them enhance and move their skill sets through and past their chosen/familiar modalities, and in so doing to advance their flexible use of other language arts strands. Relinquishing some power over choice of modalities can facilitate learners’ agency over how they make



and share meanings. In so doing, this can provide a means for the Davids of the classroom to make their mark, find their voice, and claim their place.

When considering the story of Carrie against my broader thinking about literacy, I learned the importance of allowing for multimodal expression as equal to other forms of expression. My future decisions would allow for greater agency by the learner to select the most appropriate mode of expression to make their multiple meanings understood. What has changed for me, by examining this story, is the realization that a broader theoretical framework for literacy would have pedagogically supported my decision (as an informed decision rather than a chance decision) to let Carrie engage with clay as a means of expressing her knowledge of wolves. Carrie “claimed her place” in my classroom by going to the clay when she needed to, and in so doing taught me a lot about power.

The story about Carrie also taught me that by broadening my understanding of literacy I became more aware of my own pedagogical decision-making being much less neutral than I once thought. Viewing literacy as social practice requires that the teacher-researcher understand the ways in which, “power relationships determine which literacy practices are available to a given community, which are dominant and privileged, and which are marginalized” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1984). The examination of the story about Carrie provided an illustrative example of my learning in this regard. This learning does not come easily to me, as I have had to look critically at the ways (although well meaning) I may have marginalized and “cut out” some learners from the “taken for granted” educational culture of the classroom. In this regard my work is not done; it has

just begun as I move forward from this exercise in a more informed way regarding how I use power in the classroom.

The story about Kelly documents a shift in my interpretation of how much of my teacher practice was dominated by the privileging of written and oral literacies. Looking for evidence of literacy requires more than evidence of the four strands of the language arts that dominated my practice at that time. Kelly had a literacy identity that turned out to be very rich in “literary language” and she showed me that she had an ability to hear and transmit the cadence of language from the aural to a written form. Without evidence of her abilities it was easy to place Kelly in a deficit position of being “less literate” when in fact she was highly literate in many strands but did not demonstrate this capacity verbally. Literacy as social practice questions the validity of designations that position literacy as an either/or proposition such as “literate” or “illiterate”. In today’s world “being literate” entails being communicatively competent across multiple discourse communities (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; 2001), and as Pahl and Roswell (2005) state: in exploring identity over different types of literacy practices, “we are who we are and who we are allowed to be is shaped in part by the way we use literacy” (p. 23).

In each of these stories, the child had a unique and powerful means of communicating meaning, which provided me with an opportunity to examine how my view of literacy has shifted. My view now places the learner’s drive for meaning-making at the center of my pedagogical decisions. Also, it is clear to me now, that acts of literacy are about the particular person using them within a particular context, for a particular purpose. I have learned that attention must be paid to whether there is equitable access for

meaning making by all learners. Are various modalities easily accessed or claimed?

Literacy is always about making meaning in many forms—simply that.

Moving onto my exploration of Lacey's emergent and later literacies at home and at school, my shifting understanding of literacy not only impacted my current learning discussed in this thesis, but as I noted, I was aware that during the teacher-mother era that preceded my era as researcher, my observations of Lacey's literacies impacted some of my actions in the classroom "as I was learning" and before I had gained an expanded theoretical frame and accordant language in order to name what I was observing and thinking.

For example, I noticed Lacey's many opportunities to "thrive in a slower-paced discussion, where [she did] not have to work so hard to get a conversational turn" (Genishi & Dyson (2009). This observation demonstrated to me how important sustained engagement with an attentive adult is to a child's emergent literacies. By respecting and remaining open to Lacey's use of her "at hand" resources to make meaning, I can now name this as a kind of sharing of power. Lacey's playful explorations with objects such as chalk and lipstick as tools and "at hand" resources such as walls, floors, and steamy windows as her canvases, required a kind of "stepping back" on my part as the adult, so as to allow her the space to make her mark, claim her place, and find her voice. Throughout this era I examined how Lacey followed her desires to make meaning. My sustained relationship with this one learner at home had an impact on my actions with other learners in the classroom. I consciously created more spaces and opportunities for the children in my classroom to make meaning, without ever calling it or naming it a

sharing of power. Lacey's many opportunities for collaborative talk and engagement with a caring adult, underlines for me how important it is to provide children in school language arts classrooms with the same kind of time and space for their own pursuits of literacy.

The story called "Buffalo far away" also documents my growing understanding of how power has an impact on literacy learning. My investigation of centrally positioning the child as storyteller also positioned me as an adult to think about how much is gained in child-adult literacy interactions when the power differentials are realigned. Similarly, the story of "A mother's appreciation" enabled me to experience humility as I examined my interactions with Lacey around her early drawings in her sketchbook.

When I first saw Carrie's spectacular wolf, David's drawing of the horse, and Kelly's "word perfect" story my teacher-self, and my now teacher-mother-self had a "gut-level" appreciation for the value of what I had observed in these three moments. But it is from within my larger theoretical perspective that I can now say that the feeling of humility I felt in these moments came from my sharing of power. Literacy is all about power, and how young children claim their power can be pedagogically insightful for their teachers.

To return to the "Buffalo far away" story, I shared this story to demonstrate the importance of honoring a child's creation, but it had direct consequences for the invaluable knowledge and insights it afforded me as a mother-teacher. For you see, it is not only Lacey that found her voice and place with these mark makings, but I found my place too as a mother and as a teacher.

The story “This sketchbook is mine!” demonstrates for me an over-stepping of my power as I inserted myself into Lacey’s meaning-making. The sketchbook entries (in a particular sequence) are a window into Lacey’s use of drawing and the written form as a means of expressing her true self and her claiming her identity as a participant in her own world. From this story I learned how her creations and identity claims are more “authentic” when she is in control of the mark, her voice, and the place in which her voice and marks appear.

This study of self and Lacey causes me to be aware of the many times as teacher I may have overstepped my welcome into the meaning-making of the children, and in so doing, derailed their intentions and identity formation. What is required of us as literacy teachers is collaboration with the learner, and respect for when the learner is leading their own advances in making meaning.

Lacey spent some of her at home “free” time engaging in literacy events that can be seen as tightly linked to the social and literacy practices of our home. These vignettes are evidence of Lacey using literacy events embedded in literacy practices in order to meet a social purpose for their creation. For the longest time, I enjoyed Lacey’s practices on a purely teacher-mother level, but now as a teacher-mother-researcher I can name them as literacy events, embedded in literacy practices, and see them as evidence of a literacy learner and user who chooses to act within a contextual frame of literacy as social practice. The documentation of these vignettes represents my transforming my perspective towards a “literacy as ideological” lens. Not only do I see and appreciate Lacey’s use of the alphabetic code to make meaning, but I can also appreciate these

literacy events and practices in terms of her agency, when she chooses to create these literacy forms to meet a particular social purpose. This is a shift, for me, as I move forward as a mother and educator. The “autonomous literacy lens” (Street, 1984) (dominant in my teacher era) would have had me focus more on how Lacey was using the alphabetic code against a standard of proficiency, rather than in relation to its social purpose. It is the social purpose that keeps her engaged over time in these literacies. This expanded theoretical lens is more inclusive of the agency of learners, which means not only are learners or meaning-makers making decisions about the alphabetic code to express themselves, but they are choosing to do this within a specific context for a particular social purpose. When Lacey makes the place cards or invitations, she is practicing the lifelong skill of using the written code to create a literacy event embedded in a literacy practice, which in turn is part of the larger social and cultural practice of welcoming others.

Lacey’s list-making is another example of understanding literacy more broadly. Her list-making uses the alphabetic and visual code to create a literacy event. The need to remind her of what is important establishes the context in which it can be named a literacy practice. Her writing of her “to do” lists remind me of the practice of sending myself texts as reminders of what I may need to do, or notes jotted down in my daily calendar. This is an iterative literacy event she practices over a long time because it serves a larger social practice related to organizing her time.

I very much enjoyed telling the story of “Lacey’s art gallery”. This story documents how a learner can move from one mode of expression to another in a seamless and

playful way. What began as images created on the computer using “The Paint Program,” were transformed by Lacey based upon her own decision-making. Each transformation (from computer image, to printed image, to material art to be mounted, to illustrations included in a book with text) had meaning for Lacey. Her creation of the art gallery, which remained a destination in our home for some time, illustrates a child “playing out” a somewhat common family practice of going to art galleries. When Lacey had decided that she was “all played out” with the art gallery, the art was taken down, and made into a picture book with text. The picture book with text is now a literacy event (inclusive of written text) embedded in a literacy practice of illustrated bookmaking. The earlier manifestation as art in an art gallery had found its genesis in the family social practice of going to art galleries. The larger literacy social practice here that ties all of these events together can be named as visual production and appreciation in its many forms.

When I was investigating the data in the section called “Lacey’s school and home literacies meet” I found that these artefacts generated a portrait of a child who seemed to be a “dog with a bone” kind of kid. The idea behind this idiom—which means to refuse to stop thinking about or talking about a subject—resonated with the scholarship of Rowsell and Pahl (2007). Through their work I acquired a deeper way of explaining what I was seeing. They state that, “text making is a process involving the sedimentation of identities in to text, which then can be seen as an artefact that reflects through its materiality, the previous identities of the meaning maker” (p. 390). The use of the word artefact which is “to describe an historical aspect to the making of texts” (p. 392), and their explanation that text then “becomes an artefact of identities as much informed by

social practice, habitus, and content as it is by the material choices made during its creation” (p. 392), provided me with some much needed language in which to describe Lacey’s literacy passions. The notion of sedimented identities gave me the language I could use to notice that, “It is through our continual interactions with meaning-making events that we come to solidify identities in practice” (p. 401). Lacey’s various sojourns into literacy in many ways solidify for her, her own identities.

The teacher-era stories and the teacher-mother stories were selected because of my expanded theoretical lens which enabled me to conceptualize and provide a means to creatively resolve some of the dilemmas that arose out of my deeper looking into literacy and literacy practices.

One such identified dilemma arose out of my discomfort with Lacey spending so much time reading on her beloved fan fiction site. Prior to the writing of the teacher-mother-researcher stories in the section titled “Lacey writes,” I knew nothing about fan fiction. My work in this section revealed Lacey’s participation in two of her favorite affinity spaces (fan fiction and “.ca” site) and how this iterative activity found its way into her school-based literacies.

Lacey found stories to read on the fan fiction site that satisfied her interests as a lesbian girl and as a dedicated fan of “all things Tegan and Sara”. On these sites she discovered something enjoyable to read, which could not be found in the literature privileged in her school (or home). In the telling of the stories titled, “Writing in 29 chapters”, “It didn’t take me long either”, and “Is love an emotion or an action? Persuade me” I was led back once again to Gee’s (2004) scholarship. These stories solidify for me



that this kind of situated literacy demonstrates how “students’ out-of-school” literacies promote processes of learning that are “deeper and richer than the forms of learning to which they [students] are exposed in schools” (p. 107). Lacey’s forays into fan fiction resulted in a deeper, richer form of leaning. Lacey’s apprenticeship to a group of people who share a certain set of practices and interests advanced her abilities to carry out her own writing practices at home and at school. My broader literacy lens has evolved to include the idea that there is value in inviting the learner to incorporate literacies from outside of school more fully into the context of the classroom. My evolving thought process has rendered the bridging between home and school literacies as less encumbered. I have learned that this separation can be made less divisive because I have theorized language that I can use to name the different aspects of each form of literacy and examine it in both contexts. In keeping with Street’s (2003) call to “bridge the divide”, Hamilton and Barton (1994) make it clear that, “domains, and the discourse communities associated with them, are not clear-cut, however and there are questions of the permeability of boundaries, of leakages and movement between boundaries, and of overlap between domains” (p. 10). Therefore, this permeability has become essential to my understanding of literacy as social practice.

As Gee (2004) posits, “Online affinity spaces represent the cutting edge of effective learning environments in several respects” (p. 81). The detailed examination, through story, of Lacey’s use of these kinds of out-of-school affinity spaces can be viewed as one of many text types that our students can use for learning.

Lacey's considerable time spent interacting with folks on her ".ca" site, serve many purposes for her. This site functions as an affinity space, as it is a location for Lacey to interact with groups of people to whom she is drawn because of a shared or passionate interest. Initially her communications with this group centered on their shared love of all things Tegan and Sara, but their communication has moved beyond that one topic. Her ".ca" site is an online community for Lacey that encourages her sharing of knowledge or participation in a specific area of interest to all participants and in which informal learning is the common outcome.

Throughout my conversations with Lacey about this site it was clear to me that Lacey has a strong sense of belonging on this site. Many of her lists that she incessantly makes include references to spending time on ".ca", always referring to the people that she engages with on this site as her "friends". Each of these sites serve different social and literacy purposes for her. She goes to the fan fiction site to read, and she goes to her ".ca" site to engage in community. Lacey's feelings of belonging within this community are so strong and so embedded in her everyday life that the content of these interactions even find their way into her school writing. These affinity spaces for Lacey provide access to people that differ in gender, race, class, age, ability, sexual orientation, education level, and geographical location. Lacey treasures these diverse qualities as her favourite "reasons" for reading on the fan fiction site, and for checking in on the ".ca" site. Affinity spaces by definition (Black, 2008) include the novice and expert who are afforded the same access to the same resources and forms of participation. Lacey is able to take advantage of the reading opportunities on the fan fiction site and use most of the

features available to her on “.ca” without anyone limiting her access. Black (2008) says that, “approaching fan fiction as a space rather than a community, then, is a way of focusing attention on the interplay among engagement, active participation, a sense of belonging, and the production of social space” (p. 47).

I strove to examine my dilemmas about Lacey as a reader in the two stories found in Lacey reads called; “*Harriet the Spy* is the best book I have ever read.” and “How come I don’t get to read what I want?” The struggle I have had for some time with my concerns regarding Lacey as a reader is nowhere near resolved for me by the end of this thesis. In truth, very little discussion came up between Lacey and me over the 4-week data gathering time span regarding reading print text in novel form. This was partially because much of her school literacy centered on writing during the data collection period and also because Lacey does not choose reading books as a pleasurable pastime. She clearly stated in the Harriet story that, “I think that I am a better writer than reader, because I don’t read very much.” Although there is little resolution to my dilemmas around how I see Lacey as a reader, there is much to ponder in terms of my understanding of her reading. It turns out that Lacey is a reader, but just not the kind of reader that I hold dear. Lacey’s interest in graphic novels does not surprise me, nor did her Grade 6 teacher’s dismissal of a graphic novel as an appropriate text to be reading during “silent reading” period in her language arts class. My earlier teacher-self may have done the same thing, and my earlier teacher-mother stance would perhaps have applauded the teacher’s demand upon Lacey that she read “read traditional” books, because that would have been more closely aligned with my beliefs. Now, as teacher-mother-

researcher, I am able to look at these stories as evidence of how my framing of “real reading” has shifted. While Lacey has benefited from my learning to not marginalize her reading choices, there are many who may be marginalized at home as readers and then again at school, making it necessary for all teachers to think seriously about this issue. Through my broadened theoretical lens, I would investigate more fully with Lacey her interest in graphic novels in general and her choice of this particular title rather than dismiss such choices cavalierly. I would use such conversations to understand Lacey as a reader, who is also a writer and an artist. Lacey was unable to really tell me why she is drawn to graphic novels in general (she has read several that she has taken out of the public library). In the case of the graphic novel Essex County, it is a pretty sure bet that it was because Sara Quin liked it and was defending it on the CBC Canada Reads program that she chose to read it. I still lament that Lacey is not a reader like I am, reading the paper bound text of fictive narratives, but I am developing an appreciation for who she is as a reader different from me, but not without value.

In my exploration and analysis of the stories in the section titled, “Lacey’s many other modalities,” I see a child once again being driven by her desire to make-meaning using the many resources she has at-hand in various contexts. In her movie of Sammy made at home for fun, Lacey is free to create meaning unencumbered by any other boundaries or provisions but those she places on herself. In her in-school animation project she quickly figured out what the minimum criteria “for marks” were for the assignment, so that she could just got on with what it was she wanted to create, using it as an opportunity to incorporate many of the things she loves along with varied aspects of

her “sedimented identities”. The analysis of her PowerPoint creations prompts me to see her as both a consumer and producer of texts who rarely keeps her text choices to a singular mode. She uses her knowledge of how these texts function and the affordances they possess.

This study of Lacey and myself has moved my interpretation of literacy teaching beyond having my students become proficient in each of the literacy strands (reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and representing) referred to during most of my career, to one of expanding my view of literacy teaching and re-conceptualizing my students as “remakers”, “redesigners” and “transformers” of sets of representational resources, as well as a “user of stable systems” (Kress 2000. p.160). My role as a language arts teacher has been enlarged to consider how I might create more open spaces for my students to bring their sedimented identities (Pahl and Rowsell) into their literacy activities.

In order to “allow” for more space and more agency for my students I have learned that the issue of power in my school classroom (now university classroom) requires that I constantly interrogate my practice so as to facilitate my students’ access to various text types and modal expressions. It is required of me that I co-create a classroom literacy learning culture that is open for students to bring their literacy events and practices into dialogue with the literacy events and practices of the classroom. The breaking down of many barriers, of which I was not always conscious, between at-home and in-school literacies requires my continuing attention. As an educator, I am not as “neutral” in the

choices of texts or the modes of student expression I invite or make possible, as I once thought that I was. I have work to do going forward as a literacy educator.

### **Where to From Here?**

My evolutionary trajectory as a literacy educator is still in process, I am an actor who is making her mark, finding her place, and claiming her voice within my current teaching position at a university where I prepare undergraduates as future English language arts credentialed teachers. As a teacher-researcher I ask myself how my thesis research might impact my continuing professional practice and contribute to the scholarly work in the literacy education field on this topic; there should be a “so what” at the end of this process. This research has informed me that as I am still teacher-mother-researcher within my current teaching position at the university, I must try to use what I have learned in my current practice and how I might make thoughtful decisions about literacy education issues into the future. The following five statements summarize the important learnings I will bring forward into my current teaching practice and represent my contributions to the scholarship in the field.

**Learners are driven by their own human need to make meaning.** An understanding of literacy requires a shift in thinking from one solely grounded in the language arts and the concomitant proficiencies to competencies driven by the need for meaning making of the child. In so doing, this positions literacy learning as something that is driven by the learner as opposed to something driven solely by the teacher. Teachers need to appreciate that all of our students have been using the affordances of

literacy since birth.. From this perspective, the child's agency as a meaning-maker, who draws upon the multiple affordances of literacy, is the continuation of a familiar process begun long before school.

**Learners have literacy experiences that are situated in many contexts, are applied with many purposes, and are practiced throughout a learner's life.** Being literate involves being communicatively competent across multiple discourse communities in and out of school and throughout one's life. As literacy events and practices are imbedded in discourses and originate in many domains of a learner's life; a teacher's pedagogies need to support the learner's integration of these everyday practices so that they can be applied in multiple contexts and on many levels.

**Learners are enacting or "playing out" their literacy events and practices within social situations and institutions that always exercise some form of power.** Power that is not shared with the learner can include, exclude, or maintain existing status quo positions of power. Some children are shut out of the literacy learning culture of a school or classroom when the pedagogy selected does not take into consideration how that power is wielded. Learning in any social context is never neutral in terms of power, therefore, requiring a conscious effort on the part of the teacher to question which texts, which modalities, and which voices are being privileged and which ones are being silenced or are less accessible to all of the literacy learners. Learning in any social context is never neutral.

**Learners will make their mark, find their voice, and claim their place using numerous modalities and in numerous combinations.** What is valuable is not only

learners' proficiency in the various literacies, but also the ability to navigate these diverse literacies for themselves so that they may continue to grow in their competency, flexibility, and identities as they move forward into their literacy futures.

**Teachers, at all levels of instruction—at home, at school or at the university need to challenge their literacy theories and practice by critically examining their past and current pedagogical practices so as to reconstruct their future practices.**

When educators advance their theoretical understandings of literacies and attain vocabulary in which they can name and explain what they are observing in the literacy learners that they teach, they are able to be in a deeper pedagogical dialogue with others. When this language is grounded in theoretical evidence, then pedagogical actions and decisions are not taken by chance, but by design.

### **My Understanding of Literacy Remains Permeable**

The term literacy throughout this exploration has been examined in reference to how I have interpreted it throughout my career as a language arts teacher predominantly in the early and middle years classrooms, and how I might use my evolutionary understanding of literacy beyond this study in my present teaching. The use of the term “literacy” over the history of Western society has always changed based upon what the particular society at the time considered an individual needed in order to function as a literate person. At one time people who could sign their names were considered literate. There were times in the Western world that a literate person was someone who could sign “his” (for the most part) and later her name and read a prepared passage, usually from a



text such as The Bible. In many respects little print-based literacy was needed in one's daily life. With the advent of public schools, and a more text-based society, learners needed a certain level of literacy skill and ability in order to obtain a level of proficiency demanded of the school-based texts of the era and also to conduct their lives day-to-day. Advancement of applied technologies in the workplace and in the home required of folks the ability not only to succeed in the print texts of school but also to acquire the ability to read and comprehend appliance and workplace manuals, for example, and to complete various forms that had to do with such things as taxes and banking. Literacy abilities required in-school and the literacy abilities required out-of-school did not always fit together. There has been and still are boundaries between what is learned in school and what one needs to know in life. Breaking down some of these boundaries between in-school and out-of-school learning and literacies so that there is greater permeability is not an easy task. John Dewey, as far back as 1889 proclaimed a clarion call to break through this boundary when he wrote, "the great waste in the school comes from his (the learner's) inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside of the school in any complete and freeway within the school itself; while on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school" (Dewey, 1899/1998; p. 76-78).

This research study contributes to the theoretical and practical scholarship that considers literacy as social practice and provides a context for an understanding of literacy that addresses as its central premise that literacy learning takes place across the expanse of a person's whole life and in many diverse contexts. The developmental/cognitive psychological paradigm, in which attention is primarily paid to

individual development against a set of uniform technical skills to be mastered by the individual, has a place in the English language arts class. Through the genesis of this study, however, it will no longer play such a central role in how I position my future practice and understanding of literacy.

Therefore, when I consider the literacy learning of my students I will now look more broadly at their literacy learning, so as to include considerations of power, the possible uses of multimodalities and multiliteracies, and the centrality of the learner to navigate back and forth between different literacies and contexts. Added to my current thinking about the term literacy are considerations of other curricular areas that speak of mathematical literacy, scientific literacy, environmental literacy, and a myriad of other descriptors which have begun to circulate through larger societal discussions about literacy.

My purpose in this self-study has been to consider literacy and my evolving understanding of this term as it relates to language arts education. In this study I have taken a predominantly semiotic perspective of literacy. The term semiotics, in its simplest form, stands for the “study of signs” or the construction and communication of meaning by drawing upon systems of signs. Semiotic systems are referred to as grammar for different modes of communication (sign, symbol, codes). A sign is something that represents something and is found within varied text modes, expressed in whatever conveyance is chosen. The use of semiotics (sign, symbol, and codes) facilitates the making of meaning intended by the creator or designer.

As this is a study of self and Lacey it is important to acknowledge that my examination of literacy has been bracketed by this semiotic perspective of literacy and for the purposes of this study I have not considered some of the other forms of literacy mentioned in the previous paragraph.

### **Implications for Practice**

I have come to realize that many of the tensions documented in this study are encapsulated in the following quote by Janks (2010), in her book *Literacy and Power*:

How does one provide access to dominant forms, while at the same time valuing and promoting the diverse languages and literacies of our students in the broader society? If we provide students with access to dominant forms, this contributes to maintaining dominance of these forms. If, on the other hand, we deny students access, we perpetuate their marginalization in a society that continues to recognize the value and importance of these forms. (p. 24)

I am in the process of reconstructing and redesigning two of the courses I teach for teacher candidates in the undergraduate program at my university (Early and Middle years Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment of the English Language Arts).

Much of the work I am doing in changing the focus of my courses invites teacher candidates to ponder some of the big questions introduced in Janks' quote, along with me. For example: "How does one provide access to dominant forms, while at the same time valuing and promoting the diverse languages and literacies of our students in the broader society?" (Janks, 2010, p. 24). Asking such questions positions me to ask my

students to consider literacy more broadly as I have done for myself. By bringing this larger question into my classes, a kind of inquiry transpires which fosters more questions such as: “What are the dominant forms in school literacies? Who has decided that these are the dominant forms? What are other forms of literacies that can be invited into the classroom? What are the literacy events and practices in your life, and what are the literacy events and practices of your students? Is there a place in your future classroom for your student’s out-of-school literacies? What are some of the diverse languages and literacies that you have in your life that shed light on the experiences of your students? How might you find out how literacy functions in your students’ lives? How can you engage your students in becoming aware that they are literacy learners in many contexts with many purposes? How can I use in-school literacy instruction to create links for my students between in-school literacies and out-of-school literacies?”

In the aforementioned Janks quote lies a challenge to some of our assumptions as teachers about power in the classroom. This self-study has taught me that considerations of power (or my lack of consideration of power), has been central to many of the struggles and tensions around my decision making in the classroom as it relates to literacy learning. As a teacher, I have to make a myriad of decisions about how I portion out instructional time in my classroom. Jank’s challenge fosters another line of inquiry, which I could also pose as questions in my classes, such as: How can I help my students become proficient in the many dominant forms of literacy (print literacy, written text literacy), while at the same time having time for the less dominant forms of in-and out-of school literacies (multimodal texts, visual literacy, etc.)? How do I allocate instructional

time that helps my students become proficient in the forms of literacy that are traditionally school literacies and for which “society continues to recognize and value,” while at the same time creating learning environments that honour and invite literacies into the classroom that have traditionally been marginalized and/or are not necessarily valued by the larger society? Do I prepare my students for a world that was or a world that is yet to be, with respect to literacy learning? I have begun this kind of inquiry in my courses already, and have found that the introduction of the kind of theoretical lens for literacy developed in this study has opened up all of our learning. If I think that my students should provide space in their literacy teaching that allows for their students to find their voice, claim their place, and make their mark, then I must do the same for them.

This study builds upon the foundational descriptions of out-of-school literacy events and practices developed, and asks us to return our gaze to the relationship between in-and-out-of-school literacy events and practices so that the understandings of children's emerging experiences with literacy in their own cultural milieus serve to address broader educational questions about literacy and the flexible switching among literacy practices required in different contexts. This is not meant to imply that all good things belong to out-of-school contexts and everything repressive resides in school. On the contrary, there were many examples of Lacey as learner which showed how her out-of-school literacies segued with her in-school literacies. In her seeking of reading material that she enjoyed, her writing abilities were advanced. The implication for practice in schools lies with the fact that many times teachers dismiss a child's engagement in out-of-school learning as merely frivolous or incidental. By dismissing Lacey's reading of fan fiction as not being

real reading, much could be lost for Lacey. I learned from examination of these stories that Lacey had gained much from accessing this kind of fiction on her own. The implication for practice asks of us, what are some of the out-of-school literacies that children and adolescents access that can enrich the literacy learning in schools? My work in this research study contributes to the work of researchers who have made important contributions to understanding literacy learning through ethnographic or field-based studies in homes, in community organizations, and in a variety of other settings. My study has been primarily concerned with understanding the ways in which one learner uses literacy in her everyday life, as I have endeavoured to find ways to make sense of my own evolving understanding of literacy. As a consequence, I have new theories and new language in which to make my literacy instruction meaningful and relevant and as a means of opening up literacy education spaces for once marginalized students in my own classroom. Literacy as social practice is, “part of a particular view on literacy that has implications for how we think about learners, how we think about what they ought to learn and how this could be achieved (Papen, 2000, p. 12).

Given the ways in which theories shape our understandings of literacy learning and instruction, my goal in this study is to use this theoretical framework to look specifically at how my understanding of literacy has evolved. It is here then that an understanding of literacy as social practice meets educational practice in ways that begin to fulfill the potential of the approach—encouraging dialogue amongst educators rather than simply an imposition of researchers' agendas on educators. In a compendium of research on principled practice for adolescent learners, Sturtevant et al. (2006) claimed:

As important as identity construction is in teaching all students, there is research to suggest that it alone is not sufficient for turning students into life-long readers and learners. For that to happen, educators must give equal attention to the contexts in which students become literate learners. (p. 13)

This study has offered an interpretative approach that combines identities, practices, and contexts through analysis of meaning making. I believe that this broadening of my own understanding of literacy concept can be useful for future literacy teachers in the following ways:

First, it can support researchers and teachers looking at children's text-making in schools to identify ways in which children's written and drawn texts are concrete representations of their at-home literacy. These texts represent an opportunity to open up dialogue with children in order to bring their lived experience (learned at home) into the classroom. I can envision a teacher taking on a research project where by children can use take-home cameras, for example, to document their various identities in order to bring them with them into the classroom, much like I did by inviting Lacey to photograph her bedroom walls.

Secondly, understanding that learners (children, adolescents, and adults) make meaning and produce texts through multiple modalities can become a starting point for classroom activities rather than considered an add-on or something that we eventually get to. Multimodal literacies have their own design principles and logic of design, and by

placing them more centrally in the literacy learning of the school, a learner's ability to not only read and consume them, but to consider them more critically, is enhanced.

Finally, considering literacy with an expanded theoretical lens can enrich literacy education and provide literacy researchers and educators with a lens through which to engage with texts as part of a wider social process. Classrooms are spaces that can be more infused with our students' identities. As children come to in-school literacy activities the range of their experiences since birth can be brought to bear in these school literacy activities. By recognizing and honoring the fullness of children's experience, teachers can rightfully welcome students' identities into the classroom.

By paying close attention to text production, and understanding the way in which practices—mediated by identities—sediment into texts, a view of text production emerges that is alive to what happens during the making of texts. The decision-making processes a child uses while making texts, can become an important aspect of the classroom culture.

This scholarship has implications for teachers in schools who work to represent children's lived realities. The reading of texts becomes an active process, whereby identities are located and found within texts. The making of texts, as evidenced in the study of Lacey's literacy practices, invites active research into lived practices as exemplified in the production of multimodal texts.

Teachers can draw from this theoretical framework and use it with students to consider the choices made when making texts, to trace back the origins of texts to homes



and community settings, and celebrate students' identities in classroom settings in order to support the creation of new identity-infused texts.

There is a complex relationship between the author of a text and the environment in which that text is made. This study provides a possible sense of some ways in which ethnographic, longitudinal studies offer perspectives on the making of texts in families and communities.

### **Limitations of this Study**

The limitations of this study predominantly reside in the very methodology chosen, which as autoethnography was a means to investigate and interrogate some of my long-held knowledge structures as teacher, teacher-mother, and teacher-mother-researcher, and involved asking myself how and why has my understanding of literacy been changing over time? I chose autoethnography because it served my research purpose. Therefore, the limitations of this study are bounded by how successful I have been in inviting the reader to see through my own lived experiences of literacy, into their own, and how my self-investigation might serve your literacy education purposes and processes.

### **Conclusion**

My evolutionary story continues. I am an actor in my own learning who will continue to make my mark, find my voice, and claim my place. There are many stories that never made it into this study and there have been many more stories that I am still writing as I observe and discuss Lacey's unfolding literacies with her. I have had the greatest

privilege of all, which is to continue to watch and marvel in Lacey's development as a literacy learner. I look forward to learning from her as she continues to make her mark, find her voice, and claim her place through her literacies. As her mother I would have it no other way. As a mother-teacher-researcher, I recognize that I have much work to do.

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## Appendix



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## APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

May 5, 2011

TO: **Barbara J. Shearer** (Advisor W. Sercharin)  
Principal Investigator

FROM: **Stan Straw, Chair**  
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: **Protocol #E2011:034**  
"My Timely Dance with a Symbol Weaver and Sign Maker"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement. This approval is valid for one year only.

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

## Please note:

- If you have funds pending human ethics approval, the auditor requires that you submit a copy of this Approval Certificate to the Office of Research Services, fax 261-0325 - please include the name of the funding agency and your UMN Project number. This must be faxed before your account can be accessed.
- If you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: [http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/ethics/ors\\_ethics\\_human\\_REB\\_forms\\_guidelines.html](http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/ethics/ors_ethics_human_REB_forms_guidelines.html)) in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.