LITERACIES IN CONTEXT

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

lit·er·a·cy (lit'ər-ə-sē) *n.*

1. The condition or quality of being literate, especially the ability to read and write.
2. The condition or quality of being knowledgeable in a particular subject or field: *cultural literacy; biblical literacy.*

con·text (kän'təkst') *n.*

1. The part of a text or statement that surrounds a particular word or passage and determines its meaning.
2. The circumstances in which an event occurs; a setting.

The title of this text is *Literacies in Context*. Of course, you already know this. I draw your attention to the title not because I think you are unaware of its existence but because we rarely make much use of titles, at least not beyond locating the text it labels and turning past the cover on which the words are printed.

BEFORE YOU READ any further, take another look at the key words that make up the title of this textbook. Given these key words (as defined in the box above), what do you expect this textbook will be about? Tie this information to what you already know about the course itself. What do you imagine you will be expected to read? to write? to do with these reading and writing projects?

Not surprisingly, the subject of *Literacies in Context* is literacy. That means we will be concerned with your development as a writer, reader, and researcher, as well as the ways in which these activities (literacy) function in the world beyond ourselves (and in our own lives beyond the walls of our classrooms).

In doing so, we work from two, complementary assumptions: first, that writing (and reading) is, as Jacqueline Jones-Royster puts it, a "people-oriented enterprise" (27), and second, that texts do not exist except as "texts in use." Before you picked up this textbook, for example, its meaning lay dormant, pressed silent between the pages on which these words are written. As reading theorist M.J. Tonjes puts it, "a text is gobbledygook unless the reader can breathe meaning into it" (10). The writer must do the same, infusing the voices involved on their[1] end of the conversation with enough power to sustain the conversation until the reader arrives.

Literacy (reading and writing) exists only when it is active, alive, and in "conversation" with real people posing real problems—people with real lives and histories who are asking these questions and having these conversations some *place* rather than in some abstract, cognitive no-place where mysterious writers write for "general" audiences.

It is for primarily these reasons that the subject of this writing course is *literacy* as it exists when put to use by real people for specific purposes and in specific places. We will, therefore, begin (in Chapter 2) with an exploration of the ways in which various people—growing up at different times and in somewhat different locations—describe their experiences with literacy and literacy education. Next (in Chapter 3), we will analyze a variety of *places* in which literacy is put to use—and how these places, and the needs of the people inhabiting them, largely determine the shape and function of literate behavior (in church, in the restaurant, at home).

1 Throughout, I will use "their" as a singular pronoun in order to avoid using "he" or "she" as a generic pronoun referring to both male and female subjects. According to the Modern Language Association, using "he" as a generic pronoun ("every student should bring *his* textbook") is considered "sexist language" and should be avoided. I often use "she" as a generic pronoun, but I have learned some students find this a bit jarring as they are more used to reading "he" as a generic pronoun and are thus less likely to think of "she" in the same way. The "slash" version ("every student should bring *his/her* textbook") and the version using "or" ("every student should bring *his or her* textbook") are simply too awkward. For these reasons, among others, I rely on the fabulously-flexible pronoun "their" ("every student should bring *their* textbook").

In Chapter 4, we will begin analyzing out-of-school literacies and the ways in which they are largely usurped by those literacies most commonly associated with school.

Over the past several years, my own teaching, administrative, and scholarly work has become increasingly shaped by my growing appreciation for vernacular literacies—video game literacies, Star Trek literacies, and Anime literacies, among others—as represented not only by our students but also in, among other things, Deborah Brandt's *Literacy in American Lives* (2001), Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher's *Literate Lives in an Information Age: Narratives of Literacy from the United States* (2004), Steven Johnson's *Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter* (2005), and, especially, work in the New Literacy Studies (like James Paul Gee's *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Literacy and Learning* [2003] and *Situated Language and Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling* [2004]). In response to the persuasive conclusions these and similar studies in multiple literacies illustrate, even the most conservative readings of literacy have to accept that literacy itself has changed and, as the world moves from a print-based culture to a digital one, it will only continue to change. All this makes teaching writing much more complicated than ever before, but knowing this better enables writing teachers to help students make more deliberate use of the literacies they already possess in order to further develop the variety of literacies required of them at the college level.[2]

As I continue to take vernacular literacies seriously, I have been amazed to find the intellectual rigor and rhetorical sophistication embedded in rhetorical spaces that extend beyond the academy, especially those spaces rarely understood to have anything to do with the kinds of writing students are expected to do at school. As you look at out-of-school literacies in these new ways, I believe you will be similarly impressed. Perhaps you already are.

Each chapter and the readings and activities it includes are designed in such a way as to result in at least one formal writing assignment; each formal writing assignment will build upon the previous one(s), eventually leading to ideas from which a strong and interesting ethnographic research project will begin to emerge (see John F. Szwed's classic essay, "The Ethnography of Literacy" and Bruce Ballenger's "Writing an Ethnographic Essay").

2 See the forthcoming book *The Way Literacy Lives: Rhetorical Dexterity and the "Basic" Writer* for more on how this philosophy has shaped the Basic Writing Program at A&M-Commerce; an article-length version of this project will appear in the 25th anniversary issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing* (as "Redefining Literacy as a Social Practice").

Ethnography

Ethnography is a method of studying and learning about a person or group of people. Typically, ethnography involves the study of a small group of subjects in their own environment. Rather than looking at a small set of variables and a large number of subjects ("the big picture"), the ethnographer attempts to get a detailed understanding of the circumstances of the few subjects being studied. Ethnographic accounts, then, are both descriptive and interpretive; descriptive, because detail is so crucial, and interpretive, because the ethnographer must determine the significance of what she observes without gathering broad, statistical information. ("What is Culture?" Learning Commons, < http://www.wsu.edu:8001/vcwsu/commons/topics/culture/glossary/ethnography.html>)

In almost every case, the readings and the writing assignments included in Chapters 2-4 are ethnographic in nature. Deborah Brandt's article "Sponsors of Literacy" (from Chapter 2), for example, "attempts to get a detailed understanding of the circumstances of the few subjects being studied"—specifically, their experiences with literacy and literacy education. You will then be asked to create your own mini-ethnography of sorts—one that describes your personal experiences with literacy and literacy education and, it seems likely, the experiences of at least one other person.

Chapter 3 includes ethnographic studies of "a small group of subjects in their own environment"—specifically members an African-American church (Moss) and food service workers at a family-style restaurant (Mirabella). For the next formal essay you will be asked to develop an ethnographic analysis of a particular context and the ways in which literacy is put to use within that very specific context.

The next chapter (Chapter 4) presents a series of ethnographic studies of the ways in which the literacy practices most valuable in school often ignore the many important and complex literacy practices in which many students engage when they are not in school. Michael W. Smith and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm's *Reading Don't Fix No Chevy's: Literacy in the Lives of Young Men* (2002), Ellen Skilton-Sylvester's "Literate at Home But Not at School: A Cambodian Girl's Journey from Playwright to Struggling Writer" (2002), and Ann E. Green's "My Uncle's Guns" (1997) illustrate—through "small group[s] of subjects in their own environment[s]"—the disconnect between school-based literacy practices and those more commonly developed and perpetuated in out-of-school contexts. Here, the formal essay asks you to develop an auto-ethnography[3] that explores the ways in which your own school-based literacy practices might compare with out-of-school ones.

Any one of these formal essays (assigned in chapters 2-4) may be extended into the 10- to 15-page ethnographic project that will serve as the culminating project for this course. At semi-regular intervals throughout the term, your instructor may ask you to submit "Position Papers," "Difficulty Papers," or "Dialogue Journal Entries" that describe potential projects you might consider exploring in this culminating research project. The project itself will make use of ethnographic research methodologies (like surveys and interviews) as well as more traditional research choices (library research, Internet, library databases). You will receive much guidance and support throughout the semester, so please try not to feel too overwhelmed by this final project right now. When it is time to begin researching and writing this major paper, you will be ready.

So let's get everyone ready for this by getting started. Turn the page and join the conversation.

3 Durr, Kathryn. "Toward a Definition." Humboldt State University, <http://www.humboldt.edu/~kd3/Toward.htm> An autoethnography combines autobiography, the story f one's own life, with ethnography, the study of a particular social group.

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Chapter 2

Narrating Literacies

We will begin our exploration of literacies in context by looking at the ways in which a variety of people (different ages, different backgrounds) have developed new literacies. According to Deborah Brandt, a professor of English at University of Wisconsin-Madison and author of the award-winning study *Literacy in American Lives* (2001), literacy development depends on literacy "sponsors." In the article that follows, Brandt "trace[s the] sponsors of literacy . . . as they appear in the accounts of ordinary Americans recalling how they learned to write and read" (167). She urges us to stop thinking of "literacy as an individual development" and instead begin to understand "literacy as an economic development, at least as the two have played out over the last ninety years or so" (166).

READING

Sponsors of Literacy

Deborah Brandt

BEFORE YOU READ Brandt's essay, *read yourself.*

1. Who or what has encouraged you the most in your efforts to become a more effective reader or writer in a particular context? Do you have any memories of someone or something specific that may have discouraged your efforts to read and/or write more pleasurably or flexibly? What are those memories?
2. From your own observations or experience, what factors prevent people, especially adults, from increasing their literacy skills?
3. What experiences does the term "sponsor" bring up for you? What do you think about when you hear that word? How do you think someone may actually "sponsor" a particular facet of education?

AS YOU READ the following article, be sure to consider your responses to the above questions. You should also . . .

READ IT ONCE (quickly), just to see where it is going. We know from the title of the essay that Brandt is going to discuss what "sponsorship" may have to do with literacy and who may actually "sponsor" literacy. She's tracing this term as it functions in the lives of several specific people. Who are these people? How did they learn to read and write (and for what purposes)? As you do this first quick read-through, you should also consider this: Why does Brandt use the term "sponsor" in conjunction with the term "literacy"?

READ IT A SECOND TIME, much more carefully. This time, read with a pen in your hand so you can jot down notes, mark important passages (or other passages you'd like to talk about in class), and find yourself in this text by agreeing with portions of her arguments (if you do), dismissing other portions of her argument (if you can't agree), relating to some of the things she says with stories from your own life (if you can), and basically reading her argument against your own arguments in order to (1) understand her position as best you can so you can (2) expand on it and/or resist it—if need be—in order to advance your own arguments, ideas, and experiences.

In his sweeping history of adult learning in the United States, Joseph Kett describes the intellectual atmosphere available to young apprentices who worked in the small, decentralized print shops of antebellum American. Because printers also were the solicitors and editors of what they published, their workshops served as lively incubators for literacy and political discourse. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, this learning space was disrupted when the invention of the steam press reorganized the economy of the print industry. Steam presses were so expensive that they required capital outlays beyond the means of many printers. As a result, print jobs were outsourced, the processes of editing and printing were split, and, in tight competition, print apprentices became low-paid mechanics with no more access to the multi-skilled environment of the craftshop (Kett 67-70). While this shift in working conditions may be evidence of the deskilling of workers induced by the Industrial Revolution (Nicholas and Nicholas), it also offers a site for reflecting upon the dynamic sources of literacy and literacy learning. The reading and writing skills of print apprentices in this period were the achievements not simply of teachers and learners nor of the discourse practices of the printer community. Rather, these skills existed fragilely, contingently within an economic moment. The pre-steam press economy enabled some of the most basic aspects of the apprentices' literacy, especially their access to material production and the public meaning or worth of their skills. Paradoxically, even as the steam-powered penny press made print more accessible (by making publishing more profitable), it brought an end to a particular form of literacy sponsorship and a drop in literate potential.

The apprentices' experience invites rumination upon literacy learning and teaching today. Literacy looms as one of the great engines of profit and competitive advantage in the 20th century: a lubricant for consumer desire; a means for integrating corporate markets; a foundation for the deployment of weapons and other technology; a raw material in the mass production of information. As ordinary citizens have been compelled into these economies, their reading and writing skills have grown sharply more central to the everyday trade of information and goods as well as to the pursuit of education, employment, civil rights, status. At the same time, people's literate skills have grown vulnerable to unprecedented turbulence in their economic value, as conditions, forms, and standards of literacy achievement seem to shift with almost every new generation of learners. How are we to understand the vicissitudes of individual literacy development in relationship to the large-scale economic forces that set the routes and determine the wordly worth of that literacy?

The field of writing studies has had much to say about individual literacy development. Especially in the last quarter of the 20th century, we have theorized, researched, critiqued, debated, and sometimes even managed to enhance the literate potentials of ordinary citizens as they have tried to cope with life as they find it. Less easily and certainly less steadily have we been able to relate what we see, study, and do to these larger contexts of profit making and competition. This even as we recognize that the most pressing issues we deal with—tightening associations between literate skill and social viability, the breakneck pace of change in communications technology, persistent inequities in access and reward—all relate to structural conditions in literacy's bigger picture. When economic forces are addressed in our work, they appear primarily as generalities: contexts, determinants, motivators, barriers, touchstones. But rarely are they systematically related to the local conditions and embodied moments of literacy learning that occupy so many of us on a daily basis.[1]

This essay does not presume to overcome the analytical failure completely. But it does offer a conceptual approach that begins to connect literacy as an individual development to literacy as an economic development, at least as the two have played out over the last ninety years or so. The approach is through what I call sponsors of literacy. Sponsors, as I have come to think of them, are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way. Just as the ages of radio and television accustom us to having programs *brought* to us by various commercial sponsors, it is useful to think about who or what underwrites occasions of literacy learning and use. Although the interests of the sponsor and the sponsored do not have to converge (and, in fact, may conflict) sponsors nevertheless set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty. Sponsors are a tangible remind that literacy learning throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, coercion, or , at minimum, contact with existing trade routes. Sponsors are delivery systems for the economies of literacy, the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners. They also represent the causes into which people's literacy usually gets recruited.[2]

For the last five years I have been tracing sponsors of literacy across the 20th century as they appear in the accounts of ordinary Americans recalling how they learned to write and read. The investigation is grounded in more than 100 in-depth interviews that I collected from a diverse group of people born roughly between 1900 and 1980. In the interviews, people explored in great detail their memories of learning to read and write across their lifetimes, focusing especially on the people, institutions, materials, and motivations involved in the process. The more I worked with these accounts, the more I came to realize that they were filled with references to sponsors, both explicit and latent, who appeared in formative roles at the scenes of literacy learning. Patterns of sponsorship became an illuminating site through which to track the different cultural attitudes people developed towards writing vs. reading as well as the ideological congestion faced by late-century literacy learners as their sponsors proliferated and diversified (see my essays on "Remembering Reading" and "Accumulating Literacy"). In this essay I set out a case for why the concept of sponsorship is so richly suggestive for exploring economies of literacy and their effects. Then, through use of extended case examples, I demonstrate the practical application of this approach for interpreting current conditions of literacy teaching and learning, including persistent stratification of opportunity and escalating standards for literacy achievement. A final section addresses implications for the teaching of writing.

Sponsorship

Intuitively, *sponsors* seemed a fitting term for the figures who turned up most typically in people's memories of literacy learning: older relatives, teachers, priests, supervisors, military officers, editors, influential authors. Sponsors, as we ordinarily think of them, are powerful figures who bankroll events or smooth the way for initiates. Usually richer, more knowledgeable, and more entrenched than the sponsored, sponsors nevertheless enter a reciprocal relationship with those they underwrite. They lend their resources or credibility to the sponsored but also stand to gain benefits from their success, whether by direct repayment or, indirectly, by credit of association. *Sponsors* also proved an appealing term in my analysis because of all the commercial references that appeared in these 20th-century accounts—the magazines, peddled encyclopedias, essay contests, radio and television programs, toys fan clubs, writing tools, and so on, from which so much experience with literacy was derived. As the 20th century turned the abilities to read and write into widely exploitable resources, commercial sponsorship abounded.

In whatever form, sponsors deliver the ideological freight that must be borne for access to what they have. Of course, the sponsored can be oblivious to or innovative with this ideological burden. Like Little Leaguers who wear the logo of a local insurance agency on their uniforms, not out of a concern for enhancing the agency's image but as a means for getting to play ball, people throughout history have acquired literacy pragmatically under the banner of others' causes. In the days before free, public schooling in England, Protestant Sunday Schools warily offered basic reading instruction to working-class families as part of evangelical duty. To the horror of many in the church sponsorship, these families insistently, sometimes riotously demanded of their Sunday Schools more instruction, including in writing and math, because it provided means for upward mobility.[3] Through the sponsorship of Baptist and Methodist ministries, African Americans in slavery taught each other to understand the Bible in subversively liberatory ways. Under a conservative regime, they developed forms of critical literacy that sustained religious, educational, and political movements both before and after emancipation (Cornelius). Most of the time, however, literacy takes its shape from the interests of its sponsors. And, as we will see below, obligations toward one's sponsors run deep, affecting what, why, and how people write and read.

The concept of sponsors helps to explain, then, a range of human relationships and ideological pressures that turn up at the scenes of literacy learning—from benign sharing between adults and youths, to euphemized coercions in schools and workplaces, to the most notorious impositions and deprivations by church or state. It also is a concept useful for tracking literacy's material: the things that accompany writing and reading and the ways they are manufactured and distributed. Sponsorship as a sociological term is even more broadly suggestive for thinking about economies of literacy development. Studies of patronage in Europe and *compradrazgo* in the Americas shows how patron-client relationships in the past grew up around the need to manage scarce resources and promote political stability (Bourne; Lynch; Horstman and Kurtz). Pragmatic, instrumental, ambivalent, patron-client relationships integrated otherwise antagonistic social classes into relationships of mutual, albeit unequal dependencies. Loaning land, money, protection, and other favors allowed the politically powerful to extend their influence and justify their exploitation of clients. Clients traded their labor and deference for access to opportunities for themselves or their children and for leverage needed to improve their social standing. Especially under conquest in Latin America, *compradrazgo* reintegrated native societies badly fragmented by the diseases and other disruptions that followed foreign invasions. At the same time, this system was susceptible to its own stresses, especially when patrons became clients themselves of still more centralized or distant overlords, with all the shifts in loyalty and perspective that entailed (Horstman and Kurtz 13-14).

In raising this association with formal systems of patronage, I do not wish to overlook the very different economic, political, and educational systems within which U.S. literacy has developed. But where we find the sponsoring of literacy, it will be useful to look for its function within larger political and economic arenas. Literacy, like land, is a valued commodity in this economy, a key resource in gaining profit and edge. This value helps to explain, of course, the lengths people will go to secure literacy fro themselves or their children. But it also explains why the powerful work so persistently to conscript and ration the powers of literacy. The competition to harness literacy, to manage, measure, teach, and exploit it, has intensified throughout the century. It is vital to pay attention to this development because it largely sets the terms for individuals' encounters with literacy. This competition shapes the incentives and barriers (including uneven distributions of opportunity) that greet literacy learners in any particular time and place. It is this competition that has made access to the right kinds of literacy sponsors so crucial for political and economic well being. And it also has spurred the rapid, complex changes that now make the pursuit of literacy feel so turbulent and precarious for so many.

In the next three sections, I trace the dynamics of literacy sponsorship through the life experiences of several individuals, showing how their opportunities for literacy learning emerge out of the jockeying and skirmishing for economic and political advantage going on among sponsors of literacy. Along the way, the analysis addresses three key issues: (1) how, despite ostensible democracy in educational chances, stratification of opportunity continues to organize access and reward in literacy learning; (2) how sponsors contribute to what is called "the literacy crisis," that is, the perceived gap between rising standards for achievement and people's ability to meet them; and (3) how encounters with literacy sponsors, especially as they are configured at the end of the 20th century, can be sites for the innovative rerouting of resources into projects of self-development and social change.

Sponsorship and Access

A focus on sponsorship can force a more explicit and substantive link between literacy learning and systems of opportunity and access. A statistical correlation between high literacy achievement and high socioeconomic, majority-race status routinely shows up in results of national tests of reading and writing performance.[4] These findings capture yet, in their shorthand way, obscure the unequal conditions of literacy sponsorship that lie behind differential outcomes in academic performance. Throughout their lives, affluent people from high-caste racial groups have multiple and redundant contacts with powerful literacy sponsors as a routine part of their economic and political privileges. Poor people and those from low-caste racial groups have less consistent, less politically secured access to literacy sponsors—especially to the ones that can grease their way to academic and economic success. Differences in their performances are often attributed to family background (namely education and income of parents) or to particular norms and values operating within different ethnic groups or social classes. But in either case, much more is usually at work.

As a study in contrasts in sponsorship patterns and access to literacy, consider the parallel experiences of Raymond Branch and Dora Lopez, both of whom were born in 1969 and, as young children, moved with their parents to the same, mid-sized university town in the midwest.[5] Both were still residing in this town at the time of our interviews in 1995. Raymond Branch, a European American, had been born in southern California, the son of a professor father and a real estate executive mother. He recalled that his first grade classroom in 1975 was hooked up to a mainframe computer at Stanford University and that, as a youngster, he enjoyed fooling around with computer programming in the company of "real users" at his father's science lab. This process was not interrupted much when, in the late 1970s, his family moved to the Midwest. Raymond received his first personal computer as a Christmas present from his parents when he was twelve years old, and a modem the year after that. In the 1980s, computer hardware and software stores began popping up within a bicycle-ride's distance from where he lived. The stores were serving the university community and, increasingly, the high-tech industries that were becoming established in that vicinity. As an adolescent, Raymond spent his summers roaming these stores, sampling new computer games, making contact with founders of some of the first electronic bulletin boards in the nation, and continuing, through reading and other informal means, to develop his programming techniques. At the time of our interview he had graduated from the local university and was a successful freelance writer of software and software documentation, with clients in both the private sector and the university community.

Dora Lopez, a Mexican American, was born in the same year as Raymond Branch, 1969, in a Texas border town, where her grandparents, who worked as farm laborers, lived most of the year. When Dora was still a baby her family moved to the same Midwest university town as had the family of Raymond Branch. Her father pursued an accounting degree at a local technical college and found work as a shipping and receiving clerk at the university. Her mother, who also attended technical college briefly, worked part-time in a bookstore. In the early 1970s, when the Lopez family made its move to the Midwest, the Mexican-American population in the university town was barely one percent. Dora recalled that the family had to drive seventy miles to a big city to find not only suitable groceries but also Spanish-language newspapers and magazines that carried information of concern and interest to them. (Only when reception was good could they catch Spanish-language radio programs coming from Chicago, 150 miles away.) During her adolescence, Dora Lopez undertook to teach herself how to read and write in Spanish, something, she said, the neither her brother nor her U.S.-born cousins knew how to do. Sometimes, with the help of her mother's employee discount at the bookstore, she sought out novels by South American and Mexican writers, and she practiced her written Spanish by corresponding with relatives in Colombia. She was exposed to computers for the first time at the age of thirteen when she worked as a teacher's aide in a federally-funded summer school program for the children of migrant workers. The computers were being used to help the children to be brought up to grade level in their reading and writing skills. When Dora was admitted to the same university that Raymond Branch attended, her father bought her a used word processing machine that a student had advertised for sale in a bulletin board in the building where Mr. Lopez worked. At the time of our interview, Dora Lopez had transferred from the university to a technical college. She was working for a cleaning company, where she performed extra duties as a translator, communicating on her supervisor's behalf with the largely Latina cleaning staff. "I write in Spanish for him, what he needs to be translated, like job duties, what he expects them to do, and I write lists for him in English and Spanish," she explained.

In Raymond Branch's account of his early literacy learning we are able to see behind the scenes of his majority-race membership, male gender, and high-end socioeconomic family profile. There lies a thick and, to him, relatively accessible economy of institutional and commercial supports that cultivated and subsidized his acquisition of a powerful form of literacy. One might be tempted to say that Raymond Branch was born at the right time and lived in the right place—except that the experience of Dora Lopez troubles that thought. For Raymond Branch, a university town in the 1970s and 1980s provided an information-rich, resource-rich learning environment in which to pursue his literacy development, but for Dora Lopez, a female member of a culturally unsubsidized ethnic minority, the same town at the same time was information- and resource-poor. Interestingly, both young people were pursuing projects of self-initiated learning, Raymond Branch in computer programming and Dora Lopez in biliteracy. But she had to reach much further afield for the material and communicative systems needed to support her learning. Also, while Raymond Branch, as the son of an academic, was sponsored by some of the most powerful agents of the university (its laboratories, newest technologies, and most educated personnel), Dora Lopez was being sponsored by what her parents could pull from the peripheral service systems of the university (the mail room, the bookstore, the second-hand technology market). In these accounts we also can see how the development and eventual economic worth of Raymond Branch's literacy skills were underwritten by late-century transformations in communication technology that created a boomtown need for programmers and software writers. Dora Lopez's biliterate skills developed and paid off much further down the economic-reward ladder, in government-sponsored youth programs and commercial enterprises, that, in the 1990s, were absorbing surplus migrant workers into low-wage, urban service economy.[6] Tracking patterns of literacy sponsorship, then, gets beyond SES shorthand to expose more fully how unequal literacy chances relate to systems of unequal subsidy and reward for literacy. These are the systems that deliver large-scale economic, historical, and political conditions to the scenes of small-scale literacy use and development.

This analysis of sponsorship forces us to consider not merely how one social group's literacy practices may differ from another's, but how everybody's literacy practices are operating in differential degrees of sponsoring power, and different scales of monetary worth to the practices in use. In fact, the interviews I conducted are filled with examples of how economic and political forces, some of them originating in quite distant corporate and government policies, affect people's day-to-day ability to seek out and practice literacy. As a telephone company employee, Janelle Hampton enjoyed a brief period in the early 1980s as a fraud investigator, pursuing inquiries and writing up reports of her efforts. But when the breakup of the telephone utility reorganized its workforce, the fraud division was moved two states away and she was returned to less interesting work as a data processor. When, as a seven-year-old in the mid-1970s, Yi Vong made his way with his family from Laos to rural Wisconsin as part of the first resettlement group of Hmong refugees after the Vietnam War, his school district—which had no ESL programming—placed him in a school for the blind and dear, where he learned English on audio and visual language machines. When a meager retirement pension forced Peter Hardaway and his wife out of their house and into a trailer, the couple stopped receiving newspapers and magazines in order to avoid cluttering up the small space they had to share. An analysis of sponsorship systems of literacy would help educators everywhere to think through the effects that economic and political changes in their regions are having on various people's ability to write and read, their chances to sustain that ability, and their capacities to pass it along to others. Recession, relocation, immigration, technological change, government retreat all can—and do—condition the course by which literate potential develops.

Sponsorship and the Rise in Literacy Standards

As I have been attempting to argue, literacy as a resource becomes available to ordinary people largely through the mediations of more powerful sponsors. These sponsors are engaged in ceaseless processes of positioning and repositioning, seizing and relinquishing control over meanings and materials of literacy as part of their participation in economic and political competition. In the give and take of these struggles, forms of literacy and literacy learning take shape. This section examines more closely how forms of literacy are created out of competitions between institutions. It especially considers how this process relates to the rapid rise in literacy standards since World War II. Resnick and Resnick lay out the process by which the demand for literacy achievement has been escalating, from basic, largely rote competence to more complex analytical and interpretive skills. More and more people are now being expected to accomplish more and more things with reading and writing. As print and its spinoffs have entered virtually every sphere of life, people have grown increasingly dependent on their literacy skills for earning a living and exercising and protecting their civil rights. This section uses one extended case example to trace the role of institutional sponsorship in raising the literacy stakes. It also considers how one man used available forms of sponsorship to cope with this escalation in literacy demands.

The focus is on Dwayne Lowery, whose transition in the early 1970s from line worker in an automobile manufacturing plant to field representative for a major public employees union exemplified the major transition of the post-World War II economy—from a thing-making, thing-swapping society to an information-making, service-swapping society. In the process, Dwayne Lowery had to learn to read and write in ways that he had never done before. How his experiences with writing developed and how they were sponsored—and distressed—by institutional struggle will unfold in the following narrative.

A man of Eastern European ancestry, Dwayne Lowery was born in 1938 and raised in a semi-rural area in the upper midwest, the third of five children of a rubber workers father and a homemaker mother. Lowery recalled how, in his childhood home, his father's feisty union publications and left-leaning newspapers and radio shows helped to create a political climate in his household. "I was sixteen years old before I knew that goddamn Republicans was two words," he said. Despite this influence, Lowery said he shunned politics and newspaper reading as a young person, except to read the sports page. A diffident student, he graduated near the bottom of his class from a small high school in 1956 and, after a stint in the Army, went to work on the assembly line of a major automobile manufacturer. In the late 1960s, bored with the repetition of spraying primer paint on the right door checks of 57 cars an hour, Lowery traded in his night shift at the auto plant for a day job reading water meters in a municipal utility department. It was at that time, Lowery recalled, that he rediscovered newspapers, reading them in the early morning in his department's break room. He said:

> *At the time I guess I got a little more interested in the state of things within the state. I started to get a little political at that time and got a little more information about local people. So I would buy [a metropolitan paper] and I would read that paper in the morning. It was a pretty conservative paper but I got some information.*

At about the same time Lowery became active in a rapidly growing public employees union, and, in the early 1970s, he applied for and received a union-sponsored grant that allowed him to take off four months of work and travel to Washington, D.C. for training in union activity. Here is his extended account of that experience:

> *When I got to school, then there was a lot of reading. I often felt bad. If I had read more [as a high school student] it wouldn't have been so tough. But they pumped a lot of stuff at us to read. We lived in a hotel and we had to some extent homework we had to do and reading we had to do and not make written reports but make some presentation on our part of it. What they were trying to teach us, I believe, was regulations, systems, laws. In case anything in court came up along the way, we would know that. We did a lot of work on organizing, you know, learning how to negotiate contracts, contractual language, how to write it. Gross National Product, how that affected the Consumer Price Index. It was pretty much a crash course. It was pretty much crammed in. And I'm not sure we were all that well prepared when we got done, but it was interesting.*

After a hands-on experience organizing sanitation workers in the west, Lowery returned home and was offered a full-time job as a field staff representative for the union, handling worker grievances and contract negotiations for a large, active local near his state capital. His initial writing and rhetorical activities corresponded with the heady days of the early 1970s when the union was growing in strength and influence, reflecting in part the exponential expansion in information workers and service providers within all branches of government. With practice, Lowery said he became "good at talking," "good at presenting the union side," "good at slicing chunks off the employers case." Lowery observed that, in those years, the elected officials with whom he was negotiating often lacked the sophistication of their Washington-trained counterparts. "They were part-time people," he said. "And they didn't know how to calculate. We got things in contracts that didn't cost them much at the time but were going to cost them a ton down the road." In time, through, even small municipal and county governments responded to the public employees' growing power by hiring specialized attorneys to represent them in grievance and contract negotiations. "Pretty soon," Lowery observed, "ninety percent of the people I was dealing with across the table were attorneys."

This move brought dramatic changes in the writing practices of union reps, and, in Lowery's estimation, a simultaneous waning of the power of the workers and the power of his own literacy. "It used to be we got our way through muscle or through political connections," he said. "Now we had to get it through legalistic stuff. It was no longer just sit down and talk about it. Can we make a deal?" Instead, all activity became rendered in writing: the exhibit, the brief, the transcript, the letter, the appeal. Because briefs took longer to write, the wheels of justice took longer to turn. Delays in grievance hearings became routine, as lawyers and union reps alike asked hearing judges for extensions on their briefs. Things went, in Lowery's words, "from quick, competent justice to expensive and long term justice."

In the meantime, Lowery began spending up to 70 hours a week at work, sweating over the writing of briefs, which are typically fifteen to thirty-page documents laying out precedents, arguments, and evidence for a grievant's case. These documents were being forced by the new political economy in which Lowery's union was operating. He explained:

> *When employers were represented by an attorney, you were going to have a written brief because the attorney needs to get paid. Well, what do you think if you were a union grievant and the attorney says, well, I'm going to write a brief and Dwayne Lowery says, well, I'm not going to. Does the worker somehow feel that their representation is less now?*

To keep up with the new demands, Lowery occasionally traveled to major cities for two or three-day union-sponsored workshops on arbitration, new legislation, and communication skills. He also took short courses at a historic School for Workers at a nearby university. His writing instruction consisted mainly of reading the briefs of other field reps, especially those done by the college graduates who increasingly being assigned to his district from union headquarters. Lowery said he kept a file drawer filled with other people's briefs from which he would borrow formats and phrasings. At the time of our interview in 1995, Dwayne Lowery had just taken an early and somewhat bitter retirement from the union, replaced by a recent graduate forma master's degree program in Industrial Relations. As a retiree, he was engaged in local Democratic party politics and was getting informal lessons in word processing at home from his wife.

Over a 20-year period, Lowery's adult writing took its character from a particular juncture in labor relations, when even small units of government began wielding (and, as a consequence, began spreading) a "legalistic" form of literacy in order to restore political dominance over public workers. This struggle for dominance shaped the kinds of literacy skills required of Lowery, the kinds of genres he learned and used, and the kinds of literate identity he developed. Lowery's rank-and-file experience and his talent for representing that experience around a bargaining table became increasingly peripheral to his ability to prepare documents that could compete in kind with those written by formally-educated, professional adversaries. Face-to-face meetings became occasions mostly for a ritualistic exchange of texts, as arbitrators generally deferred decisions, reaching them in private, after solitary deliberation over complex sets of documents. What Dwayne Lowery was up against as a working adult in the second half of the 20th century was more than just living through a rising standard in literacy expectations or a generalized growth in professionalization, specialization, or documentary power—although certainly all of those things are, generically, true. Rather, these developments should be seen more specifically, as outcomes of ongoing transformations in the history of literacy as it has been wielded as part of economic and political conflict. These transformations become the arenas in which new standards of literacy develop. And for Dwayne Lowery—as well as many like him over the last 25 years—these are the arenas in which the worth of existing literate skills become degraded. A consummate debater and deal maker, Lowery saw his value to the union bureaucracy subside, as power shifted to younger, university-trained staffers whose literacy credentials better matched the specialized forms of escalating pressure coming form the other side.

In the broadest sense, the sponsorship of Dwayne Lowery's literacy experiences lies deep within the historical conditions of industrial relations in the 20th century and, more particularly, within the changing nature of work and labor struggle over the last several decades. Edward Stevens Jr. has observed the rise in this century of an "advanced contractarian society" (25) by which formal relationships of all kinds have come to rely on "a jungle of rules and regulations" (139). For labor, these conditions only intensified in the 1960s and 1970s when a flurry of federal and state civil rights legislation curtailed the previously unregulated hiring and firing power of management. These developments made the appeal to law as central as collective bargaining for extending employee rights (Heckscher 9). I mention this broader picture, first, because it relates to the forms of employer backlash that Lowery began experiencing by the early 1980s and, more important, because a history of unionism serves as a guide for a closer look at he sponsors of Lowery's literacy.

These resources begin with the influence of his father, whose membership in the United Rubber Workers during the ideologically potent 1930s and 1940s, grounded Lowery in class-conscious progressivism and its favorite literate form: the newspaper. On top of that, though, was a pragmatic philosophy of worker education that developed in the U.S. after the Depression as an anti-communist antidote to left-wing intellectual influences in unions. Lowery's parent union, in fact, had been a central force in refocusing worker education away from an earlier emphasis on broad crucial study and toward discrete techniques for organizing and bargaining. Workers began to be trained in the discrete bodies of knowledge, written formats, and idioms associated with those strategies. Characteristic of this legacy, Lowery's crash course at the Washington-based training center in the early 1970s emphasized technical information, problem solving, and union-building skills and methods. The transformation in worker education from critical, humanistic study to problem-solving skills was also lived out at the school for workers where Lowery took short courses in the 1980s. Once a place where factory workers came to write and read about economics, sociology, and labor history, the school is now part of a university extension service offering workshops—often requested by management—on such topics as work restructuring, new technology, health and safety regulations, and joint labor-management cooperation.[7] Finally, in this inventory of Dwayne Lowery's literacy sponsors, we must add the latest incarnations shaping union practices: the attorneys and college-educated co-workers who carried into Lowery's workplace forms of legal discourse and "essayist literacy."[8]

What should we notice about this pattern of sponsorship? First, we can see form yet another angle how the course of an ordinary person's literacy learning—its occasions, materials, applications, potentials—follows the transformations going on within sponsoring institutions as those institutions fight for economic and ideological position. As a result of wins, losses, or compromises, institutions undergo change, affecting the kinds of literacy they promulgate and the status that such literacy has in the larger society. So where, how, why, and what Lowery practiced as a writer—and what he didn't practice—took shape as part of the post-industrial jockeying going on over the last thirty years by labor, government, and industry. Yet there is more to be seen in this inventory of literacy sponsors. It exposes the deeply textured history that lies within the literacy practices of institutions and within any individual's literacy experiences. Accumulated layers of sponsoring influences—in families, workplaces, schools, memory—carry forms of literacy that have been shaped out of ideological and economic struggles of the past. This history, on the one hand, is a sustaining resource in the quest for literacy. It enables an older generation to pass its literacy resources onto another. Lowery's exposure to his father's newspaper-reading and supper-table political talk kindled his adult passion for news, debate, and for language that rendered relief and justice. This history also helps to create infrastructures of opportunity. Lowery found crucial supports for extending his adult literacy in the educational networks that unions established during the first half of the 20th century as they were consolidating into national powers. On the other hand, this layered history of sponsorship is also deeply conservative and can be maladaptive because it teaches forms of literacy that oftentimes are in the process of being overtaken by new political realities and by ascendant forms of literacy. The decision to focus worker education on practical strategies of recruiting and bargaining—devised in the thick of Cold War patriotism and galloping expansion in union memberships—became, by the Reagan years, a fertile ground for new forms of management aggression and cooptation.

It is actually this lag or gap in sponsoring forms that we call the rising standard of literacy. The pace of change and the place of literacy in economic competition have both intensified enormously in the last half of the 20th century. It is as if the history of literacy is in fast forward. Where once the same sponsoring arrangements could maintain value across a generation or more, forms of literacy and their sponsors can now rise and recede many times within a single life span. Dwayne Lowery experienced profound changes in forms of union-based literacy not only between his father's time and his but between the time he joined the union and the time he left it, twenty-odd years later. This phenomenon is what makes today's literacy feel so advanced and, at the same time, so destabilized.

Sponsorship and Appropriation In Literacy Learning

We have seen how literacy sponsors affect literacy learning in two powerful ways. They help to organize and administer stratified systems of opportunity and access, and they raise the literacy stakes in struggles for competitive advantage. Sponsors enable and hinder literacy activity, often forcing the formation of new literacy requirements while decertifying older ones. A somewhat different dynamic of literacy sponsorship is treated here. It pertains to the potential of the sponsored to divert sponsors' resources toward ulterior projects, often projects of self-interest or self-development. Earlier I mentioned how Sunday School parishioners in England and African Americans in slavery appropriated church-sponsored literacy for economic and psychic survival. "Misappropriation" is always possible at the scene of literary transmission, a reason for the tight ideological control that usually surrounds reading and writing instruction. The accounts that appear below are meant to shed light on the dynamics of appropriation, including the role of sponsoring agents in that process. They are also meant to suggest that diversionary tactics in literacy learning may be invited now by the sheer proliferation of literacy activity in contemporary life. The uses and networks of literacy crisscross through many domains, exposing people to multiple, often amalgamated sources of sponsoring powers, secular, religious, bureaucratic, commercial, technological. In other words, what is so destabilized about contemporary literacy today also makes it so available and potentially innovative, ripe for picking, one might say, for people suitably positioned. The rising level of schooling in the general population is also an inviting factor in this process. Almost everyone now has some sort of contact, for instance, with college educated people, whose movements through workplaces, justice systems, social service organizations, houses of worship, local government, extended families, or circles of friends spread dominant forms of literacy (whether wanted or not, helpful or not) into public and private spheres. Another condition favorable for appropriation is the deep hybridity of literacy practices extant in many settings. As we saw in Dwayne Lowery's case, workplaces, schools, families bring together multiple strands of the history of literacy in complex and influential forms. We need models of literacy that more astutely account for these kinds of multiple contacts, both in and out of school and across a lifetime. Such models could begin to grasp the significance of re-appropriation, which, for a number of reasons, is becoming a key requirement for literacy learning at the end of the 20th century.

The following discussion will consider two brief cases of literacy diversion. Both involve women working in subordinate positions as secretaries, in print-rich settings where better educated male supervisors were teaching them to read and write in certain ways to perform their clerical duties. However, as we will see shortly, strong loyalties outside the workplace prompted these two secretaries to lift these literate resources for use in other spheres. For one, Carol White, it was on behalf of her work as a Jehovah's Witness. For the other, Sarah Steele, it was on behalf of upward mobility for her lower middle-class family.

Before turning to their narratives, though, it will be wise to pay some attention to the economic moment in which they occur. Clerical work was the largest and fastest growing occupation for women in the 20th century. Like so much employment for women, it offered a mix of gender-defined constraints as well as avenues for economic independence and mobility. As a new information economy created an acute need for typists, stenographers, bookkeepers and other office workers, white, American-born women and, later, immigrant and minority women saw reason to pursue high school and business-college educations. Unlike male clerks of the 19th century, female secretaries in this century had little chance for advancement. However, office work represented a step up from the farm or the factory for women of the working class and served as a respectable occupation from which educated, middle-class women could await or avoid marriage (Anderson, Strom). In a study of clerical work through the first half of the 20th century, Christine Anderson estimated that secretaries might encounter up to 97 different genres in the course of doing dictation or transcription. They routinely had contact with an array of professionals, including lawyers, auditors, tax examiners, and other government overseers (52-53). By 1930, 30% of women office workers used machines other than typewriters (Anderson 76) and, in contemporary offices, clerical workers have often been the first employees to learn to operate CRTs and personal computers and to teach others how to use them. Overall, the daily duties of 20th-century secretaries could serve handily as an index to the rise of complex administrative and accounting procedures, standardization of information, expanding communication, and developments in technological systems.

With the background, consider the experiences of Carol White and Sarah Steele. An Oneida, Carol White was born into a poor, single-parent household in 1940. She graduated from high school in 1960 and, between five maternity leaves and a divorce, worked continuously in a series of clerical positions in both the private and public sectors. One of her first secretarial jobs was with an urban firm that produced and disseminated Catholic missionary films. The vice-president with whom she worked most closely also spent much of his time producing a magazine for a national civic organization that he headed. She discussed how typing letters and magazine articles and occasionally proofreading for this man taught her rhetorical strategies in which she was keenly interested. She described the scene of transfer this way:

[My boss] didn't just write to write. He wrote in a way to make his letters appealing. I would have to write what he was writing in this magazine too. I was completely enthralled. He would write about the people who were in this [organization] and the different works they were undertaking and people that died and people who were sick and about their personalities. And he wrote little anecdotes. Once in a while I made some suggestions too. He was a man who would listen to you.

The appealing and persuasive power of the anecdote became especially important to Carol White when she began doing door-to-door missionary work for the Jehovah's Witnesses, a pan-racial, millenialist religious faith. She now uses colorful anecdotes to prepare demonstrations that she performs with other women at weekly service meetings at their Kingdom Hall. These demonstrations, done in front of the congregation, take the form of skits designed to explore daily problems through Bible principles. Further, at the time of our interview, Carol White was working as a municipal revenue clerk and had recently enrolled in an on-the-job training seminar called Persuasive Communication, a two-day class offered free to public employees. Her motivation for taking the course stemmed from her desire to improve her evangelical work. She said she wanted to continue to develop speaking and writing skills that would be "appealing," "motivating," and "encouraging" to people she hoped to convert.

Sarah Steele, a woman of Welsh and German descent, was born in 1920 into a large, working-class family in a coal mining community in eastern Pennsylvania. In 1940, she graduated from a two-year commercial college. Married soon after, she worked as a secretary in a glass factory until becoming pregnant with the first of four children. In the 1960s, in part to help pay for her children's college educations, she returned to the labor force as a receptionist and bookkeeper in a law firm, where she stayed until her retirement in the late 1970s.

Sarah Steele described how, after joining the law firm, she began to model her household management on principles of budgeting that she was picking up from one of the attorneys with whom she worked most closely. " I learned cash flow from Mr. B____," she said. " I would get all the bills and put a tape in the adding machine and he and I would sit down together to be sure there was going to be money ahead." She said that she began to replicate that process at home with the household bills. "Before that," she observed, "I would just cook beans when I had to instead of meat." Sarah Steele also said she encountered the genre of the credit report during routine reading and typing on the job. She figured out what constituted a top rating, making sure her husband followed these steps in preparation for their financing a new car. She also remembered typing up documents connected to civil suits being brought against local businesses, teacher her, she said, which firms never to hire for home repairs. "It just changes the way you think," she observed about the reading and writing she did on her job. "You're not a pushover after you learn how a business operates."

The dynamics of sponsorship alive in these narratives expose important elements of literacy appropriation, at least as it is practiced at the end of the 20th century. In a pattern now familiar from the earlier sections, we see how opportunities for literacy learning—this time for diversions of resources—open up in the clash between long-standing, residual forms of sponsorship and the new: between the lingering presence of literacy's conservative history and its pressure for change. So, here, two women—one Native American and both working-class—filch contemporary literacy resources (public relations techniques and accounting practices) from more educated, higher-status men. The women are emboldened in these acts by ulterior identities beyond the workplace: Carol White with faith and Sarah Steele with family. These affiliations hark back to the first sponsoring arrangements through which American women were gradually allowed to acquire literacy and education. Duties associated with religious faith and child rearing helped literacy to become, in Gloria Main's words, "a permissible feminine activity" (579). Interestingly, these roles, deeply sanctioned within the history of women's literacy—and operating beneath the newer permissible feminine activity of clerical work—become grounds for covert, innovative appropriation even as they reinforce traditional female identities.

Just as multiple identities contribute to the ideologically hybrid character of these literacy formations, so do institutional and material conditions. Carol White's account speaks to such hybridity. The missionary film company with the civic club vice president is a residual site for two of literacy's oldest campaigns—Christian conversion and civic participation—enhanced here by 20th century advances in film and public relations techniques. This ideological reservoir proved a pleasing instructional site for Carol White, whose interests in literacy, throughout her life, have been primarily spiritual. So literacy appropriation draws upon, perhaps even depends upon, conservative forces in the history of literacy sponsorship that are always hovering at the scene of acts of learning. This history serves as both a sanctioning force and a reserve of ideological and material support.

At the same time, however, we see in these accounts how individual acts of appropriation can divert and subvert the course of literacy's history, how changes in individual literacy experiences relate to larger scale transformations. Carol White's redirection of personnel management techniques to the cause of the Jehovah's witnesses is an almost ironic transformation in this regard. Once a principle sponsor in the initial spread of mass literacy, evangelism is here rejuvenated through late-literate corporate sciences of secular persuasion, fund-raising, and bureaucratic management that Carol White finds circulating in her contemporary workplaces. By the same token, through Sarah Steele, accounting practices associated with corporations are, in a sense, tracked into the house, rationalizing and standardizing even domestic practices. (Even though Sarah Steele did not own an adding machine, she penciled her budge figures onto adding-machine tape that she kept for that purpose.) Sarah Steele's act of appropriation in some sense explains how dominant forms of literacy migrate and penetrate into private spheres, including private consciousness. At the same time, though, she accomplishes a subversive diversion of literate power. Her efforts to move her family up in the middle class involved not merely contributing a second income but also, from her desk as a bookkeeper, reading her way into an understanding of middle-class economic power.

Teaching and the Dynamics of Sponsorship

It hardly seems necessary to point out to the readers of *CCC* that we haul a lot of freight for the opportunity to teach writing. Neither rich nor powerful enough to sponsor literacy on our own terms, we serve instead as conflicted brokers between literacy's buyers and sellers. At our most worthy, perhaps, we show the sellers how to beware and try to make sure these exchanges will be a little fairer, maybe, potentially, a little more mutually rewarding. This essay has offered a few working case studies that link patterns of sponsorship to processes of stratification, competition, and reappropriation. How much these dynamics can be generalized to classrooms is an ongoing empirical question.

I am sure that sponsors play even more influential roles at the scenes of literacy learning and use than this essay has explored. I have focused on some of the most tangible aspects—material supply, explicit teaching, institutional aegis. But the ideological pressure of sponsors affects many private aspects of writing processes as well as public aspects of finished texts. Where one's sponsors are multiple or even at odds, they can make writing maddening. Where they are absent, they make writing unlikely. Many of the cultural formations we associate with writing development—community practices, disciplinary traditions, technological potentials—can be appreciated as made-do responses to the economics of literacy, past and present. The history of literacy is a catalogue of obligatory relations. That this catalogue is so deeply conservative and, at the same time, so ruthlessly demanding of change is what fills contemporary literacy learning and teaching with their most paradoxical choices and outcomes.[9]

In bringing attention to economies of literacy learning I am not advocating that we prepare students more efficiently for the job markets they must enter. What I have tried to suggest is that as we assist and study individuals in pursuit of literacy, we also recognize how literacy is in pursuit of them. When this process stirs ambivalence, on their part or on ours, we need to be understanding.

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Endnotes

1 Three of the keenest and most eloquent observers of economic impacts on writing teaching and learning have been Lester Faigley, Susan Miller, and Kurt Spellmeyer.

2 My debt to the writings of Pierre Bourdieu will be evident throughout this essay. Here and throughout I invoke his expansive notion of "economy," which is not restricted to literal and ostensible systems of money making but to the many spheres where people labor, invest, and exploit energies—their own and others'—to maximize advantage. See Bordieu and Wacquant, especially 117-120 and Bourdieu, Chapter 7.

3 Thomas Laqueur (124) provides a vivid account of a street demonstration in Bolton, England, in 1834 by a "pro-writing" faction of Sunday School students and their teachers. This faction demanded that writing instruction continue to be provided on Sundays, something that opponents of secular instruction on the Sabbath were trying to reverse.

4 See, for instance, National Assessments of Educational Progress in reading and writing (Applebee et al,; and "Looking").

5 All names used in this essay are pseudonyms.

6 I am not suggesting that literacy that does not "pay off" in terms of prestige or monetary reward is less valuable. Dora Lopez's ability to read and write in Spanish was a source of great strength and pride, especially when she was able to teach it to her young child. The resource of Spanish literacy carried much of what Bourdieu calls cultural capital in her social and family circles. But I want to point out here how people who labor equally to acquire literacy do so under systems of unequal subsidy and unequal reward.

7 For useful accounts of this period in union history, see Heckscher; Nelson.

8 Marcia Farr associates "essayist literacy" with written genres esteemed in the academy and noted for their explicitness, exactness, reliance on reasons and evidence, and impersonal voice.

9 Lawrence Cremin makes similar points about education in general in his essay "The Cacophony of Teaching." He suggests that complex economic and social changes since World War Two, including the popularization of schooling and the penetration of mass media, have created "a far great range and diversity of language, competencies, values, personalities, and approaches to the world and to its educational opportunities" than at one time existed. The diversity most of interest to him (and me) resides not so much in the range of different ethnic groups there are in society but in the different cultural formulas by which people assemble their educational—or, I would say, literate—experience.

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NOW THAT YOU'VE READ, what do you think? Don't forget to offer responses that both accept the arguments and evidence Brandt offers in this article and "resist" them. That is, share what you know and respect about her arguments before working to resist them or aspects of them (which is the next, very important step).

1. What is the function of a "sponsor of literacy," according to Brandt?
2. Brandt argues that you are not just in pursuit of literacy but that "literacy is in pursuit of [you]." What does she mean by this? How might a sponsor "permit" literacy? How might a sponsor "prohibit" literacy?
3. Is your experience more like Raymond Branch or Dora Lopez's? How?
4. Who are the key agents sponsoring your own literacy history? How do you know?
5. Who may be the agents "prohibiting" literacy? What advantages might they gain from this prohibition?

Writing Assignment

This essay calls upon you to reconstruct key moments in your literacy history by identifying the agents sponsoring this literacy and narrating the way literacy has "pursued" you in a variety of contexts.

According to Brandt, "[s]ponsors . . . are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and *gain advantage by it in some way*" (166, emphasis mine). How does this definition match up with your understanding of what a sponsor does? How might a sponsor "gain advantage" from sponsoring someone else? What ideas, conversations, and past experiences does Brandt's exploration of "sponsorship" call up in you? What can you learn by accepting this definition? What can we learn by resisting this definition of sponsorship?

Be sure to do more than merely describe your experiences with literacy and literacy education. Instead, analyze your findings using—among other things—the relevant arguments from Brandt's "Sponsors of Literacy." Take some time to unpack Brandt's key arguments and your position in relation to them, then consider how they are (or are not) true of your own experiences with literacy acquisition.

Chapter 3

Expanding Notions of Literate Practice

In this chapter, we continue our exploration of literacies in context by examining the ways in which literacy functions in a variety of places for a variety of purposes (in a particular African American church, for example, or a restaurant). We begin with an excerpt from David Barton and Mary Hamilton's *Local Literacies* (1998) in which they articulate what they call a "social theory of literacy." Rather than treating literacy as a skill that, once acquired, is equally applicable to a variety of contexts, Barton and Hamilton define literacy in terms of "practices" ("what people do with literacy") and events ("activities where literacy has a role"). We then examine these "literacy events" and "literacy practices" as they manifest themselves in an African-American church (Moss) and, finally, a family style restaurant (Mirabelli).

David Barton[4] is Professor of Language and Literacy at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom, as well as co-author of numerous books that further articulate and apply to various contexts the "social theory of literacy" described in the following excerpt. Mary Hamilton[5] is a Professor of Adult Learning and Literacy, also at Lancaster University, and has co-authored several books and articles on the subject, as well—many with David Barton.

4 Additional information on David Barton is available at <http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/staff/david/david.htm>.

5 See http://www.lancs.ac.uk/staff/eramh/ for additional information on Mary Hamilton.

READING

Literary Practices

David Barton and Mary Hamilton

BEFORE YOU READ the following article, *read yourself.*

1. In the excerpt that follows, Barton and Hamilton put forth a "social theory of literacy" and describe the ways in which it differs from the much more common assumption that literacy is a set of skills one carries with them and applies to a text in order to make sense of it. As they explain in the introduction to their book-length study of which the following essay is a part,

   Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analyzed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. (3)

   Respond to this quote. Is this how you have seen described literacy in other contexts? Where do you see literacy "located?" Where have you been taught to "locate" literacy? in the heads of readers and writers? in the texts themselves? What does it mean to locate literacy "in the interaction between people"?

2. Without doing any research at all, think about the ways in which you have heard and/or seen the word literacy used and write all those ways down. Do you find a pattern among them? What is this pattern?[6]

3. Barton and Hamilton discuss literacy in terms of "events" and "practices" rather than "skills." How do you see a literacy event or literacy practice differing from what we often describe as a literacy "skill"? Why might it be productive to think of literacy in these new ways?

A Social Theory Of Literacy: Practices And Events

In this chapter we provide a framework in terms of a theory of literacy. It is a brief overview of a social theory of literacy. This can be seen as the starting-point or orienting theory, which the detailed studies in this book then expand upon, react to and develop. We define what is meant by literacy practices and literacy events and explain some of the tenets of a social theory of literacy. This is pursued in Barton and Hamilton (1998), where a further example of situation literacies not covered in this book can be found.

We present here the theory of literacy as social practice in the form of a set of six propositions about the nature of literacy, as in Figure 1. The starting-point of this approach is the assertion that *literacy is a social practice*, and the propositions are an elaboration of this. The discussion is a development on that in Barton (1994, pp. 34-52), where contemporary approaches to literacy are discussed within the framework of the metaphor of ecology. The notion of *literacy practices* offers a powerful way of conceptualizing the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape. When we talk about practices, then, this is not just the superficial choice of a word but the possibilities that this perspective offers for new theoretical understandings about literacy.

Our interest is in social practices in which literacy has a role; hence the basic unit of a social theory of literacy is that of *literary practices*. Literacy practices are the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon

6 This question was adapted from Linda Adler-Kassner's "Reading About Uses of Learning" (*Considering Literacy: Reading and Writing the Educational Experience*, 2006).

FIGURE 1: LITERACY AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- Literacy is historically situated.
- Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.

in their lives. In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy. However practices are not observable units of behaviour since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships (see Street 1993, p. 12). This includes people's awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense of literacy. These are processes internal to the individual; at the same time, practices are the social processes which connect people with one another, and they include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities. Practices are shaped by social rules which regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access to them. They straddle the distinction between individual and social worlds, and literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals.

To avoid confusion, it is worth emphasizing that this usage is different from situations where the word *practice* is used to mean learning to do something by repetition. It is also different from the way the term is used in recent international surveys of literacy, to refer to 'common or typical activities or tasks' (OECD/ Statistics Canada 1996). The notion of practices as we have defined it above-cultural ways of utlising literacy—is a more abstract one that cannot wholly be contained in observable activities and tasks.)

Turning to another basic concept, *literacy events* are activities where literacy has a role. Usually there is a written text, or texts, central to the activity and there may be talk around the text. Events 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. It is parallel to ideas developed in sociolinguistics and also, as Jay Lemke has pointed out, to Bahtkin's assertion that the starting point for the analysis of spoken language should be 'the social event of verbal interaction,' rather than the formal linguistic properties of texts in isolation (Lemke 1995).

Many literacy events in life are regular, repeated activities, and these can often be a useful starting-point for research into literacy. Some events are linked into routine sequences and these may be part of the formal procedures and expectations of social institutions like work-places, schools, and welfare agencies. Some events are structured by the more informal expectations and pressures of the home or peer group. Texts are a crucial part of literacy events and the study of literacy is partly the study of texts and how they are produced and used. These three components, practices, events, and texts, provide the first proposition of a social theory of literacy, that: *literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these are observable in events which are mediated by written texts.* The local literacies study was concerned with identifying the events and texts of everyday life and describing people's associated practices. Our prime interest there was to analyse events in order to learn about practices. As with the definition of practices, we take a straightforward view of events at this point, as being activities which involve written texts; discussion throughout this book returns to the definitions of these terms. An example of an everyday literacy event, taken from the local literacies study, is that of cooking a pudding; it is described in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: COOKING LITERACY

When baking a lemon pie in her kitchen, Rita follows a recipe. She uses it to check the amounts of the ingredients. She estimates the approximate amounts, using teacups and spoons chosen specially for this purpose. The recipe is hand written on a piece of note-paper; it was written out from a book by a friend more than ten years ago. The first time she read the recipe carefully at each stage, but now she only looks at it once or twice. The piece of paper is marked and greasy by having been near the cooking surface on many occasions. It is kept in an envelope with other hand-written recipes and ones cut out of magazines and newspapers. The envelope and some cookery books are on a shelf in the kitchen. The books range in age and condition and include some by Robert Carrier. Sometimes she sits and reads them for pleasure.

Rita does not always go through the same set of activities in making the pie. Sometimes she makes double the amount described in the recipe if more people will be eating it. Sometimes she cooks the pie with her daughter Hayley helping her where necessary. Sometimes she enjoys cooking it, at other times it is more of a chore, when times is limited or she has other things she would rather do. Rita has passed the recipe on to several friends who have enjoyed the pie.

Rita does not always follow recipes exactly, but will add herbs and spices to taste; sometimes she makes up recipes; at one point she describes making a vegetable and pasta dish similar to one she had had as a takeaway meal. She exchanges recipes with other people, although she does not lend her books.

Once one begins to think in terms of literacy events there are certain things about the nature of reading and writing which become apparent. For instance, in many literacy events there is a mixture of written and spoken language. Many studies of literacy practices have print literacy and written texts as their starting point but it is clear that in literacy events people use written language in an integrated way as part of a range of semiotic systems; these semiotic systems include mathematical systems, musical notation, maps, and other non-text based images. The cookery text has numeracy mixed with print literacy and the recipes come from books, magazines, television, and orally from friends and relatives. By identifying literacy as one of a range of communicative resources available to members of a community, we can examine some of the ways in which it is located in relation to other mass media and new technologies. This is especially pertinent at a time of rapidly changing technologies.

Looking at different literacy events it is clear that literacy is not the same in all contexts; rather, there are different *literacies*. The notion of different literacies has several senses: for example, practices which involve different media or symbolic systems, such as a film or computer, can be regarded as different literacies, as in *film literacy* and *computer literacy*. Another sense is that practices in different cultures and languages can be regarded as different literacies. While accepting these sense of the term, the main way in which we use the notion here is to say that literacies are coherent configurations of literacy practices; often these sets of practices are identifiable and named, as in *academic literacy* or *work-place literacy* and they are associated with particular aspects of cultural life.

This means that, within a given culture, *there are different literacies associated with different domains of life*. Contemporary life can be analysed in a simple way into domains of activity, such as home, school, work-place. 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. We begin with the home domain and everyday life. The home is often identified as a primary domain in people's literacy lives, for example by James Gee (1990), and central to people's developing sense of social identity. Work is another identifiable domain, where relationships and resources are often structured quite differently from in the home. We might expect the practices associated with cooking, for example, to be quite different in the home and in the work-place—supported, learned, and carried out in different ways. The division of labour is different in institutional kitchens, the scale of the operations, the clothing people wear when cooking, the health and safely precautions they are required to take, and so on. Such practices contribute to the idea that people participate in distinct *discourse communities*, in different domains of life. These communities are groups of people held together by their characteristic ways of talking, acting, valuing, interpreting, and using written language. (See discussion in Swales 1990, pp. 23-27.)

Domains, and the discourse communities associated with them, are not clear-cut, however: there are questions of the permeability of boundaries, of leakages and movement between boundaries, and of overlap between domains. Home and community, for instance, are often treated as being the same domain; nevertheless they are distinct in many ways, including the dimension of public and private behaviour. An important part of the local literacies study was to clarify the domain being studied and to tease apart notions of home, household, neighbourhood, and community. Another aspect is the extent to which This domain is a distinct one with its own practices, and the extent to which the practices that exist in the home originate there, or home practices are exported to other domains. In particular, the private home context appears to be infiltrated by practices from many different public domains.

Domains are structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used and learned. Activities within these domains 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 of life. These include family, religion, and education, which are all social institutions. Some of these institutions are more formally structured than others, with explicit rules for procedures, documentation and legal penalties for infringement, whilst others are regulated by the pressure of social conventions and attitudes. Particular literacies have been created by and are structured and sustained by these institutions. Part of the study aims to highlight the ways in which institutions support particular literacy practices.

Socially powerful institutions, such as education, tend to support dominant literacy practices. These dominant practices can be seen as part of whole discourse formations, institutionalized configurations of power and knowledge which are embodied in social relationships. Other vernacular literacies which exist in people's everyday lives are less visible and less supported. This means that *literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible, and influential than other.* One can contrast dominant literacies and vernacular literacies which exist, and with exploring their relationship to more dominant literacies.

People are active in what they do and *literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.* Whilst some reading and writing is carried out as an end in itself, typically literacy is a means to some other end. Any study of literacy practices must therefore situate reading and writing activities in these broader contexts and motivations for use. In the cooking example, for instance, the aim is to bake a lemon pie, and the reading of a recipe is incidental to this aim. The recipe is incorporated into a broader set of domestic social practices associated with providing food and caring for children, and it reflects boarder social relationships and gendered divisions of labour.

A first step in reconceptualising literacy is to accept the multiple function literacy may serve in a given activity, where it can replace spoken language, enable communication, solve a practical problem, or act as a memory aid—in some cases, all at the same time. It is also possible to explore the further work which literacy can do in an activity, and the social meanings it takes on. For instance, there are ways in which literacy acts as *evidence*, as *display*, as *threat*, and as *ritual*. Texts can have multiple roles in an activity and literacy an act in different ways for the different participants in a literacy event; people can be incorporated into the literacy practices of others without reading or writing a single word. The acts of reading and writing are not the only ways in which texts are assigned meaning (as in Barton and Hamilton 1998, Chapter 14).

It is important to shift from a conception of literacy located in individuals to examine ways in which people in groups utilise literacy. In this way literacy becomes a community resource, realised in social relationships rather than a property of individuals. This is true at various levels; at the detailed micro level it can refer to the fact that in particular literacy events there are often several participants taking on different roles and creating something more than their individual practices. At a broader macro level it can mean the ways in which whole communities use literacy. There are social rules about who can produce and use particular literacies and we wish to examine this social regulation of texts. Shifting away from literacy as an individual attribute is one of the most important implications of a practice account of literacy, and one of the ways in which it differs most from more traditional accounts. The ways in which literacy acts as a resource for different sorts of groups are a central theme of Barton and Hamilton (1998), which describes some of the ways in which families, local communities, and organisations regulate and are regulated by literacy practices.

A person's practices can also be located in their own history of literacy. In order to understand this we need to take a life history approach, observing the history within a person's life. There are several dimensions to this: people use literacy to make changes in their lives; literacy changes people and people find themselves in the contemporary world of changing literacy practices. The literacy practices an individual engages with change across their lifetime, as a result of changing demands, available resources, as well as the possibilities and their interests.

Related to the constructed nature of literacy, any new theory of literacy implies a theory of learning. *Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making* as well as formal education and training. This learning takes place in particular social contexts and part of this learning is the internalisation of social processes. It is therefore important to understand the nature of informal and vernacular learning strategies and the nature of situated cognition, linking with the work of researchers influenced by Lev Vygotsky, such as Sylvia Scribner, Jean Lave, and colleagues (Scribner 1984; Lave and Wenger, 1991). For this it is necessary to draw upon people's insights into how they learn, their theories about literacy and education, the vernacular strategies they use to learn new literacies. We start out from the position that people's understanding of literacy is an important aspect of their learning, and that people's theories guide their actions. It is here that a study of literacy practices has its most immediate links with education.

Note

This chapter is adapted from pages 6-13 of D. Barton and M. Hamilton, *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community,* Routledge, 1998, with permission of the publishers.

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NOW THAT YOU'VE READ[7], what do you think?

1. According to Barton and Hamilton, "literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relations and some literacies are more dominant and visible than others" (64). What do they mean by this? Unpack this quote as it relates to your own literacy experiences. You may also refer back to your experiences with literacy as you described them in the previous writing assignment (see Chapter 2).
2. To illustrate their definition of literacies, Barton and Hamilton provide an example of Rita's cooking literacy as she makes a lemon pie. Create a representation—a chart, a list, a map, a diagram, or something else—that shows all of the elements involved in this illustration. Be sure to include connections to other people (like the friend who gave Rita the recipe) in your representation.
3. Reflecting on your representation of Rita's cooking literacy, think about the literacies in which you participate, and where you participate in them (Barton and Hamilton refer to these different places as "domains"). Schooling is an obvious one since you are a student and there are likely others as well (a religious affiliation or a club or fraternal organization membership, for example). How do you show you have developed literacies in each of these domains? What skills, behaviors, and other factors are involved?

7 Questions 2-3 in this "Now That You've Read" section were also adapted from Adler-Kassner's text (citation above).

MAKING CONNECTIONS (to Deborah Brandt's "Sponsors of Literacy)

Reflecting on your own representation of Rita's cooking literacy and the literacies in which you participate (see #2 and #3 above), take another look at the literacy practices of Dora, Raymond, and the rest of the subjects described in Brandt's study. In what domains can their literacies be found? How might these subjects show they have developed literacies in each of these domains? What skills, behaviors, and other factors might necessarily be involved?

READING

Creating a Community:

Literacy Events in African-American Churches

Beverly J. Moss

*For her dissertation, Beverly Moss did an ethnographic analysis of her home church, which led her to examine other African-American churches and—eventually—developed into an important book on the subject (*A Community Text Arises: A Literate Text and a Literacy Tradition in African-American Churches, 2002*). The article that follows offers the early results of the extensive study on which* A Community Text Arises *was based.*

BEFORE YOU READ the following essay, *read yourself.*

What sorts of "literacy events" do you understand to be a regular part of a church community with which you have some familiarity? Remember, Beverly Moss is analyzing what literacy scholar Shirley Brice Heath calls "literacy events": "Any action sequence involving one or more persons in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role" (from *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Schools*, Cambridge UP, 1983). So what literacy events are involved with a church community you know? What kinds of texts can be found? How are they used? What "literacy events" surround their use?

Introduction

Background

This chapter, like other chapters in this volume[8], examines literacy in a social institution or community other than the mainstream academy—the African-American church. In examining a literacy event to which most members in the African-American community have been exposed, I use Heath's (1982) definition of a literacy event: "Any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and / or comprehension of print plays a role" (p.92). The African-American sermon fits this definition, and it is the major literacy event that most African Americans have been exposed to in their communities, including those African Americans who do not attend church.

Over the past few years our discussions about literacy have taken a new direction, one long overdue—looking at literacy in nonacademic communities. A major tension in the discussion of literacy centers on the way literacy is defined or, more accurately, how people who are perceived to be literate and people who are perceived to be not literate are characterized. This issue relates to how we characterize and contrast with academic literacy? Before addressing these questions, it is necessary to provide some background information on the African-American church and preaching tradition and to introduce the three churches in which the highlighted literacy events take place.

The role of the church in the African-American community has been unsurpassed by any other institution (Hamilton, 1972; Smitherman, 1977). Smitherman (1977) states that "the traditional African-American church is the oldest and perhaps still the most powerful and influential black institution" (p.90). Theologian C. Eric Lincoln (1974), emphasizing the impact of the church on African-American people, states that "[their] church was [their] school, [their] forum, [their] political arena" (p.6). Lincoln (1974) also asserts that "whether one is a church member or not is beside the point in any assessment of the importance and meaning of the Black church" (p.115), and Mays and Nicholson (1933) assert that the "Negro church is one of the greatest perhaps the greatest channel through which the masses of the

8 The volume to which Moss refers is her edited collection *Literacies Across Communities* (1994), which includes ethnographic analysis of, among other things, literacy practicies in Philadelphia's Hmong community and an African-American Youth Basketball Association in a Chicago YMCA. .

Negro race receive adult education….It becomes the center of religious, moral, and intellectual teaching" (p.58). This role of the African-American church is not a new one. Many reports focus on the role of the church and religion in helping African Americans survive slavery in American in the 18th and 19th centuries. Blassingame (1979) states that "slaves found [in religion] some hope of escape from the brutalities of daily life" (p.130). Frazier (1974) points to Christianity as the force that bonded slaves from many diverse backgrounds (p.16).

Features of African-American preaching. The characteristics which are the core of African-American preaching are the very features that make the sermon a literacy event worthy of study and that provide more insight into literacy acquisition and functions in African-American communities. These essential characteristics of African-American preaching can, I believe, lead us to think more complexly about literacy, literate behaviors, and literate texts.

Mitchell's *Black Preaching* (1970) is probably one of the most complete explorations of African-American preaching. Mitchell suggests that African-American preaching takes place only in dialogue, and he credits the congregation with "making the dialogue a normal part of the black preacher's sermon" (p.95). Mitchell (1970) characterized the dialogue as that which occurs when a member of the congregation responds "because he identifies with something the preacher has said…he is at home, he is interested in what the preacher is saying because he is involved, crucially involved in the issues as the preacher shapes them with scriptural reference and skillful allegory" (p.97). In other words, as the typical African-American sermon is being shaped by the preacher, he or she depends on the participation of the congregation in completing that sermon.

This dialogic quality contributes to another essential characteristic in African-American preaching: African-American preachers must create a sense of community between themselves and their congregations. Mitchell (1970) states that through the sermon "one has to establish a kind of intimate fellowship" (p.185). It is this task of creating a sense of community or "intimate fellowship" and its connection to the sermon that I concern myself with in my discussion of features of the sermon. That is, one of the major features of the sermons in the churches that I studied is that the texts are used to create and maintain a sense of community. This feature sets this literacy event apart from the essay—the major academic literacy event—because of the sermon's dependence on both participants, preacher and congregation to be considered a successful text in the community. African-American preachers, like other rhetoricians, can only be successful at setting up this dialogue if they know their audience and their needs.

Mitchell's (1970) characterizations of African-American preaching can be condensed to two major points:

1. Black preachers must preach in the language and culture of their people no matter how educated the preachers are.
2. The preacher must address the contemporary man and his needs. (p.29)

The first point is similar to one raised by St. Augustine (1958) who states that preaching is a rhetorical act and that the preacher/rhetor must, if necessary, speak the language of the people to reach them. One key difference between Augustine and Mitchell is that Mitchell sees this role as a necessity for being successful in the African-American church, whereas St. Augustine views it somewhat as a last resort. The second point stresses knowing enough about the congregation, being connected enough with them, to know what's important to them. This kind of knowledge and skill, prerequisites for building a community, makes African-American preachers quite effective in reaching their congregation. The dialogic quality of the text and the creation of a community through the text make the African-American sermon a distinctive text.

The Ministers And Their Churches

Each minister in the study held a bachelor's degree, had seminary training, and currently held the position of pastor in a mainstream African-American church. With the inclusion of the term *mainstream*, I excluded storefront churches where memberships are generally small, and there is less likelihood that the preachers have gone through formal training. Even though each church in the study belongs to a different denomination, even denomination falls within the reformed tradition in which the sermon is the key part of the service. Also, the Sunday services are similar in format and follow in the tradition of the African-American church, and even though each preacher is marked by fairly different individual styles, each is firmly within the tradition of African-American preaching discussed earlier in the chapter.

G. Davis (1983) argues that in spite of differences among denominations and preaching styles "the sermon structure identified…as African-American describes sermons preached from hundreds of Black pulpits across American without regard to denominational affiliation. That sermon structure is cultural" (p.30). The only noted exception to Davis's statement may be seen in African-American Catholic churches, where the structure of the service does not permit or invite the kind of sermons that are commonplace in most other African-American churches.

Meeting the Manuscript Minister

The most important distinction among the three preachers for the purposes of this study is the amount of writing they do in preparing their sermons. The minister who writes and uses a full manuscript from which he delivers his sermon is referred to hereafter as the *manuscript minister*, a term used by the manuscript minister himself. The manuscript minister pastors a church located on the South Side of Chicago, which in 1992 celebrated its 30th anniversary. This church has approximately 5,500 members and an annual budget of approximately $2,000,000. It is the largest church in the study, and to accommodate the large numbers of people who attend this church, the minister normally preaches at two services, one at 8 a.m. and one at 11 a.m. This congregation will be moving into a newly built worship center within a year.

Licensed to preach at 17 years old, and ordained eight years later, this minister has been a pastor since 1972. He has a B.A. in English, an M.A. in literature, an M.A. in the History of Religions, and a doctoral degree in Divinity. This minister's seminary training focused on academic scholarship rather than preparation to preach. He explains that this kind of training has an influence on what he preaches, specifically his understanding of the African-American religious tradition in the context of world religions. In addition, he serves as an adjunct professor with the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education.

This manuscript minister's biographical sketch gives evidence of his deep commitment to education. Also, he is deeply committed to addressing political and social issues as well as religious issues. His sermons contain many illustrations that concern politics from the local level to the global level such as criticisms of Chicago politician Ed Vrdolyak, former U.S. President Ronald Reagan, and former

South African President P.W. Botha. He does not shy away from relating Biblical politics to world politics nor does he shy away from criticizing politicians from the pulpit. Some of these references to politics are impromptu, but most of them are parts of the written sermons. This minister also educates his congregation about different cultures, telling them about the cultures of the people in the countries he visits, particularly the cultures of the peoples of color. He constantly introduces Hebrew and African concepts to the congregation in the context of a particular sermon's message. His focus on the bonds between peoples of color was evident to me after two months of observation. In short, he is a well-educated, charismatic man whose command of language and knowledge of the Bible and religions of the world are displayed in his sermons.

Meeting the Manuscript Minister's Congregation

Some churches reflect their denomination's teachings, some reflect the congregations' wishes, and other churches reflect their ministers' visions. This church falls into the latter category. Many of the programs that exist in this church are a result of the manuscript minister's philosophy and ideas brought to fruition. His effectiveness as a pastor can be measured by the growth of the congregation and the church's programs since his arrival over 20 years ago. The membership has grown from less than 100 to approximately 5,500 members. The church now has a federally approved credit union, a reading, writing, and math tutorial program, a day care center, a legal counseling service, a large pastoral counseling staff, an educational program that concentrates on educating the church membership about their religious and cultural roots as an African people, broadcast ministries, and much more.

The manuscript minister stresses to his congregation that they should be "unashamedly Black and unapologetically Christian." This statement is part of the oath that the congregation takes when accepting new members into the church. During the time that the data were collected, this church was always full, with standing room only. Worshippers arrived 50 minutes before the service starts so that they can get seats in the sanctuary.

The congregation of this church is viewed as middle-class by many members of Chicago's African-American community. However, the minister views his congregation as a mixed group. He takes pride in the diversity of the congregation. Yet, although the members of this church represent a range on the socioeconomic ladder, there are a large number of people who are professionals; judges, lawyers, doctors, educators, businessmen and women, entertainers, and so on. A TV documentary which aired nationally addressed the perceived "middle classness" of this church ("Keeping the faith," 1987). It is a church that stresses education, yet it does not make the less formally educated feel uncomfortable. Its apparent upward mobility makes this church appealing to those who identify with the upwardly mobile. In fact, many members of the congregation drive to Chicago's South Side from Chicago suburbs.

Despite its middle-class identification, this church is rooted in the tradition of the African-American church, and the minister is rooted in the tradition of African-American preachers. My interviews with this minister confirmed what I had observed previously: that this manuscript minister takes great pride in being identified as "in the tradition of black preachers." He believes in making connections between the traditional African-American church and the contemporary African-American church, and in using the language of the African-American community in his sermons. This use of the language is much more than just speaking; it is also establishing a sense of community, communicating ideas and attitudes about African-American people, and promoting certain community values.

Meeting the Nonmanuscript Minister

The second preacher in the study prepares no manuscript from which to preach and usually no written notes. He pastors a church, located in a North suburb of Chicago, that has approximately 800 members. Even though the church is in a Chicago suburb, it is located just across the northern border of Chicago and has very strong ties to the city. Many of its members live in Chicago. Like the manuscript minister, the nonmanuscript minister also preaches at two Sunday morning services, at 8:00 and at 11:00. This church, rich in history, celebrated its 122nd anniversary in 1992.

This preacher initially came to this area as a faculty member at a nearby well-known seminary. He was on the faculty at this seminary for 15 years. During the latter years of his faculty appointment, he also served as senior pastor of this church, probably one of the few professors who also pastured a church full time. In his church he is addressed by his academic title "Dr_ _ _ _ _" rather than "Reverend _ _ _ _ _." This minister brings to this church not only a traditional training of years of preaching experience mostly in smaller churches, but also a scholarly foundation.

And although this scholarship includes the study of noted Western philosophers such as Heidegger and Kant, this minister has devoted much of his scholarship and his ministry to African-American theological issues.

Like the manuscript preacher, the nonmanuscript preacher has a basic philosophy that guides his ministry. That philosophy, which is printed on the church bulletins, is "faith and freedom for African-American people." He says that he is "unapologetically a race preacher." Committed to his people, this minister's philosophy and commitment affects his sermon preparation and consequently his sermons. Through my interviews with this minister I learned that his experiences as preacher at a southern church and at divinity school in the South played a major role in his training to be a pastor to African-American people. Born in a Midwestern, white-collar city, it was his experiences in the South that introduced him to the traditional African-American worship patterns that so many African-American preachers exemplify. He now describes the congregations of many urban churches as full of transplanted Southerners who are used to the Southern African-American tradition of worship, a sentiment echoed by Davis (1985) who notes the important influence of the Southern African-American church tradition on African-American churches in general.

When discussing methods of communicating with his congregation, the nonmanuscript minister focused on verbal and nonverbal language. He relies on gestures to communicate as well as words. The nonmanuscript preacher explains that in the African-American church he reaches some people with words; he states, for instance that, "celestial skies means heaven for some, but those words mean nothing to people ruled by emotions. A gesture, however, pointing upward and looking upward has the meaning of heaven for those people who attach less meaning to words." This raises the issue of how much value some people attach to words in this setting. It also raises the issue of how this minister and others identify and communicate with the multiple levels of audience that make up their congregations. This minister, as evidenced by his identification of the different kinds of language use to which people respond, has a special awareness of this multiple audience issue. More importantly, he seems to meet the needs of his congregation.

Finally, of great importance when discussing this nonmanuscript minister is his commitment to political and social issues. It is very obvious that he sees the pulpit as the perfect place to discuss politics. During the time that I attended services and collected data, I noted that the minister regularly discussed local, state, national, and international politics. Many times, issues of politics were used as illustrations in a sermon. Tied to political issues raised in the pulpit are social and economic issues. One sermon began with a discussion of the impact of AIDS on the African-American community. The politically centered discussions focus on their impact on African-American people, in keeping with this minister's identification of himself as a race preacher.

Meeting the Nonmanuscript Minister's Congregation

The oldest of the three churches in this study and located in a middle-class suburb, this church's location suggest that it serves a predominantly middle-class African-American population. Indeed, many of its members fit that label. Like the congregation in the manuscript minister's church, this church has a large number of African-American professionals. There are teachers, judges, lawyers, doctors, businesspersons, and corporate executives in this congregation. In addition, because this church is located very near a major university, there are a large number of African-American college students, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, who attend this church.

This church, unlike the other tow churches in the study, is not located in an African-American neighborhood; people drive from various distances to get to Sunday morning service. In spite of these facts, the minister indicated that he does not really see his church as middle class, although he recognizes that there are a large number of professionals and what he calls intellectuals in his congregation. His perception does assist him in not preaching above the heads of those who are limited in their vocabulary and educational levels or who do not respond as enthusiastically to verbal stimuli.

The church's organizations are concerned not only with the operation of the church but also with education and community fellowship. This church has an administrative staff consisting of the senior pastor, executive assistant pastor, and assistant pastors in charge of special ministries, educational ministries, and youth ministries. There are the traditional deacon, trustee, and usher boards. There is also a library committee and a group that runs a precollege seminar for church members who are going off to college. The focus on education reflects one of the priorities of the minister, who promotes the value of higher education in his sermons.

In addition, this church has numerous organizations that promote fellowship among the congregation such as the singles' ministry, the widows' and widowers' club, the bowling league, and the softball team. There is also a church-run marriage counseling program. These organizations and programs show how many diverse groups the church tries to serve. It also emphasizes the church as the center of not only religious and political activities but social activities as well.

Meeting the Partial Manuscript Minister

The third preacher in the study, hereafter referred to as the partial-manuscript minister, writes approximately 25% of his sermons. He brings into the pulpit with him a written text that physically resembles a sentence outline but that seems to include far more information than an outline usually does. The partial-manuscript preacher pastors a 78-year-old church on the far South Side of Chicago. This church, with approximately 550 members on roll (only half attend regularly), has one morning service at 11 a.m.

I learned of the partial-manuscript minister's church through an acquaintance who is a member of that church. This acquaintance described his minister as one who did not write his sermons. So it was the search for the nonmanuscript minister that brought me to this church. What I found, when I talked with the minister, was that he wrote too much to be considered a nonmanuscript minister (approximately one-fourth of his sermon was written), and he wrote too little to be considered a manuscript minister. However, this minister places himself more on the nonmanuscript end than the manuscript one. I refer to him as a partial-manuscript minister to distinguish him from the nonmanuscript minister.

This minister is the youngest of the three ministers in this study. After leaving the military he became pastor of his first church in 1974, and he has been a minister for 25 years and pasturing over 18 years. He has the least amount of education of the three ministers in that he was completing his graduate work (master's level) at the time of this study. However, he has studied in several seminary programs which, although they do not offer graduate degrees, prepare ministers to preach and pastor a church. He even stated in one of his sermons I collected that he goes to seminars and takes courses on preaching and the ministry to become a better communicator. What this congregation has is a model, the minister, who is constantly trying to improve himself as a preacher and pastor, mostly through education.

This minister's effectiveness is measured by his congregation's admiration of him, admiration which seems to cover the preacher and the man. When discussing his preaching, he said his sermons were arranged a certain way because he wasn't good at other kinds of arrangements, particularly topical arrangements. Yet, he also questioned the legitimacy of preaching topical sermons. He describes himself as being more of an exegetical preacher, which he views as the most legitimate type of preaching. Many works on preaching support him (H.G. Davis, 1958; W. Thompson, 1981). Exegesis involves close reading of the scripture as a basis for the sermon. It deemphasizes choosing a sermon from outside the Bible as the other two ministers often do. This minister's sermons closely resemble line-by-line literary explications of text. He is by far the more conservative in personality and philosophy of the three preachers.

He rarely included any political statement in his sermons during the time that I was in his church. The extent of his political statements was to urge people to vote in the upcoming election, a statement he made during the announcements, not during the sermon. His style is not to mix politics and religion in the pulpit, on one occasion he did use the pulpit to tell women not to wear pants to any function held at the church because some members had complained. This policy suggests the conservative nature of this church. The partial-manuscript minister basically sees the pulpit as the place to expound on the word of God. This is reflected in his sermons and interviews. This minister believes that sermons should be explanations of the Bible. His goal is to explain the Bible to his congregation as best he can.

Meeting the Partial-manuscript Minister's Congregation

The congregation, like their minister, can be described as low key. Holiness churches generally have the reputation, in the African-American church community, as being even more active and expressive than most African-American churches. Congregants also have the reputation of "staying in church all day." I even asked my acquaintance how long the service was when he first suggested that I visit his church. He said, "it's never more than two hours, unlike most holiness churches." This congregation and its service did not fit the image I had of how their service was supposed to be, an image which was shaped by my experiences with holiness churches in the rural South.

The low-key nature of the congregation is evident in many ways, most notably in how the congregation proceeds through the service. As in the other churches, the congregation is more active in some parts of the service than they are in others. Yet, their participation is not as intense or perhaps as verbal as in the other two churches. For example, when the senior choir sings, the congregation generally listens fairly quietly rather than standing or clapping to indicate that they are moved by the song. This could be because the choir sings anthems and spirituals more so than gospel music, and anthems and spirituals, which sometimes move people to tears, do not seem to invite the same kind of vocal responses from the congregation as do gospel songs.

The partial-manuscript minister's congregation is most vocal during the sermon and after the sermon. During the sermon, the congregation participates in the call-and-response patterns that are traditional in the African-American church, but the response seems limited to a few verbal statements. I noted that the congregation rarely showed their excitement by standing or clapping during the sermon, even during the climax. Yet, many members, especially men, answer the preacher during the sermon with "amen" and "umm hmm" or an affirmative nod of the head, and the congregation consistently answers [the minister] as a group "yes," "that's right," and "Lord." In addition, individual voices can be heard over the group responding "preach" along with other comments. As in the other churches, the more excited the minister becomes (when he raises his voice), the more vocal the congregation becomes. The more low key this minister is during the sermon, the quieter the congregation. Unlike the other two ministers, this minister seems to "wind down" during his climax, and his congregation "winds down" with him. The congregation's response reflects the minister's preaching style—straightforward and reserved, but not so low key that the service does not resemble a traditionally expressive African-American church service. However, I saw few people outwardly carried away by emotion in this church as I did in the other two churches.

Because this church is smaller than the other two churches, more members of the congregation know each other; consequently, they know when there are visitors, even when the visitors do not stand to identify themselves. I was recognized right away as new, and members of the congregation came up to me after the services each Sunday to greet and welcome me, treatment that other visitors and new members also received. Because few members knew about my research, they saw me as a potential member. I was constantly asked if or when I would join their church. I was surprised that more of the congregation's outgoing personality did not appear during the service.

Differences and Similarities

Although the three churches are similar in the format of their service, the manuscript minister's church and the nonmanuscript minister's church are more similar to each other than they are to the partial-manuscript minister's church. In a sense the partial-manuscript minister's church is a very traditional church. There are the normal organizations: deacon board, board of trustees, usher board, choirs, Sunday schools, youth groups, and so on. With the exception of the usher board and the choirs, most of these organizations are traditionally dominated by men, especially the leadership positions.

The usher board and choirs, traditionally female dominated, are organizations that have almost no role in the decision-making process of the church. In this particular church, men hold the leadership positions of almost all of the organizations. During my weeks of observation, I never saw a woman in the pulpit of this church. In contrast, the churches of the manuscript and nonmanuscript ministers have large ministerial staffs including women, who also have roles in other phases of the church. Both churches also have nontraditional organizations, such as singles groups. The manuscript preacher's church has African-American men's and women's organizations, and the nonmanuscript preacher's church has a widow(er)'s organization.

I note these differences in church organizations and the role of women because they reflect not only different philosophies of denomination but also of preachers and that affects how the preachers view their congregations. Consequently, their sermons are affected.

Although I have noted some differences, one major similarity which should be noted is the active youth groups and youth programs of each church. Each church has regular Youth Sundays when the youth run the entire worship service, including preaching. The youth also have organizations and other programs which are integral parts of the church. Because the youth at each church are so active, they are vitally involved in their churches, constantly exposed to and, indeed, deeply entrenched in the tradition of the African-American church and, therefore, its literacy traditions. This exposure to the sermon may have important consequences for how these youth and other members of the congregation view formal discourse, written and oral.

Literacy Events And Literacy Practices

This chapter focuses mostly on the sermon, but that is not the only literacy event that exists in the African-American church. Therefore, this chapter includes a brief discussion of other literacy events in these three churches which occur during Sunday worship services. It is these other literacy events that provide the context from which the sermon takes place.

Literacy Practices in the Manuscript Minister's Church

At first, one might think that the typical worship service at this church revolves around oral language use. And indeed, the sermon, which is the major activity of the service, is an orally performed event, as are the various prayers throughout the service, is an orally performed event, as are the various prayers throughout the service. However, before the congregation hears this sermon, they most likely have participated in several reading acts. Upon entering the sanctuary, worshippers are given bulletins by the ushers. These bulletins average 12 pates of written material.

The bulletin, used to present the order of worship and to make churchwide announcements, is the method that this church uses to proved non-sermon-related information to its congregation. Although many of the same announcements are read orally by one of the associate pastors each Sunday, it is this bulletin that lets the congregation know what activities are occurring in the church from week to week. Also included in this bulletin are a list of sick and shut-in members of the church, apartment advertisements, employment opportunities, and sometimes editorial essays from the desk of the pastor. This is by far the most effective method of disseminating information to the congregation. Usually before each service officially starts, most members of the congregation are using the time to read their bulletins. The information in these bulletins also becomes the basis of the talk by the pastor who highlights important information. In this case the congregation uses writing as a source of information.

The bulletin also contains the order or worship for each service. This is a church that rarely deviates from the printed order of worship in the bulletin. This order of worship appears almost ritualistic. Every Sunday the service opens with the choral introit, an opening choral number, and the Lord's Prayer. The next two acts are reading acts. The congregation sings an assigned hymn which can be found printed on an insert in the bulletin or in the hymnal. Then they participate in the responsive reading which is also printed in the bulletin and in the back of the hymnal. These two acts are performed every Sunday, and at the center of these acts is a written text. It is clear that the written Order of Worship provides structure to the service, serving the function for which it is named. Using writing as an ordering device then becomes one use of literacy in this church.

The elements in the worship service that change from Sunday to Sunday are the songs and the sermon. Because of the ritualistic nature of the service, the written Order of Worship may be more a tradition than a necessity, and if so, what kind of message is sent to the congregation about the value of writing in this situation? In African-American churches in which the Order of Worship is not consistently written, the services generally proceed in an orderly fashion but are far longer than in the churches in which the Order of Worship is written.

If one looks only at the Order of Worship, one may be puzzled by its seeming rigidity in what has been traditionally seen as the spontaneous nature of the African-American church. However, by attending the services of the manuscript minister's church, I found that within this structured service is opportunity for spontaneity by the preacher(s) and the congregation, particularly when the choir sings, during prayer time, or during the sermon. It is during these three times, when the congregation has no written text to guide them through these acts, that they seem most involved as measured through their verbal and physical responses. They are attentive through other parts of the service, but their responses are rather mechanical. Anytime the congregation reads a text, they become more passive participants as if they are listening to a lecture. However, during the times when there is not written text such as the choir's musical selections, the invocation, altar call prayer, and the sermon, the congregation becomes more active by responding vocally, clapping, standing, or some combination of the three. In short, the congregation becomes part of a dialogue.

In the sermon, the manuscript minister invites these responses. He believes that the sermon is a dialogue, not a lecture, and that the congregation should be actively involved. He sees this practice as marking a major difference between the African-American worship service and most white worship services. This practice, referred to as "call and response" (Holt, 1972) is a mainstay of the sermon event. Therefore, in this particular setting, reading is a passive act, but listening, which is normally viewed as a more passive act than reading, is far more active.

Listening to the sermon, the songs, and the prayers means answering the minister when he "hits home," or singing along or calling on Jesus to "help me," encouraging the preacher with "come on preacher" or "I know that's right," and saying "Amen" or countless other responses to let the preacher or the singer or the person praying know that you are participating in the act. Two of the more popular responses during the sermons are "preach" and "come on minister." Whether the speaker has a written text or not is not an issue for this congregation. So whatever the congregation may learn about language from a sermon or a prayer, they learn through the oral/aural mode. This is the norm (or interaction) in this church as well as in most other African-American churches I have attended over the past 25 years. And this norm is attached to an oral performance just as there are norms attached to the reading act. For the congregation these acts, prayers, and sermons are speech events that are detached from whatever written text from which they may have originated. Yet, this minister's sermons are based on written texts.

Just as the channels of language change throughout the order of service, that is, oral and written language are both used alternately throughout the service, the many acts within the Order of Worship (Lord's Prayer, invocation, ritual of friendship, altar call, sermon, hymn of invitation, etc.) result in different "keys" (Hymes, 1972). Hymes uses "key" to refer to the tone or manner of a particular act. The tone during the ritual of friendship is upbeat and lively, whereas the tone during the altar call is very serious and intense, and during the sermon the "key" may change many times. In this particular setting, there are many elements that may signal "key" from how loud the congregation is singing to how much feedback they give the preacher to how stationery the manuscript minister is during his sermon to the intonation patterns of this minister. During the services of this church, key is tied to the Order of Worship as well as to what is said and done. Because the congregation generally knows what should happen next in the service, they also know the appropriate tone and manner in which to perform an act. During my period of observation, neither the minister nor the congregation gave any indication of any inappropriate responses.

The manuscript minister best signals the key through his intonation patterns in his sermons and his physical gestures as he preaches. This minister's use of intonation and rhythm not only signals his feelings and emotions but also guides the congregation's responses to the sermon. For instance, in every sermon the manuscript minister establishes a pattern of repetition with words and intonation. As he moves toward the end of this pattern, his voice rises and along with it the congregation's responses become more vocal, louder; the clapping becomes more intense. In short, the response level rises with the minister's rise in intonation.

Literacy Practices in the Nonmanuscript Minister's Church

The nonmanuscript minister's church resembles the manuscript minister's in the way that written texts are used in the service. As in the manuscript minister's church, this church has a printed Sunday bulletin that includes the order of the service, announcements, names of the sick and shut-in, and sometimes forms to fill out (e.g., Vacation Bible school registration). The bulletin averages approximately 7 pages per Sunday. Although most of the announcements are in the bulletin, there are a few that are not and therefore must be read to the congregation. Every Sunday, someone, usually the same person, highlights many of the announcements in and out of the bulletin. This printed bulletin, combined with the oral reading of announcements, seems to be an effective means of disseminating information. And as stated earlier, it provides the order of the service.

This order of service includes two reading acts in addition to reading the bulletin—the responsive reading, which is a part of most church services, and the hymn of celebration, both of which are found in the hymnal. Not other reading acts are read by the congregation; instead, someone reads to the congregation. These reading acts tend to occur early in the service before the sermon. The scripture, however, is generally read by one of the assistant pastors. Many members read along (silently) in their own Bibles, as does the congregation in the manuscript minister's church. Most of the service proceeds according to the program. The congregation is generally low key during this part of the service, participating when they are supposed to.

The only time that feedback occurs before the sermon is when the choir sings a particularly moving arrangement of a song or when some announcements are read that invite feedback. For example, one Sunday, members of the singles ministry performed a brief commercial to advertise the church picnic which was to occur in the near future. It drew great responses from the audience. There are several occasions when the choir sings songs that have many members of the congregation singing along, standing and clapping, and a few times physically feeling the sprit and shouting, although shouting is rare in this church. For the congregation, everything in the service is an oral speech event except the two previously mentioned reading acts. Again, as in the manuscript minister's church, in this church, language is predominantly oral; therefore, one must deduce that most of what the people in this congregation learn about language use in this setting, they learn from and through the oral mode.

Literacy Practices in the Partial-Manuscript Minister's Church

The services in his church are similar to the services of the other two churches in that they also follow a written Order of Service printed in the Sunday bulletin. This bulletin averages four to five pages (front and back) per Sunday. Much smaller than the bulletins of the other two churches, this bulletin has on its cover a picture of the church and the biblical statement, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." This cover statement illustrates the differences between this church and the other two churches, namely, that the first two churches explicitly combine their religious and social missions for the world to see. The partial-manuscript minister's church, in contrast, pushes social (and political) missions into the background and pushes its religious mission to the front. This is not to say that the other churches do not place their religious missions at the top of their priorities. Indeed, they do. However, they seem to consider their social mission as part of their religious mission.

Usually, the bulletin at the partial-manuscript minister's church includes one page devoted to the Order of Service, another devoted to a list of the sick and shut-in, a page or two that lists announcements, and finally a page which lists church officers and regular weekly church activities. Also, on the last page of each bulletin is a space called "sermon notes" where parishioners can take notes on the sermon. That is unique to this church. The other two churches provide no space in the bulletin to take notes on the sermon. This space is very small, but by virtue of its existence, one may assume that the idea of taking written notes is not an alien idea. My acquaintance in this church even told me that many people including himself take notes during the sermon. As I looked for this during my observation, I found that the people I noticed taking notes were the younger, more educated members who had been introduced to me by my acquaintance, then a doctoral candidate in biomedical engineering, and his wife, a medical doctor. Very few of the other members of the congregation take any kind of notes during the sermon.

This church's order of worship only deviates from what is printed in the bulletin when there is a guest speaker, and even the, the deviation is slight. The congregation moves through the order of worship in a very straightforward manner. The services open with the same hymn each week and a scripture which is printed in the bulletin. This call-to-worship scripture was the same three times out of the five weeks of services for which I have tapes. The congregation reads this call to worship aloud as a group, but there is no responsive reading as it is done in the other two churches. However, as in the other two churches, there are musical selections, announcements, scriptural readings, and as in the manuscript minister's church, an altar call in each service.

Also like the other churches, this church adds to the bulletin communion-related concerns on every first Sunday when they celebrate communion. In addition, during the time of my observation, a memory verse was assigned in the bulletin each week. The congregation was given the book, chapter, and verse of the passage which they were to look up and memorize. This verse changes each week, unlike in the manuscript minister's church, where a memory verse is assigned every month and is printed in the weekly bulletin. For both of these churches, assigning a memory verse encourages the congregation to learn the Bible. In African-American churches there is great value attached to being able to recite Bible verses from memory because it indicates that you know the Bible.

As in the other two churches, in the partial-manuscript minister's church, oral language dominates the service, particularly for the congregation. For them the most important part of the service, the sermon, is oral and aural, whereas for the minister, it is oral and written. Written texts are the basis for his sermons. The written texts that the congregation regularly uses during the service are the bulletins, the hymnal, and for a brief 60 seconds or so, the Bible.

The Sermon As A Literacy Event: The Ties That Bind

One of the more well-known facts about African-American sermons is that they are characterized by a call-and-response pattern, in which the congregation provides feedback to the minister throughout the sermon. This audience participation pattern is always prevalent in the minds of the three ministers in this study. It is this pattern that prompts each minister to characterize the sermon as a dialogue and because of this characterization to distinguish African-American sermons from most other American protestant sermons (there are some exceptions) which more closely resemble a monologue. This dialogic pattern is the rhetorical device that acts as the foundation for the other three devices I focus on in this section.

In the ministers' discussions of their sermon preparation, each seems acutely aware of the role of the congregation in the construction of a successful sermon. Even the manuscript minister who writes practically all of his sermons speaks of making room for the congregation to participate in the sermon. What these ministers do in their "texts" is to invite audience participation by using the sermon to create and maintain a community. In a sense, viewing the sermon as a dialogue between minister and congregation makes the sermon a community text that is written (or created) through a collaboration between minister and congregation. What I examine in the remainder of this chapter are the features used by the ministers in the sermons that contribute to this sense of community and create space for the dialogue.

Much of the success and/or effectiveness of the three ministers depends on their creating a bond between themselves and their congregations. Also, because part of people's identities are linked with the communities in which they hold memberships, when these preachers use sermons to construct communities, they are also constructing not only their identities, but also the identities of the members of the congregation.

Why is it important to create this sense of community? According to the ministers, placing themselves in the congregation and seeing themselves as part of the group, helps them keep their sermons relevant to the congregation, helps build trust between the minister and the congregation, and therefore, makes it easier for the congregation to hear and accept the message that the minister is preaching. Ultimately, these three ministers try to eliminate distance between them and the congregation through the sermon; yet, they must maintain the "proper" distance because of their leadership positions. Already we can see the multiple functions of this literacy event as well as its multidimensional nature.

The rhetorical strategies that the ministers use to construct and maintain community range from the seemingly simple reliance on first person plural pronouns to the more complex reliance on personal narratives and shared information. Various rhetorical devices are used by these ministers to construct community. It is also important to note that the theme of community also pervades the sermons as a mechanism for emphasis.

"We, The People"

One of the most obvious strategies that each minister consistently uses to help establish a sense of community is the employing of the collective pronouns *we, our,* and *us*. This strategy is a favorite of these ministers, and although it is not unique to African-American sermons (see Jellema, 1988), it is a feature that they use effectively. When the ministers use this strategy, they are tapping into the multiple levels of community represented in their churches as well as establishing their relationships with those communities. Consider the following examples from two different sermons in which the manuscript minister invokes at least three communities: his specific church community, the community of Christians, and society at large. As he taps into these three communities, his membership in these communities is also emphasized:

> *Example 1:* Some of the meanest most miserable ungodly people I know got more degrees behind they names and make more money than most of us will ever see in a lifetime.

> *Example 2:* We not at the pinnacle and we not in the pits. We just in between. Nothing to complain about and nothing to write home about either. We're not on a constant high no matter what kind of rhetoric we spout. And we not continuously in the dumps. Oh we have our moments like everybody else. But for the most part we find ourselves hanging around that gray area called in between.

In the first example, the pronoun *us* is so subtly used that we almost miss it. Based on its linguistic context, we can reasonably deduce that the community that the manuscript minister is tapping into is the specific church community. More interesting than the community that he taps into is that he includes himself in this community with the rest of the congregation. He is constructing his identity as a "regular guy" out there in the pew with little money just like everyone else in the church. Yet, he has a BA, two MAs, and was working toward a doctorate (which he has obtained since the study). He drives an expensive car, makes a most respectable if not enviable salary, and lives in an upper middle class Chicago neighborhood (in the church parsonage). But he constructs an identity that downplays his credentials and status.

It's important to this minister that he not separate himself from the congregation based on socioeconomic issues. That is seen even more clearly in the second example taken from the first few minutes of one the manuscript minister's sermons. In this example, *we* can have at least three referents—the church community, the Christian community, and the community of people in general. The primary audience seems to be the church community; yet, there are no cues that signal a specific community. Again, the minister establishes himself as a member of all of these communities, constructing his identity and contributing to the construction of their identities as a group. The congregation's apparent acceptance of their identities as shaped in this example (through nods of the head, amens, and other comments) marks their contribution to the dialogue that constructs their identities.

Another prominent community which the ministers, particularly the manuscript and nonmanuscript ministers, reference consistently is the African-American community. This is no surprise given the philosophies of those two ministers. They constantly emphasize their identities as African Americans and try to get their congregation to do so as well. Therefore, many times, the collective pronouns refer to the African-American community to which the ministers and their congregations belong. Consider the following example from the manuscript minister and a later example from the nonmanuscript minister:

> *Example:* The God of Harriet Tubman is an *us* God—Community
>
> The God of Martin Delaney is an *us* God—Community
>
> The God of Ida B. Wells is an *us* God—Community

These names refer to famous African Americans from the past. One reading of this passage is that the God of these noteworthy African Americans who struggled yet accomplished much is a God of the people—a God who embraces African Americans. He is not a *them* God—a God for the rich and powerful only, or a God for whites only. African Americans are part of the community too. Here, the theme of community is intertwined with constructing the community. This passage is also one of those examples, which I address later, of using an assumed shared knowledge between minister and congregation to construct and maintain community.

An example of the nonmanuscript minister using collective pronouns to emphasize the African-American community occurs in statements such as the following:

> *Example:* We can no longer stand in this world as second class in the economic world, but we got to think big.

Previous statements in the sermon signal that we refers to African Americans. The nonmanuscript minister implies that he, along with his other sisters and brothers, needs to think big. Of course, after being in this church for only a couple of weeks, it is clear that this minister thinks big consistently and that he is really trying to get African Americans in general, and his African-American congregation in particular, to think big. In this case, the minister is trying to change the perceived identity of the community. Yet, he has chosen not to place himself apart from the community he is addressing.

"I Can Witness"

This strategy of using collective pronouns to bind the ministers with their congregations seems obvious and simple, but its functions, as shown above, are subtle and complex. A less obvious strategy in creating and maintaining a community in the sermon is the use of personal narratives and testimonial-like statements. Again, this pattern is prevalent in both the manuscript and nonmanuscript ministers' sermons. These ministers' reference to themselves as individuals in the sermons most often take the form of personal stories, testimonies, and testimonial-like statements. In these churches there appears to be an implied distinction between testimonies and what I refer to as testimonial-like statements. A person who testifies, who gives a testimony, usually gives a detailed account of some tragedy or down time in his or her life. The account ends with how God brought him or her through this bad time. The testimony is usually quite specific. A testimonial-like statement is a more general version of "testifying;" for example, "God has lifted me up when I was down." Yet, we do not know what the down period was. My field notes contain several entries concerning how excited and vocal the congregations become in the midst of these ministers' stories or testimonies.

During interviews, each minister commented on how African-American churches value personal stories from the ministers. The partial-manuscript minister explains this value most succinctly: "In black churches, the people want to know what God has done for you [the minister]. What can you testify to?" The ministers gain more credibility and authority when they can show their congregations that they know what they are preaching about because they have been down and survived, they have been scared and conquered the fear, they have had experiences which have paralleled those of the people in the pew, and they have persevered and prospered. These personal stories provide the congregation with a more intimate view of the minister.

In sharing something personal, be it poignant or funny, these ministers forge even stronger bonds between themselves and the congregations; hence, they are strengthening community ties. The following example is a personal narrative that the nonmanuscript minister uses as an illustration in his sermon about Abraham:

I was in the Marine Corps. I was training in Parris Island. I learned something at Parris Island. It was back in those days in 1954 when they was killing marines down there. Marines died on forced marches. I went down there right after six marines were drowned. When I got there the first thing I heard when I got off the bus, somebody said "move." Then he called me a name that just hurt me to my heart. When he called me he said move it you [blank] and I went to him and said sir, just a minute. I said I'm "—" Then he called me another name. I don't care who the [blank] you are. It took me a whole week. My heart just lay bare. I was hurt to the core. But every time in the morning they could get up early when you are tired they would come in and say "move it." We just got in bed. "Move it."

My friend and I were put in swimming. I never swam in my life. I didn't know how to swim. They took us into the pool. One day there we were. I thought we were going in there to learn how to doggy paddle. Stand on the side, put your feed up and down, learn how to swim the normal and intelligent way. There we all were there buck naked standing over the side of the pool. I remember all of us lined up. DIs standing on the side over there. There was a young brother named Logan standing next to me. I said, "Logan guess we're going to learn to swim in a minute. They going to teach us how to do this." Logan said, "Yes I've been waiting for this." Then they told us I want you to bend over just like that (demonstrates to congregation). All of us bent over then I heard this loud crack, "Move it!" I turned and looked back and said, "Do you mean?" "Yes, move it." I looked at Logan and said, "We're on this island out here. We're not going to get out of here. I better move." Logan said "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes." I jumped in. I took a risk. When I jumped in I went down. There I was swallowing the whole pool. I went up and down again. I started out the third time. They threw something out and pulled me out….Brothers and sisters God is often saying to us and you know something I moved at least four times, almost drowned at least four times. But the fifth time I got out there. I found a way of swimming like nobody has ever seen before. I got out that pool. I was not going to drown out there anymore. Brothers and sisters what I'm saying to you. God said it to Abraham, "Move it."

This lengthy example is actually two smaller stories within one longer one, and it highlights this preacher's skills as a storyteller. Storytelling, be it personal or biblical, is a dominant rhetorical device that this minister uses throughout his sermons. The story above is one of his most successful ones as measured by the large amount and loud volume of feedback he receives from the congregation. In this example, the minister shows himself as a naïve, sometimes frightened young man who overcomes these drawbacks by taking a risk, by moving forward. This characterization of him as naïve and frightened is in direct conflict with the person that he seemingly is now. He has a confident, self-assured presence. One might view him more as a drill instructor than a naïve marine private. Therefore, sharing this story about himself with the congregation shows the congregation a different, more vulnerable side of him.

This minister also uses the testimonial-like examples in his sermons to the same effect as he uses the narrative:

> *Example*: A Jesus that I know lives. He is not a dead Jesus. This Jesus that I serve, this Jesus that I know is alive. The Jesus is at this table right now (inaudible) Jesus, he's alive. He lives. How do I know he lives? Because he walks with me and he talks with me. He tells me I am his own. Jesus is the life of the world. Jesus puts joy in my life. Jesus gives me peace when I'm sorrow…

> *Example*: Well what do I get from it? You see these degrees that I've got? Well I see. They're not there just for me. But one is for my father, one is for my grandfather, one is for my great-grandfather, one is for those generations yet unborn. I've come a long way. And don't stop me now. I am what I am Thank God. I am so glad to be (inaudible). Thank you Jesus. I am what I am. Don't mess with me. Don't mess with me.

The latter example is fascinating because it relates to the earlier example from this minister of thinking big, and it contributes a new dimension to the issue of constructing an identity through the sermon. Although the manuscript minister emphasizes how he is just like everybody else, this minister emphasizes how he is just like everybody else, this minister emphasizes how he is not like everybody else. The latter example emphasizes his degrees. The earlier narrative emphasizes how he takes risks. He is constructing an identity of himself as a strong-willed, aggressive, upwardly mobile person. He wants his congregation to reach his heights and not accept being "just plain ole folks." He wants them, particularly his African-American congregation, to construct an identity different from that which society has given the. And the implicit message is that he should be the role model for this reconstruction of identity.

Even though the nonmanuscript minister appears to distance himself from his congregation by emphasizing his successes, he, in fact, is trying to decrease the gap by appealing to them to rise to his heights and by showing them that his successes were for those who had come before him and for "generations yet unborn." He emphasizes his dedication to his people and, implicitly, his faith that his risks will pay off. The evidence of the value of his strategy is the positive response of the congregation; their level of feedback increases; they respond vocally, and they applaud with a great deal of energy. Through this focus on himself, this minister skillfully manages to maintain community ties, and he skillfully yet subtly establishes some standards for community behavior: taking risk, thinking big, and so on.

The final example below fits into two categories. It is another example of the testimonial-like statement, and it is an example that introduces the strategy of using shared information between minister and congregation to emphasize community ties.

> *Example*: I don't sing…because of thunderous ovations and grand audiences. I don't sing…because I've got a voice like James Cleveland, Dave Peaceton, or Teddy Pendergrass. I don't sing because I think I got a solo voice, and I might get discovered by some record company. I sing to praise him. I sing to my little light shine. I sing…because God has been good to me. I sing because I'm happy and I praise him and I say thank you Lord. I sing because I'm free. And I praise him. I sing because I know he watches over me.

As the manuscript minister delivers this part of his sermon, much of the congregation stands and applauds, waves their hands, and responds with encouragements such as "preach," "yes," "amen," "thank you Jesus," and other phrases. As they are responding to the minister's words about himself and his relationship with God, there also seems to be a kind of transformation which takes place. The congregation is moved by the witnessing of the minister, but they also identify with him. That is, the "I" in the example becomes a collective "I" that refers not only to the minister but also to the community of believers in that congregation. This minister is no longer speaking for himself but for the community as well. This takes the personal testimony to a new dimension in which the minister's story becomes the people's story.

The manuscript minister says that one of his goals when he prepares his sermons is to seek this collective voice. He views himself as part of the congregation and asks himself, "What do I need to hear today?" He is successful only if he is so much a part of the congregation that he sees himself in them, and they see themselves in him; hence, the "I" becomes representational. When the minister and congregation identify with each other so strongly, the community ties are more deeply embedded, the minister is more firmly entrenched as a role model, and his or her use of language and literacy is more influential.

"The Knowledge We Share"

The previous example provides a segue into the final feature of the literacy event on which this chapter focuses—relying on shared knowledge. These ministers relied on shared knowledge between themselves and their congregation to signal community identification. That is, the ministers assume that their congregation, by virtue of their membership in various communities, has a body of knowledge about certain topics, that that this knowledge is part of their culture. Therefore, these ministers assume that they do not need to explain certain references that come under the auspices of these topics. Many of the examples in the sermons point to an assumed shared knowledge of popular culture, of the Bible, and most often, of African-American culture and history. The previous example emphasizes a knowledge of African-American music, both secular and gospel. James Cleveland was a well-known African-American gospel singer. David Peaceton is most recently known as a rhythm and blues singer, and Teddy Pendergrass is noted for being a soul singer. All of these singers are popular in the African-American community and noted for their great voices. The manuscript minister assumes that this information is knowledge that the community shares, therefore, there is no need to explain.

In addition to the three references that rely on shared or given information, this example also taps into the community knowledge of music in a different way. Included in the minister's example are lyrics from the popular gospel song

"His Eye Is On the Sparrow." This song is not unique to the African-American community, and it is a very popular song. "I sing because I'm happy/ I sing because I'm free/I know that he watches over me" are lyrics found in this song. Never in the sermon does the minister make mention of the song title. Again, he assumes that the congregation knows the song. Using song lyrics as examples, either gospel or secular, is a common device for the manuscript and nonmanuscript ministers. In interviews each minister emphasized how important music is in the African-American community, particularly in the African-American worship tradition. Music is so important that it becomes part of the text and, therefore, part of the literacy event. Neither of these ministers make clear distinctions between secular and sacred music.

As I mentioned earlier, the ministers also assume a shared knowledge of African-American history. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed an example from the manuscript minister that employed collective pronouns and focused thematically on community: "the God of Harriet Tubman is an *us* God….community/ the God of Martin Delaney is an *us* God…community/ the god of Ida B. Wells is an *us* God…community." The minister mentioned other famous African-American historical figures. Again, he offers no explanation of who these people were. His assumption is that people in the community know these people, and if they do not, they should know and better find out about their history and culture, or that those who do not know are not in the community. Being in the community and not having the shared knowledge becomes, for some, a motivation to learn—a subtle teaching device like many of the strategies discussed earlier.

Using examples from the culture of his congregation not only emphasizes the value of the culture but also signals that the minister knows the music, history, literature, and ways of the community. When we assume memberships in the same communities, then we feel comfortable assuming that other members of that community are familiar with much of the same information. Tapping into that familiarity, that common ground, through the text is a major function of the sermon. Tapping into that familiarity also allows the ministers to move their congregations from the familiar to the unfamiliar, by beginning with what people know—a sound pedagogical strategy.

Conclusion

I had three major goals in this chapter: (a) to describe the major literacy events and their functions in three African-American churches; (b) to describe and analyze the features and functions of the African-American sermon, the major literacy event in African-American churches; and (c) to compare and contrast models of literacy in three African-American churches with models of literacy in the academy. The discussion of the first goal provides a context for discussing the second goal, a description and analysis of the African-American sermon, which in turn provides the basis for the third goal. All of the literacy events discussed meet Heath's (1982) definition of a literacy event: "Any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and / or comprehension of print plays a role" (p.92).

Even though each of the three churches represents a different denomination and has ministers with different styles, there was some consistency in the kinds of literacy events which took place in each church. The most obvious literacy event in each church beyond the sermon was represented in the church bulletin. The bulletin's major function was to disseminate information, but it also served as a structuring device by providing the Order of Worship for the service and as a mnemonic device, reminding the congregations of the verse they were to memorize weekly or monthly.

Other literacy events in both the manuscript and nonmanuscript minister's churches included responsive readings of the scriptures from either the bulletin or the hymnal. And one of the more interesting yet overlooked literacy events in each church was the songs assigned. At least one song in each church functioned as a reading act. That is, the song was either printed in the bulletin or in the hymnal. The literacy events mentioned above are typical kinds of literacy events recognized and/ or used in the academy because they involve reading print. They are, as this chapter demonstrates, part of the ritualistic services at most African-American churches and many protestant churches in general.

The atypical literacy event in this institution is the major one—the African-American sermon. The description of the features of the sermon has shown its uniqueness both as a literacy event—an ongoing process—and as a literate text. The textual features of the sermon which I have focused on are (a) use of collective pronouns in the sermon, (b) use of personal narratives and testimony, (c) reliance on shared cultural knowledge, and (d) the dialogic quality of African-American sermons. Because of its foundational role, the fourth feature—the dialogic quality—could not be treated separately; instead, it is shown to be an integral part of each textual feature. The ministers use these prominent sermonic features to create a community in their churches. The text—the sermon—becomes the major instrument by which to construct and maintain community ties and identities.

As the analysis has shown, the first three features are rhetorical devices that the ministers use in their sermons to draw them closer together with their congregation. The ministers use collective pronouns and personal narratives to shoe their congregations that they are no different than the people sitting in the pews, that they [the ministers] can identify with their congregation. The third device calls for the ministers to display their understanding of cultural knowledge, thus establishing community insider/ outsider status. These are all devices that encourage the congregation to involve themselves in the making of the text. Seeing themselves as part of the text, as being able to provide feedback and respond to the minister as part of the sermon, is a traditional characteristic of African-American sermons, and it is this process that is the essence of the fourth device—the dialogic quality.

The final goal—comparing and contrasting literacy in these African-American churches with literacy in the academy—is best understood by examining the implications of this study. First, this study suggests that because of the dialogic quality of African-American sermons and the focus on constructing community identities through the sermon, no fixed boundary between speaker and audience exists. Instead, participant roles constantly switch back and fort during the sermon. Even when a minister writes his sermon, as the manuscript minister does, he understands, allows, and, in fact, needs audience participation to complete the text. Audience participation in performance events, such as the sermon, is an Afrocentric concept characteristic of many African-American communities' performance-oriented events (R.F. Thompson, 1983).

The dialogic nature of the text also suggests, because of the lack of fixed boundaries, that the sermon can realistically be viewed as a community text. As he conceives of and shapes the sermon, the minister has no real ownership of the text. The ministers in this study argue that once a sermon is preached, it is no longer their sermon. There appears to be no concept such as ownership of text or intellectual property. Yet, academic literacy holds as one of its most sacred principles the ownership of words. These ministers also suggest that even if they preach the same sermon twice, it really is not the same sermon. Once the audience changes, the dialogue changes, and, therefore, the sermon changes. In other words, the sermon can never be decontextualized. Much of its meaning is determined by the participants.

As the boundaries are blurred between speaker and audience, so too are the boundaries between oral and written patterns in the sermons. Even through the sermon is an orally performed event, it also represents a literate text, one that uses varying degrees of writing and speech. This integration of speech and writing is part of the text of the sermon and once more points to the blurred boundaries and seamlessness that surround the sermons. This seamlessness can be found not only within the sermons. This seamlessness can be found not only within the sermons, but also within the service that surrounds the sermon (see Mountford, 1991). That is, neither the sermons nor the service can be easily segmented into discreet sections.

The blurred boundaries between speech and writing are most evident when one considers how many devices the manuscript and nonmanuscript ministers' texts have in common, even through one minister wrote everything down and preached verbatim from his written text, and the other wrote nothing. Because the sermon is an orally performed event, one is inclined to think of it as only an oral text, but the sermons are generally rooted in biblical scriptures—a written text. In addition, these ministers are highly literate men (as defined by the academy) whose lives are deeply influenced by written words. Yet, clearly, they do not view writing and speaking as an either/or dichotomy; in their communities, writing and speaking are intertwined and interdependent. The boundaries blur.

The nonfixed and blurred boundaries which characterize these ministers' sermons point toward a model of a literate text that is far different from the model that most quickly comes to mind when one thinks of the kind of literate text that dominates in school—the academic essay. The academic essay is generally characterized by its fixed boundaries between media and genres, its radical individualism and monologic quality, its decontextualized meaning, and its traditional definitions of intellectual property. These are features of the essayist tradition.

Although some argue that this is an ideal rather than a real model of the academic essay, it is still the model from which we operate in the academy and which we use to measure most other models and to measure students. Even though collaboratively written texts are acceptable texts in the academy, the text is still one that uses the monologic model. No matter how many writers a collaborative text may have, the writers strive for only one voice to be heard, as if there were only one writer and there were no audience involvement in the text.

Thus, the African-American sermon stands as a model of a literate text which in many ways is the antithesis of the academic essay and promotes a type of literacy which is the antithesis of the most popular academic notion of literacy. Like those who point to electronic and hypertextual forms of literacy, this study suggests that the academy must broaden its definition of literacy and, in addition, its conceptualization of the literate text and the "writer" or "owner" of that text. Privileging the essayist tradition of literacy leaves the academy unable and unwilling to recognize and validate types of literacies from other communities. One powerful consequence of this weakness is that we ignore the richness of literacies that our students from nonmainstream communities bring to the academy, literacies that could be used to help many of these students to more easily expand their knowledge base to include academic literacies. Most seriously, we also close ourselves off from opportunities to learn more about the diverse cultures and literacies represented in our classrooms. If multiculturalism and diversity are the future of the academy, then so is multiliteracy.

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NOW THAT YOU'VE READ, what do you think?

1. What have been your experiences with what Moss calls here the "African-American sermon"? If you have no direct experiences with this, what experiences have you had with a church community you know well? Are your experiences similar to those Moss articulates? Different? In what ways? What are we to make of these similarities? these differences? If you haven't had many direct experiences with a particular church, work with what you do know about the literacies associated with church. (How you know what you know about churches.)
2. What are the "features of African-American preaching" as Moss describes them? List them and then reflect upon what conclusions we can draw from that list.
3. What are the literacy practices Moss observes? Name at least three. What else can we learn from these lists and the patterns that emerge from them?
4. If your experiences are with religious institutions quite unlike the ones Moss describes, reflect on those experiences and unpack them for us. What texts are involved at these church services? What do members of the congregation typically say before, after, and during the service? What "norms" are "attached to the oral performance" of the texts involved (perhaps the sermon) and which are "attached to the reading act" (Moss 102)?

READING

Learning to Serve:

The Language and Literacy of Food Service Workers

Tony Mirabelli

Tony Mirabelli is a Tutorial Coordinator at University of California-Berkeley, where—in 2001, he earned his PhD in Education in Language, Literacy and Culture. His article, "Learning to Serve: The Language and Literacy of Food Service Workers," examines the literacy practices involved in restaurant work in many of the same ways Moss looked at the African-American church. Like Moss, Mirabelli had extensive personal experience with these literacy events and practices as they manifest themselves in the contexts he investigates. The following article examines an Italian-American restaurant where he worked as a waiter for two years.

BEFORE YOU READ the following essay, *read yourself*.

1. What sorts of literacy events and practices do you understand to be a regular part of food service work? Have you ever worked in a restaurant? If not, the time you've spent in one or more restaurants will help you answer these questions. Make use of that knowledge. Might the literacy practices required of workers in what Mirabelli calls "Diner restaurants" differ from those required of fast-food service workers? How? What literacy practices and events are involved with a restaurant you know particularly well? What kinds of texts can be found? How are they used? What "literacy events" surround their use?

2. According to the following essay, "how language is spoken, read, or written in a restaurant may be vastly different from how it is used in a classroom. . . . How the waitress or waiter understands and uses texts such as the menu and how she or he 'reads' and verbally interacts with the customer reflect carefully constructed uses of language and literacy" (145). What does he mean by this? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Bitterwaitress.com is one of the newest among a burgeoning number of worker-produced websites associated with the service industry.[1] The menu on the first page of this website offers links to gossip about celebrity behavior in restaurants, gossip about chefs and restaurant owners, accounts from famous people who were once waitresses,[2] and customer-related horror stories. There is also a forum that includes a "hate mail" page that posts email criticisms of the website itself, as well as general criticisms of waitressing, but the criticisms are followed by rebuttals usually from past or present waitresses. Predictably, most of the criticisms either implicitly or explicitly portray waitresses as ignorant and stupid. One email respondent didn't like what he read on the customer horror story page and sent in this response:

> *If you find your job [as a waitress] so despicable, then go get an education and get a REAL job. You are whining about something that you can fix. Stop being such a weakling, go out and learn something, anything, and go make a real contribution to society….Wait, let me guess: you do not have any marketable skills or useful knowledge, so you do what any bumbling fool can do, wait on tables. This is your own fault.*

This response inspired a number of rebuttals of which the following two best summarize the overall sentiment expressed in response to the rant above. The first is from the webmaster of *bitterwaitress.com*:

> *Is it possible that I have an education, maybe I went to, oh say, Duke, and I just waitressed for some free time? Or that there are very many people in the industry who do this so that they CAN get an education? Not all of us were born with a trust fund.—There is, I might add, considerably more or less to a job than*

> *a "clear cut" salary. If you…live in New York,…you'll know that empty stores and un-crowded subways are half the reason to work at night. By the way, what are the three Leovilles? What are the two kinds of tripe? Who was Cesar Ritz' partner? What is the JavaScript for a rollover? I guess I would have to ask a bumbling fool those questions. So, tell me then.*

The second is from a mother of four:

> *I might not have a college education, but I would love to see those so called intelligent people get a big tip out of a bad meal, or from a person who is rude and cocky just because that's the way they are—that takes talent and its not a talent you can learn at any university. So, think about it before you say, "poor girl—to dumb to get a real job…."*

Assumptions that waitresses (and waiters) are ignorant and stupid and that waiting on tables contributes little to society are not new. The rebuttals to commonplace, pejorative understandings of the food service industry suggest, however, that there is complexity and skill that may go unrecognized by the general public or institutions such as universities. Indeed institutions, particularly government and corporate entities in the United States, like the Bureau of Labor Statistics or the National Skills Labor Board, define waiting on tables as a low skilled profession. By defining this kind of work as low skilled, there is a concomitant implication that the more than one-third of America's work force who do it are low skilled.

Service occupations, otherwise known as "in-person" services (Reich, 1992) or "interactive services" (Leidner, 1993; MacDonald and Sirianni, 1996), include any kind of work which fundamentally involves face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions and conscious manipulation of self-presentation. As distinguished from white-collar service work, this category of "emotional proletariat" (MacDonald and Sirianni, 1996) is comprised primarily of retail sales workers, hotel workers, cashiers, house cleaners, flight attendants, taxi drivers, package delivery drivers, and waiters, among others. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (1996), one-fifth of the jobs in eating, drinking, and grocery store establishments are held by youth workers between the ages of 16 and 24. While this kind of work is traditionally assumed to be primarily a stop-gap for young workers who will later move up and on to other careers, it also involves youths who will later end up in both middle- and working-class careers. It should not be forgotten that more than two thirds of the workers involved in food service are mature adults—many or most who began their careers in the same or similar industries. Interactive service work is a significant part of the economy in the U.S. today, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that jobs will be "abundant" in this category through 2006.

Economists such as Peter Drucker (1993) suggest that interactive service workers lack the necessary education to be "knowledge" workers. These economists support general conceptions that service work is "mindless," involving routine and repetitive tasks that require little education. This orientation further suggests that these supposedly low skilled workers lack the problem identifying, problem solving, and other high level abilities needed to work in other occupations. However, relatively little specific attention and analysis have been give to the literacy skills and language abilities needed to do this work. My research investigates these issues with a focus on waiters and waitresses who work in diners. Diner restaurants are somewhat distinct from fast food or fine-dining restaurants, and they also epitomize many of the assumptions held about low skilled workplaces that require interactive services. The National Skills Standard Board, for instance, has determined that a ninth-grade level of spoken and written language use is needed to be a waiter or a waitress. Yet, how language is spoken, read, or written in a restaurant may be vastly different from how it is used in a classroom. A seemingly simple event such as taking a customer's food order can become significantly more complex, for example, when a customer has a special request. How the waitress or waiter understands and uses texts such as the menu and how she or he "reads" and verbally interacts with the customer reflect carefully constructed uses of language and literacy.

This chapter explores these constructed ways of "reading" texts (and customers) along with the verbal "performances" and other manipulations of self-presentation that characterize interactive service work. In line with MacDonald and Sirianni (1996), I hope this work will contribute to the development of understandings and policies that build more respect and recognition for service work to help ensure it does not become equated with servitude.

Literacy And Contemporary Theory

In contrast to institutional assessments such as the National Skills Standards Board (1995), current thinking in key areas of education, sociology, anthropology and linguistics views language, literacy, and learning as embedded in social practice rather than entirely in the minds of individuals (Street, 1984; Gee, 1991; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Kress, 1993; Mahiri and Sablo, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Gee, Hull, and Lankshear, 1996). As earlier chapters in this book have noted, Gee (1991: 6)—a key proponent of this conception of literacy—explains that to be literate means to have control of "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network.'" In a similar fashion, research work located explicitly within workplace studies proposes that literacy is "a range of practices specific to groups and individuals of different cultures, races, classes and genders" (Hull et al., 1996: 5).

In most societal institution, however, literacy, continues to be defined by considerations of achievement and by abstract, standardized tests of individual students. Also, there is a decided focus on printed texts over other mediums of communication like visual and audio. Such a focus limits our understanding of literacy in terms of its use in specific situations in multiple modes of communication. The New Literacy Studies orientation that shapes the work reported in this book argues that literacy extends beyond individual experiences of reading and writing to include the various modes of communication and situations of any socially meaningful group or network where language is used in multiple ways. The New London Group (1996), for example, claims that due to changes in the social and economic environment, schools too must begin to consider language and literacy education in terms of "multiliteracies." The concept of multiliteracies supplements traditional literacy pedagogy by addressing the multiplicity of communications channels and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today. Central to this study is the understanding that literate acts are embedded in specific situations and that they also extend beyond the printed text involving other modes of communication including both verbal and nonverbal. In this chapter, I illustrate something of the character of literacies specific to the "social network" of waiting on tables and show how they are distinct from the conceptions of literacy commonly associated with formal education. This is not simply to suggest that there is a jargon specific to the work, which of course there is, but that there is something unique and complex about the ways waiters and waitresses in diners use language and literacy in doing their work.

Methodology

Taken together, extant New Literacies Studies research makes a formidable argument for the need to re-evaluate how we understand literacy in the workplace—particularly from the perspective of interactive service workers. The research reported here is modeled after Hull and her colleagues' groundbreaking ethnographic study of skill requirements in the factories of two different Silicon Valley computer manufacturing plants (1996). Instead of studying manufacturing plants, the larger research study I conducted and that underpins the study reported here involves two diner restaurants—one that is corporately owned and one that is privately owned. In this chapter, however, I focus only on the one that is privately owned to begin addressing the specific ways that language use and literacy practices function in this kind of workplace.

To analyze the data, I relied on some of the methodological tools from the work of Hull and her colleagues (1996). In short, I looked at patterns of thought and behavior in the setting; I identified key events taking place; I did conversational analysis of verbal interactions; and, I conducted sociocultural analyses of key work events.

The data used in this chapter came from direct participation, observation, field notes, documents, interviews, tape recordings, and transcriptions, as well as from historical and bibliographic literature. I myself have been a waiter (both part-time and full-time over a ten-year period), and I was actually employed at the privately owned restaurant during my data collection period. In addition to providing important insights into worker skills, attitudes, and behaviors, my experience and positioning in this setting also enabled access to unique aspects of the work that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. The primary data considered in this chapter were collected during eight-hour periods of participant observation on Friday and/or Saturday nights in the restaurant. I chose weekend nights because they were usually the busiest times in the diner and were therefore the most challenging for the workers. Weekend shifts are also the most lucrative for the restaurant and the workers.

Lou's Restaurant

Lou's Restaurant[3] is a modest, privately owned diner restaurant patterned in a style that is popular in the local region. It has an open kitchen layout with a counter where individual customers can come and sit directly in front of the cooks' line and watch the "drama" of food service unfold while enjoying their meals. The food served at Lou's is Italian-American and it includes pastas, seafood, and a variety of sautéed or broiled poultry, beef, and veal. As is often the case with diner restaurants, Lou's has over ninety main course items, including several kinds of appetizers and salads, as well as a number of side dishes. The primary participants focused on in this chapter are three waiters at Lou's: John, Harvey, and myself.

After finishing my master's degree in English literature and deciding to move out of the state where I taught English as a Second Language at a community college, I ended up working as a waiter for two years at Lou's. This work allowed me to survive financially while further advancing my academic career. At the time I began my study at this site, the only waiter to have worked longer than two years at Lou's was John. Like myself, John began working in the restaurant business to earn extra money while in school after he had been discharged from the Marines, where he had been trained as a radio operator, telephone wireman, and Arabic translator. Two days after his honorable discharge, he started working in the restaurant that four years later would become Lou's. He subsequently has worked there for ten years. John also is the most experienced waiter at Lou's, and although the restaurant does not have an official "head" waiter, John is considered by his peers to be the expert. In an interview, he noted that it took almost ten years before he felt that he had really begun to master his craft.

Harvey might also be considered a master waiter, having been in the profession for over thirty years. However, at the beginning of the study he had been with Lou's for only two weeks. He was initially reticent to participate in the study because he said he lacked experience at this restaurant, and "didn't know the menu." Having left home when he was 14 years old to come "out West," over the years he had done a stint in the Air Force, held a position as a postal clerk, worked as a bellhop and bartender, and even had the opportunity to manage a local café. He decided that he did not like managerial work because he missed the freedom, autonomy, and customer interaction he had as a waiter and took a position at Lou's.

The Menu

Harvey's concern over not knowing the menu was not surprising. The menu is the most important printed text used by waiters and waitresses, and not knowing it can dramatically affect how they are able to do their work. The menu is the key text used for most interactions with the customer, and, of course, the contents of menus vary greatly from restaurant to restaurant. But, what is a menu and what does it mean to have a literate understanding of one?

The restaurant menu is a genre unto itself. There is regularity and predictability in the conventions used such as the listing, categorizing, and pricing of individual, ready-made food items. The menu at Lou's contains ninety main course items, as well as a variety of soups, salads, appetizers, and side dishes. In addition, there are numerous selections where, for example, many main course items offer customers a choice of their own starch item from a selection of four: spaghetti, ravioli, french fries, or a baked potato. Some of the main course items, such as sandwiches, however, only come with french fries—but if the customer prefers something such as spaghetti, or vegetables instead of fries, they can substitute another item for a small charge, although this service is not listed in the menu. In addition to the food menu, there is also a wine menu and a full service bar meaning that hard liquor is sold in this restaurant. There are twenty different kinds of wine sold by the glass and a selection of thirty-eight different kinds of wine sold by the bottle, and customers can order most other kinds of alcoholic beverages.

In one context, waitresses and waiters' knowing the meaning of the words in the menus means knowing the process of food production in the restaurant. But this meaning is generally only used when a customer has a question or special request. In such situations the meaning of the words on the page are defined more by the questions and the waiters or waitresses' understanding of specific food preparation than by any standard cookbook or dictionary. For example, the *Better Homes and Gardens New Cook Book* (1996) presents a recipe for marinara sauce calling for a thick sauce all sautéed and simmered for over thirty minutes. At Lou's, a marinara sauce is cooked in less than ten minutes and is a light tomato sauce consisting of fresh tomatoes, garlic, and parsley sautéed in olive oil. At a similar restaurant nearby—Joe's Italian Diner—marinara sauce is a seafood sauce, albeit tomato based. Someone who is familiar with Italian cooking will know that marinara sauce will have ingredients like tomatoes, olive oil, and garlic, but, in a restaurant, to have a more complete understanding of a work like *marinara* requires knowing how the kitchen prepares the dish. Clearly, the meanings of the language used in menus are socially and culturally embedded in the context of the specific situation or restaurant. To be literate here requires something other than a ninth-grade level of literacy. More than just a factual, or literal interpretation of the words on the page, it requires knowledge of specific practices—such as methods of food preparation—that take place in a particular restaurant.

On one occasion Harvey, the new but experienced waiter, asked me what "pesto" sauce was. He said that he had never come across the term before, and explained that he had never worked in an Italian restaurant and rarely eaten in one. Pesto is one of the standard sauces on the menu, and like marinara, is commonly found on the menus of many Italian-American restaurants. I explained that it comprised primarily olive oil and basil, as well as garlic, pine nuts, Parmesan cheese, and a little cream. Harvey then told me that a customer had asked him about the sauce, and since he could not explain what it was, the customer did not order it.

On another occasion a mother asked Harvey if her child could have only carrots instead of the mixed vegetables as it said in the menu. Although he initially told her this was not possible, explaining that the vegetables were premixed and that the cooks would have to pick the carrots out one by one, the mother persisted. After a few trips from the table to the cooks' line, Harvey managed to get the carrots, but the customer then declined them because everyone had finished eating. Later, I explained to Harvey that it would have been possible to go to the back of the restaurant where he could find the vegetables in various stages of preparation. While the cooks only have supplies of pre-mixed vegetables on the line, Harvey could have gone to the walk-in refrigerator and picked up an order of carrots himself to give to the cooks.

Harvey's interactions with his customers highlight how much of what he needs to know to be a good waiter is learned within the specific situations and social networks in which that knowledge is used. The instantiation of the meaning of words like *pesto* and *marinara* often occurs in the interaction between co-workers as well as with customers. Conversation becomes a necessary element in achieving an appropriately literate understanding of the menu.

Harvey's understanding and use of the menu and special requests also involves more than his knowledge of food preparation. It involves the manipulation of power and control. Sociocultural theories of literacy consider the role of power and authority in the construction of meaning (Kress, 1993). From his perspective, the order of carrots was not simply an order of carrots, but a way of positioning one's self in the interaction. The customer saw her desire for the carrots as greater than what was advertised in the menu and thus exercised authority as a customer by requesting them despite Harvey's attempt to not make the carrots an option. While such a request might seem fairly innocuous in isolation, when considered in the specific situation of Lou's at that time—that is, peak dinner hour—it becomes more complex.

Special requests and questions can extend the meaning of the menu beyond the printed page and into the conversation and interaction between the waiter or waitress and the customer. Furthermore, special requests and questions can be as varied as the individual customers themselves. The general public shares a diner restaurant menu, but it is used by each individual patron to satisfy a private appetite. How to describe something to an individual customer and satisfy their private appetite requires not only the ability to *read* the menu, but also the ability to *read* the customer. This is achieved during the process of the dinner interaction, and it includes linguistic events such as greeting the customer or taking food orders and involves both verbal and non-verbal communication. In such events the meaning of the menu is continually reconstructed in the interaction between the waitress or waiter and the individual customer, and as a text functions as a "boundary object" that coordinates the perspectives of various constituencies for a similar purpose (Star and Griesmer, 1989); in this case the satisfaction of the individual patron's appetite. The degree to which private appetite is truly satisfied is open to debate, however. Virtually everyone who has eaten at a restaurant has his or her favorite horror story about the food and/or the service, and more often than not these stories in some way involve the menu and an unfulfilled private appetite.

In addition to being a text that is shared by the general public and used by the individual patron to satisfy a private appetite, the menu is also a text whose production of meaning results in ready-made consumable goods sold for profit. The authors of a printed menu, usually the chefs and owners of the restaurant, have their own intentions when producing the hard copy. For example, it is common practice to write long extensively itemized menus in diner restaurants like Lou's. As was pointed out earlier, Lou's menu has over ninety selections from which to choose, and many of these can be combined with a range of additional possible choices. Printing a large selection of food items gives the appearance that the customer will be able to make a personal—and *personalized*—selection from the extensive menu. In fact, it is not uncommon for patrons at Lou's to request extra time to read the menu, or ask for recommendations before making a choice. The authors of the printed menu at Lou's constructed a text that appears to be able to satisfy private appetites, but they ultimately have little control over how the patron will interpret and use the menu.

The waiters and waitresses, however, do have some control. While customers certainly have their own intentions when asking questions, waitresses and waiters have their own intentions when responding. When customers ask questions about the menu, in addition to exercising their own authority, they also introduce the opportunity for waiters and waitresses to gain control of the interaction. A good example of how this control could be manipulated by a waiter or waitress comes from Chris Fehlinger, the web-master of *bitterwaitress.com*, in an interview with *New Yorker* magazine:

> *"A lot of times when people asked about the menu, I would make it sound so elaborate that they would just leave it up tome," he said, "I'd describe, like, three dishes in excruciating detail, and they would just stutter, 'I, I, I can't decide, you decide for me.' So in that case, if the kitchen wants to sell fish, you're gonna have fish." He also employed what might be called a "magic words" strategy: "All you have to do is throw out certain terms, like guanciale, and then you throw in something like saba, a reduction of the unfermented must of the Trebbiano grape. If you mention things like that, people are just, like, 'O.K.!'" (Teicholz, 1999)*

The use of linguistic devices like obfuscating descriptions and "magic words" is not unusual—particularly for waiters in fine dining restaurants. In *The World of the Waiters* (1983), Mars and Nicod examined how English waiters use devices to "get the jump" and gain control of selecting items from the menu. Their position of authority is further substantiated in fine dining restaurants by the common practice of printing menus in foreign languages, such as French, because it shifts the responsibility of food ordering from the customer, who often will not understand the language, to the waiter.

While diner restaurants generally do not print their menus in incomprehensible terms, they do, as at Lou's, tend to produce unusually long ones that can have a similar effect. But, diner menus like Lou's which offer Italian-American cuisine do use some language that is potentially unfamiliar to the clientele (e.g., *pesto*). The combination of menu length and potentially confusing language creates frequent opportunities for waiters and waitresses to get a jump on the customer. Customers at Lou's tend to ask questions about the meaning of almost every word and phrase in the menu. Not being able to provide at least a basic description of a menu item, as shown by Harvey's unfamiliarity with pesto, usually results in that item not being ordered.

Knowing what a customer wants often goes beyond simply being able to describe the food. It also involves knowing which descriptions will more likely sell and requires being able to apply the menu to the specific situation. For instance, in the following transcription I approach a table to take a food order while one customer is still reading the menu (Customer 3b). She asks me to explain the difference between veal scaloppini and veal scaloppini sec.

Tony:	(to Customer 3a and Customer 3b) hi
Customer 3b:	what's the difference between scaloppini and scaloppini sec?
Tony:	veal scaloppini is a tomato based sauce with green onions and mushrooms / veal scaloppini sec is with marsala wine green onions and mushrooms
Customer 3b:	I'll have the veal scaloppini sec.
Tony	ok / would you like it with spaghetti / ravioli / french fries
Customer 3b:	ravioli
Customer 3a:	and / I'll get the tomato one / the veal scaloppini with mushrooms
Tony:	with spaghetti / ravioli / french fries
Customer 3a:	can I get steamed vegetables
Tony	you want vegetables and no starch? / it already comes with vegetables / (.) (Customer 3a nods yes) ok / great / thank you
Customer 3a:	thanks

The word *sec* functions not unlike one of Fehlinger's "magic" words. Customers who are interested in ordering veal frequently ask questions about the distinctions between the two kinds of scaloppini. I discovered over time that my description of the veal scaloppini sec almost always resulted in the customer ordering the dish. It seemed that mentioning marsala wine piqued customer interest more than tomato sauce did. One customer once quipped that marsala is a sweet wine and wanted to know why the word *sec*—meaning *dry*—was used. I replied that since no fat was used in the cooking process, it was considered "dry" cooking. In situations like this the menu is situated more in a conversational mode than a printed one. The transition from print to spoken word occurs due to the customer's inability to understand the menu, and/or satisfy his or her private appetite which results in a request for assistance. As a result the waiter or waitress can become the authority in relation to not only the printed text, but within the interaction as well. Eventually, I began to recommend this dish when customers asked for one, and the customers more often than not purchased it.

This particular food-ordering event also is interesting with regard to the customer's request for steamed vegetables. When I asked what kind of pasta she would like with her meal, she asked for steamed vegetables. The menu clearly states that vegetables are included with the meal along with the customer's choice of spaghetti, ravioli, or french fries. When she requested steamed vegetables, I simply could have arranged for her to have them and persisted in asking her which past she would like, but instead I anticipated that she might not want any pasta at all. I knew that, while it was not printed on the menu, the kitchen could serve her a double portion of steamed vegetables with no pasta. Most importantly, this customer's ability to order food that would satisfy her private appetite depended almost entirely upon my suggestions and understanding of the menu. Mars and Nicod (1984: 82), discussing a situation in a similar restaurant noted a waiter who would say, "You don't really need a menu…I'm a 'walking menu' and I'm much better than the ordinary kind…I can tell you things you won't find on the menu." Examples like this illustrate not only how waitresses and waiters gain control of their interactions with customers, but also how other modes of communication—such as conversations—are used to construct complex forms of meaning around printed texts like menus. Thus, the meaning of words in a menu are embedded in the situation, its participants, and the balance of power and authority, and this meaning manifests itself in more than one mode of communication.

Reading menus and reading customers also involves a myriad of cultural distinctions. Although there is not the space to discuss them here, age, gender, race, and class are all relevant to interactions between customers and waiter or waitress. The argument can be made that diner restaurants like Lou's promote a friendly, family-like atmosphere. Historically diners in the U.S. have been recognized as being places where customers can find a familial environment. Popular media today support this characteristic—particularly via television—where restaurant chains explicitly advertise that their customers are treated like family, and a number of television situation comedies have long used restaurants, diners, bars, and cafés as settings where customers and employees interact in very personal and intimate ways. This cultural atmosphere can have a tremendous impact on interactions with the customers. There is sometimes miscommunication or resistance where a customer may or may not want to be treated like family, or the waitress or waiter may or may not want to treat a customer like family. At Lou's, in addition to having an intimate understanding of food production and being able to describe it to a customer in an appealing fashion, reading a menu and taking a customer's food order also requires the ability to perform these tasks in a friendly, familial manner.

The following example reveals the complexity of meanings involved in taking a customer's food order and the expression of "family." Al is a regular customer who almost always comes in by himself and sits at the counter in front of the cooks' line. He also always has the same thing to eat, a side order of spaghetti Marinara, and never looks at the menu. Perhaps more important to Al than the food he eats are the people he interacts with at Lou's. He will sit at the counter and enjoy the badinage he shares with the other customers who sit down next to him at the counter, the waitresses and waiters as they pass by his seat, and the cooks working just across the counter. On this particular evening, however, he was joined by his son, daughter-in-law, and young adult granddaughter, and rather than sitting at the counter, he sat in a large booth. Although I immediately recognized Al, I had never waited on him and his family before, I was not sure how informal he would like the interaction to be. So I began with a fairly formal greeting saying "hello" instead of "hi" and avoided opportunities to make small talk with Al and his family:

Tony:	hello::=
Customer 2d:	=hello
Al:	hey(.) what they put in the water? / I don't know / is it the ice or what is it?
Customer 2s:	(chuckles from Customer 2d, Customer 2s and Customer 2c)
Tony:	does the water taste strange?
Customer 2s:	no

Tony	do you want me to get you another water?
Al	no / I don't want any water
Tony:	ok
Al:	I had a couple of drinks before I came
Customer 2s:	(chuckles)=
Tony:	(in reference to the water tasting strange) =it could be / it could be / I don't know
Customer 2d:	(to Customer 2s) are you having anything to drink?
Customer 2s:	I'll have a beer / American beer / you have miller draft?
Tony:	(while writing down the order) miller genuine
Customer 2d:	and I'll have a tequila sunrise
Al:	(to Customer 2d) what are you having?
Customer 2d:	tequila sunrise
Al:	oh / you should fly / you should fly
Tony:	(to Customer 2a) al / you want anything?
Customer 2s:	(to Customer 2a) a beer? / or anything?
Al:	no / I've had too much already
Customer 2s:	are you sure
Customer 2d:	we'll get you a coffee later
Tony:	(nod of affirmation to daughter-in-law)
Al:	I've been home alone drinking
Tony:	ugh ogh:: / (chuckles along with Customer 2s)

Al's comment about the water tasting funny and his drinking at home alone both provided opportunities for me to interact more intimately with Al and his family, but instead I concerned myself solely with taking their drink orders. Al's desire for me to interact in a more familial manner became more apparent when I returned to take their food order.

Customer 2d: (as the drinks are delivered) ah / great / thank you

Tony: (placing drinks in front of customers) there you go / you're welcome

Al: (to Customer 2s) so we're flying to vegas (mumbles)

Tony: all right / you need a few minutes here?

Customer 2s: no / (to customer 2a) are you ready or do you want to wait?

Customer 2d: you made up your mind yet?

Al: (mumble) made up my mind yet

Customer 2d: oh / ok

Tony: al / what can I get for you?

Al: I said I haven't made up my mind yet

Tony: oh / ok (everyone at the table chuckles except Al)

Al: I always have pasta you know / I would walk out there (points to the counter) the guy says / I know what you want

Tony: ok / I'll be back in a few minutes

Customer 2d: come back in a few minutes / thanks

While I misunderstood Al when I asked if he was ready to order, for him the greater transgression was simply asking if he was ready to order. Al expected me to know what he was going to eat because he's a regular; he's like family. He wanted a side order of spaghetti marinara and didn't want to have to speak regarding his food order. To be successful in fulfilling Al's private appetite required more than the ability to describe food according to individual customer preferences. A side order of spaghetti marinara represents not merely a food item on a menu, nor a satisfying mix of pasta and tomatoes, but also, depending on the way it is ordered and served, a gesture of friendliness: "I always have pasta you know / I would walk out there (points to the counter) the guy says / I know what you want." To be literate with a menu also means knowing when and how to express emotion (or not express emotion) to a customer through its use.

Being able to take a customer's order without him or her reading the menu are important ways of expressing friendliness and family at Lou's. John, the most experienced waiter on staff, often can be found running to get an order of homemade gnocchi from the back freezer and delivering them to the cooks when they are too busy to get back there themselves. Or, he might step in behind the bar to make his own cappuccino when the bartender is busy serving other customers. On one occasion, like many others, John had a customer request a special order called *prawns romano*, a pasta dish consisting of fettuccine with prawns in a white sauce with green onions, tomatoes, and garlic. This is not listed on any menu in the restaurant, but it is something that the cooks occasionally offer as an evening special. John politely asked whether or not the cooks could accommodate his customer's request, and they complied. One can frequently hear John greeting many of his customers with some variation of, "Can I get you the usual?" Alternatively, in the case of special requests, some variant of, "That's no problem" is an often used phrase. Just like a friend for whom it would be no problem, John attempts to satisfy his customer's special requests in a similar fashion.

Yet, friendliness is often a feigned performance. Being friendly is an experiential phenomenon that is learned through participation. To be a good waitress or waiter generally requires being able to perform friendliness under any number of circumstances. To be successful at the practice of being friendly requires performing certain techniques over and over until they can be performed on an unconscious level. Referred to as *emotional labor* (Hochschild, 1983: 6-7) this kind of work "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others." Emotional labor also is an integral part to how a waitress constructs meaning in a menu. While emotional labor may not yield the same monetary results in restaurants like Lou's, it is still essential to the work. For example, John is masterful in the way he utilizes emotional labor. On one particularly busy evening John was trapped in a line at the bar waiting to place his drink order. He was clearly anxious, and was looking at his food order tickets to see what he needed to do next. The crowd of customers waiting to be seated spilled out of the foyer and into the aisle near where the waitresses and waiters were waiting to place their drink orders. One customer, who recognized John, caught his attention:

John:	hi=
Customer:	=hi can I get a glass of wine
John:	sure (.) what do you want

Customer:	are you busy
John:	NO (.) I got it (.) what do you want

John's friendly "hi" and over emphatic "no" were intended to suggest to the customer that he was not busy, when he clearly was. As he later explained, he knew that the customer knew he was really busy, but he also knew that if he was friendly and accommodating, the customer probably would give him a nice tip for his trouble, which the customer did. His feigned amiability in agreeing to get the customer a drink was more or less a monetary performance. John had learned to use language for financial gain. One should not be fooled by the apparent simplicity in the preceding interaction. While it may be brief, being able to be friendly and accommodating under extreme circumstances like the "dinner rush" requires years of practice in a real work setting learning to be able to say, "hi—sure—NO, I got it."

Although interactions with customers have been presented individually, the reality of how these events occur is quite different. Unlike fine-dining restaurants where the dinner experience can extend over a few hours, diners operate on high volume serving to a great number of patrons in a short amount of time. George Orwell, reflecting on the difficulty involved in this work, wrote, "I calculated that [a waiter] had to walk and run about 15 miles during the day and yet the strain of the work was more mental than physical….One has to leap to and fro between a multitude of jobs—it is like sorting a pack of cards against the clock" (Orwell, 1933). Because one person may be serving as many as ten tables or more at one time, the process of serving each individual table will overlap with the others. Food orders are taken numerous times in a half-hour period during busy dinner hours at Lou's. The preceding transcriptions were taken from tape-recorded data collected on Friday evenings around 7 o'clock. My own interactions were recorded during a period when I had what is referred to as a *full station*, meaning that all of the tables under my supervision were filled with customers. By this point in the evening I had two customers at the counter, a party of four and six parties of two, for a total of eighteen customers—all of whom were in the process of ordering their meals within the same half-hour to forty-five minute period.

Literacy practices in this environment are nothing like those found in traditional classrooms, but they might be more comparable to those found in the emergency ward of a hospital or an air-traffic controller's tower. Interaction with texts and participants takes place in a rapid succession of small chunks. During the dinner hours, there are no long drawn out monologues. Time is of the essence during the busiest dinner hours for all participants involved: from the waiters and waitresses to the cooks, bartenders, and busboys. In two hundred lines of transcribed dialogue during a busy dinner period, for example, I never paused longer than thirty-nine seconds, and no participant spoke more than forty-one words in one turn. Even these pauses were usually the result of other work being completed, such as preparing a salad or waiting to order a drink. During this period, virtually all the conversation, reading, and writing were related to the immediate situational context. As this research has shown, language use was far more complex than one might assume in situations and events that involve taking a customer's food order. In addition to knowing how food is prepared, what will appeal to specific customers, and how to present this information in a friendly manner, the waiter or waitress must also remain conscious of the number of other tables waiting to have their orders taken and the amount of time that will take. Reading menus and reading customers requires the ability to think and react quickly to a multitude of almost simultaneously occurring literate events.

Conclusion

Menus at Lou's are texts that are catalysts for interaction between staff and customers, and their meaning is firmly embedded in this interaction. Meaning is constructed from the menu through more than one mode of communication and between a variety of participants. This process involves knowledge of food preparation, use specific linguistic devices like magic words and other ways of describing food, the ability to read individual customers' tastes and preferences, the general expectation to perform in a friendly manner, and all during numerous virtually simultaneous and similar events. Yet, there is much left unconsidered in this chapter, particularly regarding the nature of power and control. While waitresses and waiters are frequently able to manipulate control over customer decisions while taking a food order, this control is often tenuous and insignificant beyond the immediate interaction.

Little also has been said in this chapter about the role of management. Extensive research has already been done in the area of management control, literacy, and worker skills (Braverman, 1974; Hochschild, 1983; Kress, 1993; Leidner, 1993; Hall, 1993; Hull et al., 1996; MacDonald and Sirianni, 1996; Gee, Hull, and Lankshear, 1996). These researchers consider how literacy practices are manipulated by management to maintain control over the worker. Whether it be scientific management where workers are deskilled and routinized, or Fast Capitalism where forms of control are more insidious and shrouded in the guise of "empowering" the worker, there is little research on interactive service work beyond the fast food industry that explores how this rhetoric plays itself out in a real world situation. This leaves open to debate questions regarding the effectiveness of Fast Capitalism as a form of control over the worker. While my research has shown that waiters and waitresses can exercise some level of authority, skill and wit through their use of language with customers, they must also interact with management and other staff where authority and control plays out in different ways.

In the end, however, the customer has ultimate authority over the waiter or waitress. Diner waitressing has a long history of prejudice dating back to the beginning of the industrial revolution and involves issues of gender regarding our general perceptions and ways of interacting (Cobble, 1991; Hall, 1993). Waitressing is integrally tied to domesticated housework and likewise has historically been treated as requiring little skill or ability. In fact, the stigma of servitude that plagues waitressing and other similar kinds of work are not only the result of less than respectable treatment from management, but from customers as well. In her sociological study of diner waitresses in New Jersey, Greta Paules sums it up best:

That customers embrace the service-as-servitude metaphor is evidenced by the way they speak to and about service workers. Virtually every rule of etiquette is violated by customers in their interactions with the waitress: the waitress can be interrupted; she can be addressed with the mouth full; she can be ignored and stared at; and she can be subjected to unrestrained anger. Lacking status as a person she like the servant, is refused the most basic considerations of polite interaction. She is, in addition, the subject of chronic criticism. Just as in the nineteenth century servants were perceived as ignorant, slow, lazy, indifferent, and immoral (Sutherland 1981), so in the twentieth century service workers are condemned for their stupidity, apathy, slowness, competence, and questionable moral character. (1991: 138-139)

The low status of waitressing and waitering belies the complex nature of this kind of work and the innovative and creative ways in which such workers use language.

Endnotes

1 Some of the more than 20 websites I have found so far like waitersrevenge.com are award winning. They include sites for taxi drivers, hotel workers, and the like.

2 How to appropriately refer to waitresses and waiters is not a simple decision. Terms like *server* and *food server* are alternatives, but all are problematic. I personally do not like *server* or *food server* because they are too closely related to the word servitude. The waiter/waitress distinction is problematic not simply because it differentiates genders, but also because it is associated with a kind/class of service. Often in fine-dining restaurants today both men and women are referred to as waiters, but it is more commonly the practice in the "diner" style restaurant to maintain the distinctive terms. This is historically connected to the diner waitressing being regarded as inferior to fine-dining waitering because it was merely an extension of the domesticated duties of the household.

3 Pseudonyms have been used throughout this chapter.

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NOW THAT YOU'VE READ, what are your thoughts?

1. What's Lou's restaurant like? What was Mirabelli's role there? Who's Harvey? Who is John? What were their roles there?
2. Mirabelli describes "the restaurant menu [as] a genre unto itself" (149). What does he mean by this? How does he describe the variety of ways this genre is put to use? What literacy events surround the use of the menu at Lou's, at least as they are articulated in this essay? How do these compare with the literacy events you've witnessed at other restaurants?
3. Not only must the menu be "read" and acted upon, but the food service worker must also "read" the customer. What does it mean to "read" the customer? How do literacy practices further complicate the work of a server?
4. The essay suggests that "literacy practices in this environment are nothing like those found in traditional classrooms." A better comparison, according to Mirabelli, might be "the emergency ward of a hospital or an air-traffic controller's tower" (158). What does he mean by this comparison? What other comparisons can you make that might serve as a good analogy for the way literacy functions in the various restaurants with which you are most familiar?

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

This essay calls upon you to describe literacy practices as they function in a particular *place* (in your church, in your workplace, in your home, in a store you frequent, or someplace else).

In developing this essay, you should consider questions like these: *What texts are involved?* At church, this may include the church bulletin, Bibles resting on the church pews, and hymnals, but they might also include notices posted in the church entrance, signage indicating where members should go, and so on. At home, relevant texts might include any and all reading materials found on the shelves, on the coffee table, in your room, in the rooms of the people living in the home in which you grew up. Name these items. Tell us where in the home these materials are located. Discuss where the reading typically takes place (and who is typically involved). Don't forget to discuss the reading of magazines and newspapers (even if it is just to locate coupons or information about the latest game) and any reading/writing that takes place online (gaming, blogging, research). *How are these texts put to use by the people involved in this context? Who develops these texts? Where do the people making use of these texts typically procure them?*

Requirements: You must make use of Barton and Hamilton's article and either Moss or Mirabelli (or all three), especially as they describe the theoretical framework you will be using. Take some time to unpack the Barton and Hamilton's key arguments, then those made by Moss and/or Mirabelli and your position in relation to them; next consider how they are (or are not) true of your own experiences with literacy acquisition in the particular place you are describing. You might also find Brandt's key arguments helpful here, especially the metaphor of "sponsorship."

Chapter 4

Dominant and Vernacular Literacies

Not every literacy practice/event has equal value in society at large. In this chapter, we will further our analysis of literacies in context by illustrating the complexities involved in acquiring those literacies Lauren B. Resnick describes as "dominant"—those most commonly associated with school. In doing so, Resnick analyzes literacy in terms of the place (as we did in Chapter 3) and the people involved (as we did in Chapter 2) in literacy *practices* (as Barton and Hamilton describe "literacy practices" in the previous chapter). In this way, Resnick's article "Literacy In School and Out" will set the context for our inquiry into the ways in which the same writers who may struggle with school literacies are often enviably literate in other contexts.

In the essay that follows, Lauren B. Resnick looks at the ways in which people learn to engage in various categories of literacy practices. Rather than looking at literacy as "skills or abilities" demonstrated in school or testing situations, Resnick treats "literacy as a set of cultural practices" (170), examining literacy as it "is practiced in *any* situation in which people engage with written texts" (172, emphasis mine). We have already looked at literacy as it "is practiced" in situations like those one might encounter at church (see Moss) or in a restaurant (see Mirabelli), among other places (as described in your most recent writing assignment). Resnick will ask us to look at how "people engage with written texts" like those "most frequently cited as literacy objectives of the school—the useful ["using print to mediate practical activities"], the informational ["using print to convey or acquire knowledge"], and the pleasurable ["reading for the fun of it"] (172).

"Literacy In School and Out" is most concerned with the ways in which we learn to "engage with written texts" in a variety of situations.

READING

Literacy In School and Out

Lauren B. Resnick

BEFORE YOU READ the following article, *read yourself*.

According to Resnick, "schools are not the only—or perhaps even the primary—source of literacy competence" (182). Do you agree with her assessment? Why or why not? What experiences can you make use of to counter and/or support her claim?

To understand the literacy crisis and imagine possible solutions, it is essential to examine the nature of literacy practice outside school as well as within. Schools are too isolated from everyday ways of using the written word to serve as the only source of literacy competence in society. Young people need to function as apprentices in communities where people use the written word for practical, informational, and pleasurable purposes. To change our general levels of literacy, efforts to provide such literacy apprenticeships in the community and at work, as well as in the schools, are needed.

We are told there is a literacy crisis in the United States. Nearing the end of the twentieth century, we have still not succeeded in educating a fully literate citizenry, a goal that was articulated by our founding fathers and that motivated creation of what is probably the most inclusive public education system in the world. As the structure of the economy changes, America's declining ability to compete is attributed to workers' inadequate literacy and numeracy. All of this fuels demands for educational reform, mostly calling for tougher standards and higher rates of high school completion. It is assumed that school is the agency responsible for the nation's level of literacy, and that if schools just did their jobs more skillfully and resolutely, the literacy problem would be solved.

I will challenge that assumption in this essay. School is only one of the many social forces, institutionalized and not, that determine the nature and extent of the nation's literacy. To understand the literacy crisis and imagine possible solutions, it is essential to examine the nature of literacy practice outside school as well as within. Continuing an earlier analysis of the relationship between mental work as it is performed outside school and the practices of the schools,[1] I examine here several different ways in which people engage with the written word. Since literacy practice outside school has been the object of very little systematic research, my analysis is suggestive rather than definitive. Nevertheless, it is possible to see that there are important discontinuities between school literacy practices and literacy outside school. These discontinuities make it doubtful that schools alone can successfully address the problem.

In most discussions of the literacy crisis, it is assumed that literacy is an acquired ability that characterizes individuals; people either possess literacy skills or they do not. The *practice* of literacy, the social conditions under which people actually engage in literate activities, is not examined. Although cognitive scientists and other students of literacy have done much to reveal the invisible mental processes involved in reading and making sense of written texts, most have worked on a widely shared assumption that these processes are, at most, only peripherally affected by the social contexts in which people read and write. It is assumed that individuals carry literacy skills in their heads. As a result, the nature of the situation in which people "do" literacy is not thought to alter the nature of the process.

I adopt here, as a heuristic for understanding literacy more deeply, a shift in epistemological perspective. Instead of asking what constitutes literacy *competency* or *ability*, terms that invite efforts to list the skills and knowledge possessed by individuals who are judged literate, I want to examine literacy as a set of cultural practices that people engage in. Taking this perspective does not deny that people engaging in literate activity must be knowledgeable and skillful in particular ways. However, examining literacy as a set of cultural practices rather than as skills or abilities leads to questions that are not often posed in discussions of the literacy crisis. These are questions about the kinds of situations in which literacy is practiced, that is, in which people engage with written texts. *Who* are the actors—both readers and writers—in these situations? How do they define themselves in relation to the texts they engage with, to each other, to other people who may also engage with those texts? *Why* are they reading and writing? What are they attempting to do with the written word? What kinds of institutional or broadly social invitations, permissions, and constraints influence their activities? *How* do people read and write? What are the processes, cognitive and social, that define literate practices? Finally, *what* do people read and write? What are the texts themselves like, and how do their characteristics facilitate particular forms of literate practice?

The shift in perspective from personal skill to cultural practice carries with it implications for a changed view of teaching and instruction. If literacy is viewed as a bundle of skills, then education for literacy is most naturally seen as a matter of organizing effective lessons: that is, diagnosing skill strengths and deficits, providing appropriate exercises in developmentally felicitous sequences, motivating students to engage in these exercises, giving clear explanations and directions. But if literacy is viewed as a set of cultural practices, then education for literacy is more naturally seen as a process of socialization, of induction into a community of literacy practic*ers*. The best model (*metaphor* is perhaps a more accurate term) we have for such induction into communities of practice is the ancient one of apprenticeship. *Apprenticeship* has largely dropped out of our educational vocabulary but warrants revival in new forms.

The heart of apprenticeship as a mode of learning is coached practice in actual tasks of production, with decreasing degrees of support from the master or more advanced colleagues. This practice takes place in the context of preparing a product that is socially valued. In traditional craft apprenticeships, there was far less direct instruction than we are used to in schools and relatively little decontextualized practice of component skills. Instead, by working collaboratively, often on tasks they could not yet accomplish entirely on their own, apprentices practiced in a context that both motivated work and gave it meaning. A series of increasingly complex productions tasks through which apprentices progressed provided the equivalent of a curriculum. The conditions of work and learning made it possible to rely on considerable self-correction, with apprentices judging their own products against criteria established through extensive observation and discussion of the group's products. Several recent experimental programs have demonstrated possibilities for adapting elements of traditional apprenticeship forms to education in complex cognitive practices of literacy and mathematics.[2] These programs attempt to establish communities of literate practice in which children can participate under special forms of guidance. Such programs try to make usually hidden mental processes overt, and they encourage student observation and commentary. They also allow skills to build up bit by bit, yet permit participation in meaningful work even for the relatively unskilled, often as a result of sharing the tasks among several participants.

In this essay I consider briefly several different kinds of literacy practice and attempt to characterize each in ways that respond to the *who, why, how,* and *what* questions raised earlier. For each, I begin by sketching skilled adult practices as a way of setting a "developmental target"—a possible educational goal. I then try to imagine "beginner" forms of that practice, forms that might characterize the early stages of apprenticeship in literacy. This educational thought experiment provides a template for assessing school literacy practice. How much apprenticeship opportunity does the school typically proved? How might the school be organized to provide more such opportunity? How much of the job of educating a literate citizenry can the school alone be expected to do? In light of this analysis of literacy as situated activity, I then reexamine the nature of the literacy crisis and propose some institutional responses that may be necessary for change.

Three Forms Of Literacy Practice

Literacy is practiced in any situation in which people engage with written texts. The range of literacy situations is vast and varied. In earlier work,[3] we identified, without claiming to be exhaustive, six major categories of literacy activity: the sacred (using print in religious practice and instruction); the useful (using print to mediate practical activities); the informational (using print to convey or acquire knowledge); the pleasurable (reading for the fun of it); the persuasive (using print to influence the behavior or beliefs of others); and the personal-familial (using letters to stay in touch with family and friends). Here I consider three of these categories that are most frequently cited as literacy objectives of the school—the useful, the informational, and the pleasurable.

Useful Literacy

A common type of literacy practice is the use of written texts to mediate action in the world. Some everyday examples of such practical literacy include reading recipes, following instructions for assembling or manipulating equipment, and consulting bus or airline schedules. These are among the kinds of activities that appear on functional literacy tests such as the recent National Assessment of Educational Progress. The class of useful literacy practices would also include writing letters of inquiry, filling out job applications, and leaving notes for coworkers. Readers come to functional literacy practice of this kind with very immediate goals, usually assuming that the text is authoritative and can successfully guide action. They willingly follow the author's plan of action in order to accomplish a specific task.

This action-oriented stance shapes the nature of the reading process. Consider, for example, texts that provide instructions for action on physical systems. To engage successfully as a reader of such texts, one must relate each proposition in the text to a specific set of physical objects, infer relationships among those objects, and plan actions on them. In the simplest form of practical literacy, this is done with the objects present. Under these conditions, the physical objects substantially assist the reader in making sense of the text. Research on the processes of following directions shows that readers of such texts shift attention back and forth between the text and the physical display. Furthermore, there is evidence that diagrams, when available, are relied on to a great extent, and that readers often favor the information in diagrams when text and figures conflict. In this kind of literacy activity, the reader needs to construct only a limited mental representation of the situation described by the text, because the elements of the situation are physically present, and it is possible to act directly on them. Furthermore, the physical results of one's actions often provide continuous (if only partial) information about whether one has correctly interpreted the text and diagrams.

A more cognitively demanding form of practical literacy requires readers to make inferences about the state of a physical system from textual materials, without being able to see or interact with the physical system directly. In these situations, a more complete mental representation must be constructed by the reader, with less supportive help from the physical environment. This kind of processing is necessary, for example, when texts are read in anticipation of action—that is, preparing to do something without actually doing it. Some simple examples of anticipatory practical reading are using a bus schedule to decide when to go to the bus stop, and reading a recipe to determine if a shopping trip is needed before cooking can begin. More complex examples can be found in automated work situations in which the actual physical labor is done by machines, while workers monitor and adjust those machines on the basis of their readings of various indicators.[4] To perform such tasks, workers need a complex mental model of the physical system on which they are operating, a model whose immediate states can be updated on the basis of indicator readings. As such jobs proliferate, a new standard of technical literacy is developing. As in more "hands-on" practical literacy, the reader must be able to act on a physical environment, but a much greater effort of purely mental representation is required.

Practical literacy also includes uses of texts to help one act in and on social systems. Tax forms and job applications are of this type. Such forms are used much like instructions for physical systems—that is, in step-by-step fashion, reading a line, then immediately following the instructions given. To participate effectively in this form of literacy, one needs only to understand each line of the instructions and to be willing to persist through many steps. A more general mental model of a situation—of tax rules, for example, or of what a potential employer might be seeking—can help in this step-by-step interpretation but is not strictly necessary. Thus, in this kind of literacy, there is only a limited requirement for mental representation. There are also less formulaic texts that help people act in a social system. Such texts might, for example, guide one in using services of a health care system, initiating grievance proceedings against an employer, or choosing among insurance options. When using these texts, the reader needs to construct a mental model of the system as a whole before it becomes possible to decide how to act.

How do people learn to engage in practical literacy? It is not difficult to imagine an apprenticeship in the functional use of texts occurring within families. With a parent or other older person, a child as young as four or five can participate in an activity in which a text is used to guide physical acts (assembling a game or following a recipe, for example). Very young children cannot yet read the texts themselves, but they can observe important aspects of the practical literacy form such as the ways in which one alternates between reading the text and carrying out a physical act, or the fact that the text is used to verify accuracy of action. By eight or nine years of age, a child participating with an adult might do some or even all of the reading but would not be expected to figure out alone exactly what actions were prescribed. Later, the child might do most of the work alone, calling for occasional help in interpreting certain difficult words or steps. This kind of "scaffolded" learning has been well analyzed and described for a number of typical family activities as well as for learning in traditional craft apprenticeships. Regular engagement in such activities in the family or other extra-school settings probably helps children develop a generalized pattern of interacting with texts ("read-do, read-do") and a broad confidence that enables them to use texts to guide practical activity on their own.[5]

Such practical literacy apprenticeships, however, are largely absent from school. The reading done in school seldom mediates any practical action in the world, and there is hardly ever a chance to work side by side with a more skillful partner toward a shared goal. An exception may be found in the science laboratory. Science educators often complain that too much time is spent setting up experiments and too little on interpreting them. Yet students may learn something about a very basic form of practical literacy from these exercises—to the extent that they get to participate in them. Much elementary-level science instruction proceeds from textbooks rather than laboratories, and the students whose functional literacy is a source of public worry almost never take upper-level science courses. Vocational courses offer another potential site for functional literacy practice in school. Often, however, functional literacy skills are *prerequisite* to entering vocational courses, rather than what can be learned in them. A result is that the students most in need of this form of literacy practice are excluded from the opportunity for practice. Significant opportunities for functional literacy activity also occur in some extracurricular school activities. There is evidence, however, that, with the exception of sports, extracurricular participation in high school is largely limited to the more academically inclined and successful students and does not include those for whom functional literacy development is a concern.

These observations suggest that, if school were the only place in which people learned literate practices, we would probably observe far *less* functional literacy in the general population than we do. It seems likely that the many people who become competent at various forms of functional literacy develop their initial competence outside school, through participation with family members and friends. If functional literacy practices are learned mainly outside school, however, certain students—those from families who do not practice much literacy in the home or do not engage their children in such activities—can be expected not to learn them.

Informational Literacy

People also read to learn about the world when there is no immediate practical utility for the information acquired. In this kind of literacy activity, the only likely immediate activity after reading is discussion with others. The reader's main task is to build a mental representation of the situation presented in the text and to relate the new information to previously held knowledge. This process of text comprehension has been intensively studied by cognitive scientists. From their research, we know that building mental *situation models* on the basis of a text requires much more than an ability to recognize the words—a level of literacy ability that few people in this country lack. Rather, it depends crucially on the reader's prior knowledge, along with certain general linguistic abilities. It is also highly sensitive to aspects of the text structure, including rhetorical devices, signals about relationships among sections of the text, and the extent to which suppositions and arguments are laid out explicitly.

One aspect of informational reading that has not been much studied is how the reader interprets the author's intention and what knowledge the reader attributes to the author—what we might call building an *author model*. Furthermore, cognitive science has paid almost no attention to what the reader expects to do with the information gained from the texts, or to the social context of either the reading or subsequent information use. All of these can be expected to influence reading activity substantially.

A wide range of intentions, from personal interest and wanting to know what people are talking about to needing background knowledge for one's profession, can motivate informational reading. Some forms of informational reading can have eventual practical aims, even though immediate action is neither called for nor possible. For example, many advice and "how-to" texts—ranging from household hints and Ann Landers columns to books offering guidance in personal finance or business management—are geared not to individual situations, but to prototypical situations that many people encounter. When reading such texts, people have to imagine themselves in others' situations in order to find useful information for themselves. To do this, they must not only build a mental representation of the situation described in the text, but also relate the situation described to their own.

In everyday life, probably the most frequent kind of informational literacy activity is newspaper and magazine reading. For most people, reading the news is a matter of "keeping up"—finding out what is going on in the world, updating one's mental accounts of ongoing events. Although such reading appears to be a private activity, it is socially defined in two important senses. First, informational reading is often followed by discussion with others of like interests, and what one chooses to read in a newspaper probably depends to an important degree on what kinds of conversations one anticipates. People may keep up with sports, for example, in order to join the talk at work or follow local news because that is discussed at parties or while attending to business in town. What we find it necessary to "keep up with" is determined partly by the people with whom we associate and the conversational habits of that group. If one is not in a social circle that discusses national and international political events, those parts of the newspaper will probably not receive attention. Thus, everyday informational reading is a function of the social groups with whom one interacts.

A second sense in which reading is socially defined is that the kind of mental representation constructed from the reading depends on the kinds of intentions one ascribes to the authors. American newspaper readers expect journalists to be both knowledgeable and neutral, to convey the facts fully and without bias. Except when reading signed columns and editorials, readers do not devote much attention to determining the newswriters' persuasive intentions, what political positions are represented, or what might have been left out of the communication. In contrast, continental European newspaper readers do not assume neutrality; newspapers and newswriters have known political positions, and readers interpret their articles in this light. People trying to get the whole picture of some important event are likely to read several different news reports because they expect an interpretive slant in each report. In countries with active press censorship, readers must go even further to read between the lines in order to learn what is happening in the world. These different social assumptions can cause differences in the cognitive processes involved in reading. The American assumption of a neutral press, together with a relative absence of political discussion in everyday life, probably has the effect of providing our people with minimal practice in critical textual interpretation. Americans have little experience in looking for authors' intentions or hidden meanings or tracking down missing parts of an argument. Although many become fluent at constructing text and situation models, they have little practice at building author models.

Imagined author-reader relations also play a role in the process of writing informational texts. In actual literacy practice, authors writing informational texts have, in the best cases, a lively sense of their audience. They are used to crafting their communications to appeal to imagined readers. Definitions of what constitutes a well-crafted text vary among social communities of readers and writers. Broad distinctions between popular and scholarly writing do not do justice to the variety and distinctiveness of what have come to be called "discourse communities." The readers of different segments of the popular press expect different forms of writing. In recent years a lively analysis of the varied ways in which different scholarly disciplines shape their written discourse has emerged, and students of literacy have begun to speak of processes of initiation into these discourse communities, referring both to practices of interpretive reading and to those of authoring.

Informal, family-based opportunities for apprenticeship in these informational literacy practices are probably less available than are practical literacy apprenticeship opportunities. Not all families regularly read and discuss the information in newspapers or magazines, and most such reading is limited to particular narrow segments of the press. Reading of informational books occurs in only a limited number of families. And even among children growing up in our most literate families, few ever get to observe—much less participate in—the process of actually crating an extended informational text for an interested audience.

More than for practical literacy, it seems, we depend on the school as the place in which informational literacy will be cultivated. School is the time and place in most people's lives when they are most intensively engaged in reading for information. Indeed, other than newspapers, textbooks provide most Americans' only practice of informational literacy. A populace with the capacity and taste for engaging in informational literacy activities, particularly as they bear on public and civic issues, is part of the Jeffersonian vision of democracy. It is a major reason for treating universal public education as a requirement for a democratic society. But as education has developed, very little literacy practice in school engages students in activities from which they might learn the habits and skills of using texts to understand public issues and participate in public decision making. A consideration of the actual activity of textbook reading in school shows that it is a very different form of literacy practice from the informational reading that might be envisioned as part of the Jeffersonian ideal. Differences can be found in the intentions that people bring to school text reading as opposed to other kinds of informational texts, in the nature of the texts themselves, in the kinds of background knowledge they bring to the reading, and in the rhythm of the activity itself.

When texts are assigned in school, they are almost always on topics new to students, for which the students must build initial mental representations. Textbook reading thus provides little experience in updating mental models, as occurs when keeping up with the news. Worse still, school textbooks are often badly written, a jumble of bits of information without the coherence needed to support this initial building of a representation.[6] Finally, and perhaps most important, students in school read textbooks because of an assignment or a test to be passed, not because they are personally interested in the topic or expect lively conversation about it with others. In many classrooms, there is a catechetical flavor to the way that texts are assigned and used. Small sections are read, and students are expected to give specific, generally noninterpretive answers to questions posed by the teacher. Informational writing experience is, if anything, more restricted. For the most part, if students write informational or analytical texts at all, it is to show teachers that they have done the required reading and absorbed the canonical interpretation. The normal relationship between author (as someone who knows something of interest) and reader (as someone who would like to learn about that something) is absent or seriously attenuated. The typical audience for student writing is only the teacher, who already knows (or is thought to know) all the information conveyed. For the large majority of students, then, no place—neither home nor school—provides an extended opportunity to engage in high levels of authentic informational literacy practice.

Pleasurable Literacy

Being literate can also mean reading for pleasure, a form of literacy practice in which reading is its own end. The kinds of texts that people read for the fun of reading are diverse, and the cognitive and social processes engaged are equally different. Narratives—texts with a story line, whether fictional or based in reality—are generally considered to be the material of pleasurable reading, although some people read expository texts that might be classed as information just for the fun of it. Engagement with the text is the primary requisite for pleasurable literacy, and many kinds of texts—from pulp crime stories and Gothic romances to high literature—are capable of providing that engagement. Different kinds of texts, of course, require differing degrees and types of interpretive activity; what is engaging for some may be too difficult or too simple to engage others.

Cognitive scientists have given substantially less attention to the processes involved in pleasurable reading than to the processes of informational and practical literacy, although some psychologists with more interest in motivation and consciousness (including Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in this volume)[7] have tried to understand the nature of psychological engagement with a story. The nature of fiction reading is also, of course, a major concern of literary theory and criticism.

Proponents of a recent literary theory are now exploring the many personal goals served by pleasurable reading—from escape and imagining oneself in more satisfying conditions (as in reading romance stories)[8] to stimulating and resolving curiosity (as in reading mysteries) to penetrating cultures and life situations to which one does not have personal access. Psychologists and literary scholars seem to agree that readers of popular stories—mysteries, romances, and the like—focus all energies on understanding the situation described and perhaps on imagining themselves in that situation. This engagement with the story contrasts with what some would reserve as truly "literary" reading, which involves deliberate attention to language and expressive device. This aspect of literary reading distinguishes it from more popular forms of pleasurable literacy in which language is "transparent," unattended to in its own right, just a vehicle for conveying a story.

At first look, pleasurable literacy seems to fare better than informational literacy in terms of apprenticeship opportunities. For many children, pleasurable literacy practice begins in being read to by parents. The process by which children who are regularly read to gradually "appropriate" the reading act for themselves is often used as a model of how apprenticeship in cultural practice might work for literacy. Encouragement of parents to read to and with their children and extensive reading aloud to children in preschools and kindergartens represent efforts to extend these forms of apprenticeship opportunity to more children.

Similar efforts are made throughout the elementary grades in may schools. Finding pleasure in reading is frequently stressed as a goal of reading instruction. In support of this goal, books of interest to children are made available, and children are encouraged to read them. Time is allowed in the school week for free-choice reading programs and reading for which children are not formally accountable, although they are encouraged to discuss or even write about their reading. Many civic programs aimed at supporting literacy development in schools also stress the pleasurable aspects of literacy. Such programs, which include bookmobiles and other community access programs organized by public libraries, programs that distribute children's books to families at no or low cost, and programs in which volunteers either read to schoolchildren or listen to the children read, focus either implicitly or explicitly on the pleasures of reading.

The motivation for such emphasis on reading for pleasure is partly based on sound pedagogy. We know that reading skill develops best when there is massive practice in reading, and children (like adults) are more likely to read a lot when they enjoy the process of reading as well as its possible practical or informational outcomes. But educators and civic organizations also stress reading for pleasure because they recognize it as an authentic form of literacy practice; a more literate nation would engage in more reading for its own sake. With respect to pleasurable literacy, then, more than for the useful or the informational, many schools and surrounding institutions seem to be reaching for authentic forms of practice.

Yet the programs that seem to provide some pleasurable literacy apprenticeship opportunities represent a very limited part of the school experience of most students. For most Americans, the only extended discussion of literature they are likely to encounter is in school. But even a brief consideration of the ways in which literature reading is organized in school suggests a fundamental discontinuity with the features of pleasurable reading as we engage in it outside school.

A key—perhaps the defining—feature of pleasurable reading is that one picks up and puts down a book or a story at will. There is no need to prove to others that one has read, although sharing opinions about books is not uncommon among those who read for pleasure. In schooling, by contrast, literature is usually doled out in daily assignments. Not only what one is to read, but also the pace of the reading is imposed. Reading ahead if one is captivated and engaged by the story is not encouraged and may be subtly punished. Proving that one has read the assigned material by answering questions about it or writing book reports is central to school literacy. Not infrequently, literature study is turned into a kind of catechism—a canonic set of readings, standard questions, and expected answers. These activities implicitly carry a message that reading is not a pleasure in its own right. As a result, students who have not acquired a sense of the pleasures of reading elsewhere may not easily acquire it through standard schooling practice, especially after the primary grades.

Literacy Apprenticeships

The preceding analyses suggest that the schools are not the only—or perhaps even the primary—source of literacy competence. As we have seen, dominant school practice is so mismatched to the ways in which practical, informational, and pleasurable literacy activities take place in everyday life that it seems highly unlikely that schools alone are responsible for the levels of literacy practice we observe in society. We must understand the nation's literacy—or lack of it—in terms of the kinds of literacy apprenticeships that are available to young people. For many, these apprenticeship opportunities are severely limited. In order to substantially change literacy practices in the nation, we cannot simply call for raising school standards. Without a broad cultural shift in the direction of more interpretive literacy activity in all segments of adult society, we cannot expect young people to acquire the skills and habits of literacy practice.

Schools could become sites for true literacy apprenticeship, but fundamental shifts in school practice would be required. What is called for are school activities in which students have extensive reason to use written texts in the ways that characterize out-of-school practical, informational, and pleasurable literacy. A number of experimental programs now in use point to the possibilities. These programs share features of apprenticeship environments: children work to produce a product that will be used by others (e.g., they produce a book on a history topic that is then used to teach others, or they collect data that are used to produce a scientific report); they work collaboratively, but under conditions in which individuals are held responsible for their work; they use tools and apparatus appropriate to the problem; they read and critique each other's writing; they are called upon to elaborate and defend their own work until it reaches a community standard. We know considerably more about how to design and manage such environments than we do about how to get schools to adopt and maintain them. Educational programs are often adopted enthusiastically by a few schools during an experimental phase and then abandoned in favor of conventional school literacy forms, often in the wake of calls for a return to "the basics" and the practices that adult citizens recall from their own school days. Apparently, the school system cannot move far ahead of the general culture.

To "bootstrap" ourselves into new levels of literacy participation, I believe we must actively develop other institutions for literacy practice. These can function jointly with schools in the best circumstances or independently when necessary. We need multiple apprenticeship sites where children and youth can spend significant amounts of time working among people who are using the written word for practical, informational, and pleasurable purposes. For younger children, community centers, churches, and other agencies could play this role. Many children now attend after-school and weekend programs at such centers, and there is some evidence that participation in community programs is positively related to school and later work performance. For the most part, however, these agencies offer child care and recreational programs but make no attempt to provide literacy-related activities. When after-school or summer programs are offered with the intention of improving school performance, they usually mimic school conditions rather than provide truly alternative occasions for literary practice. We need new forms of community programs aimed at developing literacy through apprenticeship. For older students—at least from the beginning of high school—participating (preferably with pay) at real work sites is probably the best way to experience literacy practice, along with training in a variety of social skills and habits that are essential to work performance. Such on-the-job participation would not only provide natural apprenticeships for literacy, but might also solve important motivational problems resulting from some students' belief that even good school performance will not assure them access to jobs and other forms of economic participation.

These proposals follow from the shift in perspective with which I began this essay. When we stop thinking about literacy as a collection of skills and begin to view it as a form of cultural practice, we are led to consider the multiple ways in which young people are socialized into the practices of their societies. Although there is room for improvement, schools appear to be doing reasonably well at teaching the basic skills of literacy. But, at least as currently organized, schools are too isolated from everyday ways of using the written word to serve as the only sites for learning literacy practice. For some young people, family, community life, and, eventually, work provide informal apprenticeship opportunities for various literacy practices. For many others, though, these apprenticeship opportunities are unavailable. Unless organized efforts are made to provide literacy apprenticeship environments for these young people, there seems to be little hope of change in our general levels of literacy participation. There is a historical precedent for looking outside schools for major changes in literacy levels in a population. Europe's earliest literacy campaigns took place in homes and churches. Recent literacy campaigns, for example in Cuba and China, have looked to institutions such as citizen armies for literacy education. In past efforts of this kind, only very basic forms of literacy were sought. Today's challenge is greater, and the relatively simple forms of literacy activity that sufficed for basic literacy campaigns cannot be expected to succeed. But with imagination and perseverance, we should be able to develop places and forms for apprenticeship that can effectively reshape literacy practice in our society.

ENDNOTES

1 Lauren B. Resnick, "Learning In School and Out," *Educational Researcher* 16 (9) (December 1987): 13-20.

2 Allan Collins, John Seely Brown, and Susan E. Newman, "Cognitive Apprenticeship: Teaching the Crafts of Reading, Writing, and Mathematics," in Lauren B. Resnick, ed., *Knowing, Learning, and Instruction: Essays in Honor of Robert Glaser* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1989).

3 Daniel P. Resnick and Lauren B. Resnick, "Varieties of Literacy," in A.E. Barnes and P.N. Stearnes, eds., *Social History and Issues in Human Consciousness: Interdisciplinary Connections* (New York: New York University Press, 1990).

4 Shoshana Zuboff, *In the Age of the Smart Machine: The Future of Work and Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

5 Jean Lave, *The Culture of Acquisition and the Practice of Understanding*, Report No. IRL 88-0007 (Palo Alto: Institute for Research on Learning, 1988); and Barbara Rogoff, *Apprentices in Thinking: Children's Guided Participation in Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

6 Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, and Erika W. Gromoll, "Learning from Social Studies Texts," *Cognition and Instruction 6* (2) (1989): 99-158; and Harriet Tyson-Bernstein, *America's Textbook Fiasco: A Crisis of Good Intentions* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Basic Education, 1988).

7 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Literacy and Intrinsic Motivation," *Dædalus* 119 (2) (Spring 1990): 115-40.

8 Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

NOW THAT YOU'VE READ, what do you think?

The shift in perspective from personal skill to cultural practice carries with it implications for a changed view of teaching and instruction. If literacy is viewed as a bundle of skills, then education for literacy is most naturally seen as a matter of organizing effective lessons: that is, diagnosing skill strengths and deficits, providing appropriate exercises in developmentally felicitous sequences, motivating students to engage in these exercises, giving clear explanations and directions. But if literacy is viewed as a set of cultural practices, then education for literacy is more naturally seen as a process of socialization, of induction into a community of literacy practices. The best model . . . we have for such induction into communities of practice is the ancient one of apprenticeship. (Resnick 171, emphasis in original)

1. What do you know about the term "apprenticeship"? Look it up. What does it mean? What sorts of communities of practice[9] make use of this model? If you can come up with no community of practice that makes use of this model today, take us back in history a bit by googling this term on the Internet. Describe how the apprenticeship model functions in one or more specific communities of practice.
2. Take a look at the above passage from Resnick's article. What does it mean to you? What do you think about what she suggests? How can we make use of this apprenticeship model in training literacy learners in a variety of contexts? For instance, how might it work in training newcomers to join the staff at Lou's (see Mirabelli in previous chapter) or to function in ways other members of the Moss's church congregation would expect (see Moss in previous chapter)? How might we make use of the apprenticeship model when training literacy learners in school?
3. What does Resnick include in the category "useful" literacy ("using print to mediate practical activities")? Offer five examples of this kind of literacy, at least three of which should extend beyond those Resnick includes in her article. If you agree with her categorization, explain why you think these literacy practices might belong to this category

9 "Communities of Practice" is a concept further developed by Jean Leave and Etienne Wenger, and one that has become key to our basic program and the scholarship that articulates its theoretical framework and curricula design. (See, especially, Carter's forthcoming book, *The Way Literacy Lives*, as well as the recent *Journal of Basic Writing* article, "Redefining Literacy as a Social Practice.")

and not another. If you disagree with her, explain why you disagree and how you think these literacy practices should be categorized instead.

4. What does Resnick include in the category "informational" literacy ("using print to convey or acquire knowledge")? Offer five examples of this kind of literacy, at least three of which should extend beyond those Resnick includes in her article. If you agree with her categorization, explain why you think these literacy practices might belong to this category and not another. If you disagree with her, explain why you disagree and how you think these literacy practices should be categorized instead.
5. What does Resnick include in the category "pleasurable" literacy ("reading for the fun of it")? Offer five examples of this kind of literacy, at least three of which should extend beyond those Resnick includes in her article. If you agree with her categorization, explain why you think these literacy practices might belong to this category and not another. If you disagree with her, explain why you disagree and how you think these literacy practices should be categorized instead.

READING

Going with the Flow

Michael W. Smith and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm

In their study *Reading Don't Fix No Chevy's* (2002), Smith and Wilhelm argue that "if boys are successful outside of school"—as the young men involved in their study were—"then it raises the question of whether it's the context or the kids that are to blame for their problems in school." In order to determine whether or not the blame for the in-school failures these young men experienced were, at least in part, context-based, they "look at what characterizes the activities that the boys in our study value and see how that relates to their feelings about school in general and reading in particular" (28).

As you read the essay that follows, pay particular attention to the various ways these boys describe their out-of-school activities. As they describe them, what is it these out-of-school literacies possess that these young men find so lacking in the reading they are asked to do in school?

BEFORE YOU READ, read yourself.

1. What do you make of this title ("Reading Don't Fix No Chevy's")? Given the title, what do you imagine this essay will be about?
2. What sorts of reading do you do on a regular basis? Perhaps the morning newspaper is a regular part of your daily routine; maybe you enjoy keeping up with latest gossip in magazines like *People*. Do you blog? look up information (online) on your favorite activity? Read the "FAQs" or "Cheats" associated with your favorite video game?

3. How does the reading you do out of school differ from the sorts of things you are asked to do in school?
4. In order to determine what the young men in this study value, researchers asked them to rank a series of activities (see "Figure 2.1: Activity Ranking Sheet"), "plac[ing] a 1 next to the activity you like most, moving down to a 14 for the activity you like least." Take a few moments to rank this same series of activities yourself. After you rank these activities, consider what this ranking might mean—to/for you, to/for your relationship with literacy and literacy education, etc.

It was a cold, damp Saturday in March. Just the kind of morning that's perfect for catching up on some much-needed sleep. The window was open a crack, just to let some air in, creating the need to snuggle tightly under the covers. But at 7:30 Michael was awakened by the *skrtch-skrtch* of wheels on pavement. He made his way to the window to see three neighborhood boys practicing their skateboarding, as they had been doing the night before and the night before that. 7:30 A.M.! In the drizzle!

Every day a group of three or four boys in Michael's neighborhood is working on their tricks. They're not very good, no heirs to Tony Hawk yet, but they are improving. They've built a ramp and have arranged with neighbors who have hilly lots to use their driveways. And they practice, practice, practice. Even in the rain. Even when Michael, at least, would rather be sleeping.

The mantra that boys are in trouble has been picked up by the popular press. In our last chapter we explained our reservations about much of the research upon which that mantra has been built. But even if we accept it, it doesn't mean that boys are in trouble in all aspects of their lives. Michael doesn't know hoe the skateboarders in his neighborhood are doing in school, but he does know that they've displayed diligence, ingenuity, and persistence—all qualities that ought to contribute to their success.

If boys are successful outside of school, then it raises the question of whether it's the context or the kids that are to blame for their problems in school. Like Mahiri (1998), we believe that trying to understand the sources of young men's success and enjoyment outside of school may shed light on how schools can better serve them. In this chapter we'll look at what characterizes the activities that the boys in our study value and see how that relates to their feelings about school in general and reading in particular.

To find out, we asked the boys in our study to rank the activities they most enjoyed, and then talked with them about their rankings and the reasons behind them in interviews that ranged from thirty to sixty minutes. Michael used the ranking sheet illustrated in Figure 2.1. Jeff modified it somewhat, chiefly by specifying other kinds of reading that one might do. (For example, he added *Reading a Magazine* to the ranking sheet.) After transcribing the interviews, we coded them, looking at each of the conversational turns the boys took and identifying its major theme or themes. We tried to understand why each boy liked to do what he liked to do. We then looked at how those themes played out across the interviews. We had technical difficulties with two tapes, so this chapter is drawn from interviews with forty-eight young men, one of whom dropped out of the study after the activity interview.

As we explained in the last chapter, as we looked at our data, we wanted to be on guard against assuming a homogeneous population and overgeneralizing. The stance we took was a teacher's stance. When we thought about a theme, we asked ourselves whether it sufficiently characterized the group to the degree that it would be a sensible starting point for us as teachers when we planned our curriculum and instruction. We found several such themes. But we also found several important ways in which the data suggest that our boys were different and defied generalization. The implications of both the commonalities and the differences challenged us as teachers and teacher educators. At the end of this chapter, we will highlight the key issues that the data from this activity and interviews raised for us, and we will share how this is causing us to think about our teaching in new ways.

Before we present what we found out, though, we wan to turn to the lens that has helped us understand the activity interviews. And interestingly, that lens was not provided by the myriad studies of gender that we discussed in the last chapter. Instead it was provided by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990a), a psychologist who researches what he calls *flow*, "joy, creativity, the process of total involvement with life" (p.xi).

Csikszentmihalyi (1990a) begins his book with a simple premise: that "more than anything else, men and women seek happiness" (p.1). Everything else for which we strive, he argues—money, health, prestige, *everything*—is only valued because we expect (sometimes wrongly) that it will bring us happiness. Csikszentmihalyi has spent his professional life studying what makes people happy, more specifically by examining the nature of flow, "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (p.4).

He offers eight characteristics of flow experiences that we think can be usefully collapsed into four main principles:

- A sense of control and competence
- A challenge that requires an appropriate level of skill
- Clear goals and feedback
- A focus on the immediate experience

These principles resounded through all of our data.

What we found in our study is that all of the young men with whom we worked were passionate about some activity. They experienced flow. But, unfortunately, most of them did not experience it in their literate activity, at least not at school. Before we discuss how they talked about their reading, we want to give an idea of how they talked about the other activities that they loved.

A Sense of Competence and Control

According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990a), when people describe flow experiences, they typically talk about a sense of competence and the feeling of control that stems from having developed sufficient skills so that they are able to achieve their goals. He quotes a dancer, who exclaims, "What a powerful and warm feeling it is! I want to expand, to hug the world. I feel enormous power to effect something of grace and beauty." And though chess is a much different activity, a chess player offered a similar description: "I have a general feeling of well-being, and that I am in complete control of my world" (pp. 59-60). The young men in our study shared similar feelings. They gravitated to activities in which they felt sufficient competence to have a feeling of control. What they were good at varied widely, but their feeling of competence was crucial.

Here's Johnny on cooking:

Um, it's kind of a way I can express myself. I like to cook for my family and friends. They all like to cook. And when they know I'm cooking they say, "Oh, I'm coming over for digurunner." And they usually do. I just like cooking. It's really the only thing I'm good at.

And Deuce on rapping:

Well, music, I've been doing music and art the same amount of years. Since I was young, I was doing music, and music, I just had this talent in music that I know. It's some thing called freestyling or when you have just a person just knock over the song. When people try to battle me, it's like a big thing. You know, different artists try to battle each other. I just look quiet, but everywhere I go, all around town, nobody can beat me. I get respect from everybody. Everybody comes out of their houses to come listen on the corners and stuff, and I just walk away. I know that I can write because I'm smart. You know what I mean? I'm smart. Plus, I'm street smart so I know I could write about some good, interesting stuff. You know what I mean? So I'm real confident with music, and I'm confident in my team.

And Prinz on hockey:

Well, I think it's just a fast-paced sport, it's just something that, well, I'm small but…I have an advantage that I'm fast in hockey and I just like to play hockey because it's one of the things that I'm best at.

Our data also suggest that there may be a cost to this emphasis on competence, for it keeps many of the young men from developing new interests and abilities. Ricardo made this very clear:

> *Yeah, I can't do snowboarding. I thought I could, my parents got me a snowboard for the first time and I couldn't even stand up on it, so I gave up on that real quick.*

As did Clint:

> *Like I try and do new stuff but I usually stick with what I already know. Like if I try and do something new, and I'm no good at it, like I won't just try something for a minute and then say I don't want to do it because I'm no good at it. I'll try it for a long period of time, but if I don't' get better at it, I'll just stop*

Buster felt much the same way. He was a prize-winning mountain biker and he spoke about how he enjoyed the feeling of competence and control his sport gave him:

> *Just, I don't know, it gives me a thrill and a sense of accomplishment I guess. I mean it's something that I did, not something you know that someone else did or you know it's all about if I had a good race, then I had a good race, and if I had a bad race, well then that was me.*

The same feeling marked his mechanical work:

> *Um, I guess it's just kind of a sense of accomplishment as far as you know if I actually put something together or take something apart and plus I'm learning while I'm doing it. If, say I'm, say I'm replacing my exhaust and my dad's there teaching me how to do it and that's something I can learn and then I know and I can pass that on to my kids and it's just something, it's kind of like attained knowledge I guess that you can get from, you know, just from doing.*

But absent that feeling of competence, Buster did not enjoy pursuing an activity, even if he thought it was important.

Figure 2.1: Activity Ranking Sheet

Please rank the following activities in the order that you like them. Put a 1 next to the activity you like most, moving down to a 14 for the activity you like the least.

___ Listening to music

___ Hanging out with friends

___ Playing sports

___ Playing video games

___ Doing something mechanical, like fixing an engine

___ Drawing, painting, or cartooning

___ Reading a good book

___ Watching a favorite sports team on TV or at the stadium

___ Surfing the net

___ Learning something new about a topic that interests me

___ Working on a hobby (Please specify your hobby _____________)

___ Going to school

___ Watching television or going to the movies

___ Other (Please specify ________________)

> *I don't know, something about computers, I'm really not all that, I mean I like the communication aspect of computers, but I'm really not, I don't know, something about them that I'm not—first of all, I'm not all that computer literate, and second of all, there's just something about them that I'd rather, they're too complicated for me I guess.*

Buda took it one step further, suggesting that even within an activity in which he felt competence, he focused on his strengths rather than trying to address his weaknesses.

> *Stick handling is a hobby for me. I don't have the speed like some people do, but I'm always aware and stick handling is one thing I'm very good at, like most people would say I'm very good at and ah, it's something I always want to work on because I know I'm not the fastest guy. I know I have to work on my speed, but I don't' know, stick handling is just fun to improve. It's fun to work on what kind of new moves you can come up with and you can. It's also you can watch professional hockey and see what kind of moves they have and try them out.*

Again and again we heard boys talk about how a feeling of competence kept them involved in an activity. Again and again we heard boys exclaim that they would quickly give things up if they did not gain that competence. That's why it was so striking that only two boys made a link between accomplishment and reading.

Pablo talked about how he had enjoyed seeing himself improve as a reader:

> *Well, I think it gains a certain, like you gain knowledge from it, from whatever you read, and I like that aspect of it, that I've accomplished reading a book because I used to struggle when I was younger, I didn't like to read at all. I liked to read, like, comic books and that was it. But I've gotten a lot better and I read more for myself and then I'll read the English books and things and I think it's almost a sense of accomplishment as well because—I think in everything you do you learn knowledge.*

And Larry was alone in linking his increasing competence to school:

Um, I haven't started reading until this year pretty much....I have been starting novels this year because of Mrs. , kinda like assigns the homework and this is the only time its' really been due so I've been reading pretty good novels now and I like John Steinbeck and stuff. A lot of novels like that get to me and Mrs. 's been kinda showing me the road and the path. I kinda thought reading was dumb, but now I'm kinda getting more into it.

Larry went on to talk about the recognition his teacher had given him and the pride he took in recognizing and naming his own improvement. Several boys, however, reported that reading didn't give them that feeling. Mark explained why he ranked reading so low: "It feels like it is almost a waste of time, because you are not accomplishing anything."

Thus far, we've focused on competence. We've referred to both its importance as a motivator and how its absence might stifle activity. This has powerful implications for literacy instruction.

The boys also discussed the importance of feeling control. This came out clearly in their discussion of school. Csikszentmihalyi (1990a) notes that "knowledge that is seen to be controlled form the outside is acquired with reluctance and it brings no joy" (p. 134). The boys in our study seemed to concur, both in their discussions of reading and of writing.

Here's Chris talking about writing:

A lot of times with writing I get excited, especially when the teacher doesn't give you a limitation. Like with , we did a lot of writing assignments with poems and what not and that really caught my interest because you could write about whatever you wanted to write about.

Guy echoed his point:

I like writing without having any guidelines to follow, just where you have to do your own thing. I might not mind having a guideline as how long it has to be, but I don't like having a topic to write about, just to make up my own story.

According to some of the boys, what was true for writing was also true for reading. Joe noted the importance of control over his reading:

I don't' like it if I have to read it, but if I read it on my own then it would probably seem a little better.

One indication of the salience of the theme of control is the reaction it provoked from Melissa Larson, a university student of Michael's who did much of the transcribing for this study. Michael began every class with what he called "opening circle." The circle was an invitation to students to discuss anything education-related that was of interest to them. The only time Melissa initiated the opening circle discussion was when she brought up the issue of choice. "Choice is so important to so many of the kids whose transcripts I'm typing. I'm wondering what [my classmates] are going to do to allow choice." From the time we began this study, our data have provoked similar questions for us. In this case, Melissa's question started a long discussion about balancing the desire for choice and the chance to work on common projects with the mandates of curriculum and assessment (cf. Rabinowitz and Smith, 1998; Wilhelm, Baker, and Dube, 2001).

We'll talk about the issue of choice and control at much greater length when we discuss our reading log interviews in Chapter 4. But from the time we began our interviews with the boys, the question that Melissa raised was with us. And so was the warning issued by Newkirk (2001) that sometimes when we think we are offering choices, our students—particularly the boys—may construe the classroom context and what is valued there in such a way that they do not feel they are really being offered a choice.

A Challenge That Requires an Appropriate Level of Skill

As Csikszentmihalyi (1990a) notes, "By far the overwhelming proportion of optimal experiences are reported to occur within sequences of activities that are goal directed and bounded by rules—activities that require the investment of psychic energy, and that could not be done without the appropriate skills" (p. 49). He explains, "Enjoyment comes at a very specific point: whenever the opportunities for action perceived by the individual are equal to his or her capabilities" (p. 52). We found that the young men in our study gravitated to activities that provided the appropriate level of challenge.

Unlike Martino (1995a), who found that sports are used as a way to enforce a particular kind of masculinity, it seemed that the young men in our study spoke instead of sports as a way to provide a particular level of challenge. Geo described it beautifully:

> *Because when I get the ball—people draw things and stuff like that—that's my art, get the ball, I like to run, make moves, and like if they make good blocks, I just read the blocks, it's like, I don't know, it's a challenge every time and I like challenges. So, I'm just going to go up there hard. If people are big, I'm going to run there anyway.*

But the boys didn't' have to be starting on varsity teams as tenth graders as Geo was to have similar feelings. Wolf played on a club hockey team, and his remarks resonated with Geo's:

> *I don't know, I just enjoy it. I think I like it because what other sport can you play on ice, you know. There is a lot more skill involved than playing football or basketball or baseball. Not to say that those games are not completely, totally skill oriented, it is just that in hockey there's a lot more going on. That's more of a thinking game than it is a physical game, despite what it looks like. I mean, there is a lot going on. I mean, yeah, there is a lot of hitting and checking and elbowing*

> *and sticking and things like that, but that is just like minor stuff. That's like low level, you don't have to think about that. At the same time you got to know where everybody else is on the ice and you've got to put yourself on the court, you need to be in a good position to make a play.*

Even when the boys were not involved in team sports, they spoke of the importance of challenge. Deuce, who saw himself primarily as a rapper, reported:

> *Basketball, I'm not competing that much. Well, you got to compete, but I just like playing basketball, just like playing it. It seems like everything I like doing is proving a point to myself: How good can I do this? Do you know what I mean? I don't never do nothing to lose. I don't ever do nothing to lose.*

We wrote earlier about the boys' feeling of the importance of control and competence. But control did not mean domination. Challenge had to remain. Aaron suggested that absent an appropriate level of challenge, sports lose their interest:

> *Well gym is, we're playing badminton in gym and my partner and I are like 9 and 0 in badminton games and I think we had—when we were both there—a total of 6 points scored on us in the 7 games that we were both there for. So it's kind of, gym is kind of boring.*

Not every boy was involved in sport. But challenge was important for them nonetheless. Our data suggest that one of the primary attractions for the boys who enjoyed video games was that the games provided the kind of challenge they found compelling. And once again, if that was not the case, the boys rejected the game.

Maurice talked about why he like Lara Croft video games:

Yeah, they're more of a challenge. Like you have to search here, kill animals, find keys, and find codes, and door latches, and everything. It's an adventure. Something like Indiana Jones but she's a girl, and it's real good.

And Fred talked about why he liked Zelda: "The video game, like Zelda, that causes you to think a lot…"

The fact that video games contain different levels means that the level of challenge will always be appropriate. That, Bodey explained, is what makes them so compelling:

James Bond, when you first play, um it's OK and then I think the thing that really sucks you into it is there is a lot of hard levels and there are a lot of things that you can do. In terms of finding cheat codes, um to make yourself invincible. Therefore, you feel the urge to keep playing.

Without that sort of challenge, the games lose their luster, as Barnabas, the most passionate devotee of video games, acknowledged. The best games, he said, are games that take a long time to beat. Where you can finally beat it [after a long time]. Like fighting games, like they are OK but they get really old. Like if you play with every character it is like five times [before you master it] so it gets old. I mean if you can do all of the finishing moves, you do them all like ten times and it gets pretty old.

The importance of an appropriate level of challenge extended into schooling. As we noted earlier, Johnny loved to cook. So he tried to sign up for his school's cooking elective. He was unsuccessful, but in the end he thought that was OK:

Yeah, I cook good. I never took the cooking class here. I mean, I signed up for it every year, but I never got it. So, but the things they cook are like, so easy to cook, *I think it just wouldn't be any fun. It's just the fundamentals they're probably teaching in there.*

The emphasis on an appropriate level of challenge extended beyond their favorite sports and hobbies. It also marked their discussions of reading in interesting ways. Some of the boys wistfully recalled reading *Goosebumps* books that they had found interesting but that were now too easy. But more often the boys talked about feeling overmatched by reading. Haywood put it this way:

Ah, well I like a book that isn't, isn't easy but not so difficult that you don't understand what is going on. Ah, because if you are reading a book that doesn't make sense to you then you just, you know, "Well I don't' know how to read this" and then you have negative attitude and you don't concentrate and you don't' really gain anything from the experience.

Ricardo provided a specific example:

Ah, I don't like reading plays because it's hard, it's just everything is talking and…when you've done a page you have to look back and say OK, this person is talking to that person.

The potential impact of feeling "overmatched" is clear as we recall the comments in our discussions with the boys about the importance of competence and control. The young men in our study wanted to be challenged, but they wanted to be challenged in contexts in which they felt confident of improvement, if not success. If the challenge seemed too great, they tended to avoid it, instead returning to a domain in which they felt more competent.

Maybe this should not be surprising, After all, it jibes with very established research literature on self-efficacy. Bandura (1993) is a leading researcher in that field. He critiques psychology for its "austere cognitivism," for its neglect of the impact of motivation and affect. Bandura is especially interested in the ways that people's perceptions of their capabilities affect their courses of action. He puts it simply: "It is difficult to achieve much while fighting self-doubt" (p. 118).

Hundreds of studies have concurred. In fact, when we did and ERIC search on self-efficacy, calling for journal articles published after 1995, we found 619 entries exploring the impact of self-efficacy in a myriad of arenas—from performance in various school subjects, to health, to career choice, and so on. As Pajares (1996) points out in a comprehensive review, the area of research is abundant and thriving. Pajares also makes what we think is a significant point: "Particularized judgments of capability are better predictors of related outcomes than are more generalized self-beliefs" (p. 563). This means that self-efficacy beliefs don't' extend from one context to another, especially if those contexts aren't' clearly related. For example, Haywood's self-efficacy beliefs about basketball seem to have transferred to his beliefs about his ability in football and lacrosse, but they didn't' extend to his reading. Our findings suggest that there may not be a generalized self-esteem that teachers can mine. Rather, the boys in our study developed self-efficacy beliefs that emerged from experiencing success in particular domains. This offers a clear challenge to teachers to work toward ensuring success with particular kinds of literacy tasks and texts, an idea we will follow up on in later chapters.

The work on self-efficacy and our findings here clearly relate to Vygotskian views of teaching. Vygotskian theorists (e.g., Tharp and Gallimore, 1988) emphasize that teaching is assisting learners to more competent performances. In other words, teachers need to provide students with a repertoire of expert strategies for approaching and completing particular tasks. This is a break with other views and models of learning that see teaching as transmitting information or allowing for student discovery. The sociocultural model based on Vygotsky's work instead argues that teaching is providing the procedural means for a student's participation in a community task so that the student can move from being a novice to being an expert. This occurs by helping students understand the specific procedures that are required to complete particular tasks in particular contexts and by helping them name and employ their understandings. Unfortunately, the boys in our study did not report receiving such help. Instead, they reported being assigned texts that were beyond them and working (or not working) to muddle through them.

Clear Goals and Feedback

The importance of clear goals and feedback is intimately associated with the first two characteristics of flow experiences that we have discussed so far. First, without a clear sense of a goal, it seems impossible to have a sense of competence. Second, it is impossible to identify an appropriate level of challenge. As Csikszentmihalyi

(1990a) points out, sports and games provide goals and feedback by their very nature: a tennis player wins or loses a point, a lacrosse player scores a goal or is scored upon, a video game player moves up to a new level or loses the game.

Thought the activities the boys most enjoyed were different, they all valued clear goals and feedback in the activities they enjoyed. Gohan talked about his love for taking photographs of sunsets. Marcel wrote poems. Hasan mixed raps. Mike was learning to play bass guitar. Rev played Dungeons and Dragons. Joe created hyperstudio stacks. Stan had taken up painting. In every case, the activity provided the kind of feedback of which Csikszentmihalyi (1990a) speaks. Gohan, for example, only had to look at his photograph to see what he had accomplished. Johnny, who loved cooking, provided perhaps the most succinct statement of the importance of clear goals and feedback when he talked about another of his loves—weightlifting:

> *Yeah, like, I mean, no pain, no gain. There has been times when I work out so hard that I can barely pick up an apple to eat. I'm in so much pain, but I like the way I look at the end. I look all pumped up and everything, and uh, I feel good. And actually, I feel, I look bigger. I like that.*

This emphasis on immediate feedback has important consequences for reading. Reading extended texts such as novels is not likely to provide quick and clean feedback, but reading short informational texts, such as magazines and newspapers, does.

For example, in the activity interviews, when boys spoke of their enjoyment of reading, most spoke about how they valued it as a tool they used to address an immediate interest or need. Here's Timmy talking about what he read on the Internet:

> *Well, I like to go to the sports and stuff cause I like to see, I like sports a lot…I like to see what is going on and what's, like, who won the games and …I like to go to NASCAR and I like NASCAR a lot so. I like to see what is happening and they are like [mumble] it is just fun to ah, find out.*

And Mark talking about reading a golfing magazine:

'Cause ah, it's probably the best golf magazine out there and it, I mean it just tells you ways and shows you pictures on how you can improve your swing and if you slice the ball, it teaches you how to hook the ball so it goes straight and it ah shows you what new balls come out that are fit for you and new clubs that would fit you and just different things like that.

And Bam on reading the newspaper:

Like, if you find something that happened around your neighborhood, "Oh, I didn't know that happened. I should read it." Stuff like that. I didn't know my friend went to jail because he tried to rob somebody. I didn't know that until I read the paper. They put his name there in the paper.

And Maurice on reading his driver's education book:

That was something that I thought was interesting because it helps me. It helps me to put my seatbelt on because before, if they see me without a seatbelt on, they couldn't do anything about it unless you were actually stopped and they saw you without a seatbelt on. But now, if they see you, they can just stop you like that. So that's helping me put my seatbelt on at all times, and it's keeping me out of ticket trouble, keeping points off my license.

And Barnabas on reading about video games:

Some of the stuff be frustrating. All the magazines I read, they say how they made the game too hard. It's true. They made the game too hard. And, sometimes, I beat the game already and I want to see what all the secret stuff was. I mean, it

> *tells you where all the secret stuff is, but I still got to find them myself. That's all. I'm just asking for a little map.*

The boys we cite here could be described as taking an efferent stance (Rosenblatt, 1978) in their reading. Or perhaps it's more accurate to say that they choose texts that reward an efferent reading. Csikszentmihalyi (1990a) provides a lens through which to understand that choice. Efferent reading by its nature provides an opportunity for clear and immediate feedback that aesthetic reading does not. If you're looking for information and you find it, you know that your reading is successful: You can beat the game, fix the electrical problem, or hit the ball straighter. Aesthetic reading, the kind that most teachers (us included) want to cultivate, is a much more nebulous thing. The focus in aesthetic reading is not what can be learned but what is experienced. As such it is consonant with the final characteristic of flow experience that we'll discuss in this chapter, a focus on the immediate. But it is at odds with the way most of the boys in our study spoke about reading. (At the end of Chapter 4 we will explore some ways of cultivating more competent and informed aesthetic reading.)

Perhaps that's why Larry's comment stayed with us:

> *[My teacher's] been kinda showing me the road and the path. I kinda thought reading was dumb, but now I'm kinda getting more into it.*

Not only does this inspire us as teachers, but it was the only comment of its sort that appeared in any of the interviews. Notice that Larry went beyond saying the teacher took a personal interest in him, thought that was important. Even more important was that his teacher shared her reading expertise with him, showing him how to approach and read particular texts in a way Vygotskian theory would endorse.

Larry helps us understand that there is a social dimension to competence, a point famously made by Vygotsky (1978) in his discussion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which stresses that learning can only occur when the learner is challenged and is able to perform with assistance what he or she would be unable to do alone. Teaching, then, should precede development, leading the leaner into uncharted and challenging waters that can be navigated with assistance.

Our data suggests that many of our boys did not feel they received that kind of assistance. Our reading of Csikszentmihalyi (1990a) gives another lens through which to see the experience Larry's teacher provided him. Larry developed a feeling of control and competence in his reading because he wasn't overmatched by the challenge of school reading, in part because his teacher made the road to reading visible. Both lenses suggest that teachers need to do more work to assist learners to develop the competence of experts.

A Focus on the Immediate Experience

The implications of the way that boys valued reading become even clearer in light of the final characteristic of flow experiences. The *sine qua non* of flow experiences is that people are so focused on what they are doing they lose awareness of anything outside the activity. Csikszentmihalyi (1990a) speaks of this quality in a number or ways: the merging of action and awareness, concentration on the task at hand, the loss of self-consciousness, and the transformation of time. In his study, a young basketball player provides testimony: "Kids my age, they think a lot…but when you are playing basketball, that's all there is on your mind—just basketball…. Everything seems to follow right along" (p. 58).

The young men in our study spoke in ways that resonate with the words of this basketball player. They valued their favorite activities for the enjoyment they took from the immediate engagement in those activities, not for their instrumental value. The boys played sports because they enjoyed them, not to win a scholarship or to impress others. They played music or rapped because they enjoyed being engaged in that way. And when they engaged with other media, they did so because it made them laugh or kept them on the edge of their seats. Unlike their experience with reading, their focus was on the moment, not on the instrumental value of the activity. Stan developed this idea when we talked about listening to music:

> *Lately I've been listening to a couple hard-core bands, Vision of Disorder, and um Machine Head and stuff like that. I like listening to Vision of Disorder when I'm really mad because it helps me just, like, feel what I'm actually feeling.*

Maurice's description of his video game involvement also showed his focus on the moment:

> *Say you're having a problem with someone or whatever. You play a video game or it's like a shooting game or airplane flying game. You have to take the mission. That helps you take your mind off the stuff that's going on in your life, and you just, for that ten or twenty—for however long you play the game—it helps you forget that. It helps you relieve your mind from that and focus yourself on the game.*

To these boys, the immediate experience was key. And as we'll see later, when the boys who were engaged readers talked about reading—at least, the reading they did outside of school—they had the same emphasis.

The Importance of the Social

Although Csikszentmihalyi's (1990a) work helped us understand our boys' activity rankings, it wasn't fully explanatory. Csikszentmihalyi notes that "Another universally enjoyable activity is being with other people" (p. 50), yet as he admits, socializing appears to be an exception to the rules for flow that he posits. What wasn't an exception was how important socializing was to the young men in our study.

Mike provided what could be a mantra for the whole group: "It's always better with friends, always." One of the most striking findings of our study was that virtually all of the boys reported having a small close-knit group of male friends. Only five boys reported having girls in that friendship circle. These friendships were absolutely central to the boys' lives. That centrality was manifested in a number of behaviors that challenge conventional images. The boys talked about needing a place where they could be themselves. And all of them had that place. In short, all of our boys spoke of having intimate connections with others in a way not recognized by popular psychology accounts of boys' experience.

Larry and Chris shared a sentiment echoed by many. Chris said:

I don't know. I guess just because it's the most fun, and it's easy to relax around friends. And, you can be yourself. That's why I put [hanging out with friends] first.

Larry noted:

There's only like a couple good friends you know I really have. Um, one good friend—it's just fun to, you know, go places. One friend, I go over to his house pretty much every day or whatnot, we're with each other and um, but yeah, I like hanging out. Usually we talk about what's going on with our life and stuff, it's usually how you want to spend your time I guess, that's what I do. We always do stuff together, which makes it more fun. Watch a movie or just sit around, watch TV, play basketball, or swim or do something.

The boys talked about how their friendships allowed them to be themselves. What they seemed to mean was that they could talk more intimately with friends. Only two alluded to friends as protection against the pressure of being male in a specified way. Both of those who did were very involved with the arts, and they seemed to see girls as more accepting of their artistic inclinations. Pablo put it this way:

I guess boys are more—they judge you. They think you have to be a big macho man in order for you to hang out with them. I mean, not all boys, but a lot of 'em, and I guess girls accept you more, for who you are, and I guess it depends on person to person, but that's what I've found.

But this was decidedly a minority opinion. The rest of the boys had found friends who supported them. The "boy code" that Pollack (1999) describes as making intimate relationships taboo was not supported by the evidence in our interviews.

What was in evidence, as Larry suggests, is how the emphasis on the social extended to the boy's discussion of other activities, sometimes in surprising ways. Chris, who used a wheelchair to help him get around after a battle with a childhood illness, was one of the few boys who watched much television. But when he did, he often did so with others. He would arrange with friends to watch a show and to be on the phone together as they watched so they could talk about what they were seeing.

Music, too, was a point of contact, as Zach explained:

> *That's another thing. Like all the friends, we kinda listen to all the same music and we go to the concerts together and we go in the mosh pits and we do all that. And it's hard for adults to comprehend sometimes.*

We noted earlier how important feeling competent was to the young men in our study. In fact, only one of our participants talked about liking to do something he wasn't good at. Jamaal continued to play video games because of his friends:

> *We play a bunch of them. We got one that's like Tony Hawk's pro skater or something. It's like a skateboarding game and I, to tell you the truth, really stink at video games and they always make fun of me when I play it but I just…it's just funny trying to do good.*

The friendships occasionally affected the boys' literate lives. Gohan and two friends with whom he shared poetry. Mark checked the Internet or the newspaper to keep up with the hockey scores not because of his interest but because his friends would expect him to know. Neil's friendship circle was characterized by long discussions of movies by favorite directors.

The importance of having a closely knit friendship circle also affected the way the boys engaged with technology, especially the emailing and messaging they did. Although some boys spoke of how they enjoyed meeting people from different areas through the Internet, many more talked about how they used the Internet to continue conversations with the same friends they hung out with at school.

Their friendships also affected their attitudes toward school. Of the twenty-one who talked about liking school, nineteen said they did so because of the social dimension of schooling. Buster's sentiments provide a summary of this viewpoint:

Probably my favorite part of going to school is the social aspect. I don't know, I guess I just like interacting with my friends and stuff. I mean, that's probably my favorite part about school. As far as classes go, there's certain classes I really don't like and some that are OK, but…probably my favorite part of school is seeing my friends.

In contrast, only two boys talked about valuing school because they loved to learn. If, as Vygotsky maintains, all learning occurs in social situations where expertise is shared between people, then the boys' desire to be social could be used to great advantage, as we'll explore at the end of Chapter 4.

Not only did the boys have friendship circles to which they were closely tied, but they also spoke of their strong relationships to their families. We did not see the alienation from family that is often depicted in the popular press or popular psychology accounts. Fred, for example, talked of a family connection through sports:

I like to [watch football] because that gives me time to sit down with my stepfather and we, like, spend time, we sit there, cheer on the team, like if we're on opposite teams, we still have fun. A family thing in my house is like the Superbowl. He'll cook up some chicken wings, and some stuff, and I'm allowed to stay up and watch the entire game, and, like, we all sit there and cheer on the team we want to win. And it's just a fun night.

The importance of socializing and friendship and the way all our boys were able to achieve healthy and supportive relationships belies the current psychological concerns. However, we recognize that our population may be skewed in the opposite direction from those of the psychologists whose works dominate the discussion in the popular press. We asked teachers to nominate a wide variety of boys, boys from diverse backgrounds and with different histories of school success. Some of those boys needed a little persuading before they agreed to participate. Though we'd like to think we achieved a representative sample of American boys, it's not surprising that boys in therapy talk more about alienation than those who feel sufficiently comfortable with adults to agree to participate in a project that would require them to meet with a stranger for six interview sessions.

The Importance of Getting Away

One way that our data do relate to the arguments of those who argue that boys are in trouble is the number of young men in our study who reported feeling stress and the need to get way from it somehow. Nineteen boys made comments of this sort in their activity interviews. School was a source of pressure for some, as Brandon explained:

> *I watch comedies, like* The Simpsons, Malcolm in the Middle, Married with Children, *those kind of sitcom programs. Seinfeld is another one of my favorites. I just feel after a long day of school, I really try hard at school, I really bust my hump, and after I finish all my homework and take a shower, to relax, TV is the best thing to go to. I got a nice large TV up in my room, so I crawl in my bed and just put it on sleep timer and watch that until I fall asleep.*

Liam sought his escape by being with friends:

> *Ah, I just enjoy really relaxing with my friends, getting out of the whole school mind-set and just kicking back. I go over to their houses, watch movies, um, other activities, I play lacrosse with my friends, I play sports with my friends, ah, but mainly just stuff that's relaxing that I like to do. I do it to just relieve stress.*

Bam was among those who used music to escape stress:

> *That's when I like to just come home from school, I just want to sit down, just be myself. I'll go in my room and turn on the radio.*

Even those activities that brought boys joy occasionally brought pressure as well. Geo was an accomplished athlete, in both football and wrestling, and he felt pressure to do what was necessary to continue his accomplishment:

Because they don't like—after that class, I go to a different class and then you know I do whatever, then after school I got wrestling and then I got to concentrate on that, then after that I got to take a shower and try to unwind a little and I'm a little tired and I got to take a shower and try to unwind a little and I'm a little tired and I got to still look over all my work. Usually I don't do my homework at home, but if I got something important then I'm gonna look over it, but once I get home, I usually just watch the TV and unwind because you know sports is like real pressure like. I don't want all that pressure to get to my head so I think about it too much. I'll just watch a little TV.

All of the boys we've cited in this section were successful at something important to them, yet their success didn't' reduce the pressure they felt. Not all of the boys spoke about such a feeling, but the number and intensity of those who did surprised us.

The Importance of Activity

Other themes that emerged in our analysis were less salient but, we think, worthy of attention. More than half of the boys in the study talked about the importance of physical activity, the drive to be doing something at all times. None were as adamant as Robert. Here he is talking about watching a movie:

No. I can't really sit down and watch no movie, just sit there and watch it. I got to be up, walking around or moving or talking or something. I can't really sit down and watch no movie for a long period of time.

And playing a video game:

I just can't sit down and play no video games. I'll play, like, every once in a while. I can't play it on a regular basis.

Wolf voiced a similar understanding:

> *One, I can't sit down to a board game. Either my attention span isn't long enough, or I don't have enough patience. I can't sit still. I'm always on the go. I mean, my parents can't understand how I can always keep going 'cause, I mean, I'll go to bed at 1 A.M. and I'll have to get up and ref a hockey game at 7 A.M., don't go back to sleep after I get done with that, go right to a friend's house after that, and go to the movies and then go sledding or skiing and then go out somewhere that night and then wake up early again. I'm always on the go.*

Though the majority of the boys in the study were less insistent on the need to always be moving, many talked about their desire to avoid having nothing to do, a much-dreaded occurrence. In fact, many of the boys talked about the lower-ranked activities on their lists as activities of last resort, picked up only to ward off boredom. For some of the boys, this meant browsing to see what was on television. On occasion it meant picking up a book, as we'll explore in greater detail later.

The Importance of Avoiding the Routine

A number of the boys spoke of their desire to avoid routines and to do things in new and different ways. As we'll see in Chapter 4, one of the fundamental criticisms boys had of school was its sameness. Eleven of the boys spoke of their enjoyment of variety. Scotty, for example, enjoyed snorkeling for just that reason:

> *When I started snorkeling when I was probably in fourth grade or fifth grade in the Bahamas, um, I just thought—I just had so much fun and thought it was really cool. Like I've been to Cancun snorkeling, uh, Hawaii, um, like scuba diving and snorkeling and different stuff, like probably every island, British Virgin Islands. I've been to the Bahamas. I've been to Florida. I've just been to different places where I'm able to scuba dive and snorkel and, like, each time is different. Like there is never two things that are the same. So I mean, every time you go down, a coral is going to be different.*

Bodey enjoyed going to his family's wilderness cabin for a similar reason:

Well, what I like to do is, see, when I'm here like now, I know what time lunch is, I know what time I'm going to go home, I know what time I have to wake up. Up there at [the cabin], let's say, I have no idea what time I'm going to go to bed, I have no idea what time I'm going to wake up, I have no idea what I'm going to do the next day, if it's going to be hunting, if it's going to be snowshoeing, or if it's going to be staying inside playing cards, and that's I think what I like, and that's what I like to feel, you know, once a year.

Of course, not all of the boys were able to get away from their routines in such a dramatic fashion. Rev offered a related view of a more mundane activity, game playing: "I play anything that's not really repetitive." School meant routine activity for many of the boys, and some of them emphasized the importance of the unexpected as an antidote to that routine.

Two Issues

Thus far, we've argued that our data resonate with the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990a). The young men in our study sought out flow experiences and described them in ways similar to the participants in Csikszentmihalyi's work. Though we found these similarities compelling, we realize that discussing them to characterize the young men in our study is problematic for two reasons. First, if Csikszentmihalyi is right, then what we are saying about boys would be equally true of girls. That is, we realize that our analysis cannot be sued to make a comparison. Second, we are wary of overgeneralizing, for we also identified important differences among our participants. We discussed some of these differences when we explored the range of the boys' interests. Even more compelling was the patterns we noticed within two smaller groups that distinguished them from their colleagues.

Significant Departures

The Readers

As we noted previously, virtually all of the boys noted that reading played a part in their lives outside school, but only seven spoke of the enjoyment they received from reading extended text outside of school, which seems to us to be the conventional understanding of what it means to be a reader. Of these seven, two were primarily readers of history and five of novels, though two of the novel readers talked especially of their interest in historical fiction.

These seven boys provided a number of reasons for their enjoyment of books. Stan worked the hardest to articulate his feelings:

> *I like reading books because they let you think about certain things that have happened or they…I wouldn't say I want to get away from the world, but it's kind of an escape, like watching TV but it's better than TV. You can't really—like reading a book is—watching TV is, like, no comparison to reading a book because reading a book you can get right into it and all that stuff, and I'm not quite sure what makes a book good, just it has to be sort of interesting. I mean it's different for, you know, certain people. Certain people like certain things. I like a lot of books, I like books that sort of keep you on your toes, books that make you think, controversial books, just a little bit of everything I think.*

Stan's last statement resonates with previous ones we've cited on the importance of challenge. Suspense and the drive to figure out the "puzzle" a book provides were important. He raises other key points as well, including the need to be able to enter a book. We took this to mean that he was able both to visualize the story world and to see things from the perspectives of others. Like Stan, the boys who were readers spoke of a desire to be engaged in the big ideas they encountered in reading. Stan, in fact, distinguished the "pie and cake kind of reading" he does during the summer from the more serious reading he undertakes at other times of the year. They also talked about using books to get away.

For Neil, the engagement in these serious ideas were major markers of his identity. He spoke of how he and his friends thought and talked about things of little interest to most of his classmates. He asserted his difference from those classmates through his reading, making a show of carrying complex adult books to class and reading them there.

The Urban Young Men

As we exchanged ideas about what we were hearing as we collected data, it became clear to us that what boys need to get away from varied considerably. While boys in all four schools spoke of the pressure of school or sport, only the urban boys felt a pressure to make a success of themselves. This feeling was most clearly manifested in the elaborate plans for the future that many of the urban young men had. Jigg, a student in the learning community designed for students who could not make it in a traditional setting, detailed his future plans at a level of specificity far beyond any of the boys in the private, rural, or suburban school:

> *After I graduate? I want to do this. This is my plan when I got out of high school. To go to barber school…but I said I want to try to go to college. I'm going to go to college first. I was looking at University. They've been sending me letters. My grades are OK. My [test] scores are OK so they're probably good enough to get into that college. I was probably going to go to college for Computer Programming and Business Administration. That was just next year. Five years from then, I was planning on owning a barbershop because I know how to cut hair right. Five years from then, I was planning on a nail salon.*

Hasan displayed similar kind of planning:

> *Yeah, I just want to have a better life. I ain't really had to go to public school. I chose to go to public schools because I just wanted that experience because I wanted to be a counselor and I wanted to counsel urban area kids to encourage them to do better and let them know that hey can do it. I don't want them to say, "Well, you went to private schools, and, if I go to private schools, I could do the same." So, yeah, I knew what I wanted to do in the future. I always wanted to do it.*

The sense of an impending future that would require careful planning and preparation was largely absent form the interviews of the boys outside the urban area.

But that does not mean the feeling of pressure was absent for the working-class boys from other settings. When Michael read the interviews Jeff had done at the private boys academy, he was able to pick out the two scholarship boys, not because they referred to money pressures but rather because of a feeling of pressure that permeated their entire interviews. One of our worries about the emphasis on gender as a superordinate category is that it may bring with it a lack of emphasis on other structures that affect an individual's experience. Our data strongly suggest that social class is one of those structures.

What This Makes Us Think About: Where Do We Start?

When we talked about the way that we approached making thematic generalizations from our data, we noted that we tried to do so in a teacherly way. We asked ourselves whether the understandings that we gained across our participants was sufficiently similar to provide us with a sensible starting point for us as teachers in thinking about how to teach them. The most compelling question our generalizations in this chapter raised for us is a very basic one: *Where do we start when we plain instruction?* We think our data fundamentally challenge the starting point from which many teachers, ourselves included, proceed.

In planning instruction, most teachers start by asking, "What am I preparing my students for?" The answers to this question vary: for the unit test, for college, for the upcoming state assessment, for next year's class, for success in the world of work. And each answer is undoubtedly important. But if we want our students to bring something of the passion to our classes that they bring to the activities in which they engage outside of school, our data suggest that we have to start by asking another question right along with it: "What is the quality of the experience I want them to have today?"

This isn't' a question educators are used to asking. Our friend Brian White, who read a draft of our book, told us that our analysis reminded him of a metaphor he heard in a curriculum theory class taught by Herbert Kliebard at the University of Wisconsin. "In the education-as-preparation view," Kliebard argued, "life is a concert—and education is the bus that takes you there." In such a view, as long as students ultimately hear the music, it doesn't matter how long or bumpy the bus ride is for them.

How much changes when teachers ask "What is the quality of the experience I want them to have today?" instead of—or along with—"What am I preparing them for?" A lot, we think. When we apply this new question to our own teaching of preservice teachers, we see that it makes us more immediately accountable for our curricular and instructional decisions. For example, it means we can't select a difficult text for our reading list and say simply "This is important fro them to know in the future." It means we have to think about the kind of instruction that will make their engagement with that book immediately rewarding.

Doing this kind of thinking has caused us to look for inspiration in unlikely places. For example, we suspect that many teachers regard video games with suspicion or even contempt, as symptomatic of our students' need for flashy visuals and instant gratification, which are at odds with what they get in our classes. But our study has convinced us that thinking about video games can be a useful guide, or heuristic, for us as teachers. By their very nature, video games are designed to hook their players by providing flow experiences. Because they get more difficult as players become more accomplished, they provide both a feeling of competence and an appropriate level of challenge. Because the goals are clear, they provide unambiguous feedback. It's no wonder that many of our boys could lose themselves in video games.

Sequencing Curricula

The attraction of video games resides at least in part on the fact that they provide players with a careful sequence of experiences. But a similar sort of careful sequencing characterizes too few classrooms. When Applebee, Burroughs, and Stevens (2000) examined the curricular structure of the classes of a group of experienced and highly regarded literature teachers, they found that in the vast majority of them, teachers did not sequence texts in such a way that students could make connections and build understandings from text to text.

Unless curricula are structured so that the understandings students gain in one text or activity can be brought forward to the next one, they can't develop a sense of competence. Instead, as our respondents told us, they're likely to feel overmatched and then resistant. But if students can bring their learning from one text to the next, they can feel equipped to meet the challenges they encounter in their new reading. Moreover, they'll be more likely to understand why they're doing it.

In Chapter 5, we explore in greater depth the idea of sequencing assignments so that students develop strategic knowledge in one activity or assignment that they can then apply in the next activity or assignment. Right now, though, we want to stress that we think the notion of carefully sequencing experiences with texts challenges many common practices in language arts classrooms. When you play a video game you know the rules and get better at abiding by them and using them to your advantage. When you read a certain kind of text like a satire or an editorial, the same thing happens. But the genre divisions that inform textbooks and curricula are simply too broad to provide the same kind of experience. Are short stories sufficiently similar that one reads them all in similar ways? Poetry? In many American literature anthologies, Dickinson and Whitman appear close to each other. The fact that both wrote poems in the same country at about the same time doesn't mean that they have the same expectations of their readers. In fact, what it takes to read the free verse of Whitman is very different from what is required to read the lyric poetry of Dickinson.

While short stories might not be a useful category, short stories with unreliable first-person narrators might be. Accepting the invitation to read such stories requires one to identify what might make a narrator reliable or unreliable in certain circumstances. It requires identifying the facts of the story that are beyond question. It requires applying standards from outside the story to the interpretation of those facts. (See Smith, 1991b, for a more complete discussion of judging narrator reliability.)

Other sets of stories that share the same expectation of readers might also be usefully grouped. Stories told through letters and diaries, for example, require attention to dates in a way that other stories don't. However, more than using strategies is typically involved in responding to a genre or a particular kind of theme. Stories told through diaries can also require assessing how and why a character changes. And if the diary is by an adolescent, it often means thinking about what it means to grow up and whether the character is making positive progress in that direction. As another example: survival stories usually need special attention paid to the setting and how people relate to nature.

Our object here is not to make exhaustive lists, for slicing genres so thinly would involve teaching a virtually limitless number of rules that had very limited application. Rather, it seems to us that we can help our students feel competent in playing the game by identifying relatively broad genres that invite the application of similar interpretive strategies. Thinking of poetry as a genre probably does not work, so putting Whitman and Dickinson together might not be sensible. But maybe grouping Whitman with some Sandberg and some Ginsberg and some rap in a unit on what might be called oratorical poetry would.

Ricardo didn't like reading plays because he was baffled by them. We wonder how much experience he had reading them. If his experience is like most students, the answer is likely one a year. We wonder how he would have felt if he had experienced reading short dialogues and then one-act plays as a way to gain experience in understanding the subtext of dialogue, and of imagining scenes in which that dialogue takes place. We wonder how he would have felt if his teachers had shown him "the road and the path" and had given him repeated practice in traveling. We think he would have felt more competence and as a consequence his attitude about reading plays and his performance both would have been much better.

We want to stress that when we look to video games for inspiration, we're doing more than saying study has to be leavened with a bit of fun. If, say, we were faced with the requirement of teaching *Twelfth Night* (as was one group of teachers we observed) or another text that we felt would be too difficult for our students, creating the conditions of a flow experience would have to involve far more than tossing in an occasional wordsearch or *Jeopardy* game. Instead it would have to involve setting up a sequence of texts and instruction so that students would understand why they are reading, how they ought to be reading, and that they're able to do the reading.

We want to stress as well that our attention to students' likes and dislikes in this chapter doesn't mean that we are simply saying, "Just give them reading that relates to their interests." The boys' interests were sufficiently different that doing so would mean a class could never read a common text. Rather, we are saying that if we understand why they like what they like, we can work to create the conditions that will make students more inclined to engage in learning what they need to know. These conditions are those of "flow" experiences: a sense of control and competence, and appropriate challenge, clear goals and feedback, and a focus on the immediate. Sensible sequencing can help us to do just that.

NOW THAT YOU'VE READ

1. Smith and Wilhelm make extensive use of what the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow." What is "flow" and how did that concept help the researchers understand what these young men were getting out of their preferred out-of-school activities?
2. How do Smith and Wilhelm's findings match up with your own experiences? Do they ring true? Explain your answer.
3. What did these "flow experiences" give the young men in this study? Have you witnessed something similar?
4. What lessons might teachers take away from this study of out-of-school reading and apply to in-school activities? For instance, Smith and Wilhelm argue that teachers have a lot to learn from the dynamics of gaming (video games). What is it that the gaming experience offers the boys described in this study that their in-school reading experiences were not offering? How might teachers change in-school reading activities so that they encouraged more of the "flow experiences" that are, at least for these young men, a regular part of gaming?

READING

Literate at Home but Not at School

A Cambodian Girl's Journey from Playwright to Struggling Writer

Ellen Skilton-Sylvester

BEFORE YOU READ the follow essay, *read yourself*.

What do you make of the complete title of this essay ("Literate at Home But Not at School: A Cambodian Girl's Journey from Playwright to Struggling Writer")? Given the title, what do you imagine this essay will examine?

> Through my writing I found myself again after a long time of being lost. I learned who I was in the past, who I was then, and who I wanted to be in the future. There I finally found freedom in writing. I flew in the sky with my pencil and notebook. (Ngo, 1994)

In more than 3 years of participant observation in home and school contexts with seven young Cambodian girls in Philadelphia, it became quite clear that there was a big separation between school literacy and home literacy in the lives of these girls.[1] At home, it was possible to imagine many of them "flying in the sky with their pencils and notebooks," but at school, this image was much more difficult to visualize. Fro the girls in my study, across home and school contexts, there were differences in written genres, differences in the social and academic prestige of writing, differences in the functions of writing, and incredible differences in volume and quality of written text. Their experiences with writing took place within a social, academic, and cultural context in which writing often had negative connotations.

At the school these girls attended, being good at literacy had quite negative peer-group consequences. In describing why she had a hard time relating to the academically oriented members of her class, one middle school student described them disdainfully in terms of their literacy practices. She explained, "They're always reading books. All the time. If I see them and try to talk to them, they can't even talk because they're reading some book" (fieldnotes, 4/4/94). This student devoured magazines and romances outside of school but made a point not to become a "school-oriented reader." Another Cambodian teenager explained what makes someone popular in this way: "Smart people are not popular." When I asked who is popular, she said, "class officers…people who get in trouble. Bad people" (interview, 5/23/94).

The peer culture at this school was complemented by an academic culture in which true engagement in the work of school was rare. Much of the work students were asked to do was quite disconnected from their interests and lived experiences. In many situations, I saw students focused on filling in blanks on worksheets, copying already written texts that they could not comprehend, getting better grades for copying the summaries of books from the back cover than for writing their own, and being evaluated based on whether or not they had finished an assignment but not on how they had finished it or what they had written on the page (Skilton-Sylvester, 1997). In those cases where literacy activities at school overlapped with the interests and experiences of students (e.g., journals, pictures, autobiographies), they were often seen as peripheral to the "real work of school."

Because the families of the girls in my study are refugees, we also need to consider the role that literacy has typically played in rural Cambodia and how this influences family literacy practices in the United States. Aside from monks, many Cambodians, women especially, have had little formal schooling and have little knowledge of the Khmer or the English script. Several of the Cambodian women I know in Philadelphia find it both physically and cognitively challenging to write on a page. Ina study of women in Cambodia, Ledgerwood (1990) highlights the emphasis on oral performance throughout Cambodia's history, even when there were written texts available. Ledgerwood also discusses the suspicion many had of those who were highly literate. This historical stance toward those who are literate was reinforced by the genocide of Pol Pot's regime in which being literate was a reason for being killed.

In spite of the social, academic, and cultural reasons for a young Cambodian woman to turn her back on reading and writing if given a choice, several of the girls I worked with most closely enjoyed an active writing life at home that was nearly invisible at school. Once girl in particular, Nan, who was in third, fourth, and fifth grade during the 3-year fieldwork period, had been held back once and struggled with academic literacy throughout the time I knew her. However, she was a prolific writer outside of school and had explored several genres: plays, fictional and nonfictional stories, captioned pictures, letters.

In order to understand Nan's experiences with writing, one must be careful not to construct artificial dualisms about her ethnolinguistic background or her writing. First, it is not accurate or helpful to conceive of Cambodians in the United States as bicultural. Ledgerwood, Ebihara, and Mortland (1994) explain why the refugee experience of Cambodians in the United States makes understanding culture much more complex than simple notions of biculturalism:

> *One needs to abandon a view of Khmer refugees as biculturals…and exchange it for a perspective that sees war, flight, camp life and resettlement as a series of distinctive cultural experiences that have far-reaching impact on refugees…. Americans trying to understand Khmer refugees in the United States explain behavior they do not understand by saying "That is Cambodian." It may be, but*

> *it has been influenced by the intervening experiences and by the particularities of the experience of being newcomers in a strange environment (pp. 18-19, 20).*

All the parents of the Cambodian girls I knew had spent a few years in refugee camps, as had the oldest children. Nan, the focal child in this chapter, was born in the United States, but her parents' experiences of refugee camp life deeply colored her sense of what it means to be Cambodian.

While it is tempting to see Nan's struggles primarily as a mismatch between her home and school practices, it is also true that her own very particular subjectivities—her ways of being in the social worlds of home and school—played a powerful role in framing her literacy practices in both contexts. Heller (1999) has recently shown how students with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds can respond variously to the linguistic, academic, and social demands of schooling; they meet the overt expectations of the school while at the same time finding ways to meet their own needs as well. In reviewing the ethnographic literature on how student subjectivity is related to school experiences, Levinson (1998) highlights the ways in which it is limiting to think of students' selves as being imported into the school context:

> *Student subjectivity, while formed in important ways outside the school, also comes to be (re) formed within the space of the school itself*. Contingencies of school and student culture play a significant role in this outcome, and the eventual form that subjectivity takes depends on processes of cultural production and affiliation not entirely predictable from the patterns of enculturation outside the school. (Levinson, 1998, p. 267; emphasis added).

In fact, this debate is quite similar to that sketched earlier on how limiting it is to think of Cambodians in America as merely living out their intact Cambodianness—brought with them across miles and miles of ocean—in a new context. In much the same way, Nan did not arrive in school with a predetermined set of practices that she imported into the school context. Instead, she came to school with a set of resources that continued to expand and be reshaped as she negotiated with particular teachers and particular peers to, in Dyson's (1993) words, use writing to do "social work." Learning to write in school is a complicated process that involves negotiating with the expectations and evaluations of multiple "imaginative universes," which do not always make their values explicit (Dyson, 1993, p. 17).

Nan was able to do significant "social work" through her writing outside of school, I want to argue, but had a hard time accomplishing the social work of school through her writing. Other researchers have discussed the distinction between the school and non-school writing done by students both in and out of school (Camitta, 1993; Dyson, 1993; Finders, 1996). In her study of junior high school girls, Finders (1996) describes the two literate systems at work in these girls' lives. On the one hand, students engaged in "sanctioned literacies" that teachers were aware of and supported. And on the other, students also engaged in a "literate underlife" that allowed them to break with the official conventions of the sanctioned literacies and to express more controversial opinions. I believe that understanding Nan's literate underlife is valuable in part because it allows us as educators to imagine how the knowledge of writing she does in fact have could serve as a bridge to engaging in other more sanctioned literacies.

What can we learn from out-of-school literacy practices that could help us reshape what happens in schools around literacy? Is it possible that the kind of investment Nan demonstrated in her out-of-school writing could be fostered in her in-school writing as well? If students believe that the best return on their investment comes from their peers, and if their peers see literacy as an unpopular activity, how can we convince them that reading and writing in school are worth their energy and attention?

Context, Participants, Methods

Nan's school and home were located just blocks from a major university. Although predominantly African American, the neighborhood included a concentration of Cambodian families not far from the elementary school Nan attended. Nan, her two younger sisters, her older brother, and her parents lived in a one-bedroom apartment not far from the elementary school. Her parents had come from rural Cambodia and struggled to find economic stability in the urban landscape in Philadelphia. Nan's family was on public assistance, and her parents also did seasonal work picking berries at different times of the year. Unlike her cousins' parents (who lived in the same building), neither of Nan's parents spoke English and both had had very little schooling in Cambodia. Nan's apartment was always a welcoming, warm, and comfortable place for me to be, but it was clear that her family was struggling to make ends meet, with few of the resources needed to succeed economically in urban Philadelphia.

The data presented in this chapter are part of a larger ethnographic study (Skilton-Sylvester, 1997) documenting the identities, literacies, and educational policies that are part of the lives of several Cambodian women and girls in Philadelphia. The fieldwork on which this chapter is based consisted of weekly tutoring sessions over a 3-year period with Nan and her cousins in either of their apartments (located in the same building on different floors). These sessions focused primarily on homework structured around the particular needs of individual girls in any given week. But as we built relationships, they extended to weekend trips to the museum, to my apartment, or to local parks. The girls often gave me drawings, paintings, and writings as parting gifts, especially Nan. And at the end of our tutoring sessions, they also often performed skits, dances, ice-skating competitions, and lip-synching in the living room. As themes emerged from the data, I interviewed the girls about their points of view concerning particular findings or issues.

Fieldwork also included regular visits to the neighborhood elementary school. I had visited the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classrooms in this school regularly for a year before I met these particular girls as part of another research project. These regular visits to the school continued during the early phases of my work with Nan, her sisters, and her cousins. During the second year of tutoring the girls, I spent several months visiting each of their ESOL classrooms and each of their grade-level classrooms. In addition, I interviewed each girl's ESOL and grade-level teachers.

I focus on Nan in this chapter because there are such dramatic differences between her in-school and out-of-school writing identities and products. Although the girls were from similar cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, their school trajectories were not so similar. Nan's younger sister and her cousin both now attend an academic program at a local high school. Nan, however, is on the nonacademic track and still struggles to get to class and to not give up on school all together (personal communication, 2/2/00). Nan interests me greatly both because the resources she brought to school were often invisible or devalued and because I can imagine other possibilities when I see her out-of-school writing. In the right classroom, her enthusiasm for making meaning through print, pictures, and performance could have been a resource to build on in learning to use writing as a tool to do the social work of school.

Taller than her sisters, brother, and cousins, with shoulder-length dark hair, Nan spent a lot of time imagining that being white and American would be better than being Asian and Cambodian American. She also spent a lot of time imagining a glamorous future for herself, possibly in Hollywood. Perhaps more than any of the other girls, she devoted much energy to managing her relationships with her peers.

Nan viewed her academic limitations as linked to her "Cambodianness," as demonstrated by the choices she made in finding an American name. Although other girls had likewise chosen American names, Nan seemed to tie her ability to choose the right American name to her success at school. In fifth grade,[2] she began writing "Mandy" before her Cambodian name on all her homework sheets. Just before she did this, I noticed what a difficult time Nan was having copying down her homework. When I later realized that she had copied all her homework very, very neatly for several days, I asked her what had changed. She replied, "I changed my name to Mandy. Now I can copy my homework." Later I noticed that Nan had adopted still another name, Stacey, a choice she again connected to her academic identity: "When I was Mandy, I was too lazy, so I changed it to Stacey" (fieldnotes, 2/1/95). I would argue that at some level, Nan sensed that she did not have the resources she needed to succeed in school but that if she could somehow be someone else, she might be able to flourish.

Nan's Out-of-school Writing

The prolific nature of Nan's out-of-school writing always amazed me, as did the way she alternately used such writing to tackle tough subjects and create fantasies. The variety in her writing and the joy with which she produced it were also startling—in part because her school experiences were so challenging. Her ESOL teacher remarked, "I don't' think Nan will ever test out of ESOL" and went on to talk about the difficulty Nan faced because she "writes in circles" (fieldnotes, 5/10/94). Her fourth-grade teacher expressed similar doubts: "She's lacking in a lot of the basics in reading and writing skills….She's going to go into fifth grade. My concern is a lot of them are going to go into fifth grade and they're not really ready…. Nan wouldn't be able to do the fifth-grade math" (taped interview, 6/2/94).

Meanwhile, outside of school Nan appeared unable to stop writing. I collected more examples of out-of-school writing from Nan than from the other six focal girls in the larger study combined. During our tutoring sessions at her family's apartment, Nan regularly wrote something to give to me when she had finished her homework. In fact, many times I had to encourage her not to rush through her schoolwork in order to finish it quickly and be able then to write a story. During the fieldwork period, she gave me 25 pieces of writing. This out-of-school writing spans several genres: pictures without words (2), pictures with captions (5), multipage fictional stories with pictures (4), stories/reports about real events with pictures (6), letters to me (6), a questionnaire (1), a play (1), and one picture that combines several genres: a picture with a memo to me including a few sentences about the weather (this format was characteristic of much of the daily writing done at her school).

Nan's Strengths

When I compared Nan's in-school and out-of-school literacy practices, one of the first things I noticed was how her oral, visual, and creative focus was often at odds with what mattered most in the school writing she encountered. Whereas at home her strengths as a speaker, an artist, and a storyteller were assets, at school such strengths did not help her master the powerful discourse in which the written word is more valued than speech, words are more important than pictures, and accuracy often matters more than meaning.

Orality And Performance

When Nan wrote at home, it was first and foremost an enjoyable experience. She was totally engaged with the process and could not wait to "perform" what she had written for an audience. To her, writing was meant to be read orally for an audience. There were often many mistakes in her writing, and she usually had some trouble reading what she had written. It was when her written work was performed orally that it really came to life, as she paraphrased the words on the page. She consistently strayed from the text of the story, even though she held the story in front of her. And she often crafted a much more complicated story as she "read" during the performance. This practice of reading texts orally fits with a tradition in Cambodia, whereby performance is an essential aspect of reading (Ledgerwood, 1990, p. 72).

For the women and girls in my study, orality and literacy were connected. Even in English, a Cambodian practice of viewing performance as part of reading crossed generations, socioeconomic classes, and levels of English (see Thierry, 1978). An emphasis on oral performance could certainly be found by looking at the reading goals of adult Cambodians in Philadelphia. Many discussed their desire to learn better pronunciation as they discussed their reading skills, and most read out loud even if they were reading alone. The tendency to see speech and performance as part and parcel of literacy fits well within what has been written about Khmer literacy practices in Cambodia (Ledgerwood, 1990; Thierry, 1978). Interestingly, although most Cambodian children in Philadelphia are not learning to read and write in Khmer, they continue a tradition of performance and oral reading in the context of their English literacy.

An emphasis on orality, while not present in the grade-level classrooms of the Cambodian girls in my study, complements a historical and current emphasis on spoken language in ESOL classrooms in the United States. The well-known audiolingual method does not foreground reading and writing, especially at the lower levels. Observational and interview data that I collected from elementary and middle schools similarly revealed an emphasis on oral language in ESOL. This focus was a common source of tension between grade-level teachers and their ESOL colleagues, since reading and writing are key components of academic work outside the ESOL classroom (Skilton-Sylvester, 1997).

In fact, reading and writing were key concerns in the development of a "New Instructional Model" for Asian ESOL students; this mandated curriculum resulted from a class action suit filed against the school district: *Y.S. v. School District of Philadelphia*.[3] As the new program was developed, there was consensus that ESOL needed to focus on more than just oral English if the program was going to prepare students to succeed in their grade-level classes. It is particularly important that there be an emphasis on reading and writing in ESOL when bilingual students, such as the Cambodian girls in this study, are often fluent *speakers* of English by the time they reached second grade.

My findings show the congruence between an oral/performance orientation of Cambodian students at home and the emphasis on oral language in the ESOL classroom. Such a continuity can make for a good match between home and school practices in relation to ESOL. This was particularly noticeable for Nan, who attended and ESOL class that regularly required students to read aloud from their journals (Skilton-Sylvester, 1997). In this setting, Nan was able to use her oral strengths in ways that were connected to her out-of-school writing practices. This congruence often makes it possible for Cambodian students such as Nan to be more engaged in their work in their ESOL classrooms than in their "regular" classrooms. However, for children and young adults, success in the grade-level classroom (especially in the upper grades) depends more and more on so-called decontextualized literacy skills that do not include an oral component. What is missing, then, is a bridge between the "comfort zone" represented by oral language use and the different demands outside of home and ESOL contexts.

Visual Images

In looking at Nan's writing, it is clear that visual images overshadow the words on the page in most of her texts. Quite a talented young artist, she took great pride in her drawing abilities. When asked what she wanted to do when she grew up, she explained why she wanted to be an artist: "Because I like to draw and I draw good. When I come and paint at your house, I'll make something pretty." After her cousin's comment that she wanted to be a lawyer because she could make a lot of money, Nan added to her earlier response, saying: "I want to be a cartoonist and work at Disney World and make a lot of money at Disney World and Hawaii and everywhere" (fieldnotes, 5/14/94).

In *Before Writing*, Kress (1997) explores the semiotic systems that children have at their disposal before they become writers. One key system of signs is pictures, and Kress makes a compelling point that, in this regard, children are in step with the world at large. As he suggests, words are literally being pushed off the page in current newspapers and textbooks where visual images are prominent. According to Kress, while we discuss with panic the ways in which children are oriented to television and video, we ignore the fact that modes of communication are increasingly visual. In teaching children about writing, we tend to see pictures as superfluous; they are there to complement the writing but are often not "counted" in school contexts as a part of making meaning. Kress believes that we think of pictures as expressions of children's feelings but not as ways that they communicate their interest. Of the 25 pieces of Nan's writing that I analyzed for this chapter, just 4 have no pictures/graphic image accompanying the text: 3 letters and 1 play. In all the others, pictures are a key, if not the main part, of what Nan created. (See, for example, Figure 3.1, a picture she drew of my husband and me.) Kress discusses how difficult it is for children to go from a semiotic system in which form and function are closely matched to a writing system in which symbols themselves are quite distant from what is meant. As he explains, "For children who learn alphabetic writing, the path is from drawing images to the drawing of sound, a path which takes them across a chasm which not all manage to negotiate, a shift from spatial display to sequences in time" (Kress, 1997, p. 137).

Nan's orientation to visual images is common among children her age, but her orientation to drawings and pictures also coincides with Cambodian practices in the United States that value visual images over written texts in the transmission of culture. Many scholars have discussed the importance of television and video for Cambodian families in the United States (Hardman, 1994; Hornberger, 1996; Smith, 1994). Television has become a way of remaining connected to the home culture through Chinese videos dubbed in Khmer. In Cambodian homes, it is videos, photographs of family members, and posters of scenes from Cambodia—not books or magazines—that allow Cambodians in Philadelphia to remain connected to their homeland.

Creating A Message

Watching Nan compose something for school was quite a different experience from watching her compose something for her own purposes. Her difficulties with spelling and grammar in English never seemed to get in her way when she was writing a story or a letter for her own purposes. Her focus on creating a message and her ability to use oral language and pictures to supplement her meaning made it possible for her to write without being particularly focused on whether the form of her message fit the spelling and grammatical conventions expected at school. There were times when this orientation didn't' work for the reader, but it worked for Nan as an out-of-school writer. For example, one of her earliest stories, entitled "The Store is Come Tonight," is quite difficult to follow, even with pictures:

> *One day the man owner a stor he said to the stor! stor! stor! give me a moeny. So his pocker is a picture of a stor so the man is a number of a stor. So his mother say are you are Right day! his mother say, you must put it in your pocker. So the man mother Leater go to the New big store and owner of the store Right Now. The End.*

Even given the benefit of knowing Nan personally and being able to examine the accompanying pictures, it was hard for me to decipher this story. It has something to do with a man getting some money and buying a big new store, but many of the details are lost. As in much of her writing, in this piece Nan did a better job putting her personal thoughts and ideas on paper than communicating them to a reader. One of the interesting aspects of this story is the way that Nan gets the spelling of *store* right in some cases but not in others. This isn't, then, an instance of not knowing how to spell the word, but one in which getting the form right is not what matters most.

In her out-of-school writing, Nan was able to compose much clearer stories as time went on when she controlled the topic and the genre. One of her most polished writings (and also one of the last I collected) is a play entitled "Daytime":

Lindsey: Oh, it seem sad that my sister's had forgot about my birthday, Oh, will.

(Lindsey walks out of the room).

Lemming: I didn't not want Lindsey to think we're not thinking about her birthday party

Karen: Oh, it's OK Lemming don't worry she will know soon (put her hand on

Lemming shoulder).

Banky: Ha, want me to tell her (sitting on Manny's lap)

Lemming, Karen: big mouth

Manny: Ha don't say that to he she is just an tiny little sweet girl.

Karen, Lemming: but

Manny: no but (Linda—stuck her tongue at them)

Manny: go to sleep

Banky: did you buy everything

Manny: Oh no, we can because we have no money

Banky: Ha we have no moeny But we could make a card for her

One of the things that is most interesting about her mastery of this genre is that it is a written version of oral speech. In merging her oral strengths with writing, Nan produced a piece of writing that contains the most standardized language of any of her texts. The play is also the only piece of writing besides three letters that does not have a picture to accompany it. In writing down speech, it seems that Nan did not need visual "data" to represent her ideas; rather, the genre itself helped her to compensate for some of her difficulties with capitalization and punctuation because it is clear who is speaking each line. Although she replaces *will* for *well* in the first line, the only other spelling error is *moeny* for *money* in the last line.

Kress (1997) distinguishes between the representation of a message—what an author wants to say or mean—and the communication of a message—how an author gets that meaning across—as two central aspects of school writing suggests that she emphasized representing the message using both words and pictures. She was often so absorbed in creating her text that its representation took precedence over communication. In addition, her ability to communicate to the reader/listener outside of school was not based primarily on the form of the words she used in her text. She relied on pictures and oral explanation to supplement the written word. Outside of school, she often performed her texts; this "performance" also occurred in her ESOL classroom, where she regularly read from her journal, but rarely in other school contexts. Dyson (1993) suggests that privileging communication over performance is common in academic writing in which "the composer is never a performer, only a communicator" (p. 16). In her academic writing, where form mattered more and where she often could not supplement her words with pictures or embellish the text with oral performances, Nan struggled more with both representing and communicating her message.

It is also important to note that power relationships at home were quite different from those Nan experienced at school. At home she had significant prestige as the most fluent writer of English and the kind of power that comes when immigrant and refugee speak more English than their parents (Auerbach, 1989; McKay & Weinstein-Shr, 1993). At school, as a nonnative (and struggling) writer of English and an elementary student, she had vastly less power. These shifts in prestige and power relations influenced Nan's ease with composing. As Kress (1997) explains, "Participants who have greater power are able to force other participants into greater efforts of interpretation. They have a different notion of 'transparency' than other participants who have less power and have to make every effort to produce messages which truly require minimal efforts of interpretation" (p. 14).

Transparency of message was something Nan actively struggled with in her school writing, as demonstrated when she was asked to write a report about a black explorer named Matthew Henson. As she wrote, Nan referred to photocopies of several encyclopedia pages about him (of which a few portions were missing) and struggled to make sense of what she had read. She also wrestled with what to write if she weren't going to copy directly from the published text. When Nan wrote stories for her own purposes, she rarely worried about spelling and easily constructed new texts. In contrast, as she worked on this assignment, spelling and accuracy became very important as she realized that this writing would be judged by how well it followed spelling rules and how much it was connected to the actual facts of Matthew Henson's life (fieldnotes, 12/14/94). The first draft of her report reads as follows:

> *Mattrew was born in 1837. he was an exporter he was black he was lucky because ~~it help him~~ every people thought he was their family. he explorer Greenland North pol. Mattrew helped Aruther parory He was ~~Story~~ that people would Story ~~and~~ gave up and he dies in 1855.*

After talking about her text for a while, we worked on revising it together. The final version of her story ended up like this:

> *Matthew was born in 1837. He was an explorer. Matthew helped Admiral Peary. Admiral Peary was a very famous explorer who discovered the North Pole. Matthew was black. He was lucky because the Eskimo people thought he was their family. He explored Greenland and the North Pole. He was strong. Other people would give up, but he didn't. He died in 1855.*

In this genre, Nan's strengths were not readily available as resources. There was no link to oral speech or to visual images that would help her construct her message. As in much academic writing, she had only words to use as tools for conveying her message. Especially because of her positioning as a student and as a nonnative speaker of English, she needed to make her message as transparent and accurate as possible for the reader. All the meaning needed to be contained in the words she wrote. As a result, this assignment was a real challenge for her because she simultaneously had to focus on accuracy, representation, and communication without the oral and visual tools that assisted her in out-of-school writing.

Nan's Written Meaning-making

In analyzing Nan's out-of-school writing, three questions are important in understanding the texts themselves: What is she writing? To whom is she writing? And why is she writing? Sociolinguistic studies of written language have tended to focus on the form of the writing, its context, the functions it serves, and the roles and statuses of the writer(s) audience. (For a review of this literature, see McKay, 1996.) Only recently have sociolinguists concerned themselves with the content of writing (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000). Here I examine not only the form of Nan's writing but the topics that she chose to write about as well.

Understanding the audiences Nan wrote for its especially important, since so much of school writing is done solely for the teacher to read. Notions of audience are quite connected to issues of purpose and function. In Camitta's (1993) study of out-of-school writing at a Philadelphia high school, she found that audience and purpose intersected in significant ways for adolescents:

> *Personal and creative writing is motion toward intimacy, and…its exchange weaves the strands of friendship and understanding.…For adolescents, writing is personal and social, an act of invention in which everyday actions are shaped and influenced by the content and by the symbolic value of written texts (p. 243).*

As I show in the analysis that follows, the genre/content, purpose/function, and audience of Nan's out-of-school writing were quite different from those of her school writing. In part, this analysis can explain why she was such an engaged writer at home and such a disengaged writer at school.

Genre

Although Nan's out-of-school writing included several different genres, she was most comfortable with narrative stories and letters to people she knew. Even the accounts that she wrote about real events had a storylike quality to them. Most of her fictional and nonfictional writing began with "One day…" For example, two nonfiction stories about me started: "One day is a girl name Miss Ellen." Here's the shorter version of this story:

> One day is a Girl name Msr. ELLEN
>
> Who like to teach a student
>
> her name is <u>ELLEN</u>
>
> She like to teach a lettle student

Another nonfictional story that started this way recounted how Nan's friend had thrown away the disposable camera she had taken to school. This story begins "One day I give my camera to my freind." All of her fictional stories (except the play) also began in this same way; for example: "One day it was a cloud and it was so cold." Nan's fictional and nonfictional stories as well as her single-page and multipage stories shared this storytelling mode. Her multipage stories were different in that each concluded with "The End." In all of the other fictional and nonfictional writing, the only other story that ended this way was the one about the camera. These beginnings and endings show, I think, that she had mastered aspects of the story genre and preferred it over other kinds of writing. More than half of her writing used these "story-oriented" conventions. The emphasis on narrative in her out-of-school writing illustrates the somewhat narrow set of conventions that she was comfortable working within. Clearly, as a student she needed to master other genres. What is unfortunate is that her rhetorical knowledge of storytelling was not made visible in ways that would allow her to make comparisons to alternate ways of making meaning in the classroom.

The other genre that Nan used most often was the letter. She wrote six letters to me during the fieldwork period, several around the time of my wedding. For example:

Dear Mrs, Mr, Ellen and Paul

Have a very good time I wish
you and Paul have a baby so we
can see what he or her looks like

We wish	Fr, Bnom* Rem
he or her	Family
well be	To you and and
pretty and	Mr. Paul
cute	

In this letter, Nan showed that she knew some of the conventions for writing a letter, such as starting with "Dear" and ending with some kind of closing. She didn't use a typical convention for letters, but rather the kind of headings often found in memos or on gifts. She ended with a section that shows whom the note is from and whom it is to. Although she still struggled with punctuation (there is non in this writing sample), she did capitalize appropriately, making it easier to distinguish the boundaries between ideas.

About a year later, Nan sent me a letter in the mail which shows that she had figured out several other letter-writing conventions:

Dear Mrs. Ellen

How are you! Thanks for the letters you sent to us. Did you know I have got a crush on a boy name Tommy he's cute and he's in 7th grade he's my typ but he have a girlfriend I got a crush on him since's he frist came to this school went he didn't have a girlFriend yet. please write back what should I do.

Love. Tiff

ask know ask ←— — — — — AKA

Nan

P.S. wish you a nice time

my friend knew I like him thy say they'll hook

me up with him

wish you like my letter

In this later letter, Nan demonstrated that she had learned about closing personal letters and that she could also append a "P.S." for additional thoughts. She used more punctuation, and she had also learned a common preteenage convention of putting "AKA" after her name to include both a nickname and her more formal name. Although she used this convention correctly, she incorrectly indicated that it stands for "ask know ask" rather than "also known as." In this case, Nan had learned the form but did not completely understand the meaning.

Certain features of the school genres she regularly produced can be found in the writing she did outside of class. I first noticed this practice in the writing of Nan's younger sister, Chamran. After a huge struggle with reading and writing in first and second grade, one day Chamran asked me if she could write a story. This was a monumental event because she had never asked to write something for fun. When I gave Chamran a piece of paper, she wrote her name in the top right corner of the page and then put "Spelling" as a title centered at the top of the page and numbered from one to ten down the left-hand side. In her first piece of out-of-school writing, she had decided to compose a spelling test. This was the genre that she felt most comfortable with and the only kind of "story" she knew how to write. In contrast, Nan always embraced story writing. The one exception was a picture at the top of which she had written "Today is Monday, January 18, 1993. It is a cold and sunny." This type of note consisting of the date and a short sentence about the weather was typically written on the chalkboard in the ESOL classes at her school.

Content

Before looking at particular themes in Nan's out-of-school writing, I would like to draw attention to one general feature of its content—the fact that in most of the texts I analyzed, women and girls are the main characters. The only exceptions in the writing she gave me are the "store opening" story, which had a man as its main character and the drawing of me with my husband (see Figure 3.1). At one point during the fieldwork period, Nan told me that she had added a boy character to a story she was writing about a girl who encountered some bees. When she rewrote the story to include the boy, she changed the title to reflect this change. Interestingly, although the female character had a name, she did not name this boy. When I asked her why she had made the decision to add a boy to her story, Nan explained: "My friend told me it is better if there's a boy, too."

This example shows that Nan talked about her writing with her friends and sometimes took their advice about the content of what she was composing. It also shows that when writing for her own purposes, the content of her writing was typically connected to her own interests and experiences as a girl. Although the topic of her writing was not always herself, it was the starting point for much if not all of what she wrote. This is yet another way in which the school writing Nan did differed from the writing she did on her own, for she was often not able to include herself or her experiences in her school writing (Skilton-Sylvester, 1997).

In Nan's out-of-school writing, there was a dual emphasis on fantasy and reality. Her thematic focus ranged from (1) seemingly mundane topics (such a story about her mother cooking, as story about seeing a bird in a tree, and a letter telling me that she had drawn a lot of pictures); to (2) fantasy topics (such as one about dressing in glamorous dresses and dancing, several about participating in my wedding, and a few that take place in nonurban settings quite unlike her neighborhood—settings with trees, birds, flowers, and single-family homes with chimneys); to (3) topics about difficult realities (including one about a fictional family living in poverty and another about a girl who cannot go to school because she is pregnant).

An example of the first set of topics about seemingly mundane realities is a text about her mother cooking. It included a picture of an overhead light and a table set with plates, forks, knives, and spoons. The text reads, "My mom is making a fried. But it is good to eat." Even in this apparently straightforward story, one can see the ways that Nan situated herself, not just as a reporter of what she saw, but a creator of written realities. She wrote this text as if she were writing a description of something that she had witnessed, but she also transformed the message in ways that vary from reality. Nan's' family did not own a table; they typically ate sitting on the floor. They also ate using chopsticks, not forks, knives, and spoons. Even in this seemingly straightforward story, Nan created a reality with her message; she didn't merely transcribe it. The insertion of a table, chairs, and silverware fit with Nan's interest in the lives of the families she saw on TV and of other Americans. She regularly interviewed me about my family's practice and asked if we ate the way that people do on television. Her choice also fit with her ambivalence about being Cambodian.

> *Nan*: I don't' want to be Asian American. I want to be just American.
>
> *Me*: Why?
>
> *Nan*: Cause it's better.
>
> *Me*: Why is it better?
>
> *Nan*: It just is. (fieldnotes, 2/5/95)

In her pictures and stories, she sometimes had the power to "Americanize" her family in ways that did not fit her lived reality.

Nan's ability to create new realities was even more present in the writings that clearly included fantasy content. In these stories, she created the content completely, rather than basing it partially on her own lived experience. The same is true of her later drawings (see Figure 3.2). In these stories and pictures, the figures were typically who are dressed in long, elaborate gowns. Another example can be seen in the story called "The Pretter Girls" ("The Pretty Girls"): "One day it was six pretter girls and They all dances Pretter like a pretter women that has a picture for me. Some of the pretter girls were asleep now." This particular story and drawing had six girls, all in full-length gowns with one lying down and sleeping at the bottom of the page; in many others Nan created similar situations in which women are described as pretty and are dressed quite formally and extravagantly. Her interest in stories about formal occasions became more intense before my own wedding; Nan spent a long time talking about what I would wear and how pretty I would look.[4]

The final set of themes have to do with fictional stories written about difficult realities; they are not about Nan but instead address issues that are relevant to her life. In addition to challenges similar to those facing other girls in school, the Cambodian girls in my study often had significant family responsibilities that outweighed those of their brothers or their non-Cambodian classmates, strict rules about interacting with the opposite sex, and uncertainty about their language abilities or limited experience with participation patterns found in the classroom (Skilton-Sylvester, 1997).

In addition, the girls often worried about getting pregnant early, a fear closely linked to concerns about not finishing school and a potential version of their futures. When I visited college campuses with Nan's older cousin Ty, her mother kept lecturing her about how important it was not to get pregnant if she were allowed to live on campus (Skilton-Sylvester, 1997). On a similar topic, in fourth grade Nan wrote the following story entitled "The girl that can not got out of School":

> *One day she went home with not to tell the teacher. The teacher cannot found her. The girl went up the sky and down the dry and then she got home early. But she forgot to go to school. The teacher was very happy that she did not go to school. The girl said "Oh no." In the next morning, she did not go home. Her mother was very sad because she did not go home. The girl's mom give her a wedding. The girl cry today. The girl is a mommy and the girl's mother is a grandmother and she have a baby. The girl cannot go to school because she had a baby. The End.*

While the title seems to suggest that the girl cannot get out of going to school (i.e., she has to go to school), the story ends by stating that she can't go to school. This might be just an inadvertent mix-up, but I think it may also point to ambivalence about school, which is supposed to be a place where people want to be but often is not. It is also interesting (and disturbing) that the teacher in the story is happy when the girl doesn't come to school. Although this story line may not have been directly applicable to Nan's experience with school, there were certainly times for all the girls in this study when they did not feel good about going to school, often because of peer relationships and negative connotations associated with being in ESOL. For example, Nan's youngest sister Chamran once asked me when I would come to her class to visit again "because sometimes I don't have any friends." She went on to explain that her friend "took" her other friend by saying that Chamran wasn't good at ESOL (fieldnotes, 6/2/94). At other times, discomfort with school had more to do with academic struggles. Nan's older cousin Saporn talked about her difficulty in school this way: "I'm doing so bad in school. I've never been this scared. I study and study and I fail, but my other friends, they didn't even study and they know how to do it. It just doesn't make any difference. I study and it does nothing" (fieldnotes, 2/22/95).

Most of the pictures that Nan drew for "The girl that can not got out of School" illustrate directly what was happening in each segment of the plot, except in the first section when the girl left school early, and there are a few rhyming words that don't makes sense: "the girl went up the sky and down to the dry." The picture in Figure 3.3 shows a car near the school with what looks like a young man in it; in this context these words seem to allude to what she is doing with him. Since most Cambodian girls Nan's age don't' seem to know too much about pregnancy, it makes some sense that whatever she is doing with this boy is in almost indecipherable terms. (One of her cousins who is the same age was surprised that I didn't have a baby when I got home from my week-long honeymoon.)

It is also noteworthy that the girl in the story sees the boy under the guise of school. This fits with my understanding of the uses of an "education" label in increasing freedom and mobility for young women. If an event is seen as a school event (i.e., going to the library, meeting a tutor), girls and young women can often do things they wouldn't ordinarily be able to do (dancing with a boy, wearing a sleeveless dress). As Kulig (1994) states, "There are many opportunities for freedom here for these young women because they attend school where they can meet and spend time with young men without parental supervision" (p. 139).

This story says a lot, I think, about the fear girls have about not living up to their parents' goals for their future. The fears expressed by Nan about getting pregnant as a teenager are an example of this. However, it is important not to see their fears simply in terms of the disruption of having a baby as a teenager. Nan's story also seems to express well both the ambivalence these girls often have about school and a sense that they do not always feel wanted when they are there. In a more general way, this story illustrates the fact that going or not going to school is often a gendered process; that is, that processes that influence girls (i.e., pregnancy, needing to take care of siblings, rules about interactions with the opposite sex, marriage) can be in conflict with being a student.

Clearly, in the content of her writing, Nan did not focus primarily on the specifics of her own everyday reality. Instead, she transformed those realities, dreamed of other realities, and worked out fears about current and/or future realities. Although her own life was typically the starting point, she often created her stories at the intersection of fact and fiction. My analysis of the reading and writing that these students did in school indicates that outside of the ESOL classroom, there were few opportunities to write with their own lives (or the lives of other Asian Americans) as a starting point. The writing that these girls did in school focused much more on fact than on fiction, making Nan's stories sometimes seem like false representations of the facts, rather than her own "trying on" of different possibilities.

Audience/Function

Unlike much of Nan's school writing, for which the teacher was the only audience and the purpose of writing was often "to finish the assignment for a grade," Nan's out-of-school writing had multiple audiences and served multiple functions. I was surprised to see how much copying students were required to do in their school writing, especially in the early grades. I was also somewhat surprised to hear Saporn, Nan's cousin, say that students got higher grades when they copied something from the book than when they wrote something themselves (fieldnotes, 5/30/94). Saporn's copying during middle school could be framed as plagiarism, but it could also be seen as a product of many years of school training in which copying was the main genre of school-based writing. In fact, in first grade, almost all Chamran's homework had to do with copying. From this perspective, Saporn used the training that she received in elementary school, despite the fact that the rules for writing had changed. She had developed few skills for meeting the writing expectations of middle school and high school.

The notion that it matters more to put something on the page than to write something good or original was echoed many times in the comments of these school-aged girls. As Saporn explained, "Sometimes when I copy what I write, I don't even know what it means anymore" (fieldnotes, 2/25/94). Not knowing what things mean seemed to hamper other aspects of writing for some of the girls. Ty, for example, thought that not knowing the meaning made it hard for her to spell words. She questioned, "They asked me about the spelling of the words, but I don't know what they mean, how can I know how to spell them?" (fieldnotes, 6/2/95).

In contrast to the school writing Nan had to do, her out-of-school writing had multiple audiences and multiple functions. For example, letter/note-writing was something that Nan (and the other girls) did a lot and not just with me. They regularly used letters to repair and maintain relationships, write to members of the opposite sex, and keep in touch with friends (Skilton-Sylvester, 1997). In fact, when Nan sent me the letter about her crush on a boy, she also included a copy of the note that had been passed back and forth between her and her friend about this boy. In the note, parts were crossed out as new messages were exchanged:

> ~~Whatever you name Tommy~~
>
> ~~Why you ask me if I like him~~
>
> Because I'm gonna hook you up with him
>
> No I got a boy already
>
> Who?
>
> My friend brother in Maine name Timmy

This strategy of maintaining relationships through writing was particularly appealing to these girls in part because it was difficult for many of their parents to read what they had written. Neither of Nan's parents could read in English, so a note was a safe way for her to communicate even about things that her parents might not want her to talk about (i.e., a crush on a boy). So, in addition to there begin a real audience, the value of communicating in this way also connected to a "nonaudience"—knowing, that is, that one's parents could not read what was written.

Although Nan often focused more on creating and representing her message than on being sure it was communicated as she intended, it is clear that her out-of-school writing was always done to be shared with someone. In some cases, it was performed; in others, it was passed along to show her interest in a topic or to show that she cared about the receiver. In our tutoring sessions, she gave me pieces of her writing as gifts when I left, as something of value that she had created. Another example of this practice can be seen from the story line of her play "Daytime," when disappointed girls cannot buy a birthday present for their sister: "We have no money but we can make a card for her." Here is the foundation of the audiences and purposes Nan imagines as she writes. Although she struggled in school and did not have much money, Nan was able through her pencil and paper to give those around her a creation that was part of herself. In this way, writing was a limitless resource for connecting with others outside of school.

Investment

Understanding Nan's experiences with writing requires thinking about her investment (Norton Peirce, 1995) in using and learning about writing. This notion acknowledges that power relationships and other particulars of the context can shape identities and language practices at any given point in time. Norton Peirce's (1995) term *investment* is connected to the idea that those who are learning a new language need to believe that they have the "right to speak," that what they say will be heard and responded to with interest, respect, and action. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1977) work, she suggests that we cannot assume that listeners always grant those who are speaking (or writing) English as a second language the "right to speak."

I believe that Nan's experiences with writing in home and school contexts can be understood in terms of investment, identity, and the right to speak. In thinking about Nan's experiences with school writing, it would be easy to conclude that she was just no motivated, that she simply had little interest in print. What her out-of-school writing shows is that she could be incredibly invested in using and learning about the written word when she was granted the right to write and knew that there were those who really wanted to listen to her thoughts, experiences, and ideas. At school, when she was framed as a "struggling writer" and where the purposes of writing were not primarily to "do social work," she was often unable to reveal her literacy strengths. In her ESOL classroom, however, where she was given the opportunity to "perform" parts of her journal for her classmates, she was able to demonstrate some of her literacy strengths within the school context. At home, where she was framed as storyteller and playwright, she wrote with great enthusiasm and creativity. We have often failed in schools because we tell students we want them to speak/compose their thoughts on paper, yet we constrain their "right to speak" by making our responses primarily evaluative. As teachers, we are often not a real audience, and so it is difficult for students to invest in the work we are asking them to do. Nan's engagement in the writing of her ESOL classroom shows, however, that when purpose and audience are meaningfully constructed, she was able to claim the right to write within the classroom context.

Implications For Teachers And Schools

Both Norton Peirce (1995) and Cummins (1997) point to the important role that teachers can play in shaping the identities students have at school. In discussing what makes it possible for language-minority students to succeed, one of the key elements Cummins (1997) stresses is "the identity options that are being opened up or closed off for students" (p. 425) in the school context. Similarly, Norton Peirce (1995) discusses this changing subjectivity of students in different contexts and concludes that because identities can be shaped by those who listen to students and read their texts, educational intervention can really have an impact. Norton Peirce (1995) suggests:

> *Motivation is not a fixed personality trait but must be understood with reference to social relations of power that create the possibilities for language learners to speak….It is their investment in the target language that will lead [learners] to speak….The lived experiences and social identities of language learners need to be incorporated into the formal second language curriculum (p.26).*

My study has shown, however, that if students' lives only enter the school walls through writing that is on the periphery of how students are ultimately evaluated, we have not created the bridge needed to make the out-of-school strengths of a student such as Nan visible when she is tackling academic literacy. It is also important, as Zamel (1993) has pointed out, that we not merely prepare students for the academic world that already exists, but that we work to make that academic world take the realities of writing in a second language into consideration in evaluation.

Nan's writing also highlights the importance of visual and oral discourse in the ways she augmented the meaning-making she dos with letters and words. Bridges need to be built between these mulitsensory messages and the ways that school writing is often judged and interpreted based on the messages that the words themselves convey. Kress (1997) suggests, "As texts draw more and more overtly on visual means of communication, the skills and knowledge of visual design and display will need to be fostered as a central part of any literacy curriculum" (p. 58).

If schools are to compete with peer groups for the investment of students, it needs to be clear to students that they have something to gain by learning school writing conventions. This "return on investment" needs to be more than a good grade. We need to show the doors that open up if one can write "transparent" messages as part of academic discourse. Even more, we need to show that there is an immediate return on students' investment in school writing, that this writing is being written for real audiences and real purposes beyond evaluation.

In Nan's writing, there was just one time that a school writing genre visibly appeared in her out-of-school writing (that is, when she place a date at the top of a page and described the weather). Her genres of choice—fictional stories and pictures and letters—were not typical genres she was asked to write in school. The genres that she liked best had an emphasis on creative storytelling and personal connections, two features often not present in school writing. The one place where school and out-of-school genres intersected was in the journal that she kept in ESOL class that she was often able to read aloud to her classmates. The journal captured both the creativity and the emphasis on relationships that are central characteristics of the genres that she most often picked, and it included a performance element that also highlighted her strengths. Unfortunately, journal-writing was not a type of genre that had much importance at school, so this link was not a powerful bridge between her home and school writing practices. Also, in other classes I observed, journals were not linked to performance but were primarily used as communication tools to discuss ideas and thoughts with an audience that included the teacher, but no necessarily other students.

During Nan's fourth-grade year, I spent a significant period of time her grade-level classroom. Her teacher, Mrs. Jackson, explained that she was at a second-grade reading level and that the school had recently adopted a textbook series that meant that all students in a particular grade read the same text at the same time. This was quite difficult for Nan, who got the most out of the lesson when the stories were read out loud or listened to on tape. It appears that her comfort in speaking in the classroom could also have been used as a bridge. Mrs. Jackson explained, "Well, the Cambodian girls are very quiet, very timid….Nan on the other hand is very vocal. I mean, whether she has the right or wrong answer or has any idea what you were talking about, she'll offer an answer to a question" (taped interview, 6/2/94). Even so, much of the "language work" that went on in her fourth-grade classroom was "over her head." On one of the days that I observed the class, while much of the class read a story, Nan worked in a small group of students focusing on phonics exercises from a workbook not associated with the main text (fieldnotes, 5/22/94).

When Mrs. Jackson spoke about writing instruction in her classroom, she first mentioned the lesson that she thought was most successful that year. It was an exercise the children did after reading a story that contained a lot of similes; most of the students then successfully created similes of their own. As Mrs. Jackson goes on to discuss what her goals were for writing instruction, one can sense how much she wanted writing to be fun for her students:

> *One thing I work on from the very beginning is just building sentences….I work on creative writing and my feeling is writing is just something the kids should do. We do through all the writing process. I go through all the steps—brainstorming, the rough copy, the editing, the final copy. It takes maybe a whole week to do one story. An my goal is not so much to get a finished piece of work that is grammatically correct, punctuation and all. My goal is to get a story that shows some imagination and shows that the child was able to go through those steps, was able to…get their ideas down….I will grade them, but I don't put the marks all over the paper. So my goal is that by the end of the year, they've had an enjoyable experience writing….We read autobiographies in the book and then from that we just took of and wrote an autobiography. (taped interview, 6/2/9, emphasis added)*

The writing Nan most often did in her fourth-grade classroom clustered around three types: (1) writing based on readings done in class, (2) creative writing in which students showed their ability to go through the writing process, and (3) workbook exercises that included individual words or the construction of sentences.

There are several ways in which Nan's strengths from her out-of-school writing could have been evident here—the emphasis on meaning-making in creative writing (rather than on correctness) and the writing of autobiographies were both potential pathways for Nan to participate in school writing. However, the emphasis in the creative writing process was on communication for the teacher who would be grading the writing and not on performance or relationship-building through the writing. Also, pictures were not a part of the meaning-making she did for these creative writing activities. In addition, because the readings were often inaccessible to Nan, the writing of autobiographies or the writing of similes might have been difficult to even begin to understand.

It is not difficult to imagine that the classroom context could be one in which oral and visual meaning-making exists alongside written communication, where both teachers and students are an authentic audience for the written work of others in the classroom, and where the purposes for writing are connected to multiple real reasons why class members would want to communicate with each other. And in fact, in some of the many classrooms I visited, this very kind of writing instruction did occur. If Nan had been in such an environment, her abilities as a playwright might have been a springboard for doing the social work of school through writing.

Aside from the ways that writing instruction occurred in the classroom, two other factors might have made Nan's writing trajectory quite different. First, if she had learned to read and write in her native Khmer, there is reason to believe (Garcia, 1999, in press; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) that she might not have fallen so far behind her native-English-speaking peers in her ability to understand and create texts in English. Like Nan, all her sisters and cousins struggled with the technical skills of reading and writing in the early grades, and this continued to make them fall farther and farther behind their peers. Much of Nan's writing, although expressive, creative, and interesting, did not meet the expectations of school personnel for what children of her age should be able to accomplish with print.

Nan's in-school writing was also influenced by her perception of herself within the school context. As I mentioned above, student subjectivities are "(re)formed within the space of the school itself" (Levinson, 1998, p. 267). Nan was a part of a peer culture in which being literate was not the pathway to popularity. Part of why Nan's out-of-school writing was more visible than her in-school writing may have had to do with the fact that mastering "sanctioned literacies" was seen as the key to unpopularity. Her desire to win popularity, however, was also connected to the fact that she saw herself losing at the academic game. As we saw earlier, Nan believed that adopting an American name was a good way to achieve better academic results. At some level, when she was not in her ESOL classroom, she had given up on herself as someone who could do "sanctioned literacy" and so it is not surprising that her "literate underlife" was so much more vibrant that what she did at school.

Nan did find some success in her ESOL classroom, where she was able to use her multimodal resources to perform literate acts in the classroom, where many of the students had similar reading and writing difficulties, and where her linguistic and cultural differences were "normal." However, the reading and writing she did in ESOL was not the kind of reading and writing she was expected to do outside it. The engagement she experienced with writing out-of-school shows that she saw the potential power of the written medium to convey meaning and build relationships—to "do social work" with writing. Nan's out-of-school literacy resources—and those of many nonmainstream students in U.S. schools—can be a foundation for school literacy if we are able to read the words and the worlds that children bring with them to school and help them to engage in new and related words and worlds as they use writing to do the social work of school. There are many things to learn by looking at Nan's out-of-school writing in relation to her in-school writing. It is abundantly clear that we, as teachers, have as much to learn from Nan as she from us.

Endnotes

1 The research reported in this chapter was made possible in part by a grant from the Spencer Foundation. The data presented, the statements made, and the views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author.

2 Most of the girls did not choose American names until high school.

3 *Y.S. v. School District of Philadelphia* was a class-action suit filed in 1985 on behalf of Asian students in Philadelphia. The resulting court mandate included restructuring curriculum, placement, and staffing in schools with a significant number of Asian students.

4 She was, in fact, somewhat disappointed by how informal my wedding was, which did not fit with how (fueled by television) she imagined such an event. At one point she told me, "You have to have a pink cake like they did on *Full House*" (one of her favorite television shows).

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NOW THAT YOU'VE READ, what do you think?

1. In what out-of-school writing activities was Nan involved? How did Nan use out-of-school writing? How do these uses compare with the ways in which she made use of writing in school?
2. Nan was clearly much more interested/invested in her out-of-school writing Why might that be, according to Skilton-Sylvester? do you agree with Skilton-Sylvester's conclusions? Why or why not?
3. In the opening pages of Skilton-Sylvester's essay, she asks "What can we learn from out-of-school literacy practices that could help us reshape what happens in schools around literacy? Is it possible that the kind of investment Nan demonstrated in her out-of-school writing could be fostered in her in-school writing as well? If students believe that the best return on their investment comes from their peers, and if their peers see literacy as an unpopular activity, how can we convince them that reading and writing in school are worth their energy and attention?" (64). What do you think? How would you respond to Skilton-Sylvester's question?

READING

My Uncle's Guns

Ann E. Green

In the essay that follows, Ann E. Green asks readers to look at the process of writing a "personal narrative" for a first-year composition class—like the one in which you are currently enrolled—from the perspective of the writer. Interspersed among the kind of safe and largely commonplace details so often associated with first-year composition are digressions into the real, complex, and fascinating lifewords and thoughts of the writer. These "Metacognitive Moments" are the things the writer decides not to include in the essay she's writing for class because she believes the events and choices that make up her life beyond school are not welcome in the academy—certainly not in this particular classroom where she feels certain she'll be judged as a "redneck" if she shares them.

BEFORE YOU READ this essay, *read yourself.*

Have you ever been asked to write a personal essay about your life? Did you hesitate to include details you felt the teacher might judge as inappropriate or that you felt the teacher might not appreciate? Think about the process of writing that essay. What was going through your head? Green asks you to understand all non-blocked text as the prose the writer is generating for her teacher to read. You should understand all the blocked, *italicized* text as metacognitive moments—things the writer thinks about including but decides against. The first "metacognitive moment," for example, begins "I'm not sure how these essays are supposed to start. You said in class that a narrative should tell a story. How much of the story do I have to tell?" These are the things she remembers but worries are too "redneck" to include. Do any of these struggles seem familiar to you?

My uncle, who is not really my uncle but my father's best friend since grade school, bought an antique gun from the First World War. We saw it when we went over to my uncle's house to visit. Dad and T.J. were talking, having conversations with long pauses, while I watched out the living room window.

I'm not sure how these essays are supposed to start. You said in class that a narrative should tell a story. How much of the story do I have to tell? Should I put in a reflection now? Should I tell you about smoking? Growing up, I watched men have conversations with each other filled with these long moments of silence where they smoked. One of them would light another cigarette or refill his pipe or, on a special occasion, smoke a cigar. If they didn't smoke, they chewed, either wintergreen Skoal or a pipe stem or a long piece of hay. Dad smoked a pipe with Old Hickory Tobacco until he quit farming. T.J., according to Dad, used to have every vice imaginable and then some, but he had quit smoking both cigarettes and cigars, almost entirely stopped chewing tobacco, and even cut back on his drinking since his heart attack. Every time I watch Dad talk, I remember how he smoked. Should this be part of the story?

While I was looking out the window, two deer appeared from the woods and strolled out into the yard. Although T.J. and Dad hunted together every year, T.J. fed wild animals, birds and rabbits, deer and eve stray dogs in his back yard. The two deer went to pick at the food that had fallen from the bird feeders. One was a good-size doe, the other a late-born fawn with spots on its rump yet. When I walked up to the window to get a closer look, the deer spooked and leaped over the stone wall separating the lawn from the woods. Dad said, "Damn it, T.J., where's your camera?"

"Don't own one. If I shoot something, it ain't going to be for a god damn picture, anyway." He paused and slowly stood up from his recliner. "Come here, I'll show you what I'll shoot it with come December."

Dad and I went into T.J.'s spare bedroom to his gun cabinet, and he pulled out the WWI gun, a rifle whose stock had been cut off and refinished, evidently as a deer hunting gun. T.J. said, "It's my gun from the First World War." And then he laughed long and hard at his own joke. His laugh, as usual, drowned out any other sound and ended with a couple of snorts after which he laughed again. T.J. hadn't seen any combat after he enlisted. His ROTC scholarship paid for Penn State, but instead of sending him to Korea where the fighting was, the Army sent him to West Germany as a stretcher carrier in a medical unit. For the Army, it hadn't been bad, T.J. said. They spent most of their time moving the mobile medical unit along the East German border, to practice in case of a communist attack.

My father took the gun from T.J.'s hands. "Nice job cutting it back. Craig .340."

The gun didn't look any different tome than the dozens of other guns I'd seen and handled. I didn't hunt, or at least I didn't shoot, but I occasionally had gone out for turkey with Dad in the spring. We'd never even seen one, but it was beautiful in the woods at dawn.

At twelve, my first date was a picnic on roast woodchuck in a field near home; the gun that shot the chuck was a bolt-action 30.30. Everyone in my class took the Hunter Safety course in sixth grade, before it was legal for us to hunt at twelve. All of my boyfriends and a good many of my girlfriends owned guns for shooting or hunting purposes, and school was canceled for the first day of buck season in December. In the fall, I was late home from dates because any boy I was with would use the drive home as a good opportunity to spotlight deer, to see how many there were before hunting season.

Are these the kinds of details that you mean when we talk in class about significant details? How am I supposed to know which details are important to you?

I feel like I have to tell you all the details about deer hunting so you won't think we're simple or backward or country, getting all excited about looking at somebody's gun. Even though you assign us those Tim O'Brien stories with lists, you really don't think we'll write like that do you? And you would tell us we were too repetitive if we did. You're not from around here, and I can see you don't like us sometimes when we go outside on break from class and smoke and talk too loud about how we hate our jobs.

You look at us and think that we don't know anything. You think that teaching us how to write can't help us cause we're not going to change our lives by reading some essays. But we all want to do well in this class. Can't you just tell us what you want us to write about?

As dad looked the Craig .340 over, peering down the barrel, checking to see if it was loaded, he said, "Let's try the son-of-a-bitch out in November at the fireman's shoot-in and pig roast." We left then, in our pickup, complete with spotlight and gun rack in the cab. Dad had to get home to go to work as a janitor at 7 A.M., while I had to make it in early to run the drive-by window at the bank. We saw twelve deer in a field on the way home, and nothing was unusual.

In fact, the night that it happened I had gone to the fair with Dad and his new woman, Louise. It was about time Dad found somebody else, and I was glad it was Louise, who was younger than Dad but older than me by quite a bit. I'd seen what other kinds of women men found after their first wives.

I'll cut Louise out of this paper later, because I know that you'll think she's extra, just one more person who's not really in the rising action of this story, but right now it's important to me that she stay in here. Most of the time I'm too busy trying to figure out how I'll pay for my next class and my car insurance to sit around and think about how I feel about somebody who's important in my life, but not a pain in my ass in some way. Louise has just been a fixture, a nice addition to Dad's life that makes him leave me alone more.

I rode down to the fair that night with Dad and Louise, knowing that I'd most certainly see somebody I knew and come home with whoever was there. T.J.'s volunteer fire company had beer at its fair, so it was a big event. It was high school reunion week, but nobody had called me to go as a date. I guess after this long, everybody brought their wives. What I didn't expect at the fair was that Mike would show up, looking better than the last I'd seen him, appearing between the clam and the beer tents while Dad brought Louise and me beers. He wasn't wearing anything Army. Evidently he no longer needed to shoe his pride in the uniform by wearing it to public events. He came over and asked Dad how he was and what he was doing since he wasn't farming. Mike nodded to Louise, but he was looking me up and down, checking to see if I had a wedding band, if weight had settled on my legs or on my ass, trying to see if the rumor about me taking college classes could be true. Dad said, "Mike, are you staying with your folks? Could you run Maria home on your way?"

I was mad that Dad was passing me off on Mike, even if I did plan on staying later. I could find my own way home and always had.

"I'll take her home. No problem," Mike said, grinning at me. "Does she have to be home at any particular time these days?"

We all laughed, because even when there were particular times, I had often missed them. Mike and I had another good long look at each other. No beer belly.

No visible scars. Lines around his eyes. Teeth still straight and white. The Army has good dental.

The good dental is an important detail, and you probably don't know that. If you're on welfare, you get dental, same if you're in the Army, but if you work loading potato chips on tractor trailers you don't get dental, the bank gets some dental (because otherwise who'd deposit their paycheck with a teller-girl minus a front tooth?) but if you're self-employed or working in a stone quarry, you don't get dental. First thing that goes on people round here, makes them look older than they are, are teeth. That's why kids in Heard Start are fluoridated almost to death. Mary, from our class, her kid is in Head Start, and she says they make those kids brush their teeth twice in the three hours they're there. It's like that Head Start teacher believes Mary's teeth are bad because she doesn't brush them, not because her Mom raised her on potato chips and soda. If those kids don't' look poor, if they have good teeth, a decent set, they just might make it.

"How's the babies doing?"

"Fine. Growing like weeds. They're still in Texas. This is a short trip, just me seeing Mom and Dad and going to the reunion. Karen's pregnant again, and she don't travel too good."

I remembered the one time I'd seen Karen, she was a dishwater blond with circles under her eyes and a crooked, white smile. Mike had met her at basic training in Oklahoma. Mike just came back from that last ten day brutal basic training hike in the desert and proposed. They were married before he was shipped to Germany, and they were in Germany when Mike got shipped to Saudi. She had stayed in Germany, praying that what was at first a conflict wouldn't last too long, and then praying that the war wouldn't kill him before their first child was born.

We decided to go get a drink at our favorite bar, the Tea Kettle, because it had been a good place to skip an afternoon of school when we were growing up. It seemed like a perfect place to fill Mike in on the local gossip.

Mike was driving a familiar car, his Dad's ancient, rust and white colored Ford Fairlane, the passenger seat littered with the usual collection of empty cigarette packages, a partially filled bottle of oil left over from a previous oil change, and an oil filter wrench. Mike threw the junk into the back seat on top of a light-weight fluorescent orange hunting vest with the license pinned in the back and an ancient red hunting cap. I smiled because the clutter in the back seat was so familiar. The extra flannel shirts and jumper cables didn't seem to have moved in the years since I'd ridden with him.

You said something in class about Tim O'Brien and parataxis. Is that a list or something? Does this description of Mike's back seat count? Should I describe the flannel shirts? Do you even know what an oil filter wrench looks like?

At the Tea Kettle, we started drinking shots and went through our high school classmates, listing births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and affairs. We'd each graduated with about seventy people, most we'd known all our lives, and we had talked about almost everybody when I started asking him about his time in the Gulf.

"It was lots of sand and way too hot," he said. "But in that way it was like Oklahoma and basic all over again. MREs and sweat. No black widow spiders, though. Did I tell you about that?"

"No. Don't we have black widow spiders around here? The males have the red hour glass on their backs?"

"No, the females. They bite their mates after they have sex and kill them."

"But, what about the Gulf? Your Mom told Dad that you were in the actual fighting and some of the digging the bodies out of the bunkers after stuff was over."

"It wasn't that big a deal. The hardest thing was losing the barracks to the Scud. I knew those people to speak to….They were Pennsylvanians, reserve, not career military. Stupid loss, shouldn't have been there.

"But anyway, I was on maneuvers in the Oklahoma desert," Mike continued. "Last ten day stretch of basic. The Army has convinced you, you can't brush your teeth unless somebody else says it's O.K. and shows you how, and we're supposed to be out surviving in combat conditions. I'm in my tent putting on socks…"

"Putting on socks?"

"Yeah. We had to mark ten miles back and my feet are blistered, so I'm putting on a pair of these stupid army issue socks. I'm pulling the left sock on and I feel this sharp pain, and I look down and there's a god damn black widow spider stuck to my leg. And we'd been told there are no black widow spiders in the Oklahoma desert, no dangerous spiders at all."

“Wait a second. No bad spiders. How in the hell did it end up on you then?”

“Christ, I don’t know. But this drill sergeant has been giving me shit since the beginning, saying that it don’t’ matter if my father was in Asia, that I’m such a smart ass that I’m not going to make it through basic. And since I think I’m so god damn intelligent, I should try for an ROTC scholarship in the Air Force, and just look at war on a computer screen, like Space Invaders. He’s been busting on me for weeks, and now he’s not going to let me finish basic. Or he’s not going to believe me, and by the time he does I could be dead.”

“Why are they such sons-of-bitches?”

“Right now you can only be career Army if they keep moving you up the chain of command. Career Army means retirement at thirty-eight and a new life. This weekend warrior shit means dying whenever somebody who’s been away for a while forgets the rules and has an accident and you’re in the line of fire or in the tank that he mistakes for the enemy.”

I don’t know if this is the kind of dialogue that you say “reveals character.” We said “fuck” a lot more than I’m writing down now, but you probably don’t want that in a paper. It’s probably one of those things that a professional author can use, but that we can’t yet. Like we have to get good at knowing how to use big words first, before we can write like we talk. See, for me the spider symbolizes what Mike’s life has been like, something always biting him on the ass at a crucial moment and screwing things up, but I don’t know if you’ll get the spider comparison. It doesn’t seem “realistic,” but it’s what he said rally happened, so it must be true.

Is this the language of “the oppressed” that you’ve been talking about in class? Like that guy who taught those peasants, those peasants probably said “fuck” in Spanish a lot, too, but that probably wasn’t included in their essays, right?

“So, anyway, you’re still in the Army,” I said, motioning the bartender to give me another chaser. “So what did you do about the spider?”

“Well, the Army gives you this stuff that freezes on contact. Why not just a bottle of bug spray, I don’t know. So I’m hopping up and down and grabbing the can from my kit, dumping stuff all over, and the spider’s trying to beat a hasty retreat and I’m hopping after it, knocking the tent down, till I finally freeze the sucker. I’m trying to figure out…”

The door to the Tea Kettle slams, and Candy Dimock, now married to a Brown, bursts in, talking before she’s in the door.

"There's bodies in the road. Please come help. They're dead. We think they're dead, but we're not sure. Bodies…"

"What bodies, Candy?" I ask, but people are already standing up and pushing forward. "What road, where?"

"Up the hill," she says. I had seen her from a distance at the fair grounds earlier with her husband. They must have been driving home and seen something. "Danny went to call the state cops, the ambulance."

"Run over?" I ask. Candy says, "Blood in the road. I don't know…"

Mike grabs Candy by the arm. "Come show us where you saw them," he says. "We'll see if we can help. Maria, you know CPR, right?" He pulls Candy toward the Ford and throws open the back seat door for her. Reaches around and pulls a thirty-thirty out from underneath the hunting clothes. "Get in," he says, and pushes Candy inside, handing me the rifle. "There are shells in the glove box." Other people are getting into their cars, some still holding their beers. Some are unpacking knives and deer rifles from beneath their back seats. They are waiting to follow us. I fasten my seat belt and open the glove compartment while Mike gets in the car. When I open the glove box, Mike's grandpa's service issue revolver tumbles out with boxes of shells, pink registration information, and their Family Farm insurance card. Mike backs up fast, while I start slipping long yellow-colored bullets into the chamber of the thirty-thirty, load it and put the safety on. Candy says, "Maria, do you remember two-man CPR in case we need it? I can't remember how many breaths per second…"

"How far," Mike asks, voice calm. He doesn't wait for an answer before he says, "Load the Colt, too."

I am already filling the Colt from the other box of bullets. The only gun I have shot on a regular basis. Friday nights shooting bottles filled with water and watching them explode. Saturday nights shooting mailboxes at midnight driving too fast, throwing beer bottles at the mailboxes if it wasn't your turn with the gun.

"Here," Candy says, but at first we see nothing. Then we spot the white in the ditch, the unmoving white in the ditch.

I remember (from first aid class):

-gun shot wounds are to be treated as puncture wounds;

-knife wounds also puncture (don't remove the knife);

-cover and try and prevent bleeding with direct pressure.

Mike gets out of the car with the thirty-thirty, metal glinting, catching the light from a car pulling up behind us. Others pull up behind us, also get out. Slowly. Moments drag on and on. I hold the forty-five. The bodies are end to end in a ditch by the road side. Blood has run from the man's chest and onto the road and pools on the asphalt. In the headlights, it's not clear whether the woman's sweatshirt is gray or white. She lies on her side, and I can see that she was shot from the front because the exit wound on her back is big enough for me to put one of my hands in.

"Two," Mike says, his hand gently lifting the man's dark hair from his neck as he feels for the carotid pulse.

My fingers probe the woman's neck for the artery, any sign of life. Their clothes are red and maroon, fresh and bright, partly dried blood. Her eyes are wide open, but she is dead. It is silent as we gather around the bodies, not moving them. Sticking the guns back in the vehicles, finishing the beers, lighting cigarettes, waiting for the cops. No one recognizes the two dead.

We found out later it was a lover's triangle involving newcomers. The guy who did the killing went to the fair with his ex-girlfriend. She wanted to be friends and invited him to come with her to meet her new boyfriend. The old boyfriend was in the back seat of the car, pulled a gun, shot through the seat and killed the boyfriend. She stopped the car, turned around, and said, "What the hell is going on?" and was shot in the chest. He panicked, threw the bodies in the ditch and drove off. Threw the revolver and its clip out at different places on his way out of town, but was caught before he hit the interstate because a cop stopped him and noticed the blood and rips on the passenger seat. The cops found the clip the first day, on the five mile strip of two lane that was most likely, but they couldn't find the gun. T.J.'s fire company cleaned up from the fair and then helped hunt for the gun. T.J. found the weapon three days later, ten yards from the road, in the rain. He knocked over some strands of purple and white vetch with a branch when the stick hit the gun. It was his sixtieth birthday, and after he found the gun, all the state cops shook his hand. His picture, holding his walking stick and grinning, was in the local paper.

That night, after we'd talked to the cops, Mike drove me home and finished telling me about the Gulf.

"Since I'm in for twenty years and already served almost half, they stuck me in a tank with more firepower than you'd ever imagine, guarding some West Point son-of-a-bitch commander who'd never even sweated in a desert. He was trained in jungle warfare, a kind of leftover. It was just miles and miles of tunnels, sand, and oil. And we were going to suffocate in their bunkers anyway."

As I sit here trying to write this story, I try and remember what was said about a good narrative, what a good narrative consists of, but I don't' have a conclusion in this story, just more fragments: Dad and T.J. hunted deer and came back empty-handed; Mike's mother sent over a venison roast from one of their deer; we ate the venison roast today at noon, with potatoes. And I don't have any questions for peer reviewers, because now that I'm in these night classes with these eighteen-year-olds, they don't understand my life anyway. At least in the continuing ed classes we had a variety of experiences, like shitty jobs or boyfriends, and shared ideas about good writing, like no comma splices and clear words. These girls can't even tell the difference between a Honda and a Ford, a double barrel shot gun and a pellet gun, or eve, a buck and a doe. Some of them aren't even sure what their major is, while I'm trying to get enough algebra in my head to pass chemistry, qualify for the nursing program.

The assignment sheet said that this narrative should contain reflections, reveal something about ourselves and how we were changed by an event. But how should I be changed by finding a couple of bodies on a strip of two lane a couple of miles from home? Should I have a moral about how guns are dangerous and bad and nobody should have them anymore? Should I lie and tell you that I'll never be around guns anymore, that I'll be a good girl now and stay away from violent people and places?

How can I explain to you or to the other people in class that I finally decided that the noise I'm hearing outside the window as I write this isn't firecrackers, but gunfire. And that the phone just rang, and I talked to my neighbor who apologized for shooting his gun off, although it's ten on a Sunday night. I told him no big deal and he said, "I'm sorry for what I done, but I needed to do that, or I'd have to go somewhere and hit somebody." I don't tell him that Dad's not here, and that I'm trying to finish writing an essay.

And that he scared me.

And that while I've been listening to the shooting, I've propped the twelve-gauge at the front door and the thirty-thirty at the back.

NOW THAT YOU'VE READ, what do you think?

What stands out in your mind after reading Green's essay? Think about her key arguments by recasting them from the perspective of Nan, the young women from Skilton-Sylvester's study, or any of the young men from Smith and Wilhelm's study. Do you think the experience would be the same for them? When they enroll in their first college classes, can you see them experiencing struggles similar to those illustrated in Green's study? Why or why not? How might those struggles manifest themselves?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

A. Examine Smith and Wilhelm's, Skilton-Sylvester's, and/or Green's findings via the terminology Resnick provides.

1. In what ways might the out-of-school reading activities in which these individuals engaged be considered "useful literacy"? (remember the ways in which Resnick defines this category) Cite specific examples.
2. In what ways might they be considered "informational literacy"? Cite specific examples.
3. In what ways might they be considered "pleasurable literacy"?
4. Bring Resnick's key arguments into conversation with those made by Smith and Wilhelm, Skilton-Sylvester, and/or Green. How do the findings of each study hold up when brought together in this way? What are we to make of this scholarly conversation? What are we to learn from it?

B. Examine Smith and Wilhelm's findings via the theoretical framework Brandt provides (tracing the sponsors of literacy) and/or the one provided by Barton and Hamilton.

C. Examine Skilton-Sylvester's findings via the theoretical framework Brandt provides (tracing the sponsors of literacy) and/or the one provided by Barton and Hamilton.

D. Examine Green's findings via the theoretical framework Brandt provides (tracing the sponsors of literacy) and/or the one provided by Barton and Hamilton.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

In this essay, we want you to examine not only your own literacy practices as you've experienced them but to compare these experiences with what formal literacy instruction asks of writers and readers.

According to Resnick, "schools are not the only—or perhaps even the primary—source of literacy competence." In *Reading Don't Fix No Chevy's*, we hear from several young men who find the reading and writing they are asked to do in school irrelevant to what they want to do out of school. In "Literate at Home But Not at School," we meet yet another person—this time a young women—who finds no passion in the literacy practices she's expected to perform at school yet writes copiously when she's not at school. Ann Green ("My Uncle's Guns") offers a fictional account of a writer who finds her personal experiences irrelevant to these expected of her in this task of creating a "personal narrative" for a first-year composition class.

What is your position? How do the out-of-school literacy practices in which students regularly engage compare with the literacy practices required of them in school?

In writing this essay, you should make use of Resnick's key arguments, as well as those of at least TWO other scholars presented in this chapter (Green, Smith and Wilhelm, and/or Skilton-Sylvester). Though you needn't agree with all (or even *any*) of the key arguments presented in this section, your essay should certainly make use of them, if only to—in the end—attempt to disprove them. As always, you should provide evidence from the readings, as well as your own personal experiences, as support for your key arguments.

Chapter 5

Conducting Field Research and Writing Ethnography

Not all research is conducted in the library. In fact, the library may be just a starting point, providing you with an overview of your topic and the background information you need in order to undertake field research. Field research includes making observations, conducing interviews, and using questionairs. In fact, researchers often combine two or more of these methods in a research project.

(John Trimbur, *The Call to Write,* 509)

For several weeks, you have been preparing for this culminating project. In fact, any one of the formal writing assignments you've written thus far can serve as fodder for the formal—and more extensive—ethnographic project you will be expected to create this semester. As Bruce Ballenger explains in his popular textbook, *The Curious Writer,* "The real value of trying ethnography isn't that you'll be writing lots of ethnographies in other classes—you probably won't. Instead, writing an ethnographic essay will test your research skills by bringing them out of the academic and into the field" (390). "Field Research" is what ethnography is all about. Thus, I will include here a chapter on "Conducting Field Research" from Donna Dunbar-Odom's fascinating textbook, *Working with Ideas* (Houghton-Mifflin, 2001). We'll get to that in a minute. Before we do, however, let's spend some time thinking about how ethnographies are generally constructed.

According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz,[1] "Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and the tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviors" (10). In preparation for her article ("Sponsors of Literacy," see Chapter 2), researcher Deborah Brandt "read" the literacy experienced of several residents of a Wisconsin town (and surrounding area) as they describe them. In preparation for her essay "Creating a Community" (see Chapter 3), Beverly Moss "read" three African-American churches in order to determine how literacy manifested itself in these spaces; Mirabelli "read" the Italian restaurant in which he once worked in order to better understand how literate behaviors are shaped and reproduced in the public space. I'm sure you see the pattern here: nearly every essay included in Chapters 2-4 is ethnographic in nature. In most cases, these are what sociologists and anthropologists call "thick descriptions" of individual experiences as they make up a larger group rather than attempts to make generalizations across a particular culture (or cultures). Even in these cases, however, the researcher will draw some conclusions about a larger group based on the "thick descriptions" they present and every research project certainly begins with some assumptions about how the subjects might be "read." In other words, as Geertz explains it,

> *Although one starts any effort at thick description, beyond the obvious and superficial, from a state of general bewilderment as to what the devil is going on—trying to find one's feet—one does not start (or ought not) intellectually empty handed. Theoretical ideas are not created wholly anew in each study; as I have said, they are adopted from other, related studies, and, refined in the process, applied to new interpretive problems. If they cease being useful with respect to such problems, they tend to stop being used and are more or less abandoned. If they continue being useful, throwing up new understandings, they are further elaborated and go o n being used. (27)*

Thus your deep and extensive readings of key research in literary studies (in Chapters 2-4) were a necessary prerequisite to conducting you own ethnographic study of literacy practices.

However, while the previous studies may have offered you a good overview of the kinds of work being done in the field of literacy studies (and what has been discovered about literacy by investigating these out-of-school contexts), the field research process itself has thus far remained largely invisible. What we see in the ethnographies presented thus far are the researcher's findings and conclusions presented in such a way as to support their key arguments about the subject at hand. What we don't see, however, are the steps they took to choose the subject, locate an appropriate "group" to investigate, develop an effective procedure for collecting the requisite data, interpret them, draw appropriate (supportable) conclusions, and then present them to readers in ways that support the researcher's key arguments.

For primarily this reason, it seem appropriate to go back to these essays (in Chapters 2-4) and analyze them from the ethnographer's point of view. Let's do that now.

1 Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays.* NY: Basic Books, 1973. Available online: <http://www.stanford.edu/~davidf/qualitative151/geertz.pdf>.

2 Anthropologist Clifford Geertz is most often credited with bringing "thick description" (both the term itself and research practices it names) into the ethnographer's repertoire.

Analyzing The Field Research Project Design

Step I: Choose one of the following articles for analysis—Brandt's "Sponsors of Literacy," Moss's "Creating a Community," Mirabelli's "Learning to Serve," Smith and Wilhelm's "Going with the Flow," Skilton-Sylvester's "Literate at Home But Not at School."

Step II: Answer the following questions with respect to that article (questions generated from the "nine components of culture" as described by James Spradley—see Dunbar-Odom, page 78). Not all will be relevant, but most will. If you run across a question that seems entirely *ir*relevant to the study you are analyzing, skip it.

A. (Space) What is (are) the location(s) in which this analysis took place?

B. (Actors) Who are the members of this group/subgroup as represented in this article? Describe them.

C. (Activities) In what activities do the members of this group or subgroup engage?

D. (Acts) Describe one or more of the "single actions" within an activity (as described in response to the previous question).

E. (Objects) What are some of the objects used as a regular part of the activities in which the members of this group engage?

F. (Events) What are some of the related activities as carried out by the group?

G. (Times) When do these events take place and how long do they generally take?

H. (Goals) What do the members of this group or the group as a whole want to achieve and/or accomplish?

I. (Feelings) How do members of the group feel about the events or activities (as described in response to some of the previous questions)?

It is important that your study make good use of the many options of field research, but it is no less important that your project be clearly and deeply situated in the ongoing conversation regarding the subject at hand. What is it that has already been said about the subject under investigation? What is missing in the conversation, as you are reading it? How is your project going to fill the research gap you say now exists in the scholarly conversation surrounding your topic?

It may be useful to think of the research project you choose to undertake as part of an "ongoing conversation," something that many argue may be best understood in terms of the "Burkean Parlor"[1]:

> *Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of you opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (Burke, 110-111)*

In other words, the scholarly conversation regarding literacy and the various forms it takes in a variety of contexts has been going on for a long time—long before you began reading, discussing, and writing in response to the essays included in the previous chapters—and it will continue long after you turn in your final project and move on to other courses and your life beyond college.

However, after "listening" to parts of the ongoing conversation (as represented by essays in the previous chapters), you are in a much better position to join the conversation in more formal ways. In your final project, you should make extensive use of these essays and the key arguments they present, but you should also add to them though relevant library research and, of course, field research.

Consider these readings and your library and field research plans as you respond to the following questions, which are intended to help you analyze the situated and ongoing conversation regarding the topic under investigation (literacies in context).

1 Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form.* Berkeley: University of California P, 1941.

Analyzing The Situated and Ongoing Conversation

Step I: Return to the article you analyzed before ("Analyzing the Field Research Project Design")—Brand's "Sponsors of Literacy," Moss's "Creating a Community," Mirabelli's "Learning to Serve," Smith and Wilhelm's "Going with the Flow," Skilton-Sylveste's "Literate at Home But Not at School."

Step II: Answer the following questions with respect to that article.[2] Not all will be relevant, but most will. If you run across a question that seems entirely *ir*relevant to the study you are analyzing, skip it.

A. What is the general problem or issue that the author investigated in the article you are analyzing?

B. What background information is available on the problem or issue? What specific research has already been done, according to the author? What questions have guided that research?

C. How does the author use background information and previous research to help carve out a research space to develop a significant question? What are the gaps in the research, as the author describes them?

D. Does the author extend current research? How do we know?

E. What does the author say their study will do that differs from what has already been done by previous researchers in the area?

F. What does the author say makes their study significant to the ongoing conversation regarding the subject at hand?

Field research methods:

G. Why/how did the researcher choose the population they sample?

H. Did the researcher choose to observe the subjects? Survey them? Interview them? A combination of observation, interview, and/or interview(s)?

I. Why did they make the choices they made (regarding field research method—observation, interview, and or interview)?

J. How does the focus of the researcher's inquiry shape their research plan?

K. What conclusions does the researcher draw from their investigation? Given the data as presented in this article, do these conclusions seem appropriate? Why or why not? If not, what might be some alternative ways to interpret that data?

2 Questions A-F adapted from John Trimbur's *The Call to Write,* 518.

READING

Conducting Field Research

Donna Dunbar-Odom

Doing field research gives you an opportunity to explore your topic in a hands-on, personal way and enables you to write about it from personal experience. With the firsthand knowledge that field research provides, you can confidently challenge the claims and assumptions made by others. Thus conducting field research is a particularly effective way to achieve the kind of intellectual growth and ownership that this book stresses.

This chapter first explains the need to focus your inquiry so that you can come up with an effective research plan. It then discusses using the field researcher's tools—observation, questioning, and interviewing—to collect data to support your thesis. Finally, the chapter considers the need to analyze the data you collect. My hope is that after you've read this chapter, you'll find ways to use field research to support or challenge some of the arguments made in the readings .... (Some suggestions are included in the assignment sequences; you can use these or come up with your own field research ideas.).

When, in a paper, you can describe the outcome of your own field research, you can do much more than just react to what others have written, thought, or done. You can offer a fresh contribution to the academic discourse on your topic. Of course, much of value can be offered by reacting to the investigations and interpretations of others, but when you inject new and unique information into the conversation, you are more likely to gain the attention of the other participants in the discourse of your topic. Which story is likely to be more interesting—a friend's account of his roommate's spring break trip to Florida or his account of his own trip? Those in the crowd who can offer personal experiences to discuss are the ones who will keep the conversation going. The difference between discussing other researcher's findings and presenting your own, then, is the difference between just going along with the conversation and actively leading it. The goal of this chapter is to help you lead the conversation.

Planning Field Research

Field Research is a general term that encompasses a wide range of activities. For a marine biologist, field research might consist of observing the migratory patterns of whales off the coast of Hawaii. For a psychologist, field research might involve interviewing prison inmates about the psychological effects of incarceration. For a sociologist, field research might mean collecting survey data on the relative level of education and the wages of men and women in a particular profession. There are a number of ways to collect field data; the one you choose will depend on the essential focus of your inquiry. Once you've established what form your research will take, you can decide whether you should use observation, surveys, or interviews (or a combination of these methods) to get the data you need and how you should structure your research process.

Focus Your Inquiry

By "the essential focus of your inquiry," I mean this: exactly what you need to find out in order to support your thesis and specifically who or what you need to examine to get that information. The focus of your field research is likely to be more specific than your overall topic or even your thesis. That is, the data you collect from your field research are more likely to be details that support your thesis (such as the secondary sources you cite in your paper) than comprehensive examples or illustrations of what your thesis states. Indeed, your inquiry might have multiple small foci, requiring several distinct research plans. How, then, do you go about boiling down your topic to determine where to focus your field research?

You'll be doing ethnographic research, so you might begin by distilling the concept of "culture." What is a culture? Cultural differences are evident when we visit many foreign countries (for example, the Japanese tea ceremony is a deeply meaningful custom that is almost incomprehensible to many Americans). You don't have to travel abroad to find distinct cultures, however. Ethnographers have studied the "drug culture," "criminal culture," "football culture," and "bar culture," among many others. You might decide, then, that a culture is simply any group with distinct behaviors, beliefs, or activities. Thus fraternity members, dorm residents, student activists, commuter students, and college athletes can all be considered members of distinct cultures or subcultures within the overall culture of higher education. You might determine that you will have to investigate one or several such subcultures for each of the assignment sequences in this book, depending on what you need to find out to support your thesis.

You might go even deeper than this and dissect each culture or subculture you've chosen to study, to identify its elements. For example, James Spradley, who has written ethnographies of the experience of cocktail waitresses and alcoholics, breaks culture down into nine components.

1. Space—the location of the group or subgroup
2. Actors—the members of the group or subgroup
3. Activities—what the members do within the context of the group or subgroup
4. Acts—single actions within a group activity
5. Objects—objects used by the group as part of their activities
6. Events—related activities carried out by the group
7. Times—times when events or activities take place and how long they take
8. Goals—what members of the group or the group as a whole want to achieve or accomplish
9. Feelings—how members of the group feel about the events or activities

You could use components such as these to sharpen the focus of your research efforts. If you were conducting field research on dating behavior among college students, for example, you might attend a party (event) at a fraternity house (space).

You would probably focus on a few people (actors) and observe how they approach one another (activity). As part of this activity, you might also watch how males hold and handle beer bottles or how females handle their hair (acts and objects). You would take note of how long their interactions take (time). To determine the goals and feelings of the actors, you would need to talk to the individuals involved.

Choose the populations you want to sample

As the preceding example illustrates, distilling your topic in this way will help you clarify which population you are studying, how you will sample that population for your research, and what details about the sample's behavior, characteristics, and opinions you wish to investigate. In other words, focusing your inquiry will help you decide whom to interview, what groups to survey, what or whom to observe, and when to make your observations. Some projects will require that you limit your research to particular groups (for example, members of the women's soccer team), whereas others will allow a wider focus (say, commuters), and still others can be done with a random sample of the student population (such as students who happen to be in the student center at a particular time on a particular day); it all depends on what data you need to collect to support your thesis.

You will need to explain in your paper why you chose the particular populations you selected and how you sampled them. For example,[1] suppose that for Sequence 3, "Negotiating Differences: Race, Class, and Ethnicity," you decide to write a paper challenging Barbara Ehrenreich's argument in "The Professions as Class Fortress" (from *Fear of Falling*) that the educational requirements for entry into various occupations (law, medicine, social work, academic research, and so on), such as obtaining an advanced degree or taking specific courses as an undergraduate, "serve as much to exclude as to educate." (Ehrenreich argues, for example, that the requirement that pre-med students take organic chemistry serves no real purpose other than to "screen out students who have not had the benefit of a high-quality, middle-class, secondary education" from gaining admittance to medical school.) After actively reading the selections in Sequence 3, you decide to argue in your paper that by and large, the educational requirements of the professions serve to protect the public by ensuring the competence of practitioners and that the exclusionary effect Ehrenreich suggests is at most a secondary by-product of such requirements, not an intentional goal.

1 Dunbar-Odom refers here to a sequence in her own book, *Working with Ideas*, rather than one included in this (*Literacies in Context*). Still, the same principles apply.

Now suppose that you go the library and find lots of scholarly responses to Ehrenreich's argument, many of them supporting her position. You remain unconvinced by her argument, however, and are eager to conduct some field research to help you refute her claims. What populations might you study to achieve this goal? Because Ehrenreich stresses the medical profession in her essay, you decide to start there. This leaves you with a new choice: Should you study pre-med students? students who are enrolled in medical school? practicing physicians? all three of these populations? some other population? Complicating matters further, you also want to test Ehrenreich's assertions in a second profession, one that she did not use as an example to bolster her claim. In keeping with the theme of this book, you decide to test whether her assertions hold up for the teaching profession. Thus, to keep your field research manageable, you decide to survey a group of practicing medical interns, who have recently completed medical school and have begun practicing medicine, and a group of public school teachers.

Your next decision is how big a sample to survey from each of these populations. At this point in your college career, this will probably depend more on practical factors, such as the time and resources you have available, than on such formal research considerations as the statistical significance of your sample sizes. Later you may learn how to determine when a sample is statistically significant. If you decide to major in psychology, for example, you will have to learn how to conduct statistically significant field research. This concern is beyond the scope of this book, however. (If you're interested in learning about statistical sampling methods now, ask your instructor or a reference librarian for help.) But for our purposes, just try to get as wide a sample from the population you're studying as you can reasonably handle. Use common sense: A survey of your suitemates or the members of your carpool won't be likely to convince your reader of much of anything. I suggest you keep the number a round one to make figuring percentages easier. The size of your sample will also depend on what method you use to collect your data. You can probably survey many more individuals than you can interview, for example, and you might be able to observe many more individuals than you can survey.

Understanding your relationship to your subject populations

When you begin designing your research process and tools, remember that it makes a difference whether you are an outsider or an insider to the group you are studying. An outsider can see things insiders can't. For example, when I observe another teacher's class, I can see how the students seat themselves around the room, see who dominates the conversations, see patterns in the way the teacher asks questions and the way students answer, and see who's engaged with the class discussion and who isn't. The teacher, immersed in trying to keep the class on schedule and following a coherent chain of activities, may or may not be able to see all of these things, because he or she is juggling so many tasks. But I, as an outsider, don't have to do anything but watch.

Outsiders can lack important information about the groups they study, however. For example, I once observed a class and saw a student reading a newspaper. I immediately assumed that he was not paying attention. It turned out that each day, one student was responsible for reporting on a current event related to the day's assignment; the student I had thought was inattentive was actually making sure he was ready to make his brief presentation to the class. If I hadn't talked to the teacher after class, I wouldn't have had an accurate picture of the class. The moral of this story is that to make sense of the populations and cultures you will be studying, you need to be aware of your relationship with them and to use more than one method—observing, talking, reading, and so on—to learn as much as possible about them and their activities.

As a current student, you are an insider to the culture of higher education, compared with someone who has never gone to college or someone who went to college thirty years or ago. You know something about what college is because of your position on the inside. Yet there are different ways of being inside. For example, you may be a student at a community college or at a four-year private college. You may be fresh out of high school or returning after raising a family. You may live on campus or you may commute. Even different majors affect the different ways students experience college. In fact, then, you are an outsider in relation to certain groups on your campus. If you've never commuted, for instance, you can only guess what it would be like to drive back and forth to and from campus each day. If you've never lived in a dormitory, you can only guess what it would be like to live on a floor with a great many other people near your age. Therefore, you have to consider your relationship to the specific group or subgroup you've decided to study.

Gather background information

To find out what another group's experiences are like, you can interview or survey group members, read about the group, observe where group members congregate, and watch members of the group when they are together and apart. Your job is to interpret for you audience a particular group's experience. To do a good job analyzing your focus group's behavior, you will probably need some background information about it. For example, what are the rules of membership of this group (informal or formal)? What are the codes of acceptable behavior? Do group members ever break the rules? What happens if they do? What determines whether someone will "fit in" with this group? The type of background information you need will affect how you plan your researching process, and your research tools and methods will themselves become background information in your paper. For example, you'll need to report any problems you encountered in the course of your research. Did you have to change any of your questions after you got some sample responses? If so, why? And how did you change them? How many people, overall, did you observe or attempt to contact? What did your respondents have in common? Were there any variables that ultimately had a significant effect on your results? When did you conduct your research and over how long a time?

Field research gives you a variety of options for what may be counted as a resource. For example, you may want to collect and analyze artifacts as a part of your field research. Artifacts are objects that are commonly used by a culture or subculture. Artifacts on a college campus might include the campus newspaper, items displaying school or school organization emblems or logos, announcements and flyers posted to attract student attention, materials given to students in their classes, and so on. Many times we can tell something about a group by what the members of that group wear and by the objects they commonly use. Although the focus of your research in the assignment sequences will be human populations, don't forget, as you plan your research, that artifacts attached to those populations may provide you with valuable background information about them.

Designing And Executing Your Field Research

Once you've focused your inquiry, identified your subject populations, and gathered any background information you can, it's time to think about which method or methods to use to get the specific data you need to support your thesis. You may have many options for how to design your research, but your three basic tools as a field researcher are observing, surveying, and interviewing.

To ensure the validity of their results, professional researchers in the sciences and the social sciences create detailed research designs based on accepted scientific methods and complex statistical principles. Again, such considerations are beyond the scope of this book. What I want you to do in this course is to begin thinking about field research goals and methods in broader strokes—to begin making a habit of taking a hands-on approach to your intellectual investigations. Informal research designs are fine for this purpose and for the assignment sequences in this book.

Obviously, you must design your research before you can execute it. But if you've never done field research before, you might not yet have a clear idea about how to design it. It's like trying to break into a new profession—how do you get the required experience if you can't get a job without experience? That's why this book aims to get you out into the field now, early in your college career, before field research is usually stressed or required. You may have to try out a research plan, go back and refine it, and then try it again until you get usable results. Sometimes the best way to gain needed experience is simply to "learn by doing."

Observing your subjects

You might begin by just observing. You can learn much this way. For instance, if I were to walk on a sunny afternoon through the campus where I presently teach, I could tell that this is a college with a significant number of commuters. How could I tell? After 3:00 P.M., the sidewalks are almost deserted. Parking lots are plentiful and are located near almost every building on campus, but at this hour, many empty spaces are available in prime spots, so I can see that a lot of students have left for the day. I can tell all of this just from observing my surroundings and "reading" the evidence—I haven't asked one person a single question.

Try it yourself. Look around you and try to "read" what you see as you walk across your own campus. Think of yourself as an anthropologist. What can you tell about your college from the number of people and the ages, ethnicities, and genders represented? Is it still a busy place at 3 P.M., or does it seem deserted? What kinds of activities are advertised around campus? What can you learn from observing the grounds? Are there lots of places to sit and talk? Where are the parking lots? Are many bike racks available? Are they used? Are there businesses located near the campus that cater to students, or is your school a "suitcase" college that makes little economic impact on the community around it? Simple observation can tell you a lot about your topic if you take the time to read the evidence before you.

Of course, you won't just rely on chance and serendipity to produce relevant data; you'll plan your observations—what or whom you observe and when and how you observe them—on the basis of the nature of the data you need to collect to support your thesis. For example, suppose you want to test Paul Rogat Loeb's claim in "I Feel a Little Fearful" (In sequence 2, "Campus Politics, Global Politics"[2]) that American college students are apolitical and reluctant to voice what political opinions they do have. How might you determine the extent to which the students at your campus have political opinions and are willing to voice them? You could ask them in a survey or in interviews, but you decide that observation is likely to give you a more accurate, objective picture of this behavior. But whom should you observe, and where and when should you observe them? How you focus your efforts will affect your results. Maybe you're a women's studies major or part of another group that frequently discusses political issues in class, and so you think Loeb has overstated his claim. In that case, you might compare observations of one of your own classes with observations of a class in which political issues could be relevant but students might be less inclined to speak up or to challenge the opinions of others (a history class, for example). This would probably produce different results than would parking yourself on the quad or in a cafeteria and eavesdropping on any conversation that just happened to fall within earshot. Planning plays an important role in research whether it's library research, observation, surveying, interviewing, or some other means of uncovering information. What you choose to scrutinize and how you go about doing it will affect your findings, so think carefully about these choices, and explain them and their possible effects on your conclusions in your paper.

The type of observation you can do will also be determined by the time and resources you have available. If you were writing a paper about "ecoterrorism," for example, you might want to go and observe a protest by a fringe environmental group at a logging site in Oregon. But this might not be feasible if you don't live in Oregon, so you might decide that you could gain some valuable information by observing a nearby protest sponsored by a mainstream environmental group such as the Sierra Club.

2 See previous note.

When you observe people, remember to take their body language into account. If one person in a conversation is leaning in and the other is edging away, then you can infer that the other is edging away, then you can infer that the first is interested in extending the interaction between them but the second is interested in ending it. As a teacher, I read body language every day in the classroom. I can tell who is engaged in the discussion and who is thinking more about the upcoming weekend. I can tell who didn't get enough sleep. I can tell who is angry and who is frustrated. Many times, body language tells me who is prepared to participate in a discussion and who isn't.

Also pay attention to the dynamics within a group. For example, in my classes I soon learn who the leaders are and who the followers are. Others act as "facilitators," helping the discussion along with supportive comments. I learn who the shy people are and who the extroverts are. In many classes, there will be one person whom the rest of the class finds to be extremely irritating, and I can see how the class responds to that individual when he or she attempts to participate in the discussion (discreet eye rolling, whispering, significant eye contact with others, and so on). The next time you're in a group, look around you and try to "read" how people are feeling and who plays what roles. Who are the leaders? Who is the person people listen to and respect the most? Who is the least respected member of the group? What effects do these roles have on the group's activities or discussions?

Surveying your subjects

Compiling an effective survey takes a great deal of thought and patience. Questions must be clear, unambiguous, and neutral, and they should have an air of professional detachment. They should not lead respondents to answer in a certain way, and they shouldn't be too nosy. For instance, a student of mine a couple of years ago wanted to include a question asking single students to reveal whether they were virgins, in order to determine whether they were—according to her definition—"truly religious." Her fellow classmates helped her see the problems in asking a question like that, a question that revealed far more about *her* assumptions than it would have about her respondents' religious practices on campus. Analyze your questions to make sure they are not leading and are not influenced by your own assumptions, and test them out on a willing roommate, friend or spouse *before* you administer your survey.

Figure 5.1 shows a sample survey asking students questions about religion on campus. Notice some of the assumptions and biases this survey reveals. Questions 2, 3, and 5, in particular, seem to assume that respondents will be the stereotypical eighteen- or nineteen-year-old college students living away from home for the first time. If this accurately represents the population of your campus, then such questions are not necessarily a problem (you would want to point this out in your paper, however). These questions would not be likely to yield useful data if distributed to older students or commuter students, however.

Depending on your research design and goals, your survey might include closed questions, open-ended questions, or both. With closed questions, you control the range of responses. See, for example, Question 1 in Figure 5.1. The question asks simply whether the respondent belongs to a religious organization, and if so which one; it doesn't allow for any responses beyond the options provided. An open-ended question, by contrast, leaves the door open for a wide range of responses. Open-ended questions give the researcher an opportunity to learn more about respondents' characteristics, opinions, beliefs, and so on. For example, the second part of Question 3 asks respondents to speculate about why students today are more or less religious than their parents were at the same age. By comparing different respondents' answers to open-ended "Why?" questions such as this, researchers can find out and track factors that might produce a particular opinion. If you're not sure what type of questions to ask, try a mix of closed- and open-ended questions.

FIGURE 5.1: A Sample Survey

I am currently enrolled in a research writing class at this college. We are attempting to learn more about student attitudes toward faith and religion at this school. Please take a few moments to answer the following questions.

1. Are you a member of a church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious organization?

_______ Yes _______No

If yes, which type of organization do you belong to?

_______ Roman Catholic church _______ Synagogue

_______ Protestant church _______ Mosque

(denomination: _______ Other (please indicate:

____________________) ________________)

2. What sort of role, if any, do religious practices play in your daily life as a student?

_______ Very important role _________ Somewhat important role

_______ Little or no role

3. Would you say, in general, that students today are more or less religious than they were when your parents were your age?

_______ More _______ Less

Why do you think this is the case?

____

4. Do many of the students you know well actively practice a religion?

_______ Yes _______ No

5. Did you attend religious services regularly when you lived at home?

_______ Yes _______ No

6. If yes, do you find it more difficult to do so now that you're in college?

_______ Yes _______ No _________ I haven't tried

7. If yes, what factors contribute to this?

____

Personal Information:
1. Sex: _______ Male _________ Female
2. Age: _______
3. Marital status: _______ Married _______Single
4. Children: how many and what age?

Interviewing your subjects

In general, my students have found interviewing to be the most interesting and engaging type of field research. Interviewing gives you a chance to obtain more detailed information than you can get from a survey, but from a smaller sample. Interviewing is the obvious choice if the subject of your inquiry is one or two individuals or a very small group. You're not likely to have time to interview more than a handful of people for any one writing project, so if you're studying a large population, you'll probably need to include a survey as part of your research plan to get an accurate idea of that population's characteristics. Interviewing a representative few may add valuable additional insight to your study, however. For example, and interview can reveal and debunk erroneous theories or assumptions you may hold. One student I know interviewed a couple of members of a fraternity and a couple of members of his college's gay and lesbian student organization concerning their religious beliefs and practices. He had assumed that the responses from these two groups would be radically different and that the gay and lesbian students would be far less likely than the fraternity members to consider themselves religious. He was surprised to find that their responses were not much different from each other and that both gay students were deeply religious. Because interviews provide greater detail, they can help us recognize the complexity of a group or an issue and confute false generalizations.

Figure 5.2 contains a list of some sample interview questions, focusing again on religion on campus and designed for a student interviewee. In an interview, pretty much all of the questions are open-ended, except for those that ask for specific information about your interviewee (age, employment history, marital status, and the like). As an interviewer, your job is to get answers that are as detailed as possible, to probe beyond generalities to concrete examples and experiences. For example, consider Question 6. The point of asking such a question is not just to get a "yes or no" response but to elicit details that reveal something about the interviewee—his or her background, standards, beliefs, and so on.

Here are some broad guidelines to help you with interviewing:

- Think of yourself in professional terms and conduct your interviews as professionally as you can, even if you're interviewing a buddy.
- Make an appointment and, of course, make sure that you keep it. Give yourself plenty of time before your assignment's due date so that your interviewee won't feel under pressure to pitch in at the last minute to help you out.

- Come prepared with written questions, paper, and a couple of pens.
- If you want to tape the session, make sure it's all right with your interviewee; tape recorders make some people nervous. Remember to bring extra batteries and a spare tape, just in case.
- Ask some easy questions at the beginning of the interview to help both of you relax. Most people love to talk about themselves and will usually warm up once the interview is under way.
- Use your prepared questions, but also remember to ask follow-up questions based on the interviewee's responses, and feel free to ask any other questions that occur to you during the conversation.
- Remember that your interviewee is doing you a big favor, so be sure to follow up with a written thank you note. Later, if you find that you left something important out of the interview, or if you think of a great question you didn't ask, you can call back. If you've sent a proper thank you, the person will probably be happy to answer another question or two.
- Get permission to use the information from your interviewee in your written work. This is called getting an "informed consent." Type up a form that says something like "I, [name of interviewee] give [your name] my consent to use what I say during this interview in his written research. I understand that I will have a chance to read and comment on a draft before it is turned in or published in any form." Then include blanks for signature and the date.
- When your draft is done, the ethical thing to do is to give each of your interviewees a chance to read it and respond to how you used their responses. This way they can be assured that they won't be made to look foolish, and you can be assured that you've "gotten it right" and that you haven't written anything that would cause them distress.

FIGURE 5.2: Sample Interview Questions

1. Does your religious faith play an important role in your life as a student? In what ways?
2. Do you attend organized religious services? How often?
3. Have you ever seen someone's religious beliefs get in the way of their ability to participate or to think critically in one of your classes? What happened?
4. William Bennett, author of *The Book of Virtues*, has argued that "we desperately need to recover a sense of the fundamental purpose of education, which is to provide for the intellectual *and* moral education of the young." Do you agree? Why or why not? What might a school like this one do to further this aim?
5. Do you ever discuss your religion with others at school? Under what circumstances?
6. Have you ever felt that someone on campus has "pushed" his or her religious beliefs on you? What happened, and how did it make you feel?
7. Is organized religion important to a "successful" life? How do you define success?

It's important to provide your reader with background information about any interviews you refer to in your paper. For example, where did you conduct your interviews? What were the circumstances? Were you sitting across a table from your interviewee? Did you tape the interview or take notes? Did you do any of the interview over the telephone? Was anyone else present? Did you ask everyone the same questions in the same order, or did you vary the order depending on the circumstances? Were some interviews longer than others? Why? Was anyone reluctant to speak? How did your interviewees seem to respond? How did they seem at the end of their interviews?

You should also mention any observations of your own that serve either to confirm or to raise doubts about individual responses. In other words, if your interviewee says one thing but observation tells you something else, speculate about the possible reasons for the discrepancy. For example, if you ask two people who are flirting with each other what they hope will be the result of their behavior, it's possible that they might not be willing to share certain goals with you. Both might say they are just enjoying themselves and have no goals beyond that, for instance, when in fact one might be hoping to meet someone to begin a lasting relationship and the other might be trying to make someone else jealous. Motives are complicated and are worth considering at length. Many of us do things with very little sense of why we're doing them.

Finally, when you transcribe your interviewee's words, it is standard practice to do a certain amount of editing. Where I live, many people have a thick Texas accent. Some people say "git" rather than "get," for example. I would never use "git" in a written transcript of an interview, however. Emphasize *what* your interviewees say, not *how* they say it. Emphasizing quirks in how an interviewee speaks only serves to demean the person who was kind enough to give you an interview.

Analyzing Your Data

The final step in field research is to analyze your data. It's not enough to gather and compile information about your target population; you also need to draw conclusions from that information. By the time you get to the end of any of the assignment sequences in this book, you will have read several essays, consulted scholarly research on your subject, and conducted your own field research. You might be tempted to write up a list of observations—yours and others—along the lines of "I read this and then I saw that and then I heard this…." But remember that your job is not only to collect information but also to *shape* it. Suppose you observed dating behavior on your campus. Don't just describe that behavior in your paper—speculate about what purposes it serves. Or suppose you observed that students at your campus are more likely to discuss politics with members of their own gender than with members of the opposite sex. Can you infer something from this about the students on your campus? about American society in general? Why or why not?

In other words, use the data you collect from your field research to test your thesis and to back it up, if possible. Throughout this book I've urged you to come up with a carefully considered thesis and then to make it your goal to find evidence, from library research and from field research, to support it. This doesn't mean, however, that your thesis must be immutable. You might find ample information from library research to support your thesis but then gather research data that leads you to modify or even completely reverse it. Or you might find that your field research gives you the confidence to strengthen your thesis and take issue with the prevailing scholarly view on your topic. Such changes can become part of your dialogue on your topic. The basic point is this: Plan your research carefully, and then put the same amount of care into analyzing whatever information you collect, and your argument will be as persuasive as it can be.

Sample Student Paper

Following is a research project by Shelle Smith. Shelle is a nontraditional, returning student who felt a little out of place and a little put out by traditional students, whom she believed took going to college for granted and didn't know how easy they had it. Her original idea was to prove how much more complicated the lives of nontraditional students are than those of students just out of high school. But then, in the course of her field research, she found that on her campus, at least, *everybody's* lives are complicated. Her final paper describes her research findings and her conclusions.

What I value about this paper is that Shelle's own interests fueled its development. And I respect Shelle's ability to change her mind as a result of her research. I also admire the way she brings others' ideas and words into her paper; she integrates quotations, for instance, into her own arguments or her paragraphs. In other words, she learned from the work she did and was able, as a result, to see beyond the limits of her own experience. That seems to me to be a crucial hallmark of real research.

Shelle Smith
Professor Dunbar-Odom
English 102
27 Apr 1997

Going to College: A Balancing Act

There was once a time when going to college was an all-expense-paid opportunity reserved for recent high school graduates. Times have changed. Because of increasing tuition costs and decreasing grant money, many students must rely on income from jobs, student loans, or both. The College Board reports that three-quarters of full-time students held down jobs in 1998-90 (Kramer 6). According to my own student survey, that still holds true almost a decade alter. There has also been a change in the type of student attending college. According to the College Board and the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1996 forty percent of undergraduates were 25 or older (Hube 137). Since older students usually have responsibilities such as family and full-time jobs, the additional task of attending college can be very stressful. I must admit that when I started this research project, I assumed that the dilemma of balancing school, work, and family was mostly a problem for nontraditional students (described as part-time, independent, or over 24). Since I am a nontraditional student, my perception may be biased, but it seems that older students are better able to handle large amounts of stress than are younger traditional students (described as full-time, dependent, and under 24). However, I realize that the task as well as the stress of balancing responsibilities is not limited to nontraditional students; many students must make personal and financial sacrifices to attend college.

I conducted a random survey of fifty college students attending Texas A&M University-Commerce. Most surveys were completed by students in freshman-level classes; therefore, there was not a large variation in age. Of the students surveyed, the average age was 21, and 70 percent commute to school. Seventy percent of students also said that their main motivation for going to college was to get a good job while only 20 percent said they wanted to better themselves. Forty-five percent of students said that the most difficult thing about going to college was doing homework and going to class, while 25 percent said managing time was the hardest. I asked students what their biggest stress while attending school was, and most of the answers related to studying, homework, and tests. Some of the most surprising results to me were that 75 percent of the students surveyed worked and that 60 percent of those held down full-time jobs. Unfortunately, only 10 percent of the students said that they studied ten hours or more per week, and 40 percent said they studied 0 to 5 hours per week.

Apparently, they are too busy to study, but I don't understand how any student could pass a college course without studying. In an article in *Change*, Theodore Marchese said, "Gone everywhere, it seems, is the old understanding that college takes three hours outside class for every one in" (4) He also claims that it is not entirely the fault of the student. He states:

When federal and state policymakers decided to shift college costs from the public and parents to the student, and to move from low tuition and grants to student work and loans, they all but ordained that a culture of "work now, study in-between" would take hold (Marchese 4).

For research purposes, I interviewed a non-traditional student and a traditional student to get two different views on balancing responsibilities. Robin Smith is a 27-year-old female Animal Science major at TAMU-Commerce. She attended college immediately after high school but quit to get married and have a family. Seven years later, she decided to go back to school to pursue her dream of being a veterinarian. She is currently a sophomore taking fifteen college hours and commutes 120 miles round trip every day. She is married with two children and works about twenty-five hours per week. Robin says she studies about eight hours a week and has a GPA of 3.35 but claims her grades are much better now than they were when she was younger. She said, "At 19, I was happy if I passed a class; now I'm upset if I don't get an A." Robin admits that as a 27-year-old, she gets aggravated at incoming freshmen who want to be "spoon fed." She says, "They aren't mentally mature….They don't' have critical thinking or understand what they are learning and how to apply it to life."

Robin said that her biggest stress was trying to manage her time between work, family, and school so that nothing gets left out. She also said that sometimes the pressure makes her snap and she has to have a tantrum. When I asked Robin if she was an organized person, she replied, "I don't have time to get organized; I go on adrenaline." She admits that a person has to be slightly insane to do what she is doing and that not everyone can handle the stress. It takes a certain kind of person to go in all directions at the same time and still be able to accomplish goals. Robin gave up a job paying $45,000 a year to go back to school. She is willing to sacrifice almost anything to accomplish her goal.

Billy Fowler is a traditional male student. He is a 20-year-old Agricultural Economics major at TAMU-C with a GPA of 3.0, and he lives at home with his parents. He is currently taking fifteen college hours and says that he studies about seven hours a week while working two part-time jobs. He believes that his biggest stress is trying to balance his time among school, work, being an FFA (Future Farmers of America) officer, and his duties as a Scoutmaster. Billy said that it is difficult trying to fit in study time with all his other responsibilities. He said, "By the time I figure out a system, the semester is half over." Billy realizes that he should probably cut out some of his activities but feels that he needs the diversion. He also said that most of the students that he knows work, and some students even skip class to study for a test if they had to work the night before. Billy said that school comes first, and he believes that better planning and better time management could be the key ingredient for being better prepared for classes.

In an article in *Change* magazine, Martin Kramer stated, "The present generation of students can surely be labeled the over-scheduled generation, and not only those who are nontraditional. They have appointment books that must be checked whenever there is a matter of 'fitting in' an activity" (6). I believe that there are a large number of today's students, myself included, who stretch themselves pretty thin. Unless students are lucky enough to receive a full scholarship, to be awarded grants, or to have parents who pay their expenses, their only options are working and student loans. Because of the rising cost of college, most of us have to work to be able to afford going to school. However, many of us not only work full-time while attending college but also have families, mortgages, and various other responsibilities.

Both of my interviewees, Billy and Robin, said that balancing responsibilities was their biggest stress factor while attending college. It is difficult enough to go to school and work, but add family responsibilities to that, and things really get complicated. There was a recent study published in the *Journal of Psychology* about the conflicting demands of work, family, and school. In it the authors stated:

> Research has shown that when people experience a greatamount of stress in coping with the demands of work and family, there are negative consequences both on and off the job. Logically, those negative consequences may also exist when people attempt to balance work, family, and student roles simultaneously (Hammer, Grigsby, Woods 221).

As Robin said earlier, a person has to be slightly insane to attempt to go to school and work while trying to maintain some sort of family life. The stress involved could affect grades, relationships, or mental and physical health.

So how does a student balance the stress of all these responsibilities? Billy mentioned better planning and time management. Good organizational skills would definitely be a plus, but I think it takes more than that. I think it takes a fierce determination, an inner drive that not everyone has. A person must be willing to make great sacrifices to achieve a balance for this juggling act.

The face of the college campus is changing. It appears that college is no longer just a party time for 19-year-olds. according to the Office of Admissions, the average age of undergraduates here at TAMU-Commerce is 23.4 (*Lion Facts*). That obviously means that there are a large number of older students on this campus, and older students usually tend to have more responsibilities and more stress. However, as I stated earlier, my survey results showed that 75 percent of the students that I survey on this campus work, and their biggest stressor is studying and getting homework done. Since my survey included many 19-year-olds, I can conclude that young students are also under stress. Of my two interviewees, Robin appears to have more demands put on her than Billy; however; both students may feel equally stressed. There are varying degrees of stress, and everyone copes differently. Usually, a person who feels stressed is stressed. I think that age and maturity may play a part in being able to handle larger amounts of stress. However, my research has proven that students of all ages are trying to deal with the stress of balancing responsibilities. Regardless of a student's age, trying to balance work, studying, going to class, family, and various other responsibilities is very difficult. Therefore, the present generation of students all must make sacrifices to attend college.

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Closing Thoughts on Field Research

Field research gives you an opportunity to teach yourself and others something real, immediate, and unique about your subject—something you probably wouldn't find in a book or journal. It gets you involved in your project in a way that library research just can't match. As a teacher, I find the prospect of my students' experiencing that kind of involvement extremely exciting. Each term, my students learn things about their lives and experiences as members of a college community and teach those things to me, and the prospect of learning from them has transformed my own experience as a teacher.

Performing field research helps you grow intellectually and helps you claim true ownership of your writing. As I said in the Introduction, at its heart this book is more about thinking than it is about writing. It's about breaking free of formulaic approaches and actively engaging with ideas. It's about growing intellectually and cultivating a richer academic experience. Because of the personal involvement it entails, field research is a vital contributor to these processes.

As you move on to the sequenced assignments in Part Two, remember to practice the habits of reflection that will help you write convincing and illuminating papers: Read and think critically, carefully consider your theses, plan your research, thoughtfully analyze your results, and carefully consider how best to frame your arguments. Then you'll be ready to write excellent papers. I hope you find the work you do with this book worthwhile, and I hope you choose to share some of that work with me and others. I welcome your e-mail at Donna_Dunbar-Odom@tamu-commerce.edu.