

AFFORDANCES AND RECONTEXTUALIZATIONS:  
A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT IN  
INFORMATION LITERACY PRACTICES IN SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL  
CONTEXTS

by

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## **Abstract**

Students' future worlds will require the use of conventional print literacies and new multiliteracies in order to access and construct information that requires print, electronic and face-to face interactions within private and public economic sectors, and within local and global corporate worlds (Luke, 1998). Research has called for a new understanding of literacy and literacy teaching and learning to account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies, and to account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003a).

Drawing on a sociocultural theory of literacy learning situated in particular contexts, this qualitative multiple-case study examines the school and out-of-school contexts of four second-grade children. It focuses on the ways in which these contexts afforded and constrained opportunities for the children to engage in, appropriate, and recontextualize information literacy (IL) practices. Findings show that despite similar constraining factors in both contexts (i.e., press of time, perceived needs, access to informational texts, and disruptions and interruptions), the out-of-school contexts offered the children greater and more diverse opportunities for engagement than did the school context. Further, findings show that the children's school IL practices crossed to out-of-school contexts where the children embedded and changed them in flexible, playful, and contemporary ways that enhanced their IL development. Although the children tried to transfer the practices and genres back in the classroom, these attempts were largely ignored unless they fit with the practices upheld by the school.

The study offers new knowledge of how school literacy may impact some children's out-of-school literacies. It provides implications for teachers, parents and curriculum writers in conceiving IL as social practice and in recognizing the role of out-of-school contexts as spaces to construct meaning. It also suggests that attempts to bring the literacy practices from children's out-of-school lives to the school context for purposes of literacy instruction may be misguided; rather, it may be more realistic to concentrate efforts on supporting those out-of-school contexts that enable children to recontextualize school practices for a wider and more global use.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Figures.....	xi
Acknowledgements.....	xiii
Dedication.....	xv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY .....	1
1.0    Introduction to the study .....	1
1.0.1    Definition of information literacy.....	3
1.1    Rationale for the study .....	3
1.1.1    The pilot study .....	4
1.2    Purpose of the study .....	6
1.3    Research questions .....	6
1.4    Theoretical framework.....	7
1.4.1    A sociocultural perspective.....	7
1.4.2    Social semiotic theory and multimodality .....	18
1.4.3    Dialogism.....	21
1.4.4    Situating “context” in the theoretical framework .....	24
1.5    Unifying the theoretical perspectives.....	26
1.6    Significance of the study.....	27
1.7    Summary of the chapter .....	28
1.8    Organization of the dissertation .....	28
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	30
2.0    Introduction.....	30
2.1    Information literacy research .....	30
2.1.1    Research on using informational texts with young children .....	31
2.2    Family literacy research .....	35
2.2.1    The home environment as a context for literacy learning .....	36

2.2.2	Families' and family members' roles in young children's literacy learning .....	37
2.2.3	Types, availability and uses of texts in the home .....	40
2.3	Young children's literacy and technology research (including multimodality and representation of meaning).....	43
2.4	Out-of-school literacy research .....	46
2.4.1	Research on young children's out-of-school literacy .....	47
2.5	Summary .....	49
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....		51
3.0	Introduction.....	51
3.1	The research design.....	51
3.1.1	Rationale for the research design.....	52
3.2	The research context and participants.....	56
3.2.1	Selection of the school.....	56
3.2.2	Selection of the classroom .....	57
3.2.3	The research participants .....	58
3.2.4	The context of the study .....	60
3.3	Data collection .....	66
3.3.1	Interviews .....	67
3.3.2	Observational field notes .....	69
3.3.3	Artefacts.....	70
3.4	Data analysis .....	71
3.4.1	The research process.....	75
3.4.2	Field work for the present study and preliminary analysis.....	75
3.4.3	Further data collection and further analysis.....	76
3.4.4	Final data collection.....	76
3.4.5	Formal analysis .....	76
3.5	Role of the researcher .....	79
3.6	Trustworthiness and authenticity of the study .....	80
3.6.1	Objectivity/confirmability .....	80
3.6.2	Reliability/dependability/auditability .....	81
3.6.3	Internal validity/credibility/authenticity .....	82

3.6.4	External validity/transferability/fittingness .....	82
3.6.5	Utilization/application/action orientation .....	83
3.7	Summary .....	83
CHAPTER FOUR: SCHOOL CONTEXT AFFORDANCES: OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT IN IL PRACTICES .....		84
4.0	Introduction .....	84
4.1	The focal teacher: Ms. Davidson .....	85
4.1.1	Ms. Davidson's personal literacy history .....	85
4.1.2	Ms. Davison's IL practices .....	87
4.1.3	Ms. Davidson's philosophy of instruction.....	89
4.2	Grade two in Ms. Davidson's room: The focal classroom .....	91
4.2.1	Description of the focal classroom .....	91
4.2.2	The IL curriculum of the focal classroom .....	93
4.3	The school IL practices of the focal children.....	94
4.4	The spheres of activity in the school context that offer opportunities for children to engage in IL practices .....	98
4.5	Summary and discussion.....	108
CHAPTER FIVE: SCHOOL CONTEXT AFFORDANCES: FACTORS THAT CONSTRAIN OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT IN IL PRACTICES.....		111
5.0	Introduction.....	111
5.1	"We need to hurry...": The press of time as a factor in constraining opportunities for children to engage in IL practices .....	113
5.2	"They are so needy!": The factor of perceived needs that constrained children's opportunities to engage in IL practices .....	126
5.2.1	Strategies used to meet the perceived needs of the children .....	129
5.3	"You can only choose one information book...": Access to informational texts as a factor that constrained opportunities for children to engage in IL practices in the school context.....	132
5.3.1	Strategies used to enhance children's access to informational text.....	135
5.4	"Today's been crazy...": Disruption/interruption as a factor in constraining opportunities for children to engage in IL practices in the school context.....	135
5.4.1	Strategies to ameliorate the factor of disruption/interruption.....	137

5.5	Summary and discussion.....	138
CHAPTER SIX: OUT-OF-SCHOOL CONTEXT AFFORDANCES: OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT IN IL PRACTICES .....		
6.0	Introduction.....	143
6.1	Tara Crawford .....	144
6.1.1	Description of the Crawford household.....	145
6.1.2	Debbie Crawford's personal literacy history .....	147
6.1.3	Debbie Crawford's IL practices.....	148
6.1.4	Tara's out-of school IL practices .....	149
6.1.5	The spheres of activity in the out-of-school context that offer opportunities for Tara to engage in IL practices .....	151
6.2	Jack Hunt .....	155
6.2.1	Description of the Hunt household .....	157
6.2.2	Janice Hunt's personal literacy history .....	158
6.2.3	Janice Hunt's IL practices .....	159
6.2.4	Jack's out-of-school IL practices.....	161
6.2.5	The spheres of activity in the out-of-school contexts that offer opportunities for Jack to engage in IL practices .....	163
6.3	Ivan Wang.....	167
6.3.1	Description of the Wang household .....	169
6.3.2	Marion and Terry Wang's personal literacy histories .....	170
6.3.3	Marion's and Terry Wang's IL practices.....	172
6.3.4	Ivan's out-of-school IL practices.....	174
6.3.5	The spheres of activity in the out-of-school context that offer opportunities for Ivan to engage in IL practices .....	177
6.4	Ross Mason-Miller.....	182
6.4.1	Description of the Mason household .....	183
6.4.2	Julia Mason's personal literacy history .....	184
6.4.3	Julia Mason's IL practices .....	185
6.4.4	Description of the Miller household .....	186
6.4.5	Robert Miller's personal literacy history .....	186
6.4.6	Robert Miller's IL practices.....	187

6.4.7	Ross' out-of-school IL practices.....	188
6.4.8	The spheres of activity in the out-of-school context that offer opportunities for Ross to engage in IL practices.....	191
6.5	Summary and discussion.....	195
CHAPTER SEVEN: OUT-OF-SCHOOL CONTEXT AFFORDANCES: FACTORS THAT CONSTRAIN OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT IN IL PRACTICES .....		197
7.0	Introduction.....	197
7.1	"There is never enough time...": The lack of time as a factor in constraining opportunities for children to engage in IL practices .....	198
7.1.1	Strategies used to ameliorate the lack of time .....	205
7.2	"If a kid's not being challenged, there's always the risk that they will get lazy": The factor of perceived needs as a factor in constraining children's opportunities to engage in IL practices .....	210
7.2.1	Strategies used by the parents to meet the perceived needs of their child.....	213
7.3	"Right now we're having Internet problems": Access to information as a factor in constraining the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices .....	214
7.3.1	Strategies used by the parents to facilitate the focal children's access to information .....	217
7.4	"Everybody always has their crisis at the same time ...": Disruption/interruption as a factor in constraining the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices.....	219
7.4.1	Strategies used by the parents of the focal children to ameliorate the factor of disruption/interruption.....	221
7.5	Summary and discussion.....	221
CHAPTER EIGHT: CHILDREN'S APPROPRIATION AND RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL IL PRACTICES .....		226
8.0	Introduction.....	226
8.1	"I'll do it my own way...": Tara's appropriation and recontextualization of school and out-of-school IL practices .....	227
8.1.1	From mapping skills worksheet to designing a virtual bedroom.....	228
8.1.2	"This one's hard!": Changing the rules changes the game.....	231
8.1.3	"Take out as many skinny books as you want": Playing school at home.....	233

8.2	“I just think it in my head...”: Ivan’s appropriation and recontextualization of school and out-of-school IL practices .....	235
8.2.1	Information books as resources for recontextualization .....	236
8.2.2	Popular culture as resources for recontextualization .....	239
8.2.3	Media as resources for recontextualization .....	241
8.2.4	Personal experience as resources for recontextualization .....	241
8.2.5	Juxtaposing home and school journal writing .....	242
8.3	“Canucks game tonight!”: Ross’ appropriation and recontextualization of school and out-of-school IL practices .....	244
8.3.1	Journal entries as sports reports and play-by-plays .....	244
8.3.2	Anticipating the game .....	246
8.4	Jack’s appropriation and recontextualization of school and out-of-school IL practices .....	248
8.4.1	Video gaming as journal writing topics .....	249
8.4.2	Video games become subject for dramatic play .....	252
8.5	Summary and discussion .....	254
CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FURTHER WORK .....		260
9.0	Introduction .....	260
9.1	Conclusions drawn from the findings of the study .....	260
9.1.1	The affordances of school contexts in young children’s IL development .....	260
9.1.2	The affordances of out-of-school contexts in young children’s IL development .....	263
9.1.3	Contexts for recontextualizations .....	264
9.1.4	Contributions of the study to our knowledge of literacy and learning .....	265
9.2	Theoretical Implications .....	266
9.2.1	IL as a situated and sociocultural practice .....	266
9.2.2	IL, social semiotics and multimodality .....	268
9.2.3	IL and dialogism .....	268
9.2.4	IL and a comprehensive theoretical framework .....	269
9.3	Implications of the study .....	269
9.3.1	Implications for curriculum writers .....	269
9.3.2	Implications for teachers and administrators .....	270
9.3.3	Implications for families .....	273



9.4	Limitations of the study .....	274
9.5	Future research .....	275
	References.....	277
	Appendix A.....	293
	Appendix B.....	294
	Appendix C.....	297
	Appendix D.....	313

## List of Tables

Table 3.1: Family members consent for the study and participation in interviews.....	68
Table 3.2: Transcription conventions .....	69
Table 3.3: Artefact collections and setting sources .....	70
Table 4.1: Spheres of activity, IL practices and characteristics of activity in the school context .....	95
Table 5.1: Factors that constrain opportunities for children to engage in IL practices in the school context .....	112
Table 6.1: The composition of the Crawford family .....	144
Table 6.2: Spheres of activity, Tara's IL practices, and characteristics of activity in the out-of-school context .....	149
Table 6.3: The composition of the Hunt family .....	156
Table 6.4: Spheres of activity, Jack's IL practices, and characteristics of activity in the out-of-school contexts.....	161
Table 6.5: The composition of the Wang family .....	168
Table 6.6: Spheres of activity, Ivan's IL practices, and characteristics of activity in the out-of-school contexts.....	175
Table 6.8: Spheres of activity, Ross' IL practices, and characteristics of activity in the out-of-school contexts.....	189
Table 7.1: Factors that constrain out-of-school opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices .....	198
Table 8.1: Summary of the appropriated and recontextualized IL practices of the focal children in school and out-of-school contexts .....	254

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1: A comprehensive framework for analysis of the study.....	26
Figure 3.1: Data analysis as three concurrent flows of activity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). ...	72
Figure 3.2: The research process .....	74
Figure 4.1: Ross’ journal entry .....	100
Figure 4.2: Ivan’s journal entry .....	101
Figure 4.3: Tara’s journal entry .....	101
Figure 4.4: Jack’s journal entry .....	102
Figure 4.5: Planner routines.....	107
Figure 5.1: Factors that constrain the focal students’ opportunities to engage in IL practices in the school context .....	142
Figure 7.1: Factors constraining focal children’s opportunities to engage in IL practices in out-of-school contexts.....	225
Figure 8.1: Mapping Tara’s bedroom in the school context.....	229
Figure 8.2: Tara’s virtual bedroom.....	230
Figure 8.3: Tara’s weekly spelling worksheet.....	232
Figure 8.4: Ivan’s sketch of a locomotive engine.....	237
Figure 8.6: Ivan’s illustration to accompany his writing for the topic “What is Canada?”.....	238
Figure 8.7: Ivan’s writing on the topic “What is Canada?” .....	238
Figure 8.9: Ivan’s mélange of characters appropriated from the TV program <i>Sponge Bob</i> ....	240
Figure 8.10: Ivan’s depiction of crab-fishing in the TV program <i>The Deadliest Catch</i> .....	241
Figure 8.11: Ivan’s sketch of his visit to the hospital to meet his new brother .....	242
Figure 8.12: Ivan’s home journal entry regarding his impending trip to China .....	243
Figure 8.13: Ross’ sports report .....	245
Figure 8.15: Ross’ recontextualized hockey schedule for the month of January .....	246
Figure 8.16: Ross’ poster advertising the televised hockey game.....	247
Figure 8.17: Ross’ remake of the Jumbo Tron’s message.....	248
Figure 8.19: Jack’s journal entry on “Lego” .....	250
Figure 8.20: Lego Star Wars video game for PS2 .....	251

Figure 8.21: Jack's journal entry asking Ms. Davidson if she has played video games .....	252
Figure 8.22: The relationship between the focal children's appropriations and recontextualizations and the IL practices in school and out-of-school contexts .....	257

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## **Dedication**

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.0 Introduction to the study**

We are living in New Times, a juncture characterized by the domination of a new global capitalism and fuelled by fiercer competition and unprecedented use of sophisticated technology (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996; Hall, S., 1996; Helfenbein, 2004; Koh, 2004; Luke, 1998). In response, governments and industries around the world are challenging education systems to focus their attention on literacy in order to maximize peoples' contributions to a healthy, democratic and diverse society and maintain a sustainable and prosperous economy. This intense focus on literacy has caused alarm in educational sectors, resulting in repeated claims that we are entrenched in a literacy crisis. Government organizations, such as Human Resources and Skill Development Canada, claim that almost half of working-age Canadians do not have the literacy skills they need to meet the ever-increasing demands of modern life (Brink, 2006). We are told that we need to educate tomorrow's workforce to read and write more effectively. This is generally taken to mean to read and write with greater accuracy and speed and, in some countries (e.g., the United States), has resulted in a wave of reductionism that forces teachers to adhere to tightly regulated literacy learning outcomes and highly scripted reading programs. As Dyson (2001) points out, many state and provincial curricular guidelines now equate children's learning with adults' teaching of "orderly lists of literacy knowledge and know-how" (p. 9).

However, school-based or essayist forms of literacy may not necessarily guarantee success in out-of-school contexts (Gee et al., 1996). Students' future worlds will require the use of conventional print literacies and new multiliteracies in order to access and construct information that requires print, electronic and face-to face interactions within private and public economic sectors, and within local and global corporate worlds (Luke, 1998). What is needed is a new understanding of literacy and literacy teaching and learning to account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies, and to account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003a).

The shift to an information-age and knowledge economy has changed literacy requirements and these requirements will continue to change as new technologies emerge and blend into our everyday private and work lives (Castells, 1996; Drucker, 1993; Gee et al., 1996).



Changing technology and the pace of innovation will require “knowledge workers” to flexibly adapt to new circumstances and to integrate Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the workplace (Gee, 2000b; Organisation for Economic and Cooperation Development, 2001), to think in new ways and take action (Castells, 1996; Gee et al., 1996), and to work in teams “that collaboratively, interactively, and continuously design and redesign their work processes, functions, and relationships” (Gee, 2000b, p. 414). Essentially, there will be the need to learn how to learn (New London Group, 2000) or unlearn and relearn (Toffler, 1971). Lonsdale and McCurry (2004) advise, “The abilities to ‘read’ a range of printed, electronic and visual texts; master the new communication technologies via spoken and written language; locate, manage, evaluate and use information or knowledge; and engage critically with media and other texts” (p.32) will be crucial for success in the work world of the new millennium.

The changes outlined above have prompted reconceptualized notions of literacy that encompass new media and ICT (Kinzer & Leander, 2003; Kress, 2003a; Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004). These new forms of literacy, *literacies of information*, are both verbal and multimodal, combining music, printed text, visual images, animation, video, and sound. Currently, students navigate and interact with websites, web pages, chat tools, e-mail, instant messaging, anime, video, games, hypertext, and hypermedia on a daily basis. These new literacies are not traditional print literacies transferred to on-line contexts; they involve distinctive processes and skills and new competencies for participation in the New Times and in new worlds (Asselin, Early, & Filipenko, 2004). Further, as Leu, Ataya, and Coiro (2002) explain:

...while the precise definition of “new literacies” will never be complete...they include (a) rapidly locating the most useful information within complex ICT networks such as the Internet; (b) reading and critically evaluating that information for validity and utility; (c) writing effectively with word processing software; and (d) communicating information clearly to others with e-mail (p.1).

It should also be acknowledged that some researchers would argue that communication and social networking are more significant than information in new technologies. For example, Bigum (2002) states, “The biggest impact digital technologies are having and will continue to have is on relationships between people and relationships between people and organizations”

(p.135). With the continued acceleration and advancement of technology, the world of relationships will also change profoundly. And it should be noted that for others, literacy has a deeply personal and internal function beyond maintaining social connections, and attaining higher-level employment.

### **1.0.1 Definition of information literacy**

Information literacy (IL), may thus be foundational for learning in our contemporary environment of technological change (Bruce, 2002). With the rapid development of ICTs, and the shift to an increasingly complex information environment, educators are now recognizing the need for an education system that stimulates students to acquire and practice new skills in order to build new knowledge beyond what they already have. As Bruce (2002) states, “IL is generally seen as pivotal to the pursuit of lifelong learning, and central to achieving both personal empowerment and economic development” (unpaged). While definitions of IL continue to shift and continue to be debated, for purposes of this dissertation, I draw on several sources (e.g., Larson & Marsh, 2005; Leu et al., 2002; Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004) to operationalize the term. I define IL as:

the ability to locate, “read,” and manage information within a range of printed, electronic, visual, multimodal texts and ICT networks; to critically evaluate information, and to communicate information clearly via spoken and written language while mediating social networks and relationships.

## **1.1 Rationale for the study**

Early childhood educators have taken up the challenge of designing learning opportunities that will enable learners to take advantage of the information and communication resources available to them. Such opportunities make it possible for learners to experience the influence of effective information practices. Educational policy makers have responded to research on IL by including requirements in state and provincial standards for students to be competent users of informational texts (cf., Ministry of Education, 2006a). At the same time, researchers have noted the ability to find, understand, evaluate and synthesize information across a wide variety of sources requires different and more sophisticated reading and writing strategies for informational text than required in the past (Kamil, Intrator, & Kim, 2000; Leu, 2000; Moss, Leone, & Dipillo, 1997). In order to develop these strategies, researchers have

made repeated claims for the importance of providing children experience with informational text early in their developing literacy (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Duke, 2000a; 2004; Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Hiebert & Fisher, 1990; Hirsch, 2003; Pappas, 1991; 1993).

While there continues to be a number of arguments for using informational texts with primary students, there is little research to indicate how this will indeed contribute effectively to participation in an information society. As Street (2000) has argued, we must take into account the social practices that go into the construction, uses, and meanings of literacy. Indeed, as mentioned previously, it may be much more about creating and managing new relationships (e.g., those established through personal and professional emails, net-based messenger services), than creating and managing new information (Merchant, 2006; Schrage, 1998). Therefore, the need to investigate how IL is given meaning in the social context and how this meaning-making leads to effective participation in an information age, is increasingly urgent. Further, it raises questions of how school literacy practices using informational texts may transform out-of-school literacy practices. Focusing solely on school literacies, at the expense of literacies students practice out-of-school, invalidates those literacies in which students are fluent and effective (Knobel, 2001). At the heart of this issue is not only the relationship between the school and children's everyday-life experiences, but the consideration of what counts as effective language and literacy education of young people. Schultz and Hull (2002) have also suggested research should be documenting the ways school imposes a version of literacy on the outside world.

### **1.1.1 The pilot study**

I became interested in children's school and out-of-school IL practices while working as project manager for a larger longitudinal quasi-experimental study, Young Children's Informational Literacy (YCIL), in which the principal investigator (PI) asked primary classroom teachers to incorporate informational reading and writing experiences into their instructional program<sup>1</sup>. The PI provided funds for each teacher in the study to purchase informational resources such as books, software, and magazines, to support their program. The foci of the YCIL study included: (a) children's reading and writing achievement, (b) genre development, (c) attitudes to informational reading and writing, and (d) engagement with informational reading and writing. During the YCIL study, I observed students' engagement with

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish, & Shapiro (2007) for further information on this study.

informational reading and writing went far beyond the borders of the classroom. This finding links with Dyson's (2003b) and Hull and Schultz's (2002) research, which suggests the boundaries between school and out-of-school and are more porous than we imagine. Wanting to probe deeper into the finer details of these boundaries for my dissertation, I designed a single case pilot study in order to refine a variety of existing ethnographic techniques (e.g., develop appropriate interview questions, develop respectful interview probes, determine focused observations) to best suit a naturalistic study of young children in the context of their homes and community spaces. The pilot study examined the intersection between the school IL practices and out-of-school (i.e., home and community) IL practices of a third grade student from a working-class neighbourhood in a large city in Western Canada<sup>2</sup>. The results of my pilot study indicated the focal child's school and out-of-school IL practices ran parallel to each other and only intersected in ways in which school practices took precedence. For example, drawing on information from home Internet use and home video-gaming, the child wrote a play script featuring street car racing. While the teacher acknowledged the script in the classroom, she only allowed him time to work on the script after he fulfilled his assigned schoolwork obligations. Further, I found the teacher did not strongly recognize or value the child's out-of-school IL practices in the classroom. The findings of that case study raised some interesting questions concerning the affordances of the school and out-of-school contexts, which provided opportunities for the child to engage in IL practices. Wanting to refine my understanding of the affordances of the school and out-of-school<sup>3</sup> contexts for my dissertation, my first task was to look closely at how to operationalize the term "affordance."

**Affordance.** The term "affordance" has its roots in perceptual, cognitive, and environmental psychology. Gibson (1986) introduced the term to describe what an environment "offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill" (p. 127). Since this time, the concept of affordance has gained popularity resulting in further shifts of meaning. Over the past few years, the idea has been applied to educational settings. In particular, affordance has been used in connection with ICT teaching and learning to understand the opportunities for action various technologies provide. Despite the varied use of the term, its predominant contribution to all fields suggests "a way of seeing the world as a meaning laden environment offering countless opportunities for actions and countless constraints on actions" (Hammond,

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<sup>2</sup> See McTavish (2009) for further information on this study.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that for purposes of this dissertation, I define out-of-school as home and community.

2009, p.2). In this study I draw on and extend these ideas to define affordance as the characteristics of activity in its context<sup>4</sup> that offers opportunities for engagement in IL practices. Further, in this definition I also include the notion that some characteristics of activity in its context may also serve as constraints on these opportunities.

Having operationalized affordance, I designed a multiple-case (Yin, 2003), each case instrumental to the understanding of the affordances of the school and out-of-school contexts and their relation to IL learning.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

As previously discussed, gaps exist in the research indicating: (a) how young children's exposure to informational text will indeed contribute effectively to participation in a global economy and information society, (b) how IL is given meaning in the social context and how this meaning-making leads to effective participation in an information age, and (c) how school literacy practices using informational texts may transform out-of-school literacy practices. It is the intention of this present study to fill these gaps by investigating: (a) how school contexts afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices, and (b) how out-of-school contexts afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices. From the production and analyses of thick descriptions of the IL practices in both contexts, it examines: (c) the factors that constrain the opportunities in these contexts, and (d) how children appropriate and recontextualize school and out-of-school IL practices for their own purposes. To date, there is very little research in evidence of young children's IL development, and there is virtually no research, with the exception of my pilot study, investigating how school and out-of-school contexts afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices. The findings of this present study will give rise to an emerging framework for early childhood IL learning that will meaningfully connect learning across school and out-of-school contexts. It is anticipated the findings will contribute to the creation of more effective literacy pedagogies and curricula, particularly in the area of IL.

## **1.3 Research questions**

In light of the previous discussion, the following questions guided the study:

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<sup>4</sup> In section 1.4.4 of this chapter I further operationalize the notions of activity and context for this study.

1. How do school contexts afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices? What factors constrain these school opportunities?
2. How do out-of-school contexts afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices? What factors constrain these out-of-school opportunities?
3. How do children appropriate and recontextualize school and out-of-school IL practices for their own purposes?

#### **1.4 Theoretical framework**

This study is framed by three interrelated theoretical perspectives: sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978) or cultural-historical theory<sup>5</sup> (Cole, 1996; Moll, 2000; Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003); social semiotic theory and multimodality (Kress, 1997; 2003a; 2009); and dialogism (Bakhtin, 1986). Viewed together, these theories work to form a comprehensive theory of learning, language, and literacy.

In the following sections, I outline the theoretical principles which underpin each perspective. Although the theoretical perspectives share equal importance, I begin with the sociocultural perspective as an overarching set of propositions that serve as the important foundation to this study. Following the perspectives, I offer a discussion on the notion of “context” as viewed through the lens of activity theory. I argue that context is a highly significant construct central to all perspectives and serves to connect them. Finally, I discuss the proposed framework as a way of conceptualizing literacy in and out-of -school.

##### **1.4.1 A sociocultural perspective**

From a sociocultural perspective, human beings are actors who interact with their worlds primarily through mediational means, such as cultural artefacts or tools, and symbols, including language (Vygotsky, 1978). From a Vygotskian frame, language is the pre-eminent tool for learning and human development. Language mediates individuals’ activities in the valued practices of their communities across a lifespan (Cole, 1996; Cole & Engestrom, 1993). A sociocultural view of learning centers attention on cultural practices, or valued activities with particular features or routines, and is fundamental to understanding the nature of literacy (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003). By focusing on the cultural activity of various communities, the nature of

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<sup>5</sup> The terms ‘sociocultural,’ ‘cultural-historical,’ and ‘sociocultural-historical’ (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 100) are often used interchangeably. In this dissertation, I use the term ‘sociocultural’ but recognize the distinction between the terms and the importance of inherent historicity.

learning and the participation in these valued practices is visible. The role of other participants and the available cultural tools become key features of learning environments. As such, literacy learning from a sociocultural perspective is a socially mediated process that cannot be understood apart from its context of development, the forms of mediation available, and the nature of participation across various cultural practices (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003). As Barton (1994) notes:

... all our experience is mediated, nothing is direct. Secondly, by the way they structure reality for us in social interactions, people mediate our experience; and thirdly, texts, whether they are books, films or advertisements, mediate our experience (p.68).

As such, a sociocultural perspective is contrasted with conceptions of literacy as the autonomous acquisition of a series of discrete skills (Street, 1984).

An instrumental view of culture in the sociocultural perspective is interwoven in all aspects of human development, and thus has implications for how children's literacy practices are studied and understood. Accordingly, the development of children's early literacy practices must be viewed and understood in relation to the context in which those practices are culturally, historically and ideologically situated. This view allows us to understand literacy events are linked to individuals' social histories and to larger sociohistorical practices and processes, and thus, are situated within broader social relations and historical contexts (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003) .

Vygotsky's work (1962; 1978) has transformed our understanding of learning in early childhood, and language and literacy learning in particular. For Vygotsky, the use of signs, which includes oral language, writing systems and number systems is the transcendent tool that mediates human development. Thus, development is predicated on the ability to use these signs in a culturally appropriate way as it is mediated by the cultural and historical context in which it is embedded (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003). It is the more expert members of a particular practice that determine what is or is not appropriate participation (Rogoff, 1990). In other words, people learn to write by writing, and to read by reading, with the support of an expert or more proficient other, for a specific purpose or purposes.

Social relations mediate individual mental processes, and those social relations are mediated by speech, including inner speech. Vygotsky (1978) argues all thought occurs first in

social interaction on the interpsychological plane, and then gradually moves to the internal or intrapsychological plane as the child appropriates knowledge. As Wells (2000) points out, human development is not simply a matter of biological maturation; it is enriched and extended through an individual's appropriation and mastery of cultural inheritance as encountered in activity and interactions with others. Rogoff (2003) suggests development results from the interaction of three planes: the individual child, social interaction, and the community context as social elders assist children in appropriating the knowledge practices of local communities. She argues people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities – which also change. Learning is embedded within sociocultural contexts.

This concept of learning as interaction relates to Gee's (1996) concept of D/discourse (to be discussed more thoroughly in following sections) by positioning language as a mediating tool in the construction of identity, social languages (Bakhtin, 1981) and community languages (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000) that serve as resources used both deliberately and implicitly by students and teachers in the co-construction of literacy knowledge.

The capacity to learn is not finite and bounded. In any learning situation, there exists an ever-shifting range of possibilities determined by the background knowledge the novice has, the nature of the task to be learned, the activity structures in which learning takes place, and the interaction between the learner and those involved. It is within the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), Vygotsky argues, that learning takes place. He describes the ZPD as “the distance between problem-solving abilities exhibited by a learner working alone and that learner's problem-solving abilities when assisted by or collaborating with more experienced people” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 48). This conception of learning situates an individual within the concrete social context of learning and development and emphasizes the fact that the development of a child's individual mental processes is socially mediated. Vygotsky also argues instruction is effective only when it proceeds ahead of development; when it awakens those processes which are in the process of maturing (Griffen & Cole, 1984).

Mediated by interaction with others, individuals learn through their participation in social, cultural and historical contexts. Therefore, children learn, both in formal and informal contexts by their participation in sociocultural activities. In becoming literate, children learn the meaning of written language in the context of relevant situations, both in and out-of-school (Larson & Marsh, 2005). The focus is not on transferring literacy knowledge from those who



know more to those who know less but rather the co-construction of knowledge (Moll, 1990). In this way, children are recognized and legitimized in the classroom and the community for their competence as literate individuals.

**Literacy learning as a situated activity in communities of practice.** According to Wells (2000), society consists of overlapping activity systems with their associated “communities of practice.” Lave and Wenger (1991) define communities of practice as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (p. 98). These activity systems include the social practices of education, health care, the arts, households, etc., that include the norms, values, division of labour, and goals of the community (Gutierrez & Stone, 2000; Moll, 2000). The values, identities, and knowledgeable skills of individuals are formed through participation in activities in which they are involved first with family members, then in school and the community, then activity systems of work, leisure and so on. From this perspective, who a person becomes depends on which activity systems he or she participates in and what support and assistance he or she receives from other members of that relevant community. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest, congruent with Vygotsky’s theory, that learning is an integral aspect of participation in any community of practice and not a separate and independent activity. As participants meet new situations with new demands, opportunities for learning and further development occur. Newcomers to an activity are provided with models and assistance; old-timers learn from the new situation and from changing responsibilities in the community. Situated learning then, is more than the traditional notion of apprenticeship. In Lave and Wenger’s (1991) view, “learning is not merely situated in practice...learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world” (p. 35).

From this perspective all learning (and literacy learning in particular) is not simply the acquisition of isolated skills but involves the transformation of the participants as they engage in activities that have real meaning and purpose. Further, any activity is situated in place and time and each activity is unique because it involves the coming together of particular individuals in a particular setting with particular artefacts, all which have their own histories, which in turn, affect the way in which the activity is actually played out (Wells, 2000).

In sum, when learning is viewed as socially situated, our understanding of learning is broadened to take into account the social, cultural and historical contexts of an individual’s existence (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Literacy learning from a sociocultural view, then, is situated

in social, interactional, cultural, institutional and historical contexts, and provides the context for which teachers and students can construct authentic opportunities for learning (Putney, Green, Dixon, Duran, & Yeager, 2000).

**The New Literacy Studies.** Within the sociocultural perspective, I draw on a body of work articulated in the New Literacies Studies (NLS) (Street, 1993) to understand the nature of literacy learning that not only occurs in formal or informal settings or in or out-of-school, but also the “in-between” literacy learning that occurs in daily interaction as tools for building and maintaining social relationships. The NLS serve to help us deeply understand literacy in everyday life.

The NLS offer a perspective that assumes literacy is a critical social practice constructed in everyday interactions across local contexts (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Characterized by their focus on an understanding of literacies as multiple and situated and varying within time and space, the NLS point to the central role of power. Noteworthy for their attention to literacy in out-of-school contexts, these studies build on the ethnographic tradition of documenting literacy in local communities (Hull & Schultz, 2002). The NLS are situated within a group of movements that have taken a social turn from a focus on the study of individuals to an emphasis on social and cultural interaction (Gee, 2000a).

It is within the NLS that “literacy” is thought of as “Discourse” which Gee (1996) defines as “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or ‘types of people’) by specific *groups of people*. . . [Discourses] are, thus, always and everywhere *social* and products of social histories” (p. viii, emphasis in the original). Gee’s framework draws our attention away from a solitary focus on learning and language use in school settings to position learning, literacy and identity construction more broadly in and out-of-schools and across the life span (Schultz & Hull, 2002).

While Gee has shown us that the term *literacy* can be limiting, Street (1993; 1995) argues that the conception of literacy practices can be limited and focused narrowly on schooling and pedagogy. School-based concepts of literacy are often held as a standard definition of literate competence across contexts. In other words, autonomous models of literacy assume text has meanings that are independent of its context of use. Further, autonomous definitions associated with school can repress students under the ideological and social control of dominant groups (Larson & Marsh, 2005). When literacy is presented as a

context-neutral skill, it fulfills the political purposes of those in power to maintain dominance and to marginalize others.

Street (1984) defines literacy as an ideological practice that highlights the social, historical, cultural and political contexts of use. As such, literacy must be studied as it is tied to social practices and ideologies, such as economic, political, and social conditions; social structures; and local beliefs systems both in school and out. Street argues for literacy research that brings to the forefront the complexity of local, everyday, community literacy practices, or literacies outside of school settings. By using Hymes' (1964) notion of an ethnography of communication (cf., Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988), ethnographic case studies, or case studies employing ethnographic techniques (this investigation being an example), a richer understanding of literacy and language skills is conceived.

**Literacy learning as a set of social practices.** Extending Street's (1984; 1995) framework, Barton and Hamilton (1998) view literacy as an activity that is located in the space between thought and text. Literacy is inherently social, residing not only on paper, but located within the relationships and interactions between people. It can be characterized as what a particular group of people do with literacy; the social activities, the meanings and thoughts behind the activities and the texts that are used in these activities. As Barton and Hamilton (2000) argue, literacies are situated. Reading and writing are things that people do, either alone or with other people, but they are always situated within a social context and at a particular place and time. Therefore, literacy can be viewed from the context of the home, the church, the school, or any social institution. Barton and Hamilton (1998; 2000) present a theory of literacy as social practice in the form of six propositions about the nature of literacy, as follows:

**1. Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.** Literacy practices can best be conceived as the general cultural ways people utilize written language in their everyday lives. These practices are not observable units of behaviour because, as Street (1993) claims, they involve attitudes, feelings, values and social relationships. Included in this definition of practices are people's awareness of literacy, as well as their constructions and talk about literacy. Literacy practices exist within the relationships that we form with people and within groups and communities, rather than distinct properties that reside within individuals. Literacy practices are also shaped by social rules and power which relate to who may have access to texts, who can produce them, and who can distribute them.

Barton and Hamilton (2000) also differentiate between literacy *practices* and literacy *events*. Originally, Barton (1994) notes, the term “literacy events” was derived from the sociolinguistic conception of speech events (Hymes, 1972). Heath (1982) characterized a literacy event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes” (p. 350). Building on these notions, Barton and Hamilton (2000) propose that literacy events are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them. These episodes are usually activities where literacy has a role and a written text or texts are present, for example, cooking from a recipe, filling out an application form, or choosing a television program from a printed TV magazine. Many literacy events are regular activities and routines that are found and expected in social institutions like schools, work places and leisure centers. Literacy events are connected to the idea that literacy is situated in nature; that is, they always exist in a social context. As Lemke (1995) notes, it is parallel to ideas developed in sociolinguistics and to Bakhtin’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 (p.8-9).

Written texts are a critical part of literacy events; however, many literacy events are a mixture of written, spoken, and visual language. Barton and Hamilton (2000) claim that in literacy events, people use written language in integrated ways as part of a range of semiotic systems including mathematical systems, musical notation, photographs, and visual media. In examining the variation of literacy events, it becomes clear that literacy is not the same in all contexts.

**2. There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.** Barton and Hamilton (2000) say that within a culture, there are different literacies that are associated with different domains or particular spaces (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005) of life. Domains are structured, patterned contexts in which literacy is used and learned; within them there are particular patterns of literacy practices and there are particular and expected ways in which people act in literacy events. The activities that occur within these domains are not random or accidental. Literacy practices from one domain (e.g., school) may often cross to another domain (e.g., home).

**3. Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.** Different domains support different literacy practices. For example, in the socially powerful institution of

the school, dominant literacy practices that reflect middle-class values and attitudes are supported, reinforced, and promoted particularly in terms of what should be happening in other domains (e.g., homes).

**4. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.** Specifically, literacy is used as a means to some other end. For example, in the activity of reading a recipe in order to prepare a meal for a family, literacy serves a purpose in order to fulfill the social goal of caring for and meeting the needs of a family. Further, while texts are often assigned a purpose, they can serve multiple purposes as people appropriate them for their own ends in the context of its social meaning. For example, a family set of encyclopedias may be used by a child to find information for a school project or used by her mother to resolve arguments with friends, or used as a decoration to signify that the family is literate. Literacy has multiple purposes in any given activity, and therefore has multiple social meanings.

**5. Literacy is historically situated.** Rogoff (1990) argues that culture is not fixed or unchanging, but is formed as the outcome of people working together. Literacy practices, which are culturally constructed, are also fluid; they are transformed and modified as the lives and societies of which they are a part change. Since literacy is historically situated, we must look to the past to understand contemporary literacy practices.

**6. Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense-making.** A person's practices can also be shaped by his or her own literacy history. Literacy changes people and over the course of their lives, they will experience changes in their literacy practices. In the process of constructing meaning and sense-making in particular social contexts, people learn new literacies, which in turn will guide their actions.

**Home-family-community connections.** An ecological model of child development considers the child not in isolation but in context of family, classroom, and community, and the connections among these contexts. Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1989) proposed an ecological model whereby children's development is shaped by a set of nested environments in which they live their lives. The microsystem affects children the most directly. Microsystems include the family and local community consisting of the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious groups with which the family identifies, as well as preschool, childcare or kindergarten settings.

Microsystems are nested within a mesosystem, which includes settings outside the immediate

family context, such as schools. Beyond this are the exosystems that impact children but do not directly involve them, such as parents' workplaces, and finally, the macrosystem, larger social and political contexts within which the other systems are embedded (Goldstein, 2008).

The home is a domain that provides a structured, patterned context in which literacy is used and learned. Within this domain there are particular patterns of literacy practices. Scholars who view literacy with a sociocultural lens suggest that young children learn about literacy practices in the home and also the ways in which reading and writing can accomplish certain social goals (Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004).

Barton (1996) makes a useful distinction between the terms *household* and *home* in his study of family literacy in Lancaster, England. He states that *households* are groups of people living together in a shared space and usually eat together in a *home*. Households may include parents, children, caregivers, and extended family members such as grandparents and siblings. Families can also be biological and social, spanning generations, bringing together people who want to spend their lives together. Definitions of families, Taylor (1997) asserts, need to include the men, women and children who are separated from their families due to political, social, or economic reasons. As is pertinent in this study, a broad definition of families is necessary for examining how children acquire literacy in the context of the home.

From the very beginning of life, children are socialized into the cultural practices of families and the members with whom they share their lives. As in other cultural practices, children are socialized into particular language practices through language itself. Language socialization is a process whereby novices gain knowledge and skills relevant and appropriate to a social group (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Ochs, 1988; 1991). In the home, family members communicate with their children and conjointly construct meaning in a shared world. From this perspective, language plays a critical role in the construction of social languages (Bakhtin, 1981) and/or discourses and identities (Gee, 1996; Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003). As Barton (1996) has shown, there are many literacies present within this space, tied in with daily activities, which extend beyond traditional book reading. Recent ethnographic and case study research has illustrated the rich and varied ways that individuals, families, and communities practice and value literacy (cf., Anderson, J., Kendrick, Rogers, & Smythe, 2005; Heath, 1983; Lenters, 2007; McTavish, 2007; Purcell-Gates, 1995). This research has demonstrated that these families have access to "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) that

underlie productive, everyday life. These literacies are integrated into practices that include: establishing or maintaining relationships, displaying or accessing information, self-expression and/or for pleasure; and skill development (Cairney, 2003). While literacy is occasioned by many activities, it is often not itself the main objective. Literacy is used to get other things done. Children are exposed to and participate in this range of practices.

In the home, literacy is distributed according to relationships and identities. Parents mediate literacy experiences across and within the family so that even siblings in the same family may have different experiences (Taylor, 1983). Barton (1996) asserts that there are many home literacy practices that are patterned through gender. For example, in his study examining literacies outside schools and of families and neighbourhoods, Barton found women's literacy lives were complex and not defined solely in terms of their relationships with their children's education.

Family literacy practices are effectively under the strong influence of school literacy practices once a child enters school (Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Taylor, 1983). Particular types and uses of literacy that are associated with schooling become more prominent. Time is spent engaged in activities such as homework and "playing school" (Gregory, 2001; Mui & Anderson, 2008). Cairney and Ruge also suggest that from birth, some children are strongly shaped by the parents' experience with school literacy as well as the desire to prepare the preschool child for later schooling.

The community can no longer be defined in terms of its geographical boundaries, its ethnic associations or the languages spoken within. Most certainly, the literacy development of children in multilingual societies and learning contexts often cross the traditionally-fixed boundaries of culture, ethnicity, and language. Baquedano-Lopez (2003) argues that the concept of community has to take on a more dynamic meaning by attending to the practices of members and activities as units of analysis; that is, the "communities of practice." To be sure, the seminal work of Heath (1983), Street (1984) and Scribner and Cole (1981) have contributed to the knowledge we have about the literacy practices of adults in their homes and communities. Crow and Allan (1994) view community as the realm of local social relations that mediates between the private sphere of family and household and the public sphere of impersonal, formal organizations.

**Extensions of the New Literacy Studies.** The New London Group has extended the notion of the NLS by developing a way of talking about the social context of literacy learning

and the forms of literacy pedagogy. The Group's work has focused on the concept of *multiliteracies* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), the notion that there are multiple communication channels, hybrid text forms, new social relations, and an increased significance of linguistic and cultural diversity (Schultz & Hull, 2002). Further, as the New London Group (1996) explains, "multiliteracies also creates a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve various cultural purposes" (p.64).

A further extension of the NLS by Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) has taken into account the concept of sociotechnical practices. These researchers seek to understand how learning and knowledge are construed in a world where the new capitalism is positioned to define what counts as learning and knowledge in a "knowledge economy" (p. 23). The authors look at how new identities are shaped, arguing that we need to understand how knowledge resides in a family, an organization, a social practice, a particular technology, or a culture rather than focusing on what knowledge resides in an individual's head. They further argue that the focus of learning and education should not be on children nor schools, but human lives seen as trajectories through multiple social practices in various social institutions. "If learning is to be efficacious," they argue, "then what a child or adult does *now* as a learner must be connected in meaningful and motivating ways with 'mature' (insider) versions of related social practices" (p.4, emphasis in the original).

Researchers Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton (2002) have argued that detailed ethnographic studies, which demonstrate the role of identity and context in language development, need to be located within a larger, global framework. One of their most interesting observations is that literacy practices depend on technologies which can be transformed locally but are nonetheless tied to global communication systems. They suggest that social practice theory is too human-centered; as such, they call for forms of ethnographic inquiry that includes attention to the role that non-human actors (e.g., the computer and Internet) play in meaning-making. With the enormous changes in communication that have marked the past 20 years, the authors argue that the concept of multimodality enriches the NLS.

In sum, the NLS serves to provide a language and a perspective for examining and describing the connections between literacy practices and identities. Also noteworthy is the NLS' ability to help focus attention on and embrace out-of-school contexts such as home, community and work and value the literacy practices found within. In this way, the NLS assist



us in the examination of the kind of literacy we teach in school and in what we count as literacy practices.

#### **1.4.2 Social semiotic theory and multimodality**

To account for the changes in communicative practices, I turn to social semiotic theory and multimodality to understand new ways of reading, writing and making meaning. Expanding on Saussure's theory of sign processes, and signification and communication, social semiotic theory attempts to explain and understand how signs are used to "produce and communicate meanings in specific social settings be they 'micro' settings such as the family or settings in which the sign making is well institutionalized and hemmed in by habits, conventions and rules" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 264). Social semiotic theory implies that meanings and semiotic systems are shaped by relations of power, and that as power shifts in society, our languages and other systems of socially accepted meanings can and do change.

Social semiotics focuses on all types of social meaning-making practices, including those that are visual, verbal or aural in nature (Thibault, 1991). These different systems or channels for meaning-making (e.g. speech, writing, images) are known as semiotic modes. Modes can include visual, verbal, written, gestural, musical, and auditory resources for communication. An assemblage of any of these modes is referred to as multimodal (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001).

Multimodality asserts that societies use many means of making meaning beyond those of speech and writing. Kress (2009) states, however, that multimodality is not a theory, but rather, describes the field in which meaning is made. Multimodality, Kress contends, when viewed from the perspective of social semiotic theory, enables an account of communication, of meaning, and of learning.

Learning is the result of a semiotic/conceptual/meaning-making interaction with an aspect of the world. In this interaction, the learner's semiotic/conceptual resources for making meaning (and acting in the world) are changed and enhanced. Learning happens in specific environments; those environments "make available specific semiotic/conceptual resources in particular configurations" (Kress, 2009, p.20). The features of these environments and the shape of the configurations affect the possibilities of learning.

From this perspective, children are sign makers who use resources available to them in their sociocultural environments (Kendrick, McKay, & Moffat, 2005). The signs that children use to produce and convey meaning reflect the here and now of their environment as well as the

resources they draw from their environment (Kress, 1997). The meanings they attribute to the signs are not arbitrary, but reflect what is imminent for them at the moment of text production, the here and now of the social context (Kress & Jewitt, 2003). The sign-maker is “constantly transformative of the set of resources of the group and of her/himself” (Kress, 2001, p. 401).

**Multimodality and technology.** Kress (2003a) states,

It is no longer possible to think about literacy in isolation from a vast array of social, technological and economic factors. Two distinct yet related factors deserve to be particularly highlighted. These are, on the one hand, the broad move from the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the new dominance of the image and, on the other hand, the move from the dominance of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen. These two together are producing a revolution in the uses and effects of literacy and of associated means for representing and communicating at every level and every domain (p.1).

New information and communication technologies have irrevocably changed the nature and use of literacy in the past decade. This digital turn has challenged us to rethink the very nature of literacy practices and how they are situated in local and global spaces. Researchers such as Cope and Kalantzis (2000) have responded to the changes by pluralizing the term “literacy” (e.g., multiliteracies) to account for the multiple ways of meaning making, while others have wedded the term “literacy” (e.g., media literacy, digital literacy, visual literacy) to convey competence in a range of areas. Although these phrases have been widely accepted, Kress (2003a) suggests that ‘literacy’ “is the term to use when we make messages using letters as the means of recording that message” (p. 23) and that the other uses of the word have conflated the representation of resources, the production of the message, and the resources for dissemination. Jewitt (2006) agrees with Kress, stating that pluralizing the concept of literacy dilutes its meaning beyond usefulness and “merely accommodates the new within the domain of the old” (p.134). As such, Kress calls for a theoretical shift from linguistics (language alone) to semiotics (gesture, speech, image, writing, 3D objects, colour, music, etc.) to take into account the many modes available for representation. This theory shifts thinking about literacy as a matter of ‘competence’ to thinking about literacy as multimodal design (Jewitt, 2006; Kress,

2003a; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; New London Group, 1996). These authors argue that literacy in the context of technology-mediated learning is multimodal.

While Larson and Marsh (2005) acknowledge Kress and others, they claim that the use of the term “literacy” to refer to competence in various aspects of new technologies is so widespread that it would be difficult to curtail it. They further argue that the terms ‘digital literacy,’ ‘new literacies,’ and ‘media literacy’ “all have currency and appear to address similar issues, namely, the ability to decode, encode and make meaning using a range of modes of communication including print, still moving image, sound and gesture, all mediated by new technologies” (p.69).

To address these divergent viewpoints, Marsh (2003) has developed one model which takes into consideration Kress’s idea of literacy as lettered representation but also acknowledges the way in which current practices involve much more than a focus on printed text. Marsh uses the term “communication” to encompass a range of meaning making processes, including literacy. The distinction is made between communicative practices and events, which include the oral (spoken word or sound), the visual (symbols and images), literacy (written word or sign) and the corporeal (gesture/physical movement). In this model, oral, literacy, visual and corporeal events are seen as communicative events, and from these communicative events we draw communicative practices. Marsh’s model offers one way of analyzing the interaction between literacy and other communicative modes. She also calls for a re-examination of traditional notions of literacy, given the range and nature of children’s and young people’s communicative practices outside of school<sup>6</sup>.

From a multimodal viewpoint, there is also a need to redefine the way we see and interact with texts. New technologies make available a whole range of multimodal possibilities for individuals’ production of documents. It also allows a new kind of ‘reading’ of texts. Kress (2003a) views communication, whatever the mode, as text. In his view, text is seen as the result of social action, and the expression of social action gives one kind of shape to text, namely that of genre. Within the text, there is always the matter of, in Kress’s words, ‘what is at issue’

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note here that this investigation acknowledges the views of both Marsh and Kress. As such, the focus of this study centers on the concept of IL as defined earlier in the chapter and restated here: the ability to locate, “read,” and manage information within a range of printed, electronic, visual and multimodal texts and ICT networks; to critically evaluate information, and to communicate information clearly via spoken and written language while mediating social networks and relationships. For purposes of this dissertation, I view literacy where forms of language do not stand in opposition to each other, but exist along a continuum.

(p.47). Using Gee's (1996) notion of Discourses, texts are seen as carrying different Discourses, those ways of speaking, behaving and acting in culturally specific ways and are made up of visuals, sound, movement, and gesture. According to Pahl and Rowsell (2005), texts can be seen as artefacts that link back to people and places. When texts are seen as artefacts, that is, as objects with a history and material presence, they are exposed as traces of social practice. When texts are created, they are created in terms of the intended practices and interests of the producer. Texts are motivated signs (Kress, 1997) that bespeak identity and relate to processes of synaesthesia (creativity and creative expression). Modal resources provide users of the resource with the ability to reshape the resources in relation to the needs of the sign-maker. Young children typically draw on different modes when making meaning and choose the most appropriate mode for their meaning-making activities (Jewitt & Kress, 2003)

Our understanding of texts, also guides the way we read and produce future texts. How we choose to make texts signifies our own interpretations. The "stuff" (the materiality, such as words, actions and gestures) we use to make texts is shaped by our identities (Kress, 1997). Therefore, when we create texts, meaning-as-form and form-as-meaning, stand on equal footing. Often the issue of materiality is located in the affordances of the materials we use (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). Some materials afford a text greater power and attention than others. For example, understanding and applying the principles of academic writing affords opportunities to succeed in school. To this end, questions of assessment of multimodal choice remain persistent in a multimodal world. Learners will need to develop skills in relation to the design, production, and analysis of multimodal texts (Kress, 2003a; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

The facilities of new technologies require the re-evaluation of the notion of the reading path (Jewitt, 2006; Jewitt & Kress, 2003). The design of the mode offers students entries into texts at different points, allowing alternate reading paths and the potential re-making the text simply by their reading of it. We are socialized into ways or practices of using these texts.

In sum, the practices of students with new technologies require a broader reconceptualization of literacy as multimodal design. This is of particular concern (as will be demonstrated in this investigation) where literacy is conceptualized in its most restricted sense, as a matter of competencies in reading and writing.

### **1.4.3 Dialogism**

This study is also informed by the theoretical perspective of dialogism, an epistemology that seeks to understand human behaviour through the use humans make of language (Holquist,

2002). Central to this theory is Bakhtin's concept of dialogue. The perspective of dialogism shows us that if we think of language as dialogic, then we can see that as we live among the many languages of social practices, dialogism is necessarily the way in which we construct meaning. The language we use in personal or textual discourse is itself composed of many languages which have all been used before, and will be used in the future. In this way, we see Bakhtin's notion of intertextuality, the shaping of texts' meaning by other texts. At any moment, our discourse will be informed by the contemporary languages we live among and informed by their historical roles and the future roles we anticipate for them (Vice, 1997). Further, the notion of dialogism asserts that all productive language assumes a listener or reader, even when we speak or write to ourselves.

When language is conceived as dialogue, utterance is the topic of analysis. The Bakhtinian utterance "is dialogic in the degree to which every aspect of it is a give-and-take between the local need of a particular speaker to communicate a specific meaning, and the global requirements of language as a generalizing system" (Holquist, 2002, p. 60). An utterance is constrained by the fact that it is never "*in itself* originary" (p. 60, emphasis in the original) but is always an answer. Further, utterances are restrained by the procedures and the context which make the utterance meaningful. In this sense, communication can only be situated in the social sphere as the rules that determine precedence develop out of group practices. The norms controlling the communication exist only in the individual minds of particular people in particular groups, whose values of their particular community are shared. In other words, learners develop their understandings both implicit and explicit through experience by using that language in interactions with others within specific cultural contexts.

Language and language use vary broadly by context and also within contexts. It is within these contexts or "*spheres of communication*" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.60) that language has its own relatively stable patterns or repertoires of utterances. Bakhtin refers to these as specific *speech genres*. According to Bakhtin, speech genres:

...reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all through their compositional structure. All three of these aspects - thematic content, style, and compositional

structure - are inseparably linked to the whole of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication (p. 60).

Bakhtin further notes that the diversity and heterogeneity of oral and written speech genres are boundless because of the various possibilities of the spheres of human activity. Each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex. In any community of practice, there will be a complex array of speech genres that will be constructed within instances of situated dialogue. Speech genres, therefore, include daily interactions and dialogue (greetings, conversations, meetings, letters, church services, email, etc.), writing, business documents, commentary, and the like. Thus, Bakhtin's perspective helps us to see genres as situated, social actions. As Chapman (1999) explains, genres are:

...situated in that they arise out of and are embedded in particular contexts and spheres of activity; social, in that they are learned through and used in interactions with other; active, in that they are dynamic, flexible, purposeful, and useful and are learned through engagement – by doing (p. 471).

In this study, IL is situated when it is an integral and purposeful part of the various spheres of activity in the school and out-of-school contexts. These spheres of activity are seen as sets of cultural practices or ways of communicating, and are usually associated with routines. For example, in the home context, spheres of activity may include the routines of bedtime, TV watching, playing video games, or doing homework. In the classroom context, spheres of activity include the morning gathering, sustained silent reading, guided reading, or writers' workshop. It is these spheres of activity to which specific genres are tied.

Based on the perception that genres are context-embedded, localized, and tied to specific time and space, Bakhtin (1986) makes a distinction between *primary* and *secondary genres*. Primary genres are used in everyday speech communication, can be learned without formal instruction, and come into being before they are specified into institutional forms (Holquist, 2002). Secondary genres are highly developed such as specialized academic or sociopolitical activities that are legislated by unitary institutional or professional usage.

As previously mentioned, Gee (1996) also makes a distinction between primary and secondary d/Discourses that are learned through apprenticeship in social groups and institutions. Related to the Bakhtinian notion of speech genres, discourses involve far more than talk or language alone. Gee distinguishes between discourse as language-in-use with Discourse by suggesting that:

Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize (p.127).

Learning primary genres or discourses is a developmental task for young learners acquiring literacy. As they begin formal schooling, children then acquire knowledge of secondary genres through school-based activities. Since current understandings of literacy development emphasize building on children's out-of-school literacy practices and experiences, the validity of school literacies that are separate from students' personal experiences with real world literacies is questionable.

#### **1.4.4 Situating “context” in the theoretical framework**

The theoretical perspectives previously discussed share common roots in that they conceptualize literacy not just in terms of skills and competencies, but as an integral part of social events and practices which are shaped by culture and history. Within each perspective, there are underlying notions about context and intertextuality, and the role of language. Taken together these perspectives offer a framework that links individual people's everyday experiences with the more global social institutions and structures. The framework also assists in exploring issues of power by examining the relationship between micro- and macro-level contexts.

Using this framework allows the researcher to construct, through analyses, how participants make meaning of literacy for themselves within particular social contexts. This framework attempts to move away from conceptualizations of texts, contexts, individuals and communities as stable units, toward notions of text-mediated practices, the connections between

different contexts in producing meaning, and the shifting of individual and community identity across different activities and contexts (Maybin, 2000). At the same time, this framework must accommodate how individual activities are shaped and given meaning by the social, cultural, and historical contexts within which they occur, and in turn must be constituted within larger social and institutional structures. This framework suggests a dialogical view of contexts, a view that moves between the micro and macro, and the local and the global. To further conceptualize the notion of context for this study, I draw on activity theory (cf. Leont'ev, 1978; Wertsch, 1981) and in particular, Engestrom's (1996) notion of context.

The earliest structural versions of contexts were conceived as containers, devoid of human action and culture. Later analyses focused on dyadic interactions which resulted in the view of context as interpersonal constructions, but based solely on situational and experiential factors without acknowledgment of the "deep-seated material practices and socioeconomic structures of the given culture" (Engestrom, 1996, p. 66). However, these definitions of context lack what the other has, as Engestrom notes, "one has system without individual experience, the other experience without system" (p.66).

In activity theory, Engestrom (1996) states, "[c]ontexts are activity systems. An activity system integrates the subject, the object, and the instruments (material tools as well as signs and symbols) into a unified whole" (p. 67). In other words, context is not just "out there," it is constituted by people both internally (involving specific objects and goals) and externally (involving artefacts, other people and specific settings) (Nardi, 1996) and are dependent on each other. In this way, Engestrom demonstrates that meaning is mutually constituted between persons and activity systems (Kell, 2006).

In this study, activity theory can assist and facilitate analyses of literacy learning by tracing the communicative interactions among the focal children, the teacher, and the parents of the focal children in the overlapping activity systems of which they are a part, and the material tools (e.g., texts) without separating the people and tools from the collective, on-going action over time. In this way, literacy events can be drawn from practices, and delimit the nature of who and what defines context. Further, in defining contexts as activity systems, we can look at how meanings can travel across activity systems and re-embed themselves. In this view, the concept of "recontextualization" (Iedema, 2003) is useful in studying meaning making processes as they travel across social groups, time and spaces (Kell, 2006). In other words,

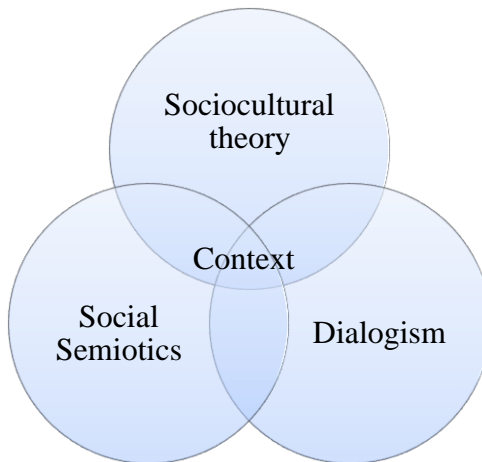


literacy itself cannot travel but when used as a mode of representation in a particular medium it can enable meanings to traverse contexts and switch modes.

### 1.5 Unifying the theoretical perspectives

Together, the theoretical perspectives work together to provide a comprehensive framework for analysis of this multiple-case study. As illustrated in Figure 1.1, each perspective brings theoretical structure to the framework and strength is built through their interconnectedness.

**Figure 1.1: A comprehensive framework for analysis of the study**



Dialogism provides a lens to see the ways children and adults construct meaning as we all live among the many languages of social practices. Social semiotics enable us to see how literacies are used and interpreted and for what purposes. Finally, sociocultural theories of learning complement social semiotics and dialogism by offering notions of tool use (i.e., technology, mediation and appropriation) and a meaningful understanding of how learning happens in and out-of-school. If we view learning as changing participation in a culturally valued activity that is mediated by interaction and cultural tools from the local to the global activity systems, children can be prepared for participation in a global, knowledge and communication economy.

These theoretical perspectives do not operate in a vacuum, and there are many features of the perspectives which indeed overlap. It is important to note, however, that all of the perspectives emphasize sociocultural contexts and all position the learner as an active

participant in the construction of meaning. It is the affordance of each perspective, contributing equally to the framework, on which this multiple-case study rests.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

As schools prepare students to deal effectively with the demands of IL in these new times, the need for a deeper examination of the affordances of the school and out-of-school contexts in providing children opportunity to engage in IL practices is of critical importance. Because the early school years provide the foundation for success in school, indeed, for life-long learning, it is imperative that we establish a knowledge base to guide practice in IL in the primary grades. This study makes an important contribution to that base.

An investigation of the affordances of the school and out-of-school contexts in providing opportunities for children to engage in IL practices will assist in broadening the understanding of the relationship between children's social and cultural practices in school and out-of-school spaces. This study allows us to see how children draw on social and cultural resources from these contexts to develop as IL learners.

While children are often deemed "at-risk" (i.e., having intellectual, cognitive or linguistic deficits) because they live in areas of lower economic value, it does not necessarily mean that the opportunities to engage in IL practices are not as extensive or varied as those of mainstream children. A deeper and more informed understanding of school and out-of-school contexts will illuminate how children not only make use of their available resources and practices across contexts but how they appropriate and recontextualize these resources and practices for their own purposes, in spaces they feel are safe to do so. These findings can make an important contribution in terms of troubling the assumptions educators may have regarding families living in these urban areas, particularly about the way the children "take-up" school practices.

This research study has the potential to provide useful insights to teachers who hold dominant middle-class notions of parenting and early literacy experiences. This study may allow teachers and administrators to appreciate the cultural capital of students despite their students' socioeconomic situations and their unfamiliarity with these experiences.

In a related issue, this study may also make an important contribution in terms of troubling the valued literacy practices found in school. Because children's literacy practices out-of-school often do not match those of school, these practices may be seen as unworthy in

terms of “proper” literacy development. As a result, children may be unsuccessful with school literacy practices and their performance in school may not truly reflect their abilities and potentials. Unfortunately, this underachievement may be blamed on parents or caregivers who are considered to be not living up to the school’s expectations to help their children promote or assimilate the mainstream school discourse. A better understanding of children’s IL practices in the home may help to eliminate these deficit notions of families.

The findings of this study could also benefit the family members and care givers of the children and what role they play in the affordances they provide for opportunities for their children to engage in IL practices. Family members and care givers may realize and appreciate their role and the environment they provide in terms of a broader notion of literacy or the practices they promote and the support they provide in relation to children’s literacy development. The recognition of their value as key facilitators may help to strengthen their positions as advocates for their children and serve to bring about more frequent and effective communication with teachers, administrators and schools.

## **1.7 Summary of the chapter**

This introductory chapter presented an overview of the background to the study and included the definition of information literacy as used in this dissertation. This definition was followed by a discussion of the study’s rationale and a description of the pilot study, foregrounding the purpose of, and justification for, the investigation of the present study. The research questions guiding the study were then presented. Following the research questions, the theoretical framework in which the research is grounded was discussed. The chapter ended with the significance of the study and its possible theoretical and practical contributions to young children’s information literacy learning.

## **1.8 Organization of the dissertation**

This dissertation reports how school and out-of-school contexts afford opportunities for engagement in IL practices of four Grade 2 children living in a lower socioeconomic area of an urban city in western Canada. Eight chapters follow this introductory chapter. Chapter Two focuses on a review of literature and previous empirical research findings. In particular, I focus on four relevant research areas. First, I look at the field of IL, and in particular, the use of informational text with young children. Next, I examine the literature connected with family

literacy, literacy and technology, and out-of-school literacy, in view of how they relate to the present study. In Chapter Three, the qualitative case study methodology selected for the design of this research study is outlined, and a discussion of data collection and data analysis procedures is presented. The findings and related discussion are presented in the next five chapters (Chapters Four through Eight) in response to the three research questions guiding the investigation. In Chapter Nine, the final chapter, I present the conclusions to the study and the theoretical implications of the work and its limitations. The final chapter also includes a discussion of the implications for curriculum writers, educators, administrators, and parents, and provides direction for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **2.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I present a review of the empirical research findings of four research strands related to the present study: IL research (including young children's use of informational text), family literacy research (including research on culturally, linguistically and economically diverse home literacy environments; family roles; and the availability, uses, and types of texts), young children's literacy and technology research (including multimodality and the representation of meaning), and out-of-school literacy research. In doing so, my intent is to (a) situate the present study in the existing literature, (b) link the findings of the present study discussed in subsequent chapters to the review of the literature and, (c) enrich existing research trajectories in order to map new directions for future research.

### **2.1 Information literacy research**

At the forefront of the review of research on IL lies the difficulty associated with its definitions. As I discussed in Chapter One, the concept and concise definition of IL is blurred and is not widely used in the field of early childhood literacy. Therefore, I present a very brief history of the concept of "information literacy" here in order to foreground the review of research in this area.

Originally, the development of IL grew from the field of Library and Information Sciences when in 1974, Paul Zurkowski, president of the Information Industry Association, introduced the concept in a proposal to the National Commission on Library and Information Science (NCLIS) to recommend the establishment of a national program to achieve universal IL (Spitzer, Eisenberg, & Lowe, 1998). Recognizing the need to develop techniques and tools for people to utilize information for effective problem-solving and decision-making, politicians began to promote IL as a guarantee for the survival of a democratic society. Coupled with the dramatic increase of information available and the development of digital technologies as tools for information retrieval and manipulation, the call for developing requisite skills for an information literate person was made. As a result, the following was adopted: "To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have

the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (American Library Association, 1989, p. 1). Since its adoption, this definition of an information literate person has formed the basis of subsequent definitions of IL, as is the case in the expanded definition I provided in Chapter One. Over time, definitions of IL have included the introduction of a critical perspective as well as the inclusion of a number of other formats for presenting information including printed words, photographs, illustrations and drawings, charts, tables, and graphs, sound recordings, computer graphics, multimedia, and animation.

It was not until after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) that the call for the integration of IL across K-12 curricula took hold. Library media programs became the starting platform to address educational IL outcomes and since this time, IL has been firmly ensconced in the field of library science. In due course, library media specialists took a central role in the implementation of IL in educational institutions. Over the last decade and a half, however, the library media specialist’s role has included collaboration with classroom teachers in order to facilitate deeper integration of IL and promote a shift from textbook usage to the incorporation of multiple sources of information. As a result, much of the research in the IL area has been associated with secondary and post-secondary students.

### **2.1.1 Research on using informational texts with young children**

For some time, reading professionals have advocated using informational texts with older students (Moss & Hendershot, 2002), but the call for using informational texts in the younger grades is relatively new. Prior to the 1970s, it was believed that young children comprehended narrative text more easily and therefore should not be exposed to informational text until the middle grades and above (Egan, 1988; Reese & Harris, 1997). However, the primacy of narrative was soon called into question by scholars whose research suggested that post-primary school students’ poor performance with non-narrative, expository texts may be in part, the result of their lack of experience with these types of texts in the crucial early years of schooling (Applebee, Langer, Mullis, Latham, & Gentile, 1994; Hiebert & Fisher, 1990; Littlefair, 1991; Pappas, 1991). This lack of experience has contributed to the creation of what some researchers call the “expository gap” (Gee, 2001) and the “fourth grade slump” in overall literacy achievement (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990).

Researchers have seriously challenged the notion that narrative should play a dominant role in early literacy programs. For example, Pappas (1991; 1993) and Duke and Kays (1998)

found that children as young as kindergarten age are just as capable of using the distinctive discourse features of information books as story books. Similarly, Hiebert (1991) and Sanacore (1991) argued for both stories and information books beginning in the first year of schooling. Caswell and Duke's (1998) research revealed that non-narrative texts provided students with a rich array of benefits beyond simply preparing them for future encounters with non-narrative texts. They believe that non-narrative texts serve as a "way in" to literacy, serving as an important catalyst for overall literacy development. Thus, the research suggests that the inclusion of informational texts in early childhood classrooms may not only help in mitigating the substantial difficulty many students have with informational texts but also provide them a pathway into literacy.

Another area of research has shown that for some children, informational text is the preferred reading material. For example, Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish and Shapiro (2007) recorded responses from 40 children in four schools on two book preference tasks and found that children have preferences for reading not only narrative text but for informational text as well. Similar findings were reported by Mohr (2003) in a study comparing the book preferences of first-graders. Mohr found that 84% of the children in the study chose informational text when given a choice between many different genres of children's picture books. In another study, Hynes (2000) portrayed a student who described himself as a nonreader because he preferred to read for facts rather than for stories. Additionally, Caswell and Duke (1998) profiled two struggling readers and writers who progressed substantively when their teacher discovered that they were more successful when using informational texts. The preference for and inclusion of informational texts may also improve attitudes towards and motivation for reading (Dreher, 2003). This is particularly important as children's attitudes toward reading and writing seem to become more negative as they progress through the elementary school grades (Manning, 2005; McKenna & Kear, 1995). Thus, these studies serve to solidify the notion that young children can cope with informational text, are motivated to read it, and for some children, it is their preferred reading choice.

Although the call for greater attention to informational texts in the early grades has been made, several studies have shown that young children's exposure to informational texts may be limited. Nell Duke's (2000a) often cited study reported that first-grade children read or wrote informational text an average of 3.6 minutes per day, and only 1.4 minutes in classrooms serving lower socioeconomic populations. Information books were a scarce commodity in the

study's first-grade class libraries and instruction related to informational text was virtually absent. In an informal study, Yopp and Yopp (2000), found that only 14% of the materials the 126 primary-grade teachers surveyed reported using for read-aloud were informational in nature, suggesting children are further limited in their access to informational text. Analyses of basal readers have also revealed that informational text is underrepresented in primary-level selections. For example, Walsh's (2003) examination of basal reading series revealed that the basal readers missed opportunities to build word and world knowledge by offering loosely connected stories around "mostly incoherent, banal themes" (p. 24). In a most recent study, Moss (2008) examined the two basal reading series adopted in California schools under the Reading First legislation to compare the text genres represented. Although 40% of pages/selections in both series were devoted to nonfiction text, 50% of these nonfiction texts selections were expository and 33% were literary nonfiction. She found that neither series met the criteria for the inclusion of 50% informational text at grade levels one through six as required by the 2009 National Assessment for Educational Progress in Reading (NAEP), and both series limited informational text mainly to exposition.

Since the turn of the millennium, teachers and children have had greater access to a variety of recently published, higher quality information trade books (Casbergue & Plauché, 2003) and teachers have been encouraged to use information books as part of their regular reading instruction (Dreher, 2003; Duke, 2004; Reutzel, Smith, & Fawson, 2005). As a result, research on what happens when more informational text is included in primary-grade classrooms is beginning to emerge. For example, a study conducted by Duke, Martineau, Frank, and Bennett-Armistead (2003) in first-grade classrooms in low-SES school districts indicated that children in low-SES classrooms with more informational text had the same levels of overall reading and writing achievement as children in comparison low-SES classrooms who had no informational text and were better writers of informational text. Further, the children's attitudes towards recreational reading in informational text-rich classrooms did not decline. As well, children entering first-grade with low sound-letter knowledge, who were exposed to informational text and activities involving informational text, achieved higher levels of reading comprehension and writing than comparable children in the comparison classrooms. Overall, the inclusion of informational text had positive effects on first graders' reading and writing achievement, and served as a motivator for some groups of students.



The increase in the use of informational text in primary classrooms has also brought about a small number of studies which have focused on the special comprehension demands these texts require. For example, my own case study (2008) illustrated and compared the metacognitive strategies a third-grade female student used while reading narrative and informational texts. I found that the student used markedly different metacognitive strategies for each genre, resulting in comprehension difficulties while reading the informational text. The findings suggest that for students to meet the challenges of informational texts, they must be taught specific metacognitive strategies while working with explicit text structures. In another study, researchers investigated the effectiveness of an instructional program designed to teach expository text comprehension during guided reading lessons of three groups of second grade students (Hall, K., Sabey, & McClellan, 2005). Findings suggest that explicit teaching of text structure is an effective strategy for promoting informational text comprehension in young children.

These studies have recently called into question *what kinds* of non-narrative texts children should be exposed to, as all informational text is not the same (Moss, 2008). Dreher and Voelker (2004) argue that an exposure to a *range* of informational texts types is essential if teachers expect children to develop facility with this genre. As Chambliss and Calfee (1998) point out, particular information text types enable children to become familiar with particular discourse forms associated with specific content areas. Further, exposure to other types of informational texts enable children to experience information provided in visual representations such as maps, charts and graphs, and helps prepare children for engagement with more challenging documents.

Although related terms associated with informational text abound (e.g., factual, expository, non-fiction, non-narrative), for purposes of this study I draw on several definitions. The term informational text as used in this study refers to texts whose function is to inform. Informational texts include: characteristic relationships (e.g., compare/contrast, cause-effect), technical vocabulary, lexico-grammatical features (e.g., classificatory nouns, continuous present verb tense), visuals (e.g., pictures, graphs, maps), expository genres (e.g., description,

explanation, procedure); and come in many different forms (e.g., books, magazines, the Internet) (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003; Duke & Kays, 1998; Moss, 2008)<sup>7</sup>.

For the most part, a vast amount of information suggesting *how* teachers should include informational text in their classrooms proliferates (cf. Duke, 2003; Duke, 2004; Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003; Hall, K. & Sabey, 2007; Kletzien & Dreher, 2004; Read, Reutzel, & Fawson, 2008; Yopp & Yopp, 2000); however, no research has focused on how an increase in attention by teachers to informational text is changing young children's information literacy practices in these classrooms. Further, to my knowledge, there has been no research focused on the affordances of school and out-of-school contexts to provide opportunities for young children to engage in IL practices or the factors that limit these practices. This study seeks to fill this critical gap.

## **2.2 Family literacy research**

Consideration of the family environment as an educational setting has garnered much attention over the past two decades. Educators and researchers, however, continue to grapple with the notion that the environments of families and the activities that occur there can be recognized and understood in terms of the richness and complexity they add to the educational experience. Tensions around this issue constitute debates regarding notions of good parenting, appropriate parent involvement, and favoured literacy practices in homes and in families (Edwards & Turner, 2008).

The field of family literacy research is extensive. For purposes of this dissertation, I review three areas that are pertinent to the present study: (a) research that addresses the home environment as a context for literacy learning, (b) research that addresses families and family members' roles in young children's literacy learning, and (c) research that addresses the literacy practices of families with particular attention to the types, availability, and uses of texts in the home. Further, to situate the present study more explicitly, I focus on studies that report on culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families, reflecting the characteristics of the focal children of the present study.

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<sup>7</sup> It should also be noted that I draw on the work of several others to define the larger notion of text beyond the written. Following the work of Gee (1999) and Pahl and Rowsell (2005), I view text as carrying different Discourses as made up of visuals, sounds, movement and gestures; I also see texts as artefacts tracing back to people and places. Further, drawing on the work of Kress (2003a), I also see text as the result and expression of social action.

### **2.2.1 The home environment as a context for literacy learning**

Research into the home environment as a place for literacy learning has been firmly rooted since the 1980s when Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) classic study of children's language learning in two communities in the Piedmont area of the Carolinas was first published. Since this time, a number of ethnographic studies on culturally, linguistically and economically diverse families (e.g., Li, 2006; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Taylor, 1993; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teale, 1986) have provided a deeper understanding of the home as a context for literacy learning and the development of young children. These ethnographic studies and others discussed further in this chapter, provide valuable foundational evidence demonstrating that children come to school with diverse literacy experiences.

Heath's (1983) seminal ethnography offered a close look at the patterns of children's language development in the black community of Trackton and the white community of Roadville, both located in the area where Heath taught and lived. Heath found that the patterns of literacy practices of the two communities stood in stark contrast to each other. Roadville children were imbued with "ways" and discourses that would ensure them initial success in mainstream academics. Trackton's children, on the other hand, developed linguistic and cognitive patterns which were not consistent with those equated for readiness in mainstream schools, putting them at disadvantage for future academic success.

Anderson and Stokes' (1984) study of low-income families' literacy practices revealed that these families can and do provide rich literacy environments for their children. Based on over 2000 observations of literacy events and behaviours in the homes, the researchers categorized the events into several different domains of literacy activity. Anderson and Stokes reported that these literacy events were not isolated bits of activity but were embedded in functional systems around interpersonal communication, daily living, religion, and entertainment.

Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) in their study of six low-income inner-city African-American families also found that these families extensively used literacy in their daily routines. However, similar to the Trackton families in Heath's study, the children from these families failed to achieve success in school due to a mismatch between school expectations and the cultural expectations of the families. Although rich and authentic literacy experiences were available to the children in their homes, the school provided mainly decontextualized skill-type activities. That study served to question the negative assumptions commonly held regarding the

home literacy environments of children from nonmainstream cultural and ethnic minorities of low socioeconomic status.

More recent studies have explored the limits and potentials of mainstream literacy practices and have expanded the debates between traditional and progressive pedagogies. For example, Compton-Lilly (2003) studied the literate lives of her mainly African-American and Puerto-Rican urban first-graders and documented the ways in which the parents and children conceptualized reading. Despite the negative assumptions the teachers and the larger community held for these children, Compton-Lilly found these assumptions unfounded and largely based on urban mythology and media depictions. She reported that the parents of these urban children held and expressed high aspirations for their children around literacy and learning in general.

Li's more recent (2006) ethnographic study examined the cultural differences between teachers' and parents' views of what their children should learn and how they should be taught. Although this study did not deal with low-income families (the Chinese immigrant families in the study were higher socioeconomically than the white middle-class teachers), the families were indeed culturally and linguistically different from the teaching staff. Li described the many ways in which the teachers' educational beliefs and practices were in direct opposition to the parents' views. Li's critical examination of the pedagogical beliefs of the mainstream majority illuminated its privileged status which set the tensions between the homes and school. The work of these ethnographers has raised awareness of: (a) the variations of literacy practices that take place in the home, (b) how practices may differ from home to home, and (c) how practices are related to literacy and language development. Although the studies vary on the categories of literacy observed, they show that many children do come to school with a great deal of experience with written language, and more importantly, demonstrate that in culturally, linguistically and economically diverse families, these experiences are fundamentally grounded in social and cultural (rather than academic) purposes (Edwards, Paratore, & Roser, 2009).

### **2.2.2 Families' and family members' roles in young children's literacy learning**

The research on families supporting literacy learning has long been documented. While Morrow (1995) contends that "parents are the first teachers their children have, and they are the teachers that children have for the longest time"(p. 6), various family members including siblings, grandparents, aunts and others repeatedly serve as teachers in the family context. In this section, I discuss the notion of the role of parent involvement in children's literacy

development and then I discuss the research involving other family members' roles in children's literacy learning in relation to the present study.

The past three and a half decades has brought forth extensive research regarding the advantages of families' involvement in young children's literacy development. However, as Gregory (2001) has pointed out, these studies have almost exclusively focused on parents working with children in particular school-sanctioned ways. Despite the research that has documented the ways in which literacy mediates social activity (as previously discussed in this chapter), a majority of research concerning parents working with children contributes to a paradigm that invalidates home literacies and supports a transmission model of literacy. For example, a number of studies have documented the improvement of lower socioeconomic class children's achievement when parents learned and implemented school-based practices such as story-book reading, tracing letters, using flashcards and other narrowly-defined academic skills (Hannon & Weinberger, 1994; Hewison & Tizard, 1980; Tizard, Blatchford, Burke, Farquar, & Lewis, 1988). This research served to support a deficit hypothesis by attributing literacy problems largely to the inadequacies of families (Auerbach, 1989). Moreover, studies of this nature spawned a multitude of instructional programs whose purpose was to teach parents to incorporate mainstream literacy practices in order to improve the academic performance of their children (Purcell-Gates, 2000).

Much emphasis has been given to the parent as the provider of children's initiation into the world of literacy. More recently, however, recognition has been given to families who, through collaborative group activity, are able to share responsibilities for this initiation (Gregory, 2000). Acting as mediators, these individuals within the family and the wider community pass on cultural and linguistic knowledge in informal ways in their everyday activities and relationships with children.

**The role of grandparents.** Research into grandparents serving as literacy mediators in the home has drawn considerable interest in the last few years. In this section, I focus on a review of the research on grandparents as literacy mediators within the family in terms of its central importance to the present study.

Padmore (1994) first used the term "guiding light" to describe adult relatives other than parents who took a definitive role in children's early literacy life. In analyses of her interviews with adults, Padmore found that her participants often mentioned a grandmother or grandfather who unwittingly acted as a literacy broker by involving their grandchildren in the literacies that

were embedded in their everyday lives. Other studies have since investigated the influence of grandparents in transmitting literacy practices and values by providing materials (Gregory, Mace, Rashid, & Williams, 1996) or modeling ways of sharing and taking meaning from texts (Gregory, Arju, Jessel, & Kenner, 2007; Kelly, 2004; Whitehead, 2002).

Case study research has also shown how grandparents transmit cultural and linguistic knowledge to their grandchildren. For example, Luke and Kale's (1997) study of a preschool child living with her grandmother is illustrative of how children develop knowledges about literacy. Elsey, the focal child in the study, participated in various literacy events at home from playing "homework" and copying words, to "yarning" in both her native language and in English as she participated with her grandmother in the oral performance of storytelling. Other case studies have focused on the benefits of the mutual exchange of learning between grandparents and grandchildren. Kenner, Ruby, Jessel, Gregory and Arju (2007) reported in their study of Sylheti/Bengali-speaking and monolingual English-speaking families that when young children and grandparents jointly participated in events such as storytelling and computer gaming, the exchange of knowledge enhanced not only the learning for the children but also for the grandparents. Reanalyzing the data in order to take a closer look at two of the families profiled in their larger study, Kenner, Ruby, Jessel, Gregory and Arju (2008) compared the communicative practices between grandmother and grandchild dyads while playing a numeracy game and conducting a search on the Internet. The researchers found that in each case the children and the grandparents worked together to navigate the activity, the grandparents providing knowledge with regard to literacy and numeracy, and the children providing skills regarding the computer. As grandparents are becoming increasingly involved in the care of young children, these studies serve to highlight literacy as a social and cultural practice and acknowledge that grandparents do take important roles in supporting young children's literacy development.

**The role of siblings.** Building on the notion that parents are not the sole mediators of children's literacy development, a significant body of theoretical work has been developed by Gregory and others (e.g., Drury, 2004; Gregory, 1998; 2001; 2004; Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004; Williams, 2004) on the role of siblings in mediating each others' language and literacy learning. These studies have stemmed from explorations on how older siblings influence younger children's cognitive development (Azmitia & Hesser, 1993). In extending this research to language and literacy learning, Gregory (1998) observed the complex syncretism of religious

and school-based literacy practices in the interaction between a child and her older sibling as the older sibling provided carefully adjusted scaffolding to the reading level of her younger sister. This research further spawned investigations of the role that older siblings play in families where parents only speak the minority language (Blackledge, 2000; Volk, 1997; 1999). For example, Volk and De Acosta (2001), in their study of the complex literacy lives of three Spanish kindergarteners, described how older siblings supported the children's developing literacy in the home. Gregory (2001) referred to this learning as a "synergy" in which both younger child and older sibling teach and learn equally from each other. More recently, Mui and Anderson (2008) found in their investigation of an Indo-Canadian joint family (three related nuclear families and the grandparents) living together in one household, that the older siblings and cousins (aged 3-14) helped to prepare the young siblings and cousins for the next grade or school entry by teaching, supporting and offering assistance in literacy activities. Their work promotes the recognition of the synergy between siblings playing and working together, and demonstrates that young cousins and siblings close in age develop reciprocity for enhancing each others' literacy development. Taken together, these studies acknowledge the diversity in not only the roles that different family members play in literacy but also awareness of the diversity of cultural and linguistic learning in families.

### **2.2.3 Types, availability and uses of texts in the home**

Pertinent to this study is the research which investigates the availability, types and uses of texts in the home. Edwards, Paratore and Roser (2009) contend that there are widely held assumptions regarding the literacy materials available in lower socioeconomic homes. These assumptions concern the availability of texts, the types of texts, and the uses of texts in these homes. In this section, I review the literature relating to these assumptions to further situate the present study.

**Availability of texts.** Given that families live in a technological world where inexpensive texts abound and others are able to be accessed by the Internet, it is an assumption that all urban children have easy and equal access to these literacy-related resources. Several studies have challenged this assumption. For example, in their study examining and comparing the print environments of four Philadelphia neighbourhoods, Neuman and Celano (2001) found that the number of bookstores in lower-income neighbourhoods stocking texts geared to children was substantially lower than in the middle-income neighbourhoods. Further, in public libraries located in lower-income areas, the researchers found smaller collections of books, fewer

children's books per child, and earlier closing hours than those in public libraries located in middle-income communities. Similar findings were reported in Worthy and Roser's (2004) study of text accessibility in a Spanish-speaking fifth grade classroom where the children were either immigrants or children of immigrant parents. The researchers found no bookstore within a ten mile range of the children's school and no public library in close proximity. Despite earlier study findings that confirmed large discrepancies in access to books between affluent and poor communities (Smith, Constantino, & Krashen, 1997), in a follow-up study Constantino (2005) discovered an "astounding" difference in the access to books among several communities in the greater Los Angeles area. Not only did children in high socioeconomic communities have access to more books in the home, Constantino found that the schools did not make up the difference for children in low socioeconomic communities.

Other studies have reported information about the quantity of appropriate level books for young children in the home. For example, Roberts (2008), in a study of home storybook reading, one-third of the participating 44 low-income families reported having no primary-level language books in the home and 50% reported having fewer than five books. This research is in marked contrast with some early case study research in middle-class homes (e.g., Baghban, 1984) that documented children as young as three years of age owning upwards of 70 children's books. While some might argue that patronage of the public library may offset the scarcity of books in the home, Hemmeter (2006) has shown that library use is affected by such factors as income, distance, and availability of material suited to patron's needs.

**Types of texts.** While the studies profiled in the previous section focused on the availability of literacy-related resources, the studies centred primarily on the availability of texts in the form of books. A body of research investigating the literacy materials found in lower socioeconomic homes has shown that these homes may contain few books; however, many of these studies have also discovered that these homes contain a wide-ranging and varied amount of other printed texts. For example, in the previously cited study by Heath (1983), it can be gleaned from Heath's thick descriptions that the lower-income Trackton homes included texts such as greeting cards, the Bible, drawings of older children, newspapers, colouring books, and Sunday school booklets. Similarly, Teale's (1986) study of culturally, linguistically and economically diverse homes revealed that while some homes did have fewer children's books or texts than others, texts such as magazines, newspapers, television guides and paperbacks were readily available and mediated by the families. Teale's study served to question the assumption



that the children of these homes entered formal schooling with “a dearth of literacy experience” (p.192).

Purcell-Gates (1996) also documented and described the ways that print was used in her study of 20 low-income homes in the Boston/Cambridge area of the United States. She found that in these homes, entertainment and daily living constituted the two domains where the highest amount of print mediation occurred. In the entertainment domain, families consulted the TV guide, read instructions for board games, and sought listings for movies in the newspaper. In their daily living routines, the families read texts for the purposes of cooking, cleaning or shopping.

In a later study, Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003) analyzed Purcell-Gates’ field notes in order to identify some of the specific text genres that were found in the 20 low-income homes and compared them with the text genres found in the studies by Duke (2000a; 2000b) conducted in 10 first-grade low-socioeconomic classrooms. The researchers reported that many of the genres found in the school settings were “school-only” (e.g., worksheets and story problems) and were not found in the homes, there were fewer genres found in both settings than in only one setting or the other, and many of the genres found in the home were related to entertainment and daily living (e.g., mail, recipes, comics).

While these studies have documented the text types found in low-income homes, there is a dearth of research about the availability of informational texts in these homes. The only research I found in this area was a study of storybook reading in middle-class homes in which Yopp and Yopp (2000) reported a scarcity of information books (only 5.5 books per child) in these middle-class homes. The researchers documented the books shared for parent-child read-alouds citing narrative text as the preferred choice and informational text seldom being used. As for the number of information books found in lower-income homes there is virtually no research.

**Use of texts.** Although research has shown that lower-income and middle-class homes contain different texts, Taylor (1993) cautions against the assumptions that lead to a deficit theory of literacy growth. Similarly, Moll and Greenberg (1990) have pointed out that many of these culturally and economically diverse families have “funds of knowledge” (p. 323) which provide the necessary knowledge, skills and information required to maintain the household. Their study of families living within a Mexican working-class community in Arizona detailed the extensive funds of knowledge and paths of social networking these families possessed that

were specific to working and living in their communities. The researchers advise educators not to dismiss the knowledges (including the use of texts) within families, but to use them to provide links between the home and school.

In my case study of the literacy support given to a preschooler by her working-class family, I also challenged the misconception that children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods have not been exposed to the “right kind” of literacy (2007). I observed the focal child Katie being purposefully initiated into literacy by others in the home by recording events on a calendar, by making birthday cards, and by choosing TV programs from the on-screen guide. My study suggested that there are indeed many paths that children take to literacy, however idiosyncratic they may be.

In sum, the review of the research on family literacy has identified the need for further research in three areas. First, there is a continued need to examine the literacy practices in culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families, but more importantly, there needs to be a specific focus on the information literacy practices of these families. Second, the review has identified a need to look closely at the members of the families, particularly grandparents and siblings, in their role as mediators in the information literacy practices of the home. Finally, the review of the research on text types, uses, and availability has called for examination of the availability and use of informational texts in these homes. The current study seeks to map these new directions in the research.

### **2.3 Young children’s literacy and technology research (including multimodality and representation of meaning)**

Some of the most extensive reviews of the research in literacy development and new technologies is the work of Kamil, Intrator and colleagues (Kamil & Intrator, 1998; Kamil et al., 2000; Kamil & Lane, 1998). Needing to map the research concerned specifically with the 0-8 years age range in the area of new technologies (i.e., computer-based applications), Lankshear and Knobel (2003b) turned to Kamil and Intrator’s landmark reviews as a starting point. Lankshear and Knobel found that the corpus of studies included in Kamil and Intrator’s reviews reflected mainly a cognitive and quantitative orientation and treated literacy in a monolithic way. Specifically, Kamil and Intrator’s reviews did not take into consideration studies with a qualitative orientation or those studies that addressed literacy acquisition as a sociocultural phenomenon in relation to new technologies. Perhaps most alarmingly, Lankshear and Knobel

found that the corpus of research pertaining to the early years was extremely small. With these survey parameters included in their own review of the literature, Lankshear and Knobel concluded that there are two aspects to the research of new technologies in early childhood: (a) types of computing media, and (b) social purposes associated with computing mediated text production, distribution and exchange. I focus on this second aspect of the research for the present study.

Within the research associated with the social purposes of new technologies, Lankshear and Knobel (2003b) draw two distinctions between how literacy may be viewed. In the first, literacy is understood as a capacity to encode and decode alphabetic print, or as they state, “competent handling of texts that are meaningful to ‘insiders’ of particular sociocultural practices and discourse communities” (p.73). Technological activities relating to this distinction extend to the use of electronic early reader books, drill and skill software and the like. In the second distinction, literacy is viewed as acquiring competence with mature and authentic forms of meaning-making within the contexts of social practices. Examples of technological activities relating to this distinction involve participating in appropriate online communities, game playing within popular culture themes, movie-making, or blogging via networks. As Marsh (2004) contends, when children are able to access text in a range of modes (e.g., on computers, on television, in pictures) it is no longer appropriate to focus solely on literacy as a paper-based activity. She argues, “...the concept of multiliteracies has served to push the boundaries of what it means to be engaged in encoding and decoding text” (p. 52) and as Kress (2000) has pointed out, definitions of literacy must include the visual, aural and gestural ways of meaning-making. It is within this distinction that I further situate the present study and review the very small body of literature related to early childhood literacy.

Most of the research reviewed in this chapter has focused on young children’s literacy as an activity involving the use of print. Indeed, since Clay’s (1966) introduction of the term “emergent literacy” in 1966, the most influential studies on young children’s emerging literacy have been solely focused on print literacy (cf. Hall, N., 1987; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). As Marsh (2004) contends, there has been less extensive research in relation to wider definitions of literacy which take into account technology and multimodal ways of meaning-making (Kress, 1997).

One of the earliest studies to explore young children’s meaning-making (albeit print-related) was that of Harste, Burke and Woodward (1984) who believed that young children’s

authoring used the same strategies as adults but results reflected their interests and experiences. The researchers showed that young children moved across communication systems in multimodal ways. Rowe (1994) took up this notion of authoring demonstrating that young children use a variety of graphic media and switch between modalities as their interests and intent shifted. In his seminal text in the area of multimodality, Kress (1997) argues that young children choose modes, means and materials to reflect the important things they want to represent. This meaning-making may also cut across adult cultural uses or sanctions.

A number of scholars have also taken up Kress's work (e.g., Kenner, 2000b; Lancaster, 2001; Pahl, 1999; 2002). For example, Pahl (2002), in her ethnographic study of three families, examined the meaning-making of young children through their creation of texts and their improvisation upon materials found in the homes. These texts were on the cusp between mess and tidiness, and were shaped by the family's long-standing and often hidden narratives. Lancaster (2001), in her analysis of video segments recorded while a young child made a Mother's day card with her father, demonstrated that young children are capable of abstract reasoning in their representation and interpretation of graphic signs. In a more recent study, Kendrick and McKay (2004) examined the drawings of five and six year olds depicting reading and writing across the various contexts in their lives. The children were able to express complex understandings about reading and writing in the images they produced for the researchers, but were apparently not in evidence in the daily language arts activities of the classroom. These findings called into question the assumption that language as a communicational and representational medium is fully adequate to express what children feel, think, sense or say (Kress, 2000).

While researchers have investigated the out-of-school technologically related practices of older children (cf. Hull & Schultz, 2001), there have been fewer studies providing information on how younger children engage with other technologies such as film, computer games and television. A few studies have looked into the role that television has played in young children's literacy experience in the home (e.g., Kenner, 2000a; Orellana, 1994) and have emphasized how children are active meaning-makers in relation to this technology. Marsh (2004), in her study surveying the home techno-literacy practices of young children in relation to a wide range of media (e.g., television, computer games, and mobile phones), found that television was the primary text in the families' homes and that the children were active participants in making meaning as audience and co-performers. Marsh also observed in this

study that gendered patterns of gaming were evident in the families who owned a computer or a console-game machine or both, and that siblings and caregivers colluded in the identity construction of the young players.

Although there is a lack of extensive research regarding media texts and new technologies, these studies provide emerging evidence that technologies are embedded within many young children's lives and contribute to children's meaning-making. Little is known about young children's techno-literacy, particularly in culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families. Thus, the impetus for research in this area is a priority.

## **2.4 Out-of-school literacy research**

To talk of literacy these days, Hull and Schultz (2002) argue, is to speak about "events, practices, activities, ideologies, discourses, and identities" (p. 32). In doing so, we begin to understand some of the multifaceted ways in which literacy connects with doing, learning, and becoming both inside and outside of school. As a result, research has been directed in looking at the resources, both personal and community based, that children may bring to school (Dyson, 2003a; Knobel, 1999; Moll et al., 1992) in order to improve the life chances of those children who have been most poorly served.

Out-of-school literacy has multiple meanings in the research field, but two broad distinctions delineate the main positions. The first view takes into consideration *any* literacy practice occurring outside of formal school contexts (including school-like practices) (Knobel & Lankshear, 2003). This view of out-of-school literacy includes practices such as intergenerational or caregiver storybook reading, name writing, print awareness, decoding food and brand labels, drawing and colouring, and completing school homework (cf. Cairney, 2002; Janes & Kermani, 2001). The second view excludes school literacies from consideration focusing on those out-of-school literacies which are generally not recognized as school literacy and are perhaps not permitted or encouraged in school.

Within this second broad distinction Knobel and Lankshear (2003) argue, that issues requiring clarification arise. The first issue relates to age. Some researchers in this field include only out-of-school literacies that are practiced from the formal schooling of preschool to high school. While one might argue that it seems more fitting to include those emergent literacy practices that occur prior to formal schooling, it seems rather displaced to label and include those literacies practiced beyond high school as "out-of-school." Some researchers have tackled

this problem by accounting for those literacies practiced by adults who engage in “life-long learning” involving on-going professional development, work-based training programs, higher education institutions and the like. Indeed, much of the earlier “out-of-school” research was developed with adults in this area.

A second issue within this distinction relates to the inclusion of particular sets of concepts that are situated between the boundaries between school and the wider world. These concepts include community literacies, family literacy, intergenerational literacy, and literacies of popular culture. Within this issue lies the implication that school literacy is the “right kind” and those literacies that fall outside of school literacy are less valid or “unofficial.” These literacies are often only acknowledged in service capacities, in the ways they enhance of school literacy performance.

While Knobel and Lankshear (2003) provide four broad positions to define and distinguish out-of-school literacy practices, for purposes of situating the current study, I acknowledge out-of-school literacies as “any literacy practice engaged in by preschool and school-age individuals in settings outside the school that is *not* a formally recognized literacy practice within school pedagogy and curriculum” (p. 52, italics in the original). I take up this definition to include those out-of-school literacies researched in most of the literature reviewed in this chapter, particularly in the areas of family literacy research and young children’s literacy and technology research. I also draw upon this definition to closely examine the boundaries drawn between school and out-of-school literacies and observe the possible permeability or crossings of these boundaries. With this in mind, I now focus my review of out-of-school literacy on a smaller corpus of studies documenting younger children (age 0-8 years).

#### **2.4.1 Research on young children’s out-of-school literacy**

Since Heath’s (1983) study was profiled earlier in this chapter, I will only highlight key aspects here. Heath’s ten year ethnography of three distinctly different communities in the Piedmont area of the United States documents the markedly different ways of speaking, reading, writing and listening in each of these communities. Children’s home literacy practices (such as reading and writing stories) in the Maintown middle-class community were overtly valued and taken up in school. Roadville children’s home literacy practices included reading, writing and speaking that focused on factual information and literal interpretations that gave them initial success in school, but would prove unsuccessful over time as teachers required more abstract and creative work. Trackton children’s home literacy practices included crafting elaborate oral

narratives and playing with words that involved rhyming and singing, practices not valued in the school setting and ultimately limiting the children's success with school literacy. Heath's study confronts the taken-for-granted assumptions that working-class families do not engage in rich literacy experiences at home or in their communities. Her seminal study gave opportunities for educators to rethink the literacy practices they valued most in their classroom and to make greater efforts to accommodate different ways of being literate.

Volk and De Acosta's (2001) ethnographic case studies of three Puerto Rican children (aged five and six years) identify what "counts" as literacy in these children's everyday lives including the school, home and the church. The three children, who had varying degrees of reading proficiency, attended the same bilingual English/Spanish preschool and were inducted into literacy learning by their families' involvement with out-of-school practices. Volk and De Acosta suggest that the literacy practices of the home blended with the literacy practices valued in schools and churches to create collaborative, culturally-rooted literacy practices. Similar to Heath, the researchers call for educators to recognize out-of-school literacies as significant resources on which to base classroom teaching.

The work of Pahl (2002) focused explicitly on three young boys' text production in their homes. In particular, Faith (aged 5 years) drew on media and popular culture, church practices, and his interest in birds for drawing and story-writing. Sol, aged six years, spent most of his out-of-school time inventing, drawing, and modeling new Pokémon characters and cards. Edward, aged eight years, produced a variety of texts reflecting his and his family's interest in trains, using a range of resources from the family including narratives, models and experiences. Pahl's documentation also showed how the boys produced "ephemeral" texts made of whatever was at hand and were so localized and so specific that they would not be recognized as texts by teachers. Pahl advises researchers to pay closer attention to children's meaning-making in the home as many texts are intimately connected with the spaces in which they are crafted.

Hicks' (2002) ethnographic case study of two white, working-class children living in a large city in the United States demonstrates the importance and influence of home-based relationships and experiences in young children's lives. Profiling the lives of Laurie and Jake, both five years at the beginning of the study, Hicks demonstrated how both children had considerable emergent literacy knowledge before entering formal schooling. Once in school however, the children struggled with literacy. Hicks' study showed how an understanding of children's literacy

practices and abilities at home and school is needed. She also urges teachers not to discount the importance of parent-child relationships, and family and class values.

Sze, Chapman and Shi (2009) examined four ESL Grade 2 children's productions of written genres in and out-of-school. They found that the children's home writing was far richer in the range and diversities of genres when compared to the school writing. Given that the school had encouraged the children to write in a broader range of genres, the researchers found this surprising. They attributed this finding to the amount of freedom the children had been given to write at home, whereas in school the teachers had actually constrained the children in their efforts to assist in the young writers' growth. Their study also serves to suggest that the school needs to recognize the strong influence that the home has on young children's literacy development.

Similarly, Dyson's (2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 2003a; 2003b) long term studies of children's early writing development has shown the resources children bring to their writing from their social world, including symbolic and appropriated tools from popular culture. Dyson's work has been central to the understanding of how children take up media and popular cultural texts from their home and community to create an "unofficial curriculum" (1997) in the classroom.

My own research has also shown that the boundaries between home and school can be more porous than we imagine (2009). Profiling a third grade student's home use of the Internet to gather information unavailable to him at school, I demonstrated how recognition must be given to out-of-school interests and technologies in order to engage in literacy practices as framed by schools. Further, as Hicks (2001) suggests, schools need to develop "hybrid pedagogical spaces" (p. 225) which offer places for learners to "try on" new literacy practices which may be different than their own.

In summary, these studies offer evidence of the considerable contributions out-of-school literacies make to the understanding of the rich and complex literacy practices in which young children engage in their everyday lives. Recognition of students' out-of-school lives helps educators to build meaningfully and successfully on students' literacies and realize the synergistic relationships that exist between the school and the home.

## **2.5 Summary**

In this chapter, I presented a review of the empirical research findings of four research trajectories related to the present study: IL research (including young children's use of



informational text), family literacy research (including research on culturally, linguistically and economically diverse home literacy environments; family roles; and the availability, uses, and types of texts), young children's literacy and technology research (including multimodality and the representation of meaning), and out-of-school literacy research. In doing so, the present study was situated in the existing literature providing a foundation on which to link the findings presented in subsequent chapters. This chapter also highlighted several gaps in the research on young children's literacy development. Specifically, there is a need to focus on: (a) the affordances of school and out-of-school contexts to provide opportunities for children to engage in IL practices, (b) the availability and use of informational texts in culturally, linguistically and economically diverse homes, (c) young children's techno-literacy, and (d) the out-of-school literacies of young children as significant classroom teaching resources. This study addresses these gaps.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I outline the methodological assumptions underlying the present study. In the first section, I discuss the qualitative multiple-case study research design and my rationale for its adoption. Within this section, I provide a definition of case study as I discuss and draw on the multiple conceptions of the term found in the literature. Next, I present an overview of how the research participants were selected for the study and offer a brief description of each. This is followed by a description of the context of the study including a description of the school context in which the participants were observed and data were collected. I then discuss data collection procedures. Following, I describe my data analysis procedures in detail and then move to discuss the researcher-participant relationship and the ways in which the relationship impacted the study. Finally, I address the issues of trustworthiness in terms of the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study. I end the chapter with a short summary.

### **3.1 The research design**

As argued in Chapter One, there has been very little research in evidence of young children's IL development, and virtually no research is in evidence, with the exception of my own work (2009), investigating how school and out-of-school contexts afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices. It is the intention of this present study to fill this gap by investigating: (a) how school contexts afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices, and (b) how out-of-school contexts afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices. From the production and analyses of thick descriptions of the IL practices in both contexts, it examines: (c) the factors that constrain the opportunities in these contexts, and (d) how children appropriate and recontextualize school and out-of-school IL practices for their own purposes.

The following questions guided the study:

1. How do school contexts afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices? What factors constrain these school opportunities?

2. How do out-of-school contexts afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices? What factors constrain these out-of-school opportunities?
3. How do children appropriate and recontextualize school and out-of-school IL practices for their own purposes?

The exploratory nature of these research questions calls for a research methodology suited to investigate how a certain phenomenon operates or why it operates in a particular way.

Addressing the present study from an interpretivist stance, I have adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design.

### **3.1.1 Rationale for the research design**

In this section, I discuss my rationale for adopting a qualitative multiple-case study design. To do this, I first look at the definitions of case study as they are presented in the literature and then provide my own working definition for this study. As I narrow the focus to look specifically at multiple-case study, I also justify my design decisions by relating the literature to the present study.

**Definitions of case study.** At present, case study research is not only enjoying a renewed popularity in education but also in other areas of social inquiry. With this renewed enthusiasm, the term “case study” has not been used in a standardized way, and as Gomm and Hammersley (2000) point out, the notion of case study has not been restricted to the research context. Case study, often linked with the term *case history*, has been used widely in clinical fields such as psychology and medicine. Other fields, including engineering and business, have also taken up case study, which in turn has yielded differing perspectives.

The definitional issue deserves careful consideration because different conceptions of the term “case” are central to the enduring gulf between quantitative and qualitative social science. The view that quantitative researchers look at many cases, while qualitative researchers look at only one or a small number of cases, can only be maintained by allowing considerable slippage in what is meant by “case” (Ragin, 1992). What is needed, Ragin contends, is greater clarity in what is meant by case and differentiation of the various meanings of case. In doing so, we can simplify the linking of quantitative and qualitative research and bring richness and unity to the conduct of social science.

There seems to be little agreement about what a case study is and indeed, various definitions abound (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (1998) defines a case study as “an

exploration of a ‘bounded system’ of a case (or multiple-cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving collective sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). A case may be simple or complex and, according to Creswell, can be a program, an event, an activity, or individuals, but needs boundedness (i.e., the boundaries or the specificity) to be called a case. Yin (2003) defines case study as a comprehensive research strategy that “comprises an all-encompassing method – covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (p.14). Stake (1995) argues that “[c]ase study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Merriam (1998) defines case study as a research design that is non-experimental. She notes that the qualitative case study can be further defined by its features, namely *particularistic* (i.e., a focus on a situation, event, or phenomenon), *descriptive* (i.e., a “thick” description of the phenomenon under study is produced) or *heuristic* (i.e., the reader’s understanding of phenomenon is enhanced; new meanings are discovered, and a rethinking of the phenomenon is initiated).

Taken together, these definitions have assisted in my own definition of case study. As such, I define case study as *a heuristic device to answer the question of what is the particularity and complexity of a bounded system that is intrinsically interesting to the researcher.*

**Multiple-case study.** A multiple-case study is a study involving a number of cases (Stake, 2000). These cases may be similar or dissimilar and are chosen because the belief is that understanding them will lead to better understanding, and very possibly, to better theorizing about an even larger collections of cases. Yin (2003) considers single- and multiple-case designs to be variants within the same methodological framework. He makes no broad distinction between the single-case study and multiple-case studies. He argues that the choice is considered one of research design with both being included under the case study method. Barone (2004), however, contends that through the use of multiple-cases a stronger understanding and a more compelling argument can be made, resulting in increased credibility. Although Wolcott (1994) has criticized the multiple-case study stating that meticulous description and detail is lost with the redundancy of cases, Miles and Huberman (1994) embrace the multiple-case study in its ability to contribute to the literal replication, or in this sense, the prediction of similar results (Yin, 2003). Further, multiple-case study contributes to theoretical replication, where the multiple-cases are used to produce contrasting results for predictable

reasons (Barone, 2004; Yin, 2003). It is because of the compelling nature of the multiple-case study that I have chosen it as the present study's design.

**Important components of a case study design.** As is true with other research methods, the following components of a case study research design are important: a study's question; its propositions; its unit(s) of analysis; the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings. With regard to questions, appropriate case study questions are formulated that begin with *how* (Yin, 2003) and *what* (Creswell, 1998). The questions of the present study are reflective of the purpose of the study. These questions invite, as Yin would argue, exploration, description, and explanation.

The propositions of a case study directs attention to something that should be focused on during the course of the study (Yin, 2003). As previously mentioned in Chapter One, the propositions and hypotheses for the present study, rest on the findings from the pilot study. Specifically, I want to probe more deeply the affordances of the school and out-of-school contexts that provide opportunities for children to engage in IL practices, and I hypothesize that specific external and internal factors might constrain these opportunities. These hypotheses relate directly to my research questions for the present study.

Once the questions and purpose for the case study are established, the researcher needs to select the unit or units of analysis (Barone, 2004; Baumann & Duffy-Hester, 2000). Yin (2003) states that "your tentative definition of the unit of analysis (and therefore the case) is related to the way you have defined your initial research questions" (p. 23). Yin also asserts that when the unit of analysis is defined, there is still opportunity to redefine it. As with other facets of the research design, Yin asserts, the unit of analysis can be revisited as a result of discoveries arising during data collection. The unit of analysis in the present study is the children's IL practices in school and out-of-school. How children recontextualize school and out-of-school IL practices for their own purposes has the potential to serve as a contribution of the case study to theory.

Yin (2003) states that the linking of data to the propositions and the criteria for interpreting the findings is the least well developed aspect of case studies. He argues for a general analytic strategy for defining priorities in what to analyze and the reasons behind it. He describes three case study analytic strategies: 1) relying on theoretical propositions, 2) rival explanations and, 3) case descriptions. In the present study, I use the general analytic strategy of following the theoretical propositions leading to the design of this multiple-case study which,

in turn, reflect my research questions. Using this strategy enables me to employ other analytical data manipulation tools (e.g., *Atlas.ti*, matrices, displays). I also used the technique of cross-case analysis. These will be discussed further in the analysis section of the chapter.

**Quality of the case study.** Other components relating to the quality of the case study are reported in the literature and have been taken into consideration for the present study. For example, in determining the selection of participants, Patton (1990) discusses the need for purposeful sampling in case study research and recommends the selection of information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions proposed. Patton also identifies the strategy of “stratified purposeful sampling” (p. 174) in which above average, average and below average cases will be selected to capture major variations. In the present study attention to the selection of information-rich cases is central. Selection procedures for the focal school, the focal teacher, and the focal children will be explained later in this chapter.

Another determinant to the quality of case study is the use of multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). Multiple sources of evidence are advantageous in the development of “converging lines of inquiry” (p.98) or triangulation. This increases the “trustworthiness” of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Yin also argues for the creation of a chain of evidence. In this way the reader can follow the path of data collection and analysis with the research. The data sources for the present study include semi-structured interviews with the teacher and the children and their family members, video tapes, field notes, observations, and collection of artefacts (e.g., writing samples, children’s projects) and documents from the school and home. The data and how they are triangulated are discussed more thoroughly in subsequent chapter sections.

The purpose of the data collection in case study is to gain analytic insight into the dimensions and dynamics of the phenomenon being studied. This process is inductive and is not only grounded in the collected data, but also in the researcher’s reflexivity (i.e., an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process). It is through analytic work that the inner workings of the case are constructed (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). To assist in analyzing case study evidence, Miles and Huberman (1994) offer three concurrent flows of activity as analytic strategies: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. These flows of activity are vital to the analysis of the data collected in the present study and are expanded more fully in the data analysis section of this chapter.

Credibility for a case study can be supported by length of time in the field (Merriam, 1988). Through extended time in the field, the researcher is able to see patterns, rather than single events, which may or may not be representative of the phenomenon under study. In the present study, time in the field amounted to a total of seven months and traced the lives and cultural practices related to information literacy of the focal cases. While I do not claim that the present study is an ethnography, I do employ many of the data collection and data analyses procedures found typically in ethnographic research.

In summary, the present study adopts the research tradition of multiple-case study. Each focal child constitutes a case that is bounded by the school and the out-of-school contexts. Each case is intrinsically interesting in its particularity and complexity and the study of these cases will be instrumental to understanding of the development of children's IL practices. In adopting such a design, it is hoped a database for future comparison and theory building may be generated. It is not the intent of this study to generalize to other populations but rather to focus on the particularity and complexity of each case, as stated in my definition of case study at the beginning of the chapter. It is hoped that this study will lead to a better understanding about an even larger collection of cases by making analytic generalizations (i.e., expanding and generalizing theory)(Yin, 2003) and ultimately contributing to the creation of more effective literacy pedagogies and curricula.

## **3.2 The research context and participants**

### **3.2.1 Selection of the school**

In order to conduct this multiple-case study investigating young children's school and out-of-school IL practices, I sought a school research site that matched certain criteria. My first criterion was a primary classroom whose teacher was focusing on informational text. As the research timeline would span several months, it was also important that the teacher was comfortable with me in his/her classroom as I engaged in various forms of data collection. Secondly, from this classroom, I sought a group of focal children (and their families) to participate in the study. The nature of the study required that I spend time (again, spanning several months) in their homes and in attendance at their other out-of-school activities. It was important that the families were comfortable with a researcher who would be following the focal child as they went about their daily routines.

For several years prior to the study, I had been teaching at a school in a job-share position as a primary teacher. At a professional development meeting in October of the school year prior to the study's start date, I was invited by the principal to share the findings of my pilot study. After the meeting, I was approached by two staff members who took an interest in IL and made offers to be included in any further studies I was to undertake. It became evident that this school could be a viable site in which to conduct the study. Northwood Elementary<sup>8</sup> was similar to the school in the pilot study, enrolling a range of economically, culturally and linguistically diverse students. Although Northwood Elementary and the pilot study school were located in different school districts and in different areas of the province, they shared characteristics common to many metropolitan areas in Canada. Thus, the similarities of the research settings could strengthen the analytic generalizations and contribute to a data base from which to compare other cases in similar contexts. A complete and detailed description of the school context is discussed further in this chapter.

### **3.2.2 Selection of the classroom**

After receiving approval from the University of British Columbia Behavioural Ethics Committee to conduct the study (see Appendix A), I made contact with the two teachers from Northwood Elementary to determine their willingness to be included in the study at the start of the new school year. Both teachers were still interested in participating, and had classroom assignments (grade one and grade two) that fit the criteria of the study. At a meeting, it was mutually agreed that priority would be given to the teacher with the grade one teaching assignment. Thus, letters inviting children and their families to participate in the study were sent home in mid-September with all the students from the grade one teacher's classroom.

The response time given to the families to indicate their desire to participate in the study was one week. Although this timeline was short, I felt that a longer time to respond would result in the forms being misplaced. However, as the final date to return the participation form passed and there were no responses from any of the families, it was decided in consultation with the teacher and my advisor that a second invitation letter to participate should be sent home. This second invitation letter also did not generate any response.

At this time it was determined that although the teacher was a willing participant, the study could not be conducted in this classroom. In consultation with the teacher and my advisor

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<sup>8</sup> All names used in this study are pseudonyms.



it was suggested that I return to the grade two teacher who had also indicated interest in being included in the study. When approached, the teacher, Ms. Davidson, heartily agreed to participate and became the focal teacher for the study. She also readily agreed to offer her classroom as the research site. I also obtained a positive response from families in this second setting. Permission to conduct the study at the school was also granted from the principal and the school district.

### **3.2.3 The research participants**

**The focal teacher.** Ms. Davidson, the focal teacher in this study, is a single Caucasian woman in her early fifties. At the time of the study, she was one of two teachers assigned to teaching grade two at Northwood Elementary. This was her 16<sup>th</sup> year as a primary teacher, having taught all the primary grades from kindergarten through grade three during her career. Arriving at Northwood Elementary in 1993, she taught one year on a temporary contract. Due to her junior tenure at the school at a time of decreasing student enrolment, Ms. Davidson was a “forced” transfer to another elementary school in the district, where she completed a five year assignment. She was able to transfer back to Northwood Elementary in 1999 and has remained there since that time.

In 1976, Ms. Davidson completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in Home Economics from a large public provincial university on the west coast of Canada, a 45 minute drive from her home. In January of 1991, Ms. Davidson returned to a local west coast university recognized for its professional development program in education, where she graduated the following December with a teaching certificate in Early Childhood Education. Since her employment with the school district, Ms. Davidson informed me that she completed additional university courses in order to increase her qualifications and ascend the district pay scale. Expanded descriptions of Ms. Davidson’s teaching philosophy and her personal literacy history and current literacy practices will be discussed in Chapter Four.

**The focal students and their families.** Once the school and classroom research sites had been determined, I sought to recruit focal children and their families for the study. To this end, I visited Ms. Davidson’s classroom to explain the study to the children and invite them to participate in the study. Letters inviting the children and their families to participate in the study were sent home with all the students in Ms. Davidson’s classroom. These letters are shown in Appendix B. Four families responded immediately to the letters and I met with each family to explain the study. At the meetings, all the children and families displayed strong interest in

participating. As no other families responded to the invitation to participate, I decided that I would proceed with these four families as the focal participants in the study and so at that time I distributed the consent forms. These forms are shown in Appendix C. My justification for continuing with these families was based on several factors. First, based on my initial experience, I was concerned that I would not have greater success in recruiting more families from another classroom. Second, the diversity and the complexity of the focal children and the families willing to participate were well-suited to the nature of this multiple-case study. Each family, while being interestingly complex and unique, was representational of families found in other metropolitan areas. Third, and perhaps most importantly, I believe that the families of the focal children responded to the invitation to participate in the study because they knew me and trusted me as a teacher. Opening up a family home to a researcher is not an easy undertaking, and I believe that the families trusted me and my research intentions. While I briefly describe the focal children below, I provide complete descriptions of the backgrounds of the four focal children and their families and the out-of-school research context in Chapter Five.

At the initiation of the study, the four focal children (Tara Crawford, Jack Hunt, Ross Mason-Miller, and Ivan Wang) and their families lived within the catchment area of Northwood Elementary School. Shortly after Jack's family agreed to participate in the study, they moved outside of the school's catchment area, and then near the end of the study, the family moved a second time to settle an even further distance from the school. Despite these moves, Jack continued to attend Northwood Elementary until he finished the school year. All four focal children had attended Northwood Elementary since kindergarten with the exception of Jack, who arrived at the school after the spring break holiday in grade one. As of the start of the study in September, all the focal children were seven years old and were classmates and members of Ms. Davidson's grade two classroom.

Ivan was considered by Ms. Davidson to be a very quiet but curious student. English was Ivan's second language with Mandarin being his first language. Ivan was a focused learner and was able to pick up concepts quickly. He was "fully meeting expectations"<sup>9</sup> in all areas of the curriculum. In Language Arts, Ivan was described by Ms. Davidson as an average to above average reader and writer, and he could confidently handle grade two leveled texts. Ms.

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<sup>9</sup> "Fully meeting expectations" indicates that the work produced by the student meets grade-level expectations and there is evidence that relevant prescribed learning outcomes have been accomplished.

Davidson predicted that Ivan would soon surpass the widely held expectations for grade two students as his confidence with English grew.

Jack was described by Ms. Davidson as a troubled student. He had difficulty in maintaining friendships and was often involved in altercations on the playground. In the classroom, Jack was often disorganized and he failed to complete assignments. At the time of the study, Jack was “minimally meeting expectations”<sup>10</sup> in reading and writing at the grade two level. When interested, Jack was an engaged learner but he quickly became frustrated as the difficulty of the work increased. Jack saw the school counselor on an “at need” basis.

In Ms. Davidson’s opinion, Ross was an enthusiastic and curious student. He had a tremendous work ethic and completed class assignments on time and to the best of his ability. He was described by Ms. Davidson as “fully meeting expectations” in reading and writing. Although Ross was reading fluently at an upper grade three level, his comprehension of texts was at a lower level. Ross possessed many leadership qualities.

Tara was also regarded as hard-working student. She was confident in her learning abilities and was often called upon by Ms. Davidson to assist others. Tara had many friends due to her gentle but fun personality. Tara was one of the top students in the class in her reading and writing abilities. During the study Tara was reading and comprehending at an upper grade three level. Tara was also inquisitive and had a great deal of background knowledge which she shared freely during class discussions.

#### **3.2.4 The context of the study**

**The community of Walton – Home to Northwood Elementary.** Walton is a north-end community of the larger city of Greendale, British Columbia. Historically, the area of Greendale was working farmland, attracting many families making a living in agriculture. Over the years, the urban sprawl from a large neighbouring city forced many families to seek more affordable housing beyond the city's limits. Greendale's population grew exponentially and farmland was sold off to accommodate the burgeoning need for housing. Statistically, Greendale has the fastest growing population of any city within the lower portion of the province, and is expected to overtake the largest city in the province in terms of population size by the year 2018

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<sup>10</sup> “Minimally meeting expectations” indicates that the work produced by the student may be inconsistent but meets grade-level expectations at a minimal level. At this level, there is evidence of progress toward relevant prescribed learning outcomes but the student may need support in some areas.

(Human Resources Development Canada, 2001). Walton, in particular, experienced this heavy growth. Located beside a major river, Walton was traditionally an industrial area that serviced mainly Greendale. As the population and industry grew, rail lines were established near the river and trains transported goods brought from boats to other areas of the province. One of the first bridges to cross the river was built to connect Walton with larger cities. Near the river, Walton housed scrap yards, lumber mills, and metal industries. Today these industries continue to thrive, along with auto-wrecking establishments, strip bars, car auctioneers, and truck repair shops. It also houses the light rapid transportation endpoint for one of the largest cities in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006).

From the latest detailed census information, Walton is home to just under 50,000 people (B.C. Stats, 2004)<sup>11</sup>. Over 40% of this population is in the 20-44 year-old range. Visible minorities account for 34% of the population; over 45% are of South Asian descent, twice as high as the distribution average in the province. The immigrant population is 32%, with the highest percentages coming from India, the Philippines, and Fiji. Sixty-four percent of the population has English as the mother tongue and home language; following English, the most common home and spoken languages are Punjabi and Hindi.

In terms of the education levels of its residents, approximately 25% of Walton's residents 20 years and older have college (graduated or not) as the highest level of schooling; just under 25 percent of the residents 20 years and older have Grade 9-13 without graduation. The top two occupations for Walton are clerical and sales/service. Average household income is \$48,983, below the provincial average of \$57,593.

Walton presents a number of special problems for the community. With easy access to rapid transit, a needle exchange and drop-in centre, welfare offices, methadone clinics, community organizations, and drug recovery houses, the area is very attractive to many who utilize these services and remain in the area. Often the brunt of many disparaging remarks, Walton generates the highest number of police files in comparison to all other communities within the city of Greendale.

The Early Child Development (ECD) Mapping Project (Human Early Learning Partnership, 2007) for the Walton area provides information regarding children's early development, socio-economic characteristics of the community, and the location of community

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<sup>11</sup> Although the latest census was completed in 2006, detailed information regarding the specific community of Walton was unavailable at the time of writing this dissertation.

assets including child care centers, literacy programs and the like. The mapping project helps communities to plan for and create effective community-based responses to help support the needs of families and children within that community. A key component of the ECD mapping project is the Early Development Instrument (EDI) that assesses the state of children's development in kindergarten. This research tool assesses a child's development in the domains of: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, communication skills and general knowledge. While the report (2007) states that the children in the city of Greendale are generally developing well, 30.3 % of children were vulnerable in at least one domain of their development, an increase of 3.49% since the first cycle of assessment in 2003.

**The Focal School - Northwood Elementary.** The community of Walton spans an 11 square-mile radius. Situated in the north-west corner of Walton is Northwood Elementary school, the focal school for this study. Located in a residential area and next to a wooded ravine, Northwood Elementary serves a population of 325 children from kindergarten to grade seven. Built in 1955, the school has maintained its original structure. Several years ago, the school's neighbourhood was considered stable and family-oriented, with a mixture of income levels; today there are pockets of urban poverty identified within the school's catchment area. Pawn shops are clustered at the northern end of the neighbouring major highway, and street people and youth 'hang out' in the vicinity of the rapid transit stations, which some refer to as "the drug corridor" (Human Resources Development Canada, 2001, p. 9). In recent years it has not been uncommon to find drug paraphernalia or homeless people on the school grounds or in the ravine and adjacent park. Chain-link fences and locked gates have been erected around the main school to combat this problem and to decrease the number of school-break-ins and property damage. During the summer months, the windows of the school are boarded up and all computers and electronic equipment are removed. A sign posted on the main entrance of the school informs prospective thieves that there are no valuables left on site.

Northwood Elementary has been designated an "inner-city" school by the school district. This designation, derived from census data, is based on a combination of income, income assistance, and the transience rates of the residents. In 2008, Northwood Elementary moved up to the middle level of a five-level ranking for inner-city designation— only seven elementary schools out of the 99 elementary schools in the Greendale school district are ranked higher (School administrator, personal e-mail communication, September 30, 2008). This designation

has resulted in the provision of additional district funding to Northwood in the amount of \$18,500 per year. This money from the school district was received through a Ministry of Education initiative entitled Community Learning Includes Nutrition and Knowledge (CommunityLINK) (Ministry of Education, 2006b) and provides annual funding to school districts. A CommunityLINK school is one that has a significant percentage of vulnerable children. In determining vulnerability, the school district considers low income measures; involvement with provincial social service ministries and related agencies; community socio-economic demographics, such as aboriginal ancestry; and information attained from the ECD mapping project. The purpose of CommunityLINK funding is to support programs and services to improve the educational performance (including the academic achievement and social functioning) of vulnerable children. The funds allotted to Northwood Elementary are used to increase staff hours for the school's child and youth care worker, counselor, and teaching assistants for children with special needs.

Information from Northwood Elementary's school plan<sup>12</sup> reports that 43% of children speak a language other than English at home. Twenty-six children of the school's population are identified as high incidence special needs (a cluster of very different special needs occurring with relative frequency, such as learning disabilities, behaviour disabilities, or giftedness), and seven children are identified as low incidence special needs (a cluster of very different disabilities occurring relatively infrequently, such as deafness, autism spectrum disorder, or physical disabilities). Results from the EDC mapping project indicated that across all domains, the area surrounding Northwood Elementary school has the highest proportion of vulnerable children in all of Greendale (Human Early Learning Partnership, 2007). In order to support schools with vulnerable children, the school district has developed a number of strategies which particularly affect Northwood Elementary. Northwood Elementary is able to participate in a number of school district programs including: the School Meal Program (providing a nutritious cold lunch for as many children as possible); the BC Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program (part of ActNowBC, an initiative of the Province of BC to improve the health of BC children and families); the Welcome to Kindergarten Program (a program to make the transition to school

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<sup>12</sup> *Northwood Elementary: Priorities for student learning 2007-2008*. This document, prepared by the school planning council, must be submitted annually in order to fulfill Ministry of Education requirements for school district accountability and achievement contracts. The process for developing school plans includes consideration of school, district, and Ministry data, and district goals for improving student achievement. Plans are reviewed by senior administration and are submitted to the Board for approval after any suggested revisions have been made.

easier by introducing preschool children to the kinds of activities that children do in a kindergarten class); and Ready, Set, Learn (an initiative to help preschoolers get ready for school). The school also has a part-time aboriginal support worker, a Child and Youth Care Worker, a part-time speech and language pathologist and a part-time counselor.

**The school ethos.** Northwood Elementary has a stable and experienced teaching staff. Several teachers have been at the school for over 20 years. New staff members have joined the school in recent years, but declining enrolment has dampened teacher influx. Once teachers come to Northwood, they usually stay unless they are forced to transfer due to seniority issues, as was Ms. Davidson's case. Staff members participate in a number of school and out-of-school social activities which they organize themselves. There is a feeling of collegiality among the staff, perhaps due to the shared history between the more experienced teachers who willingly mentor and assist the newer teachers. There is the feeling of a shared sense of purpose among the teachers who appear to love their jobs and genuinely care about the children they teach. Many of the experienced teachers have witnessed the declining changes to the neighbourhood over their tenure at the school and have seen the effects these changes have had on the children who attend Northwood. Nevertheless, these teachers continue to stay at Northwood. As one teacher commented, "We just want to do what's best for kids. We're needed here" (B.B., personal communication, December 4, 2007).

Up until two years ago, Northwood Elementary was headed by an administrator who, during his 14-year residency at the school, established a very welcoming and positive school community. After his retirement in 2005, the school went through a period of adjustment with a newly appointed administrator.

**The provincial literacy context.** In April 2006, the Premier's Advisory Panel on Literacy released the report (2006), *Literacy and Lifelong Learning in B.C.: A Legacy of Leadership* recommending that:

...action must be accelerated and that literacy must have a much higher priority within the Provincial government, the Ministries of Education and Advanced Education and other ministries. Immediate and strong Provincial leadership, action and momentum are essential if we are to meet the overall goal of British Columbia becoming the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent.

(Premier's Advisory Panel on Literacy, 2006, p. 3, underlining in the original).

These recommendations were not taken lightly. At the time of this study, the Premier's goal to have British Columbia become the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent continued to require outcome-based accountability, linked to the Strategic Action Framework for Literacy, in all public and publicly funded literacy and learning agencies and service systems. To this end, school districts, including the Greendale school district, were required to submit a yearly Achievement Contract<sup>13</sup> with respect to standards for student performance and plans for improving achievement in the district. The contract had to include specific targets for literacy.

As a result, improving achievement in literacy was vaulted to top position in Greendale's educational goals for the district. Not only did these goals match the accountability requirements for the Ministry of Education, they also addressed the problem of Greendale's consistently demonstrated lower than provincial averages in the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)<sup>14</sup> reading results for grades 4 and 7. The FSA results suggested to the district that there was a continuing need to focus attention on the development of literacy skills for all children. At the time of the study, the school district chose to focus on improving writing in grades 1-3, particularly in the inner-city schools, because of their higher transiency rates and increased rates in English as Second Language (ESL) children.

During the study, Northwood Elementary's top priority for student learning in its school plan was to improve reading and writing at all grade levels. Northwood Elementary's own FSA results for grades 4 and 7 indicate an upward trend in reading achievement and a downward trend in writing achievement, as also reflected in Greendale's district results. However, the downward trend in writing achievement for grades 4 and 7 at Northwood Elementary were not only well below district levels, they are also well below the provincial average<sup>15</sup>.

As the FSA are only used with intermediate children (grades 4 and 7) the primary staff (those staff members teaching kindergarten through grade three) at Northwood Elementary used

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<sup>13</sup> The Achievement Contract is a public statement of commitment by a Board of Education to improve success for each student in the district. Each Contract is developed collaboratively, on an evidence-based assessment of the needs and priorities of the students in the district. The Contract identifies areas of focus for the improvement of student success, describes strategic actions and outlines processes to monitor progress and make adjustments intended to improve results (BC Ministry of Education, 2008, p.2).

<sup>14</sup> FSA is a set of tests in reading, writing and numeracy and are administered to students in Grades 4, 7, and 10. FSA measures skills in the provincial curriculum that students have gained in several school years, not just in a single year.

<sup>15</sup> Northwood Elementary: Priorities for student learning 2007-2008.



the Developmental Reading Assessment<sup>16</sup> (DRA) (Beaver, 2001) to collect data from their children on reading and the BC Performance Standards<sup>17</sup> (Ministry of Education, 2002) to collect data from their children on writing. The DRA is administered twice during the school year; first in the fall and again in the spring. Data taken from the school plan reveal that DRA assessment of reading ability from the fall of 2006 to the spring of 2007 shows growth of an average of 7% for grades two and three in terms of children reading at grade level. In grade one, however, 22% of children failed to read at grade level by the end of year. These grade one children would eventually move on to be Ms. Davidson's class and would participate in this current study<sup>18</sup>.

### **3.3 Data collection**

A multiple-case study aims to illuminate a phenomenon and uncover the interaction of significant factors which are characteristic of this phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, case studies offer a holistic account of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Thick, rich descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and analyses are desired and are the hallmark of quality case studies. Thus, case study researchers rely on multiple sources of evidence. In this study, data were drawn from many sources and were triangulated throughout the analysis. As previously mentioned, time in the field amounted to seven months, with data being collected from October 2007 until March 2008. The data sources included interviews, field notes from observations in the school and out-of-school contexts, and artefacts.

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<sup>16</sup> The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is a series of leveled books and recording sheets designed to allow teachers to determine students' reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension levels. At Northwood Elementary, DRA data are collected in the fall and the spring of each school year to determine student progress. Students are determined to be below grade level, at, or above grade level, based on their performance on the assessment relative to their grade level status.

<sup>17</sup> The BC Performance Standards describe levels of achievement in key areas of learning. Students are asked to apply the skills and concepts they have learned to complete complex, realistic tasks. This type of assessment supports a criterion-referenced approach to evaluation and enables teachers, students, and parents to compare student performance to provincial standards.

<sup>18</sup> Although I characterize the neighbourhood and school community as fairly bleak, Tara, Ross, and Ivan were cases representative of children who would not be considered as vulnerable as compared to their peers. According to EDC results, Jack would be considered a vulnerable child. More complete information on the focal children is provided in Chapter 6.

### 3.3.1 Interviews

The case study interview is one of the most important and essential sources for information and is usually fluid rather than rigid (Yin, 2003). Questions are open-ended, but always follow the researcher's particular line of inquiry.

**Focal teacher interviews.** Ms. Davidson was interviewed at the beginning of the study and again at the conclusion of the study. The first semi-structured interview was conducted during after school hours in the school staffroom. Lasting approximately one and one-half hours, this interview focused mainly on Ms. Davidson's educational background, her personal literacy history and current literacy practices, her teaching philosophy, and her classroom literacy program. Central to the theoretical framework of the study, the purpose of this interview was to gain understanding of how Ms. Davidson's literacy practices are culturally, historically and ideologically situated. The second semi-structured interview was conducted at the end of the study and the questions were more focused in nature and specific to certain issues that arose during the study. The questions for these interviews are shown in Appendix D. In addition to these more formal interviews, I often engaged in informal discussions with Ms. Davidson at the end of the teaching day, often asking for clarification for something I had observed. I made notes in my field notebook either during our discussions or after. As I processed the data, on occasion I emailed or called Ms. Davidson informally by telephone, again for clarification purposes. These electronic and telephone chats were recorded in my field notebook.

**Focal children interviews.** I conducted two formal interviews with the focal children, each lasting approximately half an hour. The first interview was conducted in the children's home, with the questions focused on the children's out-of-school literacy practices. This interview also included a tour of the home (including the living, bedroom, kitchen and play areas) which generated additional questions specific to what the children showed me. For example, as Tara showed me her video-gaming equipment, I asked her specific questions regarding how often she played, what games she played and with whom she enjoyed playing.

The second interview with the focal children occurred at the school. In this interview, I asked questions pertaining to the focal child's school literacy practices. I also had the children bring two of their favourite books from the class or school library in order to talk about their preferences and to read a short passage to me. The questions for the interviews are shown in Appendix D. I also conducted very brief (five minutes) interviews in the classroom or hallway in instances where the children were working on or had completed particular projects. My

intent was to gain understanding of their decision-making with regard to representation and meaning.

**The focal family members.** Interviews with the focal family members differed according to the families' particular make-up and the individual family members' consent. Table 3.1 represents those family members who gave consent to be included in the study and those who were interviewed.

**Table 3.1: Family members consent for the study and participation in interviews**

Focal Child	Consent for the study	Interviewed
Jack	Mother, Jack, younger brother, foster sister	Mother, Jack, foster sister
Ross	Mother, Father, Ross	Mother, Father, Ross
Tara	Mother, Tara, older sister older brother, younger brother	Mother, Tara, older sister
Ivan	Father, Mother, Grandmother, Ivan	Father, Mother, Ivan

I conducted two interviews with the parent(s) of the focal children. These interviews took place at the beginning and at the conclusion of the study and lasted approximately one to one and one-half hours. The focus of the first semi-structured interview was to gain information on the parents' educational background, their experiences in school, and their personal literacy histories and current literacy practices. Similar to the purpose of the focal teacher's initial interview, I wanted to gain an understanding of how the parents' literacy practices are culturally, historically and ideologically situated. I also asked questions of the parents regarding their perceptions of the children's literacy development and their child's literacy relationships within the family. The second interview, also semi-structured, focused on questions that had arisen during the study. For example, based on the importance placed on the children's planner routines in school, I asked the parents to describe the children's planner routines at home. These questions assisted with gaining vital information for the analyses.

I also informally interviewed the older siblings of two of the families. These interviews, approximately 20 to 30 minutes in length were conducted during the course of an observational

visit to the home. The questions focused on specific aspects of the older sibling's literacy practices and the sibling's literacy relationship with the focal child.

All interviews were digitally recorded on a small voice recorder. The digital files were uploaded to my computer and then transcribed. All the adult and sibling interviews were fully transcribed using a professional transcription service. I transcribed the children's interviews myself. After transcribing all of the interviews, I gave a copy to each focal participant. For the children's transcripts, I gave a copy to the parents to read and to read to their children. Each participant was asked to read his or her interview and make changes as he or she saw fit. All participants returned their interview transcripts with minimal changes and these transcripts were used in the analysis. In using excerpts from the interview transcripts for this dissertation, I maintained the exact transcription. However, a few conventions were used for readability purposes only. These transcription conventions are shown in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Transcription conventions**

[clarification]	<i>Brackets</i> used for clarifying purposes
<b>bold</b>	<i>Bold face type</i> is used for speech indicating emphasis
(...)	<i>Parentheses and dots</i> to indicate omitted speech such as “ahs” or “ums”
...	<i>Three dots</i> indicating a pause
(comments)	<i>Parentheses</i> include researchers comments

### 3.3.2 Observational field notes

I made extensive researcher field notes on IL events each time an observation in the home, school, or out-of-school (e.g., day care, art lesson) space took place. After a field observation, I immediately processed the “raw” data, often sitting in my car expanding my notes by speaking into a digital voice recorder or by writing. Later, at my computer, I typed and converted the field notes into narrative write-ups. As part of the iterative research process, it was at this time that I often formulated questions or made notes on ideas I wished to follow-up on in further observations. Observations in the school spaces occurred three times a week (usually for two to three hours) and spanned the entire school day including recess and lunchtime breaks. Observations in the out-of-school spaces occurred at least once per week

(usually for two to three hours) per focal child. Over the course of the study, observations were conducted over the entire week from early morning until the children's bedtimes. For example, I observed before-school routines in the home, bedtime reading routines in the home, and weekend activities including soccer games, church activities, and shopping trips. My hand-written, single-spaced, and double sided field notes filled two, hard-covered notebooks (9x7 inch, 192 pages each).

### 3.3.3 Artefacts

Artefacts are “the intended and unintended residues of human activity” (Hodder, 1994, p. 304). Artefact collection serves to provide the researcher with alternative insights into the ways in which people perceive and construct their lives. Further, artefacts provide valuable background information. They allow the researcher to base arguments and findings on the firm ground of existing personal and/or official writings and to provide physical items that underscore those assertions (Wright, 2003). According to Hatch (2002), artefacts often include school records, official documents, children's work, teachers' lesson plans, parent newsletters, or any materials used in the setting being studied. Table 3.3 indicates the type of artefact collected and analyzed for this dissertation and the settings from where they were sourced. Whenever possible, analyses were done with the original document. With some artefacts (e.g., artwork, writing samples, day plans), the focal teacher and the focal children shared their original copies with me and photocopies or pictures were taken.

**Table 3.3: Artefact collections and setting sources**

Artefact	Setting
Ministry of Education documents (including Integrated Resource Packages, curricular documents, policy documents, service plans, etc.)	School
Government of Canada, Province of British Columbia documents (e.g., Census reports, literacy reports)	School
Instructional materials (e.g., books, reading guides, magazines, assessment tools, assessments)	School
Teacher made materials (e.g., day plans, time tables, score sheets)	School
Focal child work (e.g., journal entries, writing samples, planner pages, artwork, drawings)	School
Focal child artefacts (e.g., drawings, Lego creations, letters, toys, art, sketches, writing, books, models)	Home and community
Researcher photos and video tapes	School, home, community

Artefact	Setting
Photos taken by families to record literacy events with digital camera given by researcher	Home and community

### 3.4 Data analysis

The process of analysis should not be seen as a distinct stage of research; rather it is a reflexive activity that should inform data collection, writing, further data collection, and so forth. Analysis is not, then, the last phase of the research process. It should be seen as part of the research design and of the data collection. The research process, of which analysis is one aspect, is a cyclical one (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p.6).

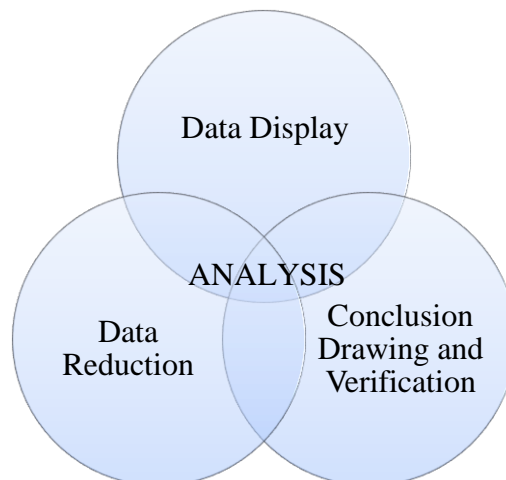
In following a qualitative tradition, as the authors suggest, data collection and analysis are conducted in a recursive manner. In designing the present study, I began with an analysis of the work I had undertaken in the pilot study. The information I gleaned from the pilot study, in conjunction with my consultation of several research methods publications (e.g., Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; 2005; Duke & Mallette, 2004; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Glesne, 2006; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Merriam, 1988; 1998; Stake, 1995), significantly shaped my research design and the research process for the present study. Specifically, I found Stake (1995), Merriam (1998), Yin (2003), and Dyson and Geneshi (2005) particularly helpful in the design stages of this multiple-case study; Glesne (2006) and Bogdan and Biklen (2003) during the data collection phase of the study; and Miles and Huberman (1994), Wolcott (1994), Coffey and Atkinson (1996), Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Strauss and Corbin (2008) to assist me with the analysis of the data I collected.

Most scholars agree that qualitative research involves three basic kinds of data: observational data, interview data, and archival data. However, there is no single way of approaching these data sources, opening the possibility for a variety of perspectives. As Strauss (1987) argues, qualitative researchers “have quite different investigatory types let alone different talents and gifts, so that a standardization of methods...would only constrain and even stifle social researchers’ best efforts” (p.5). However, variety does not stem only from the range of researchers’ commitments and talents; the collections of qualitative data are impacted by the diversity of social settings and attendant contingencies, in addition to the aim of the research. In

other words, the types of data that are collected in multiple and varying field settings also affect the possibilities for data analysis, as do the analytic aims of the researcher. The diversity associated with data leads to a wide variety of analytic strategies for data collection and analysis. As Silverman (1993) maintains, from the strength of diversity comes a distinctive form of analysis that “is centrally concerned with avoiding a ‘social problem’ perspective by asking how principals attach meanings to their activities and ‘problems’”(p.19). In dealing with data then, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) explain that “analysts *make* problems, grounding them in the everyday realities and meanings of social worlds and social actors, rather than *taking* problems from policy makers, general theorists, or others” (p.5, emphasis in the original).

Miles and Huberman (1994) define analysis as three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (see Figure 3.1). Data reduction, the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming data from transcriptions or field notes, occurs continuously throughout the qualitative project. Further reduction of the data occurs as more data are collected and summaries are written, codes are applied, themes are teased out and memos are written. In data display, information is organized into readily accessible compact forms such as a graphs, charts or matrices. This enables the analyst to see what is happening and draw justified conclusions or move on to the next step of the analysis.

**Figure 3.1: Data analysis as three concurrent flows of activity (Miles & Huberman, 1994).**

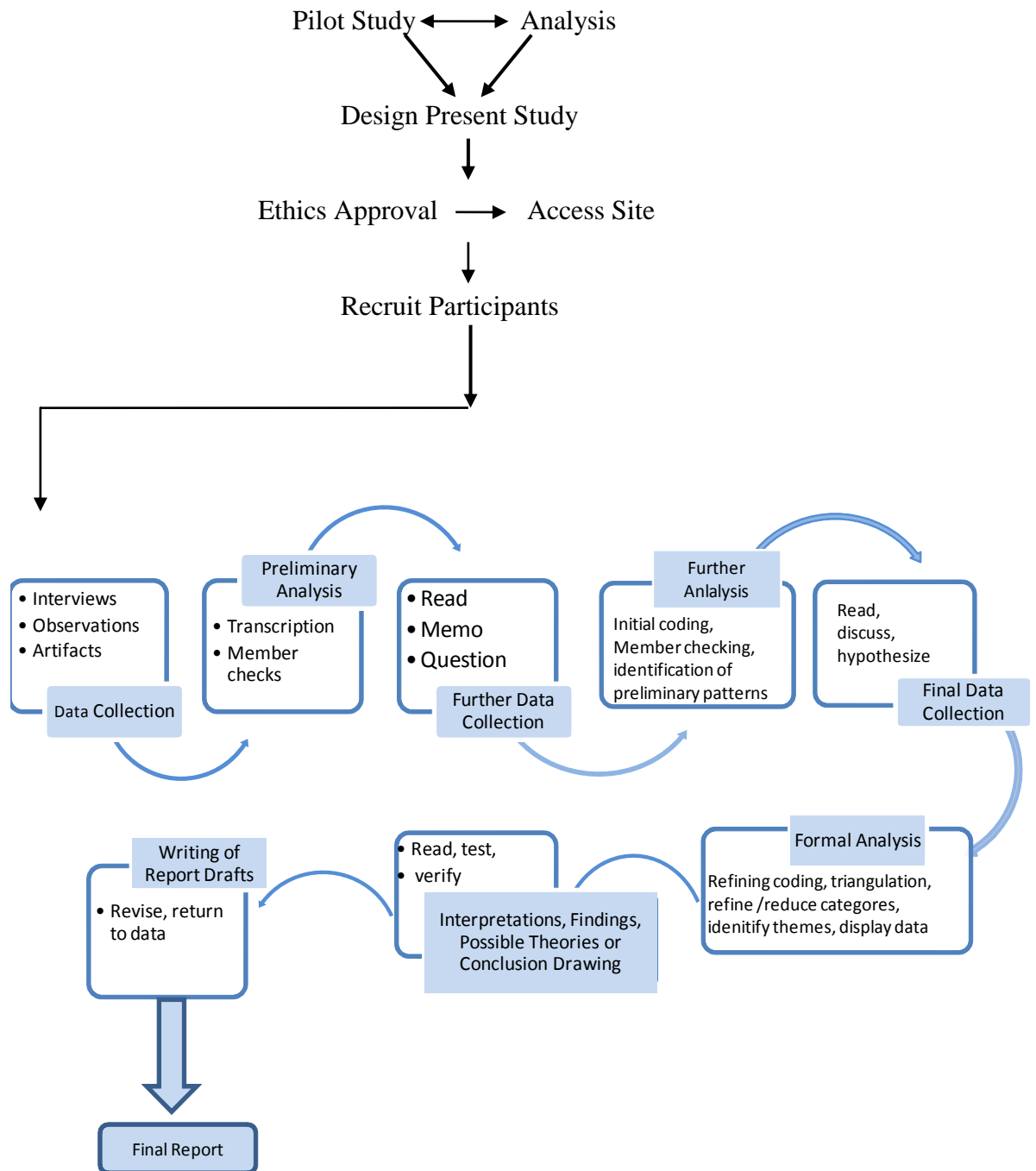


The final component of Miles and Huberman's (1994) flow model is conclusion drawing and verification. Although the researcher is noting regularities, patterns, and propositions from the start of data collection, she holds these conclusions lightly until they become explicit and grounded (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Final conclusions may not appear until the end of the data collection. Miles and Huberman state that these conclusions are also verified as the analyst proceeds. In verification, the meanings emerging from the data must be tested for their credibility or confirmed to ensure their utility and validity.

This model of analysis - data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification - is indeed interactive and cyclical. To illustrate how I followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) general view of qualitative analysis for this study, I have outlined my iterative and recursive research process visually in Figure 3.2.



**Figure 3.2: The research process**



### **3.4.1 The research process**

**The pilot study.** As mentioned, the pilot study provided important information that in turn shaped the design of the current study. For example, while trying to remain as unobtrusive as possible to record naturalistic events in the home of the pilot study's focal child, I was treated by the family as an honoured guest. On each of my visits, I was entertained, fed, and guided through the house. The house was in immaculate condition with many print literacy artefacts (e.g., books, writing, and reading materials) hidden away. My visits were scheduled by the family to coincide with the father's presence as he had the greatest command of English. While the family was gracious and receptive to my presence and to my questions, it appeared difficult for them to go about their normal routines. As a result, my visits seemed somewhat staged and artificial. In designing the current study, I allowed for extended time in the field so that the families grew accustomed to me and my observations could be conducted in more naturalistic and routine contexts.

### **3.4.2 Field work for the present study and preliminary analysis**

As I began my field work for the current study, I was highly attentive to my research questions in order to focus and guide my data collection. I drew extensively on multiple sources of information as Yin (2003) recommends (i.e., documentation, interviews, direct observations, and physical artefacts). During data collection, I often wrote thoughts or comments in the margins of my field notebook, or wrote remarks on Post-it® Notes to attach to documents to remind me of something I wanted to follow up later. As mentioned previously, after a field contact, I immediately processed the "raw" data, often sitting in my car expanding my notes by speaking into a digital voice recorder or by writing. Later, at my computer, I typed and converted the field notes into narrative write-ups. I transcribed the interviews I had conducted and wrote summary forms for the documents I collected. As I processed the data, I organized the corpus into file folders digitally and manually, keeping records of visitations and events and planning for the next visits. This process became my preliminary analysis. As I transcribed the interviews or typed my write-ups, I jotted down thoughts that struck me about the data in a notebook particularly designed for this purpose. These memos would help me modify my data collection; for example, to shift my focus slightly for the next observation, or rework a question or two for the final interviews. After the initial interviews were transcribed, I gave them to the participants so that they could read them over and check for accuracy. These member checks assisted in re-shaping my data collection.

### **3.4.3 Further data collection and further analysis**

As seen in Figure 3.1, the cyclical notion of preliminary analysis and further data collection began taking shape. And as I collected further data, I continued to read pertinent published works to help me reflect on what I was seeing. Questions arose from this reading and further guided my data collection. For example, after observing particular routines the families followed regarding the school planner and the importance it generated, I reviewed some of the literature that focused on school-home communication. Information I attained from this reading shaped and reformulated interview questions. As my data corpus grew, I began to see preliminary patterns, and initial codes began to formulate. These too, were recorded in my notebook for later reflection as I entered into the final collection phase.

### **3.4.4 Final data collection**

In the final phase of data collection, I continued to review the data corpus, reading and making notes from relevant works, rereading my memos and discussing my discoveries with my advisors and peers. I began to think more deeply about the patterns I was discovering in the data and looked at triangulation within the data sources. For example, I shared some of my initial research findings with the participants to gain feedback and determine if further data collection and/or re-analysis was necessary. I spent time going through my memos and notes, and again returned to my research questions so that I felt I was doing my best at reaching saturation in the data. This process enabled me to make an informed decision as to when to stop collecting data and to begin the formal analysis stage of the research process.

### **3.4.5 Formal analysis**

To begin the formal analysis stage of the study, I turned again to the theoretical perspectives and the research questions that guided the study. My first question, *How do school contexts afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices?* required an identification and close examination of the IL practices in the school context. As such, the IL practices were my units of analysis. As I explained earlier, literacy practices are the general cultural ways of using written language which people draw upon in their lives. Practices are shaped by social rules which regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access to them. Literacy events are activities where literacy has a role. Usually there is a 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<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, to determine the IL practices in the two contexts, my first stage of analysis involved the close identification and categorization of the IL events, that is, events where IL has a role.

Although I discuss my method of my analysis of the multiple-cases within the school context in the next section, it should be noted that the identical procedure was followed for the out-of-school contexts. Thus, beginning with the school context, I began the first stage of four stages of formal analysis by grouping all the expanded school observation field notes and converting them into rich text format (RTF) files. I then uploaded the files into *Atlas-ti*, a visual qualitative data analysis software program that assists in the coding of text.

**Stage one of the analysis.** I began coding the data according to the definition of an IL event. As an example of this coding, I use the following excerpt taken from my field notes:

Ms. Davidson calls the children to the carpet and once settled, she shows them the book, *All About... Canadian Animals: Grizzly bears* (McDermott & McKeown, 1998). She reads the title of the book to the children and relates it to the topic of Canada they are currently studying in Social Studies. She places the book upon her lap, turns to page eight, and begins reading the page aloud to the children. After reading the text, Ms. Davidson stops and turns the book around to the children to show them a picture of the grizzly bear fishing in a river that is featured on the page she has just read aloud. The children immediately break into excited talk and Ms. Davidson begins an informal discussion with them, adding her personal knowledge to the discussion regarding the life cycle of the salmon, a grizzly's favourite food.

This excerpt, at the first level of analysis, was coded as an IL event as there was an informational text involved, and there was talk around this text. After coding my observational notes in this way, I turned to the transcriptions of the school interviews, uploaded them into *Atlas-ti* and coded these as well. As a final part of triangulation, specific school artefacts (writing samples, video clips, and photographs) were converted to Tagged Image File Format (TIFF) files, Windows Media Video (WMV) files, and Joint Photographic Expert Group (JPEG)

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<sup>19</sup> For purposes of this dissertation, IL events are activities where IL has a role. Usually there is an IL text, or texts, central to the activity and there may be talk around the text. IL events are observable episodes which arise from IL practices and are shaped by them.

files respectively and coded. These helped me to validate my observational notes. As I coded, I also made comments in the form of memos within the Atlas-ti system that reflected the mental dialogue occurring between the data and me. Writing these memos forced me to think more deeply about the data. I reached saturation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) when all the incidents were classified and sufficient numbers of regularities occurred.

Systematically coding all observational notes and other sources, I continued to work with data chunks, making comparisons at this concept level. As a result of this process, I grouped the IL events into larger categories of IL practices (e.g., the sharing of multimodal texts).

**Stage two of the analysis.** In the second phase of analysis, I looked specifically at the IL practices I had identified, and focused on coding the nature of the activity and the context that afforded the opportunities for engagement in which these particular IL practices were embedded. For example, the practice of sharing information books with partners in the school context occurred largely during the sphere of activity of SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) time. I coded the particularity of the affordance, that is, the characteristics of activity in its context that offered the opportunity for the focal children to engage in IL practices. In the example of SSR, I coded the resources and tools the children had access to during the activity (e.g., books, magazines, the space, the time, Post-it notes for page markers) which afforded engagement. The findings of this analysis are the subject of Chapters Four and Six.

**Stage three of the analysis.** The findings at the second stage of the analysis were important to the third stage of the analysis. In the third stage, I sought to answer the second part of the first question: *What factors constrain these school opportunities?* Based on stage two of the analysis, I now focused on the particular characteristics of the affordance that constrained the opportunities for engagement in IL practices. For example, I examined the affordance of time very closely in activity as I began to see shifts in this affordance during the deeper layer of the analysis. This analysis is the subject of Chapters Five and Seven.

**Stage four of the analysis.** In this final stage, I focused particularly on cross-case analysis to answer the final research question, *How do children recontextualize school and out-of-school IL practices for their own purposes?* In this stage of analysis I designed a visual variable-by-variable matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Specifically, the data matrix design showed the relationship between the two contexts and demonstrated the patterns of the focal

children's recontextualizing mechanisms across the two contexts. The findings from the cross-case analysis will be explicitly discussed in Chapter Eight of the dissertation.

### **3.5 Role of the researcher**

In this study, my role as researcher was complex, and perhaps transcended the assumptions of more traditional stances. In traditional views, individuals are seen as separate from their contexts and of worlds from each other. If I view contexts as activity systems as I explained in Chapter One, individuals are seen as inseparable from their contexts. In this sense, individuals and contexts are mutually constituted and when people move between discourses, they also bring their contexts (Orellana, 2007).

In this line of thinking, I bring my own contexts to this study. I am a primary teacher with over 25 years of experience and over half of these years I have taught at Northwood Elementary. As a teacher, I have also played a role in creating the community of the school. Over the years I have witnessed the changes in the community and in the families, and I have sought to be mindful and respectful of the diversities and realities of these families.

As the researcher in this study, I have entered into colleagues' classrooms and families' homes and communities with the discourses of the academic community. It would be troublesome to assume that I fully understand the focal participants' realities, values, and beliefs. Nor can I assume that I share their same perspectives and insights. As a researcher then, my intent was to use rich qualitative methods that produced information "in its complete and lived essence"(Compton-Lilly, 2003, p. 42).

As a parent raising two children, I also hold certain assumptions about parenting and the role of parents in early literacy development. It would also be problematic to assume that I understand the focal children's families' realities and beliefs about these complex issues. My aim therefore, was to listen and observe as accurately as possible to gain understanding of *their* worlds as parents and the roles they held within.

To this end, I took on the role of an observer in the study. At times, this proved difficult. Having observed them in their homes, the focal children would acknowledge my presence in the classroom, usually with a greeting. However, as the study progressed and the children began to see me more frequently, they largely ignored my comings and goings. During my observations I was mainly positioned at the back of the room behind the children, so they could not see me as they went about their daily routines.

Through interviews with the parents of the focal children, I came to realize that the families volunteered for the study because they knew and trusted me. This relationship of mutual trust and support enhanced the study. I quickly blended into their busy households and they became familiar with my presence. In terms of reciprocity, I tried to help the families in ways that would not compromise the data collection. For example, as relatively new immigrants, the Wang family was just beginning to explore the city beyond their usual routines. I showed the Wang family different Western shopping areas, and assisted Ivan's mother with the reading of different brochures and flyers. In another example, I looked after Tara when her mother had to suddenly deal with driving two teenagers to two different places in a hurry. While it could be argued that my position as a teacher caused the families to act and respond in ways in which they felt I wanted to see and hear, I believe that this was not the case. As will be pointed out in further chapters of this dissertation, the families were honest and forthright in their actions and responses. They questioned, challenged and discussed issues with me and spent time making sure I understood. Our relationships were based on mutual trust and respect and neither I nor the focal participants were willing to jeopardize this.

### **3.6 Trustworthiness and authenticity of the study**

There are five overlapping issues for judging the quality of qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These are: objectivity/confirmability, reliability/dependability/auditability, internal validity/credibility/authenticity, external validity/transferability/fittingness, and utilization/application/action orientation. These are discussed below as they pertain to the present study.

#### **3.6.1 Objectivity/confirmability**

This issue pertains to freedom of researcher biases, and the clear delineation of the study's methods and procedures. In this study, I have attempted to provide a rich description of how the data were collected and processed and how the conclusions were drawn. An example of this is found in Figure 3.1 in which I provided a detailed account of the research process. In the analyses of the data, I provided lengthy discussions of my coding procedures with examples taken from my researcher notes. Conclusions drawn were based on triangulation of the data, that is, the events and the facts of the case studies have been supported by more than one source of evidence (transcripts, observational field notes and the collection of artefacts). For example, during an interview with one of the focal child's parents, I was told that the child was unable to

take books out of the school library because two books had been temporarily mislaid, and library policy dictated temporary suspension of library loaning privileges until the two books were returned. Analysis of the interview data indicated that access to books/information could be a constraining factor. Turning to my artefact collection, I analyzed print-out records of school library books loaned to the students in Ms. Davidson's classroom. Here I found evidence that those children, including the focal child, who indeed had two books already on loan, had weeks of listings of these same two books until they were returned. I then analyzed the student handbook for documentation for library lending policies, which confirmed the two book loan policy. Analysis of these documents indicated issues of access. I further triangulated the interview data and the written documents with observational data I collected during Ms. Davidson's scheduled library time. My notes during a library period observation were as follows:

As the teacher-librarian dismissed the students to select their books, Ross moved to the information book section and selected a book. After leafing through the pages for a minute or two, he took the book and went to line up behind others who were waiting to have their books checked out by the teacher-librarian. When his turn came, the teacher-librarian digitally scanned his name on the computer. Glancing at the screen, the teacher-librarian explained to Ross that he already had two books on loan and would be unable to take out another until the other books were returned. She then instructed Ross to leave his book on the shelving cart, collect his things and line up to go back to the classroom.

This excerpt also corroborated with the other data I had collected. By triangulating the data, I was able to support the facts of the case study by using more than a single source of evidence.

Finally, in terms of researcher objectivity, I have also identified particular researcher assumptions and biases and discussed how they may have come into play during the study.

### **3.6.2 Reliability/dependability/auditability**

The issue of reliability/dependability/auditability relates to consistency and stability of a study over time and across researchers. To ensure the reliability of the study, I focused on three very clear research questions that were based on the foundations of the detailed theoretical



framework that I provided in Chapter One. The justification of using multiple-case study as the study's design in order to answer the research questions was provided in this chapter. Data collection was based on seven months in the school and out-of-school settings, and data were collected over weekends and across multiple time periods to yield dependable accounts. As previously mentioned, interview transcripts in hard copy were given to each participant to make changes as they saw fit. All participants returned their interview transcripts with minimal changes and these transcripts were used in the analysis. During the course of the study I often met with the focal participants in order to clarify parts of the data for me. This member checking played a vital part in the analysis.

During analysis, I continued to review the data corpus, reading and making notes from relevant works, and rereading my memos as I began to think more deeply about the patterns. I discussed my discoveries with my advisors and peers. These discussions proved very helpful in shaping my thinking. More formal discussion of my emerging understandings occurred during round-table presentations at national conferences. As I began writing the dissertation, I received feedback on draft chapters from peers and my advisory committee whose comments and suggestions have been incorporated into the final report.

### **3.6.3 Internal validity/credibility/authenticity**

This issue relates to the truth value of the study, or in other words, is the study an authentic representation of what I was looking at? In Chapters Three, Four and Six, I give rich and detailed descriptions of the study contexts and thick descriptions of the focal participants. The extensive data collection (involving the multiple sources described in this chapter) was triangulated so that coherent explanations could be made. When I was unsure of the conclusions I had drawn, I considered rival explanations by returning to the data and meeting with the focal participants to ensure the conclusions I arrived at were justified.

### **3.6.4 External validity/transferability/fittingness**

This issue pertains to the process of taking findings from one study and applying them to the understanding of another similar situation. It is not the aim of this study to generalize to other populations. However, the study may be useful for "connection-making" (Maxwell, 1992). As previously mentioned, I sought a school in a metropolitan area similar to the school in the pilot study and one that enrolled a range of economically, culturally and linguistically diverse students. These characteristics are similar to many urban areas in North America. Although the participants are unique, the full profile descriptions I provide enable adequate

comparisons to other cases. While the sample was small, it was diverse enough to encourage broader applicability. The thick descriptions throughout the dissertation report also assist in the transferability of the study.

### **3.6.5 Utilization/application/action orientation**

This issue relates to the notion of what the study does for the participants, the researcher, and the consumers of the research. From an ethical standpoint, it should be reiterated that I carefully followed UBC's ethical research guidelines, and gave the research participants the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. Anonymity was ensured through the use of pseudonyms for all the individuals in the study and pseudonyms were also used for the city, the community, the neighbourhood and the school. All adult focal participants commented that the participating in the study raised their awareness of the literacy development of their young children. The parents of the focal children and the teacher of the focal children also commented that the study confirmed their appreciation for the roles they each played in the education of the focal children.

In terms of the level of useable knowledge offered, it is hoped that the study will assist in theory-building to guide future action on several different levels. First, it is hoped that it will assist teachers in a deeper understanding of the factors that shape the IL literacy practices of children in their classrooms. Second, it is also hoped that the findings have a catalyzing effect that will lead to actions leading toward more effective literacy pedagogy. Finally, it is hoped that the knowledge will contribute to effective government policy that will enhance the empowerment of children, parents, teachers and administrators.

## **3.7 Summary**

This chapter described the methodology of the present study. I provided a detailed description of the design of this qualitative multiple-case study, and I provided a rationale for its adoption. The selection of the research context and focal participants was described and an explanation of the data collection and data sources used for the analysis was provided. A detailed description of the data analysis including the cross-case analysis was given enabling a foundation on which the subsequent findings chapters are based. A discussion of the quality of the study in terms of its trustworthiness and authenticity completed the chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: SCHOOL CONTEXT AFFORDANCES: OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT IN IL PRACTICES**

### **4.0 Introduction**

In Chapter One, I outlined the arguments supported in the literature for teachers' use of informational texts with primary students. Many of these arguments emphasized capitalizing on opportunities to involve children in IL in order to prepare them for their future participation in a global economy and information society. In this chapter I address the first research question: How do school contexts afford opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices? In Chapter One I defined the term "affordance" as the characteristics of activity in its context that offers opportunities for children to engage in IL practices. Further, in this definition, I also included the notion that some characteristics of activity in its context may serve as constraints on opportunities for engagement in IL practices. My aim of this chapter, the first of five findings chapters, is to demonstrate how the context of the school (i.e., the focal children's classroom and spaces in Northwood Elementary) offers opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices. Chapter Five, the second findings chapter, will discuss the constraints on opportunities for the focal children's engagement in IL practices in the school context.

I predicated the analysis of the data for this chapter on the notion of context as constituted by people both internally (involving specific objects and goals) and externally (involving artefacts, other people and specific settings) and these factors are interdependent. In this way, meaning is mutually constituted between persons and activity systems. This chapter identifies how the goals of the teacher come together with the resources, the settings (classroom and school), and the activities, to offer opportunities for children's engagement of IL practices. In this chapter, I first provide background on the focal teacher's personal IL practices, her teaching philosophy, and the specific classroom setting and resources within. Following, I provide background on the IL curriculum of the classroom. I then examine the spheres of activity in the classroom and the school for the purposes of understanding the way certain opportunities in this context are offered for the focal children to engage in IL practices. My aim is to demonstrate that the school context, including Ms. Davidson herself, offered numerous opportunities for children to engage in IL practices.

## **4.1 The focal teacher: Ms. Davidson**

### **4.1.1 Ms. Davidson's personal literacy history**

In my study of the influence of parent literacy practices on their children's early literacy development, I found that some parents could not recall how they learned to read or if their own parents' read to them as children<sup>20</sup>. Ms. Davison's experiences were not dissimilar. For example, in our interviews, Ms. Davidson commented on her own childhood reading experiences:

I don't recall my mom ever reading to me. My mom wasn't much of a reader. She was a crafty person. She always was knitting or crocheting. But my dad read all the time. He would have big boxes of books down in the basement and we knew they were downstairs. We certainly had access to them. We would peruse them and we knew which [books] were good because they were worn from being read again and again. . . . I've always loved reading. I was told to get out of the house when I was (...) lying around reading. [Mom would say] "Get out of the house and go play." (...) My sisters and I have always been really avid readers.

Despite her mother's admonishment to stop reading and get some fresh air, Ms. Davidson's love of reading began in the home, with her dad and her sisters serving as significant role models. She also recalled that as a child, she loved school and was very eager to learn. She stated that she loved her teachers, was eager to please, and that she wanted to do well. She credited her sense of curiosity as enabling her to be successful. Ms. Davidson also referred to herself as a "fact lover," a trait that developed early in her schooling. She stated:

[T]here were always teachers that (...) liked the same kind of thing [as you did]. They (...) would give you the lecture and all the information and they'd have something in there that just - it didn't even matter - didn't really have anything to do with what you were learning. It was just

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<sup>20</sup> See McTavish (2007) for further information on this study.

something that struck a chord with them and they'd mention it and of course they liked it because it was odd or interesting. And so it appealed to me.

As will be discussed further in Chapter Five, this style of teaching had a significant effect on the way that Ms. Davidson taught her own students. When I discussed this observation with her during my data analysis phase, she appeared excited by this finding:

MM = Marianne McTavish

MD = Ms. Davidson

MM: So in our interview you said that "that [style of teaching] was kind of universal." What did you mean by this?

MD: I think some teachers like the same kind of things that appeal to kids. Like when you were intrigued when you heard me say to the kids that we drink the same water that the dinosaurs drank; it's just been recycled. I think teachers kind of enjoy learning. People who become teachers like [learning these facts] - it sticks in their heads and then it sticks in the heads of the children they teach.

MM: Yes, you can see that this is happening in your own teaching.

MD: Oh, I hope so!

Here we see that Ms. Davidson's teaching practices are shaped by her own experiences and dispositions and her personal IL history. Following the maxim that teachers teach the way they were taught (Britzman, 1991; 2003; Lortie, 1975), it does seem that this is true in Ms. Davidson's case. But in deeper analysis, as it will be discussed in Chapter Five, perhaps this adage should be restated accordingly: teachers teach the way they learned, and select methods

that reflect their own preferred learning styles. And as will be discussed in the next section, Ms. Davidson, in the process of constructing meaning and sense-making in particular social contexts, has learned new literacies which, in turn, guide her teaching.

#### **4.1.2 Ms. Davison's IL practices**

Ms. Davidson's penchant for reading did not subside in her adult years. She said she enjoyed reading the local community newspapers and the major city and provincial newspapers. She stated that she read each thoroughly because she had trouble just trying to scan them: "I just feel if I'm going to read that paper, then I need to read everything in it." In doing so, Ms. Davidson found out all sorts of trivia which she reported would "stick in her head." Ms. Davidson reported that she read and had subscriptions to several nature and geography magazines such as *Canadian Geographic*, *Equinox*, *Westworld BC*, *Travel*, and *Beautiful British Columbia*, which she brought into the classroom so that her students could access them as well.

Ms. Davidson's IL practices also involved extensive use of the computer. She had a personal computer at home and she also had use of a computer in her classroom. Frequently, her computer use revolved around researching information that just "popped" into her head using *Google*™ as the search engine. Most of her searches concerned travel topics, restaurant reviews, store locations and shopping, and reading about current events and people in the news. Ms. Davidson enjoyed gaining up-to-date information, but she stated that there was never enough time to "do it all."

Ms. Davidson also viewed *YouTube*™ (a video sharing website where users upload, view and share video clips) to catch up on what was happening in the world, and to see what other people were viewing. For example, in our interviews, Ms. Davidson related that she was an avid kayaker, often paddling in some remote wilderness areas in northern British Columbia. While discussing the wildlife she had encountered on her expeditions, Ms. Davidson turned to her computer to show me a recent *YouTube*™ video she had been watching in which a killer whale had breached on top of a kayaker. Upon viewing this for the first time, she sent the video link to others in her kayaking group so that they could also watch and discuss this spectacular video.

Ms. Davidson's travels enabled her to build a "huge" digital photo library. She uploaded these pictures to her computer cataloguing and annotating them there. She then sent selected pictures to be printed or to be shared electronically through email with family and friends. She often sent pictures via email from her home computer to her school computer so that she could

show the pictures to her class as part of her instruction. At school, Ms. Davidson also used the computer to download pictures of school and classroom events (e.g., the Back to School Corn Roast, Pirates' Day) that she recorded on the school's digital camera. During a parent-teacher conference session, I observed Ms. Davidson show these pictures as a running slide show on the classroom computer. From an NLS perspective, this is but one example of Ms. Davidson's dynamic multimodal representation to demonstrate the learning of her students within the cultural practice of the "parent-teacher" conference.

Ms. Davidson also reported that she downloaded all of her personal listening music to her home computer. From the computer, she played the music for entertainment, added it to her picture slideshows, or continued to download it to her iPod®. At home, she listened to a radio station that featured music from the 1960s to the 1990s. During her 30 minute drive to work, she preferred to listen to a Canadian all-talk radio program where she obtained information about current news, traffic reports, weather forecasts, and opinions and interviews.

Although Ms. Davidson did not watch a great deal of television, she reported that she enjoyed viewing shows about travel. She watched the evening provincial news on TV, but she preferred to receive her news from the newspaper. She regularly watched digital video discs (DVDs) of current movies and often watched those that were considered classics for children.

In terms of on-line communication, Ms. Davidson had two email accounts: a school account and a personal account. She was a frequent user on both accounts using email mainly to communicate with family and friends. Ms. Davidson stated that she didn't need to learn about the latest communication and social networking websites such as *Facebook*™ (a social utility that connects people on-line). She said that doesn't see a value in it but she appreciated that many people enjoy using it. For school related communication, Ms. Davidson used her school email account for communicating with colleagues. Her main method of communication with her students' parents was through notes that she wrote in the students' planners, a school-sanctioned coil-bound book used to improve students' organization skills that travels back and forth from home to school on a daily basis.

Ms. Davidson communicated with an older sister living in Bermuda by using Skype™, a software program that allows users to make telephone calls over the Internet free of charge. The two sisters communicated on a weekly basis, and send pictures back and forth to each other. The following is taken from my field notes:

At 10:00 a.m., the children gather in front of the class computer. They appear eager and are talking excitedly to each other. Ms. Davidson sits down on the chair in front of the computer and waits until the children settle. She then asks the children if they remember when she told them that she was talking to her sister via the Internet about how the class was raising butterflies from eggs in their classroom. The students respond with a loud, YES!". Ms. Davidson then tells the children that her sister surprised her last night by sending her pictures of the adult Monarch butterfly over the Internet to Ms. Davidson. She tells the children that she sent the pictures from her home computer to her school computer. Ms. Davison then begins showing these pictures to the students on the computer screen.

In this example, we can see that literacy can be inherently social, and is located in the relationships and interactions between people (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Technology enabled Ms Davidson to communicate both in local and global spaces. In these events, Ms. Davidson used a range of modes which included the spoken word, the visual image, and the written sign which were all mediated by new technologies, such as those afforded by Skype™.

It is evident that Ms. Davidson's IL practices reflect her enjoyment and commitment to a variety of print, electronic, visual and multimodal literacies. Ms. Davidson used these literacies to construct meaning in her particular social contexts (i.e., with her family and friends) and as will be discussed further in the dissertation, these uses will play out in her teaching.

#### **4.1.3 Ms. Davidson's philosophy of instruction**

When asked about her teaching philosophy, Ms. Davidson and I shared the following exchange:

MM = Marianne McTavish

MD = Ms. Davidson

MM: How would you describe your teaching philosophy?

MD: I really want the kids to enjoy learning. I want them to enjoy being at school [and] I want them to enjoy learning. I want it to be inclusive and I want it to



be welcoming in the classroom. And I want to access stuff they're bringing from home or their interests.

MM: So when you say enjoyable . . .

MD: The learning's fun.

MM: You were talking about the process of learning. . .?

MD: Yes.

MD: Or the content?

MD: And the content.

This excerpt relates to Ms. Davidson's description of how she currently teaches. This was supported by the following excerpt from my research notes as well:

At 1:20 p.m. at Ms. Davison's request, the children begin to tidy up from their shared reading activity in order to get ready for the Science lesson. While she waits at her desk, Ms. Davidson is approached by a boy, who holds a hand-made pinwheel in his hand. Ms. Davidson bends to talk to the boy in order to hear him. She signals for him to wait until the other children have tidied up and are ready to give Ms. Davidson their full attention. Once the children are quiet, she holds up the pinwheel for everyone to see, saying, "I want to show you what [the boy] brought in today. Remember yesterday we were talking about how we knew the air was moving by making that spiral out of paper?" The children collectively say "yes!" Ms. Davidson continues, "Well, [the boy] has made a pinwheel which also can show how the air is moving. This is really neat. Tell us how you made it..." The boy talks about how he made the pinwheel. Ms. Davidson shows the children how the pinwheel moves by blowing on it, and then discusses last day's concept of wind using the pinwheel. She thanks the boy and asks permission if the children can try making one themselves with his guidance. The boy nods yes and Ms. Davidson hangs in on the chalkboard for the class.

In this excerpt we can see that Ms. Davidson acknowledges the knowledge and interests the children bring to school and capitalizes on their interests. I argue here that she wants the

children to enjoy learning as much as she did when she was a student and also as she continues to do so as an adult. Her teaching philosophy and her actions reflect this.

## **4.2 Grade two in Ms. Davidson's room: The focal classroom**

### **4.2.1 Description of the focal classroom**

Ms. Davidson's classroom stood at the very end of the hallway on the top floor of the school building. Two other primary classrooms and one intermediate classroom shared this wing. Ms. Davidson's classroom was rectangular in shape with large south-west facing windows that overlooked the playing fields, the school parking lot, and the school's main entrance. To enter the classroom, the children lined up outside along the school walkway. During the school day, all outside doors were locked (except for the main entrance) for security reasons. At bell time, Ms. Davidson (and the other classroom teachers in this wing), met her class outside and took them up a set of large wooden stairs to the entrance directly outside of her classroom.

The children hung their coats and backpacks on hooks that lined the back wall of the classroom. Vertically sliding magnetic chalkboards above the coat hooks displayed maps and posters. Ms. Davidson dedicated one chalkboard to the weekly planner chart where, on a daily basis, she updated school and class information and events for the coming week. This chalkboard also held the class chore list that Ms. Davidson changed on a weekly basis. At this south end of the classroom, there were two small round tables with six child-sized chairs. One table served as an open work table and the other served as Ms. Davidson's reading table where she took daily reading groups for their lessons.

The east wall of the classroom contained large white boards which extended from the north door of the classroom to the south door. Twenty-one desks, grouped in rows of twos and threes, faced these boards. Four rows were situated to the left of a center aisle, and four rows to the right. Ms. Davidson did the largest part of her teaching at these white boards and in front of the children, but she often moved and used the overhead projector in the center aisle to project lessons on a screen that rolled down in front of the white boards. The white boards contained the permanent spaces for the daily agenda and spelling lists. Above these boards was an alphabet chart, a number line, cartoon character posters depicting the colour words, monthly birthday cake cut-outs with candles for children's birthdates, and story-starter phrases written on

paper strips. In the north-west corner of the classroom, at the back of the rows of students' desks, stood Ms. Davidson's desk.

In the north-east corner of the classroom, there was an area free of furniture. Ms. Davidson used this space for whole class gatherings. Here the children sat on the floor and gathered around Ms. Davidson for meeting time, calendar, shared reading, and whole group instruction. There was a small bulletin board that displayed a poster-sized calendar and the associated items for the calendar routine (days of the week, tens sticks, number charts, number of days in school, etc.). Lining the north end of the classroom were chalkboards which Ms. Davidson also used for teaching purposes. Hanging over a portion of the blackboard, there was a large pocket chart. Eye-catching posters for use in thematic studies covered other sections of the chalk board. The chalk ledge served as a makeshift book stand and displayed big books, thematic books, maps, and charts. In the corner where Ms. Davidson had her desk, a single computer sat facing out to this open space. This computer was for Ms. Davidson's use only, but she used it for teaching purposes to display class and school photos, or to search Internet sites for information to use with the children. Beside the computer, and against Ms. Davidson's desk, was a book shelf that held a substantial collection of information books, their contents mainly related to the theme under current study. For example, during a nutrition theme, books such as *Me and My Body* (Evans & Williams, 1992), *Eating Right* (Vogel, 2001), and *Food and Your Health* (Powell, 1997), were prominent titles.

On the west side of the classroom, underneath the windows, there was a long row of shelves, holding games, math manipulatives, and art supplies. The top shelf contained labeled bins of information books sorted and organized into categories such as space, reptiles, environment, plants and the like. Directly in front of these shelves was a small rectangular table with child-sized chairs. The children worked here or read books together. Beside this table and perpendicular to the windows, a large book shelf served as a divider between the rectangular table and the small round working tables. This book shelf contained easy chapter books, reference books (e.g., illustrated children's dictionaries, junior encyclopedias, phone books, children's atlases), oversized hard-covered information books, and boxed sets of magazines (e.g., *Canadian Wildlife*, *Canadian Geographic*, *Wild*, *Chickadee*) On top of this book shelf were containers of small sheets of paper (that served as book marks or note paper), pencils, and Post-it notes. Finally, one bookshelf stood near the back door of the classroom and contained an

assortment of story picture books. At any one time approximately 200 books, mostly informational in nature, were accessible to the children.

The physical set-up of the classroom (as arranged by Ms. Davidson) and the resources located within served as important supports for the focal children to engage in IL practices. This will be taken up later in the chapter.

#### 4.2.2 The IL curriculum of the focal classroom

According to the School Act (BC Ministry of Education, 1996), in each school year a school board must offer to all children in kindergarten to grade 3, an educational program that meets all the learning outcomes set out in the applicable educational program guide in English Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, Physical Education, Fine Arts, and Personal Planning (or Health and Career Education)<sup>21</sup>. ICT skills and concepts are expected to be integrated into other subjects as development of these skills is deemed important for students in their education, their future careers, and their everyday lives (Ministry of Education, 2006). The assumption is that teachers must enable their children to be information literate.

Turning to specific literacy curricula, there are 34 learning outcomes for Grade 2 in English Language Arts, and all of these learning outcomes have several learning “sub-outcomes” and are expected to be taught over the course of the Grade 2 year. Specific IL outcomes are integrated within the general Grade 2 literacy outcomes. For example, a single learning outcome (labeled as C3) and its sub-outcomes (bulleted items) for informational writing is as follows:

- C3     create **informational writing** and representations about non-complex topics and procedures, featuring
- **ideas** beginning to be developed through the use of relevant details
  - **sentence fluency** using some variety of sentence length and an emerging variety in pattern
  - developing **word choice** by using some content-specific vocabulary and details
  - developing **voice** by showing how they think and feel about a topic

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<sup>21</sup> The Health and Career Education Integrated Resource Package (IRP) was in an optional implementation phase for the 2007-2008 school year. It will be fully implemented for the 2008-2009 school year, replacing the Personal Planning IRP.

- an **organization** that includes a beginning that signals a topic and ideas that are generally logically sequenced (Ministry of Education, 2006a, p. 38, emphasis in the original).

In order to accommodate the large number of learning outcomes expected to be taught across the grade two curriculum, Ms. Davidson developed strategies that served to integrate the learning outcomes. One strategy was to design activities around significant themes or projects. For example, during this study, activities and learning were designed around the themes of Nutrition, Air and Water, All about Canada, and Cultural Holidays. During the nutrition theme, the children fulfilled some of the learning outcomes in the areas of Health Education and Social Studies Education by studying healthy eating practices and determining the growing origins of certain foods. Specific IL skills and concepts (e.g., locating factual information in text) were embedded in content. In this way, Ms. Davidson was able to meet learning outcomes while providing opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices.

### **4.3 The school IL practices of the focal children**

In this section, I describe the school IL practices in which the four focal students Tara, Jack, Ivan and Ross participated. As discussed in Chapter One, literacy practices can best be conceived as the general cultural ways people utilize written language in their everyday lives and are drawn from observable episodes (literacy events) (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Many literacy events are regular activities and routines that are found and expected in social institutions like the school. In this classroom, Ms. Davidson mainly instructed her students as a whole group (with the exception of guided reading groups), and the IL events I documented were indeed embedded in the regular activities and routines involving all the children. Therefore, the spheres of activity (i.e., those sets of cultural practices or ways of communicating, usually associated with routines), the IL practices, and the affordances for the focal children to engage in these practices are discussed as a whole. These classroom practices provide the contextual backdrop against which individual practices played out. Further detail regarding individual focal children and specific examples of their IL practices in school will be brought forward in Chapter Five.

Although the data corpus for this study included classroom observations that were conducted over the entire school day, I focus my analysis on those spheres of activity where IL

events routinely occurred. For ease of discussion, I first highlight the spheres of activity (loosely based on the chronology of the school day), the collective IL practices of the focal children, and the characteristics of activity in context that offered opportunities for IL engagement as shown in Table 4.1. I then discuss the findings in greater detail.

**Table 4.1: Spheres of activity, IL practices and characteristics of activity in the school context**

Sphere of Activity	IL Practices of the Focal Children	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offered Opportunities for IL Engagement
Morning opening routines e.g., attendance, announcements, agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• taking attendance to find information on who is present/absent</li> <li>• reading information and communication from the home via home/school planners</li> <li>• listening to school announcements and information via public address (PA) system</li> <li>• reading agenda for information on day's events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• time dedicated each morning for sharing of information within the class and the school</li> <li>• technological system for information delivery in classes within the school</li> <li>• designation of a particular book for home-school communication</li> <li>• blackboard and whiteboard space for listing of information events</li> </ul>
Library book exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the daily physical exchange of a school information library book that has been previously taken out by the student for a new information book or magazine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designated space (the library)</li> <li>• access to hundreds of appropriate leveled information books</li> <li>• a teacher-librarian/staff member to coordinate and supervise this daily activity</li> <li>• designated time provided by teacher in daily schedule</li> <li>• ability to borrow informational resources for an extended time period</li> </ul>

Sphere of Activity	IL Practices of the Focal Children	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offered Opportunities for IL Engagement
Journal writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>personal writing by student on a topic of personal interest or one chosen by the teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a venue for child's freedom to write on choice of information topic or interest</li> <li>designated time allotment</li> </ul>
Language Arts lessons – e.g., information reading and writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>participation in direct instruction lessons by the teacher on specific skills and concepts of curricular aspects of information reading and writing (e.g., vocabulary, spelling, organization)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>specific information provided on an individual and group basis on particular informational skills and concepts</li> <li>access to teacher's information knowledge base</li> <li>access to informational texts</li> </ul>
Reading groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>participation in direct instruction on specific skills and concepts of curricular aspects of information reading (e.g., vocabulary, strategies)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>individual and small group instruction and support on skills and concepts related to some informational text</li> <li>access to some appropriately leveled informational texts</li> <li>access to teacher's information knowledge base</li> </ul>
“Story time”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>listening to informational texts read aloud for theme related instruction or for pleasure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to some more advanced informational texts as mediated by the teacher</li> <li>access to teacher's information knowledge base</li> <li>designated physical space to share informational text</li> <li>a format/venue for discussion of informational text</li> </ul>
Group gathering – e.g., sharing, news	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the sharing of multimodal informational texts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>designated physical space to share informational text</li> <li>a format/venue for discussion of</li> </ul>

Sphere of Activity	IL Practices of the Focal Children	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offered Opportunities for IL Engagement
		<p>informational text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>designated time provided by teacher in daily schedule</li> <li>a venue for child's freedom to speak on choice of information topic or interest</li> </ul>
Library time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>informational text reading and sharing</li> <li>browsing, selecting and borrowing from a collection of appropriately leveled informational texts</li> <li>accessing other informational resources such as computers, media, and the Internet</li> <li>participation in discussions with the teacher-librarian on a group and individual basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>designated space (the library)</li> <li>access to hundreds of appropriate leveled information books</li> <li>access to a variety of informational resources (e.g., media, visual, Internet)</li> <li>a teacher-librarian with informational resource knowledge</li> <li>designated time provided each week</li> <li>ability to borrow informational resources for an extended time period</li> </ul>
Sustained Silent Reading (SSR time)/Buddy reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>individual informational print and visual text reading for pleasure/informational print and visual text reading, sharing and discussion with partners for pleasure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>designated space (entire classroom)</li> <li>access to appropriate leveled information books from home, school or classroom libraries</li> <li>designated time to read, share, and discuss informational texts</li> <li>access to pencils, paper, Post-it notes to make notes and mark places</li> </ul>
Class sharing of books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>oral sharing of informational print and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>designated time to read, share, and discuss</li> </ul>



Sphere of Activity	IL Practices of the Focal Children	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offered Opportunities for IL Engagement
	visual texts to class	informational texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a venue for children to share information on topic or interest</li> <li>• access to teacher's information knowledge base</li> </ul>
School planner routine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• daily reading and recording of news, events and information for the purposes of sharing information with care-givers in out-of-school spaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designation of a particular book for home-school communication</li> <li>• distribution of school notices, community flyers, order forms, etc.</li> <li>• the teacher to mediate information on flyers and order form, etc.</li> </ul>
Science and Social Studies lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participation in direct instruction lessons by the teacher on specific skills and concepts of curricular aspects of information related to Science and Social Studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• specific information provided on an individual and group basis on particular informational skills and concepts</li> <li>• access to teacher's information knowledge base including her computer and Internet skills</li> <li>• access to wide variety informational texts - visuals, maps, illustrations</li> </ul>

#### 4.4 The spheres of activity in the school context that offer opportunities for children to engage in IL practices

**Morning opening routines.** The school day began at 8:45 a.m. with classroom attendance routines followed by announcements and music from the office over the public address system. The children had 10 -15 minutes to settle into the rhythm of the morning activities. They spent these few minutes greeting each other and sharing news about the previous night's events, exchanging reviews of library books they had read the night before,

scanning information on the agenda board and planner board about the day's events, and listening to school news and events on the PA system. Although brief, this small window of time provided the children opportunities to be exposed to a number of different informational genres and communication channels, those also found in out-of-school contexts (e.g., agendas, schedules, etc). Although the expectation for this time was to quickly settle and get ready for instruction, interestingly, this time offered the children the unstructured opportunity to communicate information. The following excerpt from my field notes provides an example of this.

At 8:45, Ross and another boy enter the classroom and drop their backpacks in the space in front of their coat hooks. They are discussing the goal-scoring abilities of a particular local hockey player. While hanging up their coats and unloading their backpacks, they continue to discuss the hockey player's prowess during the previous night's televised game. To emphasize his point, Ross relates the scoring statistics of the player that he read on-screen during last night's game. As the other boy pulls a library book on volcanoes out of his backpack Ross is suddenly distracted. Heads together, the boys begin flipping through the book, pointing to and discussing the "cool" images of a volcano's flowing lava.

This exchange, taking no more than two minutes, resulted in a great deal of information being discussed. It further played out in the next sphere of activity, the daily library book exchange. The other boy returned the volcano book during book exchange, and once the book had been placed on the shelving cart, Ross immediately signed it out. Ms. Davidson, busy with other students, was unaware of these particular incidents. However, as will be brought forward in Chapter 5, she would soon see the significance of allowing the children longer unstructured time in the morning for these kind of interactions to occur.

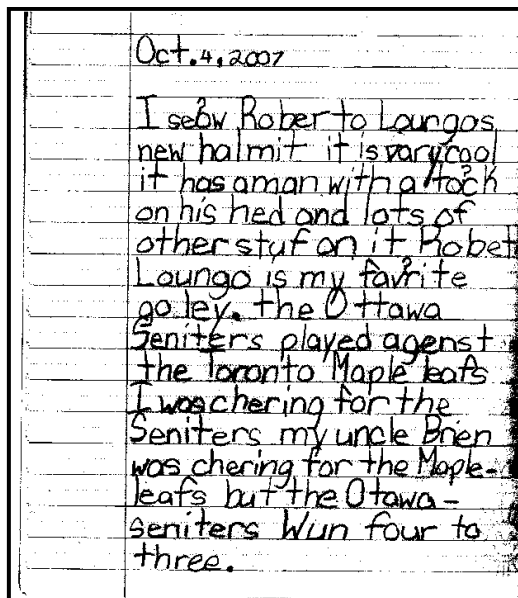
**Library book exchange.** This 15 minute daily activity in the library provided the focal children with an opportunity to access a great number of information books at their reading level in the physical space of library, to consult with the teacher-librarian about informational text interests, and to share these texts with others. Because of the characteristics of this activity, the children were given daily opportunities to engage in IL. Ivan and Ross exchanged their information books on a daily basis, and Sarah exchanged her information books usually every other day. Jack's exchange schedule was more erratic depending on whether he had misplaced

his books. These library books were read at home or at school. Further, these texts provided the valuable resources to support IL practices during other spheres of activity, particularly SSR and Buddy Reading.

**Journal writing.** Journal writing was an activity that was generally undertaken three times a week and was an important venue for information writing in this classroom. The children were generally able to write about what they were interested in, although occasionally they would receive a topic or question from Ms. Davidson to respond to. The children were expected to write to the bottom of a lined exercise book. Ms. Davidson always responded in some manner to their writing, either verbally or in written form, asking questions or sharing information about the topic. This prompted the children to write back to Ms. Davidson. These exchanges offered more sharing of information.

Ross typically wrote about his love of sports and sports teams and kept Ms. Davidson apprised of the standings of all the local hockey and football teams. Ivan wrote on various topics pertaining to his interests in aircraft, planets and trains. Tara wrote mostly about her family and her friends. She offered detailed descriptions of the play dates that she had and what games they had played or the things they created. Jack wrote mainly about his family, the changes occurring in his life, and his love of video games. Examples of the focal children's journal entries can be seen in Figures 4.1 to 4.4

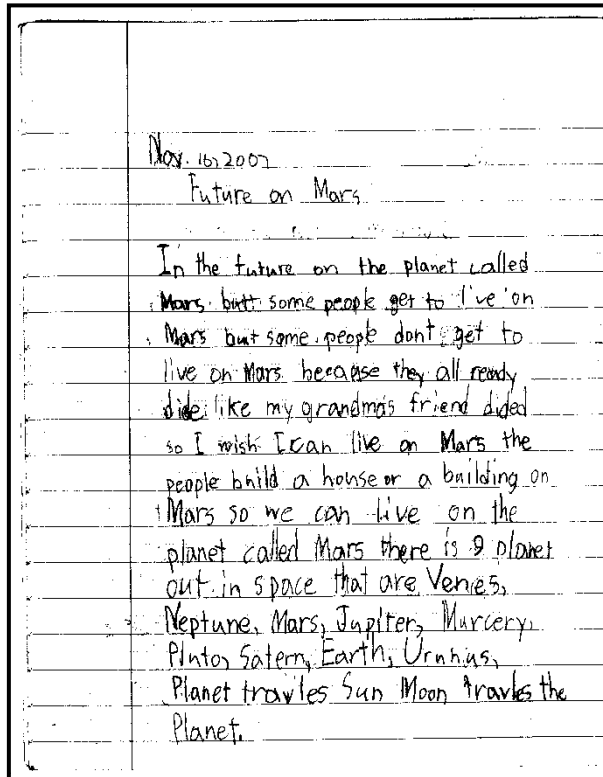
**Figure 4.1: Ross' journal entry**



**Transcription**

I saw Roberto Luongo's new helmet it is very cool it has a man with a tuque on his head and lots of other stuff on it Roberto Luongo is my favourite goalie. The Ottawa Senators played against the Toronto Maple Leafs I was cheering for the Senators my uncle Brian was cheering for the Maple Leafs but the Ottawa Senators won four to three.

**Figure 4.2: Ivan's journal entry**

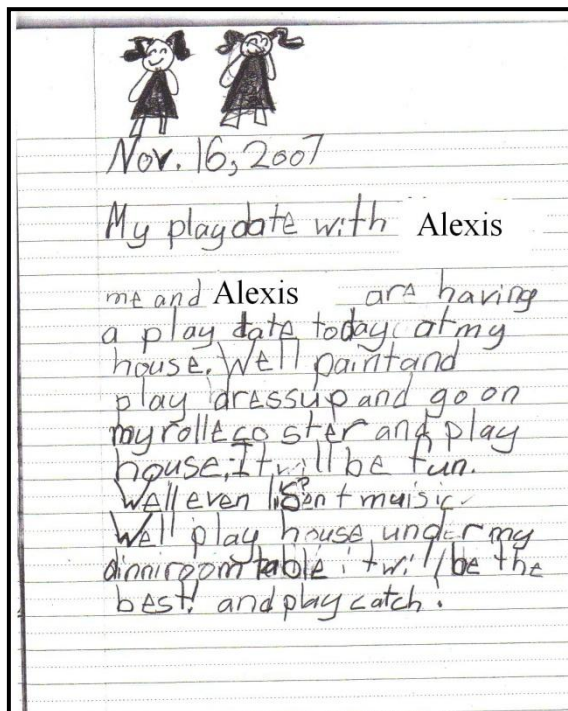


Transcription

Future on Mars

In the future on the planet called Mars but some people get to live on Mars but some people don't get to live on Mars because they already did like my grandma's friend did so I wish I can live on Mars the people build a house or a building on Mars so we can live on the planet called Mars there is 9 planet out in space that are Venus, Neptune, Mars, Jupiter, Mercury, Pluto, Saturn, Earth, Uranus, Planet travels Sun Moon travels the planet.

**Figure 4.3: Tara's journal entry**

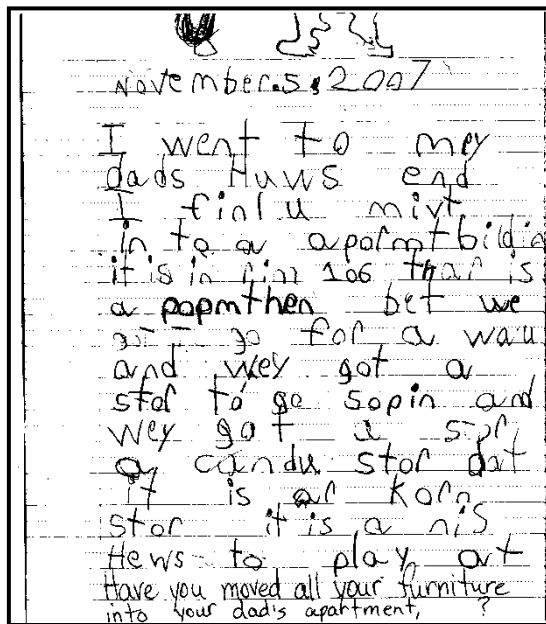


Transcription

My play date with Alexis

Me and Alexis are having a play date today at my house. We'll paint and play dress up and go on my roller coaster and play house. It will be fun. We'll even listen to music. We'll play house under my dining room table it will be the best! And play catch!

**Figure 4.4: Jack's journal entry**



**Transcription**

I went to my dad's house and I finally moved in to a apartment building it is in room 106 there is a pop machine there but we got to go for a walk and we got a store to go shopping and we got a store a candy store but it is our corner store it is a nice house to play at

**Language arts lessons.** The Language Arts lessons were formal lessons conducted by Ms. Davidson and involved direct instruction on specific concepts of curricular aspects of reading and writing informational texts. Depending on the focus of the lesson, the focal children completed work sheets on vocabulary or dictionary skills, or worked with different types of informational texts in theme-related activities. For example, after having been read an informational text on pumpkins, the students were required to create a procedural text for how to grow and raise a pumpkin from seed to harvest.

**Reading groups.** A foundational aspect of the Language Arts program was reading groups. These reading groups were homogeneous in terms of ability levels and placement within the groups was initially determined by the children's achievement on the DRA. Although some student movement between the three reading groups occurred, the majority of children stayed in the same group for the duration of the study. Tara was in the most advanced reading group of the focal children. Ross and Ivan were placed in the same reading group and read slightly less challenging texts than Tara's group. Jack was placed in the reading group between Ross' and Ivan's group and a group who were reading at a very beginning level and received assistance from the learning support teacher.

For reading group instruction, Ms. Davidson used an older literature anthology series that was developed during the 1980s when the Whole-Language<sup>22</sup> movement enjoyed particular popularity. The selections within each anthology were stories and poems from well-known children's authors such as Maurice Sendak and A.A. Milne. The series was divided into grade classifications, and each grade classification had several levels (e.g., Grade 1 had Levels 1- 5), allowing children to move through the materials at the teacher's discretion.

Ms. Davidson used a Guided Reading<sup>23</sup> approach with her children. In a typical reading group lesson, Ms. Davidson would introduce a story within the anthology using some of the pictures and the language in the story's text. She might point out features of the text or print and ask questions or make comments. For example, one story dealt with the topic of grandparents. Ms. Davidson initiated a conversation about the children's grandparents and asked the children if they knew the countries from where their grandparents had originated. In another lesson, Ms. Davidson spent time with the children explaining the components and function of the anthology's table of contents prior to the group's location of the story. After these types of conversations, Ms. Davidson would either assign the children to read a page or two from the selection, read the entire selection, or more often, have the children read the text aloud in a round-robin fashion. During this oral reading time, Ms. Davidson would go back to the selection and point out particular words that she noted the children were having difficulty with or she would clarify the definition of a certain word. While the children read, Ms. Davidson observed and kept anecdotal records of the children's progress on a small clipboard. On average during the study, each group met with Ms. Davidson approximately three to four times per week.

As narrative texts were the primary reading group source, the opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices during this sphere of activity were relatively few. However, Ms. Davidson occasionally planned additional related activities that involved the use of informational text. For example, after reading the words "sticky date" in one particular reading group's story, Ms. Davidson explained what dates were and how they could be used in cooking. The next day, Ms. Davidson brought in a selection of information books which gave factual

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<sup>22</sup> Although there are numerous definitions associated with the term "whole-language," Froese (1990) defines it as "a child-centred, literature-based approach to language teaching that immerses students in real communication situations whenever possible" (p.2).

<sup>23</sup> According to Fountas and Pinnell (1996), guided reading "is a context in which a teacher supports each reader's development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty" (p.2).

information on the growing of dates. She also brought fresh dates and homemade date squares for the class to taste. During this activity, Ms. Davidson integrated several learning outcomes by discussing several concepts such as the nutritional value of the food, the origin of the date, the climate needed for dates to grow, and the location of date trees.

Tara was a focused participant during guided reading lessons, following the text, answering questions, and sharing her background knowledge. Ivan was also a focused participant, but very quiet, rarely offering a comment unless he was directly spoken to. Ross was an enthusiastic participant but was often distracted. He was not always ready to read out loud at his appointed turn, having been involved in reading another area of the text or thinking about something else. Jack was also an enthusiastic participant in his group as long as the pace was relatively quick. If Ms. Davidson lingered too long on a teaching point, Jack would start to fidget and direct his attention elsewhere.

**Story time.** “Story time” (Ms. Davidson’s term) usually occurred during the 15 minute time period before recess. Ms. Davidson used this time to read aloud to the children. This activity allowed the children the opportunity to listen to more advanced texts than what they would normally read themselves. Story books and information texts were read aloud equally to the children. Often the informational texts were related to the particular theme the children were studying. For example, she read one information book on growing and harvesting apples to the children during their nutrition unit. Ms. Davidson added a great deal of personal information to these read alouds, providing the opportunity for the children to further discuss and share information, often in deeper and at more advanced levels.

**Group gathering.** The children came to the group gathering area to participate in Sharing (where each student had a weekly opportunity to talk about something in their lives that was important to them). This activity was entirely student run, with the helper of the day leading the routine. Similar to their journal entries, the focal children spoke on topics that interested them. Ivan usually spoke about his latest Lego construction, Tara spoke of something she did with her family or friends, Ross usually talked about his weekly soccer game or the score of the previous night’s football game, and Jack spoke of something he did with his dad or his little brother. Often the focal children brought in texts, pictures or artefacts to support their sharing session. For example, Ivan brought in an information book on sharks that his father had bought him during the school book fair. The freedom and flexibility of this 15 minute student-led activity enabled opportunities for the children to engage in IL practices.

**Library time.** The children in Ms. Davidson's class received one 40 minute library period per week. During the class' scheduled period, Ms. Davidson had her allotted preparation time while the teacher-librarian, Ms. Barrett, instructed her class. Ms. Barrett had recently graduated from the local university teacher education program and had spent the year previous to coming to Northwood Elementary as a teacher-on-call and as a part-time teacher. This was Ms. Barrett's first year in a permanent part-time position and her first year as a teacher-librarian. There was no formal information literacy program in place in the school.

Library time provided the focal children with many opportunities to engage in IL practices. There were opportunities for informational text reading and sharing, opportunities to browse, select and borrow from a collection of appropriately leveled informational texts, and opportunities to access other aspects of the library's resources such as computers, media, and the Internet. The children also had access to the teacher-librarian for an extended and more individually-based period of time. While the opportunities to engage in IL practices were abundant, the children experienced few. This will be brought forward and discussed in Chapter Five.

**Sustained silent reading (SSR) time/ Buddy reading.** The afternoon instructional program began with SSR period where the children were expected to read quietly to themselves for about 15 minutes. During this time the children read books and magazines borrowed from the classroom library shelves, or they read their own library books. My observations regarding the focal children's reading choice during this time indicated that all the focal children showed a preference for informational text. Interview data with the focal children and library borrowing records confirmed this preference.

After 15 minutes, the children were then able to read with a friend for an additional 15 minutes in any of the unoccupied areas of the classroom. The focal children enjoyed sharing their books with their friends and engaged in long conversations about the texts during this time. I rarely observed any of the focal children off-task.

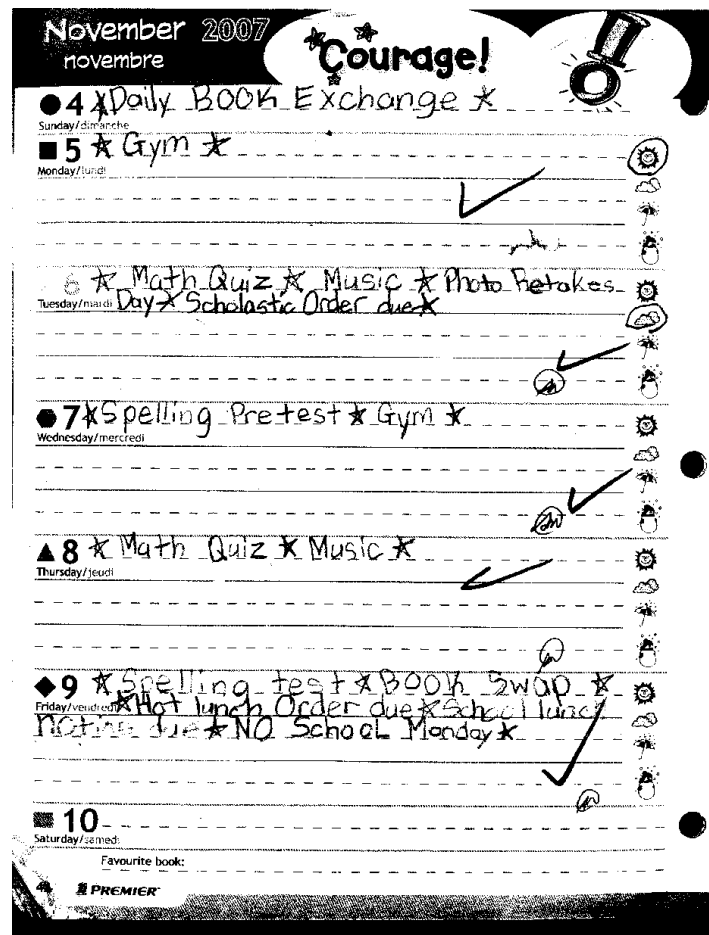
SSR and the subsequent Buddy reading were important avenues for printed and visual informational text reading and sharing in Ms. Davidson's classroom. The freedom to choose the material, and to share and discuss the material with another individual greatly enhanced their IL learning. As well, Ms. Davidson's forethought of providing other resources (such as pencils, paper and Post-it notes) to mark favourite passages and pictures for later sharing and discussion greatly enabled opportunities for the children to engage in IL practices.



**Class sharing of books.** After SSR and Buddy reading, the children gathered together as a group, and several of the children would share with the class something they found interesting in the books or texts they had been reading during SSR and Buddy reading time. The children used small Post-it notes made available to them to mark the pages they would like to share and discuss. Most often, their sharing dealt with something they found interesting in an information book. For example, Tara wanted to show some pictures of fruits she had found that were similar to those that had been discussed in a previous nutrition lesson; Ross wanted to share an interesting fact on mummification in order to clarify the difference between an Egyptian mummy and a Halloween mummy costume. Ms. Davidson expanded on what the children offered and posed questions to the entire class. After presenting, the children slowly walked amongst their seated classmates, showing the page or picture. This sharing of books and texts was a favorite activity with often ten or more children wanting to contribute.

**School planner routine.** As previously mentioned, the school planner was a school-sanctioned coil-bound book used to improve children's organization skills. The planner travels between the school and home on a daily basis and serves as a communication device between Ms. Davidson and the children's caregivers. At the beginning of the year, Ms. Davidson would have the children write in their planners those events (or "routines" as Ms. Davidson called them) that were unchanging from week to week (e.g., gym day, library day, spelling test day). At the beginning of the year, the children were assigned to write in two weeks' worth of these reminder events ahead of time as homework (see Figure 4.5) until they reached the planner's end. As there were always several special events that needed to be written for other days (e.g., Hot Lunch, Book Fair, fundraising events), the writing of the routines as homework served to reduce the daily time required of the children during class. At planner time, Ms. Davidson would also hand out school notices that were related to these and other events, reading them out loud and discussing the information contained in them with the children before the children placed the notices in the plastic pocket at the front of the planner. At the end of planner time (usually about 15 minutes), Ms. Davidson would walk around the children's desks ensuring that there were no messages she had missed from the home, and that the children had copied the information correctly from the blackboard into the planner. The school planner not only served as an important communication device between the school and the home, it served as an important venue for sharing information involving a variety of information genres.

**Figure 4.5: Planner routines**



**Science and Social Studies lessons.** The skills and concepts of Social Studies and Science were taught through a balance of direct instruction lessons and hands-on activities. These lessons were taught to the focal children through the use of integrated themes. These themes were large over-arching topics such as Fall/Harvest Time. These themes were then delineated into units of study (e.g., nutrition, safety) and these units introduced to the class by Ms. Davidson using a modification of the strategy developed by Ogle (1986) known as K-W-L (what I Know, what I Want to learn, and what I did Learn)<sup>24</sup>. For example, in the introductory

<sup>24</sup> KWL is an instructional reading strategy that is used to guide students through a text. Students begin by brainstorming everything they *Know* about a topic which is usually recorded in a column of a KWL chart. Students then generate a list of questions about what they *Want to Know* about the topic are also recorded on the chart. During or after reading, students answer the questions and the new information that they have *Learned* is recorded. While the KWL strategy functions to activate students' background knowledge in order to improve comprehension of an expository text, Ms. Davidson used KWL to access background knowledge about topics of study.

lesson to a unit on nutrition, Ms. Davidson asked the children what they already knew about nutrition and recorded their responses. From this discussion, Ms. Davidson then introduced an informational text on nutrition which she read aloud to the children. After reading, the children were required to complete a written activity that varied in form from day to day and included activities such as sequencing events, cloze activities, paragraph writing, answering questions, or list making. These activity worksheets were photocopied by Ms. Davidson for each student and placed in a folder. The students worked through the worksheets usually in a sequential order. Informational texts in the forms of books, newspapers, magazines and visuals were used extensively throughout these units of study by Ms. Davidson and the children for reading, writing, drawing, instruction and research. The spheres of activity that included Science and Social studies lessons offered perhaps the greatest opportunities for children to engage in IL practices. During these times, the children were exposed to many different kinds of information resources including books, photographs, visuals, maps, illustrations, print materials and electronic sources. During these lessons, Ms. Davidson often used the single computer in the classroom to access information from Internet sites (e.g., the current population of Canada) or to show pictures from her personal photo gallery (e.g., monarch butterfly chrysalises).

#### **4.5 Summary and discussion**

In this chapter, I have looked at the affordances of the school context that offered the focal children opportunities for engagement in IL practices. I accomplished this by first examining the personal literacy history, the IL practices, and the teaching philosophy of the focal teacher, Ms. Davidson. Here I demonstrated that Ms. Davidson's personal engagement with learning, her love of learning new information and her interest in new technologies and new literacies served as a foundation to support opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL. Ms. Davidson's goal for students to enjoy the process of learning and to enjoy the content of learning resonates not only in her teaching, but also is reflected in her organization of the classroom. The description of the classroom space in this chapter indicated Ms. Davidson's commitment to the children's engagement with IL resources – the classroom was well-stocked with information books and texts of which the focal children had continual access. Arrangement of students' desks in partner and group rows and the designation of open spaces

for individual, partner, small group, and large group discussion also facilitated the children's IL practices.

In this chapter, I have also demonstrated that the organization of the teaching day and the activities within (which I have discussed in terms of spheres of activity), offered numerous opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices. Most interestingly, four particular characteristics of the spheres of activity in context, as discussed below, appear to offer greater opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices.

**Non-structure within structure.** Those spheres of activity that offered an element of flexibility or non-structure (e.g., morning routines, library book exchange, Buddy reading) appear to provide greater engagement with IL than did those spheres of activity that involved formalized lessons. In the spheres of activity offering an element of flexibility, Ms. Davidson provided only particular time parameters and/or expectations for the activity. When the children worked within the activity, they engaged with informational texts, discussing, examining and communicating information. Conversations and ideas among the children were rich and flowed from the texts; however, the conversations within these events were largely unheard by Ms Davidson. The option for the children to physically move to alternative spaces in the classroom to share materials and texts also seemed to open the possibilities for engagement with IL.

**Choice within activity.** Somewhat related to the characteristic of non-structure within structure, the ability for the children to exercise choice within an activity was important to enhancing the opportunities for children to engage in IL. For example, if the children were allowed to choose to write or read about topics that interested them, the children's choices most often involved informational text. Had the focal children been offered the choice of reading appropriately leveled information books during Guided Reading time, I wondered if the focal children would have engaged more deeply with the lessons.

**Open-ended, integrated curriculum units.** Open-ended and integrated curriculum units, particularly in Language Arts and Social Studies and Science, enabled Ms. Davidson to address a large number of curricular learning outcomes while still responding to the children's interests. These units of study provided the flexibility, freedom, and choice around topics and materials and thus, greatly enhanced the opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices.

**Mediation.** Ms. Davidson provided extended opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices through her mediation of information, and in particular, in her mediation

of more advanced informational texts. During these events, she added a great deal of personal information providing opportunities for the children to further discuss and share information, often in deeper and at more advanced levels, and similar to the way in which Ms. Davidson learned herself.

In this chapter, I demonstrated how the school context afforded the focal children opportunities for engagement in IL practices. In the next chapter, I return to the definition of affordance to attend to the notion of affordance as some characteristics of activity in its context and how these may serve as constraints on opportunities for engagement in IL practices.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SCHOOL CONTEXT AFFORDANCES: FACTORS THAT CONSTRAIN OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN’S ENGAGEMENT IN IL PRACTICES**

### **5.0 Introduction**

Chapter Four addressed the first research question: How do school contexts afford opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices? I defined the term “affordance” as the characteristics of activity in its context that offers opportunities for children to engage in IL practices. In Chapter Four, it became evident that Ms. Davidson’s personal engagement with learning, her love of learning new information and her interest in technologies and new literacies served as a foundation to enable opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL. Further, I showed that Ms. Davidson’s goal for students to enjoy the process of learning and to enjoy the content of learning resonated not only in her teaching, but was reflected in her organization of the classroom. I also demonstrated that the organization of the teaching day and the activities within, which I discussed in terms of spheres of activity, offered numerous opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices, particularly those that offered the focal children choice and flexibility.

Bearing in mind that my definition of “affordance” includes the notion that some characteristics of activity in its context may serve as constraints on opportunities for engagement in IL practices, this chapter addresses the second part of the first research question: What factors constrain these school opportunities? My analysis is based on my examination of the individual spheres of activity in their embedded and collective nature within the school context. In particular, I explore four integrated factors serving as constraints on the focal children’s engagement in IL that emerged from this analysis: time, perceived needs, access to informational text, and disruption/interruption. Table 5.1 includes the definition of each factor as they are used in this chapter.

**Table 5.1: Factors that constrain opportunities for children to engage in IL practices in the school context**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Press of Time</b>	<b>Press of time</b> refers to the steady and significant force/pressure to complete something (e.g., an activity, the teaching of a learning outcome) by the teacher or the children within a specific period of time (e.g., within a class period, within a unit, within a reporting period).
<b>Perceived Needs</b>	<b>Perceived needs</b> refers to those educational (e.g., particular skills and knowledge) and physical (e.g., food, safety) requirements of the children in the classroom that the focal teacher perceived as necessitating priority attention.
<b>Access to informational text</b>	<b>Access to informational text</b> refers to the focal children's ability to obtain and use informational text from a variety of sources within the school and/or classroom setting.
<b>Disruption/interruption</b>	<b>Disruption/interruption</b> refers to the repeated disruption and/or confusion in the school and/or classroom setting.

For each factor, I present an interpretive account describing how opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices across the focal children were constrained in the school context including illustrations drawn from the data to support the claims made. It should be noted that although I tried to capture the complexity of some of the factors that constrained the focal children's opportunities for engagement in IL practices, the illustrations provided here only represent a limited number of typical examples and should also be seen as one of several possible interpretations.

The chapter is organized into four main sections, each of which examines a factor that contributes to the constraining of the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices in school. In the first section, I examine the factor of time, or more definitively the *press* of time. In the second section, I analyze the factor of perceived needs, and in the third section, I address the factor of access to informational text. Finally, I address the factor of disruption/interruption in the fourth section. The chapter closes with a summary and a discussion of the findings.

### **5.1 “We need to hurry...”: The press of time as a factor in constraining opportunities for children to engage in IL practices**

The conceptual category of *time*, or more specifically, the *press* of time was found to be extremely prevalent during analysis and this factor, which will be discussed further in the chapter, was tightly interwoven and connected to all factors that constrained opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the classroom’s physical environment and structured set-up afforded organized space and organized resources for the children to engage in IL practices. Looking outward from the spheres of activity to the broader organization of the school day, the classroom routines were designed and structured to be efficient and time-effective. The school day was bound into discrete subject blocks to ensure that over the course of one school week, all necessary curricular subjects and corresponding learning outcomes would be addressed. The classroom ethos was a reflection of this managed organization. The following excerpt from my field notes describes this:

I slip in the back door of the classroom and take my usual seat at the back table. The class is quiet except for the shuffle of paper and the sound of a child quietly reading aloud. No one acknowledges my presence as I begin to write in my notebook. Tara has her head down and is writing in her journal. Ross and Ivan are at the round table for their guided reading lesson and are waiting for their turn to read. They follow the text by moving their bookmarks down line by line. Jack returns from library book exchange. He enters the classroom quickly but quietly and goes to put his library book in his backpack which hangs on a hook at the back of the classroom. Ms. Davidson looks up briefly. Jack quickly returns to his seat and looks over at the boy in the next seat. Wordlessly he gets out his journal and opens it to the next free page. He looks up briefly at the whiteboard, looks again at his seatmate and begins to write. Several minutes later, the guided reading group quietly returns to their seats. Ross and Ivan quickly settle and open their journals. They pick up their pencils. Ross begins to write. Ivan taps his pencil on his head and looks at the agenda written on the whiteboard. Then he too, begins to write. Ross and Ivan’s return signals Tara to put her pencil down. She rises, pushes in her chair and goes to sit at the reading table where Ms. Davidson waits for the others in this reading group to join her.



As shown in this example, any time I entered the classroom, I would observe that the children were engaged in activity. The children knew the routines and procedures of the classroom well and my presence did not distract them. They diligently went about their work in this organized and well-planned classroom. Ms Davidson, too, was continually engaged with the children. There was a sense of efficiency, orderliness, and structure. The feeling of high expectation in this classroom was palpable.

Underlying this order, however, was a feeling of tension. Ms. Davidson often moved the children quickly from one event to the other; lessons began quickly and ended abruptly. Children physically “scrambled” from one activity to the next as Ms. Davidson waited for them, directing them to “hurry up.” Sensing this tension across a multitude of observations, I asked Ms. Davidson about the element of time in our interview:

MM = Marianne McTavish

MD = Ms. Davidson

MM: How would you describe the element of time in your job?

MD: There's never enough time...I hate that we're rushing the kids so much. I feel like these are rushed kids and they need an infinite amount of time and they will suck every amount of time you have possible. And so you have to move them along. That's just part of it. But it's such a shame when they're into something and you **have** to move them along.

These words were transformed by Ms. Davidson into events (as observed in her actions), into comments to the children, and into the tone of her voice. For example, as indicated in Chapter Four, the sharing of informational texts after the silent reading period was a favourite IL practice for the children as well as for Ms. Davidson, who added personal comments to the children's sharing. Over the course of the study however, the number of children wanting to share grew

exponentially and each child's time to share their texts became drastically reduced. This was demonstrated on one particular occasion as recorded in my field notes:

Six children were waiting at the front of the whiteboard to share something from their SSR time. A boy was sharing a picture of a dinosaur that had recently been discovered. The rest of the class eagerly responded to the boy's sharing and began calling out questions. The boy answered several of the children's questions and even more questions were called out. Ms. Davidson told the children: "If you have questions, put your hand up but we really have to move on..." A minute later she abruptly told the children in a disgruntled tone, "that's it; close [your books] up!" and then moved the children onto the next lesson. The following day, at book sharing time, Ms. Davidson apologetically told the children, "I'm sorry boys and girls, but today will be the last sharing session after book time. There are too many people who want to share and it is taking too long. We are running out of time . . . we won't have time for gym<sup>25</sup>. So unless it is your particular day for sharing, you'll have to wait."

When I later asked Ms. Davidson about her decision to curtail this important IL practice, she stated:

I had to make it a rule that the kids can only share things when it is their assigned sharing day. It takes too much time to get through everyone so it has to be planned this way. I know they love it and they just want people to talk to them about it, but I feel guilty about the amount of time I spend doing this.

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<sup>25</sup> How this announcement was phrased was particularly interesting. The disappointment in not being able share informational texts was somewhat softened in the trade-off in the unspoken assurance that the children would get gym-time, a popular activity with the class.

While this IL practice of sharing books was continued, it was modified and adapted in its curtailment, effectively regulating the access to each student's opportunity to share and recontextualize information.

Ms. Davidson's sense of guilt regarding spending too much time to engage in the children's interests seemed to put her in a bind for which she saw no easy solution. This created a pervasive atmosphere of tension during the lessons. While Ms. Davidson commented that the children were "rushed kids," she reinforced this even in the language she used. For example, Ms. Davidson wanted to show the children digital pictures of her trip to Mongolia, to support her answer to a question that the children had asked about the Genghis Khan era. This question had come after the children had been looking through an information book on ancient times. Following the discussion, Ms. Davidson artfully linked the question to their current study of nutrition, and sought to extend their learning by bringing in some visual texts in the form of digital pictures that she had taken while on this trip to Mongolia. Ms. Davidson's choice was to bring these digital pictures to school via the computer and show them to the class using this mode. This was not an easy task for Ms. Davidson as her home computer and her school computer programs were not compatible. She needed to scan the pictures at home and then email them to her school account so that she could share them on the school computer. Again, as outlined in the last chapter, Ms. Davidson wanted to share with the children the excitement of learning new facts and chose a method that was similar to her own interests and learning style. In order to get the class to quickly come to attention, Ms. Davidson urgently told the children, "We need to hurry because I want to show you my pictures of Mongolia! Hurry up!". The children responded to this and quickly hurried through their work in order to meet Ms. Davidson in front of the computer to view these most interesting pictures. The children gained a great deal of information from the pictures and the ensuing discussion, but within a limited and compartmentalized time frame in which Ms. Davidson controlled the viewing.

While Ross, Tara and Ivan were able to cope with the ordered structure and fast pace of the classroom, Jack was less able. Jack often lagged behind in the classroom routines and expectations. For example, writing in the planner was a daily routine that met several learning outcomes in the Personal Planning/Career Education IRP and was a conduit of information between the home and school. The expectation for the children was that they were to bring their planners from home to school and back home every day. Several times during this study, Jack came to school without his planner. Ms. Davidson's annoyance grew with each passing day of

the absentee planner until one day her annoyance escalated into exasperation and frustration. Although Jack told Ms. Davidson on this day that “he forgot again” she reproached him and asked him to check his backpack. He did not follow her instructions (presumably he knew the planner was not in his backpack) but instead got a piece of paper and wrote down the day’s messages. He did not get any further attention from Ms. Davidson, nor did she check his paper to see if he had copied the information correctly, as she did with the other children’s planners. Unfortunately, caught in the constraint of time, Ms. Davidson seemed to channel her energies into those children who could efficiently handle class routines and expectations. In juxtaposition to this event, in a later interview, Ms. Davidson and I discussed teaching children in an inner-city school and how this impacts her teaching. She states:

I think that understanding these kids is necessary. It’s a miracle they’re getting to school. And we have to not [condemn] them too much because they’re late or they’re not able to pay attention. You always have to keep that in mind – where these kids come from, what’s their daily life like. We would be horrified if (...) we knew where a lot of them [were] coming from. And so, an understanding that these kids aren’t getting the organizational skills [is necessary].

Despite her own words, Ms. Davidson found it difficult to keep this understanding at the forefront, particularly when it was overridden by the press of time. Since maintaining a planner is a learning outcome for the Personal Planning/Career Education IRP, Ms. Davidson’s exasperation in not being able to teach Jack to fulfill this outcome is evident. However, it is also important to note and will be discussed further in the dissertation, that Ms. Davidson’s understanding of these inner-city children, and Jack’s home life in particular, may be somewhat limited.

In a further example of the press of time as a factor that constrained opportunities for engagement in IL practices, Jack was very interested in an introductory discussion his guided reading group was having about the table of contents to a new book. The following is taken from my field notes:

Underneath the guided reading table, Jack's legs are swinging as he flips through the new book. Ms. Davidson tells the group to turn to the first page of the book, and then points to the postal code that is on a sign in an illustration. She asks the group if they know what that part of the address is called. The group does not respond. Ms. Davidson tells the group that it's the postal code, and that every address has a postal code. She moves to the top of the next page and points to it, saying "This is...?" and waits for a response. Jack reads out loud, "Tabble [sic] of Con....and stops. Ms. Davidson instructs the group to cover over "con" with their fingers, and then asks them to read the rest of word. Ms. Davidson then explains what a table of contents is to the group, "...it's what's inside, this table of contents tells us what's inside." Ms. Davidson moves on to direct the group to turn to the story they are going to read, and begins to talk about the story's illustrations and the predictions the students could make about the story. After a few minutes, Jack suddenly calls out that he remembers seeing another table of contents in an information book on dogs. Ms. Davidson responds to this saying, "We're not talking about that. We have to move on ... hurry and find the story."

Here, we see Jack engaging in the conversation, despite the fact that the teaching had moved on to another point. When Jack found an opportunity to contribute, his comment was somewhat unrelated to the teaching point, but nevertheless it was an indication that he had made a connection to the text. As the group had been already been in discussion for several minutes and Ms. Davidson needed to move on she told Jack, "We're not talking about that." In a later explanation of this comment, Ms Davidson told me that she needed Jack to stay focused on the teaching point. She said:

You can't stay on [their interests]. I mean sometimes you change your schedule. You have to and you do. But you can't always [change your schedule]. There are a lot of compromises that we have to make because we're **so** rushed and there's **so** much to get through.

This initial observation and explanation from Ms. Davidson made me wonder if she made this in reference to all the children or just to Jack's group who were placed in a reading group because they were reading far below grade level. While this example is specific to Jack, I did note in other observations that this type of exchange occurred with other children in the class.

Ms. Davidson's comment above further emphasizes the curriculum that teachers must "get through." As outlined in the last chapter, the Integrated Resources Packages (IRPs) and the corresponding Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs) that serve as the grade two curriculum framework are very comprehensive. Ms. Davidson, a very conscientious teacher, felt a need to "cover the curriculum." This was brought forward most poignantly in the following exchange:

MM = Marianne McTavish

MD = Ms. Davidson

MM: I would like to go back to a point you just made earlier. You were telling me that teachers feel under pressure. . .

MD: Every time I look at the PLOs I start sweating.

MM: Why?

MD: Because it's just so huge.

MM: Yes.

MD: And you start reading through all of those IRPs.

MM: Do you feel the need to . . . really cover **everything**?

MD: Yeah, and I never do. I'm **so** overwhelmed. I always feel like I'm failing.

While this exchange began with my reference to a previous comment that Ms. Davidson made about "teachers" in general, Ms. Davidson immediately turned the conversation to speak of

herself. It is evident here that Ms. Davidson takes the responsibility of teaching very seriously and views her inability to move through the curriculum quickly enough as a failing. This is a disheartening position in which to be. Yet, needing to do her best, Ms. Davidson makes curricular decisions to include what she feels is important. She continued:

And yes, there are lots of important things that need to be addressed. I feel that sometimes it's a bit choppy how we go through the day. And yet, I don't see how you could do it any other way, when some of these [learning outcomes] are very distinct from each other. Yes, you can do some cross-curricular teaching. There's a lot of that that goes on. But there are also these chunks that [you] need to get through and you just need to move on.

The “chunks” to which Ms. Davidson refers were essentially blocks of skills or content that she felt could not be simply addressed in an integrated way. As discussed in the following sections, these chunks were seen as either necessary components that Ms. Davidson felt needed to be “covered” during the grade two curriculum, or they were sets of skills that needed to be taught and reinforced before moving on to the next concept.

Feeling this press of time so acutely, Ms. Davidson developed strategies in order to help her manage teaching the content. However, I argue that that these strategies further constrained the opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices.

#### **5.1.1 Strategies used to ameliorate the press of time**

Ms. Davidson used several different strategies, both mindful and unconscious, over the course of the study to not only address the press of time, but also to maintain her own philosophic tenets on teaching and learning and to meet curriculum demands.

**Integrated units of study.** The first time-saving strategy Ms. Davidson employed to meet multiple learning outcomes of the curriculum was to teach through integrated units of study. This method is promoted by the Ministry of Education as referenced in the name of the curricular documents – *Integrated Resource Package*. Further, curricular integration is endorsed

by the *Primary program: A framework for teaching*<sup>26</sup>, a recommended resource Ms. Davison used in her planning. Ms. Davidson mainly used thematically integrated units (based on topics such as nutrition) to unify learning experiences. As mentioned previously in Ms. Davidson's interview excerpt in this chapter, cross-curricular teaching was enacted to help ease Ms. Davidson's anxiety to teach all the learning outcomes.

**A “pedagogy of telling.”** The second strategy Ms. Davison used to alleviate the press of time was to adopt, as I illustrate below, a “pedagogy of telling.”<sup>27</sup> Under pressure to cover content, Ms. Davidson relied on telling as a teaching method. For example, during the daily weather routine, the children noted that there had been a particularly long period of rainy days. The following exchange, taken from my researcher notes, was observed:

The children are seated on the floor watching the helper of the day record the weather on a chart. Ms. Davidson makes a comment that all the rain we have been experiencing is helping all the trees to grow. Tara comments, “We live in a rain forest!” Ms Davidson acknowledges this but elaborates. “We live in a temperate rain forest, not a tropical rain forest,” she states. “We don’t have tropical rain forests in Canada, except at the Aquarium. We are too close to the north.” Ms. Davison goes over to the globe on the table and picks it up so that all the children may see. She turns to the class as she points to the equator. “This is called \_\_\_\_\_?” The children yell out, “The equator!” Ms Davidson tells the children the equator cuts the world in half. She points to the area on the globe where the tropical rain forests are. She tells the children, “This area is half-way around the world. Only BC has rainforests. No other part in Canada has this.” Ms. Davidson then points to an area on a map on the wall. “This here,” she says, “is grassland. And this is tundra. But past the mountains you get into the interior and not into the rain forests. We have a desert in BC, in the Okanagan. And over here (points to the prairie

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<sup>26</sup> *Primary program: A framework for teaching* (Ministry of Education, 2000) is a document recognized in ministerial orders as an educational program guide. It incorporates information on how policies and provincially prescribed curriculum can be interpreted and implemented.

<sup>27</sup> A pedagogy of telling is described by O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje (1995) as “the predominance of lecture and recitation to cover content” (p. 551). Although usually linked with instruction in secondary schools, using such a method acts to establish and maintain control over the content, the pace of delivery, and the pace of classroom interaction. A pedagogy of telling provides an efficient way to respond to organizational and time constraints teachers face within an institutionalized curriculum.



provinces), in the winter it can get really, really cold. Saskatchewan and the other prairie provinces can get hot and we can grow grain really well there.” At this point Ross calls out, “I came from Saskatoon!” and another boy adds, “My dad saw the Northern Lights in Saskatchewan!” Ms. Davidson, following this line of thinking responds, “The Northern Lights are an atmospheric phenomenon. I’ve only seen them in Alberta but they’ve only been white. You need to go further north to see all the spectacular colors.”

In this excerpt, Ms. Davidson takes Tara’s comment on the rainforest and provides more information than is contextually necessary. In doing so, she manages to make connections to the class’ study on nutrition, and in particular to growing grain, a focal point in the unit. While this would be an exceptional opportunity to use informational text to support Tara’s comment, or to conduct a mini-lesson on how to find more information on several of the topics Ms. Davidson covered in this brief “telling,” the discussion abruptly ended and the children went on to their math lesson. What is also interesting about this example (and several others found in the data) is that Ms. Davidson *does* supply the children with a lot of information – information she has gleaned from her own IL practices and from her extensive travel. She has certainly piqued the children’s interest as I documented their ability to make connection after connection to what she has told them. It appears however, that not only is time a factor here in the telling (i.e., a “short-cut” to researching and communicating information) but perhaps it is Ms. Davidson’s assumption that the children simply do not understand the concept of a rainforest and feels a need to tell them. This point is similarly documented in secondary literacy education research and the use of texts. Moje (2000) revealed in a case study of her own experiences as a high school biology teacher that she believed that she needed to tell children what certain texts “said” so that they would have a basic understanding of concepts. She resorted to this pedagogy of telling because she believed that the children would not read the texts or if they did, they would not understand them. Other studies have found that teachers are concerned that many children will not or cannot read assigned pages from textbooks, in part because the textbooks are too difficult or poorly written, or children lack necessary background knowledge (Armbruster, 1984; Beck, McKeown, & Gronmoll, 1989; McKeown & Beck, 1990; McKeown, Beck, Sinatra, & Loxterman, 1992). In Ms. Davidson’s case, I argue that the press of time causes her to adopt a

similar strategy because she believes that in her informative “telling,” the children would get a more appropriate, on-student-level account of specific information within a fraction of the time. Further, Ms. Davidson’s assumption that the children lack background knowledge may also be the impetus behind her pedagogy of telling. This is evidenced by a comment she made during an interview:

...they [the children] lack experience, they lack background knowledge. They lack vocabulary of the world . . . they’ve got their own little world and it is quite small. And so a huge responsibility [of mine] is to broaden their experiences.

Ms. Davidson’s sense of responsibility to broaden the children’s experience is genuine, but how this is accommodated, I argue, with the factor of time as a constraint, is that the learning in school is limited to the information Ms. Davidson tells them. On a final point, as it will be further discussed in following sections, in meeting the children’s needs for increasing background knowledge and increasing vocabulary, Ms. Davidson misses important opportunities to use informational texts. As other researchers have pointed out, reading and listening to informational text can develop children’s knowledge about the natural and social world (Anderson, E. & Guthrie, 1999; Duke & Kays, 1998), and this could well-serve the children in Ms. Davidson’s classroom.

**Selection of core reading materials.** The third strategy that Ms. Davidson used to manage the press of time was her selection of reading materials for her core reading instruction. As previously mentioned, Ms. Davidson used an older anthology-style basal reader series from the early 1980s to use with her guided reading groups. This particular series was a leveled collection of stories and poems from well-known children’s authors. Ms. Davidson used this series because “the kids like it, it has a good variety of stories that are high interest, and the pictures match the text.” She also added:

Using the anthologies is easier than using the leveled books in the bookroom. When I was doing Guided Reading with the individual stories, I was up and down almost every

day to get new books for my different groups. Using the anthologies is much easier. They are leveled, and there are several stories in each anthology. You just move through the different books in the series.

This is a curious finding. On her arrival to the school in 1999, Ms. Davidson was instrumental in setting up the collection of leveled books at Northwood Elementary. Having used leveled books with success in her previous school, she organized the current collection of books at Northwood Elementary and initiated the buying of several other sets of books to add to the collection. Several professional development days were spent on this project, and on its completion, the primary teachers had an extensive and organized collection of leveled books. These books contained a variety of narrative and informational titles in sets. The primary teachers were able to use these sets on a sign-out system which ensured that all teachers had equal access. Over time, Ms. Davidson told me, she took to using the anthologies to save herself time. As these anthologies contained only stories and poems, the use of these anthologies constrained the children's opportunities to engage in IL practices.

**Timing of classroom events.** Finally, Ms. Davidson used a fourth strategy to ameliorate the press of time. Concerned with the physical aspect of time, Ms. Davidson used her digital watch to time events, particularly those that involved classroom routines or class discussions. For example, one of the "chores" that the children participated in was the timing of the daily sharing routine. The role of student time keeper was to give each student two minutes to share something they had brought to school or tell about an event in their lives. This was a coveted job as the student time keeper was allowed to operate Ms. Davidson's personal watch. As there were approximately four to five children on the sharing list per day, giving two minutes to share per child ensured that the sharing session lasted only 10-15 minutes. If the student went over the two minute time limit, they were asked to finish their sentence and to sit down. In an instructional example of this timing, I use this excerpt taken from my field notes:

At Social Studies time, Ms. Davidson began reading the children an information book entitled, *Fishing Communities*, as part of their unit on Canada. She paused after reading the title and asked the children, "Why do we fish?" The children responded quickly and excitedly. Overwhelmed by the multitude of comments, Ms.

Davidson acknowledged that the children did indeed have a lot to contribute about fishing and told them that she would give the children two minutes to talk with each other. The children began to talk to each other excitedly as Ms. Davidson started her digital timer. As soon as two minutes were up, she stopped them and returned to reading the story, and resumed the lesson as planned.

The use of Ms. Davidson's digital watch figured predominantly throughout the study, usually when the children had a great deal to verbally share with Ms. Davidson, but also when Ms. Davidson needed to move on with the lesson. In another example, the children were each given an information book that would be a core resource for their air and water science unit. Wanting to give the children an opportunity to look through the book in order to get a sense of what they were going to encounter over the course of the unit, Ms. Davidson used her watch to give them five minutes to do so. When the watch signaled the five minute mark, Ms. Davidson stopped the children and moved them into the planned lesson.

The digital timer gave Ms. Davidson what she believed was a viable strategy against her time limitations. This piece of technology provided a workable solution that allowed her the ability to adhere to her belief that these children needed time for talk and to share their life experiences and interests. It was a compromise of sorts that continued to resonate throughout the study and will be discussed in further sections.

In sum, in this well-structured and organized classroom, I argue that the press of time was a contributing factor that constrained the focal children's opportunities for IL practices. Coupled with a curriculum press, and a particularly essentialized understanding of her students' funds of knowledge, Ms. Davidson makes particular modifications to her teaching practice in attempting to ameliorate this press of time. What appears to be at play, however, is that Ms. Davidson inadvertently contributes to this press by eliminating the depth of the learning and thereby constraining the opportunity for the children to construct meaning for themselves. I believe that Ms. Davidson's comment regarding the "choppiness" of her teaching, and essentially, the learning, is an accurate observation. These ideas will continue to be reinforced in greater depth in the following sections.

## 5.2 “They are so needy!”: The factor of perceived needs that constrained children’s opportunities to engage in IL practices

The second parameter that constrained the opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices in the school context, concerns the factor of perceived needs. Specifically, this factor was centered on Ms. Davidson’s perception of the educational and physical needs of the children in her classroom of which Tara, Ross, Ivan and Jack were members. In this analysis I focus particularly on Ms. Davidson’s perceptions of the needs of the children and the impact these perceptions have on Ms. Davidson’s curriculum choices and teaching methodologies.

Ms. Davidson remarked in our interview that she believes children are coming to school with fewer life skills and more needs than when she first started teaching 15 years ago. Her tenure at this inner-city school has led her to believe that she can’t assume that the children she teaches know basic hygiene skills or even how to look after themselves. She states:

They come in **so** needy... they don’t even like looking after their own supplies or being organized. They have trouble listening and understanding instructions. They’re really unfocussed. I think a lot of them come in not having eaten a decent breakfast, so their brains aren’t working. They’re fuzzy.

Ms. Davidson’s comments were not unsubstantiated in my observations of the children in the classroom. Although my observations in the four focal children’s homes indicated that Tara, Ross, Jack and Ivan did indeed eat breakfast, some children in Ms. Davidson’s class did come to school without eating breakfast. My observations during recess and lunch periods also indicated that some children did not have appropriate nutritious foods to eat. This fact was greatly distressing to Ms. Davidson, and she fully supported the BC Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program and the School Meal Program that was available to all the children in the school.

In a related point regarding basic life skills, Ms. Davidson also perceived that many of her students come “from homes that are very disorganized.” She comments:

The parents are doing the best they can. And they are rushed parents. They’re working hard and they’re struggling themselves. They’re maxed for their

abilities and what they're doing. And [the children] are coming in with not as much parent input. Not as much family time: talking together, having fun together, doing physical stuff - sports, going for a walk, going through the ravine, looking at the birds, talking about what they're seeing. . .

This quote is very similar to a comment made by the focal teacher in my pilot study who stated that that she wished that her students' parents would "just talk to their kids." As will be confirmed in the next chapter, I found that the parents of the focal children did a number of different activities with their children, and talked a great deal to them although in very different ways around very different topics that did not match school discourses or school communicative practices. Further, these children were, in fact, very organized and skilled in taking care of themselves and others in their out-of-school environments.

Ms. Davidson also believed that her students were lacking social skills because "they watch too much TV and they play too many games on the computer." She connects this lack of social skills to the children's apparent inability to work together cooperatively and to solve problems independently without adult intervention. She reflected on her own childhood:

We had so much opportunity to play with other people. And we had to work things out. If we wanted to have friends, we better be able to get along and figure things out or we couldn't play anything if we couldn't get along. We didn't want our parents to come and intervene. And we really knew how to get along and organize and take turns. [My students] don't have the skills that we used to have coming into kindergarten . . . So everything slows down.

This last utterance refers to the fact that Ms. Davidson feels a need to take more time to develop the social skills and "a lot of the basic stuff that's not even mentioned in the curriculum" that is

assumed is already in place by the people who are writing the curriculum. She continued, “if they’re not getting it at school, they’re not going to get it, and they get further behind. We have to...step **way** back and do some really basic things and give them experiences so they can function.” I believe that Ms. Davidson, mindful of meeting these perceived needs of the children before attempting to cover the mandated curriculum, feels more pressure, ultimately contributing to the feelings of inadequacy and stress that were explored earlier in the chapter.

During an interview I probed some of Ms. Davidson’s comments with regard to the home influence with respect to literacy and in particular, IL. She responded:

There are some families that are very literate. It doesn’t mean highly educated, necessarily. But they’re interested – they read the newspaper. They watch the news. They keep informed. They go on the computer to find out information. But a lot of [families] who have computers only play games on them. And they don’t watch the news; they don’t have access to informational books in their home. And some don’t have access to **any** books. So these kids are coming in [to school], from a print-poor environment [and from] an information-poor environment. Their parents aren’t readers. They don’t enjoy reading. They don’t have those materials in their house. I’d say there’s a lack of informational material in homes.

Although Ms. Davidson had the perception that her students’ homes are devoid of print, as I discuss in the next chapter, there was a good deal of print in the focal children’s homes, as well as mediation around the print. Again, this print was not related to school-like genres in most circumstances, but rather print genres that were pertinent to getting things done for daily life, such as calendars, forms, bills, flyers, church notices, etc., the genres not commonly found, drawn attention to, or used in school literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 1996). As well, Ms. Davidson’s comments also suggest that the homes of the children in her class lack informational “material,” another very broad and sweeping generalization.

Unfortunately, these perceptions of working class parents and homes dominate the discourse and overshadow the more complex issues behind them.

### **5.2.1 Strategies used to meet the perceived needs of the children**

As mentioned in the previous section, as she saw it, Ms. Davidson was faced with meeting a number of educational and physical needs of some of her students, such as proper nutrition, organizational skills, background knowledge, social skills, and literacy skills. She believed that she needed to address these fundamental skills first before she began teaching to the learning outcomes of the mandated curriculum. As with ameliorating the press of time discussed previously in this chapter, Ms. Davidson also developed some strategies to assist with meeting the children's educational and physical needs.

**Teaching integrated units.** Teaching a large integrated unit was the first strategy Ms. Davidson employed to address those “chunks” of skills or knowledge that Ms. Davidson felt were vitally important and foundational and “what they need for their life right now.” For example, as previously mentioned, an ongoing unit was developed around the topic of nutrition. According to Ms. Davidson, this unit (which went on for 12 weeks) covered only three prescribed learning outcomes. But given the fact that some of the children came to school hungry and had poor nutritional foods in their lunches, Ms. Davidson made it a point that all her students gained information on the importance of good nutrition. During this unit, Ms. Davidson not only discussed nutrition, she also brought in the topics of Halloween safety, fire safety, “stranger danger,” and traffic safety. These topics, Ms Davidson stated, were “all really important, but not accommodated in the IRPs.” Ms. Davidson commented that given the needs of the children in her classroom, knowledge of these topics could mean the difference “between life and death,” and she was willing to spend the time to teach what she saw as vital topics.

**Elimination of computer time.** In an early interview with Ms. Davidson, I commented on her use of the computer:

MM = Marianne McTavish

MD = Ms. Davidson

MM: So you're pretty computer savvy. . .

MD: Yes. But I don't do it in the classroom. I find that it takes up [too much time]. I find that our



curriculum is changing so frequently and there is so much more put on us that I'm just scrambling to keep up with that. And I find that getting the kids on computers is frustrating because they really require a lot of help. They don't read and most of their experience with computers is playing games, not reading information. And I think at this age, it's not so valuable. I think they'll easily pick it up later on.

This excerpt is related to the earlier theme of the press of time. Ms. Davidson has to make decisions between keeping up with changing curriculum<sup>28</sup> and other demands that she can't afford to spend the time helping the children when they will easily pick up the computer skills later on. In the next excerpt, taken from the same interview, Ms. Davidson further discusses her reasons for limiting the children's access to information and information technology:

And I love computers. And I think information technology is really valuable. It can be fabulous. It can also be really dangerous. And I feel [that] for primary kids they need other things first that we need to provide [them with]. I think computers cost way too much money and once they get a certain age, our technicians won't fix them anymore. And we're not given any training. It's up to us to learn this [technology] on our own time and it's constantly changing. The amount of time it takes these kids to just work on a keyboard and understand the function is just [too much] (...) I don't know that it's worth it. I think we can do things that are way more valuable for their literacy and for their

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<sup>28</sup> At the time of the study, several IRPs in different curricular/subject areas and at different grade levels were being rewritten and were in different phases of implementation. Some of the changes included the redistribution of several learning outcomes across the primary grade levels. Each new school year teachers have to review all the learning outcomes for their particular grade level across the subject areas to ensure that they are teaching the mandated learning outcomes for the particular new IRP rather than the phased-out learning outcomes from years previous.

understanding of life than spending time working at the computer.

Ms. Davidson appears to have the mindset that computer use for young children may be “dangerous” and that her particular group of children needs to acquire a particular “type” of literacy that she believes will serve them better not only in school but in their lives in general. Here the elimination of computer time serves two purposes. First, it frees time for Ms. Davidson to concentrate on the more “valuable” aspects of literacy that this particular group of young children need (e.g., decoding and encoding), and it eliminates the “danger” of exposing young children to the content on the Internet which may be potentially harmful. However, in doing so, Ms. Davidson constrains opportunities for children to engage in IL practices.

**Socialization time.** Finally, to address the perceived lack of social skills of the children, Ms. Davidson tried to give them more opportunities to socialize. For example, in order to socially engage the children and to accommodate their “fuzziness” in the morning, Ms. Davidson gave them talk time in the morning before the children began their journal writing. She stated, “I give them three to five minutes just to talk so that they kind of are socialized and maybe get ideas for their journal. And then they can settle in.” As I pointed out in the example of the boys discussing the volcano book during the morning opening routines in Chapter Four, this time did give the children an opportunity to share, communicate and discuss information. As I pointed out in Chapter Four, my sense was that Ms. Davidson was largely unaware of how this time affected the focal students’ IL practices.

In sum, Ms. Davidson’s perception of the needs of the children in her class served to impact her teaching practices in ways she felt her students would gain life skills and enable them to have an understanding of the world. However, Ms. Davidson’s assumptions regarding the children’s needs appeared to be applied to *all* of her children. Although Ms. Davidson seems intent on giving children “what they need for life right now,” it calls into question the notion of who decides what’s best for children. In her struggle to give all her students what she believes is a solid literacy foundation for the future, Ms. Davidson also constrains those opportunities for children to engage in IL practices, and those which may very well prepare the children for working in a global economy.

### **5.3 “You can only choose one information book...”: Access to informational texts as a factor that constrained opportunities for children to engage in IL practices in the school context**

Access to informational texts in the school context was another factor that constrained opportunities for children to engage in IL practices in the school context. As previously mentioned, informational texts in the form of books were a very prominent resource in Ms. Davidson’s classroom. Despite receiving yearly funds from the government to purchase a wide variety of resources to support learning, including digital and visual media, Ms. Davidson used her allocated funds to purchase exclusively books and print materials. This finding is similar to the focal teacher in my pilot study who also used money to buy only information books to support her program. When asked about her choices of resources, Ms. Davidson stated that she wanted more age-appropriate information books, as many of her personal books were indeed above the reading levels of her students. As a result, the focal children in this classroom were exposed mainly to information found in books.

Ms. Davidson used the school library to supplement her collection of books and the students helped her to make choices for the classroom book shelves during their scheduled library time. Ms. Davidson usually chose information books that corresponded with her integrated units of study, and her students chose information books and narratives that piqued their interests.

The children in Ms. Davidson’s class received one 40 minute library period per week. During the class’ scheduled period, Ms. Davidson had her allotted preparation time while the teacher-librarian, Ms. Barrett, instructed her class. I observed several library periods during the course of the study. Each lesson followed a similar pattern : a whole class gathering to read a narrative text that was usually thematic based [e.g., *The Berenstain Bears Go to School* (Berenstain & Berenstain, 1978), *The Umbrella* (Brett, 2004), *If you Take a Mouse to School* (Numeroff, 2002)]; the completion of an individual activity sheet (e.g., a colouring page, a word search, an acrostic poem), and an exchange of the children’s library books. During these periods, I did not observe any informational texts being read to the children. I also observed that the information books were located at the very far end of the library toward the back, where the children were allowed limited access, due to the teacher-librarian’s belief that these texts were too difficult for primary students.

On one occasion, during a focused observation, I noted an exchange between Tara and Ms. Barrett. The following is taken from my field notes:

The students were doing their weekly book exchange. As they finished choosing, they brought their books up to Ms. Barrett to have them checked out with their library card number. Tara had chosen two books this session – two information books from the same series, at about a grade 2 reading level. After waiting her turn in line, Tara brought the books to Ms. Barrett to have her scan them. Ms. Barrett looked at the books and said, “Oh no, Tara, remember? You can only choose one nonfiction book and the other has to be a picture book. So you need to decide which one of these you want to take back to the shelf.” The expression on Tara’s face showed confusion. Ms. Barrett repeated what she said, and Tara understood. Tara stepped back from the line of children and spent several minutes looking through each book in order to select only one of the information books. Finally, she closed the books, and with a sigh, handed one to Ms. Barrett and then slowly walked to the picture book section to choose her second book.

When I asked Ms. Barrett to clarify this rule, she stated that the students were “only allowed to take one non-fiction book out because [these books] were too hard for them, but maybe after Christmas they could.” Similar to Moje’s (2000) belief that this type of text would be too difficult for students to read and understand, the teacher-librarian also met this challenge by limiting the students’ number of information books. The result was to effectively limit the children’s access to information. This finding was also supported in the data I collected on the focal children’s library book choices. Although two books in total could be checked out for each student, only one book could be an information book. However, two picture books taken out at a time was acceptable. Interestingly, when I took a thorough survey of the information books available to the children in the library, I found a great many information books at the grade two level. Certainly, a number of higher leveled information books were located at the very end of the library and out of direct view of Ms. Barrett. Whether she felt she needed to be there to assist the children to make what she felt were appropriate choices, (which would take her away from checking out books), I can only make assumptions. But it does seem curious that

the children would be limited to only one information book due to reading level difficulty when there were, in my opinion, a good deal of appropriate level information books available.

A second example that limited not only the focal children's access to informational texts but also the entire school (staff and students included) was observed in the principal's budgetary decision to terminate the school's subscription to the provincial newspaper. Before the termination, each class received a copy of the daily newspaper. As part of her own IL practices, Ms. Davidson believed that the newspaper was a vital and important genre in order to gain information within the local and global world. Ms. Davidson would use this newspaper to point out and discuss particular current events during her teaching, and then she would leave the newspaper out for the children to peruse during the day. As a result, the students had a heightened awareness of this source of information. For example, Tara often commented on articles found in the school copy of the newspaper, reporting that her mother read her the same article at home.

As a cost saving measure, the principal believed that the funds spent on the newspaper subscription could be better utilized. Upon learning of this unilateral decision, the teaching staff at Northwood Elementary lobbied to get this decision reversed, justifying the expense of a newspaper subscription would meet the school's goals to promote literacy more effectively than the purchase of new office furniture. At the time of writing this dissertation, the subscription to the newspaper had been reinstated.

A final example of the factor of children's access to informational texts in school deals with the children's access to school computers, and more specifically, the children's access to the Internet. The school had two class "banks" of computers; the first bank was a group of approximately 20 older desk-top computers with Internet access located in a specific lab setting in the ground floor library. This lab was open to all teachers on a sign-up basis, and teachers were able to secure permanent lab times each week if they so chose. The second bank contained 20 lap-top computers which were located on a mobile cart that could be wheeled into the upper-floor classrooms. This bank was stored in a locked cupboard. These computers, awarded to the intermediate staff of Northwood elementary after submitting a comprehensive proposal for inclusion in a district pilot project, were originally used to promote writing instruction with grade five students. Although priority was given to the intermediate teachers, these computers could also be signed out by the primary classes. These computers also had access to the Internet.

For reasons outlined in the last section, Ms. Davidson chose to not to take advantage of this permanent lab time offered to her and her class, despite her extensive personal use of the Internet at home and in the classroom. Further, the children were not allowed to access the classroom computer or Internet as it was deemed for Ms. Davidson's use only.

### **5.3.1 Strategies used to enhance children's access to informational text**

As mentioned in the preceding section, Ms. Davidson employed strategies to enhance the children's access to informational texts. First, as she did not want to rely on or have the children use the school's computer technology, she opted to purchase up-to-date information books at appropriate reading levels for her students. In this way, she could store the books in her classroom and access them immediately. She could manage the children's use of the books and know the content was not "dangerous," a concern for some teachers when using Internet sites in a school setting. However, her choices limited the students mainly to printed and visual informational texts. Second, although Ms. Davidson would not provide time on the computer for the children, she integrated computer technology in her classroom extensively, albeit on the single computer in her classroom and for her use only. And lastly, Ms. Davidson played a prominent role in lobbying for the return of the provincial newspaper in the classroom. In these ways, Ms. Davidson tried to provide access to informational text in ways she felt were appropriate given her perception of the needs of her students and the constraints of the school context in which she worked.

## **5.4 "Today's been crazy...": Disruption/interruption as a factor in constraining opportunities for children to engage in IL practices in the school context**

The aspect of *disruption/interruption*, or more specifically, *lived* disruption/interruption (the daily disruption and confusion in which teachers and children work and learn) was the fourth factor in constraining opportunities for children to engage in IL practices in the school context. As defined previously in the chapter, disruption/interruption refers to the repeated disruption and/or confusion in the school and/or classroom setting. In this category, there were two prominent features contributing to the lived disruption/interruption of the school and the classroom and will be discussed below: the new principal, and the excessive interruptions.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the current principal had been at Northwood Elementary for two years prior to the study and had a very different leadership style than the previous principal. Both the staff and the principal were still making adjustments to each other as new

programs were being implemented and old programs were being adapted or phased out. In particular, communicative practices between the staff and the administration were in flux as the staff struggled to adapt to the communication style and methods of the principal. This administrator preferred organization and orderliness, and spent a great deal of time on the management of student behaviour and the supervision of the office staff. Part of this management required a great amount of communication with staff regarding the infractions of various students, and this included interviews, the filling out of reports, and detailed record keeping. At the same time, the principal struggled to keep up with learning the well-established programs that had been operating in the school and needed her support to ensure their continued success. As a result, the school atmosphere, in my opinion, appeared chaotic. For example, in dealing with student behaviour, the principal felt it necessary to deal with infractions promptly. This required interviewing the student or students involved, in addition to interviewing the classroom teacher. The interviewing was usually done during class time, and the children and the teacher were usually called out in the hallway to discuss the matter while the rest of the class waited. This occurred several times during my observations in Ms. Davidson's class and often involved Jack. The situation was rarely resolved in the hallway and the teacher returned to the classroom to await a further visitation by the principal or a follow-up in class phone-call. Each time this occurred in Ms. Davidson's class, the children were involved in a lesson involving informational text, and as a result, were not able to get as far in the lesson that Ms Davidson had hoped.

In other examples, the principal used the public address system throughout the school during instructional time in order to communicate information about various school programs. The following is taken from my field notes:

At 1:45 p.m. Ms. Davidson is instructing the children on how to set up the science experiment using water. Using the overhead, she tracks the procedural text while the children read aloud. She demonstrates the procedure for the students while they watch. As the children observe, Ms. Davidson instructs the children to complete the T chart that she has photocopied for them. "I see drops!" Ivan calls out. Ms. Davidson asks Ivan to describe what he sees for the other students as she continues to lead the experiment. There is a noise from the PA system and the principal begins to announce that they "are late in setting up the Santa's breakfast and that the grade

seven students will be coming around to take tables and chairs from the classrooms.” At that moment several grade seven students walk into the classroom and ask Ms. Davidson where they are to get the tables and chairs from her room. Ms. Davidson, still holding the paraphernalia for the experiment, motions with her head and then realizes that her guided reading materials are on the table. The class is distracted and Ms. Davidson stops the experiment, effectively ruining the outcome. She sets the materials down and quickly grabs the guided reading folders off the table so that the grade seven students can take the table. Ms. Davidson waits until the students have left with the table and chairs and the class is quiet again. She resumes the experiment. A minute later, a boy from Ms. Davidson’s class comes into the classroom. He’s been waiting in the school foyer for 30 minutes having not been picked up by his dad for an appointment. Hands full, Ms. Davidson asks the boy to tell the secretary to phone home to see what has happened. The boy leaves but is back within a minute. As he enters, the classroom phone rings and Ms. Davidson is forced to abandon the experiment.

In this instance, the announcement from the principal caused more interruption to classroom learning than I believe was her intention. However, these PA announcements happened quite regularly. In another instance, during a writing lesson, Ms. Davidson’s children were instructed to stop and listen to the definitions of the word “trustworthiness” as part of a social responsibility program that the school had been following. Still later, the principal announced she was coming into classrooms to distribute reading awards. When she came to distribute the awards to Ms. Davidson’s classroom, she interrupted a social studies lesson. After gaining attention of the students, she realized that she had the wrong files and needed to return at another time. These interruptions became so frequent that at one point during an observation, when Ms. Davidson had to suspend instruction to answer her phone for the second time during her lesson, she turned to me and asked, “Can you please write down about the interruptions and that we never get a chance to teach?”

#### **5.4.1 Strategies to ameliorate the factor of disruption/interruption**

Although it was difficult to ameliorate the factor of disruption/interruption within the school setting, Ms. Davidson did employ strategies to ensure that her students received as much



instruction time as possible. The first strategy she employed was to keep a high level of structure and routine within the classroom so that the students could function relatively independently. For example, Ms. Davidson had the students oversee the daily routines of calendar, sharing, book exchange, and chore-time so that if she needed to attend to other issues, the class was able to manage on their own for a short time period.

The second strategy Ms. Davidson used to address the disruption/interruption in the general school setting was to be an active and voluntary member of the school staff committee of which the principal was also a member. Here, issues such as school interruptions could be addressed and resolved as a committee, and those decisions could be then voted on by the entire staff at staff meetings.

Although mitigating the factor of disruption/interruption in a school is difficult for one teacher to do, Ms. Davidson was able to make adjustments to her classroom routines and expectations of her students to accomplish this effectively.

## **5.5 Summary and discussion**

In Chapter Four, I addressed the first research question: How do school contexts afford opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices? In this chapter I have looked at the factors in which the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices were constrained. Drawing on the collection, triangulation and interpretation of multiple data sources in this chapter, I first presented an overview of the factors (i.e., time, perceived needs, access to informational text, and disruption/interruption) constraining the focal students' opportunities to engage in IL practices, and then gave interpretations of how each factor was responsible in constraining these practices. Following each factor, I discussed ways that the focal teacher tried to ameliorate the negative effects of each factor to ensure that the children received comprehensive literacy instruction.

One of the most interesting findings in this chapter is that Ms. Davidson's own IL practices are not strongly reflected in her literacy curriculum. While much of the literature has concerned itself with school and out-of-school literacy practices of students, very few studies have elaborated on the sociocultural-historical literacy practices of teachers and how these practices affect their teaching and program design. While assumptions held might indicate that teachers would naturally extend their own literacy practices into the classroom, this was certainly not the case with Ms. Davidson. I argue that this may be due to the press of time and

curriculum, and to Ms. Davidson's perception of the needs of these inner-city children. To explain this, I use a sociocultural lens in which learning is situated in social structures for understanding what gets learned, how it is learned, and with what similarities and variations. Using this lens includes knowing about the social, cultural and historical contexts of an individual's existence. In Ms. Davidson's case, learning, both historically and currently, was and is a pleasurable affair, rooted in social networking with family and friends and rich in personal curiosity and engagement with technology. Although Ms. Davidson tries to bring this love of learning to the children in her classroom, she is conflicted between following the mandated learning outcomes of the grade two IRPs and with what she knows about the learning needs of the children in her class. This tension is most apparent in Ms. Davidson's illuminating comments about meeting learning outcomes and "covering the curriculum." Daily classroom life teeters in a push-pull dichotomy which relates to Ms. Davidson's feeling of the "choppiness" of the curriculum. Using the computer and Internet to gain information and to communicate is something she feels the children can be taught after they have learned the basic skills and foundations for school literacy learning. Her ability to deal with this tension relates to the second finding discussed below.

The second finding in this chapter relates to Ms. Davidson's use of strategies to ameliorate those factors over which she felt she had some control and also to maximize the children's IL learning. For example, the use of integrated units enabled Ms. Davidson to meet many of the children's educational and physical needs, while meeting some of the children's interests and the interests of Ms. Davidson herself. In this way, Ms. Davidson and her students shared in the construction of activity purposes and also helped to relieve some of the choppiness in her teaching. Ms. Davidson also structured the class and routines to form a classroom community where children learned through guided participation, the cultural practices of exchanging books, of leading sharing routines, and of timing events until they could independently perform these practices within the community. However, as I argued earlier in this chapter, these strategies meant to ameliorate the factors which weighed so heavily on Ms. Davidson's teaching may have worked at cross purposes and constrained the opportunities for children to engage in IL practices.

Although Ms. Davidson tried to include the children's interests where she could, there was no room for an emergent curriculum. Her priorities rested on engaging the children in a particular "type" of literacy that she believed will prepare them for the future. This perspective

of literacy is viewed as a set of social practices that are historically situated, highly dependent on shared cultural understandings, and inextricably linked to power relations (Gee, 1996; Street, 1995). This view assists in understanding why Ms. Davidson appears less likely to offer opportunities for children to engage in IL practices or why she might not bring her own IL practices into the classroom. It may be that Ms. Davidson actually has a heightened awareness of the power connected with achieving academic literacy and the currency it holds in the outside world, and she seeks to support her students to achieve this.

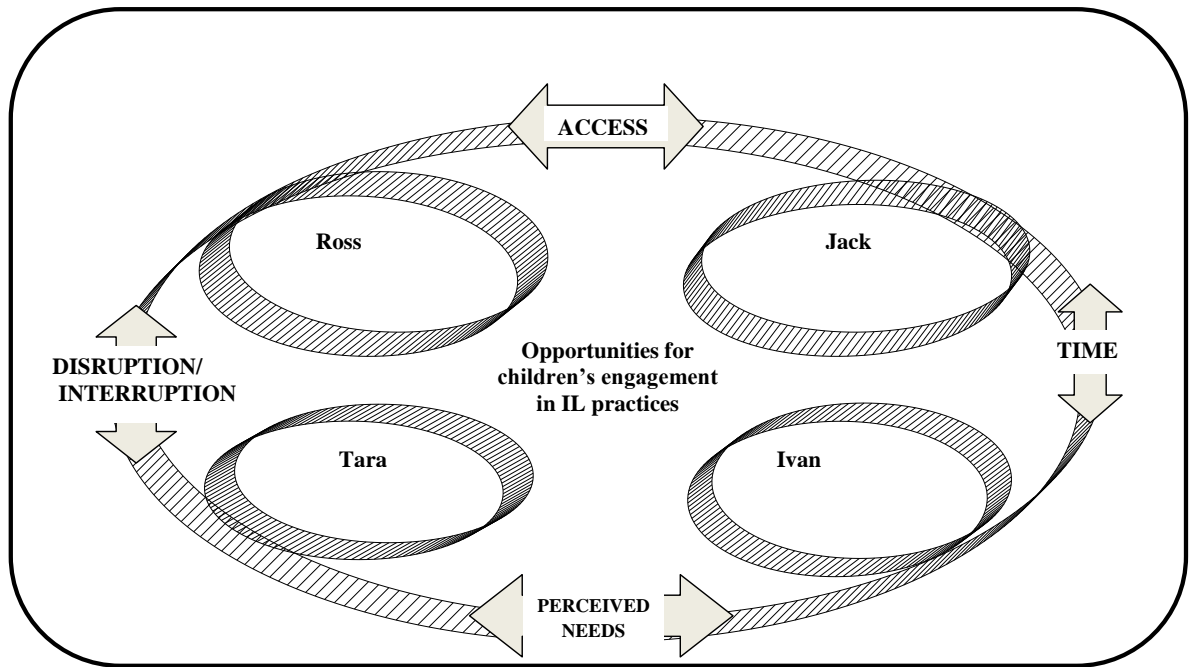
Another finding relates to Ms. Davidson's lack of knowledge of the focal children's cultural practices and her misunderstandings of how the focal children practice IL in their homes and in their communities. This further constrained the opportunities for the children to engage in IL practices at school and as a result, the children learn that IL learning is restricted to single contexts and times rather than occurring in everyday activities in multiple contexts at different times. Ms. Davidson's assumptions about the children's home lives reflect deficit notions of families, and of the literacy practices they hold. Her scant knowledge of the children's outside world is contingent on the little communication she has gleaned in parent conferences or from the children themselves. As a result, to help the children "survive" in the world beyond the classroom, IL in this classroom, as Street's (1995) autonomous model describes, is reduced to a neutral set of skills apart from the social context and is viewed as "content to be taught through authority structures whereby children learn the proper roles and identities they [are] to carry into the wider world" (p.118).

Ms. Davidson also carries a particular "mindset" about teaching and learning literacy in a new media age. This mindset can be described as one in which familiar concepts, beliefs and strategies are applied to technology within everyday practices. An example of this mindset is the use of computers to promote curriculum objectives and to reach specific learning outcomes. In opposition to this way of thinking, there exists a different mindset where technology is used to reconfigure *what* is to be learned and *how* it is to be learned. Ms. Davidson's mindset about technology for young children is built on the perception of what the children in her classroom need to survive in the future world she imagines for them. Her imagined world is very similar to the one she actually lives; a middle class world with middle class values, with a single pathway or trajectory to get there. She believes that technology is dangerous for young children and certainly not valuable as a tool for literacy learning right now. In this way Ms. Davidson is meeting the "needs" of her inner-city children to survive in the imagined world she believes is

waiting for them. However, by solely focusing on the “literacies of power” and ignoring what children bring with them from home and community (which I discuss in future chapters) children may not be able to participate in a global communication and information economy. Further, by trying to adhere to a program that will ensure that the children achieve the mandated IRP learning outcomes for grade two, Ms Davidson will be judged as a being a “good” teacher, and not one who is a failure, as she so poignantly revealed to me in our interview. Although the unofficial world of Ms. Davidson’s IL practices sometimes seep into the official world of her teaching work, she feels unable to carve out a tactical space (de Certeau, 1984) for meaningful learning amid outside pressures. And what may be necessary for these children, I argue, is direct and indirect experience with new technologies grounded in those practices in which children can engage in meaningful learning *now* and can be related to *further* points in their future life trajectories.

In summary, my understanding of the factors constraining opportunities for children to engage in IL practices is graphically represented in Figure 5.1. While the school context affords opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices, these opportunities are constrained by the factors of time, perceived needs, access to informational text, and disruption/interruption. This graphic representation will continue to be constructed as I build the multiple layers of the focal children’s IL practices across the contexts.

**Figure 5.1: Factors that constrain the focal students' opportunities to engage in IL practices in the school context**



## **CHAPTER SIX: OUT-OF-SCHOOL CONTEXT AFFORDANCES: OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT IN IL PRACTICES**

### **6.0 Introduction**

In Chapter Four, I examined how the context of the school, (i.e., the focal children's classroom and spaces in Northwood Elementary) offered opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices. In this examination, I found that Ms. Davidson's personal engagement with learning, her love of learning new information, and her interest in technologies and new literacies served as a foundation to support opportunities for the children to engage in IL. Further, I found that the organization of the teaching day and the activities within (which I discussed in terms of spheres of activity), offered numerous opportunities for the children to engage in IL practices, particularly those that offered choice and flexibility.

As argued throughout this dissertation, it is essential that we take into account the social practices that go into the construction, uses and meanings of literacy. How IL is given meaning in the school context has been the focus of the last two chapters. However, focusing solely on the context of school and school literacies, at the expense of out-of-school contexts and literacies that students practice out-of-school, invalidates those literacies in which students are fluent and effective. This issue not only concerns the relationship between the school and children's everyday-life experiences, it also challenges us to consider what counts as effective language and literacy education of young people. The second research question of the dissertation attempts to address some of these concerns by asking: How do out-of-school contexts afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices?

In Chapter Four, I predicated the analysis of the data on the notion of context as constituted by people both internally (involving specific objects and goals) and externally (involving artefacts, other people and specific settings) and these factors are interdependent. In this way, meaning is mutually constituted between persons and activity systems. The analysis of this chapter is also predicated on the same notion of context. In this chapter, I examine the affordances of the out-of-school contexts of each of the focal children in terms of how these contexts offer opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices.

To do this, I examine each of the children's out-of-school contexts in which they participated. As I collected the majority of the data in the out-of-school context of the children's homes<sup>29</sup>, I begin with background information specific to each child in terms of the composition of the family, including family members' names and corresponding personal information. Following, I provide a description of the home(s) in which the children lived. I then discuss the IL practices of those people in the children's lives who, similar to Ms. Davidson in the school context, have goals for their children and are mainly responsible for organizing the home and mediating the IL events that involved the children. I then discuss the out-of-school IL practices of the children in terms of the out-of-school spheres of activity (i.e., those sets of cultural practices or ways of communicating, usually associated with routines), and the affordances of the out-of-school context that offered opportunities for the children to engage in these practices. I begin with the first child, Tara Crawford.

## 6.1 Tara Crawford

Tara, aged 7, the only female focal child in the study, lived with her mother Debbie, her father Al, her twin brother Tom, and her older brother and sister, David and Amy (see Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1: The composition of the Crawford family**

Family	Parents (Age in years)	Focal Child (Age in years)	Other children living in the household and their ages (yrs)	Occupation	Schooling
Crawford	Debbie (mother) (40)	Tara (7)	From Debbie's previous marriage - Amy (17) and David (14) From current marriage - Tom (Tara's twin brother, 7)	Merchandiser at large chain wholesale warehouse	Graduated high school
	Al (father) (42)			Steel fabricator	Graduated high school; completed a welding course at local college

<sup>29</sup> Additional information on other out-of-school contexts will be described in relation to the particular focal child.

Tara, the youngest member of the Crawford family, was a busy girl. Tara did not participate in any organized out-of-school or community programs, but spent a great deal of her time playing in the neighbourhood after school and on the weekends. She was an active participant among the pods of neighbourhood children who wandered from one house to another and from back-yard to back-yard. Numerous times I observed Tara engrossed in variations of chase-style games, hide-and-seek, or traditional ball games. Tara was close to her siblings, and played video games with her twin brother, Tom, or downloaded music with her teenage step-sister, Amy. Tara was also close to Al's parents and spent about two weekends per month with Tom at their house. Tara enjoyed these visits and reported:

Yeah, I love going to my grandma and grandpa's. They spoil Tom and me. When we go to their house they buy us clothes and stuff and let us stay up later. They let us play as much as we want to on the computer 'cause they have one computer for me and another computer for Tom.

Debbie described Tara as the family's social butterfly, as Tara enjoyed meeting new people and trying new things. Indeed, during my observations, I rarely observed Tara alone; she was always in the company of friends, a sibling, or a family member.

#### **6.1.1 Description of the Crawford household**

Debbie worked full-time as a merchandiser in a large warehouse chain about a half-hour drive from their home. Al worked in steel fabrication for a company located in the industrial area along the river in Greendale, and a short drive from their residence. Located approximately three blocks from Northwood Elementary, their modest split level three-bedroom home was within easy walking distance from the school. During the course of the study, the driveway of the house and the front lawn contained various pick-up trucks and vans, one in disrepair, and two used for transportation. Parked in the open carport at the back of the driveway was Al's 1972 Dodge Challenger. Al occasionally raced the restored car at a speedway about an hour's drive from the house. The large grassed back yard contained a swing set, tool shed, patio and a collection of usable and discarded items including car seats, children's toys, gardening tools, ladders, and the like. A steel zip-line structure extended several feet above the ground and



dominated the backyard. Al created and constructed this structure from discarded work materials, and the family used it for backyard entertainment.

Inside the house, the ground level area contained a small kitchen, dining room, and living room. The upstairs level contained a small bathroom and three bedrooms, one for Al and Debbie, one for the twins, Tara and Tom, and one for David. The lowest level of the house contained a laundry room and beside it, a small recreation room. Al and Debbie converted this room into a bedroom for Amy after the twins were born. The family spent the majority of their time in the living and dining room that housed the family's TV and DVD player, stereo system, and main computer.

The dining room table was the location of many of the family's literacy events. For example, at this rounded oblong table, the children completed their homework, and family members read the newspaper, played board games, paid bills, painted pictures, and created crafts. As a result, literacy materials cluttered the table. Books, novels, DVDs, computer CDs, music CDs, school textbooks, writing pads, comics, spilled out into the living room area and layered the couch and coffee table. The family computer stood in one corner of the living room. The entire family used this computer, although the children mainly used it to play computer games and to do homework. Two other computers existed, one located in Al and Debbie's bedroom, and one located in the downstairs recreation room. Only Al and Debbie's computer had Internet access. Debbie occasionally brought down the modem to the living room computer so that the children too, could access the Internet.

The children accessed the Internet only with Debbie's permission and only under her supervision. This careful monitoring was due to a serious incident involving Amy and a stranger from a common online chat room; an incident serious enough to warrant limitation of the children's Internet access. Tara and Tom used the computer mainly to play software games loaded onto the computer, but they did have unlimited access to the Internet at Al's parents' house when the children visited about twice per month.

In the next section, I discuss the IL practices of Tara's mother, Debbie Crawford who, similar to Ms. Davidson in the school context, was mainly responsible for organizing the home and mediating the IL events that involved Tara. To facilitate the discussion, I first focus on the personal literacy history of Debbie and then describe Debbie's IL practices.

### 6.1.2 Debbie Crawford's personal literacy history

Debbie spent much of her childhood moving throughout the province and changing schools. Her parents divorced when she was a young child and she spent most of her time living with her mother. Although Debbie believed that she learned to read at school, she recalled that there were always books in her childhood homes, although “not that many.” She stated that her mom did read to Debbie and her siblings, due in part to Debbie’s grandmother’s influence as a kindergarten teacher and the implied importance of preparing children for school:

My [grandmother] was a kindergarten teacher before kindergarten was mandatory. I guess there was a lot of (...)pushing education when my mom was little too because kindergarten [back then] was like pre-school is now. It wasn't mandatory, but it helped prepare the kids. Apparently my grandmother ran the very well-respected kindergarten in [the city].

Debbie’s comment about “pushing education when her mom was little too” was an insightful comment about how she viewed education, currently and historically. Further, her comment about “preparing kids” for the challenges of school was an interesting idea that played out in the opportunities for Tara to engage in IL practices and will be discussed further in this dissertation.

Debbie stated that she read a lot in elementary and high school, and in particular, she recalled the *Nancy Drew Mystery Story Series*® as her favourites. Debbie never experienced problems at school and always looked forward to going. When she was in grade 8 however, Debbie chose to live with her dad who worked in a small remote logging camp in the province. At the age of 13, under the apprenticeship of her father, she learned to shake a roof, build a shed, put up a fence and use a multitude of power tools. She reported that her father never followed any written instructions; he would just tell her what to do, and she would follow along behind him. These experiences enabled Debbie to gain the confidence to complete a number of projects in her later life including constructing a rock garden and assisting in the building and erecting of the back yard swing set and zip-line. When the water pump on her pick-up truck broke during the study, she bought and read a manual on how to repair it, and then fixed it

herself. These skills assisted her in her job at the warehouse where she builds display items such as barbecues, patio furniture, and exercise equipment.

### **6.1.3 Debbie Crawford's IL practices**

Debbie continued to read extensively in her adulthood. Although she rarely went to the public library, the house had print materials (mostly in the form of books) in every room. These books generally came from garage sales or the school libraries where her children exchanged books on a daily basis.

Debbie enjoyed reading the provincial daily newspaper and usually found time to peruse it when she returned from work at about 1:30 p.m. She preferred to get current information from the newspaper rather than watching the news on TV. She stated, "I tend to retain more if I read it than just hear it. Usually there's so much stuff going on [at home] that when I read, I can actually focus." Although she stated that the sources of most of her information were books and newspapers, she reported that the Internet supplied her with a lot of information. Debbie often shared this information later in small excerpts with Tara who was particularly attentive to what her mother told her.

Sitting at the kitchen table, Debbie managed her life by paying bills, making dates on the family calendar, filling out forms, and reading and signing the twins' planners. For doing crossword puzzles or other forms of literacy for entertainment, Debbie moved to the couches in the living room. On the days she wasn't too tired to read the twins a bedtime story, she sat on their beds, reading aloud Tara's choice and then reading aloud Tom's choice.

Debbie read and wrote on the Internet-accessible computer in her bedroom. She spent her time on *Facebook*<sup>TM</sup>, communicating with old friends from high school and with her coworkers at the warehouse. She also used email to communicate with friends and family.

Debbie also used the computer to download pictures from her digital camera to share online with friends, although she rarely printed out the images. She bemoaned the fact that she lost "a bunch" of pictures during a recent computer crash, and preferred using a traditional camera and film. But this too had its challenges, as she commented that her photographic prints were actually stored in a box because she didn't have the time to put them into albums.

Although Debbie watched little TV, she did enjoy programs involving crime solving and mystery. She would watch movies on DVDs, but did not have the patience to watch them alone, preferring instead to watch with others who would converse with her during the viewing.

#### 6.1.4 Tara's out-of school IL practices

In this section, I describe Tara's out-of-school IL practices. As discussed in Chapter One, literacy practices can best be conceived as the general cultural ways people utilize written language in their everyday lives and are drawn from observable episodes (literacy events). Many literacy events are regular activities and routines that are found and expected in social organizations like the home. I focus my analysis on those spheres of activity in the home where IL events routinely occurred. For ease of discussion, I first highlight the spheres of activity (loosely based on the chronology of Tara's out-of-school day), Tara's IL practices, and the characteristics of activity in context that offered opportunities for engagement in IL practices as shown in Table 6.2. I then discuss the findings in greater detail.

**Table 6.2: Spheres of activity, Tara's IL practices, and characteristics of activity in the out-of-school context**

<b>Sphere of Activity</b>	<b>Tara's IL Practices</b>	<b>Characteristics of Activity in Context that offers Opportunities for IL Engagement</b>
Morning routines (e.g., getting up, dressed, and ready for school)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• reading notes from Debbie regarding information about the day</li><li>• reading information and communication from the home via home/school planners, checking for returned notices and messages</li><li>• reading and listening to Amy read parts of the newspaper paper aloud</li><li>• reading cereal boxes for product information</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Debbie's absenteeism due to her early start to work necessitates note reading system</li><li>• designation of a particular book for home-school communication, Debbie's absenteeism facilitates Tara's checking system</li><li>• subscription to daily newspaper</li><li>• older sister to mediate information</li><li>• purchase of cereal with game software</li></ul>
Playtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• reading instructions for crafts and projects</li><li>• consulting and reading informational texts</li><li>• constructing and assembling IL texts (notes,</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• access to craft books</li><li>• access to craft supplies</li><li>• designated spaces for construction and assembling IL texts</li><li>• access to informational</li></ul>

Sphere of Activity	Tara's IL Practices	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offers Opportunities for IL Engagement
	letters, lists, paintings, projects, etc.) • “reading” drawings for projects	texts as mediated by an adult
TV/video watching	• viewing children's educational/informational programs • viewing the on-screen guide for program information • viewing commercials for product information	• access to TV cable programs
Computer time	• reading informational texts found on websites • reading instructions for game playing • reading visual information on games	• access to a computer • access to the Internet • access to purchased or downloaded software
Video gaming	• reading on-screen instructions, rules and cues • reading, viewing and assessing visual information to make decisions regarding the play	• access to gaming system hardware and software • designated space
Dinner time	• viewing and discussing TV news programs • sharing and discussion of daily information of family news and events	• designated dinner time as a family • designated space to gather • access to TV news programming
Homework time	• reading information to complete homework • writing and drawing informational texts • reading instructions to play board games	• designated space in which to complete homework • provision of /access to games • mediation by parent
Bedtime	• listening to informational texts read aloud	• access to some more advanced informational texts as mediated by a sibling or parent • access to sibling or

Sphere of Activity	Tara's IL Practices	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offers Opportunities for IL Engagement
		parent's information knowledge base <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designated physical space to share informational text</li> <li>• a format/venue for discussion of informational text</li> </ul>

### 6.1.5 The spheres of activity in the out-of-school context that offer opportunities for Tara to engage in IL practices

**Morning routines.** As Debbie had to leave for work before the rest of the family got up, she enlisted Amy to help Tara and her brother with their morning routines. These morning routines provided a number of opportunities for Tara to engage in IL practices. For example, Debbie often left a note for the children as reminders of what they had to do that day. Tara read these notes not only to receive information on how the contents of the note would affect her day, but she also made sure that the rest of the family followed the instructions as delineated by her mother.

Breakfast also provided an opportunity for Tara to engage in IL practices. The following is taken from my field notes:

At 7:45 a.m., Tara came downstairs and went into the kitchen. An unopened box of cereal had been left on the kitchen counter. Excitedly, Tara picked up the box and began reading the front of the package. "Oooooo, I forgot!" she exclaimed, as she saw that the box contained a computer game featuring Disney's *Aladdin*. She got out a bowl, a spoon and a jug of milk and carried these to the kitchen table. After pouring the cereal, she began to look intently at the front of the box, and began to loosen the CD that was adhered to the front. As she ate her breakfast, Tara alternated between reading the cereal box and reading the CD to find out how she could load the CD onto the computer and play the game.

During this particular observation, instructions on a cereal box captivated Tara's attention. However, on other days while eating her breakfast, Tara read the headlines of the daily morning newspaper that her mother left out on the kitchen table. If she had questions about a particular picture or word, she asked Amy to read the caption or explain what the picture was about. Tara's perusal through and discoveries in the newspaper resulted in the displaying of several large newspaper posters of the favourite hockey players in the twins' bedroom. After Tara washed and got dressed, she checked her planner to make sure her mother had signed it and then read any notes or messages that Debbie wrote for Ms. Davidson. Tara also reviewed the planner routines specific to that day to see if there was anything she needed to remember to bring to school, such as library books or supplies. She then packed her lunch and her planner in her backpack, and got ready to walk to school. If Tom was late, she usually watched TV (usually morning cartoon shows) until he was ready.

**Playtime.** Upon returning from school at about 3 p.m., Tara participated in an unstructured playtime. This time usually extended until dinner time and involved the physical spaces of Tara's home, her back-yard, and the neighbourhood. Within this general free time, Tara participated in several other spheres of activity such as TV watching and video-gaming which will be discussed further in this section.

Playtime provided Tara with many opportunities to engage in IL practices. For example, a favourite activity of Tara's was to do art and craft activities. Debbie kept a cupboard in the dining room to hold all of the supplies (e.g., pens, paper, glue, scissors, paints, craft books, bought at a discount at Debbie's work) so that Tara could create what she desired. Tara constructed these creations wherever there was room, spilling from the dining room to the living room as Tara needed more space. During construction, Tara consulted craft books and began her projects by reading and following the instructions. Soon the project took off in a different direction and incorporated other interests, including ideas and icons from popular TV shows and movies. Debbie labeled and displayed these creations on the walls of the living room and on the kitchen refrigerator.

During this unstructured playtime, Debbie also provided Tara with opportunities to engage in IL practices through apprenticing Tara in the art of woodworking, as Debbie's father apprenticed her. For example, during one visit to the home, I watched as Debbie prepared for Halloween night as she constructed a simulated graveyard, complete with wooden painted tombstones and pumpkins. Together, Tara and Debbie read the directions on how to create

these representations from a magazine. Through oral instructions from her mother, Tara learned how to use a jigsaw tool. Then, Tara and Debbie consulted Tara's Halloween-themed school library books in order to create the faces on the pumpkins and the epitaphs on the tombstones.

**TV/DVD watching.** During my visits to the home, the TV in the living room was frequently on and served as a backdrop to the routines of the household. Tara drifted in and out of the living room, but would pause in front of the TV to watch segments of animated series (e.g., *Scooby Doo*, *Iggy Arbuckle*), after-school situational comedies such as *Hannah Montana*, and *The Suite Life of Zach and Cody*, or children's nature programs. These TV shows, and in particular, the commercial breaks, offered opportunities for Tara to gain information about the latest foods, fashion, and toys. Information gleaned from these shows and commercials made their way onto Tara's birthday and Christmas wish lists, and were often the subject of her school journal entries. Tara also used of the TV's onscreen guide to gain information on the times of her favourite TV shows.

**Computer time.** The family computer, located in the living room, was a well-used technology in the Crawford home and Tara waited her turn to access it. Once she had her opportunity, this sphere of activity offered Tara numerous opportunities to engage in IL practices.

During computer time, Tara played a variety of games including *Aladdin*, *Search and Rescue*, and *Eye Spy*. Debbie purchased these games at the local department store, or she temporarily downloaded them from a game website that let the user sample the game for one hour of playtime. When Tara accessed the Internet, one particular website she visited was *Yahoo Kids*. This website provided a number of activities including an "Ask Earl" activity where children could pick a question from a number of online choices and gain information about a number of different subjects. Tara enjoyed trying to stump herself with answering questions such as "Why does a laundry basket have holes?"

Although Tara usually played these computer games by herself, occasionally Tom joined her as he too, drifted in and out of the spaces of the home. Tom added helpful hints for playing the game or made comments about a particular score he achieved for the game in comparison to Tara's score. Even when Tara played alone, she engaged in a running commentary on the game, strategizing and asking questions of herself. She attended to the written instructions or print clues that the game offered to help her raise her score.



Tara often joined Amy during Amy's computer time. Tara idolized her teenaged sister Amy, who gave her a glimpse of the outside world. Amy accessed the world of information, communication and technology for Tara as Amy invited Tara to listen to music, watch *YouTube*<sup>TM</sup>, play Internet games, or communicate through texting and taking pictures on Amy's cell phone.

**Video gaming.** The Crawford family had three video gaming systems: X-Box, PS2, and Game Cube. Tara and Tom had a TV in their room specifically for the purpose of playing video games using one of the available three systems. Interestingly, Tara played these games occasionally, but she preferred to watch Tom play giving him helpful hints to raise his game scores. Her self-imposed responsibility was to read aloud the pop-up game directions, cues, and rules that Tom usually ignored. Strategically, she played the game very differently than Tom did, but they worked together for a mutually satisfying single game score.

**Dinner time.** Dinner time was a sphere of activity that offered many opportunities for Tara to engage in IL practices. As the family sat at the table to eat their meals, they tuned the television on to the local news channel. As the family ate, Al and Debbie commented on broadcasted news events. All family members, including Tara, engaged and shared in these conversations. During times when the TV was not on, the family shared the news of their day.

**Homework time.** Tara and her siblings completed homework during a time period that Debbie designated after dinner. Tara faithfully wrote down her nightly homework in her school planner in preparation for this homework time. In this sphere of activity, Tara read Debbie the homework assignment for that evening. Usually Tara studied some spelling words or completed a math sheet. If the twins' homework was minimal or nonexistent, Debbie, Tara, and Tom played board games (e.g., *Uno*, *Guess Who*, *Trivial Pursuit*) until it was time for Tara to get ready for bed. During this game time, Tara read information regarding the rules of the game in order to refresh the game players' memories or to settle disagreements.

**Bedtime.** Every night at bedtime, Debbie, or, if Debbie was too exhausted, Amy, read aloud to Tom and Tara. Tara's personal choices for her own reading included "skinny books" (those books with single stories) concerning her favourite TV or video game characters, chapter books, and information books about animals. She commented, "At home, I don't really read too much science fiction, but I read kids' books." This comment was a nod to her big sister Amy's love for science fiction. As Tara and Tom each had a read aloud choice, they benefitted by having more opportunities to be read informational text.

To summarize, the spheres of activity of the out-of-school contexts in which Tara participated provided numerous opportunities for Tara to engage in IL practices. In particular, three characteristics of the spheres of activity in context, as discussed below, appeared to offer greater opportunities for Tara to engage in IL practices.

After-school playtime offered Tara an unstructured period of time during her day to choose activities that interested her, to choose people she wanted to do those activities with, and to choose where she wanted to play. Having this flexibility afforded Tara opportunities to engage with tasks and projects in creative ways and for sustained periods of time. Through this play, she developed independence and curiosity. For example, Tara completed her Halloween project over several days, and at her leisure. Over these days, she continued to discover new information from informational text she found in books, magazines, on TV, or the Internet. In turn, she continued to add to her projects until she felt she was ready to move on to something else that interested her.

The tools, the people and the settings in the context of Tara's home mediated and supported her IL practices. Tara's mother, Debbie, and Tara's sister, Amy, supported and scaffolded Tara's IL by providing her with enough information to answer her questions or engage her interests. After this initial mediation, they often left Tara to explore on her own providing more scaffolding when necessary and when requested. Even the notes Debbie left in her absence mediated Tara's IL practices, and contributed to Tara's independence and responsibility.

Tara's world of information involved more than just print resources. Access to technology whether it was the TV, the video gaming systems or the computer opened the possibilities for Tara to look beyond her local world. The ability to explore this technology for unstructured periods of time, combined with mediation from more technologically literate people, proved to be important aspects in providing Tara with opportunities to engage in IL practices.

## **6.2 Jack Hunt**

Jack, aged 7, one of the three male focal children in the study, initially lived in the catchment area of Northwood Elementary but moved soon after the beginning of the study to a two-bedroom apartment just outside of the school's catchment area. It was in this apartment, and around the apartment complex, and in fast food restaurants that I documented Jack's out-of-

school IL practices. Jack also attended an after-school care program for one to three hours a day, five days a week, within walking distance from the school. I also collected data on out-of-school IL practices at this site.

Jack lived with his mother, Janice, and his younger step-brother, Jamie. Jack's father, Don, lived a short distance away with his girlfriend and her three-year-old son. Janice and Don shared custody of Jack in an arrangement where Jack lived with Janice from Monday night to Friday morning, and then Jack lived with Don from Friday night to Monday morning. I conducted all observations and interviews during Jack's designated time with Janice. Residing also with Janice, Jack, and Jamie was Tammy, a 16 year-old girl temporarily estranged from her mother (the mother of one of Janice's girlfriends). Tammy attended a Work/Learn outreach program to complete Grade10 coursework after dropping out of high school the previous year. Tammy lived with Janice and her sons for six months before Janice applied to become Tammy's foster mother. Condensed information on the Hunt family is found in Table 6.3.

**Table 6.3: The composition of the Hunt family**

<b>Family</b>	<b>Parents (Age in years)</b>	<b>Focal Child (Age in years)</b>	<b>Other children living in the household and their ages (yrs)</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Schooling</b>
Hunt	Janice (mother) (24)	Jack (7)	Jamie (5); Janice's friend's daughter, Tammy (16)	Unemployed, on social assistance	Graduated high school; 10 month Youth and Child Care counseling course at community college
Stevens	Don (father) – not living in the home (24)	Jack (7)		Welder	Graduated high school; Welding course at community college

Jack, the eldest child in the Hunt family, loved to rough-and-tumble play, especially with his younger brother. The two boys often played together during my observations in the apartment and around the apartment complex. Jack particularly enjoyed playing video and computer games and building Bionicle Lego sets with his brother. When the boys got too energetic for the small apartment, Janice sent the boys outside to play with other children in the grassed spaces of the apartment complex. During these times, Jack enjoyed playing pretend “battle” games and acting out versions of “good guy versus bad guy” chase games.

### **6.2.1 Description of the Hunt household**

Located at the intersection of two busy streets, Jack’s large apartment complex was approximately a five-minute car ride from Northwood Elementary. The preferred entrance to the ground-level, two bedroom apartment was along a trail from the complex parking lot to the apartment’s sliding glass living room door. Piled around the living room door was a stack of toys, moving boxes and debris. The sliding door opened into the adjoining living room, dining room, and kitchen area of the apartment. Past the living room, a short hallway led to Janice’s bedroom, Jack’s and Jamie’s bedroom, and a small bathroom.

A large screen projection TV dominated the living room. Connected to the TV were several video gaming systems including *Xbox*, *PlayStation*, and *Game Cube*, and behind the TV were several different video game cartridges for each system. A shelf under the TV held the DVD and VCR players.

Janice’s desktop computer was set up on an end-table in a corner of the living room. Janice explained to me that they were “having Internet problems.” With their mother’s permission, the boys played games that were already installed on the computer (e.g., *Spider Solitaire*, *Pinball*) or, when the Internet was working, games that Janice downloaded for them from game sites (e.g., The *Bee Movie* website). A large glass dining table took up most of the small dining area. Tammy usually did her homework here and the boys drew pictures here as well, although Janice did limit their production:

[W]e tried the crayon thing again here, not too long ago. But I don’t think [the crayons] are going to last very long. [The boys] don’t take very good care of their stuff. So, that’s the problem. I don’t like crayons from one end

of the house to the other because then my girlfriend's two year old comes over and draws all over my walls.

The family used the dining table for eating the breakfast meal only, as Janice reported that she “hates to cook and that they go out a lot, mainly for fast food.” When they were at home, the family spent most of their time in the living room. Here they watched TV, played on the computer, or played video games.

The boys' bedroom contained an old-fashioned school desk that Jack occasionally sat in to do work or to play. The bedroom closet held boxes and bags out of which spilled clothes and toys that drifted into the hallway and down into the bathroom. Two new unmade twin beds took up most of the small room. A nearby hall closet contained a stack of children's books, colouring books, and games dealing with popular media themes and characters (e.g., *Batman*).

In the next sections, I discuss the personal literacy history and IL practices of Janice, who was mainly responsible for mediating the IL events in the home that involved Jack. I then focus on the IL practices of Jack in the out-of-school spaces of home and after-school care.

### **6.2.2 Janice Hunt's personal literacy history**

Janice grew up in the area of Walton, not far from where she was currently living. As a child, she attended a few different schools within the area and found elementary school “hard.” But by the time she moved on to high school, Janice started to enjoy school. She stated:

You see, I'm a social person. And in elementary school I was having a lot of problems with my peers. And ... with my weight and everything. I had a lot of problems, but as I hit high school, I guess you can say I opened up a bit and I met a lot more people and I realized, wow, all I have to do is stand up for [myself] and people will back off. And ever since I started doing that, I've had nothing but friends.

Janice stated that she passed all her courses in high school, but received mostly average or slightly below average marks. When Janice was 16 and attending high school, she became pregnant with Jack. Several years prior to the pregnancy, Janice's parents divorced and after the divorce Janice lived with her mother. One of her mother's conditions for living with her was

that Janice had to remain in school. However, Janice stated, “When I got too pregnant to go to school, I got kicked out of my mom’s.” At that point, she dropped out of school and lived with her father until Jack was approximately three months old. At this time, Janice and the baby moved to their own apartment, and have been on their own ever since. When an aunt provided daycare for Jack, Janice returned to the Work/Learn program (the same program that Tammy attended) to complete her missed course work. At age 18, and back in the regular high school program, Janice became pregnant with Jamie. She graduated from high school when she was nine months pregnant.

Growing up, Janice stated that she did not remember her parents reading or writing, nor did she remember being read to. She commented that she remembered her dad telling her that he couldn’t read so he wouldn’t have to read to her or her sister. She didn’t recall her mother ever reading, in the past, or even currently. She commented:

I honestly don’t remember my mom, when I was a kid, reading and writing. Growing up, I don’t. But I know now that it’s beneficial and I’m able to help Jack. (...) You get flyers that come home saying read every night. And it’s just good to keep it in his head to get him seeing the words and stuff.

Despite the fact that she did not have positive reading role models, Janice acknowledged the benefits of reading to her children. Further, she commented on the importance of reading and writing, “If you can’t read and write you’re going to have a very hard time during life. I think [reading and writing] is essential. You do it every day. (...) You’re in trouble if you can’t read and write.”

### **6.2.3 Janice Hunt’s IL practices**

In our interview Janice expressed her dislike of reading:

JH: Janice Hunt

MM: Marianne McTavish

MM: Do you like to read?

JH: I’m not one for reading.

MM: No?

JH: I definitely don't even enjoy it.

MM: Do you have a reason why?

JH: No. I really don't. I just don't see myself sitting down and reading a book. If you brought me a book and you're like - this is a true story of something and it sounded interesting to me, I'd probably read it. But I'm not one to go out and be like hey that looks like a good book, can I borrow that and read it? That's not me. A lot of my friends are though. But not me.

If she did read books, however, Janice stated, "It would probably still just be like grade 8. I like *Goosebumps* books." Generally labeled with a reading level of grade four, these series of chapter books are popular with children in grades three to five. Janice told me she read the community papers to keep up with the local news, and she read Jack's school planner (whenever they could find it) as well as notices from Jack and Jamie's school and after-school care.

Janice stated that health reasons kept her unemployed and on social assistance. Janice had particular IL practices associated with her unemployment status. For example, Janice read and completed forms related to her unemployment, she scheduled appointments and filled out forms for her medical needs, and she read and completed the ongoing documentation required for her application to become a foster mother. She rarely wrote outside of these demands, except to compose letters to friends. She did not write grocery shopping lists, but instead shopped "off her head." She did not use cookbooks, but preferred to create and experiment with food. Indeed, Janice's life routines did not require her to do much writing. For example, she never wrote down our appointments for my visits and interviews but asked if I would call her to remind her the day before I was coming. Similarly, at a dinner we had in a fast-food restaurant, Janice did not read the menu at the counter but simply ordered her meal and the boys' meals from memory.

Janice had a large network of friends, and she spent most of her free time with them during the day. Some of her friends had very young children and were homebound, so Janice visited them or took them out shopping or to eat. Janice stayed connected with her friends via the telephone and her cell phone; numerous incoming and outgoing calls punctuated my visits in and outside of the home.

Janice reported that she enjoyed watching TV, and in particular, reality TV shows. She used the on-screen guide to gain information regarding the times of her shows. Janice also enjoyed playing bingo at the local Bingo Hall. When overwhelmed by the noise and the frenetic pace of the boys, Janice reported that bingo was a place she could go. Janice stated that she tried to cut down her play as the costs were getting prohibitive.

Janice reported that she loved using the computer, particularly accessing social networking sites such as Facebook and Nexopia<sup>30</sup>. She also enjoyed connecting with people in various Internet chat rooms. If she needed to find information for topics that interested her, she used the Internet to “Google” her queries. However, her access to the Internet was sporadic, mainly due to moving and cost issues.

#### **6.2.4 Jack’s out-of-school IL practices**

In this section, I describe Jack’s out-of-school IL practices. I focus my analysis on those spheres of activity in the out-of-school contexts where I documented Jack’s IL events. I first highlight the spheres of activity (loosely based on the chronology of Jack’s out-of-school day), Jack’s IL practices, and the characteristics of activity in context that offered opportunities for engagement in IL practices as shown in Table 6.4. I then discuss the findings in greater detail.

**Table 6.4: Spheres of activity, Jack’s IL practices, and characteristics of activity in the out-of-school contexts**

<b>Sphere of Activity</b>	<b>Jack’s IL Practices</b>	<b>Characteristics of Activity in Context that offers Opportunities for IL Engagement</b>
After-school care routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading and viewing informational texts</li> <li>• reading instructions to play board games</li> <li>• reading after-school care rules and behaviour charts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to informational texts</li> <li>• provision of /access to games</li> <li>• provision of rules and charts</li> </ul>

<sup>30</sup> Nexopia.com is a popular Canadian social networking website designed as a general interactive site for people aged 14 and up. Users are able to create and design their own profiles, friends list, blogs, galleries, articles, and forums. Interaction is accomplished through an internal personal messaging system and public user comments on profiles, blogs or through threads and posts on the forums.



Sphere of Activity	Jack's IL Practices	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offers Opportunities for IL Engagement
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>mediation by another child or adult</li> </ul>
Playtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>constructing Bionicle Lego sets from visual instructions</li> <li>re-enacting video game fighting through dramatization and construction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provision of Bionicle kits</li> <li>designated space within the home and outside to construct, re-enact and dramatize</li> </ul>
TV/video watching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>viewing the on-screen guide for program information</li> <li>viewing commercials for product information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to TV and DVD player</li> <li>access to TV cable programs</li> </ul>
Computer time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reading informational texts found on websites</li> <li>reading instructions for game playing</li> <li>reading visual information on games</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to a computer</li> <li>access to the Internet</li> <li>access to purchased or downloaded software</li> </ul>
Video gaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reading on-screen instructions, rules and cues</li> <li>reading, viewing and assessing visual information to make decisions regarding the play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to gaming system hardware and software</li> <li>designated space</li> </ul>
Dinner time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reading menus to choose what to eat</li> <li>sharing and discussion of daily information of family and friend news and events</li> <li>reading of signs posted in restaurant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>designated dinner time as a family</li> <li>access to restaurants and menus, signs, etc.</li> </ul>
Bedtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>listening to informational texts read aloud</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to some more advanced informational texts as mediated by an older other</li> <li>access to other's</li> </ul>

Sphere of Activity	Jack's IL Practices	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offers Opportunities for IL Engagement
		information knowledge base <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designated physical space to share informational text</li> <li>• a format/venue for discussion of informational text</li> </ul>

### 6.2.5 The spheres of activity in the out-of-school contexts that offer opportunities for Jack to engage in IL practices

**After-school care routines.** As mentioned previously, Jack spent the weekdays in the care of Janice, but spent his afternoons at Maple Lane, an after-school care program. After the 2:30 p.m. school dismissal time, Jack walked with a group of other after-school care children to Maple Lane's rented facility (a church basement) located about a block from the school. Maple Lane provided an after-school care program for approximately 15 children from ages six to twelve. From Monday to Thursday, Janice picked Jack up from Maple Lane at about 5:30 p.m.

Maple Lane structured their after-school program to provide the children with an experience that they might receive if they were at home. First, a care provider picked up the children from Northwood Elementary and then gave them a short playtime on the school playground before she walked them as a group to Maple Lane. After the children stowed their backpacks and jackets, the children prepared for a snack. After snack, the children sat in a carpeted area in front of a bulletin board that displayed written posters entitled "After-school Care Rules," "Our Daily Schedule," "Happy Birthday Calendar," and a behaviour chart with stars and stickers. The chronic difficulties with some of the children's after-school behaviour precipitated a daily scheduled discussion and the awarding of stars and stickers for good behaviour. The remainder of the after-school time was spent on doing homework, playing games, and having free time.

As the basement space was shared by the church, there were a number of religious posters and book shelves that contained religious books. These were off-limits to the children of Maple Lane due to the conditions of the rental agreement. The care program accessed a

collection of toys, books, and games located in shelves along one end of the room. A long table with benches, located in the center of the room, served as the space where the children had snack, did their homework, and played table games. The room was long, narrow, and carpeted which allowed for some active ball and bowling games. There were no computers or TVs.

Although the spheres of activity in after-school care offered Jack opportunities to engage in IL practices, the IL events I documented were relatively few. An excerpt from my field notes provides an example of how the context of the after-school care afforded an opportunity (although unintentional) for Jack to engage in an IL event:

At 3 p.m., I walk into the after-school care and take a seat near the back of the room. The main after-school care worker is telling the children that they need to clean up and help, telling them that they are now old enough to take on this responsibility. Jack is running with three boys at the end of the room playing tag. Jack calls out to the after-school care worker that a boy tried to kick him. Jack repeatedly asks the care workers to tell the boy to stop kicking him. The boys are eventually called to a group meeting at a carpeted area in front of a bulletin board that lists the after-school care rules, the after-school care schedule, and a behaviour reward chart. There is a new after-school care worker today who appears to be coaching the other workers. Two boys are awarded stars for helping. "Stars are going to be hard to achieve" says the new worker in a concerned tone. "This is now the time we need to talk. You don't give respect to your teachers..." The worker continues to talk to the children about their consistently poor behaviour. As she talks, Jack, sitting on the periphery of the circle, is looking at a book on dogs. A boy crawls up to the worker and says something as the children begin to talk. "Guys," says the worker directing her comments to the children, "I have to tell you something..." The children continue talking. "Let them talk," says another worker, "because they are wasting their free time." Jack continues to read.

During these types of discussions (of which I observed many), Jack often wiggled away from the group, took up an informational text, and looked through it quietly during the group discussions and the behaviour rewards portion of the meeting. If the meeting went on for several minutes, Jack began to take games off the shelves and played quietly in the corner. This

behaviour caused concern for the other children in the group, and as a result, the care providers castigated Jack for not paying attention. He did not receive many good behaviour rewards over the course of my observations.

During homework time, Jack's school planner was often missing, and this was the source for homework assignments (e.g., spelling words, writing class routines). While the other children did their homework, Jack often chose to look at books or play small table games with other students who assisted him in reading the game's rules. Jack then moved on to more active games such as Nerf football, tag, or bowling. Unfortunately many of these games escalated into physical altercations with other children, and the care providers reprimanded Jack several times over the course of my visits. Eventually, the owners of the after-school care program temporarily suspended Jack from the facility until his behaviour improved. At this juncture, Jack's grandfather and his father, who were not participants in the study, cared for Jack after-school.

**Playtime.** Due to the time Jack spent at after-school care, I had fewer opportunities to observe him in playtime at his home or around his apartment complex. However, when Jack was at home I observed that this playtime was a block of unstructured time that Jack was free to do as he pleased before the family went out for dinner. Similar to Tara, this unstructured time provided opportunities for Jack to participate in IL practices. During this time, Jack participated in several other spheres of activity such as TV watching and video-gaming during this free time and will be discussed further in this section.

Jack also used his playtime to re-enact battles and chase scenes from his video games in the outside open spaces of the apartment complex. As he and Jamie played, other children joined in offering their own take on the battle, many of them having also played the game themselves or those similar. These games grew in complexity and in participants, depending on the children who were available to play over the course of the afternoon.

**TV/video watching.** Jack enjoyed watching the action TV shows of popular culture superheroes, such as Batman. As Maple Lane didn't have a TV, Jack's TV watching was mostly confined to the evenings when the family was at home, or on the weekends when Jack spent time with his dad. Jack knew the number of the stations he liked the best, as these were the channels specifically designated to children's programming. With his mother's assistance, Jack found the shows he wanted to watch through the on-screen guide, or Janice chose one of the children's programs when he asked to watch TV. Jack also liked to watch the wildlife

program *Zoboomafoo*, an educational television program designed to provide interesting facts on animals to young children. Jack often discussed these facts to his mother or brother who watched along with him.

**Computer time.** On the occasions I spent with Jack in Janice's care after-school and in the evening, Jack enthusiastically played on the computer, offering him opportunities to engage in IL practices. As Janice commented, Jack "loves" using the computer and she had a hard time getting him off of it. Jack enjoyed playing the games that were already loaded on the computer (e.g., *Spider Solitaire*) which required him to read simple directions while placing number cards in correct sequences. He often played with his brother as he told me proudly that "Jamie beat [the game] before." When the Internet was working, Janice downloaded games and activities from children's educational websites. Working with Jack, she offered assistance with reading the directions to the activity or the word game. These websites also provided information on topics interesting to Jack including animals and sports.

**Video gaming.** During playtime at home, Jack also played a number of video games on his gaming systems. Janice rented some of the games and some she owned. These games usually had "army" or car-racing themes involving action and adventure. Janice assisted Jack in playing the games by reading the rules and on-screen hints for him until he got the sense of the game. He then played the games by himself, each time trying to better his score from the last time he played.

**Dinner time.** Jack's family ate out at fast food restaurants usually every night. Dining out offered several opportunities for Jack to engage in IL practices. For example, these restaurants usually displayed their menus above the ordering counter. Janice usually ordered for the boys, but over the course of the study, Jack began to read the menus himself and found that there were more choices than those offered by his mother. In another example, friends with young children joined Janice and the boys for dinner at a local restaurant. After dinner, Jack and the other children played in the restaurant's designated play area. Janice required Jack read the posted rules of play to all the children to ensure that all children met the minimum and maximum height requirements, and determine if they needed to play in their socks. During dinner, the family talked with the friends about the events in their lives. These conversations always included Jack and, as a result, he gained information about the happenings in the families' lives.

**Bedtime.** Jack often did not arrive home until well into the evening, as he spent the afternoon and early evening in the after-school care program, at his father's house, out for dinner, or out visiting friends with Janice. Arriving home later in the evening allowed Janice to get the children right into bed with minimal fuss, and she said it allowed her quiet time to talk with Tammy or call friends and family on the phone. Janice admitted that she didn't read to the boys as often as she could have, but I observed that Tammy often took on this role. Historically, losing school library books was a problem for the family but Tammy read narrative and informational texts to the boys from a collection given to them by Janice's friends when Jamie was sick in the hospital with pneumonia. Tammy offered answers to the boys' questions about the text, and added her own information to aid in these discussions.

To summarize, the spheres of activity of the out-of-school contexts in which Jack participated offered some opportunities for Jack to engage in IL practices. In Jack's case, it appeared that those spheres of activities that were less school-like in structure afforded the greatest number of opportunities for him to engage in IL. Like Tara, time for unstructured play enabled Jack to explore his own curiosities particularly in playing video-games and using the computer. Time for outside play also afforded Jack opportunity to reenact some of the information he gained from these sources. However, my observations documented these practices within a very structured out-of-school day, set by Janice, and did not allow Jack sustained play at one time in the same context. It was possible that Jack had more opportunities to engage in IL during the weekend time he spent with this dad, but as I was unable to observe during this time, I only had evidence of what Jack told me during our interviews.

### **6.3 Ivan Wang**

Ivan, aged 7, the third focal child in the study, was born in China and moved with his parents to Canada in 2005. He lived with his mother, Marion, his father, Terry<sup>31</sup>, and his maternal grandmother in a two story house located about four blocks from Northwood Elementary school. Approximately half-way through the study, Marion gave birth to a son, Dylan. Specific information on the composition of the Wang family is located in Table 6.5.

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<sup>31</sup> Upon their arrival to Canada, the family took Anglicized names. Thus, these pseudonyms are reflective of the names they preferred to be called.

**Table 6.5: The composition of the Wang family**

<b>Family</b>	<b>Parents (Age in years)</b>	<b>Focal Child (Age in years)</b>	<b>Other children living in the house- hold and their ages (yrs)</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Schooling</b>
Wang	Marion (mother) (39)	Ivan (7)	Dylan (new-born)	Currently a homemaker (Previously in China, a business owner)	Three year business degree at an Institute of Technology in China
	Terry (father) (40)			Originally in telecommunications as a programmer, now is a construction subcontractor	Bachelor's degree in electronic engineering in China
Grandmother Li (Marion's mother living with them for an extended one year visit)	(67)			Originally an apartment manager for a large complex owned by the Chinese government	A college degree from China

Although Mandarin was the main language of the home, Ivan was bilingual in Mandarin and English. Terry was very fluent in English and Marion was relearning English after taking courses in university. During the study, she often had Ivan translate for her. Marion remarked that my visits enabled her to practice her English and she became quite proficient. Ivan's grandmother spoke only Mandarin, but she learned a few words in English to make me feel welcome in their home.

Ivan displayed a different personality at home than what I observed at school. At home, he was extremely talkative and rambunctious, and enjoyed playing jokes on his grandmother

and mother. Ivan rarely played outside and rarely played with neighbourhood children. He spent much of his free time reading, playing with Lego, drawing, or watching TV. He was particularly close to his grandmother and mother who spent a great deal of time with him. After Dylan was born, Ivan had difficulty adjusting to the new baby as his mother's and grandmother's time was now divided between the two boys.

### **6.3.1 Description of the Wang household**

The Wang's two story house sat on a busy street. Terry's newer pick-up truck sat in the driveway in front of a closed garage. The Wang family rented the suite below the top floor of the house to a work friend of Terry's, and so access to the Wang's living area was along a cement pathway behind a high gate on the right side of the house. Sloping away from the pathway, a grassed area undulated down to a large vegetable garden. A set of wooden stairs at the end of a cement pathway led up to an open but covered sun deck. Drying herbs, meats, and vegetable greens hung from clothes-lines attached to the deck posts. On a small table in the corner of the deck sat jars of pickled vegetables and liquid herbal mixtures.

Ducking under the drying foodstuffs, the family entered the house through the large glass sliding doors off the sun deck. Here, the family took their shoes off and lined them up, toes pointed out, for easy entry upon leaving the house. The glass doors slid open into the dining area of the house and to the attached kitchen and living room. Furniture was sparse in the bare-floored living and dining areas, with only a small table and four chairs in the dining area, and a couch and large TV in the living room. Spiral notebooks, pencils, a dictionary, and a handheld electronic translator sat in a neat pile on the mantle above an unused fireplace. Largely undecorated, the walls within the home featured a few religious icons, a small family picture, and some art work created by Ivan. This top floor of the house also contained three bedrooms and a small bathroom. The family had turned one of these bedrooms into an office. In this room, a modern computer with Internet access sat on a small table against the window. To the right of the table stood a book case with neatly ordered Mandarin and English books; one shelf allotted to each family member for their personal collection. Against the far wall of the room, an electronic piano keyboard stood.

Marion and Terry shared a bedroom large enough to hold their bed and a small nightstand. Ivan and his grandmother shared the third bedroom, Ivan sleeping on the top of a bunk bed and Grandmother Li sleeping on the bottom. The small family bathroom located near the bedrooms also served as a laundry facility.



Although the rooms were sparsely furnished, there was warmth to the house. The family usually turned up the heat (especially after the baby was born) and the warmth and the aroma of cooking filled the rooms. A small electric box emitted a soft Buddhist chant and played continuously, day and night, to ward off evil spirits and bring peace and harmony to the home.

In the next section, I discuss the personal literacy histories of Ivan's mother Marion, and Ivan's father, Terry who were mainly responsible for mediating the IL events in which Ivan was involved.

### **6.3.2 Marion and Terry Wang's personal literacy histories**

Marion and Terry grew up in the same area of China and attended similar schools. They both learned to read (in Mandarin) in similar ways. Both had parents who greatly valued education and developed "the habit of learning" in their children from an early age. The parents instilled in their children the value of working hard, whether it was in school or at work. Terry explained how this affected his life and his parenting:

When I was young my mother and my parents always work hard. And then I see—if you want to do something better you have to work hard—so just like have an example right? For ...Ivan or Dylan, if I just—every day I just stay at home and [have] nothing to do then when they grow up—the same thing [will] happen. It's no good.

Marion and Terry's parents worked hard to assist their children in developing "the habit of learning." Terry remembered that his parents read to him and provided him with a great number of picture books. Designed to encourage and to teach early reading, these books featured easy story words and popular movie characters with which children were familiar. The books were also large, something equivalent to the North American "big books." Terry reported that his parents did not have a TV, but they had lots of books which they used for reading and writing with their children.

Terry reported that during his youth, Chinese parents expected their children work hard from a very young age at home and then work hard in school. He indicated that this expectation was still true in China. He explained:

In China, there is one way. [There are]... lots of people. [Students] have lots of competition and it's ... totally different [than here]. To go to university [in China]...like you learn ... you study in school probably for years... for 13 years. And then [you take] just one test that can fail you. You can try again but it's really hard. Only 3 out of 10 [people] go to university. You can pay lots of money and then you can take university, but most of the people can't do that, right? Can't afford that. Too expensive. Yeah, in my culture it's like you have to learn hard and you get higher mark. And then ... you can go to a good school. And you can go to a good university. And then you can get a good job. And then you get good money. And then you can relax.

The Wang family immigrated to Canada at Terry's insistence and for Terry's desire to live in open spaces with fresh air and a clean environment. A former telecommunications worker, Terry wanted a better life for his children, away from the crowds of people, the competitive atmosphere, the excessively long school days, and the nights and weekends filled with homework and studying. He explained:

In China, there's lots of pressure. There's a lot of people in there, right? And if you ... learn hard and study hard, then when you grow up you maybe can work like have a job in the office or something like that. But here, even if you work labour or something, you can make money.

Terry believed that the Chinese educational system was too difficult and competitive for his children, and he moved his family to Canada to find a different life path, one in which simple labour, he believed, could bring you great money. He remarked, "Sometimes I think I've worked so hard you know every day. And then I don't know how long I can [continue to] do it."

As will be discussed further in the dissertation, the decision to move to Canada caused Terry great anxiety.

Terry's achievement in school was high, and by the age of nine or ten, he began to learn more effectively by reading and learning on his own at home. Even in university, he rarely attended classes, but took the books and the reading assignments and learned on his own. If he had questions or concerns, he attended class to get clarification. His successful graduation from university and consequential hiring at a large telecommunications firm reinforced his belief in self-learning.

### **6.3.3 Marion's and Terry Wang's IL practices**

Marion and Terry were avid readers. They both read in Mandarin and English, although Terry's command of the English written language afforded him more choices. One of the drawbacks to living in Walton (a lower Chinese-populated community) was the dearth of Mandarin print resources. Although Marion drove, she was too nervous to navigate the busy roads in their area and relied on bus transportation during the day. As her pregnancy progressed, Marion took fewer bus trips and waited until Terry could drive her when he arrived home from work. Unfortunately, over the course of the study, Terry took jobs that forced him to be out of town for two weeks at a time, which left Marion essentially homebound.

When Terry was in town, the family took major shopping trips on Saturdays and Sundays to the large Chinese communities about a half-hour drive away. Marion stocked up on Mandarin newspapers and magazines, and Terry took her to the public library where she borrowed a number of information books in her native language. During the long wait for the delivery of her baby, and during her recuperation, Marion spent a large part of her day reading.

Marion's pregnancy and Dylan's birth provided a great number of opportunities for her to engage in IL practices in English and Mandarin. An example of this is from my field notes:

Marion and Grandmother Li were in the kitchen speaking in Mandarin, Grandmother's head bent over what looked like a book about Chinese herbs while Marilyn held a tin of baby formula. On the stove, a brown liquid was simmering in an enamel pot. The aroma was pungent and filled the living area where I sat observing Ivan complete his homework. Ivan wrinkled his nose and told me that his grandmother was cooking some tea for his mother to drink to help the baby stop

crying. Marion came into the living room and asked if I could help her read the words printed on the label of the can of baby formula. As I read the names of the complex ingredients, she began to shake her head. She said she didn't understand the long words and so I explained them to her to as best I could. After listening, she turned and brought her baby to me. She showed me the rash on Dylan's torso, explaining that she thought that the rash was due to something in the baby formula he was consuming. She then showed me the ointment the doctor recommended and haltingly read the label's English directions for use. Reaching across the table, she took up the accompanying literature she had received with the prescription and began reading it out loud.

Shortly after I recorded these field notes, the family doctor diagnosed Dylan with food allergies. As a result, reading medical literature and labels on products became an important IL practice for the family.

Terry read a variety of genres in Mandarin and English. He owned a number of classic stories (e.g., *Great Expectations*), and stored them on his shelf in the office. The shelf held a collection of Reader's Digest hard-covered books, a large English dictionary, and copies of the Bible (written in English and in Mandarin). Terry also subscribed to the Reader's Digest magazine after reading a copy in a doctor's office. He also bought and read magazines with Canadian themes (e.g., *Our Canada*) in order to learn more about the culture and country in which he lived. Although raised in the Buddhist faith, Terry read literature produced by a number of different religious groups.

The TV figured prominently in the IL lives of Marion and Terry and TV programs served as a great source of information. Marion watched the TV in closed caption to improve her English. Unable to understand some of the oral text, she followed with the assistance of the printed captions. If she did not understand the printed word, she wrote the word down and looked it up in her English dictionary, which was usually within easy reach. The amount of Marion's TV viewing increased as her baby's due date came nearer and she became more homebound. Marion watched many of the programs with her mother, and these included news reports from China. Marion also watched a TV program aimed specifically to teach the English language, although she reported it too advanced for her. Terry watched a moderate amount of

TV when he was home from work. He primarily watched programs on the Discovery Channel, gaining information on a variety of topics that interested him.

Marion also gained news and information about her homeland on the Internet. She had an email account but rarely used it, preferring to talk on her cell phone. Weekly calls to her father and brother in China helped to stem the flood of homesickness. Although she took photos on a digital camera, Marion did not send or share them with anyone. Perhaps her most vital electronic device was her handheld translator. As she negotiated different texts, she kept a list of words that she translated from English to Mandarin. If translations confused her or dissatisfied her, she made note to ask me about them during my next visit.

Terry loved music and spent time on the computer downloading music to his computer and then to his iPod. Travelling far distances to work, he enjoyed listening to music and had an iPod docking station installed in his truck. At home, he also listened to the live feed of American top 40 radio stations on their Internet websites.

Terry's employment as a sub-contractor required him to spend time at home working with building plans and drawings. As he also worked in various parts of the province, he consulted maps to locate his various worksites. These materials were always in English, as this was the language of Terry's work. Marion and Ivan wanted to know where he would be travelling and so Terry conducted brief geography lessons around the kitchen table in English and Mandarin so that his family could follow his travels.

Along with newspapers and radio stations, Terry got much of his information from the Internet. His curiosity and love of learning enabled him to do different kinds of research on the computer, both in Mandarin and in English. For example, unsatisfied by some information he received about Dylan's skin condition, Terry researched the ailment on the Internet. He then presented this information to one of the doctors who treated Dylan. True to his nature of being informed prior to learning a new subject, Terry asked informed questions when he took his son to the doctor.

#### **6.3.4 Ivan's out-of-school IL practices**

Ivan's out-of-school IL practices were wide and varied. His parents were intent on giving Ivan a well-rounded education, and this entailed enrolling him in several different programs which engaged him in many different forms of learning. As I did with the other focal children, I focus my analysis on those spheres of activity in the home and other out-of-school contexts where IL events routinely occurred. I first highlight the spheres of activity (loosely

based on the chronology of Ivan's out-of-school day), Ivan's IL practices, and the characteristics of activity in context that offered opportunities for engagement in IL practices as shown in Table 6.6. I then discuss the findings in greater detail.

**Table 6.6: Spheres of activity, Ivan's IL practices, and characteristics of activity in the out-of-school contexts**

Sphere of Activity	Ivan's IL Practices	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offers Opportunities for IL Engagement
After-school programs (i.e., "Mad Science")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading and viewing printed, visual and multimodal informational texts</li> <li>• constructing and assembling IL texts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designation of particular after-school program</li> <li>• designation of physical space</li> <li>• materials and supplies for construction</li> <li>• access to informational texts</li> <li>• access to informed instructor</li> </ul>
Homework time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading information to complete school homework</li> <li>• reading instructions to do workbook homework assigned by parents</li> <li>• writing information to complete workbook homework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designated space in which to complete homework</li> <li>• mediation by parent</li> <li>• workbooks containing informational text provided by the parent</li> </ul>
Meal time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading informational texts in recipe books and on food packages</li> <li>• discussion of news events from TV, papers, and Internet</li> <li>• using maps a to find out where Terry has travelled and where he will travel next</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designated meal time as a family</li> <li>• designated space to gather</li> <li>• access to information from parents and informed others</li> <li>• informational texts such as maps, papers, etc.</li> </ul>
Playtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading instructions for Lego projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to materials for construction and sketching</li> </ul>

Sphere of Activity	Ivan's IL Practices	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offers Opportunities for IL Engagement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consulting and reading informational texts</li> <li>constructing and assembling IL texts (drawings, maps, etc.)</li> <li>"reading" drawings for projects</li> </ul>	<p>(e.g., Lego sets, paper, pencils)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to informational texts</li> <li>designated spaces for construction and assembling IL texts</li> <li>access to informational texts as mediated by an adult</li> </ul>
TV viewing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>viewing children's educational/informational programs reading the captions on-screen</li> <li>viewing the on-screen guide for program information</li> <li>viewing commercials for product information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to TV cable programs</li> </ul>
Computer time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reading informational texts found on websites</li> <li>reading instructions for game playing</li> <li>reading visual information on games</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to a computer</li> <li>access to the Internet</li> <li>access to purchased or downloaded software</li> </ul>
Art Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reading and viewing printed, visual and multimodal informational texts</li> <li>constructing and assembling IL texts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>designation of physical space in which to conduct class</li> <li>materials and supplies for construction</li> <li>access to informational texts</li> <li>access to informed instructor</li> </ul>
Bedtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>listening to informational texts read aloud</li> <li>reading and viewing informational texts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to informational texts as mediated by a parent</li> <li>access to parents' information knowledge base</li> <li>designated physical space</li> </ul>

Sphere of Activity	Ivan's IL Practices	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offers Opportunities for IL Engagement
		to share informational text <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a format/venue for discussion of informational text</li> </ul>
Shopping and excursions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading, viewing, listening to, informational texts (e.g., signs, products, pictures, menus)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to the wider community, cultural events, etc.</li> <li>• designated weekly time</li> <li>• access to informational texts as mediated by a parent</li> <li>• access to adult information knowledge base</li> </ul>

### 6.3.5 The spheres of activity in the out-of-school context that offer opportunities for Ivan to engage in IL practices

**After-school programs.** Terry and Marion enrolled Ivan in an independently run “Mad Science” program delivered once a week at Northwood Elementary (but during out-of-school hours), which introduced the children to concepts of science in an experiential way. This out-of-school activity provided a number of opportunities for Ivan to engage in IL practices. For example, during these classes, Ivan read and viewed some advanced informational texts (e.g., maps, pictures) and used that information to conduct particular experiments. The hour-long class finished with an activity that produced a physical product (e.g., a propeller boat) that the children took home with an information sheet. At home, the children explained the experiment to their parents and discussed the product they created.

**Homework time.** Homework time was a sphere of activity in which Ivan had many opportunities to engage in IL practices. After coming home from school and eating a substantial snack, Ivan began his homework at the kitchen table. Marion looked over his planner and reviewed and assessed the homework assignments in addition to any graded school work that Ivan brought home. Together Ivan and his mother completed any homework required by Ms. Davidson. This usually included the daily practice of the spelling words for the week. Electronic translator in hand, Marion guided Ivan through his lessons, and at the same time kept



a notebook close at hand, jotting down English words (complete with annotations in Mandarin characters) to practice later. Once Ivan completed his homework, his mother instructed him to complete a few pages from the workbooks *MathSmart*, and *EnglishSmart* (a series of home workbooks designed to develop and improve Math and/or English skills) before his father returned from work. Terry purchased these books concerned that Ivan had very little school homework to complete and thought Ivan had too much free time. Following his own learning style, Terry wanted Ivan to learn new concepts before Ms. Davidson introduced them in class so that Ivan could progress faster. Terry also believed that the math concepts that Ivan was learning in class were too easy, and he wanted to challenge Ivan with more difficult material. In communication with his brother who lived in China, Terry learned that his niece, who was the same age as Ivan, was learning far more content in Math. This fact distressed Terry, despite his desire to escape the competitiveness of China, and he became more concerned that his son would be left behind. Therefore, he assigned Ivan two to three workbook pages in Math and English on a daily basis to be completed before Ivan watched TV. Terry instructed Ivan not to write in the book, but to put his answers down on a pad of paper so that when Dylan grew up, he could also use the workbooks.

These workbooks exposed Ivan to a great deal of printed information. Although the work matched school-like literacies (e.g., vocabulary exercises, and fill in the blank comprehension type activities), the content was non-narrative text types that conveyed information about Canada, animals, sports, and the like.

**Meal time.** The preparation of meals and snacks and the actual eating of the meals in the Wang household offered Ivan a great number of opportunities to engage in IL practices. Ivan helped his Grandmother prepare the family's meals as she cooked recipes from a number of different Chinese cookbooks. Grandmother made Ivan follow the recipes step by step. She also instructed him in the art of preparing herbs for medicinal purposes. His role was to read the information from the recipe texts, find the ingredients from the cupboard for his grandmother, and read the English words on the packages.

During meal times, the family shared information about their day, about news in the community, and about news in China that they viewed on TV or on the Internet.

**Playtime.** Playtime for Ivan was a sphere of activity that occurred only after he completed his school homework and the workbook pages his father assigned him. Playtime, best described as an unstructured block of time, was time that Ivan generally did what he liked.

For the most part, these activities involved reading, drawing, and building Lego. Also within this general free time, Ivan participated in several other spheres of activity such as watching TV and playing on the computer.

Playtime provided Ivan with many opportunities to engage in IL practices. Ivan read a great number of English books during this free time, including fiction and informational texts. He also enjoyed books that concerned popular culture. Ivan's favourite books were information books that appealed to his fascination with boats, ships, trains, and the sea. Ivan's parents bought him several Mandarin early reading books, similar to the books that they grew up with. He did not particularly like them, and rarely read them, but at his parents' insistence, he used the pictures within them as a source for his drawings. Many of Ivan's information books also served as sources for his sketches.

Ivan spent much of his playtime drawing and imagining with his pencil. His sketches recorded the important events in his life (e.g., the first time he saw his mother after the birth of his baby brother), his attraction to popular culture (e.g., the characters of the TV program, *Sponge Bob Square Pants*), and his fascination with transportation (e.g., ships and trains). His parents encouraged this interest and ability, and enrolled him in an evening group sketch class. They supported his drawings by buying him rolls of paper, sketch pads, and information books, and permitted him to draw on the living room walls.

During playtime, Ivan built large Lego sets for cargo ships and tanker trucks. He built these structures with Terry, according to the specific pictorial instructions, and displayed them on the fireplace hearth. After several days, they were deconstructed and returned to their boxes, to be put away until another time.

**Computer time.** Ivan used the computer to play card games (e.g., Solitaire) and other educational games that his parents bought for him and loaded onto the computer. His parents also purchased several electronic educational games from the *Quantum Pad Learning System* series which featured audio, games, activities, and quizzes. Ivan stated that he enjoyed learning facts about space and geography.

**TV viewing.** Ivan spent some of his play or free time watching television. Although the amount he watched (which was generally an hour or two per day) greatly distressed his parents, this sphere of activity actually provided numerous opportunities for Ivan to engage in IL practices. For example, some of Ivan's TV viewing included watching the Discovery Channel programs with his mother. Ivan understood the English commentary but he did not always

understand some of the concepts behind the factual information. Conversely, Marion couldn't always gain enough information from the oral English text, but the written English text provided by the captioning provided her with the missing information. As they watched, Marion explained, in Mandarin, some of the facts to Ivan. This system worked very well for the two of them, and Ivan gained a great deal of information on topics that were highly interesting to him.

**Art class.** Once a week, Ivan attended an evening sketch class. He was the youngest student in this class of about a dozen students, ranging in age from seven to 20 years old. The instructor taught the class out of her home, and provided individual and small group instruction to her students. Art class provided Ivan with a number of different opportunities to engage in IL practices. An example is provided from my field notes:

The students gather around a very long table covered in newspapers in what appears to be the instructor's living room. As the students settle around the table, Ivan takes out his sketch book and turns to last week's sketch. The instructor calls for attention and asks the students, "Do we know Van Gogh?" She turns and points to Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* reproduction on the wall. She instructs the students in the details of the picture. At the end of the instruction she asks the students to incorporate Van Gogh's techniques into their pictures and asks them to refer to the books and magazines she has piled on the table. Students rise to get the magazines and art books that are related to Van Gogh's work. She pulls one out for Ivan, and turns to a particular picture. Bending over the picture she begins speaking to Ivan in Mandarin and gestures to features in the picture.

After this observation, the instructor moved on to another student and Ivan began his sketch. He continued working for the rest of the hour, and looked frequently at the picture provided by the instructor. The art class followed this particular routine for a number of the classes with a number of different artists. Ivan learned a great deal of information about not only the particular techniques associated with the artist, he gained a great deal of historical information.

**Bedtime.** This sphere of activity offered Ivan a number of opportunities to engage in IL practices. During this time, I most often documented Ivan reading informational texts to himself. Although his mother and grandmother did read to him on occasion, they usually read

books in Mandarin. Ivan complained about this as he reported that the Mandarin books his parents bought him were “boring.” The books Ivan preferred were written in English and too difficult for Marion or Grandmother Li to read to him. Therefore, only Terry read to Ivan at bedtime when Terry was home. However, during the bedtime routines, Ivan read a great number of informational texts in the bedroom and bathroom.

**Shopping and excursions.** As mentioned previously, the family took weekend trips to the large Chinese communities about a half-hour drive from the Wang’s house. These trips involved completing a variety of errands and included shopping for the weekly groceries at different markets (e.g., the butcher, the vegetable store, the noodle shop, the tofu store), visiting the public library, viewing a cultural event, and having a meal at a restaurant. These shopping trips afforded Ivan a number of different opportunities to engage in IL practices. It was expected that Ivan participate in these events, and in particular, help his grandmother when necessary. The following is taken from my field notes:

Grandmother Li had a carry basket in her hand and was filling it with vegetables. When it became too heavy for her to carry, she placed it on the floor of the grocery store and stood next to it. In Mandarin, she spoke to Ivan. Ivan looked at the piles of vegetables as Grandmother pointed. He slowly walked in the direction she showed him, reading the signs posted above the vegetables until he found what he was looking for. Grabbing a bunch of leafy greens, he held them up for his grandmother to see. She nodded yes, and Ivan came back with the vegetables. They had a quick conversation and then she put the vegetables in her basket. She continued to do this until she was finished and Terry came and picked up the basket for her.

When I asked Ivan about this event, he told me that his grandmother needed certain vegetables for making teas to keep his family healthy. On this particular day, Grandmother told him to fetch those ingredients which would assist her in making a soup that would keep the circulatory system healthy.

Ivan also had the opportunity to go to the public library on these trips. He particularly liked to look at and borrow more advanced books on transportation. These books provided him

with the pictures that he liked to sketch from during his free time at home. These were also the kinds of books that Ivan could not access at the library at Northwood Elementary.

To summarize, the spheres of activity of the out-of-school contexts in which Ivan participated provided numerous opportunities for Ivan to engage in IL practices. Most notable in Ivan's case, was the structure within the numerous spheres of activity in which he participated. Ivan did not have had the large chunks of free-time as some of the other focal children had during the study. However, within the out-of-school time, Ivan had many different experiences in different out-of-school contexts that afforded choice and flexibility in ways that appealed to his interests and provided opportunities for him to engage in IL. Although he had to complete daily workbook pages at home to improve his math and English skills, he was also encouraged and supported by his parents in his endeavors to draw, read and construct from informational texts. Similarly, while Ivan's parents did not want him wasting his time by watching TV, the shows he watched were often in the company of his mother who scaffolded and extended his learning of the information presented. Ivan's expected participation in the daily routines such as preparing meals and shopping, offered opportunities to exchange, evaluate and communicate information. Ivan's parents' involvement and mediation in these events, I argue, promoted numerous opportunities for Ivan to engage in IL practices.

#### **6.4 Ross Mason-Miller**

Ross, aged 7, the last focal child in the study, lived jointly with his mother Julia Mason, and his father Robert Miller, in their respective residences. Although the distance between Julia's and Robert's residence required Ross to be driven back and forth several times a week, Ross maintained daily contact with both his parents. The family generally ate dinner together several times a week. Specific information on the Mason-Miller family can be found in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7: The composition of the Mason-Miller family

Family	Parents (Age in years)	Focal Child (Age in years)	Occupation	Schooling
Mason	Julia (mother) (45)	Ross (7)	Psychologist	Masters Degree, Doctoral studies coursework
Miller	Robert (father) (52)		Funeral consultant (Pre-need and at- need cemetery arrangements)	Completed Grade 11, Attained General Educational Development (GED) certificate in 2005

Ross was a physically active seven-year-old and a sports enthusiast. He was passionate about hockey, soccer, and football and he faithfully followed the status of the city's hockey and football teams. Ross played for a local soccer team and was one of the team's top goal scorers during his weekend games. He attended church with his father, and participated in Sunday school classes every Sunday morning.

As both of his parents worked, Ross attended Maple Lane after-school care and would be picked up by either his mother or his father, depending on their respective work schedules. As Ross spent flexible but equal amounts of time at the two residences, I describe both households where he spent the majority of his out-of-school time. I also describe the literacy histories and IL practices of both parents, before discussing Ross' IL practices.

#### **6.4.1 Description of the Mason household**

Julia Mason worked part-time as a psychologist for a large employee assistance program in an office located about a 35 minute rapid transit ride from her residence. She lived in a new two bedroom apartment located within a set of high rises just a half-block away from the transit station. The glassed exterior apartment buildings were a stark contrast to the neighbouring ramshackle houses and abandoned lots. The heavily secured access to the building required Julia and Ross to come down in the elevator to let in visitors. Tastefully decorated and spacious, the fourth floor apartment contained a bedroom each for Julia and Ross, a large kitchen, dining and living room area, a bathroom, and a small deck area.

The living area contained a large TV with a DVD player. Nestled in the corner of the living room, a dining area provided a space where the family ate their meals. A modern glass

table served not only for dining but for playing games, doing homework, drawing pictures and making crafts. A large hutch stood beside the table and held games, paper, and craft utensils.

Ross' bedroom, located down the hallway from the dining area, contained a neatly made bed, a small desk, a closet and two book shelves. These book shelves displayed important school award certificates, sports trophies, popular culture figures, framed pictures, stuffed animals and books. The kitchen, located near the dining area, was spacious. The refrigerator displayed a range of Ross' art work, spelling tests, soccer schedules, and school certificates. Cookbooks, calendars, recipe boxes, and decorative dishes filled the shelves and spaces of the kitchen.

In the next section, I discuss the personal literacy history of Julia, and then describe her IL practices.

#### **6.4.2 Julia Mason's personal literacy history**

Julia, an only child, grew up in a major Canadian city. Her mother, widowed when Julia was four years old, raised Julia on her own. Julia remembered her mother's love of reading, and her firm belief in the value of obtaining an education. Although she didn't have tangible memories of being read to, Julia discerned that she must have had this experience, judging by the very old toddler books she found in a box filled with childhood artefacts. Julia fondly remembered her childhood reading and school experiences:

I remember loving reading – reading voraciously – literally reading all the time. [I] loved school. I couldn't get enough of school. [I] couldn't wait for school to roll around. I was the kid who was sharpening her pencil crayons the week before. [I was] always like that.

Julia also remembered that she wanted to be a teacher when she grew up, a goal that she reached when she began a brief teaching contract at a smaller Canadian university. Julia commented how she remembered “playing school,” when she was young, employing her dolls as her students. Encouraged by her mother, Julia spent many hours in this happy pastime.

Julia's later literacy history revolved around academic literature as she worked on obtaining her university degrees. She originally acquired a diploma in acting and dancing from a well known theatre school and became a professional actress for a short time. After spending

a year in Europe in the “theatre scene,” she realized that she didn’t have “a thick enough skin” for the business and moved back to Canada. After returning to Canada, she pursued an undergraduate and a Masters degree at a western university. At the time she met Ross’ father, she was working in private practice as a psychologist.

#### **6.4.3 Julia Mason’s IL practices**

Julia reported during the study that she continued to read and write for different purposes. Some of Julia’s print IL practices surrounded work that she did at home to fulfill work obligations. She stated that all her case notes, clinical reports, and assessments were hand written to fulfill client privacy obligations. The reading and writing of these client files and the reading of research journals were examples of the IL practices that seeped from Julia’s work to her home.

Julia enjoyed reading current information magazines such as *Time* and *Mclean’s*. She stated that she also enjoyed *People* magazine “to keep up with the gossip.” She also enjoyed reading the two provincial newspapers and the local and community newspapers.

Julia had health issues that required her to manage her diet carefully. As she loved to cook, Julia had a number of cookbooks that modified traditional recipes to accommodate people who shared her condition. In dealing with her health issues, Julia carefully read ingredients on packages when buying groceries or when using products. She also read current medical and health literature to stay informed about her condition.

Julia did not own a computer but had access to Robert’s computer at his home. She rarely used it, preferring to keep her computer use to a minimum, and only at work. Although Julia enjoyed watching movies, she usually watched them with Ross and Robert when they were all together, at which time they choose DVDs that Ross enjoyed watching. Julia generally limited her TV watching to programs with historical content. During the study however, behaviour transgressions caused limitations to Ross’ TV watching, which resulted in restrictions in all the family members TV viewing. Due to the intensity and emotional aspect of her job, Julia enjoyed the quiet and peace of her home to relax, to sit quietly or to meditate.

In the next section, I describe the home of Ross’ father, Robert Miller. As Robert jointly shared in raising Ross and mediated the IL events in which Ross was involved during his stay with him, I also explore Robert’s personal literacy history and follow it with a discussion of his IL practices.



#### **6.4.4 Description of the Miller household**

Robert Miller, Ross' father, worked as a funeral consultant at a large memorial company located twenty minutes by car from his home. Located on a quiet street, Robert's house had a view of the river's bridge and the industrial area of Greendale. Situated on a sloping lot, the house had a small grassed area in the front and a large grassed area in the back. The front door of the house entered directly into the living area and adjoined dining area. A large leather couch and matching leather chair faced an entertainment unit placed against the wall. A large TV took up most of the unit, and included a DVD and stereo system in the shelves below. On top of the unit, Robert displayed framed family pictures and Ross' handmade crafts. A large oak corner table held a number of different magazines, flyers and newspapers. A child's art easel, complete with rolls of paper and felt markers, separated the dining and the living rooms. The family used the large round oak table in the dining area for eating, doing homework, and completing paper work. The kitchen opened onto the dining area. Magnets on the refrigerator secured a number of different papers including after-school care receipts, Ross' math drill worksheets, and information from Ross' after-school science program.

The top floor also contained Ross' and Robert's bedrooms. Ross' Batman-inspired bedroom featured a bunk bed complete with Batman comforter, pillows and wallpaper border. At the far end of his bedroom, a computer desk stored an older computer and a printer. A nearby book shelf held office supplies for Robert, books for Ross, and a defunct glass aquarium filled with toys. A rolling plastic storage bin contained Ross' collections of game pieces, hockey cards, and other paraphernalia.

#### **6.4.5 Robert Miller's personal literacy history**

Robert grew up in several different Canadian provinces and in some European countries. He told me that his father worked in the air force, a career that required the family to move almost every year. Robert recalled attending 16 different schools before dropping out in Grade 12. Escaping a "terrible home life," Robert left the province and moved to Alberta where he worked at a number of jobs including cook, truck driver, and car salesperson. On disability for several years due to a shoulder injury, Robert returned to work as a funeral consultant a few years ago.

Robert's experiences with school were very positive. He stated, "Out of all the things in my life I remember school, because school was a safe place for me because of my upbringing." He continued,

I excelled at school. I was [at the] top of my class all through school and I remember being bullied for that (...) you know, because they're going to think you're teacher's pet because you're the first one to answer. And especially grade school. In high school I started writing short stories and poems and that and I spent a lot of time doing that. And it [the writing] was promoted by [my] grade 11 teacher in high school (...) I remember feeling really uplifted by that (...) I had that support. And through the years I've written a lot of poetry.

Although Robert stated that did not have the time to write poetry now, he still felt strengthened and encouraged by the teacher who allowed him to shine in a very dark time in his life.

Robert remembered that he learned to read strictly at school and that he loved reading. He remembered being read to in kindergarten and in grade one and told me that he felt happy learning to read the traditional *Dick and Jane* basal reading series popular in the 1950s. Robert also recalled having a great interest in reading novels as he was growing up, and being reprimanded by his father to stop reading and go out and play.

#### **6.4.6 Robert Miller's IL practices**

Robert continued to read in his adult life. Similar to Julia, some of Robert's IL practices included reading those materials related to his work (e.g., training manuals, company directives) that he brought into his home as he prepared for the next work day. Robert reported reading *Maclean's*, *National Geographic*, and *Canadian Geographic* magazines. He also stated that he read the community newspapers that were delivered to his door. Most of Robert's IL practices, however, related to his Christian religion. Robert read from the Bible daily and attended a bible study group once a week. At the time of the study he was taking a theology course so that he could volunteer for missionary work in South America. During church on Sunday mornings, during the pastor's sermon, Robert wrote reflections in a small notebook. Robert's cousin, Noreen, and her husband Bill, introduced Robert and Ross to the church. The church offered

extensive activities in which the family participated. Robert often took home the vast amount of literature offered by the church for further reading and reflection.

Robert also spent time helping Ross with his spelling quizzes and math homework. Robert read Ross' planner nightly and signed it, after carefully reading the school's newsletters and notices that Ross placed in the planner pocket. Robert also made sure he read Ross a bedtime story at night and requested that the babysitter read a story if Robert was out for the evening.

Although Robert had a computer and Internet access in the house, I never observed them in use. Robert stated that he occasionally used the computer to Google travel spots that he would like to visit. Over the course of the study, Ross often reported that the computer was not working or the printer was out of ink.

Robert enjoyed watching sports on the TV with Ross. They particularly liked watching the city's hockey team play their games. Between periods, Ross and Robert reenacted the game by bouncing a balloon or a soft ball between them, trying to score a goal between the imaginary posts of the goal net. Robert also reported watching the news on TV to gain information on recent deaths in the community, as this affected his workplace and livelihood.

Many of Robert's electronic, visual, multimodal, and communicative IL practices surrounded religion. Attending church was a two to three hour commitment on Sunday mornings and involved worship, singing, prayer, speaking in tongues, healings, video viewing, and music. Robert and Ross also took up the practices in the home. For example, Robert and Ross prayed, listened to CDs featuring popular Christian music, and read the Bible. Robert was also trying to learn Spanish through audio CD in preparation for his missionary work in South America.

#### **6.4.7 Ross' out-of-school IL practices**

Ross' parents hope for him is that he grows up be a well-rounded, socially responsible citizen and "make the most of his own strengths, whatever they be." To this end, his parents reinforced and encouraged his interest in sports by enrolling him in a community-based soccer league that Julia reported emphasized community spirit, community support, and role modeling. Game days, which I attended, occurred on Saturdays. Although Julia did not participate in the church that Ross and Robert attended, she was in favor of Ross' participation "for the morals and the values that he's learning." Ross also attended the after-school Mad Science program, because Julia reported that Ross liked making things and he liked experimenting. She told me

that she liked to keep Ross active, and keep his mind stimulated. Finally, due to both parents work schedules, Ross attended Maple Lane, the same after-school care program as Jack, for three hours a day, five days a week. It was in these out-of-school spaces of the church, the soccer field, Mad Science, Maple Lane, and Ross’ two residences that I documented his out-of-school IL practices.

Ross’ literacy out-of-school practices varied and depended on the place in which he was in attendance. As I did with the other focal children, I focus my analysis on those spheres of activity in the home and other out-of-school contexts where IL events routinely occurred. I first highlight the spheres of activity (loosely based on the chronology of Ross’ out-of-school day), Ross’ IL practices, and the characteristics of activity in context that offered opportunities for engagement in IL practices as shown in Table 6.8. I then discuss the findings in greater detail.

**Table 6.8: Spheres of activity, Ross’ IL practices, and characteristics of activity in the out-of-school contexts**

<b>Sphere of Activity</b>	<b>Ross’ IL Practices</b>	<b>Characteristics of Activity in Context that offers Opportunities for IL Engagement</b>
After-school programs (i.e., “Mad Science”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading and viewing printed, visual and multimodal informational texts</li> <li>• constructing and assembling IL texts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designation of particular after-school program</li> <li>• designation of physical space</li> <li>• materials and supplies for construction</li> <li>• access to informational texts</li> <li>• access to informed instructor</li> </ul>
After-school care routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading and viewing informational texts</li> <li>• reading instructions to play board games</li> <li>• reading after-school care rules and behaviour charts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to informational texts</li> <li>• provision of /access to games</li> <li>• provision of rules and charts</li> <li>• mediation by another child or adult</li> </ul>
Homework time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading information to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designated space in which</li> </ul>

Sphere of Activity	Ross' IL Practices	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offers Opportunities for IL Engagement
	complete school homework	to complete homework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>mediation by parent</li> </ul>
Dinner time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>discussion of news events from TV, newspapers, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>designated meal time as a family</li> <li>designated space to gather</li> <li>access to information from parents</li> <li>access to informational texts (TV, papers, etc.)</li> </ul>
Playtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reading instructions for projects</li> <li>consulting and reading informational texts</li> <li>constructing and assembling IL texts (drawings, letters, etc.)</li> <li>“reading” drawings for projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to materials for construction (e.g., book fair sets, paper, pencils)</li> <li>access to informational texts</li> <li>designated spaces for construction and assembling IL texts</li> <li>access to informational texts as mediated by an adult</li> </ul>
TV viewing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>viewing children’s educational/informational programs reading the captions on-screen</li> <li>viewing the on-screen guide for program information</li> <li>viewing commercials for product information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to TV cable programs</li> </ul>
Soccer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reading and enacting game plays</li> <li>reading weekly game schedule</li> <li>reading maps and directions to the games</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provision of coach to direct and mediate play</li> <li>game schedules</li> <li>maps for game location</li> <li>designated space for soccer practices</li> </ul>
Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>singing, dancing, praying</li> <li>viewing multi-media presentations</li> <li>constructing crafts and projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>designated place for worship</li> <li>mediation by pastors, youth leaders and other members of the church</li> </ul>

Sphere of Activity	Ross' IL Practices	Characteristics of Activity in Context that offers Opportunities for IL Engagement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading from the bible</li> <li>• listening to sermons, stories and morals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• community</li> <li>• access to multimodal texts</li> </ul>
Bedtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listening to informational texts read aloud</li> <li>• reading and viewing informational texts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to informational texts as mediated by a parent or other</li> <li>• access to parent's information knowledge base</li> <li>• designated physical space to share informational text</li> <li>• a format/venue for discussion of informational text</li> </ul>

#### **6.4.8 The spheres of activity in the out-of-school context that offer opportunities for Ross to engage in IL practices**

**After-school programs.** Ross attended the after-school “Mad Science” program (as Ivan did) held at Northwood Elementary. As mentioned previously, this program allowed the participants an opportunity to do some “hands-on” science experiments that engaged many modes of learning. A description of this learning is taken from my field notes:

“Everyone come and look at this!” says the instructor. The children crowd around a small glass dome which has a 4-pronged fan inside. The instructor has Ross hold a flashlight to it and tells the children that this is an anemometer and tells them that this means that it is a device for measuring wind speed, and is one instrument used in a weather station. She then demonstrates what a breeze would look like on the anemometer and tells the group that scientists can count the number of times the fan inside the anemometer goes around in order to determine the wind speed. The group discusses this concept for a few minutes. Next, the instructor brings out a thermometer. She asks the children to predict the temperature outside. She gives the children small strips of paper and they begin to write their predictions. She then

tells them that the coldest temperature ever recorded was -89 degrees C, and the hottest was +58 degrees C. The class is then taken outside where they measure the temperature and then are asked to observe the cloud patterns in the sky. On returning to the classroom the children are given two papers, one entitled my cloud diagram, and the other paper giving printed information about stratus clouds. The instructor reads the information on stratus clouds from the paper and shows the group a photograph of stratus clouds. She then shows more photographs of clouds, stating that "these are the types of clouds there are." Students are instructed to sketch the clouds that they observed outside.

The children made and took home a construction that reflected the culmination of the day's learning. On this particular day, the children made a simple bead chain that changed colour when exposed to ultraviolet light.

**After-school care routines.** From Monday through Friday, Ross attended the after-school care program at Maple Lane until approximately 5:30 p.m. The schedule of the after-school care provided time to allow Ross to complete any homework he had. The facility also had a number of workbook-style papers available to the children during the homework portion of the schedule if they didn't have homework and wanted to join others in this activity. Ross often chose to do a page or two of math questions voluntarily that required him to use the facility's calculator. The calculator was a desired item for the children as they also played word games by punching in certain numbers and then turning the calculator upside down to read the "digitized" words. This activity brought hours of enjoyment to Ross. Ross also enjoyed reading the information books located on the facility's shelves, and he also participated in playing active games (e.g. bowling and football) with one or two of the other boys. Many times, I observed altercations being settled by Ross' reading of the rules to the others playing the game.

**Homework time.** Once Ross returned home (either to Julia's or Robert's), he began a routine that involved showing his parent(s) his planner, reading them his homework, and showing them that the homework that was completed at Maple Lane. Ross practiced his spelling in both homes as his parents prepared dinner. The family read together and discussed any other information in the planner or in the enclosed notices.

**Dinner time.** Dinner time was a sphere of activity that offered opportunities for Ross to engage in IL practices. When the family was together, they sat at the table to eat their meals and shared the news of their day. Robert was particularly adamant that Ross ate his meals slowly and talked with his parents about what was happening locally and globally. When Ross had dinner with Robert alone, they often watched the TV, and in particular, the local news program.

**Playtime.** On the weekdays, Ross arrived home late from after-school care and between dinner and bedtime, there was not much chance to play. On the weekends, however, after his soccer game, church, or lunch with his aunt and uncle, he returned home to one of his parent's residences where he spent the afternoon watching TV sports, or playing scrabble or other table games. At his mother's house, Ross spent time engaged in doing crafts or drawing and writing, or playing with some of the toys purchased through the school's book club order. For example, in the bathroom, Ross "grew" a large rubber shark at the bottom of the bathtub. On the bathroom counter, a constructed glow-in-the-dark caterpillar charged under the light bulbs of the vanity. Purchased through the school book club order (sponsored by a world-wide publisher and distributor of children's books) these toys supplied Ross with hours of fascination. Information books accompanied these toys which Ross read repeatedly during my visits.

**TV viewing.** After dinner, Ross turned on the TV to a televised hockey or soccer game. Ross watched these games carefully, and read the game statistics posted on the TV screen's headers and footers. He called this information out to others if they were not watching. The weekends provided further opportunities for a variety of different IL practices, again contingent on the spaces that Ross moved within. On weekend mornings before soccer and church, Ross watched cartoons and popular culture character programs (e.g., *Arthur*, *Curious George*, *Franklin* and *Little Bear*) as well as children's educational programs.

**Soccer.** Ross played for an age-leveled community soccer team and practiced once a week and played a game every weekend. In this sphere of activity Ross read and enacted certain game plays. His responsibilities included reading the weekly game schedule and informing both his parents of game locations and driving directions.

**Church.** Church was a sphere of activity that afforded Ross many opportunities to engage in IL practices. On Sunday mornings, Ross attended a Christian Fellowship church with his father. Worship for families began at 10:00 a.m. and ran until approximately 11:00 a.m. when the children left to attend Sunday school in another area of the facility. During the family worship sessions, Ross participated in the singing, dancing, prayer, and multi-media



presentations. The music was up-beat and engaging and involved an electronic-based band. Church organizers posted the song lyrics by power-point on a large screen at the front of the church. The church leaders invited worshippers to stand, sit, sway and dance. Three pastors delivered sermons at varying times during the worship and they invited the congregation to pray for and heal those in need of assistance. Robert made notes during the sermons, but Ross preferred to draw.

Sunday school roughly followed a mix of the structure of family worship and regular school. Ross joined the other children for a group bible story acted out or told by youth leaders. After the bible story, the group sang, prayed, and listened to the moral of the story given by a youth leader. The children then divided into grade groups and moved to the classrooms. Here the Sunday school leaders (usually parents from the church) led their group through three station-based activities (crafts, games, and group discussion and prayer) that reinforced the morals or values covered in the day's sermon. After Sunday school, the children and parents gathered in the church hall for coffee and socializing. Sunday afternoon usually continued with a leisurely lunch in a local restaurant with Ross' aunt and uncle and Robert. While the adults chatted, Ross completed the puzzles and colouring activities printed on the restaurant's kids menu.

**Bedtime.** Ross' bedtime routine of a bath and a quiet book time offered opportunities for Ross to engage in a number of IL practices. After his bath, Ross read a variety of printed materials to himself (e.g., hockey programs from previous games that he attended, and information books on sharks or animals). After this individual reading time, Julia or Robert read Ross a bedtime story or passages from a children's bible before they turned the lights out.

To summarize, it is apparent that the spheres of activity of the out-of-school contexts in which Ross participated provided numerous opportunities for him to engage in IL practices. Although some of the spheres of activity Ross participated in afforded fewer opportunities to engage in IL, he participated in a number of different experiences that enhanced his exposure to IL and ultimately afforded opportunities for him to engage in IL practices.

Living in two different residences with each parent afforded Ross unique experiences. Both Julia and Robert focused on providing Ross with their time and attention, and each had achieved their goals in different ways. For example, Julia's love of literature, reading and crafts resulted in her buying a number of informational texts, toys and supplies that Ross used extensively during his time with her. Ross and Julia played endless games of Scrabble and

Monopoly, and wrote letters and did crafts together. Robert took Ross to football games organized through his men's group from the church. Together, he and Ross watched every hockey and football game together, read sports statistics and reread game guides given out at the games they attended. Both of Ross' parents structured his time around his interests and acted as mediators during their time together.

## **6.5 Summary and discussion**

In this chapter, I examined the affordances of the out-of-school contexts that offered the focal children opportunities for engagement in IL practices. Taking a sociocultural perspective, I centered my analysis on the cultural practices and valued activities of the out-of-school contexts with particular features or routines. Specifically, I analyzed those spheres of activity where IL practices routinely occurred. Here, I found and demonstrated that the spheres of activity in the focal children's out-of-school contexts were similar in nature and in structure. I also demonstrated that the degree to which the focal child had flexibility, choice and extended unstructured time within that particular sphere of activity, the greater the opportunities were for the focal children to engage in IL.

In my analysis of the spheres of activity, I also identified the role of other participants in providing and mediating opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL. These participants were parents, grandparents, siblings and instructors. Their interest in technology and new literacies were central in affording opportunities for the focal children to take an interest in technology and new literacies. In some cases, the participants simply provided access to these technologies and gave the focal children time to explore them on their own. In other cases, they took an active role by playing, working, and viewing with them, scaffolding the focal children's learning as they played, worked and viewed together. As such, I demonstrated that IL learning is a socially mediated process that cannot be understood apart from its context of development, the forms of mediation available, and the nature of participation across the contexts.

My analysis also examined the availability of cultural tools (e.g., books, informational texts, computers) in the spheres of activity and examined how they became key features in these environments. Specifically, I described the physical out-of-school spaces in this chapter and the availability of the IL resources within. I demonstrated that each out-of-school context of the focal children afforded access to tools which positively impacted the focal children's

opportunities to engage in IL practices. The degree to which the focal children had access however, varied from context to context.

In this chapter, I demonstrated how the out-of-school context afforded the focal children opportunities for engagement in IL practices. In the next chapter, I return to the definition of affordance to attend to the notion of affordance as some characteristics of activity in its context and how these may serve as constraints on opportunities for engagement in IL practices.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: OUT-OF-SCHOOL CONTEXT AFFORDANCES: FACTORS THAT CONSTRAIN OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN’S ENGAGEMENT IN IL PRACTICES**

### **7.0 Introduction**

Chapter Six addressed the second research question: How do out-of-school contexts afford opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices? I defined the term “affordance” as the characteristics of activity in its context that offered opportunities for children to engage in IL practices. In Chapter Six, I demonstrated that the degree to which the focal children had flexibility, choice, and extended unstructured time within a particular sphere of activity, the greater the opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices. I also identified the role of other participants in these out-of-school contexts in providing and mediating opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL. Finally, I examined the availability of cultural tools (books, informational texts, computers, etc.) in the spheres of activity and demonstrated how they became key features in these environments and afforded the focal children numerous opportunities to engage in IL practices.

Returning to the definition of “affordance,” we are again reminded that some characteristics of activity in the out-of-school context may serve as constraints on opportunities for engagement in IL practices. Therefore, this chapter addresses the second part of the second research question: What factors constrain these out-of-school opportunities? My analysis is based on my examination of the individual spheres of activity in their embedded and collective nature within the out-of-school context.

In Chapter Five, I focused on four integrated factors that constrained opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices in the school context that emerged from the analysis of the IL practices observed and documented. These factors included: time, perceived needs, access to information, and disruption/interruption. Performing within-case and across-case data analysis of the IL practices observed and documented in the out-of-school spaces, my analysis interestingly identified very similar factors (with slight nuances or variations) constraining opportunities for the focal children to engage IL practices out-of-school. These variations are included in table 7.1, which outlines and describes each factor as they are used in this chapter.

**Table 7.1: Factors that constrain out-of-school opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Lack of Time</b>	<b>Lack of time</b> refers to the shortage of time in the parents' daily schedules which did not permit or limited the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices.
<b>Perceived Needs</b>	<b>Perceived needs</b> refers to those educational (e.g., particular skills, knowledge, and attitudes) and out-of-school life requirements the parents perceived as needing priority attention for the future success of their children.
<b>Access to Information</b>	<b>Access to Information</b> refers to the focal children's ability to obtain and use information from a variety of sources within the out-of-school settings.
<b>Disruption/interruption</b>	<b>Disruption/interruption</b> refers to the episodic or constant disruptions and/or disorder in the out-of-school settings.

In this chapter, I present an interpretive account of each factor describing how opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices are constrained in out-of-school spaces including illustrations drawn from the data to support the claims made. As noted in Chapter Five, I try here to capture the complexity of some of the factors. The illustrations provided in this chapter only represent a limited number of typical examples and should be seen as one of several possible interpretations.

Chapter Seven is organized into four main sections, each of which examines how a particular factor constrained opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices. In the first section, I examine the factor of time, or more definitively defined as the *lack* of time. In the second section, I analyze the concept of perceived needs, and in the third section, I address the factor of access to information. Finally, I address the concept of disruption/interruption in the fourth section. The chapter closes with a summary and a discussion of the findings.

### **7.1 “There is never enough time...”: The lack of time as a factor in constraining opportunities for children to engage in IL practices**

As established in Chapter Five, I found the conceptual category of *time* to be prevalent during analysis of the factors constraining opportunities for children to engage in IL practices in

the school context. Chapter Five defined the factor of time as the *press* of time; in this chapter, the factor of time is more specifically defined as the *lack* of time. Lack of time refers to the shortage of time in the parents' daily schedules that did not permit or limited the focal children's out-of-school opportunities to engage in IL practices. Although I choose to discuss the lack of time in isolation from the other factors at this point in the chapter, it should be noted that each of the factors discussed in this chapter are interconnected and are responsible in constraining opportunities for children to engage in IL practices as a whole.

As illuminated in the participant profiles in Chapter Six, the parents of the children in this study were extremely busy in their daily life activities. Employment schedules and responsibilities were the most common elements in contributing to the parents' lack of time. With the exception of Jack's mother, Janice (who could not work outside of the home due to medical reasons), and Ivan's mother, Marion (who worked outside of the home in China but was essentially on maternity leave in Canada during the study), each parent of the focal children worked in jobs that necessitated long or differentiated shifts in places that required a long commute or time away from the family. Working to make a living to support family members took up a large portion of the parents' day, and arrangements were made to accommodate care for the children during their out-of-school time.

In Tara's family, Tara's mother Debbie took the early morning shift at the warehouse so that she was able to be present when Tara arrived home from school. This early morning trade-off required Debbie to organize herself and Tara the night before, and to make arrangements for early morning care for Tara and her brother Tom. On returning home from work, Debbie carried on the chores of a busy household including doing laundry, preparing meals, helping with homework and school projects, and driving her teenagers to friends' houses and to out-of-school activities. Exhausted from a day's physical labour, Debbie often went to bed early, sometimes before her children.

Although Janice Hunt did not work outside the home, she filled her day with medical appointments and visiting and supporting friends. As previously mentioned in Chapter Six, Jack attended after-school care, and Janice did not pick him up until the late afternoon. From the after-school care program, the family went out to dinner or visited other friends in Janice's support network, arriving home usually just before Jack's bedtime. Once at home, Janice spent a great deal of time assisting her live-in teenager friend, Tammy, complete her high school homework assignments. Janice lived through a similar school experience, and she wanted to

ensure Tammy could return to the regular school program and graduate with her high school diploma.

Ross Mason-Miller's parents both worked in flexible job situations in order to take Ross to school each morning. However, Julia's job required a long commute on the rapid transit system, and Robert's job required long shifts so neither was available to provide care for Ross after school. Ross, therefore, attended the after-school care at Maple Lane five days per week. As previously mentioned, Ross lived in dual residences with the family, usually sharing meals together at one residence. Robert and Julia spent time shifting Ross from one residence to the other, and this posed specific challenges. As Robert stated,

[I]t seems like there's never enough time. . . as a single parent, between getting off of work and sometimes working in the evening. And it seems we're so busy during the week that in between getting off work, picking [Ross] up, getting supper ready, getting him to soccer practice, going to my small [church] group meeting, getting him fed before that happens... And I know it'd probably help my business if I did more evenings but . . . I want to spend time with my son.

This poignant excerpt indicates the push-pull dichotomy between work and spending time with their children that many working families face in their daily lives.

Similarly, in Ivan's family, a busy working schedule demanded that Terry leave the home for two weeks or more at a time. This contributed to the lack of time he had to spend with his children. Ivan's mother, Marion, who gave birth to Ivan's brother during the study, was overwhelmed by her husband's absences as she tried to deal with a colicky new baby. Ivan's family, who had only been in Canada for a very short period, felt the time pressures and the cultural stresses associated with their decision to move from China. This was noted in the following exchange I had with Terry during an interview:

TW = Terry Wang

MM = Marianne McTavish

TW: I don't have too much spare time.

MM: I know.

TW: But I like to have spare time but it's hard for me.

MM: Because . . .?

TW: I really would love to have some time with my kids  
but—but I can't.

MM: You can't because . . .?

TW: I have to work right?

MM: Right. And you work . . .

TW: That's the problem. It's hard to balance you know. If  
I had more money . . .

MM: Do you think that more money would let you have that  
time?

TW: Yeah. I just was thinking like if I have more money  
and then I can [have] and [my family] can have better  
life. But if I don't work hard—they never see [how  
hard I work]... also you still want to have some time  
with them right?

MM: Oh I know.

TW: You know. Sometimes the parents—they always—they  
are example for kids right? And then if you work  
hard— when they grow up they also will work hard.  
If you are very lazy and then they also lazy.



MM: Are you worried that you're not providing a good example for Ivan?

TW: Yeah. I do. So yeah I know . . . I just try do my best. Yeah.

In this example, Terry related (as Robert did in a previous excerpt), that he was simultaneously pulled in two directions. Terry wanted to set a good example for his children by working hard, but he also realized that working hard to make more money limited the amount of time he spent with his family.

This lack of time in the families' lives greatly affected the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices in several different ways. To begin, these parents prioritized their time spent with their children based on the tasks Ms. Davidson gave the child for homework. These tasks typically included practicing spelling words, recalling math facts using flashcards, or filling out worksheets. Most of the texts I documented for use in homework were not informational. The kinds of homework designated by Ms. Davidson were largely skill-based and engaged the children in the practice of completing worksheets. Further, as discussed in Chapter Six, the parents articulated the inherent importance of reading to their children on a daily basis as they were influenced by their own parents in their own childhoods or by the messages emanating from the school. As a result, the parents in this study made it a priority, similar to the homework routine, to include a designated reading routine (either at bedtime or at an alternate time) that involved the children being read to by a more proficient individual (e.g., the parents, an older sibling, a babysitter). While this time provided an opportunity for the children to engage with informational text, the texts read to the children were largely narrative in nature, well-loved, older, family-owned storybooks that were favourites of the parents. I took the following example from my research notes:

Tom and Tara are late getting ready for bed. It takes them several minutes to pull themselves away from the new *Eye Spy* computer game that Debbie purchased for them earlier that day. They slowly go upstairs to their bedroom. I wait while Tara brushes her teeth and Tom tidies his bed. It takes them several minutes to get ready

for the bedtime reading routine. Debbie, sighing, comes in to the room and sinks onto Tom's bed. She invites me to sit on Tara's bed. She asks the twins if they have their books picked out. They begin to scramble about looking for their books. Tara remembers that she has a new book on bears downstairs in her backpack and starts climbing out of her bed. Debbie tells her to stop, and that she doesn't have time to wait until she finds it. Tara begins to object, but Debbie reaches for a book from a shelf above Tara's bed. Debbie tells me that the night before she picked out stories for the twins but she never got a chance to read because she was too tired that night, so they would read these choices tonight. For Tom, she picks a book from the *Magic Tree House*® series. She tells him that because it is a chapter book, he only gets one chapter. The chapter is missing the first page but she reads it anyways, and reads it very quickly, and does not pause until she is finished. She closes the book and reaches again above Tara's head and pulls down Richard Scarry's *Going Places* (1971). Debbie reads *Happy Lappy in Finland*, one of the short stories in this anthology.

Robert regularly read Ross parts of an older children's bible, and short stories from the *Little Golden Books*® series, which were gifts when Ross was young. Although reading to the children by a more proficient adult did occur in the home, the texts used for this practice were those close at hand. Unless the focal child insisted that the story to be read was from another source (e.g., a library book) the parents, tired and lacking time, reached for the closest book available from the shelves and closets of the home and bedrooms, usually older published books that appealed to the parents as children. The children's library books (newer and quite often information books) were in other areas of the house, still in the back-packs, or near the back-packs, to ensure that the books made it back to school for the daily library book exchange. As the teacher-librarian insisted that the families paid for lost books on a school term basis, there was reluctance on the part of the parents to let the books stray too far. This was a particular challenge for Ross and Jack who spent time in dual residences (and who both lost library books during the study).

In a related point, none of the children (with the exception of Ivan, who occasionally borrowed materials from a community library a half-hour drive away) visited the community

library to borrow materials. The reason for this was two-fold. First, the parents communicated to me that they used to go to the library when the children were young, but now that the children were in school all day and had various after-school and weekend activities, the parents (who were now in full-time jobs or homebound) no longer had time to make trips with their children to the public library to choose books. Second, the parents of the children viewed their child's school library as an easy and adequate substitute to the public library system. However, as will be discussed further in this chapter, the parents' reliance on the school system's library and its associated book choice policies proved problematic and constrained opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices.

In Ivan's case, his mother, Marion, was not confident in reading Ivan's English books to him as Ivan was more proficient than she. Marion tried to read Ivan stories in Mandarin although Ivan balked at this, preferring to read books in English that piqued his interests. When Ivan's brother was born, Marion no longer had the time to read with Ivan, and often left him on his own with his English books. However, as will be discussed in further sections, Marion provided Ivan with opportunities to engage in IL through different modes in order to compensate for her lack of English proficiency and her lack of time to read with him.

Although many of the parents reported reading the newspaper or reading a number of different current event magazines, during my observations, I rarely documented the parents actually participating in these events themselves or participating in these events with their children. This is not to say that the parents did not participate in these practices, as I was not in the homes one hundred percent of the time. There certainly was evidence of newspapers and magazines in the homes, usually stacked on a table or in a corner, seemingly set aside purposefully until the parents had time to read them. However, over the course of my visits, the piles of newspapers and magazines grew larger and larger until I noticed their removal. On one particular occasion, when I documented a large pile of these newspapers in Robert's house and then observed that they were gone two days later, I asked him about their disappearance. He reported that he didn't have time to read them, and the news was now old, so he recycled them. In Tara's home, Debbie reported that when she had the time to read the newspaper, she usually read it at the kitchen table when the children were not around and left it there until she had time to finish it.

Similarly, for the families who had Internet access and reported using the Internet to access information, I rarely observed the parents participating in these events. As my visits

occurred only when the children were present and awake, I believe that these social-networking and information-locating events occurred only when the children were not at home or after the children were in bed. At these times, the parents accessed the computer and indulged in some solitary time to focus on their own interests. Therefore, the opportunities for the focal children to engage in locating, reading and managing information where the parents were the initiators of the event, were very few.

Lack of time also limited some of the parents to try new technology. For example, as part of the study, I gave the parents a small digital camera to record literacy events in their lives. I found the parents took very few pictures over the course of the study. The parents stated that they were too busy to remember to take the pictures, or as Julia commented, it was the lack of time to read the information concerning the camera's operation.

While the factor of the lack of time certainly curtailed the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices, the parents unwittingly and consciously developed a number of strategies to address this factor. In the following section I address the strategies the parents implemented to ameliorate the lack of time in their lives which in turn, offered opportunities in the out-of-school contexts for the focal children to engage in IL practices.

#### **7.1.1 Strategies used to ameliorate the lack of time**

**Information Accessors.** Perhaps the most significant strategy developed to ameliorate the lack of time in the parents' schedules was the reliance on significant others (e.g., siblings, older cousins, grandparents, babysitters) who lived in or outside of the home. These significant others spent time with the focal children in ways that gave the parents some relief from the constraints of busy schedules but also inadvertently offered the focal children opportunities to engage in IL practices. Each of the children had at least one, if not two or more individuals that impacted their IL lives. These *guiding lights* (Padmore, 1994) or *mediators of literacy* (Baynham, 1995) made their skills available on an informal basis to assist the children for specific purposes. Borrowing from these terms and expanding them, I describe these mediators in this study as *information accessors*, that is, individuals who focused on the wants and whims of the focal children and sought to help them explore their interests, answer their questions, and access the world of information. The information accessors did not take a parent-type role and they seldom helped with the school types of literacy; they simply were responsive to the child's emergent IL learning in the out-of-school spaces. Their role was to assist children to access information and then mediate this information. Through this role, the accessors introduced the

children to new discourses. The children then transformed the information using new modes (e.g., to play a video game, to write an epitaph on a mock tombstone, to sketch a model train, to plan a new sports play). Further, this learning was not unidirectional or from expert to novice, but a co-construction of knowledge and/or skills benefitting all participants in the event.

For Tara, her step-sister, Amy, served as her information accessor. As discussed in Chapter Six, Amy opened up the information, communication, and technological world for Tara in various ways. Amy read to Tara, she invited her to listen to music and to watch *YouTube*<sup>TM</sup>, she played Internet games with Tara and let Tara take pictures on her cell phone. Amy stated:

[I] try to read and do stuff in front of Tom and Tara because [I] know that it is good for them to see models like that. I read that on the Internet . . . but mom always read and did stuff in front of [me] and [I] always wanted to [be] just like her.

Amy, who desired to be Tara's role model, happily offered her time to Tara to show her what she wanted to know. While Debbie was often too busy during the after-school time catching up on the household chores, Amy spent the time with Tara on the computer, a technology that Amy favored. Through this digital buddy system, Tara learned to locate and evaluate information and learn first-hand about using the technology and the software programs Amy showed her. When Tara finally had the opportunity to access the computer on her own, she was able to navigate her favourite website games without difficulty and played them using strategies her sister showed her, effectively pushing the limits of the game in new and more challenging directions.

Amy's ability to be an information accessor had further effects on Tara. After learning new strategies and information accessed by her sister, Tara effectively taught her twin brother, Tom, in the same manner as she had been taught by Amy. Tara let Tom play the game but offered information and helpful hints so they mutually attained a satisfying conclusion to the game.

Amy further extended her role as an information accessor in traditional print literacies. Amy's reading practices included voraciously reading the books that she had taken out of her high school library. As such, she was quite willing to read Tara's school library books to her in the communal space of the family's living room or in Tara's bedroom as part of Tara's bedtime

routine. These books were current publications that Tara chose herself, and included many informational texts.

In Jack's family, Tammy (the teenage high school student who was living with the family), assumed the role of information accessor for Jack. Jack particularly enjoyed learning about dinosaurs and sports and he often brought home information books on these subjects from the school library. Janice (who did not enjoy reading and was fearful at the possibility of Jack losing the books) often recruited Tammy to read them to Jack. Tammy loved to read to Jack and thought of herself as a big sister to him. She allowed Jack to "help" her with her homework and the two did research using Jack's books and information located on the Internet when it was available to them.

In Ivan's family, Marion's mother, Grandmother Li, was Ivan's information accessor. Her role was considerably different than the role of the other focal children's information accessors. For example, although Grandmother Li could not read the English language, she provided a great deal of information for Ivan in Mandarin. Grandmother Li's IL practices involved the cultural practices of cooking and maintaining the family's health through the use of herbs and foods, and she would share her books and recipes with Ivan, and answer his questions. Marion told me that Grandmother Li was returning to China within a few months, and wanted Ivan to visit her the following summer. She told me that it was important for Grandmother Li that her grandson had knowledge of the customs of her homeland.

Grandmother Li also enjoyed playing games with Ivan on the computer. Much like Tara and Tom's shared video-game playing, Ivan and Grandmother Li played a number of simple Internet card games together. They were often quite competitive but assisted with each other's game playing strategies.

I soon came to realize that I, too, took on the role of an information accessor, and perhaps more specifically, an information *broker*, to the Wang family and to Ivan. The family, who were navigating the Canadian mainstream school system, relied on me to provide the necessary information about cultural practices involved in living, working, and learning within Canada. During the course of the study, I brought information in several different forms (e.g., pamphlets, schedules, list, maps) to help answer the questions of Marion and Terry. They then translated this information to Grandmother Li and to Ivan. In one particular example, while Terry was away, I assisted Marion access information on milk allergies on the Internet in hopes that she could solve the problem of the baby's rash. Together we accessed information in order

to plan a course of action. Ivan showed particular interest in this event as the baby's crying kept him awake at night and took away the time that his grandmother and his mother normally spent with him. He watched me carefully, asking questions on how to access certain types of visual information (e.g., pictures that documented the rashes). After this episode, I continued in this role as described in my field notes:

After I helped Marion with the information on the Internet, she went to take Dylan from Grandmother Li who was trying to calm the colicky baby. Grandmother Li turned her attention to Ivan who had returned to sketching a steam engine from a picture in an advanced information book on trains. They spoke in Mandarin for several minutes about the picture in the book and Ivan's sketch. Ivan kept shaking his head. Grandmother Li motioned towards me and continued to talk in Mandarin to Ivan. Grandmother then left the room and went to join Marion and the baby. Ivan approached me and asked if I would read to him what the book said about the functions of a particular steam train engine that he needed in order to complete his sketch.

In Ross' case, Robert's cousin Noreen and her husband Bill served as Ross' information accessors. This couple figured prominently in the life of Ross and in particular, in his spiritual awareness. Noreen and Bill introduced Robert and Ross to the church, and the four participated in the extensive activities offered by the church. Church services on Sundays, attended by Robert, Ross, Noreen, and Bill, were long but dynamic events including a multitude of print, electronic, and visual texts, music, and prayer. To a newcomer, the practices of the church invited question and reflection, and in one sense, required navigation. Services followed a loose framework but changed in their delivery. In my observations of Ross during church activities, Noreen and Bill assisted Ross in the navigation of these practices and helped him to find the information he needed in the Bible, in the pastor's sermons, and in the song lyrics. They also readily explained some of practices that seemed confusing to Ross, such as the spiritual healings and the speaking in tongues.

**Enrollment in structured programs.** A conscious strategy parents used to ameliorate the lack of time in their daily schedules was to enroll their children in particular out-of-school

programs. These programs were, in some cases, a necessity. For example, the after-school care program at Maple Lane provided the necessary care needed for Jack and for Ross while their parents were at work. The parents chose this particular after-school care program because of its proximity to Northwood School and for its reputation as a quality facility. Although the program at the care facility structured the time to imitate an after-school home experience, it was very “school-like” in its routines and schedules. The program, however, exposed Jack to a greater selection of informational texts than in his home, and he spent a great deal of time looking at these texts during free choice time.

Ross’s parents and Ivan’s parents also registered their children for out-of-school programs. These parents paid for their sons to attend the after-school science program, held at Northwood Elementary. Ivan also attended private art lessons which were located in the community and were scheduled so that Terry could take him to the lessons in the evening, and free up time for Marion to attend to the new baby’s bedtime routines.

The functions of all of these programs were to give the focal children some alternate activities, and in most cases were, as Julia reported, “to keep them active, [and] keep their minds stimulated.” She continued,

I think programs like [the after-school science programs] allow the kids to be creative and have fun, [but] they’re also learning things. They’re learning things about the basics of science [and] how things work and I think [it] stimulates that curiosity. For anybody who might have a scientific mind, which I don't know if [Ross] does, but why not expose him to those efforts?

This out-of-school program exposed Ross to new information about science. It also served as an alternate to after-school care while his parents were at work. For Ivan’s family, the science and art programs enriched Ivan’s schooling as well as provided opportunities to engage in IL practices, and provided Marion, Terry, and Grandmother Li some time to focus on the new baby.

In sum, the factor of the lack of time figured significantly in constraining the opportunities for the focal children to engage in the out-of-school context. Of particular note in



this section, was parents' use of a variety of strategies including the reliance on an "information accessor," and the enrollment of the focal children in out-of-school activities. These strategies assisted to ameliorate the lack of time parents had and provided the focal children with opportunities to engage in IL practices.

## **7.2 "If a kid's not being challenged, there's always the risk that they will get lazy": The factor of perceived needs as a factor in constraining children's opportunities to engage in IL practices**

The second parameter constraining the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices in the out-of-school context concerns the factor of perceived needs. Perceived needs refers to those educational (e.g., particular skills, knowledge, and attitudes) and out-of-school life requirements the parents of the focal children perceived as needing priority attention for the future success of their children. In Chapter Five, *perceived needs* referred to Ms. Davidson's perception of the educational and physical needs of the children in her classroom. In this section I focus particularly on the focal children's parents' perceptions of the needs of their children and the impact these perceptions had on parental decision-making that effectively constrained the focal child's opportunities to engage in IL practices.

In the interviews I conducted with the parents of the focal children, there was a strong desire expressed by each parent for their children to grow up and live their lives as happy and successful individuals. Although the parents were realistic that their children would possibly meet with adversity throughout their lives, they hoped that it would not cause them a lifetime of hardship. For example, Debbie knew the difficulties that Tara's sister, Amy, had already encountered in her life, and she wanted to ease this for all her children, Tara included. She stated,

I just want them all to be happy. I don't want them to struggle too much. I mean they're going to struggle anyway. But I just want them to be happy and content and be what they want to be. And reach their dreams. Nobody's life is easy all the time. (...) And I'm sure that will encompass bosses and co-workers and that and they might be faced with

some personal issues. I hope they don't have to. But it is a possibility.

Julia had the similar wishes for her child, Ross, as Debbie had for her children:

In the big picture my hope is that Ross will grow up to be well-rounded in terms of knowing what's important in life. I think education and the successful path in life be it a career or a job is important. [But] it's not everything. Being socially responsible, being a good citizen [is important]. And I don't expect the school to provide everything that my child would need to be well-rounded and successful and prepared for life.

Julia wanted her son to be well-rounded and successful to meet the demands of a life Ross will encounter outside of school. However, she did have some expectations for young children's development to meet future challenges. She related,

I think it's really important that developing children have the opportunity to maximize their potential. It really makes a difference (...) acquiring the fundamentals in literacy (...) reading, writing, and acquiring knowledge. It is really important especially in this information age and how fast-paced it is.

Janice, Jack's mother, also articulated the same sentiment about the future. She said,

It's absolutely amazing to watch these young kids and how good they are on computers already. And computers, honestly, and everyone else will agree, is going to be the new way of life because everything's turning into computers. [Jack and Jamie] don't get off it. They love the computer.

The parents in this study articulated that their children's future "in the information age" will involve the knowledge and use of the computer. And the pervasive feeling among the parents was that the school would indeed help to prepare their children for this future, even at the youngest of ages. Julia reported in her interview that she would like the school to go beyond this obligatory preparation and to see "more variety in the sense of the teacher being able to have the time and the energy to go beyond the curriculum." Further, as noted in the opening quotation of this section, Julia firmly believed that "if a kid's not being challenged, there's always the risk that they will get lazy." Similar to Terry's comment about providing a good role model for his children, some of the parents in the study believed that their children were destined for a future of idleness if they were not given opportunities to be challenged and to advance their academic ability.

What appeared to be a disconnect, however, was the parents' knowledge and understanding of the school curriculum and its contribution in preparing their children for the future. For example, Terry commented to me that he was unsure what Ivan was learning in school and how he was progressing. He reported:

I don't know if he's doing good or not good. I just read his writing. Some of the grammar is not good. It's wrong but the teacher never check. Because in China when we would write something—we would write an article or something —and then the teacher would check every word. Even the period and everything. And then the teacher give me back and I read it and I can understand what's wrong in there. Although here it's like—I don't really know—if teacher really read it or not.

When the parents believed that the school was not meeting the needs of their children, and specifically not meeting their needs for an imagined future, I argue that they took it upon themselves to remedy the situation. In the following section, I discuss some of the strategies the parents implemented in order to meet the perceived needs of their children.

### 7.2.1 Strategies used by the parents to meet the perceived needs of their child

As mentioned previously, Ross' parents enrolled him in a number of programs that they felt would feed his curiosity and expose him to opportunities that he might not have in the classroom. In particular, they enrolled him in the after-school science program, as did Ivan's parents, for similar reasons. Run by an independent agency, this program was costly for the participating families. While there was opportunity for the registrants to learn a great deal about the concepts of science and to be exposed to a great deal of printed and multimodal informational text, the leaders of this program spent the bulk of the class time on the management and discipline of some of the children who disrupted the class. Unfortunately, Ross' and Ivan's parents' lack of time due to busy work schedules did not give them the opportunity to observe what their children were learning. However, the families' perception that the enrolled children's scientific curiosity would be stimulated, and the convenience of the class' location and the ability of Maple Lane's after-school care to pick children up after the class' completion, were compelling reasons to register them.

Ivan's parents had concerns with the Grade Two curriculum and with Ivan's progress in English grammar. Terry wanted his children to escape the competitive nature of schooling and job acquisition in China. However, Terry still found it difficult not to compare the schooling of Ivan with his niece who was Ivan's age and attending school in China. Frequent phone calls to China indicated that the niece was advancing more quickly in her studies than Ivan, and this distressed Terry. It further distressed him when he consulted, on the advice of a friend, the Fraser Institute's<sup>32</sup> report card on schools and found that Northwood Elementary ranked in the lower performing schools in the province based on students' achievement on the FSA. As a result, Terry purchased a number of workbooks (e.g., *EnglishSmart* and *MathSmart*, as mentioned in Chapter Six) for Ivan and expected that he complete a few pages in the books on a daily basis. Terry also enrolled Ivan in a number of programs (e.g., science class, art class) to supplement Ivan's schooling. Although Terry stated, "I never hope [Ivan is] going to be an artist or something. I just like [Ivan to have] a skill." Terry liked to fill Ivan's spare time, something of which he felt Ivan had too much. Complaining about the amount of free time Ivan

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<sup>32</sup> The Fraser Institute is a conservative and libertarian think tank based in Canada whose stated mandate is to advocate for freedom and competitive markets. It publishes an annual report card on British Columbia schools so that interested parties can analyze and compare the performance of individual schools.

had to watch TV, Terry also bought a number of English information books for him. These purchases, which will be discussed further in the following section, were attempts to dissuade Ivan from watching TV, to supplement his learning, and to encourage his learning of the English language.

Debbie also believed that Tara had a lot of free time but she believed that free time was important for children. She stated, “Kids are so structured that they don’t know how to be kids – use their imagination and just kind of muck about. A lot of kids are like that. And they seem to be very tense, tight little kids. They’re six!” For Tara, this free time enabled her to play outside, play with friends, use the computer with Amy, play video games, and watch TV. Tara’s free time enabled quite different IL practices than some of the other focal children.

### **7.3 “Right now we’re having Internet problems”: Access to information as a factor in constraining the focal children’s opportunities to engage in IL practices**

The third parameter constraining the focal children’s opportunities to engage in IL practices in the out-of-school context concerns the concept of access to information. Access to information refers to the focal children’s ability to obtain and use information from a variety of sources within the out-of-school settings. How the focal children accessed information revealed several interesting findings.

**Accessing information via the Internet.** Although some parents articulated that we live in an information age and that computer use was going to be the new way of life, all of the children had limitations on their computer use out-of-school and they certainly had restrictions on their access to the Internet. As previously discussed, every home (except for Ross’ mother’s) had a computer. However, the amount of time the focal children had to access the computer, even for tasks that did not involve the Internet, had limitations and in some cases, was non-existent.

Two of the children in the study (Tara and Ivan) did have access to computers and to the Internet. For Tara, the wait to use the family computer seemed immeasurably long to her as she had to contend with portions of time allocated to her teenaged brother and sister, and her twin brother. Once on the computer, she accessed the Internet only under the permission of Debbie who had to bring the modem from her computer in her bedroom down to the family room. As previously mentioned, Amy had had a serious incident involving a stranger on a common chat line and her parents now kept a watchful eye on the Internet sites and the information that *all*

their children were accessing. Although Amy assisted Tara in accessing the Internet, she was very careful in critically evaluating websites and made sure her little sister didn't inadvertently access some questionable information. For Ivan, the computer and Internet were readily available, but I rarely documented Ivan using them on his own. Although he enjoyed playing games with his grandmother, his parents felt that his time was better spent on working on pages in his workbooks, constructing Lego, or sketching from books.

For Jack, access to the Internet was spotty, and as Janice explained, the computer experienced "Internet problems." Jack frequently used the computer during my visits, playing games previously installed as part of the computer's permanent programs. In Ross' case, Julia did not own a computer and did not have Internet access. At Robert's home, Ross' bedroom contained the computer, but I never observed Ross using it. It is my belief that financial circumstances within Jack's and Ross' family precluded an on-going Internet subscription. Jack's mother and Ross' parents accessed the Internet at work or at friends' residences if needed, but Ross and Jack did not have that option, as their out-of-school spaces did not provide access to computers or the Internet.

**Access to information via print.** As previously mentioned, none of the children (with the exception of Ivan) visited the public library as the parents were content with the daily book exchange patterns of the school library. However, the teacher-librarian's rules permitting children to borrow only one information book at a time because they were "too hard," seriously constrained the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices. This was an unfortunate circumstance as the previous teacher-librarian purchased a multitude of new information books for younger children to address this problem. These books were overwhelmingly popular with the children, read quickly and returned promptly. The "one information book" rule effectively reduced the focal children's exposure to informational print text by one-half.

The school library also had a two-book loan policy for all of the student population, allowing each child to sign out only two books at any one time. If the child lost a book while signed out to their name and library number, the child could only take one book out until they returned the other book to the library. The teacher-librarian assessed fines for lost books at the end of each school term. If the child (or parent) did not pay the fines, the teacher-librarian suspended the child's borrowing privileges. Due to the shifting of residences, Jack and Ross, misplaced library books during the study, and the loss suspended the boys' borrowing privileges. This placed Jack's and Ross' parents in an untenable situation because the search for

the library books took time and communication with the other parent in the other residence, and no parent wanted to pay an exorbitant amount for a used book that they believed could eventually be found. Robert, Ross' dad, commented on this during our interview:

Lately [Ross] hasn't been bringing home books because he's lost two books at his mom's house and he can't get library books and he's really miffed about that. I've been trying to promote her to help him find them at her place. And so that's kind of stunted [his reading] every week—I mean the highlight in his week was going to the library and bringing books home.

The school library's policies also played out in the reading and management of the books in the home. Because the parents were wary of misplacing the books, the texts often did not make it out of the focal child's back pack. Unless there was a routine established where the focal child physically brought the book to the parent to be read and was responsible for returning it to the back pack, the book often remained in the back pack unread. As mentioned in previous sections, without an established routine of returning the book to the back pack, the child was read mainly narrative selections from the families' collections.

In a related point, Janice's dislike of reading also impacted Jack's access to information. Although Janice employed Tammy to read to Jack, if Tammy was unavailable, Jack was largely unread to when he was at his mother's house. Combined with the misplacing of the library books at home, Jack often faced severe blocks to his access to and mediation of information. With little access to writing and drawing materials in his rental apartment, his literacy landscape was bleak.

Most of the parents reported that they read printed magazines or newspapers. However, time restrictions to read these magazines and papers were in evidence, and eventually, with the exception of the free local paper, I documented the presence of these materials less and less in the home. Towards the end of the study, Ross' parents, in particular, stopped their subscriptions because they said they could read them at work. It is also my belief that the financial circumstances in some families did not include the sustainability of these sources of information.

**Access to information via the TV and radio.** Some families reported watching the news via the TV. Families watched the evening news when they came home from work, as they prepared the evening meal, or when they ate as a family. Brief snatches of news played on the radio stations of the parents' cars, but for the most part, the children were not part of these events. In Ivan's home, Terry and Marion and Grandmother Li watched news from China on a regular basis. When Ivan completed all the assigned work from school and home, he would be allowed to watch. Terry and Marion often mediated this information event for Ivan in Mandarin, but Ivan usually preferred to play with Lego or to sketch.

In the next section, I discuss strategies that the parents used to facilitate the focal children's access to information.

### **7.3.1 Strategies used by the parents to facilitate the focal children's access to information**

**Purchasing of information books, computer software and video games.** The parents' anxiety associated with lost school library books grew exponentially with every misplaced school library book. For Ross, the tension over which residence contained the missing books put a strain on the family's relationships. Not wanting Ross to be without books, Julia often bought books for Ross through the school book fair and through the monthly educational book publisher orders that the school endorsed and sent home. The items offered in the book club included educational toys, craft sets, and books and could usually be purchased quite inexpensively. This was a viable option for Julia who preferred that Ross spend money on books that he could keep, rather than on the fines for missing school library books. Julia wanted to stimulate Ross's curiosity and often purchased books that were informational in nature and also included a special toy. For example, Ross received an information book on sharks complete with a "growing" shark that resided in his bathtub for many weeks.

Ivan's parents also regularly used the monthly school book order catalogue to purchase information books for Ivan. Ivan seldom misplaced school library books in the home, but because information books were a critical source for Ivan's drawings, the parents readily purchased these books for him. Terry was happy that the books encouraged the "habit of learning" and filled Ivan's free time. These books were at a reading level that Ivan could easily read himself, and also advanced his learning of English. These toys and books also served as a source for journal writing in the classroom.



In Tara's home, Internet access was available but Debbie worried about Tara's exposure to certain sites. Debbie's preferred use of the computer for young children was to play "E"-rated (acceptable for all ages) computer and video games. In this way, Debbie could be assured of the content that Tara was playing and viewing. Debbie had control over the play as she purchased much of the gaming software through discounts at her workplace or at discount department stores. Debbie found games on the Internet but viewed them first, and then if appropriate, downloaded them for Tara so that she could play them immediately. Based on popular culture themes, Tara enjoyed these games. In Jack's home, when the Internet was available, Janice also accessed free and safe game sites for Jack including those associated with popular movies.

**Mediating informational TV programs.** Another strategy that the parents used to facilitate the children's access to information was to mediate TV shows with advanced informational content. This particular strategy was most prevalent in the Wang household. Concerned with the amount of TV that Ivan was watching, and concerned with the non-intellectual content of some of the shows Ivan watched (e.g., *The Bugs Bunny Show*, the *Sponge Bob Square Pants Show*), Terry, and in particular Marion, watched TV with Ivan. The family watched show broadcasted on the Discovery Channel (a TV channel devoted to science, technology, adventure and nature news, and documentaries) and the family would seek shows with content that interested Ivan (e.g., ships, aircraft, trains). As mentioned previously, Marion watched all TV shows with the English caption option turned on, so that she could read the program text while listening to the audio. This advanced her English language development greatly and enhanced her comprehension of the program. When Ivan watched these programs with his mother, he understood the English commentary but he often did not understand some of the concepts behind the factual information. Marion used the printed English text provided so that she could explain some of the facts to Ivan in Mandarin. This IL practice greatly enhanced Ivan's exposure to information text.

**Enrollment in out-of-school informational programs.** As previously mentioned, Ivan and Ross' parents enrolled their children in out-of-school programs which increased their access to information. In particular, the science programs involved a great deal of new information about the physical world in several different modes. Ivan's parents also enrolled him in the out-of-school art program which provided him with access to information from the world of art.

In sum, the factor of access to information figured significantly in constraining opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices in the context of out-of-school. The parents' strategies of purchasing of information books, computer software and video games; mediating informational TV programs, and enrolling the children in out-of-school informational programs facilitated the focal children's access to information.

#### **7.4 “Everybody always has their crisis at the same time ...”: Disruption/interruption as a factor in constraining the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices**

The conceptual category of *disruption/interruption*, or more specifically, *lived* disruption/interruption (the constant upheaval in the lives of the focal child) was the fourth factor in constraining the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices.

Disruption/interruption refers to the episodic or continual disorder in the out-of-school settings. Each focal child had an element of disruption/interruption in their lives, and how each family dealt with the disorder they encountered in their lives contributed in unique ways to the children's opportunities to engage in IL practices. The factor of disruption/interruption will be discussed first with each of the focal children and their families, and then a discussion as to how the families dealt with the disruption/interruption will follow.

For Tara, the lived disruption/interruption in the space of the home was prevalent. In Tara's family, two alternate-shift working parents created a unique but functional atmosphere in which to raise their children. But, in Debbie's words, “With me being so busy” and with “so much stuff going on” it was a difficult task to run a household and keep the family together. A few years prior to the study, Al and Debbie had to place Amy in foster care, a decision they later regretted. Amy ran away and spent time living on the streets. Amy was now living at home with her family and was thriving. Debbie and Al watched carefully over Tara and attended to her needs despite Debbie's comment that “everybody [in the family] has [their] crisis at the same time.”

Janice Hunt, a single mother living on social assistance, tried to maintain stability in Jack's life. However, Jack's life remained complicated and disrupted. Although Janice moved twice during the study for various reasons, the boys remained at Northwood Elementary and attended Maple Lane after-school care until the end of school year. During the study, Jack's father began to take on extended weekend care of Jack, but this did not follow a regular schedule. Jack's dislike of his dad's girlfriend's son complicated matters further and I

documented Jack's resistance in going to his dad's home a number of times. Spending time at dual residences resulted in lost library books and Jack's planner, and this aggravated both Ms. Barrett and Ms. Davidson respectively, at Northwood Elementary. During the week, Janice relied on a network of social relationships that helped her keep her various medical and social assistance appointments, and supported her in raising two very active young boys.

At Ivan's house, the arrival of the new baby caused a great deal of disruption and interruption. Since Ivan was the only child of Terry and Marion for the last seven years, adjusting to the arrival of a new baby brother was particularly disconcerting. Marion had a particularly difficult birth and the recovery took longer than expected. Dylan, the baby, was colicky and kept the family awake at night. Lack of sleep caused crankiness among the family members. Terry also needed to be away from the family in order to bring in income, leaving Marion and Grandmother Li alone for long periods of time. The family had to rely on public transportation while Terry was away, and Marion, still recovering from the birth, felt too unsteady to go out. Grandmother Li now spent time trying to care for her daughter and the new baby, and this left virtually no time for Ivan. Ivan was upset with this change in the household and was involved in minor infractions at the school causing the dreaded behaviour "white slips" to be sent home for parent signatures.

Disruption/interruption in Ross' life was also apparent. Shortly before the study began, Ross' mother Julia decided to move out of the dwelling that she shared with Robert to live on her own. Despite the general good will between the parents, this was an upsetting event for Ross. Ross' parents gave him the flexibility to move between the two residences at any time and for any length of time. Because Ross' parents communicated on a daily basis, questions as to where Ross would spend his days and nights were never an issue; however, the family never followed a fixed schedule. Ross seemed generally happy with this arrangement moving freely between residences, but it was relayed separately to me, by both Ross and his parents, that Ross suffered from "melt-downs" over small events that usually necessitated a change in some aspect of the daily care situation. Towards the end of the study, Ross' beloved dog (who was living at his dad's) passed away, greatly upsetting Ross. As a result, Ross did not want to spend time at his dad's because it was too emotionally difficult for him to be there without his pet.

#### **7.4.1 Strategies used by the parents of the focal children to ameliorate the factor of disruption/interruption**

Dealing with the element of disruption/interruption in the focal children's lives was handled differently by each family, but all families employed strategies to ameliorate the sense of disorder but ultimately impacted the opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices.

In Tara's home, structured routines implemented and sustained by Debbie assisted in averting the "crises" of the family. For example, Debbie's made it a household rule that Tara placed her planner on the dining room table so that information from the school was read and dealt with by Debbie in a timely fashion. Similarly, having lunches in the refrigerator and backpacks ready by the back door the night before, ensured that Debbie did not have to worry about leaving early to go to work. The disruption/interruption in the household, however, did limit what Tara could and could not do after-school. The teenagers were so busy with their various after-school and evening projects, that Debbie did not enroll Tara in after-school activities, but let her play outside, watch TV, and play with friends.

For Ivan and Ross, their enrollment in programs served to provide structure, routine and focused learning as a way to deal with disruption/interruption. While both focal children's parents enjoyed the fact that their children experienced learning opportunities about subjects that interested them, these programs also provided Marion some relief from juggling a new baby's and older sibling's needs, and Julia and Robert with after-school care. As well, both families bought their children books and educational toys to offset the upheaval in their lives. For example, Ivan's father bought a goldfish and a new Lego fire boat when the baby was born to soothe the disgruntled Ivan. Similarly, several weeks after Ross' dog passed away, Robert and Ross researched for, and bought, a new puppy for Ross.

Finally, doctors ordered Janice Hunt receive after-school care assistance for Jack so the disruption/interruption associated with raising two young boys with her medical condition would be lessened. Janice allowed Jack extensive playtime on the many gaming systems they owned which, she reported, kept him occupied and quiet in the small apartment.

### **7.5 Summary and discussion**

Chapter Six addressed the second research question: How do out-of-school contexts afford opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices? In this chapter I sought to

address the second part of the second research question: What factors constrain these out-of-school opportunities? I first presented an overview of the factors (i.e., time, perceived needs, access to information, and disruption/interruption) constraining the focal children's out-of-school opportunities to engage in IL practices, and then I gave interpretations of how each factor was responsible in constraining these opportunities. Following each factor, I discussed ways that the parents of the focal children tried to ameliorate the negative effects of each factor to enhance their children's learning trajectories.

One of the findings revealed by the examination of the factors constraining the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices was that in the out-of-school space of the focal children's homes, due to demanding daily work schedules, limitations on the parents' time resulted in priority attention given to school literacy tasks and school-type literacy texts. These events involved the reading of narrative texts, the practicing of spelling words for upcoming tests, or the practicing of math skills or English skills using workbook pages. The school sanctioned these events and these ingrained school practices took hold in the home. In Ivan's case, Terry and Marion promoted these kinds of literacy events in order to fill a perceived gap to which the school was not attending. The classroom assignments did not require the use of any informational texts, or use of the computer, and so the parents, with their limited time, did not pursue these sources further with their children. The parents conformed largely to the school's power and authority effectively adhering to the axiom that "schools know best."

What is particularly curious about this particular parent mindset, I argue, may be in part attributed to a notion of parent accountability. Similar to Ms. Davidson's feeling of inadequacy of not being able to cover the curriculum and therefore positioned as *not* a "good" teacher, to my mind, the parents of the children in this study also felt fearful. They attended to the discourses imposed on them by the school in order to position themselves as "good" parents. I demonstrate this idea in an example taken from an initial interview with Jack's mother, Janice. Below, Janice responded to my opening questions:

MM: Tell me a little bit about yourself.

JH: I'm a child and youth care counselor. I haven't really done much with it, but two years ago I got my child and youth care counseling course. Graduated high school. Nine months pregnant with my second son.

MM: Where did you graduate from?

JH: H.R. Ferguson Secondary.

MM: Yes.

JH: Um, I don't really know [what else to say]. I've got my [driver's] license. I'm not a bum.

This was an interesting revelation at the beginning of the interview. I believe that Janice (who I did not know well at the beginning of the study) did not want me to construct her identity as a parent who was lazy or did not contribute to the well-being of her family. Nichols, Nixon and Rowsell (2009) suggest that these social identities are brought into play in specific social contexts and are adaptive responses, perhaps parents' most significant form of cultural capital. Janice's comments echo those neo-liberal discourses which aim at eliminating the concept of the "public good" and replacing the concept with the notion of "individual responsibility." Pressuring the poorest people in a society to solve their own problems without help and then blaming them or calling them "lazy" if they fail is a common theme. Reacting as Ms. Davidson did in a milieu of accountability, I argue that parents also feel a need to rise to the accountability that institutions (such as the school) and people assume for them.

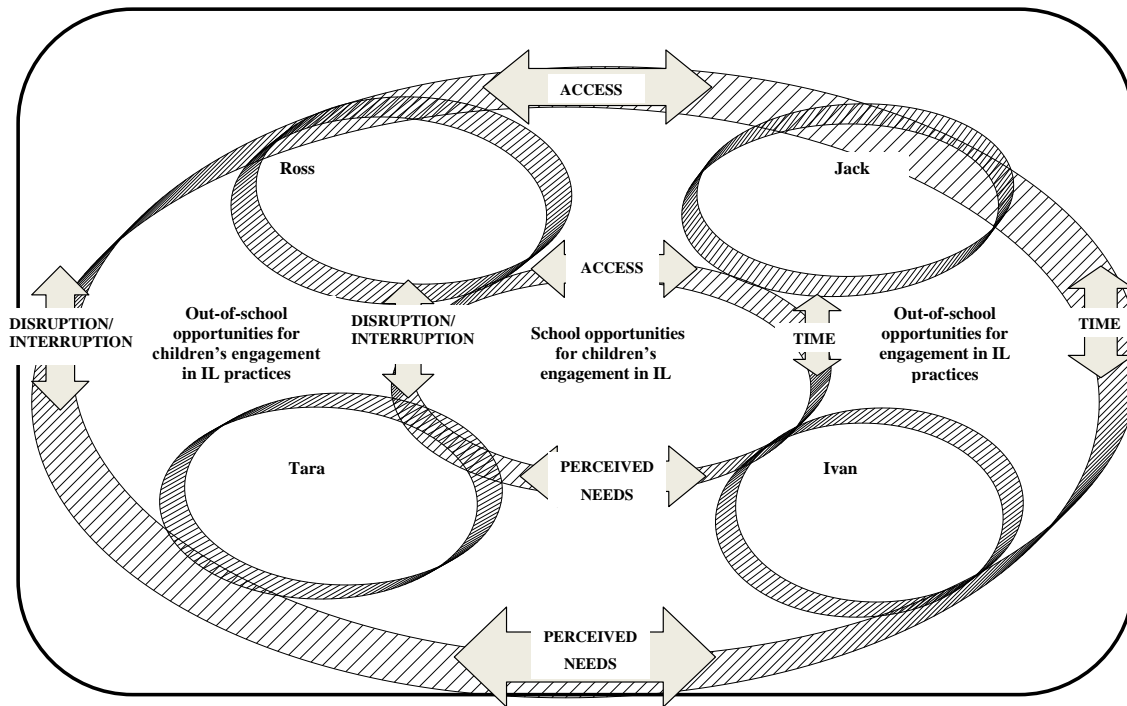
Despite Terry Wang's desire to pull away from the kind of childhood schooling he experienced, he entrenched his own son deeper into the drill and skill mindset that may not prepare Ivan to be successful for the future world. Perhaps it is the uncertainty of the future world that caused the parents to promote what they believed was the currency (i.e., the school literacy practices) for the future. What seems puzzling however, is that Terry's new world of work in his new country relies more on communication and multimodal forms of literacy (e.g., "reading" drawings and construction plans, and communicating this information to foremen and workers) than what he envisions Ivan's world of work will need. Ivan's personal world involved multimodal ways of learning (e.g., constructing, drawing, viewing) and Terry sees these as unofficial skills that may be helpful to him in later life, but certainly not as a future career.

I also demonstrated in this chapter that the focal children's access to information was a significant factor in constraining the focal children's opportunities to engage in IL practices. However, an interesting finding related to the focal children's access to information was the identification of an "information accessor" in the focal children's life. Each focal child had someone— a sister, a grandmother, a friend or an aunt or uncle who were focused on their wants and guided their world of curiosity and information learning. These information accessors were essential in opening up the world of information to the children and helped substantially to offer opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices. These particular people had more time to take an interest in the children, and who made active IL contributions to their lives and made the child feel special in some way.

Finally, the parents' almost exclusive reliance on the school library as a primary source for print materials, despite the loan regulations, was an interesting finding. It seems curious that all of the focal children did not regularly visit the public library given the restrictions placed on number of books and the genre of book the children were able to access in the school library. The public library, located a very short distance away from the focal children's homes, did endorse fines for overdue or lost books, but there were extensions on the loan periods, and certainly no restrictions on the number and the genre of books available for lending. For example, it is complex to understand why Ross, whose weekly highlight was to take home books from the school library, did not visit the public library when the teacher-librarian suspended his lending privileges. Based on comments made by Robert, I believe that the time to take Ross to the library was the biggest issue, compounded by Robert's desire to encourage Ross' responsibility to keep track of his own books. This finding calls into question the findings of other studies which have shown families' limited access to libraries in lower socioeconomic areas (e.g., Neuman & Celano, 2001). In this study, the focal children had access to a library a very short distance away (and located in one of the lowest socioeconomic areas of Greendale), but they rarely used it, despite greater flexibility in lending policies and hours of operation.

In summary, my understanding of the factors constraining opportunities for children to engage in IL practices in the out-of-school context is graphically represented in Figure 7.1. While the out-of-school context affords opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices, these opportunities are constrained by the factors of time, perceived needs, access to informational text, and disruption/interruption. This graphic representation will further be constructed in Chapter Eight as I build the final layer across the contexts.

**Figure 7.1: Factors constraining focal children’s opportunities to engage in IL practices in out-of-school contexts**





## CHAPTER EIGHT: CHILDREN'S APPROPRIATION AND RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL IL PRACTICES

*I like to play the game my own way, not the way we do it in school, like with Ms. Davidson. My way is funner and I get to use the computer...*

- Tara, focal child, playing a computer game at home

### 8.0 Introduction

In the preceding quote, Tara described the unsanctioned ways she chose to play a video game at home that required her to use phonics skills she learned at school. Although she read the information about how to play the game from the online instructions and played the game with her mother, Tara reshaped the game's rules of play to suit her needs, and effectively changed the game. I observed how Tara moved the meaning of an isolated literacy skill from the context of school to the out-of-school context and from the mode of a printed worksheet to the mode of the computer screen. I observed how Tara appropriated what she learned in the school context and documented how she recontextualized the meaning in out-of-school contexts. The result of this appropriation and recontextualization was the formation of a new way to play the game and the generation of new information. I watched as Tara demonstrated that others, such as Ms. Davidson and Tara's mother, do shape children's entry into cultural practices, but it is the children themselves who contribute to the transformation of those practices (Gaskins, Miller, & Corsaro, 1992).

The last four chapters of this dissertation focused on the opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices in school and out-of-school contexts. In particular, I focused on the affordances of each context in how they offered opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices, and then I examined the constraints on these opportunities in both contexts. In the present chapter, I explore the relationship between the school and out-of-school contexts to ask: How do children appropriate and recontextualize school and out-of-school IL practices for their own purposes?

The NLS considers how people use literacy in different contexts for different purposes. The implication is that literacy functions in all contexts in different ways and is guided by different discursive practices. Children's development is enacted as they participate in the

recurrent social activities in the contexts of their daily lives. Although adults assist in organizing and mediating these activities, children actively make sense of these activities, developing frameworks for actions (Bruner & Haste, 1987). In their process of development then, children contextualize their behaviour in some kind of activity frame and, over time, they recontextualize what they regard as appropriate ways of participating from one situated event to the other. In this recontextualizing, children “reorganize and rearticulate their resources, and in the process, may differentiate and expand their knowledge about symbolic systems, social practices, and the ideologically complex world” (Dyson, 2003a, p.15). However, to appreciate and understand the relationship between contexts and the phenomena of the crossings of these contexts and recontextualizations, we must account for multimodality, meanings, and the creation of multimodal texts (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006).

In this chapter, activity theory assisted and facilitated my analyses of the focal children’s IL learning across the two contexts as I traced the IL practices among the focal children in the overlapping activity systems of which they were a part. In this analysis, I looked at how meanings travel across activity systems (i.e., the contexts of school and out-of-school) and re-embedded themselves in these contexts. In this analysis, I drew on the concept of “recontextualization” (Dyson, 2003a; Iedema, 2003), and the lifting of particular genres, texts and practices across sites and their “remix” (Dyson, 2003b) and reappearance in different contexts. Specifically, for each focal child, I noted the recontextualization of different IL practices across sites. This concept was useful to study the focal children’s meaning making processes as they travel across the contexts.

I begin this chapter with an examination of the ways that each focal child appropriated and recontextualized school and out-of-school IL practices for their own purposes. I then examine the cases as a whole and discuss how the affordances of the contexts played out and allowed for such recontextualizations to occur.

### **8.1 “I’ll do it my own way...”: Tara’s appropriation and recontextualization of school and out-of-school IL practices**

In the home, traces of Tara’s IL practices spilled out and spread throughout the rooms. Her composed notes and messages to her family were tacked to the fridge and walls of the kitchen. Notepads, magazines, DVDs, popular culture figurines and craft projects lay in piles in

the dining room and living room. Tara's IL practices embedded space, place, and time and these were central to her recontextualization.

In the out-of-school space of the home, and within the sphere of activity of playtime, Tara favoured computer and video gaming. During these activities, Tara's IL practices included reading the on-screen instructions, rules, and cues of the game. It was also necessary for Tara to read, view, and assess the visual information of the game to make decisions regarding the play. It was during these computer and video gaming sessions that I documented many of the events in which the recontextualization of school and out-of-school IL practices occurred. I demonstrate this in the following three examples.

### **8.1.1 From mapping skills worksheet to designing a virtual bedroom**

During the study, the children in Ms. Davidson's class engaged in a Social Studies unit that focused on Canada. The design of this integrated unit ensured that the children learned a number of facts about Canada, including information about the people, symbols, geographic regions, landforms, and the like. Ms. Davidson required the children to complete worksheets as part of an "All about Canada" booklet. During one class lesson, the children learned rudimentary mapping skills by mapping a room using symbols. For this particular lesson, Tara needed to complete a worksheet that required her to think about and choose a room in her home, to remember and locate where each piece of furniture was, to choose a symbol for each piece of furniture, and then to draw these symbols in the space provided on the worksheet (see Figure 8.1). For this assignment, Tara drew the bedroom she shared with Tom from a "birds-eye" view, complete with their beds, TV, dresser, and closet.

Several days later during an after-school observation in Tara's home, I watched as she began her playtime on the GameCube™ video gaming system in her bedroom. The following excerpt from my field notes describes the scene:

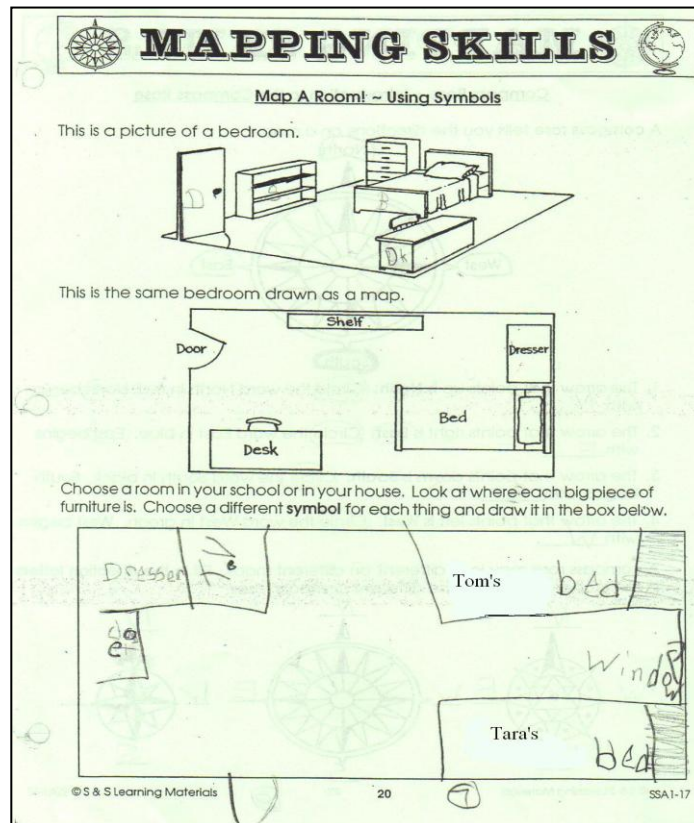
Tara takes the Sims<sup>33</sup> game software out of the box and inserts the disk into the GameCube system. She picks up the controller and makes sure that it is attached.

---

<sup>33</sup> The *Sims* is a strategic life-simulation computer game. *The Sims* focuses entirely on the lives of created characters called "Sims," and places the player in control of their character's virtual world. Each player starts with a limited amount of money that is needed to purchase a house or vacant land, build or remodel a house, and purchase furniture. After the creation of the Sims character, the neighbourhood, and the house, the player then conducts their character's daily activities.

She settles on the bed and begins the game. She reads and selects the “Get a Life” option from the playing menu on the screen and begins to create a new Sims character. Tara tells me that she is going to create a character that looks like her.

**Figure 8.1: Mapping Tara’s bedroom in the school context**



After naming her new character after herself, she chooses her skin colour, hair colour, body type and clothes. After clicking the “A” button on her controller, Tara then moves on to create a new neighbourhood. Reading the on-screen directions, Tara is asked to select a name from the pop-up menu. She deletes the default name and enters a new name, “Northwood,” from the on-screen letter pad. A neighbourhood screen then appears and offers Tara a list of lots so that she can begin building her house. After reading over the choices, she selects a lot, and reads the street address and purchase cost. She deliberates if she can afford her choice,

and then deciding she can, she purchases the lot. After purchasing the lot, Tara begins to build her house using the “Build Mode” from the Modes menu. She scrolls through the available build tools to select an item to build. She begins with her bedroom. Using the control stick she moves the bedroom frame to where she wants it to appear on her property. Using the “L” and “R” buttons and the “C” stick on the controller, she rotates the bedroom until she is satisfied with its position. She tells me that she now wants to add walls and windows. Selecting the wall tool, she builds four walls and then with the window tool, she adds windows. With these in place, she then rotates the room so that she can view it from above. “There!,” she says, “now I’ll add the furniture kinda like I did in school but I’ll do it my own way.” Tara then accesses the “Buy Mode” menu and scrolls through the available items that are listed within a specific category. She selects a bed with a heart-shaped headboard and its cost appears on the screen. Pressing the control pad she selects the bed and positions it in the room, moving it several times until she is satisfied with where it stands. She continues adding furniture in this manner (see Figure 8.2).

**Figure 8.2: Tara’s virtual bedroom**



In this example, we can see that Tara took the skills she learned from her school IL practices and recontextualized them in a meaningful way in her virtual and imagined bedroom. Through the affordance of technology, Tara's ability to "map" her bedroom in her own "unofficial" (non-school) (Dyson, 2001a) way reinforced, extended, and reshaped her learning of mapping. Following the completion of her bedroom, Tara saved the game on a memory card in order to return later to finish building other rooms in her imagined house. This particular game had unlimited replay value in that there was no way to win the game, and Tara could play on indefinitely. Playing this game provided a level of IL practices more sophisticated than Tara required in her school IL practice of completing worksheets. She also had choice and flexibility within the virtual landscape of the game.

### **8.1.2 "This one's hard!": Changing the rules changes the game**

At school, during the sphere of activity that included Language Arts lessons, Tara completed worksheets to build spelling skills. These lessons focused on visual memory and on spelling words correctly. The teacher's assumption was that the children would remember to use the words and spell them correctly based on their visual memory of the shape of the words and the letters. These lessons and the corresponding practice worksheet activities began early in the study and continued throughout the school year, the lessons and worksheets increasing in difficulty as the students gained the appropriate skills. In addition to practicing the visual memory of the words, the students had to read simple instructions in order to complete the worksheet. An example of such a worksheet is seen in Figure 8.3. On this particular worksheet, in the top section, Tara had to figure out where the spelling words were to be placed in the boxes, based on the shape of their letters. In the bottom section of the worksheet, Tara had to unscramble the letters to form the words that appeared in a small group at the bottom of the page.

**Figure 8.3: Tara's weekly spelling worksheet**

A few weeks after I observed Tara completing the worksheet in school, I visited her at home after school to observe her during playtime. The following is taken from my research notes:

It is shortly after school and I sit on the living room couch to observe Tara as she plays on the computer. She calls to her mother and asks her to come to help her load the new Disney games CD that she found on the front of the cereal box package that morning. Debbie comes in and loads the CD for her. After the CD is loaded, Debbie shows Tara the games that the CD includes, and starts her off on the first game on the list. She leaves Tara to explore the game. Tara re-reads the online instructions and begins to play a game in which the player needs to unscramble the parts of a picture by moving the individual squares around. Tara clicks on and moves the pieces around and she begins to see that they form a picture of one of the Disney characters. She continues to play this game until she completes four character pictures. Using her mouse, she returns to the game menu and chooses a spelling game. This game features Aladdin, whose face bobs up and down on the screen and gives encouraging

feedback. The game involves showing a picture of an object under which there are spaces for each letter of the word that represents the picture. Below these lines is an alphabet. The object of the game is to spell the name of the object by selecting the alphabet letters for each space. As Tara chooses a letter, the words “yes” or “no” appear, and she moves the letter into the correct spot. The first object is a cup, which she names and spells correctly. Tara talks to herself as she plays. The spelling of the objects becomes more difficult as the game progresses. At one point, Tara proclaims, “This one’s hard!” as she can’t figure out what the object is. (It is an animated picture of a small harp). After a moment, she randomly eliminates letters until only the correct letters are remaining for the word. She then unscrambles the letters and places the entire word in the space.

This particular computer game required the player to have word and spelling knowledge, but also to have a certain amount of specific background knowledge. Many of the objects presented demanded knowledge that Tara did not possess. Not to be outdone by game, she used her unscrambling strategy for figuring out the unknown word. As I watched her, she explained that she didn’t like to play the game the way it was supposed to be played. She liked to play it a different way, and a way she “learned in school,” that is, the way she completed the spelling worksheet at school. In the example provided, the first picture that Tara had difficulty with was a cartoon image of a harp. Other images, such as a goblet and a chest, also stumped her, but she was able to solve the puzzle with her “unscrambling” strategy. Arguably, Tara’s way to play the game was more challenging than the game designers’ intentions. Tara successfully recontextualized the spelling skills learned in school into the computer game at home, gaining new information as she played.

### **8.1.3 “Take out as many skinny books as you want”: Playing school at home**

In her school journal, Tara wrote about her play dates with other children in the class. She particularly liked to play with her classmate, Alexis, who would come over to Tara’s house after school where they would paint, play dress-up, listen to music, and play house. I often observed them as they easily filled their time together.

One of the girls’ favourite activities to do at Tara’s home was to play “school.” Usually the girls played in Tara’s bedroom where there was the greatest access to children’s books, as



books were some of the most important props for their imaginative play. If the game involved an art lesson, the girls moved to the dining room so that they could have easy access to Tara's art cupboard. The girls spent most of their time playing school and devising activities that were loosely structured on the daily routines of their classroom. During "school" they took turns reading to each other, doing alphabet activities, handing out and correcting worksheets, and taking on the role of Ms. Davidson.

During one play date, the girls decided to enact their school day from the starting point of entering the classroom first thing in the morning. They followed the opening routines of the day by getting their library books out of their pretend backpacks, then taking attendance, and then getting ready to do book exchange. At this point the girls decided to reenact the library book exchange routine in their makeshift library in a corner of Tara's room. Alexis took the role of the student and Tara took the role of Ms. Barrett, the teacher-librarian. I recorded their conversation as they continued with the play:

Alexis: Hello Ms. Barrett, I wanna return these books today and take out new ones.

Tara: OK, Alexis. Put your books here. Wait. I'll have to check them in here on my computer . . .  
[Pretends to check in books, makes beeping sounds]  
OK. Go and find some new books.

[Alexis goes to find some new books on Tara's bookshelf and brings back five books to Tara]

Alexis: Here's my books. Can I take them out please?

Tara: OK . . . wait . . .you need to stand in line.  
Over here!

[She waits until Alexis is in line and then pretends to check the books out, making beeping noises].

Alexis! You have too many books here. You can't take all these out. That's too many! These here are too big for you. Go put them back!

[Alexis looks distressed. She begins to whine to Ms. Barrett]

Alexis: Awwwwwwwwww.....!

Tara: Oh, ok . . . you can take out as many skinny books as you want this one time. But don't lose them . . . and don't tell the other kids I let you . . .

In this example, in their world of play, the girls appropriated the practice of taking out books from the school library. However, in the context of their pretend library in Tara's bedroom, the girls recontextualized and change this practice. In play, Tara changed the teacher-librarian's two book lending rule to extend to taking out as many books as Alexis wanted. Careful not to bend the rule too far, Tara let Alexis take more than two books out "this one time," and limited her to "skinny" books. When asked, Tara told me that skinny books were "not chapter books, or those big books at the back of the library." These skinny books were the story books that the children had the greatest access to in the school library. In her imaginative play at home, Tara feels able to change this school practice which had thwarted her own book selection in the school context. Assuming the role of Ms. Barrett gave her the power in this game to change the school rule.

## **8.2 "I just think it in my head...": Ivan's appropriation and recontextualization of school and out-of-school IL practices**

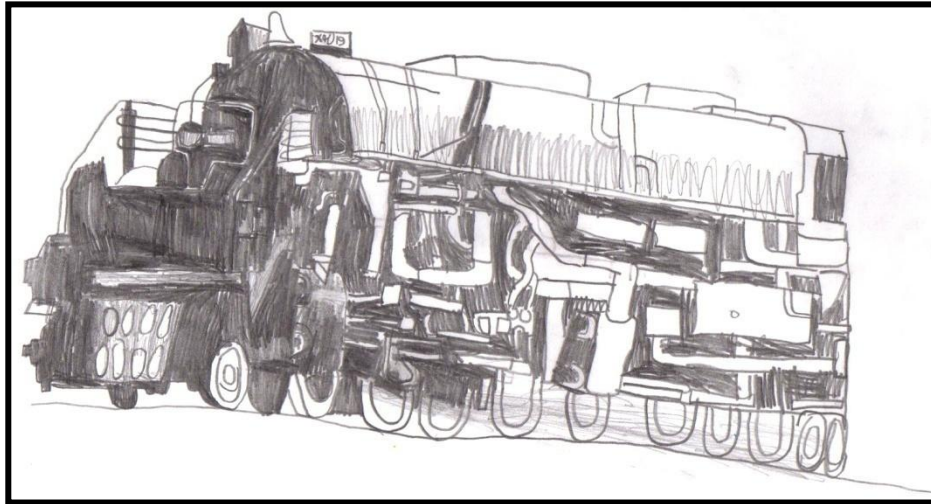
Ivan appeared to carve out a space for himself between the demands of the "official" (Dyson, 2001a) school practices, and the demands of his parents, who were eager for him to do well in those school-valued practices. In this space, Ivan was able to appropriate the IL practices from both contexts in ways to satisfy the goals that Ms. Davidson had for him at school, and to satisfy some of the educational goals his parents set for him. For Ivan, the appropriation of visual images from informational texts from his school IL practices and his out-of-school IL practices to the production of multimodal texts was a practice that brought him hours of interest and general approval and encouragement from adults. When I asked Ivan how he planned for such activities, he told me, "I just think [them] in my head." Through unique ways, Ivan's appropriations and recontextualizations crossed back and forth between contexts, and depending on his remixes and his intended purposes, his recontextualizations met with varying degrees of appreciation. In the examples below, I demonstrate how Ivan appropriated and recontextualized school and out-of-school IL practices for his own purposes.

### **8.2.1 Information books as resources for recontextualization**

During my observations of Ivan in the school context, I documented his engagement with informational texts, particularly during the spheres of activity such as Library and the combined activities of SSR and Buddy Reading. Ivan largely read and perused informational texts, during these times. His daily book exchanges to the school library included looking for advanced information books on aircraft, watercraft, and machines. Although Ms. Barrett did not really allow the children to venture down to the far end of the library where she shelved these more advanced texts, I often encountered Ivan tucked away behind one of these far bookshelves, sitting on the floor, engrossed in one of these non-sanctioned books. Ivan studied the pictures in these books carefully, looking at the intricacies of the images. He drew further information from the printed texts, reading these on his own if they were at his reading level, or asking a more advanced reader to assist him with the printed captions or texts surrounding the images.

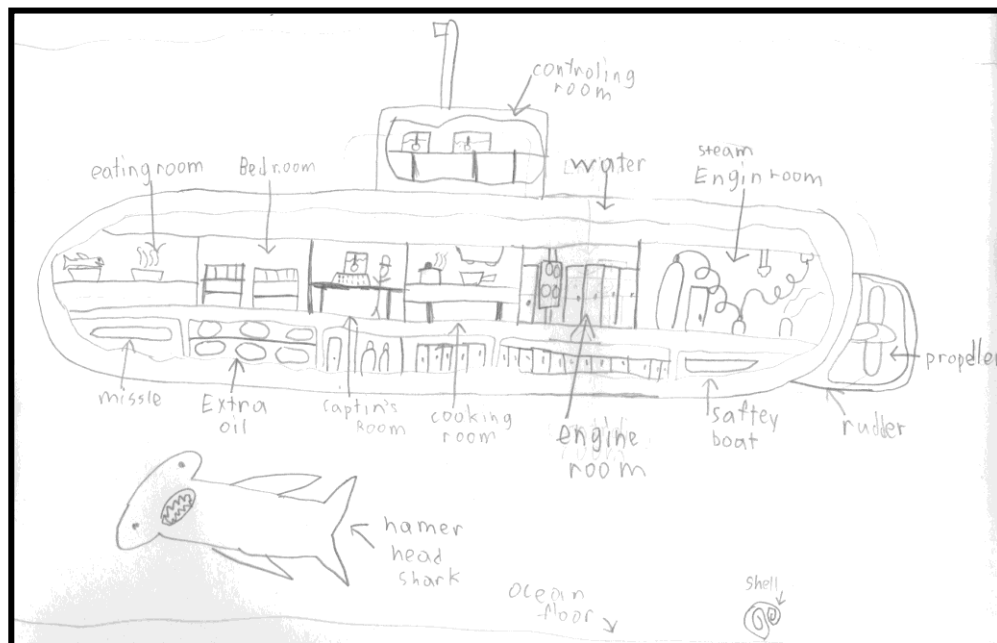
Over the course of the study, and during my visits to Ivan's home, I began to see these images reappear first on scraps of paper, then on rolls of play paper, then paper intended for the computer printer, and finally in sketch books designated for that purpose. Ivan based almost all of his drawings and sketches from images he observed in information books at school. Over the course of the study, Ivan's parents bought him the tools necessary (e.g., pencils, sketch pads, and information books) to sustain him in this interest. His parents also enrolled him in an evening art class. Ivan incorporated the skills he learned in this class (e.g., how to shade objects in order to bring depth and perspective) into his home sketches (see Figure 8.4).

**Figure 8.4: Ivan's sketch of a locomotive engine**



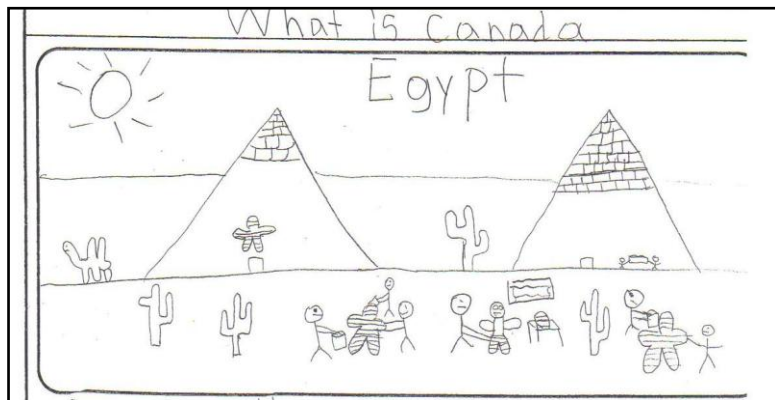
At home, Ivan continued to use informational texts from school and his home in unique ways. For example, he began to experiment, play, and combine images from several texts to re-imagine and create new texts that reflected an imagined world. For example, in Figure 8.5, Ivan appropriated information regarding the inner workings of a submarine from the pictures and printed text from an information book on submarines. With this information, Ivan drew an imagined submarine and labeled it as he had seen in other informational texts. He also added his rendition of a hammerhead shark that he saw in a book on sharks his parents purchased for him from the school book club order.

**Figure 8.5: Ivan's sketch of the inner workings of a submarine**



Interestingly, these out-of-school drawing and sketching practices did not make their way into the school context in a significant manner. The children had an unlined exercise book in which they were able to draw during teacher-allocated free time, or if the children completed their assigned work. Assignments in Ms. Davidson’s room rarely required drawing, but if they did, the students usually drew a picture to accompany a good copy of written work that was going to be displayed on a bulletin board (see Figure 8.6 and Figure 8.7).

**Figure 8.6: Ivan’s illustration to accompany his writing for the topic “What is Canada?”**



**Figure 8.7: Ivan’s writing on the topic “What is Canada?”**

Canada is the second largest country.  
 Canada has a lot of fruit.  
 There's Toronto in Canada.  
 Canada has a little desert.  
 There's B.C. in Canada.  
 Canada has 10 provinces.  
 There's Alberta in Canada.  
 There's Quebec.  
 There's Manitoba.  
 There's Saskatchewan  
 There's Yukon Territory in Canada  
 There's Prince Edward Island.  
 Nunavut is a Territory.

Transcript

Canada is the second largest country. Canada has a lot of fruit. There's Toronto in Canada. Canada has a little desert. There's BC in Canada. Canada has 10 provinces. There's Alberta in Canada. There's Quebec. There's Manitoba. There's Saskatchewan. There's Yukon Territory in Canada. There's Prince Edward Island. Nunavut is a Territory.

When I asked Ivan about his drawing for this particular assignment, he told me that Canada had “a little desert, not like Egypt, because Egypt has a big desert.” Egypt was a country that Ivan

took an interest in after a classmate found a picture of a mummy in a book during Buddy Reading. Ivan's focus remained on the desert, and not on Ms. Davidson's assumption that the picture accompanying the text would contain images related to Canada.

### **8.2.2 Popular culture as resources for recontextualization**

Although Ivan's resources of choice for his drawings were from information books and informational texts, he borrowed extensively from visual media and animation. Of interest was Ivan's use of the Mandarin readers that Marion and Terry bought for him in China. As explained earlier, teachers and parents used these books in school and out-of-school contexts to teach beginning reading in Mandarin. Terry told me the content of the books dealt with simple situations involving characters taken from Chinese popular culture. Ivan did not like these books and resisted when his parents tried to read them to him or when they suggested he read them himself. My impression was that Ivan thought these books were too immature for him and told me that he found them boring to read. Ivan did find the characters interesting to sketch, however. These pictures were of a different style than any of the other resources from which Ivan appropriated. The characters were usually involved in happy events such as birthday parties (see Figure 8.8) and were usually portrayed as open-mouthed and laughing. Ivan usually used ball point pen to draw these images when he borrowed from these books, using a single line style drawing technique.

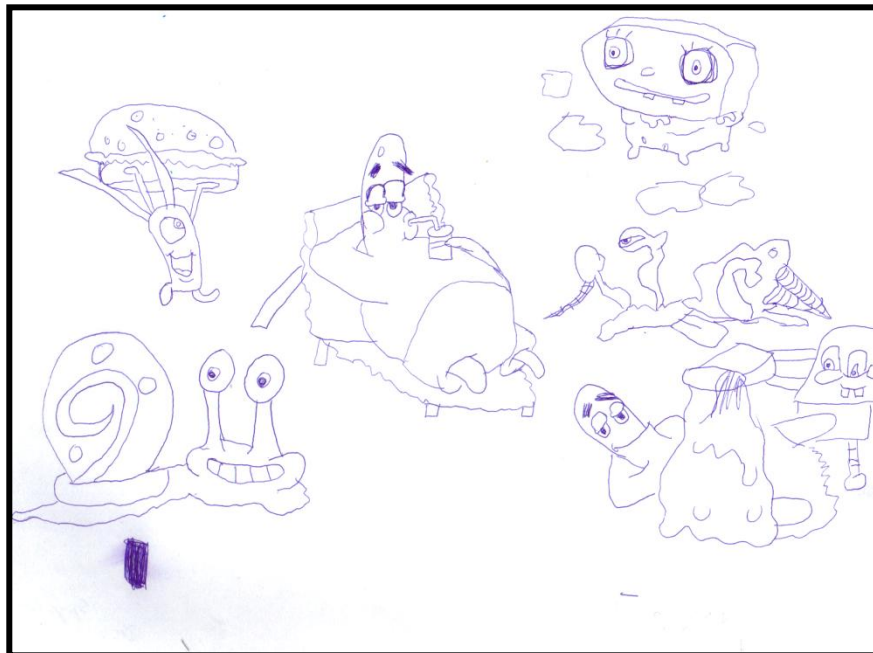
**Figure 8.8: Ivan's drawing of the characters in his Mandarin reader**



At the time of the study, the TV program, *Sponge Bob Square Pants*, was a popular animated children's show. All of the focal children watched this show, which was broadcast several times a week and usually in the after-school hours. The show's popularity also engendered the marketing of *Sponge Bob* paraphernalia including stuffed toys, posters, games, clothing, and books. *Sponge Bob* was one of Ivan's favourite characters and served as a resource for his drawings.

If Ivan was able complete all of his homework, he was allowed to watch the *Sponge Bob* TV program during the afternoon program time. However, if Ivan's father had left him a number of workbook pages to complete for homework, Ivan often missed this opportunity. As an alternative to watching the TV show, Marion and Terry bought Ivan books featuring the *Sponge Bob* character and the other characters in the show. Ivan easily read these books on his own (which his parents encouraged) and at the same time, gave him ideas for numerous drawings (see Figure 8.9).

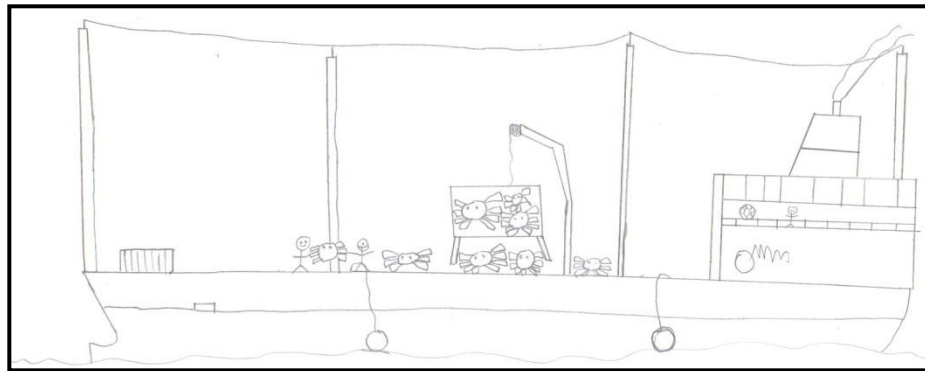
**Figure 8.9: Ivan's mélange of characters appropriated from the TV program *Sponge Bob***



### 8.2.3 Media as resources for recontextualization

Although Ivan's parents limited the amount of TV that he watched, Ivan's parents relented when they believed that the TV programs were of educational value. As discussed, Ivan's parents' IL practices involved watching the Discovery Channel that featured programs concerning science, technology, adventure, and nature. Ivan was permitted to view these programs with his parents who ran the closed caption option on the TV as they watched. The content of the shows was also appropriated and recontextualized in Ivan's drawings. For example, in Figure 8.10, Ivan borrowed the visuals of crab-fishing from the Discovery Channel's program *The Deadliest Catch*, but positioned the crabs and the crew on a container ship, rather than the show's smaller Alaskan fishing boat. Ivan remixed the images of the large container ships found in the informational texts from the school library with information from the TV program's depiction of one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. When I asked him about his choice in drawing the container ship, Ivan informed me that "they're bigger and safer to catch crabs from."

**Figure 8.10: Ivan's depiction of crab-fishing in the TV program *The Deadliest Catch***



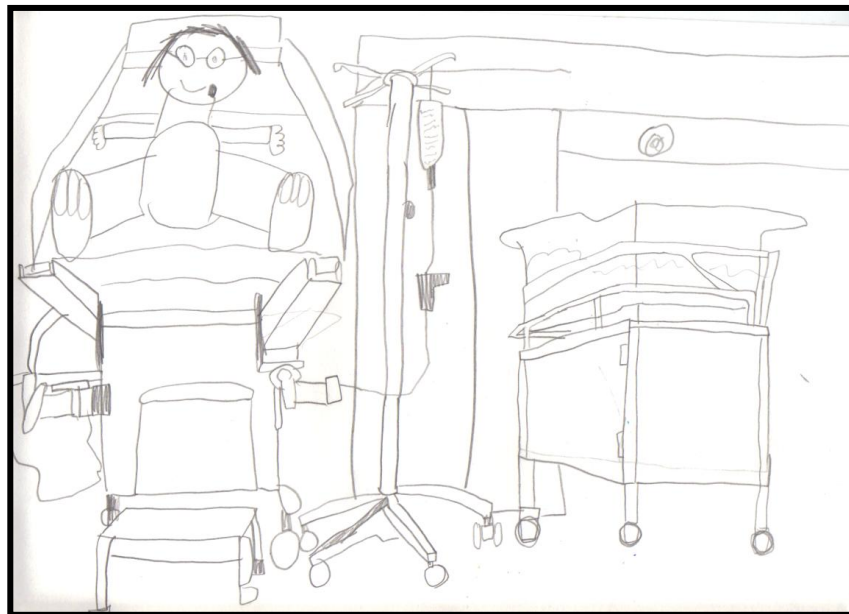
### 8.2.4 Personal experience as resources for recontextualization

As Ivan moved through the out-of-school contexts, drawing served as a mediator in his participation, and reflected his interpretation and his understanding of these contexts. In trying to negotiate these worlds, Ivan often used drawing to make sense of his world. Although it seemed natural that Ivan would use personal experiences as resources for his drawings, he seldom drew on these personal experiences, preferring to use other resources for his sketches. However, one particular event in his life served as an interesting resource.



As mentioned previously, Ivan's mother gave birth to Dylan during the study. It was a difficult birth and recovery for Marion and she had less time to spend with Ivan who had been an only child for seven years. The day after Marion had the baby, Ivan went to the hospital to meet his new brother, and he took his sketch pad. Ivan commented to me that his mother cried when she saw Ivan, which he told me was "silly." After Ivan met his brother, Marion told me Ivan sat down on the floor and sketched his mother on her hospital bed, with the bassinette beside her (see Figure 8.11).

**Figure 8.11: Ivan's sketch of his visit to the hospital to meet his new brother**



When I asked Ivan about the drawing, he stated that he really liked the hospital bed and how it worked, and that he wanted to draw it. This was the only drawing Ivan did during the study that used a "live" model, and used the practices he had learned from art class.

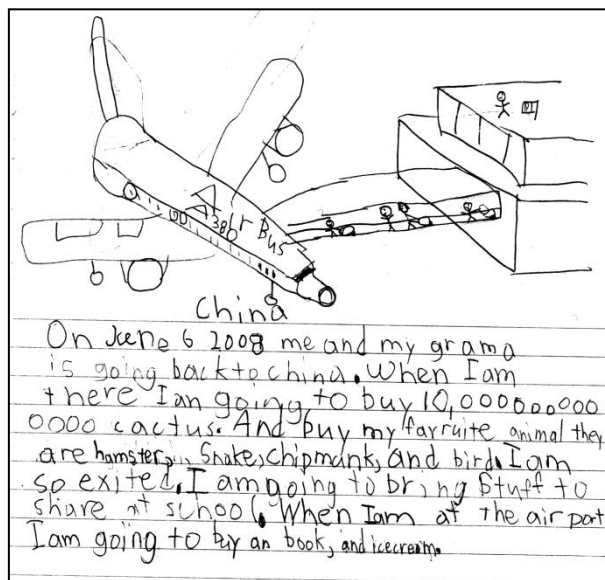
#### **8.2.5 Juxtaposing home and school journal writing**

Ivan was the only focal child in the study whose parents required him to complete a home journal as part of his daily homework routine. Ivan's parents were adamant that Ivan kept up with his studies, and in particular, kept working on his English grammar. The parents looked for ways to keep Ivan occupied and away from the TV, in addition to looking for ways of enhancing his education. To this end, Ivan's parents bought him an exercise book for journal

writing at home that was very similar to the exercise book Ivan used for his journal writing at school. The exception was that the home journal pages were “half and half,” containing lined and drawing space; the school journal pages were completely lined with no space for drawing. In school, the children were generally able to write about what they wished, although occasionally the teacher would assign a topic. Ms. Davidson expected the children to write to the bottom of the lined page.

At home, Ivan wrote informational accounts of the events in his life such as buying Lego sets or a bug-trap cactus, or he retold of a classroom event (e.g., making buns during the class’ nutrition unit). His parents’ only requirement was that he wrote, but they did not give him topics to write about, nor told him how much to write. Ivan’s written accounts always included a detailed drawing incorporating information that Ivan appropriated from other sources. For example, in Figure 8.12, Ivan shared his news about his impending trip to China. In his accompanying drawing he carefully depicted the plane he was going to take, an Air Bus A380, appropriated from his book on aircraft his father purchased through the school book order.

**Figure 8.12: Ivan’s home journal entry regarding his impending trip to China**



#### Transcript

##### China

On June 6, 2008 me and my grandma is going back to China. When I am there I am going to buy 10,000,000,000,000 cactus. And buy my favourite animal they are hamster, snake, chipmunk, and bird. I am so exited. I am going to bring stuff to share at school. When I am at the airport I am going to buy a book, and ice cream.

Ivan's parents read his home journal entries but they made no written comments or corrections. Marion occasionally taught Ivan specific skills (e.g., using dialogue in his writing) which he incorporated into his home writing and occasionally into his school writing.

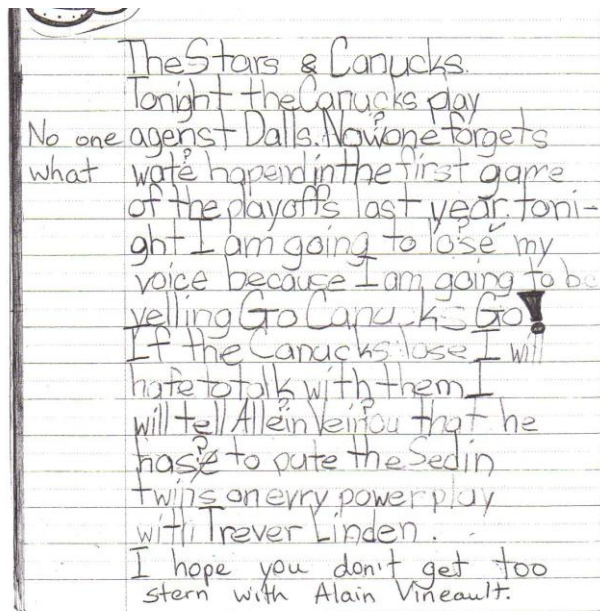
### **8.3 “Canucks game tonight!”: Ross’ appropriation and recontextualization of school and out-of-school IL practices**

Ross was an ardent sports fan. Sports and sports media were local cultural resources that Ross drew on extensively in his recontextualizing processes. Ross’ school and out-of-school IL practices revolved around his favourite sports, namely hockey, football and soccer. These practices included reading, viewing, and listening to informational texts in books, on TV, on the news, in sports pages of local newspapers, and in brochures. The information gleaned from these resources infiltrated his communicative practices. Embedded in these practices were concepts that related to knowledge of mathematics, statistics, and geography. Sports media played a large part in Ross’ out-of-school contexts, particularly in the home. However, sports media crossed contexts for Ross in an almost seamless way. Unlike Tara and Ivan whose recontextualizations remained largely in the out-of-school spaces, Will’s enrapture with sports in out-of-school contexts and his resulting recontextualizations took a firm hold in the IL practices at school.

#### **8.3.1 Journal entries as sports reports and play-by-plays**

Ross appropriated a diverse array of material from televised sports games including team names, scores, players’ names and announcements (e.g., “The Canucks Play Tonight!”). Ross’ recontextualizations included a proliferation of time adverbs and adverbial phrases (e.g., Tonight, the Canucks play against Dallas.”), and the presence of location adjectives (e.g., New York Islanders, Dallas Stars). In particular, Ross appropriated the genres from the sports media practices of reporting (see Figure 8.13) and of play-by-play (Figure 8.14).

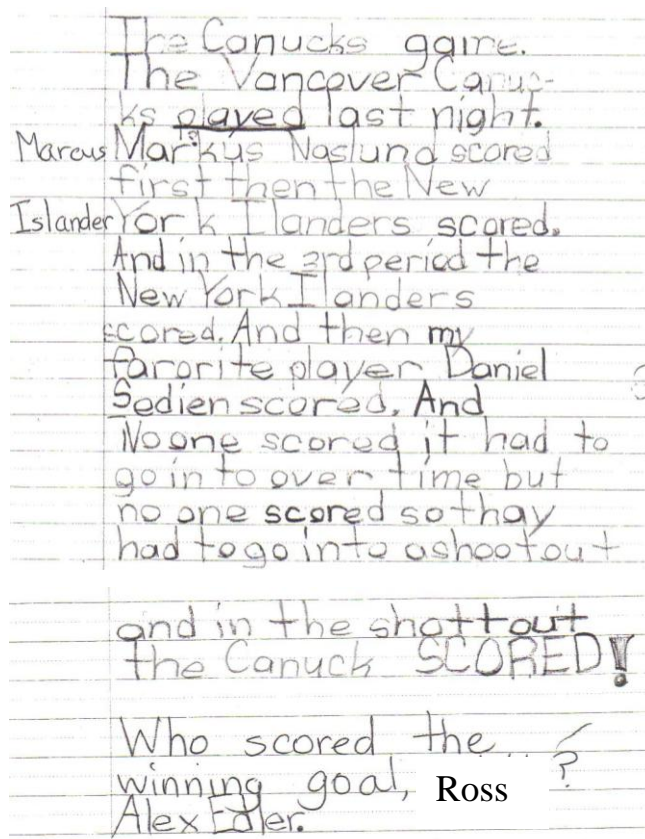
**Figure 8.13: Ross' sports report**<sup>34</sup>



Transcription

The Stars & Canucks  
 Tonight the Canucks play against  
 Dallas. No one forgets what happened  
 in the first game of the playoffs last  
 year. Tonight I am going to lose my  
 voice because I am going to be yelling  
 Go Canucks Go! If the Canucks lose I  
 will have to talk with them I will tell  
 Alain Vineault that he has to put the  
 Sedin twins on every power play with  
 Trevor Linden.

**Figure 8.14: Ross' "play-by-play" sports report**



Transcription

The Canucks Game  
 The Vancouver Canucks played  
 last night. Markus Naslund  
 scored first then the New York  
 Islanders scored. And in the 3<sup>rd</sup>  
 period the New York Islanders  
 scored. And then my favourite  
 player Daniel Sedin scored.  
 And no one scored it had to go  
 in to over time but no one  
 scored so they had to go into a  
 shoot out and in the shoot out  
 the Canucks SCORED!

<sup>34</sup> The question marks above words in Ross' writing refer to words that Ross is not sure about their spelling. A question mark provided a signal to Ms Davidson that he wanted assistance. Ms. Davidson either wrote the correct spelling for the word in the margin, or she placed a check mark beside the word if it was correctly spelled.

During my observations at Ross' homes, I documented his intense focus on the announcers' commentaries and the on-screen statistic reports. At school, Ross kept Ms. Davidson apprised of his favourite hockey teams' standings and offered her key information as he knew she had an interest in hockey, but didn't watch the games herself. Ms. Davidson did not limit Ross' extensive writing about sports although she did occasionally request that all the class write about a particular topic. Ross had no difficulty writing about other topics, but sports were clearly his choice. Ross' commitment to writing informational texts to Ms. Davidson increased as she responded to Ross' writing, asking pertinent questions about his commentaries. He, in turn, responded to her, continuing the dialogue.

### 8.3.2 Anticipating the game

Anticipation of hockey and football games consumed a large part of Ross' life. His out-of-school IL practices included consulting numerous informational texts in order to keep track of when his favoured teams were playing. He borrowed from these texts and recontextualized them for his own purposes. For example, rather than having to consult the confusing Canuck's season's published game schedule, with assistance from his mother, Ross made his own colour-coded monthly schedules of the Canucks games in a format that he could access quickly. He kept these in his room and posted on his bulletin board (See Figure 8.15).

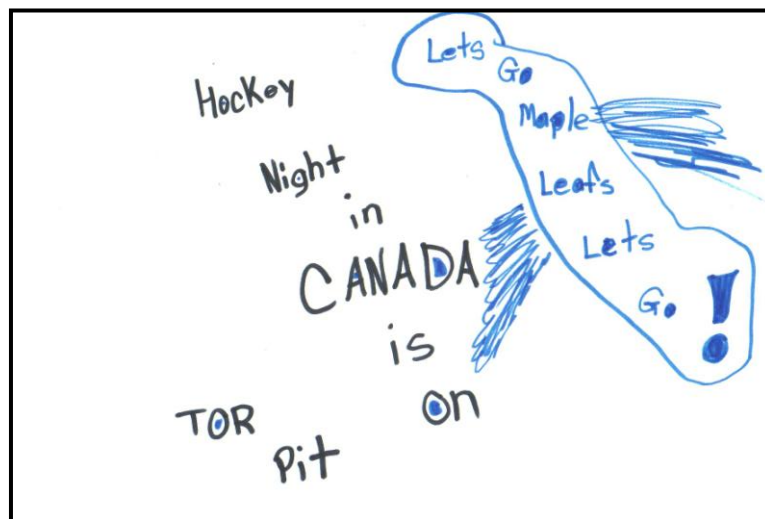
**Figure 8.15: Ross' recontextualized hockey schedule for the month of January**



Game nights were important events in Ross' homes. With assistance from his calendar, Ross accessed the local newspaper TV listings that both Julia and Robert received to find the televised game times. As his teams played all over the country, Ross had to be aware of the ever-changing early and late start times that were dependent on the time zones in which the teams played. Once Ross located this information, he made posters advertising the game for his parents and after-school care friends, using information from several resources (see Figure 8.16).

On one very special occasion, Ross was able to attend one of the Canuck hockey games. At this game he received the game program which provided him with a valuable resource for his recontextualization processes. After the game, Ross excitedly recounted his experience telling me in great detail about the Jumbo Tron<sup>35</sup> that flashed messages in order to encourage the fans to cheer on the Canucks. The next day I documented Ross' remaking of the Jumbo Tron's

**Figure 8.16: Ross' poster advertising the televised hockey game**



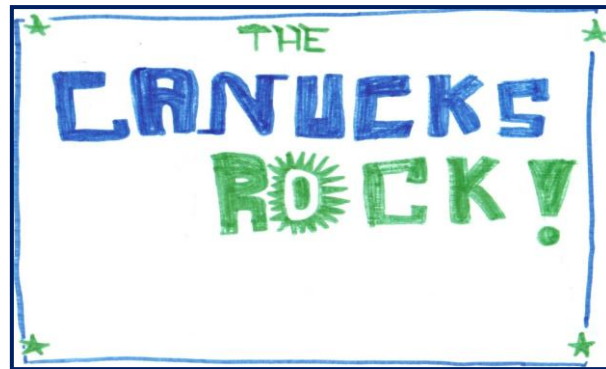
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<sup>35</sup> A JumboTron is a large-screen television used in sports stadiums and concert venues to show close up shots of the event.



messages during his after-school care time at Maple Lane (see Figure 8.17).

**Figure 8.17: Ross' remake of the Jumbo Tron's message**



Here, Ross laid out the writing as it appeared on the Jumbo Tron, rather than prose style.

It was interesting to note, that the game announcement and the Jumbo Tron message (and numerous other examples I collected) did not cross into the classroom. Ross found writing about sports (in prose form) in his journal, even about topics appropriated from the media, was an accepted and valued practice in school. Perhaps Ross, like Ivan, believed that the other appropriations (including sketches, drawings, and visual media appropriations) did not hold such value in the official context of school. It appeared that Ross knew where the boundaries of acceptance lay between the school and out-of-school contexts.

#### **8.4 Jack's appropriation and recontextualization of school and out-of-school IL practices**

If Ross was an ardent sports fan, Jack was an ardent video game fan. Like Tara, in the out-of-school space of the home, and within the sphere of activity of playtime, Jack favoured computer and video gaming. As noted previously, Jack owned several gaming systems including Xbox, PSP, PS2, Nintendo 64, and GameCube. The range of games he played on these systems was extensive and often contained violent themes of shooting and killing, as well

as depictions of crime. These games were long and challenging and Jack greatly enjoyed them. He played as often as Janice allowed, determined to “beat” or win the game.

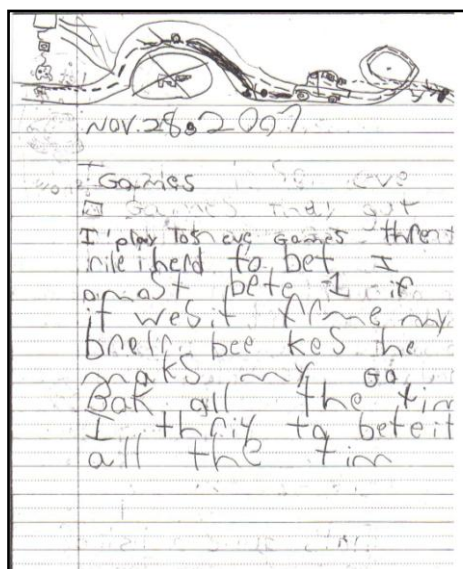
While playing these games, Jack’s IL practices included reading the on-screen instructions and cues for the game. As Jack stated, “all our games have reading, and some you gotta read more.” It was also necessary for Jack to read, view, and assess the visual information of the game to make decisions regarding the play; all very important elements if you wanted to beat the game. It was through these video-gaming practices that examples of Jack’s recontextualization processes became apparent.

#### 8.4.1 Video gaming as journal writing topics

In the school context, journal writing was not one of Jack’s favoured activities. As it was a regular Language Arts routine, the children knew the expectations well (e.g., print name and date, include title, write to the bottom of the page, hand in), and over which Ms. Davidson did not need to preside. At the end of the day, Ms. Davidson took each child’s journal out of the hand-in box, read their entry, and made comments. Jack occasionally resisted these expectations by either not handing in his journal, or by writing a short paragraph that did not meet the “bottom of the page” expectation for writing quantity.

Jack’s video-gaming frequently made its way into his journal entries as he borrowed material from the different games that he played. For example, in Figure 8.18, Jack wrote about his games (i.e., video games) in his journal.

**Figure 8.18: Jack’s response to Ms. Davidson’s writing topic, “Games”**



#### Transcription

##### Games

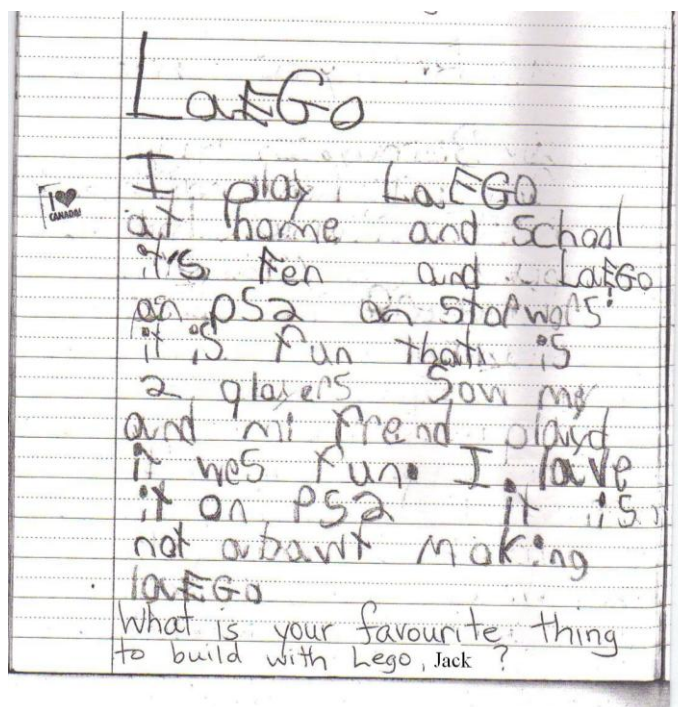
I play tons of games.  
They're really hard to  
beat. I almost beat one if  
it wasn't for my brother  
because he makes me go  
back all the time. I try to  
beat it all the time.



This example was particularly interesting as Ms. Davidson previously wrote the topic on the whiteboard for the students to copy and use as a prompt for their writing. Jack wrote about his meaning of games, namely video-games, commenting on his wish to beat the game and the reasons for his inability to do so (i.e., his younger brother's interference). In the small white space above the page's lined margin, Jack drew images of the game he appropriated and as such, included a depiction of one of the more violent aspects of the game (i.e., shooting people out of the back of a car). This shooting of the opponents was an essential element to being able to win the game. Ms. Davidson did not comment on Jack's journal entry.

Throughout the study, Jack continued to use information taken from the video games in order to satisfy Ms. Davidson's writing requirements. These recontextualizations were not met with particular enthusiasm in the school context. For example, on occasion, the children in Ms. Davidson's class had an opportunity to play with a box of Lego that she kept on a shelf. The class enjoyed playing with Lego and usually constructed things together. One day during journal writing time, Ms. Davidson wrote the word "Lego" on the board as a prompt. Jack took up the prompt and wrote about his experiences (see Figure 8.19).

**Figure 8.19: Jack's journal entry on "Lego"**



#### Transcription

##### Lego

I play Lego at home and school. It's fun and Lego on PS2 on Star Wars it is fun that is 2 players so me and my friend played it was fun. I love it on PS2 It is not about making Lego

What is your favourite thing to build with Lego, Jack?

As Figure 8.19 points out, Jack’s meaning of Lego constituted both the building toy and the video game. When reading his entry carefully, it becomes apparent that he wrote primarily about the video game for PS2 (called Lego Star Wars) that involved a “mix” of the Lego-shaped figures from the building toy in a Star Wars-themed fighting game (see Figure 8.20).

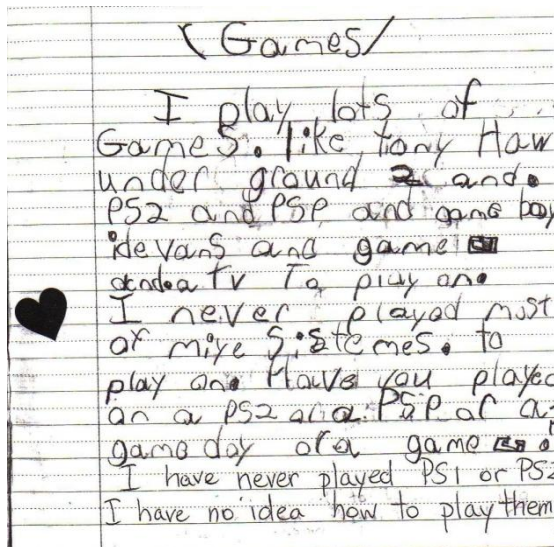
In his journal entry, Jack made the distinction between the two games very clearly, stating the video game “is not about making Lego.” Ms. Davidson did comment on the video game, but drew Jack back to the building toy, a school-valued and school-sanctioned play practice, by asking what his favourite thing is to build with Lego.

**Figure 8.20: Lego Star Wars video game for PS2**



Towards the end of the study, Jack’s attempts to gain a connection with Ms. Davidson over his video gaming got little response. In Figure 8.21, Jack continued to write about his video games in his journal but asked Ms. Davidson, “have you played on a PS2...”. Her comment, while rather neutral, perhaps carried a message of disinterest and/or non-acceptance. As I continued to document Jack’s journal entries for the next four weeks (after which the study ended), Jack did not write about video games in his journal again.

**Figure 8.21: Jack's journal entry asking Ms. Davidson if she has played video games**



Transcription

Games

I play lots of Games. Like Tony Hawk Underground 2 and PS2 and PSP and game boy advance and game [cube] and a TV to play on. I never played most of my systems to play on. Have you played on a PS2 or a PSP or a game boy or a game [cube]?

I have never played PS1 or PS2.  
I have no idea how to play them.

#### 8.4.2 Video games become subject for dramatic play

Jack continued to appropriate materials from video games into his playtime in the school and out-of-school spaces. At lunch and recess playtimes at school, I observed Jack participating in a type of fantasy play which appropriated themes taken from video games. Depending on who Jack played with, these games involved “teams” in which the players divided themselves up into “good guys” and “bad guys.” The object of the games would usually involve the chase and capture of members of the opposing team. Once captured, the teams would closely guard their prisoners in the event that they might escape. Each team had a particular base where they would hold captured prisoners and form their strategy to capture other prisoners and overtake the other team’s base. These games would take place all over the school grounds, but the best hiding spaces were usually in the school’s courtyard and around the climbing structures that offered “cover.” It was a school rule that the children could not use sticks or other objects in their play, and this was actively regulated by the on-duty playground supervisors.

In the out-of-school spaces of Jack’s home, and to some degree in the after-school care space, the dramatic play games continued but took on a different feel. An excerpt from my research notes, demonstrates this:

I sit on the edge of an open grassed area that lies between two of the apartment complex's buildings. Jack, his little brother Jamie, and four other boys stand in a group in the center of the grassed area. Jack holds a toy light saber (a replica of those used in the Star Wars movie), as do two of the other boys. Jamie and the others hold longer sticks. They begin discussing how they will be split into teams. Jack takes charge of the group and divides the children who have light sabers into one group and tells them that they are Jedi Warriors (the good guys) and the other boys with sticks are the Storm troopers (bad guys). Jack tells the Storm troopers that their sticks are really guns, and they can shoot at the Jedis but that Jedis can fight them with their "swords" (the light sabers). He slashes his sword around to demonstrate. The two groups split up and run away from each other. Jack runs behind a group of bushes near a building and waits. For several minutes the two groups hide and watch for their opponents. A boy from the Storm trooper team runs near Jack. Jack jumps out of the bushes and runs after him. The Storm trooper player runs faster and then after a few meters, turns around to face Jack and "fires" his stick at Jack, making shooting noises. Jack yells, "You didn't get me! My sword stopped it ...". Jack begins thrusting his sword in the air pretending to deflect bullets. The Storm trooper player is joined by another player and they begin dueling with Jack but now they all use their sticks as swords. All other players now join the game and the sword fight. Jack calls to his teammates, "Our reinforcements are being depleted...run...back to the command post! Come On!" Jack's team turns and runs away around the corner of the building.

This battle game was a remix of several video games that Jack played on his gaming systems including the Lego Star Wars video game (in which he borrowed the ideas of the light sabers and guns) and from the Star Wars Battlefront video game (in which he borrowed the language of the battle). As this game was not supervised by any adults, the rules by which the boys played included a weapons component. The game continued in this fashion for nearly an hour, at which time some of the boys were called in by their parents.

## 8.5 Summary and discussion

In this chapter, I explored the relationship between the school and out-of-school contexts to ask: How do children appropriate and recontextualize school and out-of-school IL practices for their own purposes? Looking at the cases of the four focal children, it is evident that all the children appropriated and recontextualized IL practices for their own purposes (see Table 8.1). These recontextualizations occurred in *and* across the school and out-of-school contexts. In these processes, the focal children effectively transported and transformed cultural material across practice boundaries. The scope of how these recontextualizations played out in each of the focal children's lives, however, showed marked similarities and differences.

**Table 8.1: Summary of the appropriated and recontextualized IL practices of the focal children in school and out-of-school contexts**

Focal Child	Appropriated School IL Practice	Appropriated Out-of-School IL Practice	Recontextualization	Space of Recontextualization
Tara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completion of Mapping skill worksheet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Playing <i>Sims</i> video game</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designing a virtual bedroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Home</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completion of a spelling worksheet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Playing a Disney computer game</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unscrambling letters to solve a word puzzle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Home</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exchanging information books at Library Time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Playing "school"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changing library book lending rules during "school" play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Home</li> </ul>
Ivan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Viewing images in advanced information books</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Viewing images in art class, watching educational TV programs, reading popular culture texts, reading informational texts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sketching images from information resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Home</li> </ul>

<b>Focal Child</b>	<b>Appropriated School IL Practice</b>	<b>Appropriated Out-of-School IL Practice</b>	<b>Recontextualization</b>	<b>Space of Recontextualization</b>
Ross	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Journal Writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sports and sports media viewing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing sports reports and play-by-plays, drawing sports posters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School</li> </ul>
Jack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Journal Writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Playing video games</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Video games as topics for journal writing and dramatic play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School/home</li> </ul>

For Tara, the IL practices in school and the skills and information learned within these practices travelled successfully across the school context to be recontextualized in the space of her home. Specifically, Tara used the information and skills learned from the school practices of finding information and filling in blanks and spaces on worksheets, to assist in the production of an imagined bedroom on a video game, and to change the nature of a computer game by changing its rules. Tara was very clear on the boundaries between the two spaces and also in her abilities to manipulate what passed through them in her own way, as she repeatedly described. I argue that it was acceptable for Tara to do this in the “safe” or unofficial space of her own home, away from the jurisdictions of the school, where video-gaming and computer gaming were not endorsed. Further, I argue that the nature of out-of-school contexts allowed Tara the freedom to change those school practices (e.g., the borrowing of particular “kinds” of texts) that Tara found unsettling, without fear of retribution. In Tara’s case, meanings across the contexts moved in a unidirectional pattern from school to home where they were re-articulated in unique and multimodal ways.

In contrast, Ross’ IL practices in out-of-school contexts concerning sports and sports media were recontextualized in the school spaces. His familiarity with the particular genres of sports reporting and play-by-play was re-organized in official school practices of journal writing. Meaning-making for Ross travelled in the direction of the out-of-school context to the school context in ways that Ms. Davidson approved. I argue that Ross’ control of the social and dialogic context of the practice of writing to Ms. Davidson created a powerful identity for him as a proficient reader and writer. Further, I believe that this particular intersection offered him many opportunities for, and ultimately a pathway to, success in literacy. Because Ross



recontextualized in school-sanctioned ways, Ms. Davidson viewed him as a successful writer. Ross successfully brought his passion for sports and sports media into a context that could not reliably be viewed as accepting of outside interests. Ross appeared to know the boundaries of acceptance in the school context, and he perhaps knew that for him, writing held greater worth than the image. As others have pointed out, one of the keys to successful literacy learning is developing an awareness of social boundaries, and deliberately negotiating those boundaries (Dyson, 1997; 2003a; New London Group, 1996).

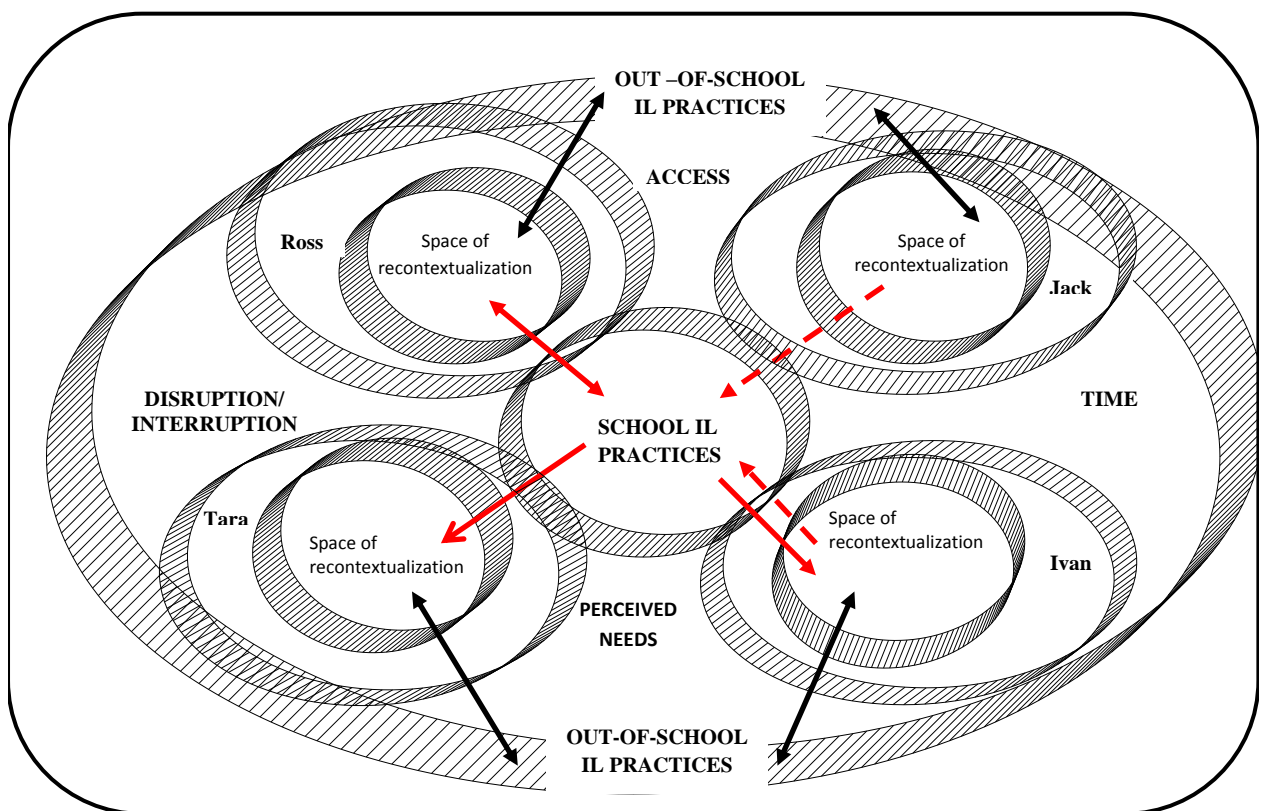
Ivan may have also known about the worth of image production in the school context. Similar to Tara, Ivan's recontextualization processes lay hidden, in one sense, out of the view of the school. Originating from the IL practices of the school, particularly those in the spheres of activity of Library and SSR, Ivan "re-used" images found in the informational texts and information books from school for creating new and aesthetically pleasing productions in the out-of-school contexts. Encouraged and supported by his parents, Ivan's remixes remained largely intact in the out-of-school spaces and seldom made their way back into the school space. This finding was quite curious to me. Although it could be considered that Tara's recontextualization of information and skills using a video game and a computer could not be repeated in the school context due to the unavailability of the technology, in Ivan's case, reproduction of images (involving pencil and paper) in the school context seems more manageable. However, in Ivan's case, I argue, it may be that his parents appreciated his artistic abilities as merely additional skills but not important for education and his future job security. Similar to a theme that underpinned Ms. Davidson's teaching philosophy, Ivan's parents believed that Ivan needed the real skills (those involving lettered representation) for success in their imagined world they held for him. In the out-of-school context, Ivan drew on resources that were particularly interesting to him such as TV shows and popular culture, but these resources did not have currency in the classroom.

Jack's remixes in the form of journal entries and dramatic play, drew on appropriations of the IL practices and the complexities of playing video games. His remixes showed consistency with the language and the imagery used in these games. For Jack, playing and replaying the video game (either on-screen or off), offered him repeated access to information that enabled him to construct meaning and to beat the game. The language of Jack's video games, both oral and written, showed marked contrast to the styles of the academic language of school. Although Jack tried to draw Ms. Davidson into a dialogue across the contexts, Ms.

Davidson did not engage. Ms. Davidson, who had no experience in which to situate the words and phrases of video-gaming found in Jack's texts, may have felt confused and frustrated. This may explain her comments in response to Jack's journal entries.

My understanding of the relationship between the focal children's appropriations and recontextualizations and the IL practices in the school and out-of-school contexts is graphically represented by Figure 8.22. In this diagram, I chose to physically represent a space (as defined as a circle within the larger sphere of the focal child) to emphasize the notion of the process of recontextualization. In this diagram, the direction of the arrows is important, in addition to their degree of intactness. Arrows indicate the direction of the appropriation of IL practices from the particular contexts into and out of the space of recontextualization for each focal child. Solid arrows represent an intact crossing between contexts; a dashed line represents a less than intact crossing to represent the idea that the recontextualization was not well received in the place of destination.

**Figure 8.22: The relationship between the focal children's appropriations and recontextualizations and the IL practices in school and out-of-school contexts**





Across the cases of the focal children, it becomes apparent that opportunities for recontextualization played out differently in the out-of-school and school contexts. Of particular note is the context of origin of the recontextualizations. The majority of the recontextualizations of the focal children were found to originate in the out-of-school contexts. I argue that the following factors largely determined the possibilities for these recontextualizations.

**Extended time to engage in recontextualizing processes.** For all the focal children, out-of-school contexts enabled extended periods of time for the children to take up and pursue their interests. During this unstructured time, which usually occurred during the after-school or weekend hours, the children had time to explore and play in ways that were self-directed and self-fulfilling. These chunks of time throughout the day and throughout the week, allowed the children to return again and again to continue working on ideas. Unstructured time opened possibilities for the focal children to create, imagine, and explore on a deeper level.

**Choice of mode.** During this extended time, the children had many choices to draw on and to represent their recontextualizations. They used the computer, video games, TV, visuals, and play to make meaning and pursue new identities. They used these modes to solve problems and to make decisions. These recontextualizations assisted some of the children in negotiating and solving problems across cultures and languages.

**Flexibility to facilitate change.** The focal children were able to change the familiar to the more familiar (e.g., the printed mode of a worksheet to the mode of the computer screen) in order to make and change meaning. In this way, the focal children were able to take an agentive role in changing school IL practices. In the out-of-school contexts, adults generally approved of this flexibility despite the fact that some of the practices stood in opposition to particular forms of literacy valued in school. As such, the students were able to forge new pathways across a number of different literacies and across contexts.

**Imagination and challenge.** The possibilities for imagination and challenge in the out-of-school contexts were many. The children constructed their worlds with the words and visuals borrowed from the practices of other contexts. In these imagined worlds, they could act “a head taller than themselves” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102) in their play. Here, the children organized their behaviour to meet the challenges they brought into existence. In this world, they were able to exercise agency within and against the perceived rules of the “game” whether it be a

computer or video game, or the rules of the inflexible practices of school. And at the intersection of the out-of-school and school contexts, each context impinged on the other, and, I argue, created new opportunities and ways of being for the children. Unfortunately, where the world of school did not happily intersect with the outside worlds of the child, opportunities for success diminished.

In summary, I demonstrated the ways in which the focal children appropriated and recontextualized the IL practices in school and out-of-school contexts. What has emerged, I suggest, is the need for a reconceptualization of contexts that reflect a dynamic system of values, beliefs, and standards developed through understandings shared by the children, the teacher, and the parents. I address this idea in the next and final chapter of the dissertation.

## **CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FURTHER WORK**

### **9.0 Introduction**

This study examined the affordances of school and out-of-school contexts and ways the contexts provided opportunities for and constraints on the engagement of four focal children in IL practices. This study also examined how the children appropriated and recontextualized the IL practices of both contexts for their own purposes. In the preceding chapters, I presented the analysis, findings and discussion I arrived at through qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. In this final chapter of the dissertation, I first present the conclusions drawn from the findings, including insights on how opportunities and constraints within contexts accounted for young children's IL learning and how children gained access to and understood new IL practices through "appropriating, stretching, and working the familiar" (Dyson, 2003a, p. 193). The conclusions and insights form the basis for the next part of the chapter; that is, the generation of implications as they relate to the theoretical framework and concepts that grounded the study. In that section, I also discuss implications for curriculum writers, administrators, teachers, and parents in terms of the role they play in the construction and maintenance of the affordances of contexts that may impact children's IL learning. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the study and suggest directions for further work.

### **9.1 Conclusions drawn from the findings of the study**

#### **9.1.1 The affordances of school contexts in young children's IL development**

It is generally uncontested that the school has responsibility to prepare children to meet the literacy demands in their everyday lives and also for their future opportunities. Many educators are beginning to consider that these future out-of-school contexts will indeed require not only the use of conventional print literacies but also new multiliteracies to access and construct information within private and public economic sectors, and within local and global corporate worlds. In this study, the school context did afford opportunities for the children to engage in IL that could begin to prepare them for these future contexts, albeit narrow in scope, and aligned largely with what the government, curriculum writers, school board, and the teacher imagined for students.

From an instructional perspective, the school context afforded a curriculum largely open-ended in nature, albeit dense in learning outcomes. IL learning outcomes were not an “add-on” in the curriculum; they were an integrated part of the content (e.g., English Language Arts), and the process for learning the content. Further, Ms. Davidson employed curricular integration, as endorsed by the *Primary program: A framework for teaching*<sup>36</sup>, a recommended resource for primary teachers. In other words, in the school context, the curriculum afforded possibilities for teaching of IL and opportunities for children to engage in IL practices.

The teacher in this study, as a part of the school context, was knowledgeable in IL and IL practices, and thus provided opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices and provided mediation and scaffolded instruction within these opportunities. The teacher also provided resources, such as periods of unstructured time and the availability of tools and resources, within her immediate capabilities, to support the focal children’s IL learning, two foundational components necessary for the provision of opportunities for children to engage in IL practices. Further, instruction and related student activities often included elements of choice and flexibility which allowed the focal children opportunities to engage more deeply in IL practices.

However, the findings of this study suggest that the children’s opportunities to engage in IL practices in school contexts were constrained by factors operating at cross purposes to the intent of preparing children for the complexities of literate environments of the future. These factors, namely the press of time, perceived needs, access to information, and lived disruption/interruption effectively transformed IL into an “add-on” in an already full curriculum. These factors, working in concert, weighed heavily on Ms. Davidson, and against a backdrop of accountability and efforts to raise school literacy scores, effectively constrained the opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices. Instructional approaches, standardized and fixed on narrow definitions of literacy, took precedence. In response, IL practices in the school context became more formalized and focused on lists of demonstrable skills. The teaching of IL was conducted in a very mainstream, autonomous way that excluded students, such as Ivan and Jack, of non-mainstream backgrounds. Their ways of knowing did

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<sup>36</sup> *Primary program: A framework for teaching* (Ministry of Education, 2000) is a document recognized in ministerial orders as an educational program guide. It incorporates information on how policies and provincially prescribed curriculum can be interpreted and implemented.

not match the monolingual and middle-class ways of the school context. And unfortunately, conforming to meet the literacy benchmarks set by the school district and school, and feeling overwhelmed, Ms. Davidson overlooked the knowledge of individual children to adhere to a one-size fits-all curriculum, rather than designing a curriculum that was culturally relevant and meaningful to her students.

The school day, structured around defined time allocations for curricular areas, reflected the rigidity of the school context. For the most part, I perceived the focal children's IL learning in the school context as imposed and compartmentalized and governed by rules. The deepest engagement of the children in IL practices occurred when the children had periods of unstructured time involving shared social practices that were authentic and meaningful, not unlike the out-of-school contexts in which the children participated. It is difficult to accurately predict the effect on the focal children's IL practices had Ms. Davidson relaxed her "grip" on teaching to the prescribed learning outcomes. I speculate, however, had Ms. Davidson provided more enabling activities that exercised more choice and freedom (e.g., different "kinds" of homework, or research projects) and access to many different modes of information over extended and uninterrupted periods of time, the school context would have afforded greater opportunities for children to engage in IL practices. This, in turn, would enhance IL development and children's preparation for the information age.

In a final point, in my role as a researcher, it was ethically difficult for me to present the analysis and findings on the profiled teacher who so generously invited me into her classroom. While my description of the constraints of my colleague's practice was not inhibited, it felt uncomfortable for me to report it as such. I struggled with these feeling throughout the data collection, analysis, and presentation of the findings, and discussed these feelings repeatedly with my colleagues and advisory committee. I was also heartened to have explored these feelings in some depth with the focal teacher through interviews and on-the-spot conversations in order to fully understand the depth of the teacher's actions and decision-making processes. I believe we shared information that afforded us greater growth in our respective roles as researcher and teacher.

### **9.1.2 The affordances of out-of-school contexts in young children's IL development**

I have argued elsewhere<sup>37</sup> that to prepare students for the information age and to improve the life chances of those children most poorly served, we must come to know and understand some of the multifaceted ways in which literacy connects with learning, doing, and becoming in contexts out-of-school. It is not my intent here, to treat the concept of context as a discrete container (Cole, 1995). As I demonstrated earlier in this dissertation and will discuss further in the next section, such school and out-of-school contexts are not tightly sealed nor boarded off. However, as school has come to mean such a particular, specialized institution with its own particular brand of learning, it does seem useful, as Schultz and Hull (2002) suggest, to set it in opposition to out-of-school contexts. From this perspective, in this study, I found the out-of-school contexts not only offered opportunities for children to engage in IL, particularly in the home contexts, but also offered greater and more diverse opportunities for engagement.

What is most surprising about this finding is that the same factors constraining the school context were at play, yet these constraints seemed not to affect the affordances for the focal children to engage in IL practices to the same degree. Ms. Davidson perceived that many of her students come “from homes that are very disorganized.” It's true the focal children had a greater amount of unstructured time in the home than the school context, but flexibility, choice, and freedom (in terms of mode, activities, people, spaces, etc.) appeared to support, not constrain their IL practices. For the most part, the focal children were simply not over-structured or scheduled in the way that they were in school.

Despite the fact that the children came from lower socioeconomic families, those commonly deemed “at risk,” and that some of the families had less economic capital than others, the members of the children's families were very resourceful. They looked for ways to provide children with material and cultural resources, bringing in their own IL practices to broaden their children's IL world. They looked for free software on cereal box packages, websites, and on the sale rack of department stores. They downloaded programs for their children from the Internet when finances allowed, and shared and borrowed programs, computers, and access to the Internet whenever possible. To buy informational texts, they usually went to garage sales or bought through discount companies or programs offered by the

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<sup>37</sup> See McTavish, 2009.

school. They entered, and won, raffles for books and toys. If the parents of the focal children couldn't afford the time to engage in IL with their children, they relied on others. These information accessors had time to spend with the focal children and shared artefacts, memories, languages, and resources. In this way, the children had a wealth of resources, or cultural capital, from which to draw (Moll et al., 1992).

Some out-of-school contexts, particularly the home context, allowed the focal children to engage in uninterrupted playtime. While school did not allow time for play and exploration, due to Ms. Davidson's concern with the curriculum press and her accountability to address the numerous learning outcomes, out-of-school contexts afforded play possibilities. In particular, at home, the children had access to a proliferation of multimedia and time to embrace it, and engage with it. In doing so, the children played freely, exploring IL through other modes such as "image, gaze, gesture, movement, music, speech, and sound-effect" (Kress & Jewitt, 2003, p.1). During playtime, this multimodality fused schooled literacies with out-of-school literacies. The focal children also used play, especially dramatic play, to take up identities in imagined communities, "communities to which they hoped to belong" (Kendrick, 2005, p.9). Through its multimodal affordances for manipulating meanings and contexts, play powerfully shaped the focal children's learning and increased their participation, not in the school context per se, but within communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in out-of-school contexts. Here, the focal children tried out new social practices, explored the multimodal potential of material resources and constructed spaces for recontextualization (Wohlwend, 2008).

### **9.1.3 Contexts for recontextualizations**

The focal children's IL practices in out-of-school contexts contrasted markedly with their IL practices at school. This finding certainly concurs with other research we have seen previously (e.g., Heath, 1983; Knobel, 2001; McTavish, 2009; Moll et al., 1992) in which out-of-school literacy practices do not align with school literacy. In the school context, IL practices were subsumed in the hegemonic practices of school where informational texts needed to be read and used in a given way; for example, to fill in blanks, to start stories and journal entries, or to display accurate illustrations. In this study, the children reframed what they viewed as malleable features of official practices (Dyson, 2008) to construct meaning on their own through appropriation and recontextualization.

In this study, the familiar conventions of communication did not constrain the focal children, but through creative exploitation of materials (Kress, 2003b) and practices, they

switched easily between modes to convey their meanings. Where these recontextualizations took place, however, was of important interest. The sites of recontextualization occurred largely out-of-school, rather than in school, as previous research has illuminated (Dyson, 1997; 2001a; 2001b; 2001c; Marsh, 2000). The children transported the IL practices from the school context to the home where the children embedded and changed them in flexible, playful, and contemporary ways that enhanced the children's IL development. However, these transformed practices were not brought back into the school; there was no place for the children's recontextualizations in the school context particularly in terms of: the material resources available to them, the time and freedom to continue working with them, and the teacher's attitude regarding acceptable practices. These one-way crossings from school to home are best thought as traveling across a selectively permeable barrier where the flow from school to home far exceeded the flow from home to school.

The creation of a transformative third space (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995) in out-of-school contexts (as illustrated in chapter 8) opened an area where the children used play to explore IL practices, assume pretend identities, and use materials in a risk-free zone. As the children moved across the many different textual landscapes out-of-school, they developed and deployed particular skills and knowledge and expressed their identities and places in the social world. In doing so, they created new texts and literacies and transformed the traditional view of what is meant by literacy. Although the children tried to transfer the practices and genres of this space back in the classroom, these attempts were largely ignored unless they fit with the constricted practices upheld by the school. This was particularly difficult for Ivan, but even more for Jack, who couldn't quite fit into these bounded cultural conventions, as often as he might have tried.

#### **9.1.4 Contributions of the study to our knowledge of literacy and learning**

This study has contributed to our knowledge of literacy and learning in the following ways. First, simply including informational texts in school or out-of-school contexts does not guarantee children's engagement with IL, nor can we assume that their inclusion will prepare children for a wider world. However, contexts that afford opportunities for children to engage in IL practices in terms of flexibility, uninterrupted time to play and explore, access to multimodal resources, and scaffolding by others, will certainly guide children more appropriately to that goal. This study has not only added to our knowledge of how children recontextualize literacy practices for their own purposes, it has shown how children



recontextualize school literacy practices in their out-of-school contexts, providing us with new knowledge on how school literacy may impact some children's out-of-school literacies. Further, this study has added to our knowledge that children may or may not choose to bring their recontextualizations for public viewing for reasons that may be intensely personal. This new knowledge has implications for current pedagogy that aims to transform out-of-school literacies into "stuff" that will give children agency in a wider world (Millard, 2003).

Finally, this study has also contributed to our knowledge and to the research (e.g., Greogry, Williams, Baker, & Street, 2004; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991) regarding the relationship between pedagogy in school and out-of-school contexts. In terms of IL learning, strong levels of support (in terms of resources, scaffolding, instruction, etc.) in out-of-school contexts may compensate for weaker levels of support in school contexts, and vice-versa. This contribution points to the need for further research on effecting changes in and out-of-school, and will be discussed in sections following.

## **9.2 Theoretical Implications**

In this section, I return to the theoretical framework that grounded this study to examine the ways the study has consolidated and developed the framework.

### **9.2.1 IL as a situated and sociocultural practice**

A sociocultural view of learning centers attention on cultural practices or valued activities with particular features and routines, and is fundamental to understanding the nature of literacy (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003). The role of other participants and the available cultural tools become key features of learning environments. As such, literacy learning from a sociocultural perspective is viewed as a socially mediated process that cannot be understood apart from its context of development, the forms of mediation available, and the nature of participation across various cultural practices (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003). In becoming literate, children learn the meaning of written language in the context of relevant situations, both in and out-of-school (Larson & Marsh, 2005).

Viewed from this perspective, the focal children's IL learning linked inextricably to their participation in the particular cultural practices within the school and out-of-school contexts. Out of school, opportunities that outdistanced those occurring in school afforded the children's participation and engagement in contemporary IL practices. The children's out-of-school IL practices involved shared social practices with family and friends, best described as ideological

(Street, 1995), that is, IL situated in the contexts of use and shaped by particular social, cultural, historical, political and economic factors. In out-of-school contexts, the children learned IL from authentic opportunities using the computer, television, video gaming, and play with the support of more proficient others, for a specific purpose or purposes (e.g., to win a game, to report a sports score, to dramatize an event). At school, the transmission of sets of skills to be learned and used in isolation, away from meaningful contexts and world practices dominated the focal children's participation and engagement in contemporary IL practices and opportunities.

The children's IL learning supported the theoretical conception of literacy as situated in social, interactional, cultural, institutional and historical contexts. Teaching implications for providing contexts in which teachers and students can construct authentic opportunities for learning will be discussed further in this chapter.

**IL within the NLS.** The work of the NLS (Gee, 1996; Street, 1993) enables an understanding of the nature of literacy learning that not only occurs in formal or informal settings or in or out of school, but also the “in-between” literacy learning that occurs in daily interaction as tools for building and maintaining social relationships. In this study, the focal children recontextualized IL practices from school and out-of-school contexts to provide a “space” for them to solve problems and to build relationships. The children used a variety of semiotic systems including drama, play, writing, photographs, and visual media to accomplish certain goals, including the construction of social languages (Bakhtin, 1981) and/or discourses and identities (Gee, 1996; Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003).

This study offers a different view of children's IL learning as they meshed local social interactions and global social structures in out-of-school contexts as they produced new texts and practices. The focal children recontextualized IL practices to make sense of their personal and social worlds, and to support and solidify their identity in both school and out-of-school contexts. However, IL, as patterned by the social institution of the school and its associated power, the school context rarely allowed the unofficial practices to enter, forcing these practices to lay hidden. In this study, the children's knowledge of the “right kind of literacy” sanctioned in school seemed to allow the steady seepage of school types of literacy into the homes, where the children made sense of them in their own ways, with the assumption that they would not bring them back into the classroom.

The focal children rarely brought their remixes back to school due, in part, to the lack of acknowledgement by the teacher in the school context. However, it is possible that the children

wanted these recontextualizations to remain in the spaces in which they were created. Perhaps these young children were exercising agency which, I argue, may extend the theoretical concept of the “third space.” Here, I question the notion of the boundedness of contexts or spaces which third space theory seems to imply. Perhaps children’s notions of communication and contexts are broader and more global than we imagine, calling into question our conceived imaginations of a contemporary child’s “unworldliness.” In this study, the space of recontextualization can be perceived as boundless; it is the boundaries that other contexts erect (such as the school) which prove problematic in their possibilities for re-entry. From this perspective, the present energy devoted by teachers and researchers in trying to bring the literacy practices in the lives of children to be used in the literacy instruction in schools may be misguided (Larson, 2009). It seems more realistic to concentrate efforts on supporting those out-of-school contexts that enable children to recontextualize school practices for a wider and more global use.

### **9.2.2 IL, social semiotics and multimodality**

New information and communication technologies have irrevocably changed the nature and use of literacy over the past decade. This digital turn has challenged us to rethink the very nature of literacy practices and how they are situated in local and global spaces. Kress (2003a) calls for a theoretical shift from linguistics (language alone) to semiotics (gesture, speech, image, writing, 3D objects, colour, music, etc.) to take into account the many modes available for representation. This transforms literacy as a matter of ‘competence’ to thinking about literacy as multimodal design. In this study, the children used semiotic resources in order make meaning and recontextualize IL practices from school and out-of-school contexts.

Multimodality could be seen in every text the children produced. These texts carried the motivations of the child and, as Kress explains, were motivated signs (Kress, 1997). The school context focused primarily on written language and dominated other modes, affording few opportunities for the focal children to engage in IL practices. For the focal children, multimodal practice in out-of-school contexts enabled them to communicate across cultures using new, changing, and global forms of communication (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). Observing the children as they navigated these out-of-school literacy practices gave clues as to how their understanding of multimodality aided their thinking and communicating skills.

### **9.2.3 IL and dialogism**

Through interactions with others in our communities and cultures, our use and understanding of words are developed. From a Bakhtinian (1986) perspective, children develop

literacy through engaging in meaningful activities and interactions with literate others. Bakhtin also contends that children, through recontextualization, process the words of others into their own speech through a kind of social dialogue. In this study, the different spheres of human activity such as meal time, bedtime, play, TV watching, and video gaming, provided opportunities for the focal children to use language, to learn language and gain knowledge about language.

The children used and learned the languages in different ways in the spheres of activity in the school and out-of-school contexts. In school, IL was subsumed under school-based literacy teaching where particular ways of using and leaning language were prized, and ways to which the children learned to conform. In out-of-school contexts, IL and the models for interacting around texts were malleable and reshaped by the children, in turn, generating new practices and literate competences, and new attitudes towards what can be done with speech and writing. As Dyson (2003a) explains, these children effectively recontextualized what they regarded as relevant ways of participating from one situated event to another. In this way, they expanded their knowledge about symbolic systems, social practices, and the ideological complex world.

#### **9.2.4 IL and a comprehensive theoretical framework**

As outlined in Chapter 1, the theoretical perspectives I have drawn on do not operate in a vacuum, and there are many features of the perspectives which indeed overlap. This study has demonstrated the need to draw on a comprehensive framework when understanding IL teaching and learning. Further, this framework is crucial for understanding its relevance for classroom practice as it is transformed over time and in relation to how theory is developed and changed. In this study, drawing on a comprehensive social practice framework is important for the consideration of the complexities of literacy education in the information age and the knowledge economy. The framework assists in the construction of: meaningful pedagogy for classroom and teacher education, the writing of contemporary curricula, policy formation, and future work in literacy research.

### **9.3 Implications of the study**

#### **9.3.1 Implications for curriculum writers**

Curricula are shaped by theories of how literacy should be taught and what literacies are considered to be important. They are formulated from assumptions about what literacy is, the

most favorable ways it can be acquired, and from conceptions of how a literate person should act. In this way, curricula are shaped by power. What is taught, and how it is taught, is often determined by government perceptions of apparent literacy crises whereby future workers will be unable to cope with the ever-increasing demands of modern life. With this mindset, literacy is often viewed as a set of internal, psychological skills that are testable and are acquired step by step in school. In this view, the teaching of literacy becomes focused on the mechanical skills learned through classroom drill and repetition.

Even with an enabling curriculum, as was the case in this study, the sheer number of prescribed learning outcomes to be taught and assessed within subject areas and programs, and within given time frames, places great demands on teachers. As this study has demonstrated, keeping up with the press of curriculum, even with the use of pedagogical strategies such as curriculum integration, teachers may adhere to narrow views of literacy in which literacy outcomes can be taught, assessed, and checked-off as accomplished. In this scenario, there is no outward look to the global, but instead, a focus on meeting prescribed outcomes to prepare children for the next grade's curriculum. For some teachers, IL outcomes may be deemed as extraneous, and perhaps strategically "weeded out" in an effort to satisfy the demands of the here and now and by pressures of district accountability.

Curriculum writers may need to focus on and respond to the new pathways that students are taking through the "globalised and local, virtual and material social fields" (Luke & Carrington, 2003, p.233). The vast amount of information and the way in which it is changing and moving blurs the boundaries between school and out-of-school. Curriculum needs to respond to the changing times and changing textual practices such as were demonstrated by the focal children in this study: video-game playing, online gaming, TV watching, drawing, and dramatic play. The move for curriculum writers to embed multiliteracies within curriculum in the early years may prove the impetus for changing classroom practice.

### **9.3.2 Implications for teachers and administrators**

Teachers' classroom practices are social practices, a theoretical tenet that grounds this study. When these social practices involve literacy, they are described as literacy practices. The literacy curriculum that teachers follow is constructed in relation to social practice and the assumptions that teachers hold about literacy. An approach to understanding children's IL practices should take into consideration not only the contexts in which children's IL learning

occurs, but also the affordances of the various contexts which allow opportunities for children to engage in IL practices.

This study has demonstrated that the factor of time, specifically uninterrupted and extended time, provided opportunities for children to engage deeply in IL practices. In terms of implications, the question must be addressed: How *do* teachers provide more time within their already full schedules? Similarly, how do teachers attend to children's needs, provide access to information, and reduce the amount of disruption/interruption they encounter on a daily basis in the school context? The answer to these questions may require a broader and deeper discussion of teaching and learning than the quick fix methods of adding minutes to a teaching day or eliminating other learning outcomes. To facilitate the discussion, I take a step back to take a more global view of teaching and learning in new times.

As was the case in this study, teachers offer legitimate explanations about why they cannot teach in ways they believe are sound. They often outline the external demands they face, including the teaching of innumerable learning outcomes and the expectations of accountability measures. As Larson and Marsh (2005) contend, teachers may not fully recognize or question the hegemony of traditional autonomous literacy practices. Without this realization, teachers may feel unable to carve out tactical spaces in which they can integrate good classroom practice with those requirements imposed by governments or other outside institutions. One of the implications of this study is that teachers might look carefully at the imposed curricular outcomes they are to teach and then examine these outcomes from the theoretical perspective which grounds their teaching practice. Grounding practice from a sound theoretical base (e.g., from a social semiotics perspective or a sociocultural perspective), may make curriculum more meaningful and relevant, thus opening opportunities for deep literacy engagement.

Questioning assumptions about the "right kind" of literacies that children need, is difficult for teachers who may hold particular attitudes about the role of IL and the role of IL and technology. To this end, teachers may want to view and analyze Internet and other multimodal texts to identify the texts' audience and purpose. Teachers may realize that the traditionally defined "correct" use of literacy skills (e.g., those for reading, writing, and viewing) may, in fact, apply accordingly to these texts. Similarly, when teachers reflect on their own literacy practices (digitized or not) in their everyday professional and personal lives, they may come to understand their own practices as social practices, and they may examine how

these texts and practices inform their teaching. This may assist in their understanding of what literacy skills children need now, as well as what they will need in the future.

As was the case in this study, teachers teaching in inner-city or urban areas are often aware of (and often contribute to) a deficit view of the children they teach. At the same time, they recognize the increased marginalization of these students in terms of the few resources to which these children have access. While this remains a dire issue, teachers can address this by acknowledging the existing practices and funds of knowledge that these children possess and may bring to school. For example, video and computer game playing were two particularly prevalent practices in two of the focal children's out-of-school contexts. If not acknowledged, as was the case in this study, children may begin to see school as irrelevant and archaic, bound by a system of rules to which they need to adhere. The issue at hand may not be one of "old" versus "new" literacies but how these literacies are meaningful, relevant and purposeful for the foreseeable future.

The idea that children make meaning and learn in all contexts (in and out-of-school) has further implications for teachers. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) have shown how examining the out-of-school practices of learners is invaluable; teachers should not feel that they need to pedagogize such practices. While teachers are advised to be aware of children's out-of-school practices, this study has shown that children may not want to bring these practices into the classroom. Instead, teachers could offer support for these practices by assigning particular types of "homework" or out-of-school projects which engage the children and promote their out-of-school IL practices. Drawing on the knowledge that these practices often involve family members, friends, or knowledgeable others, teachers can understand and be sensitive to children's cultures, languages and ways of knowing. If children choose to bring these practices or resulting texts of these practices back into the school, teachers can use them in judicious ways to construct curriculum.

There are also implications for administrators from this study. They may need to closely examine external demands that limit children's engagement in IL practices in schools. Similar to teachers, administrators may also need to examine leadership outcomes and then examine these outcomes from the theoretical perspective that guides their leadership in literacy teaching and practice. Grounding "literacy leadership" from a sound theoretical base will have implications for pedagogy within their school. Administrators play an important role in contesting the deficit models of children and can promote the view that children's language and

literacy practices may be different in comparison to school literacy, but nonetheless, equally important. Administrators are central in lobbying not just for material resources, but by providing leadership and reflecting critically on current practice. By disrupting the status quo, and by acknowledging the changing nature of literacy in an information and communication economy, they too, can carve out tactical spaces.

### **9.3.3 Implications for families**

The findings of this study suggest implications for families, particularly those families that differ culturally, linguistically, and economically from middle-class, mainstream families. As the participants in this study were from these diverse backgrounds, the discussion of the implications for families reflects these families' particular cultural beliefs, practices, and social values.

For the Wang family, interview and observation data indicated that the parents valued literacy and the formality of learning to read and write in very autonomous ways. While they supported and respected the teacher's authority in teaching Ivan to read and write, they were confused by Western early literacy teaching practices that did not endorse correct spelling, grammar and formation of letters. Although the family never questioned the teacher, they provided Ivan with additional practice in these areas through the use of workbooks, not only to improve academic skill development in the English language, in hopes to ensure his future academic success in relation to attending university, but also to keep up with the perceived level of learning with age-mates in their native country. To ease this apparent tension, the Wang family, and other families with similar cultural values or beliefs may benefit from understanding how their beliefs, practices, expectations and social values regarding literacy learning may be different from the constructivist notions of making meaning in children's literate worlds that are prevalent in most Canadian schools.

In a related issue, some families may regard their children's enrolment in certain out-of-school activities as providing their children with more intensive instruction and the acquisition of knowledge in certain areas such as science and art. While this certainly may be beneficial in facilitating the construction of information and knowledge, parents would benefit by carefully examining these programs to see if they match their expectations. Some programs may simply reinforce practices which may work at cross purposes to family expectations.

This study has also illuminated the importance of time, space, flexibility and choice in children's engagement of IL practices. Families can be recognized for the ways they provide



their children with periods of unstructured time to play using materials and resources of choice, such as technology and popular culture. Families can also continue to share their own multimodal and technological practices with their children. For example, they could show their children how to conduct searches on the Internet, and critically examine and assess the information they find. Families could also play computer and video games with their children to understand how children's problem-solving capabilities can extend beyond their own conceptions of what their children are capable.

Although families' lack of time was prevalent in this study, their strategies to ameliorate this factor also deserve recognition. Unfortunately, teachers and administrators may have little awareness of what is happening in the out-of-school lives of their students. While it is acknowledged that schools need to provide ways to form relationships with families in more than the traditional opportunities such as "meet-the teacher" nights and parent-teacher conferences, parents may benefit from allocating time to be proactive in collaborating with teachers. In this way, family members and care givers of the children can articulate what role they play in providing opportunities for their children to engage in IL practices. In turn, teachers may realize and appreciate family members' roles and the environment they provide in terms of a broader notion of literacy, the practices they promote, and the support they provide in relation to children's literacy development. The recognition of their value as key facilitators may help to strengthen their positions as advocates for their children and serve to bring about more frequent and effective communications with teachers, administrators and schools.

#### **9.4 Limitations of the study**

This study did not investigate different instructional approaches to teaching informational text, nor did it investigate the literacy practices around narrative text. Had the study been conducted in classrooms where teachers had employed specific approaches to teaching informational texts, or had provided opportunities for play and recontextualization, perhaps the findings would not have been so illuminating.

The findings of this investigation were based on multiple cases where my access to out-of-school contexts was varied. For example, had I been allowed access to the out-of-school contexts during Jack's weekend time with his father, I might have gained additional information to support my findings.

Like all case studies, my findings cannot be generalized beyond this study. However, the study may be useful for “connection-making” (Maxwell, 1992) in that the characteristics of the participants, and research sites are similar to many urban areas in North America metropolitan areas that contain economically, culturally and linguistically diverse students. The focal children were diverse enough to encourage broader applicability, and I argue, to enable adequate comparisons to other cases. The thick descriptions throughout this dissertation also assist in the transferability of the study. It is hoped that this study will lead to a better understanding about the affordances of school and out-of-school contexts in ways they contribute to young children’s IL learning by expanding and generalizing theory and ultimately contributing to the creation of more effective literacy pedagogies and curricula.

## **9.5 Future research**

Becoming information literate will require a radical departure from what we have traditionally experienced in literacy education. Becoming information literate is, or should be, about developing the skills to transform the world. We need to go beyond the traditional ways of teaching literacy that are not limited to code-breaking or operational literacy practices. As repertoires of literate practices are expanding in terms of the media, modes and languages required for living in a globalized world, schools will need to be mindful of what constitutes “proper literacy” (Lankshear & Lawler, 1988).

While this multiple-case study has illustrated that the focus for preparing children for a knowledge-based economy should be on social practices and their connection across various social and cultural sites and institutions, there is much to be done in this area. While many of us continue to observe a deepening of the gap between in-school and out-of-school worlds, now is a crucial time to investigate the interplay between out-of-school and school literacy practices in a much larger way. As a starting place, new research must now look beyond simply valuing or celebrating students’ literacies or ‘linking’ home and school literacies. Research needs to look further than the pedagogization of out-of-school literacies or how they can be transformed to fit into school outcomes. Building on the current study, new research can critically reflect on how students’ literacies travel across time and contexts to provide spaces for students to consider aspects of their literate lives and to make meaningful connections across these spaces.

Based on the findings of the study, a deeper examination of the spaces of recontextualization, in the out-of-school contexts, where students freely recontextualize without reproach is worth consideration. Specifically, questions examining the endpoints of the travel of the products and practices of recontextualization, the notion of why they travel where they do, and for what purposes, demand specific attention. As I noted at the beginning of the dissertation, Schultz and Hull (2002) have suggested, and I concur based on the findings of this study, that research should continue to document the ways that school imposes a version of literacy on the outside world. In other words, we are well-advised to continue to look at how school literacies are shaping out-of school literacies.

Finally, examinations of how teachers can possibly mediate between a print-governed, orientation to literacy and a multidimensional, multiliterate, and multimodal model of literacy is perhaps a most important critical area of research that this study has brought to light. How teachers will be able to carve out time and space for continued reflection and analyses within the changing landscape of new literacies and technologies certainly is an important and significant area for future research.

In conclusion, to prepare students for the information age and to improve the life chances of those children most poorly served, we must come to know and understand some of the multifaceted ways in which literacy connects with learning, doing, and becoming out-of-school. Only in this way can we adequately prepare students for the world outside of school.

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## Appendix A

Behavioural Research Ethics Board certificate of approval for the study.



The University of British Columbia  
Office of Research Services  
**Behavioural Research Ethics Board**  
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

### CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b> Marilyn L. Chapman	<b>INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:</b> UBC/Education/Language and Literacy Education	<b>UBC BREB NUMBER:</b> H06-03450
<b>INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:</b>		
<small>Institution</small>	<small>Site</small>	
N/A Other locations where the research will be conducted: Prince Charles Elementary School, Surrey, BC; participants' homes		
<b>CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):</b> Marianne McTavish		
<b>SPONSORING AGENCIES:</b> N/A		
<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b> From school to home to school again: A multiple case study of the teaching and learning of information literacy		
<b>REB MEETING DATE:</b> January 25, 2007		<b>CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE:</b> January 25, 2008
<b>DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:</b>		<b>DATE APPROVED:</b> February 27, 2007
<small>Document Name</small>	<small>Version</small>	<small>Date</small>
<b>Protocol:</b>		
Dissertation research proposal	N/A	November 6, 2006
<b>Consent Forms:</b>		
HSIL Adult Relative Consent Form	2	January 6, 2007
HSIL Teacher Consent Form	2	January 6, 2006
HSIL Parent Consent Form	3	February 19, 2007
HSIL Non-participating Parent Consent Form	2	February 19, 2007
<b>Assent Forms:</b>		
HSIL Student Assent Form	N/A	January 6, 2007
<b>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:</b>		
HSIL study Interview Schedule	1	November 6, 2006
<b>Letter of Initial Contact:</b>		
HSIL Initial Contact letter	N/A	January 6, 2007
<b>Other Documents:</b>		
Permission form Prince Charles Elementary	N/A	November 14, 2006
Permission letter Surrey School Board	N/A	December 1, 2006
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:		
_____ Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair		

## Appendix B

The initial contact letter sent to the families inviting them to be part of the study.

### THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Dr. Marilyn Chapman  
Department of Language & Literacy Education  
2125 Main Mall  
Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4  
Phone/Fax: 604-733-6220 (home)  
Fax: 604-822-3154



October, 2007

#### **From school to home to school again: A multiple case study of the teaching and learning of information literacy**

Dear Parents,

We are writing to invite your family to participate in a study on the reading and writing of information literacy (that is, books, computers, TV, radio, video etc.) in the home and in the school. Mrs. McTavish, a part-time teacher at Prince Charles Elementary, will be conducting the study. The study is part of her requirements for a PhD degree she is doing at the University of British Columbia.

Mrs. McTavish is looking for grade two families from Ms. Davidson's class. The research will focus on the information literacy development of your grade two child. In particular, it aims to investigate the various factors that affect the development of reading and writing information literacy in the school and at home.

If you consent to your family participating in the study, Mrs. McTavish would like to observe your grade 2 child at school and at home from October 2007 until March 2008. This would include:

- 1) Observations at school:
  - These would take place during regular classroom hours including recess and lunch periods on the playground, in the form of video- and audio-recordings and field notes focusing on your grade 2 child's literacy activities.
  - They would take place twice per week and at varying times during the day so that the observations will encompass the entire school day.
- 2) Observations at home:
  - These would take place once per week at your convenience, to observe daily life activity within the home, only when your grade 2 child is present and awake.

3) Interviews:

- A one-hour audio-taped interview with you to collect information about the informational reading and writing experiences your grade 2 child has outside the school, at the beginning of the study and at the end.
- A half-hour audio-taped interview with your grade 2 child about his/her home and school reading and writing, at the beginning of the study and at the end.

4) Reading and writing samples:

- These would include your grade 2 child's school and home writing and reading during this period.

You or your family may withdraw from participating in this study at any time. Once the study is completed, Mrs. McTavish will write articles for research journals and to present at conferences. She may include samples of your grade 2 child's work, but will not use your children's or your real names.

At the end of the study, you will be given a \$100.00 gift certificate from a local business for your participation. You will also gain some valuable insight into how your child learns.

If you are interested in obtaining more information about, or participating in this study, please fill in the form below and return it to your child's teacher by October 15th, 2007. Once all the forms are collected, an information meeting will be arranged to discuss the study in detail and answer any questions you may have. At the end of the meeting, consent forms will be available should you wish to participate.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marilyn Chapman, Ph.D  
Professor, Language & Literacy Education  
Principal Investigator

Marianne McTavish  
Ph.D Student  
Co-Investigator  
(604-922-7267)  
mmctavish@shaw.ca

Please sign and detach the next page and return it to your child's teacher by October 15, 2007.

Please sign and detach page and return it to your child's teacher by October 15, 2007.

I am interested in learning more about the study, "**From school to home to school again: A multiple case study of the teaching and learning of information literacy.**" I understand that an information meeting will be held after October 15th, 2007.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

The best time for me to attend a meeting is: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix C

### 1. Parent consent form.

#### THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Dr. Marilyn Chapman  
Department of Language & Literacy Education  
2125 Main Mall  
Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4  
Phone/Fax: 604-733-6220 (home)  
Fax: 604-822-3154



October, 2007

Dear Parents,

We are writing to invite you, your grade 2 child, and your family to participate in a study on the reading and writing of information literacy in the home and in the school. The research focuses on the information literacy development of your grade 2 child. In particular, it aims to investigate the various factors that affect the development of reading and writing information literacy in the school and at home.

If you consent to you, your grade 2 child, and your family participating in the study, we would like to observe your grade 2 child at school and at home from October 2007 until March 2008. Observations at school will take place during regular classroom hours including recess and lunch periods on the playground. These observations may be in the form of video- and audio-recordings and field notes focusing on your grade 2 child's literacy activities. It is anticipated that these observations will take place twice per week and at varying times during the day so that the observations will encompass the entire school day. Observations will also occur in the home (once per week for 25 weeks) to observe daily life activity within the homes. Observations in the home will take place only when your grade 2 child is present and awake. At the end of the study we would like to conduct two, one-hour audio-taped interviews with you to collect information about the informational reading and writing experiences your grade 2 child has outside the school. We would also like your grade 2 child to participate in two, half-hour audio-taped interviews about his/her home and school reading and writing. We would also need to collect samples of your grade 2 child's school and home writing and reading during this period. You or your family may withdraw from participating in this study at any time. Once the study is completed, we will write articles for research journals and to present at conferences. We may include samples of your grade 2 child's work, but will not use your children's or your real names. For your time you will be offered a \$100.00 gift certificate from a local business such as a food voucher from Safeway or Superstore, or a merchandise certificate from Chapters/Indigo/Coles bookstores as a thank-you.

We enclose additional information for the study on the following pages. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact either one of us. In order for your family and your



children to participate in this study, we need your signature on the enclosed form. **Please keep one copy of the form and return one copy to your grade 2 child's teacher by October 15, 2007.**

Thanking you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

Dr. Marilyn Chapman, Ph.D  
Professor, Language & Literacy Education  
Principal Investigator

Marianne McTavish  
Ph.D Student  
Co-Investigator



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Parent Consent Form

**From school to home to school again: A multiple case study of the teaching and learning of information literacy**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Marilyn Chapman, Professor  
Department of Language and Literacy Education (LLED).  
Telephone 604-733-6220 (home); e-mail, [marilyn.chapman@ubc.ca](mailto:marilyn.chapman@ubc.ca)

**Co-Investigator:** Marianne McTavish, Language & Literacy Education  
Telephone 604-922-7267; e-mail, [mmctavish@shaw.ca](mailto:mmctavish@shaw.ca)

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to document and compare the different ways in which literacy is learned, taught and practiced in families and schools in order to create more effective learning opportunities for all children.

**Data Collection:**

The data will be collected from the grade 2 children whose parents give consent. These will include:

- Copies of samples of the grade 2 child's writing in school from October 2007 to March 2008 and video- and audio-recordings of the grade 2 child's reading and writing in class during the same period;
- Interviews of the grade 2 child's school reading and writing practices;
- Observations of the grade 2 child's school reading and writing practices.

Additional data related to the home component of the study:

- Copies of samples of the grade 2 child's reading and writing at home from October 2007 to March 2008 and video- and audio-recordings of the grade 2 child's reading and writing at home during the same period;
- Interviews of the grade 2 child's parent(s) and adult family members about their grade 2 child's home reading and writing;
- Interviews of the grade 2 child's home reading and writing practices;
- Observations of the grade 2 child's home reading and writing practices.

**Time involvement:**

Observations of the grade 2 child at school (twice per week, for approximately 1-2 hours) will take place during regular classroom hours including recess and lunch periods on the playground. These observations may be in the form of video- and audio-recordings and will take place at varying times during the day. Observations also occur in the home (once per week, for 25 weeks for approximately 1-2 hours) to observe daily life activity within the homes. Observations in the home will take place only when the grade 2 child is present and awake. Additionally, two one-hour interviews with parents and adult family members will be carried out at the end of the study. Two, one half-hour interviews with the grade 2 child will also be carried out at the end of the study.

**Confidentiality:**

The identity of the participating grade 2 child, his or her parents, family members and schools will be kept strictly confidential. The only people who have access to the data will be the Principal Investigator and the Co-Investigator. The teacher, the family and the grade 2 child participants will have access to all their respective data from the classroom and the home. Everyone involved in the study will be informed of their responsibilities regarding confidentiality at the beginning of the study and reminded as appropriate.

All documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the co -investigator's office. Computer files will be password protected. Confidential information will not be collected or exchanged via email. Subjects will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.

**Communication of Results:**

The results of the study will be communicated to academic audiences through presentation at scholarly conferences, e.g., The Canadian Society for the Study of Education, and publication in scholarly journals such as *The Reading Teacher*.

**Contact for information about the study:**

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Marilyn Chapman (Principal Investigator) or Marianne McTavish (Co-Investigator). Please see page 1 for contact telephone numbers, fax, and e-mail addresses.

**Contact for information about the rights of research subjects:**

If you have any concerns about your child(ren)'s treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

**Consent:**

Your participation, and your child(ren)'s participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or refuse to have him or her participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to his or her educational program. Your signature on the following page indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records and that you consent to your participation and your child(ren)'s participation in this study. Your grade 2 child's signature indicates that you have discussed this research project with him or her and that he or she agrees to participate.

### Signature Page (Parental consent)

Two copies are provided. Please keep this copy of the signature page whether you consent or you give consent for your grade 2 child to participate or not. Please keep the consent letter with information about the study for your records.

I consent / I do not consent (circle one) to my participation in this study.

---

Signature

Date

---

Signature

Date

I consent / I do not consent (circle one) to my child(ren)'s participation in this study.

Grade 2 child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Parent Signature

Date

(or Parent or Guardian Signature)

Child's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Sibling's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Parent Signature

Date

(or Parent or Guardian Signature)

Sibling's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Parent Signature

Date

(or Parent or Guardian Signature)

I **consent/ I do not consent** (circle one) to my home as the setting for the study.

---

Parent Signature (or Guardian Signature)

Date

I **consent/ I do not consent** (circle one) to digital videotaping or audio taping during the study.

---

Parent Signature  
(or Parent or Guardian Signature)

Date

**[HSIL Parent Consent Form, October, 2007. Please keep this copy for your records.]**

### Signature Page (Parental consent)

Two copies are provided. Please keep this copy of the signature page whether you consent or you give consent for your grade 2 child to participate or not. Please keep the consent letter with information about the study for your records.

I consent / I do not consent (circle one) to my participation in this study.

---

Signature

Date

---

Signature

Date

I consent / I do not consent (circle one) to my child(ren)'s participation in this study.

**Grade 2 child's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

---

Parent Signature

Date

(or Parent or Guardian Signature)

Child's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Sibling's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Parent Signature

Date

(or Parent or Guardian Signature)

Sibling's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Parent Signature

Date

(or Parent or Guardian Signature)

I **consent/ I do not consent** (circle one) to my home as the setting for the study.

---

Parent Signature (or Guardian Signature)

Date

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---

Parent Signature  
(or Parent or Guardian Signature)

Date

**[HSIL Parent Consent Form, October, 2007. Please return this copy.]**



2. Student assent form.

**Student Assent Form**

**From school to home to school again: A multiple case study of the teaching and learning of information literacy**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Marilyn Chapman, Department of Language and Literacy Education, 604-822-9065.

**Co-investigator:** Ms. Marianne McTavish, PhD student, Department of Language and Literacy Education, 604-922-7267.

**Purpose:**

As a grade 2 student at Prince Charles Elementary School, you are invited to participate in a project that will be looking at the kinds of reading and writing that you like to do at school and at home. The project hopes to find out the following: What kinds of reading and writing do you do at school? What kinds of reading and writing do you do at home? In what ways are these activities the same or different? In what ways are your family members involved in your reading and writing activities? How does your teacher use the reading and writing you do at home in the classroom?

**Study Procedures:**

As a participant in the study, your reading and writing activities will be observed during regular classroom hours including recess and lunch periods on the playground. These observations may be video- and audio-recorded. Your reading and writing activities will also be observed in your home. You will also be asked to take part in an interview at school and at home. The interview will take about one-half hour and will take place at your school and in your home. We will also be asking to photocopy some of the things you are reading and writing.

**Confidentiality:**

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential. All documents will be identified only by pseudonyms and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Data records kept on a computer disk will be password protected. Confidential information will not be collected or exchanged via email.

**Contact for information about the study:**

If you have any questions or desire further information about this study, you may contact Dr. Marilyn Chapman at 604-822-9329 or her associate at 604-922-7267.

**Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:**

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

**Please keep this copy for your records.**

**Assent:**

Your participation in this study is entirely by choice. You may decide not to participate in the study at any time.

When you sign below you are showing that you have received a copy of this assent form to keep at home.

---

Student Signature

Date

---

Printed name of student signing above

Phone number

3. Teacher consent form.



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Language & Literacy Education  
University of British Columbia  
2125 Main Mall  
Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4

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marilyn.chapman@ubc.ca

Teacher Consent Form

**From school to home to school again: A multiple case study of the teaching and learning of information literacy**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Marilyn Chapman, Professor  
Department of Language and Literacy Education (LLED).  
Telephone 604-733-6220 (home); e-mail, [marilyn.chapman@ubc.ca](mailto:marilyn.chapman@ubc.ca)

**Co-Investigator:** Marianne McTavish, Language & Literacy Education  
Telephone 604-922-7267; e-mail, [mmctavish@shaw.ca](mailto:mmctavish@shaw.ca)

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to document and compare the different ways in which literacy is learned, taught and practiced in families and schools in order to create more effective learning opportunities for all children.

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- Interviews of the grade 2 child's school reading and writing practices;
- Observations of the grade 2 child's school reading and writing practices.

Additional data related to the home component of the study:

- Copies of samples of the grade 2 child's reading and writing at home from October 2007 to March 2008 and video- and audio-recordings of the grade 2 child's reading and writing at home during the same period;
- Interviews of the grade 2 child's parent(s) and adult family members about their grade 2 child's home reading and writing;

- Interviews of the grade 2 child's home reading and writing practices;
- Observations of the grade 2 child's home reading and writing practices.

### **Time involvement:**

Observations of the grade 2 child at school (twice per week, for approximately 1-2 hours) will take place during regular classroom hours including recess and lunch periods on the playground. These observations may be in the form of video- and audio-recordings and will take place at varying times during the day. Observations also occur in the home (once per week, for approximately 1-2 hours) to observe daily life activity within the homes. Observations in the home will take place only when the grade 2 child is present and awake. Additionally, two one-hour interviews with parents and adult family members will be carried out at the beginning and the end of the study. Two, one half-hour interviews with the grade 2 child will also be carried out at the beginning and the end of the study.

### **Confidentiality:**

The identity of the participating grade 2 child, his or her parents, family members and schools will be kept strictly confidential. The only people who have access to the data will be the Principal Investigator and the Co-Investigator. The teacher, the family and the grade 2 child participants will have access to all their other respective data from the classroom and the home. Everyone involved in the study will be informed of their responsibilities regarding confidentiality at the beginning of the study and reminded as appropriate.

All documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the co-investigator's office. Computer files will be password protected. Confidential information will not be collected or exchanged via email. Subjects will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.

### **Communication of Results:**

The results of the study will be communicated to academic audiences through presentation at scholarly conferences, e.g., The Canadian Society for the Study of Education, and publication in scholarly journals such as *The Reading Teacher*.

### **Contact for information about the study:**

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Marilyn Chapman (Principal Investigator) or Marianne McTavish (Co-Investigator). Please see page 1 for contact telephone numbers, fax, and e-mail addresses.

### **Contact for information about the rights of research subjects:**

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

**Consent:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Your signature on the following page indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records and that you consent to your participation in this study.

### Signature Page (Teacher consent)

Two copies are provided. Please keep this copy of the signature page whether you consent to participate or not. Please keep the consent letter with information about the study for your records.

I **consent / I do not consent** (circle one) to my participation in this study.

---

Signature

Date

I **consent/ I do not consent** (circle one) to my classroom as the setting for the study.

---

Signature

Date

I **consent/ I do not consent** (circle one) to digital videotaping or audio taping during the study.

---

Signature

Date

**[HSIL Teacher Consent Form, October 2007. Please keep this copy for your records.]**

### Signature Page (Teacher consent)

Two copies are provided. Please keep this copy of the signature page whether you consent to participate or not. Please keep the consent letter with information about the study for your records.

I **consent / I do not consent** (circle one) to my participation in this study.

---

Signature

Date

I **consent/ I do not consent** (circle one) to my classroom as the setting for the study.

---

Signature

Date

I **consent/ I do not consent** (circle one) to digital videotaping or audio taping during the study.

---

Signature

Date

**[HSIL Teacher Consent Form, October 2007. Please return this copy to the researcher.]**

## Appendix D

Semi-structured interview schedules (sample questions/prompts).

### 1. Adult/Parent Participant Interview (conducted at the beginning of the study).

The first portion of the interview will be devoted to establishing rapport and answering questions that the participant might have. Then, questions/prompts such as the following will guide the interview:

- What does reading and writing mean to you?
- What kinds of reading and writing do you do?
- What were your experiences with reading and writing as you were growing up?
- How do your experiences compare with your child's experiences?
- What kinds of reading and writing experiences does your child have with others (i.e. caregivers, peers, siblings)?
- What kinds of reading and writing materials do you share with your child?
- How often do you share books with your child? Describe this experience.
- What kinds of things are you doing to help your child's reading and writing development?
- What are your hopes and expectations for your child around reading and writing?
- How do you think children should be taught to read and write?
- Where did you acquire your ideas or thoughts about how children's reading and writing?
- What are your thoughts about young children and their use of technology (e.g., computer use, video games, the internet, media)?
- What are your thoughts around the amount of informational text in the world today?
- What do you think it means to be informationally literate?

### 2. Child Participant Interview (conducted in the home).

The first portion of the interview will be devoted to establishing rapport and answering questions that the participant might have. Then, questions/prompts such as the following will guide the interview:

- What kinds of things do you like to read?
- What kinds of things do you like to write about?
- Where do you get your ideas for writing?
- Do you like to read and write different things at home than at school?
- What kinds of things do your mom/dad/relative read/write/draw with you?
- What kinds of things do your mom/dad/relative read/write/draw?
- What kinds of reading/writing/drawing do you do with your brother(s) or sister(s)?
- What kinds of reading/writing/drawing do you do with your friends?
- Do you use the computer? What kinds of things do you do with the computer?
- What kinds of things do you like to do/play?
- Do you watch TV? What are some of your favourite shows?



3. Child Participant Interview (conducted in the school).

- Why did you choose this book to show me? What do you/do you not like about it?
- What types of books do you like?
- Is this a hard/easy book for you to read? Can you read some of it to me?
- Can you tell me a little bit about it?
- Do other children in the class like this?
- Do you think boys like this book? Why or why not?
- Do think girls like this book? Why or why not?
- Show me your drawing/writing/journal book? What have you drawn/written here? What made you draw/write about \_\_\_\_\_? Was that your own decision?
- What kinds of things do you like to write about?
- What kinds of things do you like to do at recess and lunch?
- Do you know what an information book is?

4. Teacher Participant Interview (conducted at the beginning of the study).

The first portion of the interview will be devoted to establishing rapport and answering questions that the participant might have. Then, questions/prompts such as the following will guide the interview:

- What other grades have you taught?
- How many years have you taught at this school?
- How many total years have you spend as an elementary teacher?
- What kind of teacher education program led to your elementary certification?
- What reading instructional materials do you use in your classroom?
- How do you use core reading programs (e.g. basal readers) and trade books (children's books or library books) in your classroom reading program?
- How, if at all, do you teach reading skills and strategies in relation to reading instructional materials?
- What kind of library facilities do you have?
- To what degree do you use trade books to support content area studies in science, social studies and mathematics?
- Do you have your own classroom library? If so, how many books are in it? How would you classify the books (e.g. fiction, nonfiction, informational, fantasy, etc.)?
- What activities do you engage in to further your professional knowledge and skill in teaching reading and language arts?
- To what degree do you use technological applications to literacy (e.g. computers, video, multimedia, etc.)?
- How would you describe your use of informational text in your classroom?
- To what extent do you incorporate your student's home literacy practices?

5. Adult/Parent Participant Interview (conducted at the end of the study).

1. Now that the study is winding down, what have you learned, observed, thought about as a result of our time together?
2. What was your reason for your participation in the study?
3. How do you view information literacy now in relation to your child?
4. What is the difference between information and knowledge?
5. Why is it important to learn to read and write?
6. Do you believe everything you read, see, hear with regards to information? How do you know?
7. Why did you enroll your child in the after-school program?
8. How was it using the digital camera? What were the barriers?
9. How did you learn to read?
10. What are your hopes and dreams for your child?
11. (What were your experiences with school? How did they affect you?)
12. Do you read everything that comes home from school?
13. Are you happy with your child's schooling?
14. Who watches TV with your child?
15. How would you describe the relationships that your child has with others?
16. How would you describe the element of "time" in your life and in your child's life?
17. Any further comments?

6. Teacher Participant Interview (conducted at the end of the study)

1. Now that the study is winding down, what have you learned, observed, thought about as a result of our time together?
2. What was your reason for your participation in the study?
3. What, in your opinion, is the difference between information and knowledge?
4. Do you feel pressured to keep up with the vast amounts of information?
5. Does teaching grade 2 (or a primary grade) limit the amount of information you need to keep up with?
6. How do you get your information (e.g. water, etc.)
7. In your bookshelves by your desk you had a lot of info text. Is that always your choice or was that because of the study?
8. What kinds of things do you think are going on in the homes with regard to reading and writing?
9. Do you think it is important to learn to read and write? Why?
10. Do you believe everything you read, see, hear with regards to information? How do you decipher what is true and what is not?

11. How did you learn to read?
12. (What were your experiences with school? How did they affect you?)
13. What do you see coming to school from home around info text?
14. What did you do with the stuff the kids brought in around Canada?
15. What do you think is going on around TV in the homes?
16. If you could describe your teaching philosophy, how would you describe it?
17. How would you describe the element of “time” in your job?
18. Any further comments?