LITERACY LEARNING IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF A RESOURCE RICH GRADE 1 CLASS

by

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Abstract

This observational study examines teacher pedagogy and student literacy practices in a 21st century resource rich Grade 1 classroom in order to gain insight into the forms, functions, tools, topics and contexts involved in students’ literacy experiences for boys of access and privilege. Teacher’s pedagogical choices were examined to understand how the teacher created learning opportunities based on her beliefs about texts and student identities and how her pedagogical choices were influenced by the curriculum, parents and the nature of schooling. Case study methodology was used in order to examine these complex relationships. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed in the form of reading and writing profiles, collection of assessment data and artefacts, classroom observations, parent questionnaires, interviews with teacher and students and data related to the texts used in the classroom.

This study is significant because it demonstrates that, in a school of access and privilege, literacy is taught in both traditional and new ways and the layering of these beliefs about literacy create meaningful learning experiences for the boys. Teacher pedagogy draws on teacher and student beliefs, knowledge and identities but is also influenced by traditional assumptions about “what the boys need to learn” in Grade 1. Theoretical frameworks that inform analysis in this research include multiliteracies (New London Group [NLG], 1996), multimodality (Kress, 2000), literacy as social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) and social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). These frameworks support an understanding of students’ literacy practices and the rationale behind the
pedagogical choices made by the teacher as the students and teacher collaborate, communicate and engage in literacy practices around multimodal texts. Implications include shaping future teacher practice, goals for 21st century curriculum development and new conceptions around literacy learning practices that influence how young students contribute to and experience literacy in 21st century classrooms.
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Dedication

To my husband, Ophir, my b’shert.
This thesis is dedicated to you.

Over these past 5 years, you have been with me every step of the way.
You listened as I talked endlessly about literacy,
you helped me over the bumps,
you guided me with your quiet observations,
you tolerated my endless book buying, and
you showed me how to smile through it all.

This was inspired by what you have given me:
A family to love, and wings to fly.

We’ve only just begun.
I love you.
CHAPTER ONE: 
THE ROOTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

After working in the field of early literacy education for the past 20 years and observing teachers and learners engaged in literacy practices in Ontario schools, I have watched the way literacy is valued, understood and taught. I have seen a great increase in teachers’ general awareness about the enormous changes in students’ engagement with a wide variety of multimodal texts, both inside and outside school. I have also watched teachers strive to build their professional knowledge about the way their students communicate, the texts their students read and write and how their students differ in their social and cultural identities.

Literacy teaching and learning continue to be a primary focus in schools today (Ministry of Education of Ontario, 2006). When visiting any early years classroom in the province of Ontario, we see a wide variety of pedagogical choices and a wide range of text used to support literacy learning. As well, we see a wide variety of learners, speaking different first languages, at various stages of development and variously engaged in their learning. However, what one would see in common in most early years classrooms is the dominance of print text and the use of the provincial language curriculum to guide each learner to mandated knowledge and skills, particularly focused in the areas of the foundational skills of reading and writing. A “learning to read” and “learning to write” philosophy is dominant in the early years and greatly influences society’s definition of what it means to be literate (Ministry of Education of Ontario, 2006).
Barton and Hamilton (1998) tell us that “literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others” (p. 7). This is certainly true in Ontario schools as school boards participate in mandated standardized testing, implement a “back to basics” curriculum, and emphasize specific knowledge and prescribed skills. However, there may be valuable ways to re-conceptualize literacy learning in schools.

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines literacy as how we communicate in society, as social practices and relationships, that encompass knowledge, language and culture (UNESCO, 2003). The Ontario language curriculum also states that:

Language is a fundamental element of identity and culture. As students read and reflect on a rich variety of…texts, they develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others and of the world around them. If they see themselves and others in the texts they…engage in, they are able to feel that the works are genuinely for and about them.. (Ministry of Education of Ontario, 2006, p. 4)

This quote demonstrates an awareness that students engage in a wide range of literacy practices both in and out of school. These practices influence their in-school literate identities and, in turn, their learning. Identities influence meaning making which occurs through an individual’s interactions with text. The sociocultural context, along with text as a medium, define literacy as social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1996; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). These understandings run counter to a traditional definition of literacy that drives classroom instruction in many schools.

In Ontario, “the language curriculum is dedicated to instruction in the areas of knowledge and skills…on which literacy is based” (Ministry of Education of Ontario,
2006, p. 3). Moreso, many schools have moved towards standardized ways of teaching and assessing literacy learning, often with a focus on reading scores as the indicator of successful literacy learning (York Region District School Board, 2011). As provincial and school district documents indicate, the foundational literacy skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing are very important to society’s definition of literacy. The question remains, how is literacy being taught to young learners in primary classrooms in 2011?

**Literate Identities in Schools: “I am!” “No, you’re not”**.

Over the course of my career, I have watched hundreds of diverse young children enter school in kindergarten or Grade 1. Although there are developmental similarities between students of the same age, students enter school with a wide variety of skills, abilities, experiences and interests. In school, the norms, structures and curriculum they encounter are the same for each student, however, the students themselves are certainly not a “tabula rasa” for literacy learning upon arrival at the classroom door. Students come to school with strong individual literate identities which are shaped by all the cultural, linguistic and literacy experiences they have had before entering school.

I question whether these individual identities are being valued as students first enter school. In fact, we know that children have literacy experiences through a variety of modes and media from very young ages. This is true even if young students do not yet “read” and “write” in the traditional sense when they enter formal schooling (Clay, 1991). As students enter school, it is important for educators to understand who their learners are, their life experiences and their identities. As illustrated by the work of
Donald Graves, children’s early literacy experiences are important in their developing identities:

Children want to write. They want to write the first day they attend school. This is no accident. Before they went to school they marked up walls, pavements, newspapers with crayons, chalk, pens or pencils…anything that makes a mark. The child’s marks say, “I am.” “No, you aren’t,” say most school approaches to the teaching of writing. (Graves, 1983, p. 3)

This quotation is just as true in 2011 as it was in 1983. Not only do “children want to write” in order to say “I am”, they want to read and talk and engage with texts to announce who they are; the fact that students’ individual identities are often not valued in the process of schooling is a major concern in literacy pedagogy and learning today.

Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic (2000) state that students’ life experiences provide them with a repertoire of literacy resources and literate practices. It is these experiences and resources that contribute to each person’s overall literate identity. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) suggest that students draw on two areas to construct this identity: the lifeworld (everything that exists outside school) and the school-based world. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) identify these different domains or identities as discourse worlds and suggest that students specifically draw on the literacy practices occurring in these discourse worlds in order to make meaning and, in turn, create a literate identity. Therefore, the literate identity with which students enter school is further constructed by their school literacy experiences. Together, these interact to provide a repertoire of resources that a person can draw on when engaging in literate practices. Barton and Hamilton (1998) describe literacy as something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people’s heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts
to be analysed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. (p. 3)

Therefore, literacy is better understood as a set of social practices that can be inferred from events that are mediated by written texts. These different practices are associated with different aspects of a child’s life. As well, in the 21st century, there is no question that what young people learn about print is affected by what they already know about texts in other media (Mackey, 2007).

**Research Questions**

My research will address these research questions:

1. How is literacy learning defined by the school, parents, teachers and students in the context of this high socio-economic, elite boys private school?

2. Which literacy events and practices are the students engaged in and what are the dominant features of these practices? Which resources and materials are used, valued and produced during literacy events and practices?

3. How does the teacher define and structure her classroom and what are the teacher’s pedagogical practices in this classroom?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to examine how early literacy experiences are shaped by both the students’ practices and the teacher’s pedagogical choices in the context of a resource rich 21st century Grade 1 classroom in an elite private boys’ school. This study will widen the definition of *successful literacy learning* and will reconsider a simple “autonomous and skill-driven view of literacy and, instead, replace it with a sociocultural
view that asserts that meanings, purposes, audiences and contexts are central to literacy” (Burke & Hammett, 2009, p. 2). Successful literacy learning, as Luke and Freebody (2000) defined it, involves “the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken, print and multimedia” (p. 9). Sustainable mastery refers to “the ability to reformulate current knowledge or access and learn new literate practices” (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 19).

The texts Luke and Freebody (2000) refer to are also termed multimodal texts. These texts are the medium with which students make meaning using multiple modes that include written, digital, visual and oral. Students often use these modes simultaneously. How young students use the texts and resources available to them is an important part of this research. Learning from text will be viewed as a complex interaction between the learner, the text and the environment in which the learning occurs (Rogoff, 1990). The assumption is that the meaning of text evolves as readers, who possess their own sociocultural ideals and literate identities, interact with text in unique ways (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). As well, the particular environment in which the learning is situated has a big impact on learners: “More than at any other time in its history, the reading community recognizes that learning from text is a sociocultural activity continuously shaped by the environment in which it occurs” (Alexander & Jetton, 2000, p. 288). Schools are sociocultural communities that provide or deny access to literacies of the dominant culture and also provide the texts, filled with ideas, perspectives and interpretations that reflect the sociocultural beliefs of the community. The focus on
collaboration is one of the obvious effects of the growing sensitivity towards sociocultural influences in schools (Wade & Moje, 2000).

Any examination of literacy instruction in the 2011 must consider a pluralized notion of literacy, as theorized by the NLG (1996). Multiliteracies theory is important because students are now engaged in literacy and literate practices in a socially and culturally diverse, globalized, digital world. As the definition of literacy has changed, so have the contexts for learning, the pedagogies associated with early literacy, and the resources used. Multimodal design offers diverse forms of representation and communication that can support teachers to implement strategies as students develop their literate identities and abilities for the contemporary digital world (Morgan & Ramanathan, 2005). The texts that students produce, consume or read often require processing of several modes simultaneously in order to make meaning and “…literacy programs must include the ability to consume and produce the multimodal texts that are an increasingly large part of students’ lives” (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 18). According to Wade and Moje (2000),

texts are organized networks that people generate or use to make meaning either for themselves or for others….different views of what counts as text – whether they are formal and informal….oral, written, enacted; permanent or fleeting – lead to different views of what counts as learning, and consequently expand or limit the opportunities students have to learn in classrooms. (p. 610)

Therefore, the opportunities teachers provide to produce, consume and use multimodal text will affect students’ experiences and, ultimately, their abilities for dealing with the demands of the world beyond the walls of the classroom. As well, how teachers use and value cultural diversity, sociocultural values, the globalized world and technology contribute to new ways of understanding early literacy experiences.
The Politics of Literacy Education in 2011

Many educational and political forces are demanding that the assessment of students’ literacy skills beginning in the very early years, even as young as Junior Kindergarten, with an eye towards specific skill based literacy outcomes for all students (Ministry of Education of Ontario, 2006). The progress that students make in reading and writing is being carefully watched by teachers, administrators, parents and policymakers in order to determine which practices and which students are successful. According to the Education, Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) website, “Student achievement results have always been considered key indicators of educational quality, and student scores on large-scale assessments are the subject of public interest” (EQAO, 2010). In Ontario schools, it has become very important to design, choose and use pedagogies and texts for literacy instruction in order to effectively engage students and impact students’ progress in acquiring a defined set of “literacy skills” (Ministry of Education of Ontario, 2006). These skills are based on traditional models that value the acquisition and mastery of sets of established practices, conventions and rules (Jewitt, 2008). This occurs even though “the decontextualized study of particular practices, assuming their universality and transfer, has clear limitations” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 255). Educators must be careful not to overgeneralize results of large-scale assessments that assess a defined set of literacy skills. Luke (1995) wrote that,

in looking over current and recent reports on “key competences,”…and “generic skills” in…education, one could be forgiven for thinking that we inhabit a world of literal language users; that the domains of everyday institutional life are conflict free places of robotic consensus. (p. 9)

This remains true today, even as the theory of multiliteracies challenges the focus of school literacy on restrictive traditional print notions of literacy (Gee, 2004). Therefore, it
is very important to consider the political and power relationships at play on both the students and the teacher in the context of this classroom.

Rationale: Situating Myself

This research is borne out of 20 years of experience teaching and learning in elementary schools. I am a teacher. I graduated from the University of Western Ontario with a B.Ed. at the end of the 20th century, eager to begin my career as a primary/junior teacher. My first classroom was in a portable. At that time, I believed I had everything I needed in order to teach my Grade 2 students – the curriculum, a variety of notebooks, sharpened pencils, erasers (just in case), foolscap, an arts area, a sandbox and water table, a chart stand with chart paper (red, blue, blue lines – of course), lots of markers and the beginning of a classroom library, filled with a new teacher’s vision of what 7-year olds might like to read (along with whatever books were left from the previous teacher) and a whole year of teacher’s college behind me! I planned my instruction, carefully meeting the curriculum expectations, incorporating manipulatives into my math lessons, read-alouds into my language lessons and teaching my theme-based units on the circus, dinosaurs, and colours. What I never did then, however, was really know who my students were. I did not ask them about their home lives, what they did in the evenings, or what they liked to read or write. I did not attempt to understand how they learned or what motivated them. In the course of what 7-year olds do, they shared, and I found out that they had brothers or sisters, that they liked race cars or merry-go-rounds and what their favourite colours were. But it did not change my program. I was there to teach skills, knowledge and attitudes, to make sure these wonderful little people learned to read and write, build and draw, paint and experiment and add and subtract. And I used lots of
different texts, but I did not know it then. It was incidental to the classroom of a young teacher who just wanted to do what she believed was best for her kids.

Fast forward to 2011 where the educational landscape has changed significantly. Young students are entering school having been exposed to a wide variety of multimodal text forms, including digital and print. They communicate differently than students did 20 years ago. They are exposed to social media, and have digital access to information and communication tools which are growing at an incomprehensible rate. Students in the education system represent different cultures, different languages and different traditions of learning. Educators and researchers have different understandings about how students learn, what motivates and engages them, and about social practices and pedagogical design. It is important work to understand the possible applications of those theories on a practical level and observe how current theory has translated into our classrooms. Although much work has been done with older children in order to understand the impact of these changes, the focus of this research will be on young school age learners. It is my desire to understand some of the possible influences on their learning and to examine their school experiences in the context of current realities and literacy as social practice.

**Situating the Study**

Therefore, my educational and doctoral journey has culminated in this observational study during which I spent 6 months examining how Grade 1 boys living in the early 21st century engage with texts, participate in literacy practices and collaborate in a resource rich classroom. I chose to observe a teacher who is knowledgeable and passionate about technology, literacy education, curriculum and her learners. She can articulate why she does what she does. It matters to her that her students are engaged, that
they want to read and write and that they feel good about themselves while they are learning.

Now may be the time that educators need to be aware of the traditional pedagogical notions prevalent in schools and shift their thinking towards a new perspective of teaching and learning: “Being a child…and, indeed, becoming literate, has changed in some fundamental ways. The tool kit of basic skills that served many of us well in the 1950s is inadequate today” (Luke & Freebody, 2000, p. 7). It is a large undertaking to transform pedagogy in schools as, for the past 100 years, schools have performed an assimilatory function (Dewey, 1966), meaning that they have assisted in making “the melting pot of homogenous national citizenries, and smoothing over inherited differences between lifeworlds” (NLG, 1996, p. 72). According to the NLG, classrooms now need to take on a different charge; that is, to attend to the individual students and their different languages, discourses and their uses of various resources for learning. As well, in the process of “doing” literacy in schools, students learn what counts as literacy (Unsworth, 2001). Teachers need to be aware that what they value as literacy has an effect on students. Literacy in the classroom is socially constructed and depends on the legitimization and valuing of different texts and interactions (Jewitt, 2008).

The focal school implements an International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, but also follows the Ontario curriculum as a guideline. According to the IB website, the IB curriculum is based on an inquiry model that prepares students to be active participants in a lifelong journey of learning, informed participants in local and global affairs and critical and compassionate thinkers. Strong emphasis is placed on the ideals of international understanding and responsible citizenship. The student becomes empowered to
participate actively in his own learning based on a central idea or organizing theme, such as *who we are* or *how the world works*. Each IB school has teachers working in collaborative teams to determine the specific themes for each organizing idea. In this model, assessment is an important part of each unit of inquiry as it both enhances learning and provides opportunities for students to reflect on what they know, understand and can do. The teacher's feedback to the students provides the guidance, the tools and the incentive for them to become more competent, more skillful and better at understanding how to learn (The IB Primary Years Programme, 2010).

By focusing on engaging yet structured content and central questions to drive the curriculum content, the IB model takes into account the flexibility necessary to view literacy as social practice. Students are encouraged and empowered to take ownership of their own learning and to pursue deep inquiry through questioning, thinking, choice and open-ended activities. The teacher can choose to change course if necessary in order to engage and motivate the students, as the students learn content focused around these big ideas. The IB curriculum also provides a possible opportunity for students to be aware of and value their in-school and out-of-school social and literate practices and, therefore, their literate identities. There are many real-world connections, authentic hands-on learning experiences and a wide variety of texts used to support student learning. As well, this model allows students to use the resources available to them to critically question and engage with texts and contexts in order to shape their understandings of content, instead of using a disciplines approach, which emphasizes a teacher-controlled transmission model of curriculum delivery (Miller & Seller, 1990).
The teacher in the classroom I studied uses a wide variety of digital, print, oral, visual and integrated texts in her instruction, and she also integrates various skills and knowledge from the Ontario Language curriculum in an inquiry-based framework. Inquiry-based planning and instruction involves a team of teachers who plan the inquiry together, focusing on a transdisciplinary theme (e.g., “where we are in time and place”) and a central idea such as *humans have many facets to their lives*. The planning focuses on what they want the students to learn by developing key concepts to be emphasized (e.g., form, function, causation, change, connection, perspective, responsibility or reflection) and the lines of inquiry (e.g., the human life cycle, what humans do and relationships among generations). They develop teacher questions to drive the inquiry, assessment strategies and then instructional strategies that focus on *how best might students learn?* When collecting resources, the collaborative teacher group brainstorms the best resources from among people, places, audio-visual, literature, music, art, computer software, etc. Finally, teachers participate in reflections during and after the unit is taught to improve the unit, record what actually happened and plan for upcoming classes. These units are available to the whole school community and do not become the “property” of the classroom teacher. Most importantly, the teacher claims that the students guide her choice of topic, content and text as she designs learning experiences with and for the students in her class.

**Significance of This Study**

As a teacher, literacy mentor and university instructor, I have become concerned about structured pedagogies that focus mainly on teaching reading and writing using print text in primary classrooms. I have worked with many primary teachers who did not
believe students could read or write until they had learned ten sight words or knew how to print the letter “e”. I watched large blocks of time devoted to specific skill instruction during literacy time, neglecting students’ identities and the fact that they are digital natives who are already familiar with a wide range of multimodal texts and experiences in their lifeworlds (Prensky, 2001). In fact over the last 5 years, I have watched more and more teachers adhere to these types of structured pedagogies than ever before. This is my second experience researching, the first being relevant to the context for this study. I completed a mixed methods research study for my Master’s degree which examined texts used for reading instruction in Grade 1 and how student identities were valued or ignored as teachers decided which texts to purchase and use as they taught their students to read.

My observational study is important because it allows me to step back from the perspective that certain things should happen in early years literacy instruction and learning and simply allows me to observe what is happening in a particular Grade 1 classroom in 2010. This classroom was chosen for a number of reasons that expand the possibilities for understanding teaching and learning: the teacher was digitally literate and excited to use and access a wide range of multimodal texts, specifically including digital literacy in her literacy instruction; the teacher valued students as individuals and articulated this, as well as empowerment of the students, as a goal in her literacy program. The framework for learning included the use of the provincially mandated curriculum but expanded beyond that to include a collaborative, inquiry based approach that theoretically provided more opportunities for student involvement, consideration of student identity and multiple entry points for learning. The students are privileged and have access to any and all resources that enhance learning, both at school and at home.
This type of privileged setting affords me the possibility to look at what constitutes successful literacy learning in this setting and extrapolate my results about pedagogy and literate practices to other educational settings. This observational study also allows me to view literacy through a new lens, and possibly rethink literacy beyond traditional teaching. The results of this study may “support teachers, curriculum, and educational policy in the work of connecting the school, children…and the demands of the contemporary communicational landscape” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 263). The findings in this study may necessitate a change in classroom literacy practices for teachers, determine how we define the literate individual, what teachers and parents value for boys of access and privilege and how we use and understand texts for representation and communication in order to prepare students to participate in the global knowledge economy and everyday life in the 21st century.

In all settings, literacy goes well beyond reading and writing; it is tightly bound to notions of people’s ability to engage effectively with the world around them. The same is true for educational practice. In other words, as Hull and Schultz (2001) have paraphrased Friere (1970), “Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world [and] transforming it by means of conscious practical work” (p. 588). Therefore, this study is meant to examine the practical work of a primary teacher and her students as they participate and learn together in their classroom community.

This study is also important to understand the range and types of texts made available to these students. The teacher’s definition of text is broad and comprehensive and, prior to beginning this study, the teacher shared with me that she uses a wide variety
of text in the class for instruction. In a classroom where virtually any type of text could be purchased or made available to the students, the nature of texts chosen as they relate to learning is an important area to study. I look at text genres, specifically linear and non-linear texts, to investigate whether one type of text is being valued over other types. I classify the linear texts by genre, and share information about the types of non-linear texts available to students in the class. Through text choice, Alexander and Jetton (2000) found that students could easily ascertain what textual content their teacher values. I use the information about text choice as the basis for understanding the types of texts valued or ignored in this school and this class and then discuss implications for these choices in other educational settings.

**Rationale for Research Design: An Observational Study**

The use of observation to understand learning and learners is underestimated. Teachers use the word freely in assessment paradigms, but many of their observations are actually prompted interactions with their students or biased episodes of proving oneself or one’s beliefs correct. In this study, I took on the role of participant observer. I did not expect to observe what I observed in this school and this classroom. I entered the school with my literature review in my back pocket, partly expecting to do a checklist of practices in this elite, resource-rich boys private school. I admit that I also had biases and assumptions towards what good literacy instruction should look like.

During my research, many of my assumptions were productively disrupted. In my role as a researcher observing the setting and participants in this study, I learned the power of real observation and how it led me to a better understanding of the teacher’s and students’ beliefs, thoughts, feelings and actions. Through careful watching and listening,
scripted and incidental questioning and clarification with the participants during the
collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, I observed a Grade 1 classroom where
the expectations of the province, community, school, teacher and students have shown to
be complex; one where the events and practices provide an insight into what is valued,
what is neglected and how successful literacy learning is conceptualized in this setting.

**Research Design**

I designed this study to examine the possibilities for transforming practices in this
first decade of the 21st century. I wanted to look at both multimodal texts and digital
technology, and the use of these with young students. I wanted to look deeply at student
identities, understanding in multiple ways the value students placed on reading/writing
and their own self concepts as readers and writers. As well, I wanted to look at a teacher
who had access to the resources that would allow for transformed practice and observe
how boys in this privileged setting learned literacy. I wanted to understand how that
information might be meaningful for others learners in other settings.

This study used a mixed methods approach, collecting both qualitative and
quantitative data. Although this study is qualitative dominant, I believe that it is
important to include quantitative data where appropriate and where it reasonably
contributes to the data sources. I rely on a “qualitative, constructivist critical view of the
research process, while concurrently recognizing that the addition of quantitative data and
approaches are likely to benefit the research” (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p.
124).
Throughout the course of this case study research, I collected data about the variety of forms, functions, tools, resources, topics and contexts for literacy learning in Grade 1. Qualitative research does not offer information about causality but as Dyson (1995) states, provides information on the “dimensions and dynamics of classroom living and learning” (p. 51). The data are primarily descriptive and inductive, and drive the understandings that emerge from the study. In this study, I used multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 1994) to improve quality and validity and look for a converging line of inquiry. I spent an extended amount of time in the field to guarantee that I would see patterns rather than collect single pieces of data that did not represent the overall situation in the classroom. Careful transcriptions of interview data, ongoing consultations with my advisor and committee members, as well as inter-rater reliability processes and member checks were used to shape and support my perspectives, avoid biases where possible and support analysis of findings.

The Teacher–Researcher’s View

The 6 months I spent in this classroom inevitably connected me to the boys, this dynamic and caring teacher, and the wonderful and welcoming staff at this school. I began to feel like I was a part of the school myself. I interacted with the participants in this study, yet I was conscious of my role as a participant observer. This was difficult for me at first. Through guidance from my advisor, Shelley Stagg Peterson, I was able to understand my role as a researcher and move away from the desire I had to share my opinions with or coach the teacher. The result is a portrait of a classroom, filled with eager and fascinating Grade 1 boys, painted with the concerns and thoughts of their
parents and filled with observations of a teacher’s pedagogical decisions and her students’ literacy practices.
CHAPTER 2:  
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Over many years of working in early years literacy education with children in schools, with more knowledgeable mentors at the graduate level as well as during this research study, I have reflected extensively and come to my own understanding about what influences literacy learning. As Barton (1999) writes, “One of the best ways for students and others to increase their understanding of literacy is for them to reflect upon their own practices and the everyday practices around them” (p. 165). There are certain theories and understandings about literacy that provide the foundation for my research. I look at literacy learning through a variety of different lenses, none of which I believe are mutually exclusive in explaining the complex phenomenon of early literacy learning.

A number of key influences shape my work. I begin with the belief in literacy as a social practice. This recognition that literacy practices are social runs counter to a skill-based view of literacy or a view of literacy as a cognitive process that exists independent of a person’s motivation, interests, identity or social practices (Street, 1984). Barton and Hamilton (1998) identify literacy practices as ways of understanding the links between reading and writing activities and the social structures in which they are embedded and which shape those practices. Literacy as social practice is situated in the contexts where students learn as they use reading and writing during specific kinds of literacy events (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2003). Literacy events are “observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 8). In this theory, the particular social context surrounding literacy practices and the language and
texts used during these practices are the basis of the literacy events that influence literacy and language both in and out of classrooms.

Just as the contexts for literacy practices and events are varied, so are the demands on learners to be familiar with the literacies involved in particular types of practices, using particular types of texts or tools. Therefore, the theories around the New Literacies are an important influence on how I understand literacy practices. The explosion of new technologies, multimedia, global connections and their place in the classroom is the foundation of the research in the New Literacies.

New social practices and conceptions of reading and writing have emerged with new technologies (Street, 1998). Along with Street, I conceptualize literacy learning as mediated by the politics, culture and history of the particular social setting and that the complexity of the social aspects of literacy learning are integral parts of how an individual becomes literate. Kress’ (2003) view incorporates the new semiotic contexts made possible by the new technologies. I also believe that the new semiotic contexts in the classroom create a dynamic shift away from a traditional definition of literacy. My first research question, which looks at how literacy learning is defined and valued by the stakeholders in a child’s education, is based on these conceptualizations of literacy.

For me, literacy as social practice theory is echoed in the sociocognitive theories proposed by Vygotsky (1962, 1978, 1987). Along with Vygotsky, I view language and texts as the tools that mediate or are used by students as they engage in literacy learning with others. These interactions involve a mixture of written and oral language and integration of reading and writing with other semiotic systems. A key component of Vygotsky’s theory is that an understanding of the social context and of social interactions
between individuals are essential for understanding learning. I will examine Vygotsky’s work as one of the frameworks that inform this study in order to understand the situated social practices involved in learning.

I add another dimension to the understanding of literacy as social practice by exploring the concept of identity as social practice and how the construction of identity is an important part of what it means to be literate. I build on the belief that literacy and identity influence each other in settings which are embedded in cultural and social contexts (Street, 1995). From this perspective, learning involves individuals in literacy practices as they participate, interact, build relationships, learn and continually construct identity as they make sense of themselves and others (Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street, 2009). According to Norton and Toohey (2002), literacy and language are practices that construct and are constructed by “the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future” (p. 1). This perspective shines a light on the relationship between the social and the individual and the construction of identity as a social process which may include social memberships, contexts and interactions (Moje et al., 2009). My second research question looks at the different literacy practices, events and resources valued and used in a Grade 1 classroom and this question is grounded in the new understanding of literacy and identity as a social practices, influenced by the New Literacies.

The NLG conceptualizes the New Literacies as multiliteracies and multimodality associated with new contexts for learning (NLG, 2000). In this framework, literacy practices incorporate the behaviours, knowledge, actions and practices required for
successful navigation of the new world created through technology. My research will provide an overview of multiliteracies pedagogy as first theorized by the NLG in 1996.

My third research question looks carefully at the teacher’s pedagogical practices in the era of new literacies, multimodality and multiliteracies. According to Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, and Leu (2008), new literacies involve a consideration of the new social practices, skills and strategies that the Internet and information technologies of the 21st century require; new literacies are central to civic, economic and personal participation in the global community; they change rapidly as information technology changes rapidly; and they are “multiple, multimodal and multifaceted” (p. 14). I agree with the summary by Coiro et al. (2008) and see new literacies as varied, requiring a new understanding of the texts educators use in literacy practices that expands beyond traditional print literacy and involves a new understanding of literacy as social, multiple and fluid. The individual is an active participant in the practices and the learning is “embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 11). Theories around New Literacies make it clear that, as researchers and educators, we can no longer think of literacy as a singular construct that applies across all contexts. Given this understanding of the New Literacies, one would expect education to look different in 2011.

Finally, the shift between thinking about language and language learning as an isolated cognitive process towards language learning as a social practice is a key influence on my research. Halliday (1977) wrote that language learning happens through the process of being socialized into the world or learning how to mean and this meaning is always context specific within social situations and interactions with others.
Retheorizing literacy learning as social practice creates a tension between what many teachers understand and value about how young children learn to read and write. As much as I believe that literacy must be understood as a social practice, I cannot dismiss the reality that, in the setting of a Grade 1 classroom, the goal for teachers, students and parents is progress, learning or demonstration of knowledge and skills. In schools today, we still measure this by assessing individuals’ cognitive abilities. According to my view, in addition to understanding literacy as social practice, we must somehow demonstrate how students think and know how and what they are learning in order to meaningfully add to any body of research about literacy learning. Language and early literacy acquisition studies cannot be ignored and are a key part of the process of understanding more about literacy and learning. I will reflect on, examine, question and expand on the traditional conceptualizations of early literacy as an individual cognitive activity organized around print. I will also explore the integrated meaning making systems of texts, referred to as multimodality. Multimodality is a response to the changing social and communicative landscape. The concept of multimodality incorporates the understanding that meaning is made through many representations and resources for communication (Kress & Van Leuween, 2001). In my research, I examine the tensions between print text and digital texts occurring in a classroom as students participate in literacy practices in this new communicative landscape. Multiliteracies theory claims that print literacy is still essential but no longer enough guides the link between the research surrounding early and emergent literacy (Clay, 1998) and literacy as social practice.

The theoretical frameworks for my study are all interconnected. I will examine relevant theories in the field of literacy studies which look at the multi-dimensional
The construct we, in educational circles, call literacy. Instead of looking at literacy as the individual’s acquisition of a set of abstract or neutral skills, I will examine the notion of literacy as a social practice. I will clarify how looking at literacy events and practices that are present at the intersection of culture, society, multimodality and language give us a new and different view of literacy; and I will also incorporate my understanding of the place of individual cognitive activity in this process.

**New Literacy Studies**

New Literacy Studies theorists contend that we must examine local literacy events, practices and actions to understand the multiple and contextualized literacies that students experience at the intersection of language, culture, politics and society (Heath, 1983; Street, 1995). My research is, therefore, underpinned by a view of literacy as situated social practice (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Street, 1998). Within New Literacy Studies, learning to read and write is viewed as the observable outcome of socially and culturally situated literacy practices (Street, 1988). For Street (1995), literacy is both embedded in social and cultural contexts and power and authority relationships.

New Literacy Studies researchers use the term *literacy practices* to avoid the notion of literacy as a set of traditional print literacies, supposedly detached from the social and cultural context in which they are used. This view “conceptualizes the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they, in turn, help shape” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 7). The simplest definition of literacy practices is that they are what people do with literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) around written texts (Heath, 1982). Brandt and Clinton (2002) define literacy practices as “socially regulated, recurrent, and patterned things that
people do with literacy as well as the cultural significance they ascribe to those doings” (p. 342). In this theory, all uses of written language can be seen as located in particular times and places and are indicative of broader social practices and processes (Barton et al., 2000). Text is important within the model of literacy as social practice, bounded by the social situation and the culture (Queensland Government Department of Education and Training, 2007).

Street (1995) makes the important distinction between a traditional model and an ideological model of literacy. New Literacy Studies have challenged the traditional view of literacy as a developmentally ordered set of skills whose acquisition has a universal impact on the learner’s cognition or even on society’s political, historical and economic development (Bartlett, 2009). Traditional models of literacy focus on traditional print literacies, based mainly around print texts, and involve mastery of particular methods and agreed upon social consequences for literacy (Luke & Elkins, 1998). As Larson (2008) explains, “we must shift our definition from one that is limited to reductionist notions of skills to one that is focused on the social practices in which literacy is used” (p. 14).

In contrast, research in New Literacy Studies has shown that literacy “is a social process, in which particular socially constructed technologies are used within particular institutional frameworks for specific social purposes” (Street, 1984, p. 97). Street (1995) cautions that culture-specific practices in traditional models of literacy narrowly misrepresent the literacy as a set of cognitive skills. The ideological model of literacy understands that literacy resources, task structures and participation rights are not neutral but, instead, “locate children within the power structure of their classroom and envisions them as participants in a curricular economy where certain kinds of writing and reading
are valued” (Rowe, 2010, p. 139). New Literacy Studies theorists view reading, writing, pedagogy and text as being influenced by the social and cultural practices in which they are embedded (Street, 1995). Street argues that an ideological model of literacy challenges the assumption that there are universal patterns for literacy learning, forcing educators to be “wary of grand generalizations and cherished assumptions about literacy ‘in itself’” (Street, 1995, p. 29), even for young children learning to read and write. New Literacy Studies concentrate on the specific social practices involved in reading and writing. Children learn writing and reading processes and procedures, along with ideologies demonstrated and valued by the teachers, parents and peers in particular types of literacy events (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1995). Literacy is experienced differently for each individual as language and literacy are influenced by an individual’s intentions, roles and relationships (Luke & Freebody, 2000). The meanings constructed by individuals are socially and culturally determined. This view considers literacy as a social process influenced by the collective, whether that is in a classroom, local community or across the globe. According to Street (1995), literacy is always a social act and the ways we interact with literacy affect the nature of the literacy being learned and the ideas held by all the participants in the practice. Which literacy practices are essential or worthwhile differ based on situated perspectives which are connected to broader cultural values and attitudes.

Street (1998) says that it is not valid to suggest that literacy is “given” and then its social effects are experienced afterwards. An example of the ideological model in early writing experiences illustrates the point. One must consider the tools and objects present for a child: how they are controlled and shared, as well as the role of home and school,
adults and teachers in the writing practices (Rowe, 2009). All of these factors influence how young children learn to write. In the same way, teachers must be aware that their pedagogical practices are shaped by their experiences and their understandings, their beliefs about literacy, culture, learning, and the nature of the interactions around these concepts.

The Impact of the New Literacies

New literacies focus on “literacies and issues about knowledge associated with the massive growth of electronic information and communications technologies” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 17). Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, and Cammack (2004) define the new literacies as inclusive of the “skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies and contexts that continuously emerge in our world” (p. 1572). Research involving new literacies has specifically drawn attention to the possibilities for literacy practices in electronic environments, both in and out of school (Gee, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2001), and particularly for adolescents. We generate and communicate meaning with texts and invite others to make meaning from our texts in turn. Literacy events and practices in the 21st century often involve new literacies. As Lankshear and Knobel (2006) state, “If there is no text, there is no literacy” (p. 4). Kress (2003) writes about the production and interpretation of text as the semiotic work involved in writing and reading meaningful content. The increasingly digitalized social context has necessitated investigation into new literacies for young learners. Teachers may want to teach young children using past models of literacy, however, in the context of new literacies, teachers must remember that students’ lived experiences are different then students’ experiences
in the past. As Delpit (2003) writes “We must learn who our children are - their lived culture, their interest, and their intellectual, political and historical legacies…then, we can begin to educate the inheritors of the planet” (p. 20). The new literacies are an irrefutable part of the social and cultural landscape for young learners.

Research in the U.S. found that 80% of kindergartners surveyed use computers and over 50% of children under 9 years old use the Internet (Goldberg, Russell, & Cook, 2003). Dyson (2003) observed young people’s use of various media resources in writing workshop. She found that these students’ writing was shaped by influences such as TV shows, video games and music. Their interactions with media texts were significant and incorporating them into writing was meaningful and purposeful for young students.

Many new literacies researchers focus on the specific skills and strategies necessary to effectively decode aspects of the multimedia texts. New literacies include new ways to locate information, comprehend information, evaluate text and communicate (e-mail, texts, chats). These include innovative text formats such as multiple media and hybrid texts (Lemke, 1998), new reader expectations to read non-linear texts (Warshauer, 2006) and the ability to create new types of products (Leu et al., 2004). These are all practical examples of new conceptions of reading and writing.

New literacies researchers examined how classrooms created opportunities for all students to learn using digital technology. Larson (2010) studied the use of e-readers in a primary classroom. Data in this case study research indicated that the participants “used new literacies and strategies to envision and access the potential of the digital reading device” (Larson, 2010, p. 19) by adjusting the font size, accessing the built-in dictionary and activating the text-to-speech feature to listen to words they found difficult to read.
Hill (2010) found that 4- to 8-year-old children understood and worked with new forms of literacy at home and at school and that children across diverse geographic locations had access to and were engaged with digital equipment beyond that available in many new schools and preschools. These findings led teacher-researchers to develop a multiliteracies map to support curriculum planning for new forms of literacy in Australia.

**Sociocognitive Theory**

Vygotsky’s approach contributes to our understanding of literacy as social practice because it also focuses on the social and the cultural aspects of an individual’s experiences and learning. Vygotsky’s work, which predates the work in New Literacies Studies, is underpinned by a view that cultural practices are socially constructed ways in which society organizes tasks and tools (Smidt, 2009) through shared values and ideologies. Children come to understand their worlds through their own explorations within a social context. For Vygotsky, language is the most important cultural tool. Therefore, according to Vygotsky, collaborative practices within a cultural and social context reciprocally construct both the child’s and the group’s values and ideologies.

According to Vygotsky (1962), language functions as a cultural tool for interacting with others and constructing social meanings, values and perspectives. In Vygotsky’s view, language is the major bridge between humans’ social and mental worlds and is the most significant influence on children’s cognitive development, helping them to think in more sophisticated ways. Culture, socialization and education are transformed through the use of language, cultural tools, symbols, music, art and any other objects or signs. According to Vygotsky, these tools are developed by communities to
assist with representation of ideas and thinking. They are rooted in social interactions with others, human cultural and historical activity (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987).

Vygotsky’s constructivist theories explain how children’s social experiences guide their thinking. As Vygotsky (1978) proposed, “Every function in the child’s...development appears twice; first on the social level, and later, on the individual level….All the higher functions (problem solving, independent thinking) originate as actual relations between human individuals” (p. 57). Therefore, Vygotsky (1978, 1987) argued that cognitive development emerges first out of the child’s social interactions with more competent members of society (e.g., parents, teacher, peers) as children actively construct meaning rather than passively accept knowledge. The process of guided participation between individuals allows for a child to creatively and jointly construct new understandings, drawing on their previous knowledge of society’s cultural tools (Rogoff, 1990). Vygotsky’s work on the social nature of learning and the importance of both mediation and cultural tools leads to the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky, the ZPD is the space where students can potentially learn with support, or scaffolding, from collaboration with others. In Vygotsky’s view, “children reach higher mental function through mediated, social, collaborative activity” (Smidt, 1999, p. 27). The social use of language is the foundation of learning itself (Vygotsky, 1986). Students’ learning in a social context is the basis of situated learning.

**Situated Learning**

Situated cognition theory contends that social activity is integral to cognition and learning (Lave, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978). Situated learning is based on the concept that
learning is a function of the activity itself and of the context and the culture in which it occurs. Social interaction is a key component of situated learning as learners become involved in a community of practice where groups of learners share a set of common beliefs and values. In order for students to become members of this community of practice, there must be a sharing of the same cultural beliefs and social values. The importance of communities of practice demonstrate that learning is much more than the acquisition of a set of skills and knowledge but is an integral part of changing patterns or participation in various communities with shared practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

According to Vygotsky, students interact as members of a particular culture by making meaning with all aspects of that culture through communication and use of tools that support development of thinking. This theory overlaps with a social theory of literacy in many ways. Vygotsky’s assertions that social interaction is an essential feature of learning, and that cultural tools differ according to the context and are accessible to different individuals in different contexts, are two of the important commonalities between these theories.

Another important part of the theory of situated learning is that Vygotsky believed that the cultural tools mediate learning because the tools were developed by past members of the culture in order to solve problems. These tools include texts. People learn to understand and use these cultural tools through a process of social construction. Gee (1990) and Luke and Freebody (1997) point out that children operate within their cultural and social contexts; they are influenced and changed by particular cultural practices and social practices. According to Vygotsky, cultural products or resources have been
invented to help people develop their thinking through literacy experiences, and teachers can foster their use through classroom interactions among students and teachers.

Vygotsky’s theories can be extended to the use of the new tool of the computer and the use of digital text in early learning, which supports collaboration and is an important cultural resource. “Cultural resources are social constructions or products of human activity, and they, in turn, may become tools engaged in processes of cultural production” (Bartlett, 2009, p. 55). According to Leu (1996), working or playing on the computer encourages peer tutoring, sharing information, collaboration and communication. These practices occur to a greater extent with technology than with traditional print text today. Learners work together as they are immersed in the rich, authentic functional language of their worlds (Dyson, 1999; Martens & Adamson, 2001). In this way, Vygotsky’s theories around cultural tools and artefacts, situated learning and collaboration in social contexts are applicable to the use of new literacies today. As well, cultural artefacts are essential to understanding identity. According to Vygotsky, cultural artefacts are central to people’s abilities to control their own social identities and, along with the new literacies of the 21st century, these artefacts are an important part of the social construction of identity.

Vygotsky’s work informs this study through his theories that involve teachers, peers and parents as they guide learning or collaboratively construct identity and cognitive development in specific social and cultural contexts. This perspective emphasizes literacy as social practice - the ways in which children’s literacy learning is accomplished through participation in social activities that occur in specific contexts, and that are mediated by talk, texts and social relationships (Dyson, 2001, 2003; Luke, 1995;
Rosenblatt, 1981). If literacy activities are viewed as social practices, these social practices involve language, values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships (Street, 1993).

**Identity as Social Practice**

From a social practice perspective, literacy and learning are influenced by how people make sense of themselves and others’ identities in a given social context. A move away from a view of literacy as a simple cognitive process has compelled researchers to consider identity as tied to people’s motivations, interests and other social practices (Street, 1984). Identity refers to the *ongoing social process* of self-making in conjunction with others through interaction (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). A social practice view of identity considers identity as lived by individuals, constructed, and produced or possessed within a social context. Other similar viewpoints include identity as situation specific, socially embedded, fluid, mediated by texts and recognized by others (Lewis & del Valle, 2009, Moje et al., 2009). Luke (1995) states that “reading instruction is not about skills but is about the construction of identity and social relations” (p. 95). These views demonstrate that identity is a crucial part of literacy learning.

Identity as social practice suggests that children learn to read and write based on the social positions they occupy and the types of participation that those positions or roles afford (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Street, 1998). Gee (1990) argues that identities are not inherent in individuals but are only brought into being when recognized within a relationship or social context. In school contexts, teachers and students alike often ascribe identities to learners such as *a good reader, a good listener* or *a poor reader*. Often, these identities are narrow and emerge from the idea that students are expected to participate in
the literacy practices that are valued in schools. Individuals may be labeled as inadequate if they do not demonstrate control over certain skills (Kelder, 1996). The identity labels, such as struggling, proficient, creative or deviant (Lin, 2008; Moje et al., 2009) not only impact reading and writing practices but also impact the type of person one becomes. As Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest, the process of learning involves becoming a different person; it is crucial to understand the reciprocal impact of literacy and identity. Davies (1989) elaborates on this point by arguing that the texts and literate practices that accompany them not only involve the identity of the young learner but also contribute to the production of an individual’s identity. “Learning, from a social and cultural perspective, involves people in participation, interaction, relationships and contexts, all of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and others, identify and are identified” (Moje et al., 2009, p. 416).

As children learn the social and cultural expectations for literacy in their home, school and community, they learn what counts as literacy (Gee, 2003; Street, 2003). In the absence of participation in valued literacy practices, whether by choice or due to the social context, students risk failure or marginalization (Hall, 2006). As well, a literate identity serves the purpose of positioning oneself to accomplish goals (Scribner, 1984). If students are given identity labels by those in power, these can be used to stereotype, privilege or marginalize students as they participate in reading and writing practices. Bartlett (2009) showed how doing literacy necessitates “social work to seem like a legitimate person practicing literacy in a legitimate context for a legitimate audience” (p. 54). McCarthey (2001) demonstrated how students’ perception of their own literacy abilities, as well as their beliefs about the perceptions of their parents and teachers about
those same literacy abilities, influenced the individual’s sense of self. Guice and Johnston (1994) showed that children who identify themselves as capable and successful readers are found to engage more readily in literacy activities. Therefore, an ‘identity as position’ metaphor helps us to understand that subjectivities and identities are produced in and through the ways people are cast in or called to particular positions and how they either accept or resist those positions (Moje et al., 2009). School practices have a great deal to do with how young children position themselves as capable or not capable (Luke, 1993). It makes sense that a positive literate identity will influence a learner’s willingness to engage in literacy practices and events in and out of school.

**Literate Identities Constructed at Home**

All literacy practices are both unique to the individual and also invented in a social context. As young students understand which literacies are offered or expected in their homes, classrooms and communities, they shape their identities as readers and writers. This, in turn shapes their practices which, in turn, shapes their identities. All literacy practices are influenced by the context in which they occur. This is why I have chosen to include the parents/home in my study. As young children are immersed in print, language and a host of other semiotic practices within their social and cultural contexts, their literacy practices are shaped by social identities, social rules and the texts which are accessible to the individual or community (Gee, 1990).

The home is a primary domain in people’s literacy lives and central to people’s developing sense of identity (Gee, 1990). Heath’s (1983) seminal work looked deeply into the literacy worlds of children in three communities, identifying how home literacies contribute greatly to children’s’ literate identities. These identities are located within
individuals but are shaped by the way people in groups engage in literate practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Bloome & Dail, 1997). Learning to read and write involves participation in a local context as children learn procedures, roles, and ideologies valued by parents, teachers and peers in the context of particular kinds of literacy events (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1995).

In 2011, young children are also exposed to many types of digital technology at home. They see their parents and older siblings on laptops, phones, watching videos, and listening to IPods and they interact with these technologies from very young ages. The literacy practices of these young people are shaped by new and complex texts that they access in the social settings of home, community and, eventually, school. Davies (1989) claims that texts and the literate practices that accompany them not only reflect but may also produce the self. Knobel and Lankshear (2006) identify the difficulties in bringing students’ lifeworlds into the classroom, including the compulsory character of school, accommodating each individual student’s literacy identity, the lack of authentic, purposeful activities in many classrooms, and the social construction and regulation of interests through adult control in the classroom environment. Another concern is that, because of access to new technologies, it is becoming increasingly difficult to know which texts and experiences are contributing to the construction of students’ identities. Therefore, with the technological and information explosion, the ability to recognize or understand identities becomes more difficult as teachers lack the relevant information about how students are socially constructing their identities outside of school.
Shaping Identities in School

As much as there are social and cultural commonalities between what children experience in their own lives and homes, each individual enters school from a different social context and with a different set of practices that are further shaped by their school experiences. What students “know, understand, and can do with texts relies on being aware of the resources available to them, that is, the knowledge and experiences that make up students’ literacy identities” (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 35). Booth (2008) states that our understanding of text depends on,

- our backgrounds;
- our knowledge of the topic;
- our attitudes towards the text and the author;
- our interest in the text;
- the skill of the author;
- our energy level;
- the others involved;
- our ease with the genre, format, language, syntax and style;
- and the required expected responses. (p. 6)

In short, our interactions with text and literacy practices involve and shape our values, beliefs and personal identity (Anstey & Bull, 2006), and are inextricably linked to both social and cultural experiences in and out of schools. The social environment of school is a key component of students’ literate identities, and these literate identities can set students up for success, or failure:

The need for contexts in which young children can be successful,…contexts in which they are supported in constructing meaning….is critical, as children also invent their literate identities. It is from these fragile identities that readers are made and, sadly, sometimes broken. (Martens & Adamson, 2001, p. 46)

Mahiri and Godley (1998) found evidence that there is a strong connection between literacy practices valued in society and an individual’s view of literacy and that both of these affect a person’s identity. McCarthey (1998) studied the demands of the social setting and found that students’ participation and identity were influenced by their
ability to successfully navigate classroom tasks presented to them. One early years study looked at the literacy curriculum and what counted as literacy in a kindergarten classroom, observing one Bengali girl’s participation in school literacy as she designed meanings and constructed her own identity in the kindergarten classroom. The researchers found an environment that valued a very traditional conception of literacy but that also demonstrated that literacy is shaped by and produced through the resources available (Siegel, Kontovourki, Schmier, & Enriquez, 2008).

The recognition that the social environment of school impacts literacy practices has led many researchers to recognize that “…people’s identities mediate and are mediated by the texts they read, write and talk about” (Moje et al., 2009, p. 416). Rowe (2008) identified the way individuals draw on shared cultural knowledge that is socially negotiated and collectively constructed to produce and use written texts in culturally appropriate ways as social contracts. She finds that very young children negotiated social contracts with their teachers related to the texts they produced and how they interacted with those texts. According to Barton et al. (2000), life experiences provide individuals with a repertoire of resources about literacy and literate practices. These experiences and resources contribute to each person’s overall identity and are, in turn, influenced by theories about how literacy happens, particularly in the early years.

Emergent Literacy Theory and the Social Practice Perspective

Perceptions about individual literacy competence necessarily involve an understanding of what literacy is (Flewitt, Nind, & Payler, 2009). Emergent literacy research has tended to embrace the autonomous or traditional view of literacy, focusing on the development and mastery of skills-based reading and writing competencies. Rowe
(2009) writes that the majority of studies in this tradition have been conducted from cognitive and sociocognitive perspectives and have focused attention on individual child writers, their texts, and their interactions with language and print. These theories about emergent literacy have contributed significantly to the field of literacy studies. Important traditional understandings about emergent literacy include the idea that children are involved in literacy experiences from very early in life, interacting and making meaning with print text in various ways which include storybook reading, playing with letters and sounds, engaging in writing activities and oral language interactions (Adams, 1990; Durkin, 1966; Sulzby & Teale, 1991).

Much of emergent literacy theory is based on the expectation that children will progress cognitively and reach certain skill and knowledge levels while learning to read and write in school. Clay (1991), a highly influential researcher in emergent literacy, makes it clear that children participate in learning as active constructive learners where the context as well as the children’s actions contribute to shaping their own environments. She emphasizes that each child will experiment, explore and construct their knowledge in different ways depending on their experiences. Clay wrote that “the very foundation of literacy learning lies in the language the child has already constructed…after children enter school, language learning will expand under the influence of school, home and community” (1998, p. 2) Clay (1998) conceptualized children as “problem solving doers and thinkers, each working towards more complex ways of responding” (p. 3). In emergent literacy research, children’s preschool interactions with reading and writing have traditionally been viewed as intentional and collaborative (Rowe, 2009). Clay (1998) insists that schools need to be places where
children can collaborate and take different paths as they make meaning in different ways to arrive at common outcomes.

**Multimodality and Multiple Modes of Meaning**

Another contribution of emergent literacy is the idea that young children engage with a wide variety of multimodal texts. Although focused on print text, Clay’s theories about emergent literacy incorporate rich descriptions of preschoolers’ writing and reading experiences which include scribbles, experiences with reading text by scanning, pictures, extracting meaning from text and exploring details of print in their environment.

Multimodal text may be “a piece of writing, or it may be a drawing, a young child’s early mark-making or an embodied action that represents and conveys a particular meaning” (Flewitt et al., 2009). According to this interpretation, emergent literacy studies have contributed an understanding about how multimodal interactions reveal children’s developing literacy (Dyson, 1985; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). This is significant for this thesis when considering the shift in the field of early literacy education that is termed the “digital turn – that is, the increased attention to new literacy practices in digital environments across a variety of social contexts” (Mills, 2010, p. 246). The definition of multimodal text is expanding; however, the idea of multimodal text is firmly rooted in emergent literacy research.

Multimodal texts are those that rely on “the processing and interpretation of print information, which blends with visual, audio, spoken, nonverbal and other forms of expression produced through a range of different technologies” (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 102). Multimodal literacy argues for an expansion of our understanding of texts to include multiple modes. Language is understood as just one communicative mode among
many which play roles in our interactions at any given time (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001).

Kress (2000) complements this understanding through his belief that meanings are disseminated through particular media: a book, moving images, writing, etc. All media offer possibilities for the teacher to teach using multiple modes of meaning and for the student to participate in practices with meaningful text. The dynamic nature of text, the growth of digital and non-linear texts as an important genre and the quality and types of texts that children interact with both in-school and outside-of-school must be crucial considerations in teacher’s pedagogical choices and, in turn, students’ learning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2000). Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) make the basic assumption that meanings are made, interpreted and distributed through many representational and communicational resources of which language is just one.

Readers transact with text to create meaning. They bring their experiences, values and knowledge about the world to a given text in order to create meaning from it (Rogoff, 1990; Rosenblatt, 1981). Readers, who possess their own social intentions and literate identities, interact with text in unique ways (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). Different kinds of texts require somewhat different backgrounds and different skills if they are to be read meaningfully and they can be read in different ways, depending on the individual interacting with the text (Lankshear, Snyder, & Green, 2000). Therefore, the more meaningful texts are to an individual in every aspect of their multimodality (semiotic, representational, communicational, culturally meaningful), the more useful they will be as tools to teach a child to read, write and communicate in schools. According to Kress (2000), the material features of text combine with visual and linguistic features to convey
meaning and this is particularly true when examining the texts involved in the new literacies.

Emergent literacy theories need not be at odds with the new literacies or the view of literacy as embedded in social practice. These theories acknowledge that children experience different kinds of literacy in different contexts, using a variety of symbol systems, and that literacy is learned most effectively when it is used in meaningful ways in real life circumstances (Street, 1998). Viewing these two theories as complementary provides a more inclusive framework for literacy learning.

Emergent literacy theory comes into conflict with the literacy as social practice paradigm when researchers write about assessing the young children’s individual competencies, using common goals for all learners and tools such as Running Records (Clay, 2002) to quantify and assess text reading abilities uniformly. Often, instruction advocated in schools involves teachers working with individual students based on each student’s current understandings and backgrounds, knowing learners through observation and immersing students in authentic reading and writing activities (Clay, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The focus on literacy as an individual cognitive activity does not sit well in this paradigm. If literacy is considered within the social context, there are no “generic instances of….literacy” (Rowe, 2009, p. 136). Instead, literacy events are rooted in local events shaped by adults in collaborative and shared interactions. Learning to read and write is fundamentally about social participation when seen through the lens of social and cultural perspectives (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Brandt & Clinton, 2002, Gee, 2003). This social participation includes rules, the power structure of the community and expectations for participation. This locates literacy learning in relations between people,
within groups and communities, rather than as something residing in individuals (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). These are concepts that have largely been ignored in emergent literacy research until now.

**Balancing Cognitive Theories and Social Practice Theory**

Echoing the work of many others, Compton-Lilly (2009) writes that the approaches that draw our attention to the way in which reading is a social experience that involves culture and identity does “not replace the need for [the] teacher to understand the reading process – the role that letters and sounds play in reading and the strategic actions that children must master” (p. 89). Along these lines, in her study about early childhood literacy in the context of New Literacy Studies, Brooker (2002) described a literacy-rich environment with a planned curriculum which offered numerous opportunities for learning about print…from individual reading sessions with a teacher, to group work (stories, writing or phonics), to child-directed activities like computer programs and alphabet dominoes (p. 302). She describes the highest level of input as the experience of reading with the class teacher – a chance to participate and interact meaningfully to learn about intentions, procedures and processes used in literacy events. Therefore, there are important parts of emergent literacy theory that may exist alongside social practice theory.

Many early literacy researchers currently conceptualize young children’s literacy as social practice. Wolfe and Flewitt’s (2010) research follows young children as they engage with diverse modes and media (including print and digital technologies) at home and at school. They introduce their research by discussing the strong focus on cognitive approaches that still exist in early years literacy, and how neglecting historically situated
literacy practices puts students at a disadvantage in schools. In many schools, the emphasis is on “developing children’s language and literacy skills through teaching about the sounds and rhythms of language. There is a similar emphasis on print rather than screen related practices” (Wolfe & Flewitt, 2010, p. 388). Drawing on the notion of literacy as social practice, they conclude that “children’s changing literacy practices at home, and…learning with both new and traditional literacy-related technologies is supported through collaborative multimodal dialogue” (p. 397). Collaborative multimodal dialogue widens traditional views of early literacy learning and involves “intersubjective meaning-making processes that occur through interaction and joint engagement in activity and are expressed through multiple communicative modes, such as gaze, gesture, movement and talk” (Wolfe & Flewitt, 2010, p. 388). This research involves children using multiple modes as they experience literacy in different media. The authors call for multimodal analysis of children’s literacy practices to understand how children’s learning might be mediated by teachers and multimodal text in the information age.

Other studies looked at the multimodal practices of young children. Marsh (2004) studied the emergent techno-literacy practices of children between 2 1/2 and 4 years of age. She completed this study to reexamine emergent literacy (Clay, 1966, 1975) and create a richer understanding of children’s emergent literacy practices in “in relation to wider definitions of literacy which incorporate technology and multimodal ways of making meaning” (Marsh, 2004, p. 52). She found that multimodal techno-literacy practices were an integral part of the young children’s home literacies as a “means of self-expression, maintaining relationships, accessing or relaying information and for pleasure” (Marsh, 2004, p. 62). Marsh concluded that it is “no longer acceptable to view
children as ‘pre-readers’ and ‘pre-writers’, given their communicative competencies from birth” (Marsh, 2004, p. 60), and this included experiences with technology and digital texts.

With the view of language as “one instrument in an orchestra of shared sign systems” (Flewitt et al., 2009, p. 215), Lancaster’s research (2007) demonstrated how very young children use their bodily modalities as one way to evolve syntactic and morphological structures. Focusing on multiple modes to support literacy learning, Pahl and Rowsell (2006) showed how children express complex understandings around text through pictures and artefacts. Therefore, a multimodal approach to literacy expands the possibilities for meaningful literacy practices.

Other studies showed that, although teachers value learning based on a view of literacy as a meaning-making process using a multimodal definition of text, few early years classroom teachers seem to have the skills to teach from multimodal text (Tan & Guo, 2009). Smolin and Lawless (2003) suggested that teachers who layer technologies on top of a traditional, skill-based curriculum, using tools for isolated work, are merely replicating what is usually done with books and paper. Hassett and Curwood (2009) examined interactive picture books used in primary classes through the lens of an expanded definition of text. Their premise was that “teachers’ and students’ interaction with the characters, plots and visuals of interactive children’s books can highlight new shifts in literacy learning” (Hassett & Curwood, 2009, p. 270). Their findings suggest that new roles for teachers must be defined (resource manager, co-constructor of knowledge, design consultant), in order to incorporate the social, open-ended activities to support students in their multimodal resource navigation. The authors state that, “the use of
multimodal tools in socially situated practice can be considered the heart of multiliteracies, in form and function” (Hassett & Curwood, 2009, p. 281).

Rowe’s work (2010) provides new opportunities for understanding early literacy learning as social practice. Throughout her research, Rowe found that young children’s writing interactions tended to be more collaborative than independent and that an understanding of literacy as an individual phenomenon was important but incomplete. Children’s textual intentions must be “viewed as a consequence of collaborative participation in literacy events, rather than as watershed individual accomplishments” (Rowe, 2010, p. 137). Rowe found that “the social practice perspective focuses on the social and cultural contexts in which literacy events occur and challenges the traditional focus of universal patterns of early literacy learning” (Rowe, 2010, p. 138). She compared questions generated by a traditional view of literacy learning (literacy as a cognitive process, literacy as multimodal) with questions that could expand the agenda for early literacy research (literacy as positioned, literacy as local, literacy as ideological). Rowe (2010) states that “because social and cultural perspectives view cognition as socially distributed, traditional concerns about reading and writing processes are retained but reframed to include investigation of the ways that literacy…is shaped by social participation” (p. 142). She concludes that it is important for researchers to shift from “intention to participation – to create a more complex and multi-focused view of early literacy learning… our observations need to consider the positioned, local, ideological, material and spatial nature of children’s participation in literacy events” (Rowe, 2010, p. 142).
The added perspective of literacy as social practice and new understandings about the communicational landscape forces early literacy educators to consider the contexts and models that are involved in literacy events where young children participate and make meaning. New theories around emergent literacy and multimodality add to traditional understanding by considering new textual practices mediated by digital technologies, and viewing literacy practices as constructions of particular social groups, rather than attributed only to individual cognition (Mills, 2010). Digital environments in and out of school provide the opportunities for innovative literacy practices (Hull & Schultz, 2001; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Literacy practices represent shared understandings and social identities (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). These are important aspects to consider when examining how young children develop through the literacy practices and events they experience.

**Multiliteracies Theory**

Multiliteracies, a concept that originated with the NLG in 1996, has shifted how many educators define what it means to be “literate”. It is important to note that multiliteracies pedagogy is a theory that enhances, rather than replaces, traditional literacy pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Rowsell, Kosnik, & Beck, 2008).

Anstey (2002) defines a “multiliterate person” as

flexible and strategic and able to understand and use literacy and literate practices with a range of texts and technologies, in socially responsible ways, in a socially, culturally and linguistically diverse world and to fully participate in life as an active and informed citizen. (p. 24)

In this definition, there are implications for the student in terms of learning, for the teacher in terms of pedagogy, and for the types and nature of texts used as cultural tools
and mediators of literacy learning. The NLG (1996) conceptualizes students as active learners and designers of their own experiences as they collaborate with teachers and peers (NLG, 1996). As students become literate in the 21st century, they engage in a wide variety of literacy practices across many contexts. The aim of multiliteracies pedagogy is to use multiple and multimodal texts and a wide range of literacy practices as the basis for engaging students in literacy learning (Jewitt, 2008). Learning is underpinned by scaffolding and supportive relationships, which draw on children’s and teacher’s cultural and intellectual resources (Cumming-Potvin, 2007).

However, as the NLG observed, many classrooms have not changed meaningfully in order to even begin to consider meeting the needs of the future literate individual:

“Literacy pedagogy has traditionally meant teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language…restricted to formalized, monolingual, mono-cultural and rule-governed forms of language” (NLG, 1996, pp. 60-61). The assumption contained in the traditional pedagogy of literacy is that literacy is value-free or that school systems are objective in their decisions around “what counts as literacy”. The NLG also questions this assumption. As the NLG (2000) states, “the role of pedagogy is to develop an epistemology of pluralism that provides access without people having to erase or leave behind different subjectivities. This has to be the basis of a new norm” (p. 18).

Multiple Modes of Meaning

According to the NLG, in addition to becoming literate in multiple modes, literacy learners must become literate in a variety of modes of meaning, knowing which literate practices and resources to use when faced with new and different contexts. This is
important as students negotiate their own literate identities through interactions with texts and others in their literate environments. Multiliteracies opens the door for teachers to support students as they build the capacity to write, read, produce and think critically about multimodal (print and multimedia) texts and using multiple modes of meaning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Teachers who employ a multiliteracies pedagogy “offer their students ample opportunities to access, evaluate, search, sort, gather, and read information from a variety of multimedia and multimodal sources and invite students to collaborate in real and virtual spaces to produce and publish multimedia and multimodal texts for a variety of audiences and purposes” (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed, 2008, p. 87). Kress (2003) writes,

> 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 in every domain. (p. 1)


**The Multiliteracies Notion of Design**

The notion of Design allows teachers to “embrace and value the diversity of our students’ literacy practices while supporting their mastery of school-sanctioned print literacies” (Simon, 2009, p. 122). The NLG envisioned a new role for educators as “designers of learning processes and environments” (Westby, 2010, p. 66).

Pedagogically, Design involves the different identities of the students as active meaning
makers. Instead of literacy being a part of the curriculum that student are taught and evaluated as “right” or “wrong”, the Design process occurs in a community of learners or social contexts where students actively experience and transform their own learning based on the context. “Design refers to how people make use of the resources that are available at a given moment…to realize their interests as sign makers” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 252). This process is not governed by static rules (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Luke & Freebody, 1997). In the process of Design, “meanings either work or don't work for a particular social or cultural context” (Kalantzis, Cope, & Fehring, 2002, p. 3).

Although print literacy is valued alongside all the other literacies that exist in students’ lives, in contrast to traditional models of literacy which privilege print and are based on “the acquisition and mastery of sets of established practices, conventions, and rules” (Jewitt, 2006, p. 252), the notion of Design refers to how students make use of the resources available to them in order to communicate across social contexts. It encompasses the importance of multimodal resources, the sign maker’s social purpose and intentions, context and audience (Kress, 2000). The NLG proposes “to treat any semiotic activity, including using language to produce and consume texts, as a matter of Design” (NLG, 2000, p. 20). Social semiotics focuses on social meaning-making practices known as semiotic modes. Semiotic modes can include visual, verbal, written, gestural and even musical resources for communication. They also include various "multimodal" ensembles of any of these modes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Interacting with these modes shapes individuals and societies.

In summary, Design offers a framework that provides structure and the predictability needed to communicate in a variety of contexts and social settings.
(Newman, 2002), and allows teacher to use literacy for transformative purposes (Simon, 2009). Viewing classrooms as places for Design gives teachers and students the opportunity for transformed practices and transformed resources based on collaborative Design experiences. Each individual’s available Designs, based on his/her social and cultural context, is an important part of the collaborative process, “where rules and procedures are flexible and open to change” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006, p. 81). Design’s focus on appropriate resources incorporates the individual’s interests, motivations and identity (Rowsell et al., 2008), thereby providing space for individuals to participate in meaningful and transformative literacy practices within the collaborative classroom community.

**Available Resources for Designing**

Available resources are a prominent part of the multiliteracies Designs of Meaning. Available resources depend on the student and the context for learning; not all resources for meaning are available to all students. Some students are privileged and some are marginalized as different classrooms, schools and communities offer different resources for Designing. The Designing is the work performed on or with the Available Designs. Finally, the resources that are produced and transformed through Designing are the Redesigned. This metalanguage for talking about language, images, texts and meaning making interactions in a community of learners is a key component in the “what” of multiliteracies pedagogy (NLG, 1996, 2000). This is because students must do more than simply follow the steps as outlined by a teacher – they must know how to read and write but also think about and critically apply the overall principles of Linguistic Design to actively participate in the process of Design. This meta-language is intended to
be flexible and open-ended and should be seen as a toolkit from which to draw meaningful experiences as students work with texts. Luke and Freebody (2000) write about providing students with the meta-language needed to understand the semiotics of various forms of media and technology in the Design process.

According to multiliteracies theory, in order to access these resources, students must interact with the new communications environment. Through new communications technologies, “meaning is being made in ways that are increasingly multimodal, that is, written-linguistic modes of meaning interrelate with visual, audio, gestural and spatial patterns of meaning (Kalantzis et al., 2002, p. 2). Multiliteracies is based on a number of elements of Design and these include the overarching theme of the multimodal nature of texts – the idea that our increasingly complex and dynamic social, cultural and technological world has impacted the nature of texts, as well as the literate practices associated with them. Although this wide definition of text has proven challenging for the purposes of developing curricula (Mills, 2009), Cope and Kalantzis (2000) have demonstrated how new literacies build on established rules and conventions that have familiar elements which are the basis for Redesign. Key to the theory is the notion of access to both language and other modes of representation of meaning as well as the engagement that will be necessary for students to have a role in designing their own social futures in a constantly changing world (NLG, 1996).

Privilege and Schooling

As the NLG (1996) wrote, “The Redesigned is founded on historically and culturally received patterns of meaning…at the same time it is the unique product of human agency” (p. 76). Schools are designed, conceived and structured with certain
historical and cultural assumptions. In his research with secondary students, Howard (2010) found that privileged students attributed advantages “to their intentions and deliberate choices of caring about their education, working hard in school and investing financially in their education (p. 1985). This has implications for how privileged students view themselves, as well as less-privileged others. Ideology plays a critical role in how privileged students perceive themselves and others (Brantlinger, 2003). Privileged students are given every opportunity for success and, in my study, I found that there is an expectation by parents and the teacher that they will succeed. These types of expectations and opportunities are important in the construction of students’ sense of self or identity. Identity is produced in relation to and coordination with ways of thinking and knowing and are culturally bound (Howard, 2010). Therefore, privileged students’ ways of thinking and knowing about who they are, their position with respect to each other and less-privileged boys, and the expectations placed upon them are all embedded ideological assumptions in my research study.

**Challenges in Implementing the Pedagogy**

Some researchers highlight the difficulty in translating the theory into practice. For example, Brandt and Clinton (2002) suggest that, since literacy materials and spaces have histories that link them to literacy practices in a child’s life and community, teachers need to adopt a more flexible and expansive view of text as a pathway to literacy. It is important to note that the presence of multimodal texts in a classroom does not necessarily mean that the teacher uses a multiliteracies pedagogy. The use of multimodal text could be occurring and might just be incidental or even an example of traditional teaching practice using a variety of different texts. It is not simply exposure to different
texts that will define a practice as integral to multiliteracies pedagogy, but how the new texts are embedded in teaching and learning (Brandt & Clinton, 2002).

There are few studies underpinned by multiliteracies theory examining Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers’ pedagogy. It appears that “literacy educators have tended to exclude young children when considering the implications of changes signalled by the call for a pedagogy of multiliteracies” (Siegel et al., 2008, p. 89). This is probably due to the fact that most of the research in early learning is related to print literacy (Miller, 2001; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001).

The studies that have been conducted with a Multiliteracies framework show that applying the pedagogy is challenging for teachers, even when their beliefs reflect aspects of multiliteracies. Recent research in Australia investigated how a Grade 1 teacher integrated technology to teach multiliterate practices when students were reading multimodal texts. Results “indicate lack of congruence between the teacher’s espoused and enacted beliefs, given that her practices focused mainly on traditional print-based modes of communication” (Kitson, Fletcher, & Kearney, 2007, p. 29). Turbill (2001) found that implementation of technology by kindergarten teachers was hindered by lack of time and expertise, teacher’s narrow definition of literacy as including only paper-based texts and lack of understanding of and confidence in the potential for technology in the early years. Teachers in Turbill’s study viewed learning to read as learning to read print, and neglected visuals and animation as vital text for young children. The research base in early literacy (Clay, 1991; Strickland, 1998; Sulzby & Teale, 1991) is dominant in our schools and teachers struggle with the tensions between their open minds to new ideas and their foundational conceptions about what literacy learning involves.
Lotherington (2009) is involved in research in schools now working to implement a multiliteracies pedagogy. Using frameworks of digital literacies, additive multilingualism and digital epistemologies, Lotherington and her colleagues have worked on collaborative action research which has produced products incorporating children’s voices, multi-languages and multimodal text in kindergarten. From these experiences, Lotherington states that language, culture and media are complexly interrelated and that how we are teaching is more important than what we are teaching. Similarly, Crafton, Brennan, and Silvers (2007) completed a study where the researchers worked together with a Grade 1 teacher to study how new definitions of literacy could be used with young learners and reshape pedagogy and practice. The children came to “use a range of tools, including technology to engage in critical inquiry and pursue significant concerns in their lives” (Crafton et al., 2007, p. 510). They note that such a complex undertaking requires extensive professional collaboration in order to translate the theory into effective instructional decisions.

**Multiliteracies Theory: The “How” of Teaching Multiliteracies**

The “how” of multiliteracies is important for my research study. The view that the human mind is “embodied, situational, and social” (NLG, 1996, p. 82), lends itself to pedagogy that is collaborative, based on the world of learners’ design experiences and embedded in social interaction. The social and political goal of multiliteracies pedagogy is to situate teachers and students as active participants in social change, the active designers of social futures (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). The NLG provides a roadmap to accomplish this.
The pedagogic model proposed by the NLG (1996, 2000) is a complex integration of the four areas of situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice. According to the NLG, this practical model may be implemented in a classroom as teachers and students interact with texts and each other. In this model, it is the interaction between the teacher and student that supports the development of literacy practices, abilities and identities. The ways that curriculum documents, government policies and pedagogy often approach or describe literacy, as an abstract set of skills, rules or competencies, misunderstand that fact that literacy learning is multiple, local and embedded in particular social contexts, communities, practices and purposes. Multiliteracies theory provides a way of understanding that the literate practices in which students engage are deeply contextualized for each and every literate learner.

**Situated practice.**

Situated practice refers to the literacy practices that are based on the learners’ experiences and the designs available to them within their own life worlds and school worlds. Situated practice values and acknowledges the lifeworlds of students (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000). In situated practice, learners immerse themselves in sociocultural contexts and meaningful practices within these worlds. The teacher must consider each individual’s specific knowledge and experiences when designing instruction.

With situated practice as a starting point, the teacher must carefully include texts, cultures and practices that are relevant to learners, in order to create meaningful learning experiences. Since students have the opportunity to interact with and value a wide range of texts outside of schools (e.g., computer games, DVDs, TV, magazines, social media), they also need to have these experiences valued in schools. Even as students will learn
through overt or direct instruction, they also need to be able to make meaningful links to new texts from their own experiences. Each experience in situated practice is unique but also mediated by the community of learners and social context in which it occurs. According to Kalantzis et al., (2002), situated practice would involve exposure to real-world texts and texts in students’ lives. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) claim that situated practice is a reflection of the traditions of whole language, process writing and various other educational progressivisms.

**Overt instruction.**

Overt instruction refers to teachers’ active and appropriate scaffolding of students’ learning experiences during instruction. It involves talking about and modelling how texts work. Here, students are instructed in order to identify and use the semiotic systems in the wide variety of texts they will encounter beyond school. According to Luke (2011), teachers cannot take it for granted that children know how to interact with and around new texts. Overt instruction leads to “the conscious control of knowledge that does not develop through immersion” (Lewis & Fabos, 2000, p. 463). The context in which the instruction takes place influences students’ ability to use text. Students also must engage their prior knowledge and experiences in order to construct and communicate meaning as they engage in literacy practices/events through overt instruction (NLG, 2006). Overt instruction is necessary but not enough for a student to engage in more articulate practices with literacy (Luke, personal communication, February 10, 2011) and, therefore, it is one part of the multiliteracies model. Overt instruction is situated within the field of constructivism, however, this model puts more emphasis on cultural, political and equity issues then other constructivist models do.
Critical framing.

Critical framing explicitly connects meanings gained in overt instruction and situated practice in relation to the historical, social, cultural, political, ideological and value-centered relations of particular systems of knowledge and social practice. The teacher’s role is to connect learning to the social contexts and consider student purposes and the social and cultural context of designs. The application to real-life situations is key. This role necessitates that the student participates in the functional and interactional role of a text analyzer as students learn to evaluate and interact with texts (Luke & Freebody, 1997) and read texts for their ideological meanings, developing a critical awareness of how knowledge is constructed and whose interests certain texts serve. Critical framing is the application of the individual’s capacity to undertake literacy events and mediate them using the resources available to them.

Transformed practice.

Transformed practice relates to the ways in which students recreate and re-contextualize meaning across contexts and in new social spaces (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Transformed practice would involve making and using texts in order to apply the new knowledge about text to various new contexts. This includes all the areas of literacy as social practice – the history and the politics of literacy learning. For example, the learner develops an understanding of how texts are constructed and produced. Being a text analyst means taking action; being an active and informed citizen and taking part in transformative practices as a result (Anstey & Bull, 2002). Transformed practice provides the evidence that ideas and concepts are seen in a different way then they were before.
No one area of the NLG’s model exists in a vacuum: the model functions as a complex interaction between the components in order help teachers and learners understand how an individual experiences literacy (Bartlett, 2009). The ability to identify, use and understand the appropriate resources is a key component of the learning for a multiliterate individual. Therefore, instead of focusing on the isolated skill to be taught, the teacher who uses a multiliteracies perspective focuses on the literate practice and how it applies to different purposes in different contexts (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Luke & Freebody, 1999).

The principles of the multiliteracies pedagogical framework change how literacy is taught. Exposing students to a wide range of resources and the transformative nature of literacy supports a new and different pedagogy. An example would be as follows: in a lesson about descriptive words in writing, there would be immersion in texts and experiences that use descriptive words which are evident in all cultures and texts, valuing students’ input and background knowledge; overt teaching about how these words are used in texts; discussion about words we choose and how they position certain people with respect to identities; giving students opportunities to create new texts using descriptive words and by accessing many modes to produce textual messages. The resources would be the social, cultural and technological knowledge and experiences that involve and shape students’ literate identities.

**Contextualizing this Study: Boys’ Literacy**

The literature on gender issues also informs my study because this study takes place in a boys’ school. A body of research has arisen based on the literacy achievement gap between boys and girls in Ontario schools and across the world (EQAO, 2009;
OECD, 2002). Standardized tests of reading achievement demonstrate that female students consistently score higher than boys on average in both reading and writing (National Assessment of Education Progress, 2009; OECD, 2001, 2002). Topping, Samuels, and Paul (2008) reported that girls exhibited high scores in both quantity and quality of reading as compared to boys, and this difference increased in subsequent grades beginning in Grade 1. However, when boys and girls having similar levels of reading quantity and quality were compared, “boys and girls achieved similar gains, suggesting gender specific patterns were not immutable” (Topping et al., 2008, p. 514). The fact that boys are often grouped as an undifferentiated group simply on the basis of gender has resulted in “interventions designed to cater to perceived common interests and learning styles, such as the introduction of the boy-friendly curriculum and of more male teachers” (Martino, 2008, p. 1). Watson, Kehler, and Martino (2010) write that “it is important to understand that not all boys are at risk and that their poor performance is not inevitable” (p. 357) based on gender alone.

The literature on boys and learning comes from a variety of different perspectives. From a psychological perspective, children and adolescents may use gender as an organizing theme to classify and understand their perceptions about the world (Woolfolk, Winne, Perry, & Shapka, 2010). In this model, society’s beliefs about the traits of females and males influences processing of social information as well as behaviour or attitudes consistent with acceptable gender schema. Brannon (2002) found that by age four or five, children develop a gender schema that describes what clothes, games, toys, behaviour and careers are “right” for boys and girls and that these ideas are quite rigid. However, this is not necessarily due to biological differences. Most studies find that
“from infancy through the preschool years, there are few differences between boys and girls in overall mental and motor development, specific abilities… or general intelligence” (Woolfolk et al., 2010, p. 178). Therefore, many of the observed differences in boys and girls may be affected by social and cultural influences.

The ways in which boys engage with literacy cannot be understood without an understanding of culture and identity (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998). Younger and Warrington (2005) found that there is a limited evidence base for the assumption that boys have distinctive or preferred learning styles based on gender alone. Brozo (2005) states that thinking about boys as a group based on gender alone makes the assumption that “there is only one way to be masculine” (p. 18). How masculinity is represented in media and culture greatly affects how boys construct their own masculinity, behaviour, and learning in literacy (Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert, & Muspratt, 2002). Traditional or dominant cultural notions of masculinity influence boys’ identity construction and their learning. Although biological make-up is an important factor in identity, the way gender is socially and culturally constructed must also be given consideration. Rather than catering to taken-for-granted assumptions (Watson et al., 2010) about how boys learn as a group, many researchers call for pedagogical reforms within safe classroom learning environments which do not over-simplify gender differences in achievement (Lingard, Martino, & Mills, 2009; Martino & Kehler, 2007).

Rowan, Knobel, Bigum, and Lankshear (2002) discuss the dynamics of gender, literacy and other differences such as socioeconomic status and ethnicity that also impact student learning. Others advocate identifying the cultural, social and institutional factors (gender, race, ethnicity, social class) that intersect with gender that affect both boys’ and
girls’ engagement with literacy (Watson et al., 2010). Collins, Kenway, and McLeod (2000) found that “socio-economic status makes a larger difference than gender to Year 12 performance” (p. 4). OECD (2004) data shows that there is a “significant relationship between the results from the students’ assessments and the students’ socio-economic status” (p. 162). Therefore, educators must consider how gender interacts with social and cultural factors such as SES, race and ethnicity when educating boys. School failure increases among boys from low socio-economic or marginalized cultural/geographical communities. (Rowan et al., 2002). “The higher the socioeconomic statuses of parents on these measures [of household income, family structure, parental education], the higher is the literacy…performance of their children, both boys and girls, on average” (Buckingham, 1999, p. 7). Therefore, the boys in this study are among those that would be expected to perform well in literacy learning as compared to others of lower socio-economic status.

The Ontario Ministry of Education tends to represent boys as an undifferentiated group in their publications about boys and literacy. They cite research that states that, when teachers observe boys who are not engaged or who achieve poorly in literacy, the findings show that boys demonstrate a general lack of interest in print-based reading and writing activities, that boys make minimalistic efforts to complete and present school literacy tasks, and that boys lack self-esteem and confidence as learners (Ministry of Education of Ontario, 2009).

Although most educators acknowledge that not all boys are underachieving or at risk and that socioeconomic status, geographical location, and poverty affect the educational performance of both boys and girls….the evidence of weaker literacy skills among boys….is an issue of deep concern. (Ministry of Education of Ontario, 2009, p. 6)
Blair and Sanford (2004) researched boys’ literacy, asking the question, “What is literacy for boys?” (p. 452). Their study suggested that out-of-school literacies and in-school literacies need to be developed together to help boys make personal meaning from school literacy. Alternative texts (games, magazines, humorous, visual texts) and literacies, (incorporating actions, success, fun, personal interest and purpose), often dismissed as irrelevant to school, can be adopted to make literacy more meaningful for boys. Newkirk (2002) suggests that our culture has produced a broad range of texts forms in many modes that are not “school-sanctioned”. He recommends that teachers keep an open mind to the use of technology and popular culture in the classroom to include boys in literacy events with various cultural texts.

In my study, I take the “which boys” approach (Martino, 2008), contextualized in literacy as social practice theory, which assumes that boys are not an undifferentiated group. “The ways in which boys engage with literacy are often determined by how they learn to relate to others and understand themselves. This, in turn, is influenced by questions of culture and identity, which cannot be reduced to biological sex differences” (Martino, 2008, p. 2). Although it is clear that high socio-economic status will have an impact on the boys in my study, I present the boys as individuals and prefer to discuss their literacy learning within the framework of literacy as social practice, rather than focusing on gender.

**Investigating Teaching and Learning in This Grade 1 Classroom**

The complexities of teaching and learning in a Grade 1 classroom are varied, with multiple perspectives and purposes. I was most interested in observing a classroom in 2011 to understand the practical possibilities for the application of theories that are
current in the field of literacy education. I wanted to examine ways to understand literacy practices through the lens of multiliteracies theory and attempt to peel back the layers of identity, social context and pedagogy to get a deeper look into literacy events and practices and the rationale behind these practices. The next chapter provides an understanding of the methodology, participants, setting and classroom that were the focus of this research study.
CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This chapter will briefly outline the rationale for the choice of methods used in this study. Next, an outline of the research study, the setting and participants will be described. I will also present the data collection process, and review the different ways I collected data. Finally, I will outline the data analysis procedures I used in this study.

Research Paradigms: The Perspective of Mixed Methodology

The research process into educational and social phenomena is a complex one and it must be carefully planned in order to look deeply at multifaceted phenomena such as people, change and learning. Any choice of methodology is influenced by the researcher’s beliefs and choice of theoretical frameworks, and by the research purpose and questions (Greene, 2007).

Paradigms “may be defined as the worldviews or belief systems that guide researchers” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), two models or paradigms for research or systematic investigations in the social sciences have dominated the field. One, known as the post-positivist orientation, is the paradigm that mixed methodology theorists have associated with quantitative research. Post-positivism, also known as the scientific method, is a move away from the tenets of logical positivism of the 19th century. Post-positivists re-characterize contemporary quantitative inquiry (Reichardt & Rallis, 1994) by rejecting the belief that the social sciences can be understood with complete scientific objectivity. Instead, post-positivists believe that
quantitative research is influenced by the values of investigators as well as the hypotheses or theoretical frameworks that guide the research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Post-positivist researchers recognize that “knowledge is relative rather than absolute but it is possible, using empirical evidence, to distinguish between more and less plausible claims” (Patton, 2002, p. 93).

Quantitative inquiry is based on gathering measurable evidence, often using large scale sampling or instruments normed on large scale samples. Usually this type of research is concerned with questions such as ‘how much’ or ‘how many’, as well as the determination of causal relationships between events. Inferences from this design are possible but would be deductive in nature, concerned with validity and reliability and the ability to generalize from a sample to a population (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In my research, I chose some quantitative measures such as surveys and reading records, which were normed on large scale samples and which allowed me to numerically measure some constructs related to values, self-concepts and reading ability. I examined whether there was any change over time in these measures among the case study participants over the 6-month duration of this study.

Mixed methods researchers associate another research paradigm, known as constructivism or interpretive research, with qualitative research approaches. This paradigm focuses on “meaning in context” (Merriam, 2009, p. 2) and assumes that reality is socially constructed and that events can be interpreted in numerous ways. Meanings can be varied and multiple, formed through interactions with others and situated in historical and cultural contexts (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In this paradigm, there is an emphasis on inductive methods, arguing from the particular to the general. Qualitative
researchers are interested in understanding how people “interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Therefore, these purposes are well served using case study research. Among others, Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited this naturalist paradigm as being incompatible with post-positivist approaches. However, recognizing that all methods inherently contain biases as well as strengths, the results of one method can develop or inform the other method, as is the case with mixed methods research.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) define mixed model studies as “studies that are products of the pragmatist paradigm and that combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches within different phases of the research process” (p. 19). Definitions of mixed methods research vary among theoreticians in the field. Johnson et al. (2007) provided a wide variety of definitions of mixed methods after soliciting responses from experts in the field: one definition of mixed methods research by Hallie Preskill is

the use of data collection methods that collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Mixed methods research acknowledges that all methods have inherent biases and weaknesses; that using a mixed method approach increases the likelihood that the sum of the data collected will be richer, more meaningful and ultimately more useful in answering the research questions. (as cited in Johnson et al., 2007, p. 121)

Johnson et al. (2007) provide a general definition of mixed methods research as follows:

mixed methods research is the type of research in which the research…combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breath and depth of understanding and corroboration. (p. 123)

Patton (1990) contends that, in mixed methods research, mixing can be at any level of design, data collection and/or analysis. These definitions all converge to support the
argument that mixed method inquiry is an approach to investigating the world that ideally involves more than one methodological tradition and thus more than one way of knowing, along with more than one kind of technique for gathering, analyzing, and representing human phenomena, all for the purpose of better understanding a given phenomena.

The Roots of Mixed Methods Research Purposes

Mixed methods first became a viable research option when Denzin (1978) wrote about methodological triangulation as one of the four basic types of triangulation. The traditional meaning of triangulation is the collection of multiple data sources to enhance the validity of research findings (Mathison, 1988). Denzin (1978) reconceptualised the term triangulation to mean “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” (p. 291). Mixed methods emerged “partially out of triangulation literature, which has commonly been associated with the convergence of results. Nevertheless…an equalitatively important result of combining information from different sources is divergence. This emphasis on divergent results often provides greater insight into complex aspects of a phenomenon” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, p. 9), which is one of the purposes of mixed method research. Later, Greene, Caracelli, and Grahame (1989) identified four further purposes for mixed methodology along with triangulation. These were complementarity (seeking elaboration, enhancement, clarification of results), development (using the results from one method to help inform the other), initiation (discovering paradoxes and contradictions that lead to a rethinking of the research question, and expansion (seeking to expand the breadth of the inquiry by using different methods from different inquiries into the same phenomenon). As is apparent from these
examples, mixed methods can be used for a wide variety of purposes. In addition to these designs, many other mixed methods designs have been posited since the late 1980s (Collins, Onwuegbuzie & Sutton, 2006), all of which involve using mixed methods to optimize or enhance findings.

Mixed methods research is considered a viable third research paradigm in educational research and argues that both quantitative and qualitative methods are important and useful, can be implemented together and are, indeed, compatible (Howe, 1988; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). As is the case in my study, the researcher can be a participant in the social context to collect information but can also use some objective measures that add to the research in multiple ways, by looking at change over time or by measuring constructs based on large scale data. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) state that mixed methods’ logic of inquiry includes “the use of induction (or discovery of patterns), deduction (testing of theories and hypotheses) and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one’s results” (p. 17). The methodology is clearly defined through the different terms used for this approach, including “integrating, synthesis, quantitative and qualitative methods, multimethod and multimethodology” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

I chose mixed methods because, based on my research questions, I wanted to have multiple ways to understand the complex phenomena occurring in this classroom. Mixed methods suited the purpose of my study, allowing me to look at practices, texts, opinions, products and abilities and providing a richer description of early literacy experiences that are shaped by both the students’ practices and the teacher’s pedagogical choices in the context of a resource rich 21st century Grade 1 classroom.
The Research Study

According to Johnson et al. (2007), “qualitative dominant mixed methods research, in which one relies on a qualitative, constructivist-postructuralist-critical view of the research process, while concurrently recognizing that the addition of quantitative data and approaches, are likely to benefit most research projects” (p. 124). In my research, the interpretation of results was inductive in nature but also contained some objective measures that allowed me to look for patterns of meaning that emerged from the variety and range of data collected. The qualitative data collection focused on teacher’s and students’ literacy events and practices. Quantitative data measuring the boys’ self-concept and values around school literacy practices and school progress in reading practices, were collected first. The same data were collected at the end of the 6 months spent in the classroom in order to look at change over time. As well, quantitative data about classroom resources supported an understanding of which resources were valued for learning to read in this Grade 1 classroom. The collection of the quantitative data informed the choice of participants and added to the understanding of the context for the qualitative data collection and the interpretation of results.

Design: Priority and Integration

There are many ways to design mixed methods research. Designs can range from parity to dominance in the choice of qualitative and quantitative methods. The decision about priority regarding one type of data or the other depends on the interests of the researcher, what the investigator chooses to emphasize in the study, as well as the audience for the study (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). In my research, multiple views, events and meanings are explored and I rely heavily on the
constructivist perspective. Therefore, this research is qualitative dominant and is primarily focused on a case study approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In addition, implementation can be sequential or concurrent. Different methods can study different phenomena or the same phenomena within the same study (Jang, course notes, 2008). According to Caracelli and Greene (1997), when mixed methods are used for the purpose of development, researchers “[use] the methods sequentially, such that results from the first method inform the use of the second method” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In my research, I mixed methods sequentially and the main qualitative method was dependent to some extent on the quantitative method for participant selection. However, this was not the only purpose for the quantitative data. I also used quantitative data to embed objective measures about literacy learning: a survey measured the boys’ values and self-concepts about reading and writing, tapping into their own personal attitudes and beliefs. Reading assessments provided quantitative data and this was an important part of the context of literacy pedagogy in this classroom. To ignore this information would have neglected an important data source used by the school and the teacher. The quantitative data also measured progress. Following the administration of the first reading survey and the first writing survey, both surveys and the reading assessment were re-administered at the end of the data collection phase. The results were embedded within the results of the qualitative data. Information about texts used for reading instruction in the form of quantitative data further helped to understand the context for this study. The quantitative data played a secondary role in the design. This design is used when a research question is more thoroughly answered using one dominant methodology. One benefit of using this design in this study is that the quantitative data are being used to answer the same
research questions as the qualitative data, and this is not the case in all mixed methods
designs. An example of this is as follows:

| quantitative | → | QUALITATIVE | → | Interpretation based on QUALITATIVE and quantitative results |

The use of upper case letters demonstrates that the qualitative portion of the research was
the dominant methodology used.

Integration occurred during data collection and at the point of interpretation
(Creswell et al., 2003). Quantitative data were collected in the form of surveys and
reading assessments; whereas qualitative data were collected in the form of observations,
collection of artefacts, transcription of video, analysis of photos, and interviews. Both
types of data contributed to my understanding of the complex processes occurring in the
classroom. Through the use of mixed methods, confidence in the interpretation or
inferences may increase (Greene, 2007) and that was one of the goals of this study.

**Case Study Research**

Case study methodology allowed me to gain in-depth information about students,
parents and the teacher in this classroom. The qualitative case studies were a significant
and central part of my research. Miles and Huberman (1994) think of the case as “a
phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). For the research to be
a case study, one particular phenomenon, in this case a classroom of learners and their
teacher (a bounded system), was selected as the unit of analysis (Duke & Mallette, 2004;
Merriam, 2009).
Case studies examine how individuals make sense of their surroundings through symbols, structures, social structures and social roles (Berg, 2001). According to Merriam (1988), case study research is descriptive and non-experimental, and is effective in exploring the processes and dynamics of practice. The researcher gains a deeper understanding of the topic by spending extended periods of time examining a teaching-learning environment and the participants in the study. Through in-depth case study, the researcher presents a rich description of the events being to enhance understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995).

The participants studied in my research were part of an instrumental case study. I chose Jan Sharp’s (a pseudonym) class and the boys in Jan’s class because they provided the context to best understand the theoretical research questions (Berg, 2001; Stake, 1995). Stake (2005) says that an instrumental case study “is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue…the case facilitates our understanding of something else” (p. 437). In my research, the case studies helped me understand how literacy learning is defined and valued in this school, which literacy events and practices the boys were engaged in and what the dominant features were of these practices, as well as the teacher’s pedagogical practices. In-depth analysis was carried out by gathering data on the teacher, the school and home literacy practices of the four student participants in the bounded case in order to understand more about these complex phenomena.

My case study research is also a collective case study because, for example, I examined the literacy practices of four boys in order to study the phenomenon associated with literacy practices in this class. The patterns and trends were observed across four cases in one setting, rather then just one case. The hope was that, by looking at more than
one case, the results would provide a wider view than would a single case study (Miles & Huberman, 1994), as the boys functioned in a similar context and the patterns and trends I found could be applied to understand the research questions. Idiosyncracies in any one case could be contrasted with patterns in the others.

By using multiple sources of evidence and having some of the data reviewed by the key informant (such as the quantitative data as well as reviewing video and interview notes), in addition to looking at patterns across cases, the results were more compelling and more accurate (Yin, 1994). As suggested by Yin (1994) and Merriam (1988), I spent 6 months in the classroom in order to ensure that I witnessed patterns and not singular events.

One of the major goals of this research was to further my understanding of the complex context of a 21st century Grade 1 classroom (Duke & Mallette, 2004). As well, I was hoping to explore how certain factors interact to affect literate practices in this classroom. As Yin (1994) argues, case studies can be used for description, explanation and exploration and, therefore, case study research clearly fit the purposes of this research study.

**Selecting the Teacher–Participant and Research Site**

For my research study, I purposefully chose a classroom and teacher based on a recommendation from a university professor and a day of observation in the classroom about 6 months prior to the start of my research. As Patton (1990) explains, “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned”
I was interested in studying a class that had a wide variety of multimodal resources, including electronic multimedia texts available for teaching and learning (NLG, 1996). This class was chosen in order to observe a resource rich Grade 1 classroom and a teacher who held certain core beliefs that supported the context for this research.

**Teacher beliefs.**

During my initial visit to the school, I spoke to the teacher about her beliefs. The teacher defined text as “anything that they’re using to communicate…text is very broad for me”. The teacher used a wide variety of multimodal texts in her instruction. The teacher used digital technology more than any other teacher in the primary department at this school. She provided access to multimedia resources for the boys in her class. On the day of my preliminary visit, the boys were engaged in literacy centres in small groups, studying the inquiry theme of structures. The boys were working at the interactive whiteboard and classroom computers, listening to stories on CDs, reading books and doing art activities in the classroom. Talk surrounded the literacy practices in the classroom.

When I discussed how she constructed learning experiences for her students, the teacher eagerly shared that she considered individual learners in her planning. She took the interests of the students into account prior to planning and allowed the students to be active participants in the learning process through their choices of texts, both oral and written, and how they used those texts. During the first visit, she told me that she gets to know her students before she plans. She finds out their interests through discussions and observations. She finds out what they like to read at home, what computer programs they
have used and what stories and characters they enjoy and are interested in. She told me she incorporates that information into her planning.

Based on other factors (including the welcoming environment and the school and teacher’s willingness to allow me access to the class) along with my day of observation, I believed that this teacher would be a suitable participant for this research. I was happy to meet a teacher who was open to sharing her beliefs and understandings about teaching and learning. I thought her ideas about incorporating the boys’ interests into her instruction were important. I also thought her ideas demonstrated that she would be open to designing literacy events that took into account the particular learners in her class.

The class I studied was at an all-boys private school in an upper middle class area of a large metropolitan city. There were 19 boys in this class. Although the boys were from high socio-economic backgrounds, they were from diverse cultural backgrounds and had a variety of varied learning styles and needs in the area of literacy. The research took place over a 6-month period during which I visited the school 2 days each week in the mornings. In total, I visited the school more than 50 times.

The school.

There are two divisions in this school: a preparatory school from Senior Kindergarten to Grade 7 with more than 400 boys and an Upper School from Grade 8 to Grade 12 with about 700 boys. During my preliminary visit, it became apparent that both the classroom and the school were rich in resources. I was told that the boys participated weekly in music classes in a designated music room, art classes using a variety of media and woodworking in a special lab for a block of time. They attended technology classes
They visited the large library weekly. The boys had gym everyday for 1 hour with a specialized gym teacher, as well as 2 half-hour supervised recess times.

**A Place of Access and Privilege**

From the pristine and expansive grounds to the sports facilities to the extraordinary print, digital, curricular and human resources, this school provided every possibility for the success of these boys. The tuition for this school was close to $30,000/year per student. These are boys who come from high socio-economic backgrounds and must pass entrance exams in order to be admitted to this prestigious school. These Grade 1 boys were the descendants of the political, cultural and business elite in Canada and around the world. But they were also 6-year-old boys coming to school to learn.

**The international baccalaureate curriculum.**

The curriculum at this school is based on a combination of the Ontario Curriculum and the curriculum of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), which offers a Primary Years Programme (PYP) for students aged 3 to 12. The authorization for International Baccalaureate (IB) certification is intensive and is designed to ensure that school is prepared to successfully implement the programme. Certification also involves the payment of substantial yearly fees, however, IBO is a not-for-profit organization. The fees cover a wide range of core services offered to school staff and faculty to enhance the implementation of the IB curriculum, which includes planners, access to units and professional development. The PYP claims to focus on the development of the whole child as an inquirer, both in the classroom and in the world.
outside. According to the IB website, the most significant and distinctive feature of the IB Primary Years Programme is the six transdisciplinary themes.

According to the IBO, these themes are about issues that have meaning for, and are important to, people all over the world. The programme offers a balance between learning about or through the subject areas, and learning beyond them. The programme has an international flavour because the “six themes of global significance create a transdisciplinary framework that allows students to "step up" beyond the confines of learning within subject areas”. The themes are:

- Who we are
- Where we are in place and time
- How we express ourselves
- How the world works
- How we organize ourselves
- Sharing the planet

The programme incorporates the six-transdisciplinary themes surrounding six subject areas, which are language, social studies, mathematics, arts, science, and personal/social development, which includes physical education.
The PYP curriculum framework is further structured around three interrelated questions.

- What do we want to learn? *The written curriculum.*
- How best will we learn? *The taught curriculum.*
- How will we know what we have learned? *The assessed curriculum.*

These three elements of the PYP programme are comparable to what would be found in provincial school curricular programs. There is no formal standardized IB assessment in the Grade 1 programme, although there are external assessments implemented at the high school level.

The IB aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end, the IBO works with schools, governments and international
organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. The IB’s claim is that these programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand other people and their differences.

From my observations at this school, the IB program emphasizes learner attributes and a focus on “structured inquiry” as a vehicle for learning. The following are the learner attributes:

- Inquirers
- Thinkers
- Communicators
- Risk-takers
- Knowledgeable
- Principled
- Caring
- Open-minded
- Well-balanced
- Reflective

School planning in the IB framework.

According to the plans for curriculum implementation developed by staff at this school, the purpose of the inquiry is determined by brainstorming a central idea, key concepts and lines of inquiry. Teacher questions address the key concepts and are crucial to the inquiry. Concept-based questions are used to explore curricular themes and to help students to make significant connections through inquiry around their questions. Teachers
consider the learner attributes in their planning. The planning at this school also involves large teams of teachers who brainstormed together which assessment experiences are best suited for the inquiry, the learning experiences that best address the central question and lines of inquiry and resources required. Teachers complete a reflection of the whole unit of study after the unit is complete, and the units are continually updated, both by the teacher and the team, which is then accessible to all members of the school staff and staff in other schools in one virtual location (www.rubiconatlas.com). This allows teachers, coordinators and administrators to collaborate on and evaluate their programs and facilitates collaboration among teachers across subjects, grades and schools.

**The Participants**

**The Teacher**

Jan is an energetic 35-year-old teacher. She grew up and was educated in a small town in Ontario. She did her undergraduate degree at a large university in Toronto, with a major in English and a minor in drama. Jan also studied ballet for 15 years. She worked 1 year in business to save money for teacher’s college and that was her first real exposure to the possibilities of technology. She attended teacher’s college outside Toronto, and then taught a Grade 3/4 split and a Grade 4/5 split in a large Public Board of Education. She then applied to teach overseas and chose to go to Asia, where she taught for 2 years and trained in the IB programme. When she returned from Asia in 2004, she knew she only wanted to teach in an IB school and applied to teach at this school, where she was immediately accepted. Since 2004, Jan has taught 3 years of Grade 4 and had two maternity leaves. This was her second year teaching Grade 1. She had been at this school for 7 years and, in 2011, was the first primary teacher awarded the role of drama lead
teacher at the school. Jan was a very enthusiastic teacher, and she was very committed to her students and their learning. She was excited about the possibilities for teaching given the wide range of resources available at her school, and she worked hard to learn to use them. For example, Jan was the only early years teacher with an interactive digital table in her classroom; however, she did share it with other teachers who wanted to try to utilize it.

**The Parents**

The four focal students for this research study all lived in a home with both their mother and father and, in each case, the parents were married. Two of the mothers (Ivan’s and Steven’s) were involved with parent teacher council. The parents of the four boys in the case studies shared information through questionnaires filled out on line (see Appendix F). As well, I examined the four families’ questionnaires given by the school at parent teacher conferences (see Appendix G).

**Choosing the Students for the Case Studies**

The four boys were chosen for the case studies based on a number of factors. The first factor was the quantitative data from the reading survey and the quantitative data from the Fountas and Pinnell reading assessments (2011). I looked at those scores to see the range of thinking and developing achievement in the class. I was looking for a diverse sample within the larger group and wanted to use reading achievement to guide my selection.

I administered the first part of a modified literacy survey, the Reading/Writing Survey (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). This instrument was modified by
deleting the conversational interview and by creating a writing survey based on the reading survey in the profile. I administered the reading survey to the whole class in order to gather baseline data on each student’s self-concept as a reader and the value the student placed on reading (see Appendix D). I used this information as one criterion to guide my selection of the students for the case study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). I considered the boys with the lowest scores, the boys with the highest scores and two boys with average scores. This survey information, along with reading data from the teacher’s standardized reading assessment and writing samples from the boys which she assessed for writing skills, abilities and knowledge, was some of the data that informed the choice of the boys for the case studies. I then collected other information such as information about cultural backgrounds, levels of performance in reading/writing tasks in the classroom, ranges of ages and variety of home languages. I then combined this information and had a conversation with the teacher about which boys I would like to choose for the case studies. I then purposively selected four diverse case study participants for further study.

Specifically, I chose these four students using information from the first phase to study in depth (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). I then administered the writing portion of this survey to the four case study participants to collect further quantitative data. Through these data as well as observations and interviews, information was collected as to how the students viewed their own literate identities, literacy practices at school and at home and how they consumed and created texts.

This survey data were compared to the quantitative reading data collected by the teacher to see links between achievement and other aspects of reading. For this survey,
the whole class participated. The self-concept scores ranged from scores of 15–38. The value of reading scores ranged from 12–40. The full scores ranged from 27–77. The assessed reading levels of the boys in the class ranged from Level C (end of SK) to Level M (mid-Grade 3). All names are replaced by pseudonyms. Therefore, all participants remain completely anonymous. The participants’ test results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Participants’ Assessment and Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Self-concept as reader /40</th>
<th>Value of reading /40</th>
<th>Full score /80</th>
<th>Assessed reading level (as of beginning of October 2010)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giano</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the boys who scored high, low and average on the survey, I balanced reading and writing proficiency based on the teacher’s input. I chose three out of the four boys because their parents spoke a language at home other the English. There were no English language learners in this class. I learned later that three of the four boys’ parents were fluently bilingual. Two of the four boys understood their parents’ home language but didn’t speak it fluently. One of the boys spoke both the home language and English fluently. I chose boys with a range of interest levels and self-concepts. I chose boys at a variety of ages. I chose an only child, one boy who is the oldest of two and two boys who are the youngest of two. I tried to get the most varied sample I could from the class of 19 boys. I also consulted with the classroom teacher when deciding on the boys for the case
study. When the choice was between two boys, she suggested the boy whose parents would probably be open to completing a questionnaire or sharing their thoughts/feeling about literacy learning and their sons.

Ivan.

Ivan is a blond boy with blue eyes, born in July, 2004. He was born in Russia. Ivan is an only child. He speaks Russian fluently and attends Russian school on the weekends to learn to read and write Russian, as well as weekend French school to learn a third language. According to his parents, Ivan’s main interests were drawing, Lego, sports and looking through his books and magazines. Ivan scored the highest on both measures of the reading survey and was among the most proficient readers in the class.

Giano.

Giano is an outgoing and confident boy, born in December 2004. He is the younger of two boys. His older brother is 9 years old and in Grade 4. Giano’s father is Filipino and speaks Tagalog. Giano’s mother speaks Macedonian. Giano says that he speaks “Canadian” at home. Giano makes comments like “I’m done. I’m perfect”. Jan commented to me that Giano’s brother is a strong, academic kid and that Giano “has to live up to something”. According to his mom, Giano’s main interests at home were playing, Lego and video games (including the Wii, IPod and Playstation). Giano scored average on the reading survey, and was among the least proficient readers in the class.

Steven.

Steven was born in April 2004. He is the younger of two boys. His older brother is in Grade 3. His dad is Indian and speaks an Indian language. His mom speaks Iranian.
Steven speaks English at home. His religion is Baha’i and he told me during a small group art activity at December holiday time “I’m the only one in the class that is Baha’i”. According to his parents, Steven spends his spare time playing soccer, playing on the Wii and reading. Steven scored the lowest on the reading survey, and was an average reader according to standardized reading assessment.

**Austin.**

Austin was born in September 2004 and was the older of two boys. He had a 4-year-old brother that he talked about all the time. Austin’s parents were both Canadian and the family spoke English at home. Austin was very small and appeared younger then 6 years old. He would often cry, lose his personal belongings, and become distracted during lessons, wandering away to play with something at his desk. According to his mom, Austin enjoyed playing with his younger brother and the neighbours as well as hockey and skiing. Austin scored average on the reading survey and was an average reader in the class.

**Researcher as Participant–Observer**

In order to contextualize the study further, I included information about myself as a participant-observer explaining why my research questions are important to me and what knowledge I bring to this study.

The question of bias of the researcher was a concern. Although I hoped to remain unbiased, I have almost 20 years of experience teaching and working with students in reading and writing instruction, especially the “hardest to teach” students in Grade 1. I am a trained Reading Recovery teacher and I taught Reading Recovery for 4 years, as
well as having taught SK, Grade 1 and Grade 2 throughout my career. I was a private school administrator for 2 years, supervising teachers and students from Nursery to Grade 1. I also spent the last 10 years of my career researching, using and authoring texts for primary reading instruction. Therefore, I may have certain biases and assumptions about the teacher’s approach to literacy instruction that influence my data collection and analysis.

I reported my observations as fully and accurately as possible. I also did a member check with the teacher to represent her views as closely as possible. I would also hope that my knowledge about this context helped me understand what happens in a Grade 1 classroom in a fuller way. I might observe things outsiders would miss because I know how early years classrooms generally function, the types of instructional strategies and texts traditionally used, and I can also compare best practices to the practices in this classroom.

The Data Collection Process

This research study was carried out in two phases. The two data sets measured different aspects of the same phenomena to create a better understanding of the phenomena being studied and create a comprehensive picture (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Greene, 2007). Through interviews, conversations, collection of artefacts, photos, transcription of videos and participants’ further completion of surveys and questionnaires, I explored the local context to understand and examine the teaching and learning in this Grade 1 classroom.
Figure 2 is an overview of my research design and shows the two phases of the research, implemented sequentially, along with the data collection approaches in both phases.

![Graphic illustrating mixed methods research design](image)

*Figure 2. Graphic illustrating mixed methods research design (based on Greene, 2007).*

**The First Phase**

The first phase, which took approximately one month, consisted of observations and collection of general qualitative data about the school setting and the classroom setting. I also gathered specific quantitative data (e.g., survey data, reading and writing data, resources data) about the boys and the class. The survey data were collected in order to understand the boys’ thoughts about the value of reading and their self-concept as readers. I thought these data were important in order to begin to understand the boys’ perceptions about literacy. The reading data were gathered in order to understand the
teacher’s groupings and the teacher spoke about this data often when discussing the boys’ literacy learning. I gathered information about the texts available in this classroom in order to understand the types and forms of texts available in this school context. I also talked informally with the teacher and completed ongoing observations of student and teacher literacy practices to understand the setting, beliefs and understandings and how texts are used or neglected by the teacher and students in this classroom.

During the first month of this research study, I observed the whole class. I asked the teacher questions about the boys, and I immersed myself in the classroom, learning the routines, learning about the school and establishing myself as a member of the classroom and school community. I met many of the teachers, visited classrooms and ate lunch in the staff lunchroom a number of times. Jan was extremely welcoming to me and some of the other teachers in the primary program offered to have me visit their classrooms too. I met the head of the Centre for Learning, a department that supports students with diverse learning needs. I attended curriculum night at the school in September 2010, and was introduced to the parents. I participated with the boys in some activities such as reading to them or helping them with an activity, however, during the first month, I mostly observed. Initially, through interviews with Jan, I was also trying to understand the ways she instructed as a reflection of her understandings and beliefs regarding literacy. I had informal conversations with the teaching assistant in the classroom, the student teacher, the boys and with Jan.

I interviewed the teacher to understand her beliefs about her learners and perceptions about their literate identities and about her own literacy practices. I also asked many questions about how/why she uses particular texts and literacy practices in
the classroom. I constantly revised and tailored specific questions based on what was happening in the classroom.

**The Second Phase**

The quantitative information from the survey as well as initial classroom observations were used to inform the sampling and implementation of the second phase. These two types of data provided two different ways of looking at the context, educational setting and participants in this study.

Through parent questionnaires and observations and interviews with students and the teacher, a case study of each of the students was completed in order to further understand how the participants understood the social context, communities, practice and purposes for learning in their classroom.

The teacher’s beliefs and practices as well as the expectations of the school and local community impacted how the students engaged in many varied literacy practices/events in this classroom. Literacy events are defined as “activities where literacy has a role…usually there is a written text, or texts, central to the activity and there may be talk around the text” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). Literacy events are “observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them” (Barton & Hamilton, 1999, p. 8). An example of a specific literacy event would be spelling and word work, where the student or group of students engage in a variety of practices such as working on an assigned word work activity on the interactive whiteboard or gathering together around a large chart paper to brainstorm words, or recording words in response to a prompt by or discussion with the teacher. Heath (1982) defines literacy events as
“any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes” (p. 93). Therefore, a focus on literacy events is practical in the context of this observational study. It is also important to include the notion of literacy practices in these results. Literacy practices are what people do with literacy, “but they are not necessarily observable since they also involve attitudes, feelings and social relationships” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 7). An example of this is the practices involved in independent reading: students participate in the literacy practice as they choose a text based on their understanding of their own competency, social and cultural goals, interests and relationships with others. Not all of these elements are observable but the event of choosing the text, reading independently and voicing comments are all observable practices within this literacy event. Literacy practices themselves are contextualized in the relations between people within a community of learners and cannot be fully understood by examining activities and tasks. For these reasons, I collected and then analyzed the results through the lens of “literacy as a social practice”, which links the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they occur.

Based on this understanding of literacy events and practices, I collected many artefacts, including writing samples, drawings, school documents (newsletters, e-mails to parents, e-mails from parents, curriculum outlines), examples of use of multiple media and reading records/report cards. I used audio-recordings, digital photography, video-recording and field notes to observed and collect data, which I present in a more detailed form in each sub-section below. During each visit to the classroom, I followed one or two boys in the case study (and the rest of their group). My focus during all of these
observations was to study the boys’ choices and interactions and record my observations as well as their comments and conversations.

Additionally, I participated in two planning meetings: one with the teacher and the other with Centre for Learning teacher when they were reviewing the spelling program. I attended another planning meeting in March. This was a deep planning session with Jan, ten teachers and the headmaster. In that meeting, the PYP planner was used and the teachers collaboratively planned the next inquiry unit because Jan wanted to change it from the previous year’s unit. I interacted with parents at times when they volunteered in the class. I also sent an e-mail to the parents of the four case study boys asking permission for them to participate in the questionnaire. I was able to obtain a clear understanding of the school and the classroom, which were the contexts and setting for this study. The data sources are described in greater detail in the following sections.

Quantitative Data

Reading and writing surveys.

A survey provides a quantitative or numeric description of attitudes or opinions. I chose this survey because of the ease of use and the ability to collect different types of data from the survey. The survey I chose to administer assessed children’s self-concepts as readers and writers and the value they see in reading and writing (see Appendix D). I modified a survey which was created to assess motivation to read. I thought this was valuable as “students who are motivated to read are self-determining and generate their own reading opportunities. They “want to read and choose to read for a wide range of personal reasons such as curiosity, involvement, social interchange and emotional satisfaction” (Gambrell et al., 1996, p. 518). The quantitative data were used to check
progress over the 6 months in the classroom. The reading surveys gave a full-scale mark, which I recorded. The survey is highly individualized. The instrument consists of twenty items and uses a four-point response scale. The survey employed a four-point response scale to avoid neutral, central response patterns. A 4-point scale worked well for elementary students as there is some evidence to suggest that young children have difficulty simultaneously discriminating between more than five discrete categories (Case & Khanna, 1981; Nitko, 1983). The items that focused on self-concept as a reader are designed to elicit information about students’ self-perceived competence in reading and self-perceived performance relative to peers. The value of reading items are designed to elicit information about the value students place on reading tasks and activities, particularly in terms of frequency of engagement and reading related activities (Gambrell et al., 1996, p. 522). These measures are positively correlated to level of reading achievement.

I only used the parts of the survey that supported the selection of the case study students: how they felt about themselves as readers/writers and the value they placed on their practices. In each case, the boys were prompted prior to beginning the survey to think about a wide variety of texts they might read and write. We brainstormed together the types of texts they might read (e-mails, text on the computer and the blog, reading on the cell phone, reading books, magazines) and texts they might write (letters, stories, e-mails, sentences, printing in their printing books, spelling, scripts). I did this for each part of the survey and every time I administered it.

Since the participants were in Grade 1, I read each question to the boys one at a time and read each possible response, prompting them to think of the best answer. I then
read each question again, and asked them to fill in the space beside the best answer. This format was suggested in the teacher directions for administration. In order to avoid repetition in the presentation of the response alternatives, some responses were listed from least to most positive and some were ordered in the opposite way.

**Quantitative data from reading assessments.**

Based on expectations set by the school, the teacher collected data on the boys’ reading skills using reading records in the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment system (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). The boys were given levelled text to read and then each boy’s level, fluency, comprehension, self-correction rate and accuracy was recorded by the teacher using a reading record. This information was used to guide the groupings of the boys for guided reading as well as groupings for the literacy centres. I used that data to support my choice of boys for the case studies and to understand how the boys were grouped in the classroom. This assessment was considered when the teacher made decisions about parts of the literacy program in this class.

The reading assessments were done in October and again in March. The second set of assessments was completed by me because Jan was not scheduled to do another reading assessment until third term and I wanted to look at actual change over time based on the initial reading data. The level was determined by calculating the number of errors (substitutions, omissions or insertions) made during oral reading, based on the number of words read. The fluency rate was based on a key, which gave criteria for behaviours that lead to a score of between 0 and 3. For example, a score of 0 was given in fluency if the student “reads primarily word-by-word with occasional but infrequent or inappropriate phrasing; no smooth or expressive interpretation, irregular pausing, and no attention to
author’s meaning or punctuation, no stress or inappropriate stress, and slow rate”
(Fountas & Pinnell, 2011, p. 72). A score of 3 would be assigned if the student reads
primarily in larger, meaningful phrases or word groups, and the reading is mostly smooth
with expressive interpretation and pausing guided by author’s meaning and punctuation.
The student must demonstrate appropriate stress and rate with only a few slowdowns
(Fountas & Pinnell, 2011).

A comprehension score was also assigned based on a key. The instructions
included in this assessment ask the teacher to have a conversation with the student, noting
key understandings expressed. Prompts were used to stimulate discussion. A score was
given for evidence of all understandings expressed, with or without a prompt. A score of
0 indicated no understanding of the text where the student either does not respond or talks
off the topic. A score of 3 reflects excellent understanding of the text, where the student
includes almost all important and main ideas. A separate score was given for
understandings “beyond the text, leading to grouped score that was correlated with words
such as excellent, satisfactory, limited or unsatisfactory.

Qualitative Data

Observations.

Classroom observations were an important part of this research and gave me the
opportunity to have firsthand experiences with the participants. Observations take place
in the setting where the phenomenon of interest naturally occurs (Merriam, 2009). As is
often the case in the real world of data collection, conversations and interview were
occurring simultaneously with observations. I visited the classroom twice a week for 6
months, observing a total of 80 literacy events in the classroom. This was in addition to
my classroom observations and pre-meeting with the teacher, attendance at curriculum
night and attendance at teacher meetings. I observed each of the boys at different times,
focusing on one or two of the boys at a time during my observations. In total, I visited the
school more than 50 times. Through transcription of video which recorded activities in
the classroom, I was able to record exact dialogue. Through photos, I was able to capture
students working individually and in large and small groups as they participated in a
variety of practices in the classroom. Classroom observations included descriptions of the
physical setting, the participants, activities and interactions, observation of instructional
times, peer–peer interactions and student–teacher interactions as well as observations of
how students interacted with the wide variety of texts they used, consumed and produced
in the classroom.

**Interviews.**

I conducted semistructured interviews with all of the participants in the case
study. According to Patton (2002), “researchers interview people to find out from them
those things we cannot directly observe…feelings, thoughts and intentions. The purpose
of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (pp. 340–
341). Therefore, in addition to my observations, I interviewed that participants about past
events, their thoughts and opinions which allowed me to explore perspectives, attitudes
and beliefs.

My interviews were often informal. I asked open-ended questions and I was
flexible with the course of the interview. I ran the interviews more like conversations. I
prompted the participants with questions that were designed to further my understanding
of my observations or were based on clarifying data that related to my research questions.
Each of the case study participants were interviewed once early in the data collection process and then conversations took place periodically throughout the observations. The teacher was interviewed many times. We sat together at lunch about once a week and I asked questions to clarify issues that were generated from my data. I began the interviews with a number of questions that were open ended in nature. The responses to these questions led the interview in different directions, depending on the responses from the teacher or the students. In order to enhance theoretical sensitivity, I asked questions such as who, when, where, what, how, how much and why? Sample teacher questions included:

- How do you consider your individual learners in your planning?
- In your view, what is a literate identity?
- Do you think that a student’s literate identity is an important part of how they learn?
- How do you define text?
- How do you determine which texts your students will use in the classroom?
- How do you know what they’re interested in?
- Tell me about your spelling program

Sample student questions included:

- What kinds of things do you write?
- Why do you think you’re a good writer?
- What do you do during guided reading? What types of activities do you work on?
- Why do you think…?
- How did you know…?
The student interviews were semistructured because, although I was flexible during the interview, I asked each participant the same guiding questions in order to further my understandings based on my research questions. Observations were transcribed and recorded in dated charts.

**Artefacts.**

Artefacts or documents are an available, easily accessible physical materials which contributed to the information collected in the case study. Artefacts are “things” or objects in the environment” (Merriam, 2009). I collected samples of student work as a source of qualitative data that enabled me to access and illustrate the text produced by the participants as individuals and as part of the classroom community. I collected artefacts that included students’ writing, students’ artwork, photos of students engaged in activities, computer printouts of work from the four case study students, blog entries, curriculum documents, planning documents, samples of reading records, screen shots from the interactive whiteboard, DVDs of class presentations, report cards, student and parent reflections and e-mails sent by the school to parents and students.

**Parent questionnaires.**

The parents of each case study participant received an open-ended questionnaire which they filled out and returned to me by e-mail. Based on feedback from the teacher, I determined that the parents did not wish to be interviewed in the home, nor did they wish to have home visits. Therefore, I structured questions for the questionnaire that I hoped would give me insight into the boys’ home literacy practices and interests, the types of texts used at home, parents’ views of literacy practices in school and their values related to school and home literacy. Questions included:
Think of all the resources your child has at home for reading and writing. Please list as many as you can.

Do you read with your son at home? What do you read?

Do you write with your son at home? What do you write?

If you had to choose your son’s three main interests, what would they be?

What kind of technology does your child use at home? How does he use it?

Specifically, what activities are done at school that, in your opinion, are most helpful in developing your son’s literacy?

What is your definition of successful literacy learning in Grade 1?

What activities are done at home that, in your opinion, are most valuable in developing your son’s literacy?

What demonstration so literacy learning (either at school or home) are you most excited about?

In addition to the parent questionnaires, some correspondence between the teacher and the parents was provided to me as another artefact for consideration and the correspondence offers some insight into parents’ thinking.

**Parent–teacher conferences: Interviews with the teacher.**

In order to gain an understanding about how information is shared with parents and how parents share information with the school, I interviewed Jan about the parent–teacher conferences, which occur in October and February. In October, the parents came into the school and filled out a survey which asked about their child (see Appendix G) and then each family met with the teacher and the teacher reviewed strengths, areas to work on, next steps and made notes about the interview. I was able to copy these surveys and add them to my field notes. In February, there was a different type of interview. Each
conference took about 45 minutes. The boys went into the auditorium with their moms and dads for 15 minutes and talked about their portfolios (a collection of work from the class). Then, there was a conference between the child, parent and teacher for 15 minutes. The students then went back with their parents, set goals and did a reflection for 15 minutes.

Prior to parent-teacher conferences, Jan did some observations and mini-assessments and filled out a sheet that gave a snapshot of the child, in order to guide the conference. Jan gathered general observations about listening/participating, snack/lunch, routines, information about reading, writing, math and inquiry and other (e.g., art/music). The approximate reading level was noted on the interview form and shared with parents.

Data Analysis

Quantitative

Surveys and reading assessments.

All 19 boys in the class completed the reading survey. All the surveys were done on the same day. The quantitative part of the data analysis was done following the prescribed scoring procedures by the authors of the reading survey. I then created a table of the survey data and compared the scores of all the students in the class them. For the first administration of the reading survey, data were compared amongst all the boys in the class. The writing survey was administered to the four boys in the case study. The pre and post results for all surveys enriched the case study data by giving a measure of progress over time. The data from these surveys were compared among the case study participants.
This quantitative data were also combined with information from other qualitative data to provide a richer understanding of the boys in the case studies.

**Classroom Books**

I counted and classified the classroom books used for reading instruction. These books were used for home reading and were accessed by the boys each day as part of the home reading program. There were many other books in the classroom used for research, read-alouds and browsing. The boys also had access to many digital texts during literacy events. However, the books listed were used for a particular purpose. I examined these findings to support a richer description of the influences on students’ literacy practices and events and which books were valued in the classroom and the school.

**Qualitative**

Collection and analysis of qualitative data was a simultaneous process during this research. The design was emergent and primarily interpretive and, therefore, observations and interviews were based on ideas that emerged throughout the research. First, data were analyzed through open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which allowed me to develop coding categories. After each classroom visit, I transcribed the videotapes, interviews and conversations. I also reviewed the still images in the photos and labelled them with keywords. I coded the data from each visit to look for key concepts by writing notes in the margins of the transcripts and looking for common categories. With my research questions in mind, I highlighted and circled repeated words and phrases, making notes about possible larger themes in the margins of the transcripts. I attached keywords to the still photos which were downloaded into a photo-organizing program.
After the first attempts at coding the data, I had more than fifty different codes or keywords. I continued to look for themes, patterns, findings and questions on the transcripts about the class, teacher and the four case study participants. I shared ideas with Jan, checking for plausibility and accurate interpretation. I generated interview questions and conversation prompts from my data from the previous visit. As I acquired new data, I compared this information with previously coded data looking for developing patterns and constantly revisited these codes throughout the time I was collecting data. Data, including observations, interviews, artefacts and photos were reviewed and coded using constant comparative methods (Merriam, 1988). Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, these codes were eventually combined and reduced as themes and then sorted into categories. I conducted an iterative inductive thematic analysis, constantly revising coding categories (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) throughout the period of data collection.

Following the data collection period, there was an intensive period of analysis when tentative findings were revised, revisited and changed. Afterwards, a list of categories was generated that represented my understanding of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used an Excel spreadsheet to organize the data according to categories found in the data and that linked to my theoretical frameworks and other possible representations of the data based on what I observed. I counted the number of occurrences of the data and what each occurrence represented. Finally, I sorted my findings to create the table that appears in Appendix H and is the basis for my results.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) say that when categories are reduced and combined they could be reduced to five or six themes. The six themes which resulted
from my analysis made sense based on the data and were responsive to the needs of the research. The themes that emerged were:

1. **Types of literacies**: The literacies were defined as traditional print literacies or new literacies and were counted each time they occurred. Many events involved both types of literacies and they were counted as both in those cases.

2. **Teaching/learning relationship**: This involved analyzing the data for instances of immersion in practices, overt or explicit instruction, transformed practice which included application of skills and knowledge to new contexts and, finally, critical framing in which critical focus was observed in a lesson or interaction.

3. **Collaboration**: This was an examination of the interactions between participants in the study and in the classroom setting.

4. **Texts and tools used**: This theme examined when images, video, digital print, integrated digital text, oral, traditional tools, digital tools and speech were used during literacy events/practices.

5. **Topics driving the events/practices**: I examined the data for evidence of self/family, pop culture or curriculum-based indicators in the data and in the content of the literacy events.

6. **Embedded influences**: I examined the data for evidence of influences on the practices. The data were coded according to the influence of school, parents, teacher and peers. There were overlapping influences in many practices and, therefore, the data were coded for more than one influence at a time.
Validity and Reliability

Inter-Rater Reliability

Since I am the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, I asked a colleague who is a consultant in early literacy education to assist me in enhancing the validity of the data analysis. She participated willingly in her role as a second rater. I debriefed her on the codes and categories, and asked her to determine the categories for the first thirty pages of the data based on the practices/events I had determined from the data. Therefore, approximately 15–20% of the data were rated by two individuals in order to establish inter-rater reliability. Some samples would be:

- Embedded influences
- Types of literacies
- Teaching/learning relationship

I did not expect tools/mediated by text to be subjective, however, the second rater did see oral language in some areas where I did not within a given literacy event, as she assumed there must be an oral component involved in that event. Through our conversations, it became apparent that some practices had “implied” uses or categories. For example, in small group work, it was implied that the teacher believed that the learning would be mediated by oral language, whether or not that was directly articulated. At that point, the second rater chose to include oral language as a tool that would be implied in that teacher practice.

In the area of collaboration, the second rater assumed more peer-peer interaction, for example in spelling practices, than I did. She assumed that, in a classroom, peers influence all practices—even those that look to be within the individual—and that gave
me a different perspective on the data. We both agreed that certain practices had situated purposes within the classroom.

The second rater also chose to categorize some data related to a guided reading session as “assigned reading”, rather then having “guided reading” as a separate category. Her ratings of the practice were almost identical to mine. I chose to include that practice in “assigned reading”.

In the instances where there was disagreement between the raters, consensus was reached through in-depth discussion. Some of the codes were simple to analyze as the characteristic itself dictated a particular method of analysis, and there was little or no subjective judgment attached to the assignment of a number. The inter-rater reliability on the first 30 pages of the data was greater than 85%.

**Member Checks**

I discussed data and tentative interpretations with Jan. I checked to see if my interpretation of the data meshed with Jan’s interpretation. I found that when I asked too many questions about the data, Jan began doubting her practice. She thought I was asking questions to challenge her rather then to clarify practices. Therefore, part way through the data collection, I was careful to clarify that I was asking questions to make sure my interpretation of the data was correct.

**Trustworthiness**

Standard means of judging trustworthiness were considered and this was an important consideration when choosing to employ multiple methods of data collection and long-term observation in the classroom. Preliminary interviews with the teacher and
case study participants were important in order to understand students’ definition of text and the teacher’s views of terms that would be used throughout the study such as “text”, “identity” or “literacy”.

There is some concern about depth vs. scope in order to produce generalizable results from this study. The qualitative data provided depth so some generalizability would be possible and, hopefully, increase the significance of this work (Stake, 2000). Of course, the specificity of the context limits generalizability somewhat. The purpose of this study, however, was to begin to understand the range and variation of ways the students are using literacy in the 21st century in this classroom. It is important to keep in mind Dyson’s (1995) notion that the purpose of case studies is not to generalize findings but to offer insight into the complex processes.
CHAPTER 4:
RESULTS

The results are presented throughout the chapter in order to give the reader a sense of who the teacher and the boys are, the types of interactions they engage in and some insight into their thinking about literacy. First I share information about the setting, the resource rich environment for learning and the participants in this study, particularly the teacher and the boys. Next, I focus on the literacy events and practices I observed within this class, based on the themes and categories generated from my analysis.

It is important to understand the context of this classroom, which includes a multitude and variety of resources available to this teacher and these learners as the context for the results as they are presented in this chapter. All of the evidence cited was taken from surveys and questionnaires, field notes of observations, transcripts from interviews and videos, and information from photos and artefacts. The literacy events and practices in this classroom are mediated by a wide variety of texts and tools, they are collaborative and use many different communication modalities. They are based on themes driven by the school’s curriculum and values and by the boys interests and are influenced by the social and cultural stakeholders in the education of these boys.

The Classroom

This Grade 1 classroom of 19 boys was located between a Grade 2 class and a Grade 3 class in a primary hallway. There was a teaching assistant (TA), working in the Grade 1 class all year. She came into the class each day after recess and stayed until lunch. This was the time of day when literacy activities occurred in the class as
designated by the classroom schedule. As well, there was a student teacher in the room full time until the end of October.

All the boys are dressed in a school uniform: a navy polo, grey slacks and black dress shoes. As I walked into the room, I saw small shelves with individual student bins on one side with slots for the boys’ agendas, which were supplied by the school. On the first page of the agenda, next to each boy’s name, was his login to the school’s e-mail and computer programs, as well as his password to access school information. On the other side of the entrance to the classroom was another set of cubbies where each boy had a bin to keep some of his belongings. This included headphones (for working independently on the computers or at the listening centre), books from home, unfinished work and even food. There were bins with notebooks for all the boys: one labeled “inquiry”, one filled with math notebooks and a third bin with math textbooks. The front of the classroom was a wide-open area with an interactive whiteboard mounted at eye level. The boys had their large group meetings at the carpet area in front of the interactive whiteboard. There was a large bookshelf beside the carpet area with many children’s literature books related to the inquiry theme the boys are studying. There was a second large bookshelf filled with more children’s literature at the back beside the carpet area. There were also bins of themed literature around the room, located mainly under a bench that runs the length of the window at the far side of the room.

The teacher’s desk was at the far end, tucked into the corner, with a teacher bulletin board and filing cabinet beside her desk. In the middle of the desk was the teacher’s laptop computer, which she used to create lessons on the interactive whiteboard, send e-mails and access the Internet throughout the day. Beside the teacher bulletin board
was another bulletin board entitled “monstrous jobs.” It was the place where the teacher assigned helpers. There was a mailbox, clipboard and big book stand in front of the class. Beside that was a divided bookshelf with a variety of dictionaries (rhyming, primary, picture). There was also a weather graph, hundreds counter and calendar with removable dates for the boys to put in the correct spot. Beside the interactive whiteboard on the right was a graph entitled “Holes in Grade one Heads” where the teacher recorded teeth lost that month.

There was a bookshelf with bins of books that were leveled but the actual bins did not show levels on the front - the books within the bins were leveled according to difficulty. These were organized according to levels. These books formed the basis for the home reading program. The boys were expected to access the books in these bins at the end of the day to choose a book for reading at home. The book that the boys chose for that night was placed in the front pocket of their agenda book. On this bookshelf there was a library bin, which was a place for the boys to return library books. There was a bulletin board to track after-school activities and homework (math games), and there was a number line above the chalkboard that ran the length of the front of the class. Also on the front board, there was a pocket chart with an agenda, which showed the day’s activities in analog and digital time and the activity at that time. The literacy block was on the activity board and was named “Guided Reading, Spelling” on the agenda and, later in the year, based on a response to questions from me, Jan decided to change the name of the block to “literacy activities.”

There was a happy birthday graph, where the students’ birthdays were recorded by month and day. There was an interactive digital table beside a kidney shaped
conference table. Often, the conference table was empty, or it was used as a storage area. At times, the boys went to the conference table if they didn’t want to sit in their assigned seats or if the teacher asked them to move there as a consequence for negative behaviours. Occasionally, the conference table was used by the teacher to gather a small group of students for focused instruction. The classroom was set up with desks grouped together in groups of four and that was where the boys normally sat to complete activities. These groupings were changed numerous times throughout the year, mostly for social reasons. Sometimes, parents would request a seating change for their son.

There was a counter that was used for storage (an abacus, juice boxes, games, kettle, soap, coats, empty bins) and there was a sink. The back wall had an art area with paints, markers, chalk, construction paper, etc. The back wall of the classroom had a hundreds chart, labeled two-dimensional shapes, a white board, an alphabet chart and a display board. As well there were four Mac computers at the back of the room. There was the beginning of a word wall at the top of the blackboard, which was started in October using high frequency words added by the teacher and completed in February using pre-made word wall words from a teacher’s store.

**The Resource Rich Context**

I considered this classroom “resource rich”, both for the resources located in the classroom and the resources available to the boys in the school. Although there were also many “arts” resources available to the boys (e.g., a music room, a woodworking lab, a visual arts room), my focus for examining resources was on the types of text used as literacy resources by this teacher and her students during instructional times in this classroom.
Classroom books.

The classroom was full of books that belonged to the class and were purchased and owned by the school. As Jan told me once, “If I switch classes, I don’t take any of this with me. It stays for the next teacher.” For the first month I was in the classroom, I sorted and counted the range and types of classroom books accessible to the students for classroom activities and home reading. The home reading books were coded with dots. Jan shared with me that this was done consciously. Jan had coded the books by letter the previous year and found that the boys were too competitive about the levels. Red dot books were short chapter books and starter chapter books. None of the red dot books were leveled by the publisher nor did they have a level written on them. All the other bins (seven other bins) contained series’ of books leveled by various publishers. Orange dot books were levels 9–12. Green dot books were levels 12–20. Blue dot books were levels 7–9, with a few unleveled “Ready to Read” books from Scholastic interspersed in that bin. Yellow dot books were levels 4–6. There were also red dot books at levels 1–3.

These were the numbers and types of books available for home/independent reading. Table 2 lists a number of categories. The books varied by genre (fiction, nonfiction, fable, play, tale or other), level (determined by the publishers and based on leveling formulas that indicate readability, with the higher numbers indicating more difficult text and the lower numbers indicating easier text), and the publisher (indicating that certain publishers provide the majority of certain types of books). Appendix I outlines the various text levelling systems used in Ontario. At this school, grade equivalencies were matched with Fountas & Pinnell reading levels (columns 1 and 2, Appendix I).
Table 2

*Leveled Classroom Books*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EIL Level</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Number of books</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Dominant publisher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short/ starter chapter books</td>
<td>Fiction (F)</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wide variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonfiction (NF)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Project X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NF</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9–12</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>Scholastic Alphakids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fable</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NF</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7–9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>Scholastic Alphakids/Project X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NF</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tales</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other books (earlier levels, non-leveled)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>Scholastic Alphakids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NF</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>Scholastic Alpha Kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NF</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was an obvious dominance of fiction at the higher levels. In fact, as the students reached the prescribed reading levels for Grade 1 and were reading independently, almost all the choices for home reading were fiction texts. The only nonfiction choices in that
bin were the nonfiction companions to the Magic Tree House books (by Mary Pope Osbourne). The books in that bin were a mix of:

- *Magic Tree House* by Mary Pope Osbourne
- *A to Z mysteries* by Ron Roy
- *Jigsaw Jones Mysteries* by James Preller
- *The Magic School Bus chapter books* by Scholastic (no author)
- *The Littles* by John Peterson
- *Cam Jansen* by David Adler
- *Nate the Great* by Marjorie Weinman Sharmat
- *The Bailey School Kids* by Debbie Dadey and Marcia Thornton Jones
- *The Berenstain Bears chapter books* by Jan and Stan Berenstain
- *Junie B. Jones* by Barbara Park
- *Little Dolphin* by Lucy Daniels
- Four other fictional chapter books not related to those series

In the five other bins, there was a dominance of books written for the purposes of reading instruction and leveled by the different educational publishers. These books were a mix of fiction, nonfiction, fables, tales and fairy tales, narrative fiction and rhyming books. Publishers were Scholastic Alphakids, Project X, Blueberry Hill, Rigby Literacy, Scholastic Phonics, Prentice Hall/Ginn, Vanwell Publishers, The Wright Group, Rookie Reader, The Story Box, Scholastic Literacy Place, Scholastic Hello Reader, Scholastic Ready to Read, Sails Literacy, All Aboard Reading, Houghton Mifflen Early Emergent, Celebration Press, Science Emergent Readers Scholastic, Scholastic Early Step into Reading, Story Steps 3. By far, the dominant publishers in the bins were books by Project
X (series written for boys) and Scholastic. These books are sold in packages which include different genres and the school purchased packages of books by specific publishers for the purposes of leveled reading instruction and the boys’ home reading. Therefore, as the boys learned to read, the types of books the read were determined by publishers, usually written by authors that work for that particular publisher. There was no children’s literature in the bins until the boys reached the short chapter book bin.

In February, Jan introduced the boys to an online reading site which provided access to leveled reading online. The boys read a number of fiction or nonfiction books in an assigned level and when those books were finished, they got points and were moved onto the next level. The boys accessed this program at school and at home, but it did not replace the home reading program and was used in addition to the regular nightly borrow-a-book from the leveled book bins.

Jan told the students, “You can read a book from any bin you want – if it’s too hard, you need to go to one lower. You might be busy tonight so you might choose an easy book. Or you might be really into bugs, and you might want a harder book – that’s fine.” Jan also commented to me that the “parents always say the book is too easy…. .” Jan would, at times, guide the boys to a bin, based on information from the parents and guided reading assessment information. She also shared this exact information with parents many times.

**Other classroom books.**

There was a wide variety of children’s literature in the classroom, including theme-based books and stories that were permanently on display in the classroom for the boys to read. The bins were titled:
The children’s literature on the classroom bookshelves was organized by themes and came from both the classroom collection and the school library. Some books on the bookshelves were books the boys brought in from home. These themes mirrored the school’s inquiry themes and were:

- Space, sun and planets
- Structures and construction
- Tell me a story – tales, fables and fairy tales
- Friendship – all about me, emotions and friends

During the time when the inquiry units were taught, there were two large bookshelves filled with children’s literature related to the theme which included a wide variety of genres, written by authors of children’s literature and which the boys accessed regularly.

**The school library.**

The library is an open, well-lit space located centrally in the school. The library is staffed by two full-time librarians and parent volunteers and boasts 15,000 volumes. The library serves students in SK–7 and has a wide variety of picture books, graphic novels, stories, audio books (which could be played on an IPod or computer), reference materials and electronic media, both in the school and online. The print resources in the library are
a mixture of children’s literature and different genres. There were no leveled resources in
the library.

Students went to the library once every 4 days and the librarian read a story aloud
to them, usually one related to their unit of inquiry. The librarian partnered with the
classroom teacher to plan the unit of inquiry and, therefore, the books chosen for read
alouds were closely related to the classroom learning. I observed the boys in the library a
number of times. When they arrived in the library, they went straight to sit on big
comfortable couches and the librarian met them at the couches with one or two books.
She proceeded to read aloud to them for about 20 minutes and then the boys had a chance
to go and look for a library book. They could take out a library book if they had already
brought back the book they took out previously.

The online library catalogue was available to all students at school or at home.
The librarian told me that, “All Grade 1 students are taught and know how to use the
library catalogue”. There were five online encyclopedias available to the boys. There
were also recommended reading lists compiled by the librarians for each grade on the
school website. They were based on book recommendations from teachers and students.
The library also housed 20 Mac computers and an interactive whiteboard in a small room
adjoining the library as well as 10 Mac computers in the centre of the library.

**Technology resources for this class.**

Each classroom in this school had an interactive whiteboard mounted at eye level.
In this Grade 1 classroom, the interactive whiteboard was used on a daily basis for whole
class instruction, centre work, music and movies at lunch and as a behaviour management
system for Jan and other teachers (e.g., the gym teacher). This class also had an
interactive digital table which had been purchased in the summer of 2010 and which was also used in this class for daily literacy centres. The classroom computers had Internet access as well as software loaded onto each computer. Each student knew how to log in with their own user name and a common password. They could also log in to the school’s computer system from home. Each Grade 1 student had an e-mail account. The students had access to Apple software including Numbers, Pages and Keynote. They could access the Internet through Safari. Other programs on the Grade 1 computers were Kidspiration and Inspiration (by Inspiration Software Inc.), Kid Pix Deluxe (by Software MacKiev), Comic Life (by Plasq) and i-movie (by Apple). There was also primary software loaded on each computer in the Grade 1 class:

- Bailey’s book house, Millie’s math house, Sammy’s science house and Storybook Weaver by Riverdeep
- A to Zap, Ice Cream Truck Math Essentials I and II and Tenth Planet Literacy by Sunburst
- The Graph Club 2.0 Neighborhood Map Machine, 2.0 by Tom Snyder productions
- Mathletics, which all students have accounts for and which they can access and play at home

There was also a primary computer lab, staffed by a half-time information technology specialist and a technician. This is where the boys went to learn new programs, both Internet based and software. Therefore, at this school, the boys had a large variety of multimodal texts to access and use.
The Curriculum

The School’s Ideology

In this high socioeconomic, elite school, parents received many communications about the curriculum content. The school shared their ideologies and goals as well as the framework for the students’ learning. As the driver for the content and skills taught at this school, the Ontario Curriculum and the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (outlined in Chapter 3) were two important influences on literacy practices and teacher pedagogy. Information shared multiple times by administration and the teacher with the parents/community included curriculum outlines, inquiry themes and curricular goals. The school also shared information about contextualizing foundational skills and exploring relevant content. The school shared that the students at this school “acquire the knowledge, concepts and skills of traditional subject areas while learning about broader global ideas and local perspectives”. The school’s Grade 1 description of studies begins with a statement from the IB document “Making the PYP happen”. The portion of the IB document that the school chose to communicate was, “The importance of the traditional subject areas is acknowledged. However, it is also recognized that educating students in a set of isolated subject areas, while necessary, is not sufficient. Of equal importance is the need to acquire skills in context, and to explore content that is relevant to students, and transcends the boundaries of the traditional subjects”. There appears to be a tension between the school’s value of the traditional, isolated subject areas and relevant, inquiry based themes and practices. This tension existed in many communications between the school and the parents/community.
School Administration

Certain key values were shared with the parents at the school’s curriculum night during the first week of September. On that night, the headmaster of the preparatory school told parents that in the primary years, “student inquire, with others, to deepen understanding they share as a community of learners”. The head of school also shared that there were three key messages from the school. The first of these messages was that the school’s goal was for the boys to build strong, positive relationships, both between the boys and between the teachers and the boys. A second point was that the school strived to balance the journey and the outcome. This meant that the process was as important as the product. Finally, the headmaster told parents that part of their role was to “help us know your son”. Through open communication that included questionnaires and conversations, the school demonstrated the belief that the best way for this school to meet the needs of each boy was to know them as individuals.

One of the heads of school discussed the balance between community and individual. He told the parents that the school is one where boys are known, loved and supported. He also talked about two strategic initiatives in place for this academic year. One was the continued growth of their world-class faculty. The second was individual attention and the goal of knowing and understanding each of the boys. The parents listened attentively to all of these messages and I observed that parents were nodding and applauding for the messages shared by the administration of the school.
The School’s Language Curriculum

The Grade 1 language curriculum fell into the categories of Reading, Writing, Spelling, Handwriting and Library. The statements that “language is valued and integrated into all areas of the curriculum” and that “literacy shapes the practices of our school community” were the school’s framework for this language curriculum.

The source document highlights certain areas of the language curriculum as follows:

**Reading:**
- Students learn to read by reading
- Daily opportunities to read and be read to
- Whole class (modeled) and small group (guided) reading approach
- Individualized reading instruction to allow each boy to progress at his own rate
- Variety of activities
- Home reading program

**Writing:**
- Daily writing
- Writing conventions introduced and mastered gradually along a continuum
- Writing skills taught daily focusing on grammar and spelling rules
- Writing process
- Student choice of topics; writing, revising, rewriting, illustrating, editing, publishing
Spelling:

- Classroom lessons
- Regular spelling challenges
- Weekly activities supporting in-class word lists
- Encouraging writing “transfer”; assist student in using conventional spelling in daily work
- Teaching words in context

Handwriting:

- Development of neat and legible handwriting
- Specific instruction on letter formation and pencil grip
- “Handwriting without Tears Program” at school and home

Library:

- Introduction to different literary genres through picture books, fiction and nonfiction, beginner novels
- Browse, make choices, read independently and practice basic research skills
- Learn to access information using the computer

The tension between the school’s goals and the foundational skills in isolated subject areas and inquiry-based instruction is apparent in the language curriculum.

The Teacher

Jan was the teacher in this Grade 1 classroom. Jan is a young, warm and energetic person who interacted with the students and me in an open and honest way from the time of our first meeting. She was happy to share observations and thoughts about her own
instruction and her students. Jan met with me regularly for debriefing about observations, conversations and interviews.

The Context

Jan’s view of her role a teacher in this elite private school was as a regular teacher in a regular school who was lucky to have access to so many resources. During one of our debrief sessions, Jan stated that the boys in her class were “just like regular boys”. She told me that when she first came to this school, she was a little intimidated because she thought the kids would be very different but she doesn’t believe they are. The big difference for her between the public school system where she worked earlier in her career and this school were the fact that the parents would support any initiatives or problems by acting outside of school (e.g., tutoring, eye check-up, hearing test) and the richness of the resources. Jan used all the resources available to her. In fact, Jan had created a proposal to purchase the interactive digital table for the primary division when she saw it at a workshop. When it arrived, she set it up and learned the software. In the entire 6 months I was there, I saw the kindergarten teacher use it twice. Otherwise, it was housed in Jan’s room at all times.

Jan repeated many times that she loves the inquiry-based model of the PYP. She participated in many PYP planning meetings and used the organizer on an ongoing basis to plan and reflect. She feels that it empowers the boys to learn, values their questions and their interests and exposes them to many different ideas and concepts. Jan shared with me that she would not want to teach in a non-PYP school. Along with a team of teachers, Jan also had many binders that outlined the integration of the Ontario Curricular standards with the standards of the PYP, and she was re-visiting those outlines
throughout the year. Jan also attended ongoing professional development around the use of technology: the MAC computers, the interactive whiteboard and software.

**Teacher’s Beliefs About Individual Learners**

When asked how she considers individual learners in her planning, Jan responded, “I don’t plan without them. I start with that. I start with what my kids are capable of, what they can do and what they’re interested in and then I plan. I don’t incorporate it later…that’s where I start from”. In fact, Jan’s use of the PYP program’s “guiding questions” was slightly different from other teachers; Jan used the student questions as the guiding questions for her unit, rather than teacher-generated questions.

I asked Jan how she would define a literate identity. She said, “it is a concept of self where they feel like they can communicate. Identity is how you think of yourself and being literate is the ability to communicate, be it in written, oral or visual ways. I imagine it’s a continuum – the more literate they are, the more tools they have in their pocket”. She continued by saying that a literate identity is an important part about how students learn because “how you view yourself and how you see yourself is vital to learning anything”. Jan speaks often about “empowering” her kids through inquiry and in other areas of the program. An example is when she was referring to the dramatic presentation of the play the boys wrote collaboratively, “The Video Game”. Jan commented, “They own it. They made it. They created it. The child is in charge of their costumes too. My basic philosophy is empowerment. I think that’s who I am”.

Jan’s Assessment and Reporting Practices

Assessment in this classroom was mostly informal and observational in nature. Jan looked at written products often and worked with the boys to produce interesting culminating tasks and activities. She carefully chose resources that interested the boys and were appropriate for the theme (DVD, story artefacts). She felt confident that she knew what they were interested in because I ask them. I watch them. In addition to asking them, I hear them…. I listen to them”. Jan did not do formal reading assessments often. She listened to the boys read during guided reading sessions, but didn’t feel the need to do running records. She commented that, “you can gauge from a kid just after a few pages. I don’t need to do a running record each time.

At times, Jan conferenced with the boys individually or in groups to assess their reading or revise/edit writing, and a teacher (either Jan or a TA) met with each boy at least once a week for 20 minutes in a small group for guided reading. She does the standardized assessment (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011) three times a year, even though it is only required twice a year by the school. Grouping for reading instruction was flexible. Jan changed the groups three times during the 6 months I was observing. As well, Jan completed a writing assessment with the boys (called a “sentence writing & spelling form”), which analyzed phonemes and spelling based on a dictated sentence. These formal assessments tested for a variety of reading and writing skills.

Jan reported on literacy skills in report cards and through conferences with parents. She reported using a 1–4 scale and the language portion of the report card has bullets to report on such as:
**Reading**
- reads for different purposes
- reads using grade appropriate strategies
- reads for meaning and understanding

**Writing**
- organizes writing to convey a message
- writes simple sentences
- applies spelling strategies to daily work

**Listening and Speaking**
- communicates thoughts and ideas
- participates in discussions and conversations
- listens for a variety of purposes

Jan was an active facilitator in all literacy events and spent a great deal of time interacting with different small groups, giving feedback and working with the boys to complete various tasks.

**The Boys**

My experiences with the boys in the classroom were rich and varied. The observations, conversations, photos and artefacts created a portrait of the boys as they engaged in a wide range of literacy events and practices. I present the data about the boys in the order I collected it. I observed the whole class and the school/class environment from the beginning of the school year. In these data, we see the social practice perspective in tension with a skills-based approach to literacy. The data shows that the focus on literacy skills is embedded within the social context of this classroom and the personal relationships within it. The boys, the teacher and the families all contribute to
the portrait of each boy as he engages with literacy in this classroom. It is interesting to note that the teacher completed reading assessments early in the year as part of a directive from the school. As Jan said, the reading assessments “help me understand the boys’ abilities and skills…they help me group the boys….they help me know what each boy should be reading”. Even though these types of assessments may reinforce a traditional skill-based conception of literacy, they are part of the reality of the literacy practices in this classroom and the results of these assessments contribute to the understandings about literacy and the pedagogical choices made by the teacher. As well, when I began collecting data, I started with the reading survey, followed by the writing survey. These data, combined with anecdotal input from the teacher and observational data from my notes and videos, assisted me in choosing the boys for the case studies. Therefore, for each boy, I will report on both the quantitative and qualitative findings as I share a picture of each boy engaged in literacy.

Ivan

When I first met Ivan, I could see that he was a serious boy. Ivan rarely smiled and I did not observe him laughing during the first few months I spent in the class. Jan commented that, “He never smiled in kindergarten. He’s loosening up in Grade 1”. Ivan carefully followed instructions given by the teacher during all classroom tasks. During circle time, Ivan would wait with his legs crossed and his hands in his lap as the other boys settled down and as Jan encouraged the class to get ready for a lesson. During whole group meetings, Ivan’s body language indicated that he was paying attention, however, he hesitated to raise his hand or answer simple questions. Occasionally, when Jan would ask a more difficult question (e.g., What is the line that cuts through the centre of the
Ivan would raise his hand and respond. When asked to do seatwork, Ivan started immediately and often finished before his classmates. When working in groups, Ivan often became frustrated with his classmates when they were not on task. He would say, “Come on, guys. We have to finish this”. Or “It’s not your turn. It’s Austin’s turn. You have to wait”. Ivan slowly became friendlier towards me throughout the course of this research study, and would converse with me more easily as time went on. At the beginning, however, he did not make eye contact with me and did not wish to have conversations that were not directly related to the assigned task in the classroom. I observed Ivan engaged in collaborative tasks, however, he preferred to work alongside others at the beginning of the year. Later in the year (for example, in the scriptwriting), he collaborated with peers.

According to September data, Ivan came into Grade 1 reading at a mid-Grade 2 level, as indicated by the Fountas and Pinnell text levels (see Appendix F for leveling correlation information). His reading data is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

**Ivan’s Reading Assessment Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fountas &amp; Pinnell text level</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
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The measures of comprehension indicated that Ivan’s comprehension was weaker in March then in October (on the chosen book). According to the teacher, Ivan’s writing was already at a beginning Grade 2 level at the beginning of Grade 1. He was also the student with the highest scores on both measures of the reading and writing surveys,
demonstrating that he had a very high self-concept of himself as a reader and writer and put a high value on reading and writing.

Ivan was very engaged with the work at school as indicated by his focused attention on the teacher or the task. He listened carefully to instructions and was a very independent worker, following the school and classroom rules diligently. He didn’t question the teacher about school tasks. He liked to show a teacher his work when he was done and he would search out the teacher with work when it was complete. If a teacher was nearby, Ivan would ask for approval. Once, on the computer when he was searching for a picture of the planet he was researching in Google images, he asked, “Can I choose that one?” I responded that I thought Jan wanted a real picture, not a cartoon. He simply said “okay” and scrolled away from his preferred picture.

During the story-writing block, when asked if he would rather use technology or write a paper book, he said “I’m happy with doing a paper book if that’s what we’re supposed to do.” Ivan persisted at challenging work. While working on a computer program in the classroom, he commented, “this is hard” but continued working at a challenging task where he had to create a graphic of his own using an application (the draw program). His printing was excellent yet he participated in whole class printing lessons weekly. From January on, he spent a great deal of time writing his daily work in “cursive” because he was interested in it and excited to try. This slowed him down but he continued to persist with using cursive in daily activities.

Based on interview data from November when he was asked to rank his favourite literacy centres, Ivan preferred activities that integrated technology. He ranked the three technology activities first, then talk, and then guided reading. Again, Ivan’s interest in
being challenged became apparent when he was asked about certain literacy events. I asked if it was okay to just do the plan for the book and not write it and he said, “it’s not fun that way”. When asked how he would change guided reading if he could, he responded “chapter books.” Even following a brief discussion about technology in the classroom (the interactive whiteboard, interactive digital table and computers), Ivan’s idea about text was centered in printing, cursive, the newspaper and books. He prefers printing activities and writing with pen/pencils at home. Ivan commented on a mind map about friendship generated on the computer that, “with this piece of work, I learned to have fun on the computer.” With parental permission, he was allowed to do other computer programs besides razkids.com at home. “Well, only if I ask and only if [my parents] say it’s alright.” Ivan participated in the reading blog. As of March 20th, Ivan had sixteen posts but no new posts were added in January and February. Ivan’s posts were detailed, such as “Annie went to Honduras. She went by plane and truck. She made friends with a girl and a boy”.

Ivan integrated pop culture into his self-selected topics for writing. He almost always included “The Wimpy Kid” (a character from a series of books which was also made into a movie) and even spoke about “The Wimpy Kid” in our interviews. Other themes in Ivan’s writing were fighting and blood, but he was careful to end his story with a happy ending. When Ivan worked with peers to write his script as a narrator for the class play, they wrote about playing video games.

Jan described him as a “careful child – he doesn’t want to make mistakes”. Together with his parents, Ivan wrote that his goal on December 4th was “to participate in class better, to take risks” and his mother wrote that she wanted him to “discuss books
after reading” and improve “active participation in discussions, sharing ideas in the class. ” On January 10th, Ivan’s goal read: “My goal is to play with other people”. Ivan was respectful of peers but asserted himself politely, “I don’t like that, Richard”, or when peers were talking, he would tell them “I need to write”. On January 16th, his goal was to “do math quicker”. In both of Ivan’s parent-teacher interviews, Jan noted that Ivan displays model behaviour and is developing his confidence. She also shared that Ivan is a “role model” for other boys. Jan noted that the parents felt that it is very important to Ivan “what the teacher thinks of him”. On the interview forms, parents were asked to share their hopes and dreams for their son. Ivan’s parents’ hopes for him in October were that he “be a diligent student. ”

**Giano**

Giano was a young boy full of energy. He was very talkative in the classroom, and curious about me from the time I arrived at the school. He would ask me questions like “What are you doing here?” or “Can I see that?” (e.g. when looking at my computer screen). Giano liked to play with the toys in the class when given the opportunity, and he often had a toy from home in his hand to show the other boys “what I got”. Sometimes, this would be an action figure or sometimes it would be a piece of playdough. Giano also talked about his “stuff” at home, such as his video games, his books and his lego. He would tell the other boys that “I got the Wii bowling this weekend and I’m good” or “I built a lego tower so high it almost touched the ceiling!” The other boys would listen, often not responding.

Giano had high scores on both measures of the reading and writing surveys and he both valued reading and writing and had a good self-concept as a reader/writer.
According to kindergarten reading data, Giano came into Grade 1 reading at a kindergarten level. His scores in October and March are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

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<th>Giano’s Reading Assessment Results</th>
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<td>Fountas &amp; Pinnell text level</td>
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Therefore, when examining the reading levels in October and March, it is apparent that Giano made slow, steady progress in reading. He had a tutor outside of school and received one-on-one instruction by a reading specialist in school beginning in October.

Giano had beautiful printing, and his teacher and other teachers in the school complimented him on it often. When asked about his writing, Giano told me during an interview that, “I write stories, piano books. I draw pictures. I write cards for birthday. I write on the blog. I write for Thanksgiving. I’m a very good writer because my printing is so neat”. In the library, Giano chose a short chapter book to read and borrow called *Looney Bay All Stars*. When Giano chose it, another boy in the class chose the same one and came over to read with him and Giano “pretended” to read the book. In the class, Giano was a struggling student in terms of decoding and meaning-making skills in reading and generating ideas and producing writing in print-based writing. Giano required one-on-one attention with reading and writing and he received that once a week outside of the classroom beginning in October, as well as some teacher support in the classroom. Jan noted in her assessment of Giano’s reading in January that Giano is “eager to read…. appeals for help prior to trying…does not follow when others read”.
Giano had difficulty staying focused on classroom tasks. He required much prompting to complete any independent work in the classroom. When working in small groups, Giano often wandered away, engaged in off-task behaviours or “picked verbal fights” with others in his group about turn taking, others’ responses or opinions about other issues.

(“Where did you get that toy? You’re not nice because you won’t share”). Jan conveyed to me that Giano was rude sometimes and would often answer adults in a harsh way (When I asked him what he does when he goes out with the Centre for Learning teacher, he responded, “Reading. What do you think?”). At times, it was difficult to engage Giano in conversations during literacy time; however, Jan noticed this a few times and spoke to him. He was more cooperative when he realized Jan was aware of his negative interactions.

When asked to choose his favourite literacy centre activities, Giano ranked guided reading last, and the technology –related centres as his top three preferences because “they’re fun”. When asked what he reads at home, he referred only to print texts (“I’m reading car books, I’m reading about dump truck books, I’m reading 39 clues”). During our interview, he reported that he does not write at home. In his school writing, pop culture themes such as “Mario and Luigi”, “Bowser” and “fighting” were evident. One of Giano’s stories was about Mario and Luigi fighting Bowser in space. He knew all the components of the story (characters, setting, climax, resolution) that were taught by Jan and he was able to tell his story logically based on his story plan. He said he thought of the story “in my brain and I have a good memory…. I’ve played it. I have it at my house. It’s called Mario Galaxy”. In script writing, Giano wrote collaboratively with a peer
about the game Candyland and the characters in that game yet that paired writing was facilitated by a teacher at all times. Giano often asked peers and teachers “how do you spell?” when participating in any printing, spelling or writing activities. This practice slowed him down a lot and he insisted on spelling each word correctly or he would erase the letters until he was sure he was correct. Giano viewed technology as a place to find out information and to play. Giano commented during a whole group lesson when Jan was teaching about researching the planets, “why don’t you go on the Internet and figure it out?” Giano did use the blog quite a bit and, as of March 20, had 15 posts. Giano’s comments were detailed. Some examples are, “I read Fishing to Mom while she baked cupcakes. And i read it to Darius” or “I Giano, finally finished Nate the Great and the missing KEY!!! going to get another Nate the Great book next week!”

Giano told me that he liked writing/spelling with technology better then with print because “when you use the eraser on the interactive whiteboard, you don’t have to rub and rub – it’s just gone. And on the computer, you just press the delete button one time and it’s gone – you don’t have to rub and rub”.

Giano had goals in the classroom. On December 4th, Giano’s goal was “to focus” and his plan to achieve his goal was to “listen better”. On January 10th, Giano’s wrote down his goal in class: “My goal is to read one book”. On January 19th, his goal was “to focus.” In Giano’s parent teacher interview, Jan shared with parents that Giano “calls out random things…. not too sure if he is listening”. In the October interview, Giano was “silly with peers” and his goal was “listening during lessons.” Giano’s February interview had information about “difficulty with transitions” and noted “very little [social] problem solving techniques”. Giano’s parents’ hopes and dreams for their son
were for him “to develop confidence in his reading skills, to develop a few close friendships and to improve his focus on tasks”.

Steven

Steven was a delightful, interesting and verbal student. From the beginning of my time in the classroom, he would approach me to show me things he was doing, and he enjoyed helping other students in the class (e.g., “I know how to login. Do you want help?”). Steven worked in collaborative groups with others at his table, but always wanted to finish quickly so the collaboration would sometimes end as he would complete work independently in order to finish and show the teacher. When Steven was writing his spelling words, he would jump up and down in his seat with his hand up to share the correct spelling of words with the class. He constantly had his hand up at whole-group meeting times, and his responses were often thoughtful (e.g. I liked that story because it is like Stone Soup that we read before. Remember? When they made the soup with all the different stuff?”) Steven was well-liked by classmates, as evidenced by their willingness to work with him when choosing groups or partners.

Steven had the lowest scores on both measures of the reading survey and the writing survey. When the research began, Steven had a poor self-concept as a reader and writer and very low value of both reading and writing. When I shared the results of this survey with Jan, she was very surprised about the low scores and contacted Steven’s parents (without informing me) to share this information. She told them that Steven’s self esteem as a reader was very low and that he really didn’t see himself as a reader. His father immediately began reading with Steven at night on the ipad and buying books for him.
Jan’s observation was that Steven “seems to want to live up to something” and that he put pressure on himself. At times, he seemed to lack interest and confidence. In October, during an interview, I asked him “What does writing mean?” and he responded, “It’s not fun – you have to sit there”. I asked him what he writes, and he said “letters and numbers”. Steven was reading at an early Grade 1 level in September, and his writing was age appropriate and was not a concern for the teacher. Steven’s reading scores are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Steven’s Reading Assessment Results*

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<th>Fountas &amp; Pinnell text level</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Satisf.</td>
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<td>Satisf.</td>
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As Steven’s ability to read more difficult text as well as his fluency improved, Steven made slow, steady progress in reading through the 6 months I observed in the classroom.

Themes in Steven’s writing were often Mario and Luigi. Other themes were good guys/bad guys and video games. When doing writing activities using pencil/paper, Steven was concerned about his spelling and “fitting it in”. When I asked him why he was erasing a thought during his planet research, he said, “she said it had to fit”. However, he often wrote during assigned tasks independently, using invented spelling in many writing samples. Even when a teacher was available, he would usually not ask for spelling help but preferred to complete assigned work independently. The spelling attempts were always accepted by the teacher in his daily work, but work to be published (which meant shared with parents or hung in the hallway) was revised and edited by the teacher for
correct spelling. Steven often asked for assistance when he was unsure of how to do an assignment. When trying to record facts from a nonfiction print text for his project about a planet he chose to research, he needed support with the reading and asked for help during the writing, “Can I say it has a hundred volcanoes?” or “Can I turn the page?” “Should I just write clouds cover Venus?” or “Can I go ask Ms. Sharp a question?” In January, during our reading conference, Steven chose a book “because I like short books…because they’re easier books. They have easier words. Because smaller books have easier words for smaller people.” Later, Steven commented that, “Chapter books are too hard for people who have just started.” As the year progressed, I would sometimes observe him self-selecting books, particularly nonfiction books or graphic novels. This self-selection sometimes motivated other boys to join him and engage in lively conversations about the book, such as “There are the 3 little pigs…they killed him…they died…the big boars…the stinky boars” (all boys laugh).

Steven was very respectful of all adults in the class and Steven was always willing to answer a question, volunteer to help and cooperate with others to the best of his ability. Steven was very motivated when engaging with any kind of technology and he was talkative in the classroom with peers. He was skilled in technology and was often helping others when they had difficulty on the computer or interactive whiteboard. Steven chose computers as his favourite activity in the classroom. He told me he liked to work on files where he could add stuff to all the things he had learned. He enjoyed looking for pictures on the Internet and printing out pictures related to the school theme (e.g., space) or pictures of characters from video games (e.g., Sonic). When asked what he would be most excited to learn in the class if he could choose anything, he said he most wanted to
do a unit on computers. In February, I asked Steven if he was a good reader and he said yes. He told me that his dad gives him games and books on the ipad, but that he also reads “real books”. As we talked, he interrupted by asking me if I wanted to see the pictures of photons that he printed off the Internet that morning and when I said yes, he left the conversation excitedly to find them in his schoolbag. Steven was technologically literate and was very interested in any experiences that included technology. One day when I was at the classroom computer looking at some of the school/class programs, Steven came in from recess and commented, “Is that Giano’s login?” When I responded yes, he answered, “Cause I know his background.” Steven gets information from technology and makes connections, expresses himself and demonstrates interest in it. Steven easily understood how to access an online reading program used by the class and was highly motivated to read, do the quizzes and earn points to buy items on the program. He engaged in many conversations about that program such as “I can’t buy that one. Why don’t I try a different thing and get more points”, referring to completing reading activities to gain points on the game. He played the game at home as choice activity. Steven liked to be challenged by technology. When playing a multiple-choice game with immediate feedback on the interactive whiteboard in a small group at literacy centres, I asked Steven “What do you think of this activity?” He responded, “It’s boring. Because we had to answer all these boring questions…we got five stars twice but it’s still not fun because you have to answer a bunch of easy questions…the only good part is that we guessed and we had fun and we got five stars…that’s the best part about it”. Steven did not use the blog often. When checked on March 20th, his last post was November 21st and he had four posts in total. His posts did include the title of the book and a comment.
“They were small” or He Peed!!! by a bush!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! . ” It seemed that Steven did the entries on his own and when I asked him, he said he did.

Steven’s scriptwriting for the play was about playing Wii games (video games) and he worked collaboratively with two other boys to write his portion of the script. During an interview, I asked Steven if he and the other boys had created the play. He answered “ya” and went on enthusiastically to tell me “we made up our own characters and we made the scenes and the characters for the scenes and then we had to practice it”. Steven performed the play with excitement and was engaged in the practices, knowing his lines before the first practice time.

Steven’s goals in December were “to learn cursive, to check my work, to try reading hard words, to do work neatly.” He was also proud “of teaching the kids how to change their background on the computer”. Steven’s goal on January 19th was “to print neater”. Jan noted in the October interview that Steven was “good at listening, good behaviour” but that he “loses focus on independent work” as an area to work on. His goal was set as “to finish work on time and focus while working”. In February, Jan noted that Steven “loves meeting his goals” and that he “likes to complete work quickly”. He was “much more confident and participating more”.

**Austin**

From my first observation, Austin appeared to me as very young emotionally and physically for Grade 1. He often seemed tired by lunch time, was slow to get simple classroom tasks completed, and he spoke often about playing with his 4-year-old brother. Physically, Austin appeared younger than the other boys as he was quite small and thin.
Austin would sometimes cry in the afternoon and say that the work was “too hard”. At the beginning of my observations, Austin did not like to interact with me, nor did he like to respond to prompt questions (e.g., If I said “tell me about your drawing”. he would respond “I’m supposed to be doing this”). Austin would wander over to the bookshelves and leaf through books if he had time, but more often than not, Austin did not finish his work so he had little time for self-selected activities.

Austin began Grade 1 reading at a beginning Grade 1 level. His reading results, as collected by the teacher, are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

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<th>Austin’s Reading Assessment Results</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fountas &amp; Pinnell text level</td>
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<td>Fluency</td>
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<td>Comprehension</td>
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<td>Oct. March</td>
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Austin had a high self-concept and placed a high value on both reading and writing. His printing was almost illegible and he struggled to generate ideas and then write them down. Austin often required additional time and teacher prompting or attention to complete assigned independent writing work. Progress was evident on all measures taken, except for Austin’s self-concept as a reader, which remained the same over 5 months.

Austin liked to listen to stories read aloud, and he would sit in awe of the book as it was read aloud, but often not respond to questions posed by the teacher. Austin chose guided reading as his least favourite literacy centre. He chose “compute” first, and
commented that he loved the classroom computers, that he “likes to play on the computers and we can play Mathletics – I play it at home”. He said he was a good reader “because I read books at home”. I asked him if he reads or writes on the computer at home and he said “No. I print stuff on the computer”. When asked what he writes at home, he said “Homework. I think writing”. When asked the kinds of things he writes, he answered, “in my agenda, my math book, in my work, in my book…I send e-mails to my friends…I also do the blog”. Austin did use the reading blog. On March 20th, he had ten entries, which included books that had been read to him at home and books from school. He often blogged by writing a brief comment such as, “I loved it” or “It was interesting”. He usually viewed the computer as a place to play, and other literacy activities as work.

For a period of time, Austin walked around with a notebook (even in the computer lab) and jotted down words. When I asked about it, Jan said, “it’s a choice he’s making – we’re just going to keep loving it” and she did not comment to him to put it away or react when he had the notebook with him. Jan described him as “having his highs and his lows”.

In October, Austin was described by Jan as “a kind, nice boy who tries really hard”. In February, Jan shared that Austin is “slow to complete written tasks and often needs assistance”. Austin’s parents’ hope and dreams were that “Austin is happy, confident in his academic abilities and motivated to learn. That he acquires the knowledge and skills expected in [Grade] 1”.

Austin’s story writing was based on the video game, “Cars”. In his story, the cars crash and he used the phrase “spare parts” to describe the crash. When asked to explain it, he said, “Where did I hear those two words? My brain”. At times, Austin became
frustrated with writing tasks and essentially gave up. During a conference with Jan, he commented, “It actually makes sense” and he walked away from an incomplete story. For parent-teacher conferences, Austin’s reflection demonstrated both his and his mother’s goals. His goal was “To print more neatly” and he planned to achieve his goals by “holding my pencil well and practice printing”. Austin showed me his published story when it was complete and then told me, “Oh no. That’s not good”. I told him, “I can read it”. He then told me, “But it’s for my brother and I don't want him to get mad…sometimes if it’s not right, he get mad”. I asked him, “Do you mean the printing?” He responded, “Yes”. Austin was very excited about the play performance although the writing was a struggle for him. Austin spoke about his role as a hockey player enthusiastically and he knew all his lines easily. During our reading conference, Austin told me he was a good reader because [his] mommy taught [him] when [he] was four and [he] started to read when [he] growed up.

**Literacy Events and Practices**

All of the literacy events based on practices that were enacted and observed in the classroom are summarized and presented in Appendix H. Students were provided with a range and variation of ways to use literacy. Literacy events included assigned writing, assigned reading, shared reading, social talk during literacy tasks, and standardized reading assessments. The literacy events represent an activity that occurred at a particular time and involved multiple practices. The headings for literacy events were determined by looking at all the data from multiple data sources and categorizing all of the literacy practices under the broader category of events. Originally, I included a category of *self-selected writing* but I did not record any instances of self-selected writing so I removed
that event from the chart. Many of the activities I observed were taught and assigned by
the teacher to the whole class at the same time. After whole class lessons, the boys would
often work in small groups or independently in the classroom to engage in practices
related to that event. The numbers in the columns represent whether or not the event
involved the categories listed at the top of the columns. For example, I analyzed every
instance of assigned writing which was highlighted in my transcribed notes (14 times)
and I determined that assigned writing involved e.g. peer-peer collaboration 7 times of
the 14 times, teacher-student collaboration 11 times of the 14 times and student working
alone 11 times of the 14 times. This type of analysis was done on each literacy event and
all the practices involved in that literacy event.

Whole Group Lessons

Jan used whole group lessons to teach concepts on the interactive whiteboard,
shared reading of poetry, printing and spelling lessons, lessons about vowel sounds and
other letter patterns, concept attainment lessons, writing lessons and brainstorming. The
boys rehearsed their scripts, reading nonfiction stories and watching videos about
phonics. At the computers, the boys worked on new programs and in the computer lab
during whole group lessons and follow-up independent activities. The boys also worked
in small groups often during literacy centres. Some of the events were lengthy but
concentrated on the same work.

In this Grade 1 class, the teacher structured the opportunities for all interactions,
either by asking the boys to work on certain tasks, setting up groupings, assigning tasks
or giving the boys choices within a structure.
Literacy Centre Time

Of the 80 literacy events/practices analyzed, I observed the boys at literacy centres most frequently (15 times). The boys were involved in literacy centres every morning, unless there was a special event. Literacy centre time was approximately 1/2 hour per day. Therefore, based on the learning time in the day (minus gym, recesses and lunch), about 10% of the day each day was devoted to literacy centres. Literacy Centres were “Build” which was the interactive digital table, “Construct” which was the interactive whiteboard, “Computers” (which were the individual Macs in the classroom), “Talk” (which was a variety of possible activities including listening to a tape recorded book or listening to a song and practicing shared reading of the lyrics) and, finally, “Reading” which was guided reading in a small group. When I observed the boys participating in guided reading, I categorized this as assigned reading in the data. Aside from guided reading, there was no leveled reading practice in the class, either at literacy centres or at any other time.

When coding, I grouped literacy centres as one event, even though it was composed of four different choices. By grouping literacy centres as one event, I was able to analyze the variety of practices for the boys within that event, and see how it was weighted in the analysis of the data.
The data from my observations was analyzed and the results are as follows.

Types of Literacies

The analysis clearly demonstrates that certain practices are more salient than others in this classroom. The first category of analysis was types of literacies. There were
two types of literacies as a focus for teaching and practiced by the boys; I called one “traditional print literacies” and the other “new literacies”. Of the 80 literacy practices, I classified 68 as traditional print literacies and 39 as new literacies. The two types of literacies were not always clearly delineated in this classroom and, in those cases, I counted the practice as incorporating both traditional print literacies and new literacies.

**Traditional print literacies.**

These literacies involved the conceptualization of literacy as a set of skills and competencies. These types of interactions would occur within the classroom, usually in notebooks or using print texts, and were bound by language rules that were understood by the teacher and transmitted to the students. Traditional print literacies meant traditional “teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language. …restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language” (NLG, 2000, p. 9). Traditional print literacies are focused on “previous understandings of literacy that are associated exclusively with print” (Mills, 2006, p. 14). I counted the practice as traditional print literacies when the pedagogy focused on teaching spelling patterns, code breaking in reading, using English grammar, focusing on English language conventions or learning to print. I did so even when the teacher used digital texts to practice or present these skills. In these cases, the practice was classified as incorporating both types of literacies.

**New literacies.**

These literacies were those that involved negotiating meaning, critiquing information, applying knowledge to new situations, interpreting and using multimodal texts (NLG, 1996, p. 83), analyzing information, communicating and collaborating to
problem solve and make decisions. In this framework, a community of learners would participate meaningfully in dynamic and authentic social practices and collaborative relationships required in private and public life (NLG, 1996).

**Tensions between traditional print literacies and new literacies.**

Jan’s lessons focused on traditional print literacies almost twice the number of times as she incorporated or taught new literacies. She often used a wide variety of texts, including digital text, as a tool to teach traditional print literacies. There was a clear tension between Jan’s belief that traditional print literacies are essential and her creative use of technology, immersion in practices, integration of multimodal texts and the creation of opportunities for collaboration in her pedagogy.

She often taught traditional print literacies within the context of authentic, high-interest experiences. When Jan taught the boys, “Dynamite” as a shared reading experience, she “tried it in a variety of ways (whole group, small group, individuals). “I played the [YouTube] video on the interactive whiteboard with the ball bouncing with each sound and word. Then I gave each boy a copy of a script that they highlighted for themselves so they would know the part they’re saying.” The boys were all able to follow this script as they were already familiar with the words due to familiarity with and multiple exposures to the song. This showed that Jan considered the contexts for learning and demonstrated that the acts of reading and writing were not the only ways in which texts are assigned meaning. Alongside teacher-selected texts that may have been difficult and not particularly relevant to the individual boys (the space text for research), she also used texts that had social meaning for the boys (the Dynamite song), kid-friendly computer programs that the boys asked for (Bailey’s Book House) and interactive digital
Guided reading.

Guided reading is an example of instruction based on traditional print literacies. The boys were assigned to small groups based on their scores on a standardized reading assessment. The small group of boys was brought to a “guided reading room” during literacy centre time. The room had bookshelves lined with packages of books, all leveled in order of difficulty. They teacher would arrive in the room and quickly pull a package of books off the shelf according to the boys’ most recent assessed reading level. Then, a conversation about the book would ensue, mostly focused on ways to decode words. The boys would then take turns reading parts of the story out loud, decoding the book with prompts from the teacher to help them. Examples of decoding prompts were “Sound it out”, “What does it start with?” or the teacher would articulate the first sounds in a word when a student was unable to decode it (e.g., it says a-p-p-l-e at which point the boys would say “APPLE!” and the teacher would praise him for decoding correctly). There would also be comprehension prompts peppered in the instruction, for example, “What do you think will happen after they put the fire out?”

However, this was a place where the tension between the two types of literacies was apparent. When the online reading programme was introduced to the boys, this was
presented as another or new way for the boys to read books at their level. The goal for using this programme was for the boys to improve their reading skills and comprehension. The program allowed them to read stories on the computer and then do quizzes to demonstrate comprehension. Jan was able to set the level of books the boys would read. She set all the levels below their most recent assessed reading levels in order for the boys to feel successful in the program. Jan was very excited to use this programme with the boys, share it with parents and encouraged the boys to read and play with it at home. However, this did not replace the weekly guided reading instruction nor was it used to assess the boys’ current reading abilities. Jan continued to meet with the boys in small groups for guided reading and assess them using the Fountas & Pinnell reading assessments. I observed other types of tensions during guided reading practice. At times, the teacher opened up a discussion with the four boys and they shared their knowledge and collaboratively discussed an issue about, for example, the environment and implications for how they treat the environment. They problem solved and predicted possible solutions during the reading of a leveled text. However, these interactions were not recorded on anecdotal records. The only information recorded was around decoding, fluency and reading comprehension as a response to literal questions and prompts.

Another tension existed between guided reading and other practices because the boys were not given opportunities to read leveled text within classroom literacy practices besides during the small group guided reading and when they took books home for home reading. They browsed through literature and nonfiction texts from the bookshelves, read on the computer, followed along with audio stories from the listening centre and read stories written by themselves and the teacher when learning to write. They required
teacher support many times in order to cope with the difficult texts they were presented with in different literacy practices in the classroom.

**Spelling.**

Jan shared with me that she “was a weak speller in school” and that she believes spelling is an essential skill. She believes that having goals around learning to spell is a concrete way of having her students set and actually meet some type of attainable goal in Grade 1. Jan devotes a great deal of time to the development of her spelling program. She uses a variety of teacher resources and programs to develop her spelling program, such as the Nelson Speller and Wilson Program. She consults many resources, including other teachers and online sources, when developing her spelling program.

Spelling was a predictable part of the weekly routine in this classroom. Jan dictated weekly spelling lists (on Mondays) based on a particular word pattern (e.g., “silent e” words or words that end with “an”). Each boy wrote the spelling words on a piece of paper in his notebook following a dictation. Then, the words were “taken up” as one boy at a time stood to recite the correct spelling of the word. These pre-tests were then marked and the teacher or TA corrected the spelling of the incorrect word. Then the boys picked their own list, based on words they missed on a pre-test and added words with the same pattern. These new words were part of a brainstormed list that the boys could copy from the board or chart paper. Then, each boy was given time to copy the list into their agenda book and they each took the words home to study. Every Friday, the boys tested each other in pairs on their “individualized spelling lists”. The test was marked out of ten points and the results were shared with parents.
Talk about spelling patterns and spelling instruction were constantly visible in the classroom. Often during literacy centres, the students practiced spelling activities on the interactive digital table. They would have to move “long i” words into a column or match pictures with “short a” vowel words. There were also computer programs that the boys used to practice phonics and spelling patterns when they were at that centre. One activity involved moving the correct letter into the space in a word on the interactive white board (e.g., m_ t), which was accompanied by visuals. There were multiple solutions and the boys could drag a letter to the blank space and receive digital feedback or peer feedback for correct answers. Another example of overlap between the two types of literacies was when the boys participated in word work in small, collaborative groups on the interactive white board table and reasoned out how to link meaning to words in other contexts. One activity was taking a long word, such as “information”, that was spelled on the interactive white board and move the letters to create new words. A lot of conversation and negotiation occurred around that task. The boys spelled words like for, in, mat, on but also longer words like format, inform, fort and rant. Steven even pulled up the dictionary as a background function on the IWB to see if rant was a word. They problem solved, predicted and manipulated the letters individually and together.

Jan thought a lot about her individual learners when planning the spelling program. Although the boys in the class were at very different points in their ability to spell words correctly in their daily work, Jan tried to find a compromise when planning the spelling patterns she felt the boys had to master. She told me many times that last year’s class went much faster and were able to skip some patterns or she could cover two patterns in one week. This year’s class was not able to spell as well in their daily work
and, therefore, she was taking the program slower. Jan is flexible from year to year. She questions herself as to the best way to teach the progression of skills necessary to get the boys where they need to be by the end of Grade 1 (“Should I spend more time on ending blends or should I start working on beginning blends” or “I don’t know if they know the short vowel sounds well enough…. I don’t think I better move onto long vowels yet”). The boys practiced their spelling and word patterns in a variety of ways, often using technology and games in small groups and talking about spelling and word patterns collaboratively. Therefore, the tension is apparent. She is focused on the individual skills associated with traditional teaching, yet she uses a variety of very creative, digital and contextualized ways to provide practice for these skills.

The tension was also apparent when Jan stated that she is aware that sharing weekly spelling lists and testing students on weekly spelling words does not necessarily transfer to their writing activities in class, but she feels it is a skill they can apply in their writing when they have enough of a foundation about how words work.

**Printing.**

Each week, the boys printed a specific letter and words related to that letter in their printing books using a pencil. During the whole group printing lessons, the focus was on teaching specific skills within context of traditional print literacies. Jan followed the curriculum set out in *Handwriting without Tears* by Jan Olsen (2008). She used specific lines and each boy had a printing book with the same lines and the same prompts for printing certain letters and words, such as the letter “b” and words like *book*, *bee* and *but*. Jan also made up her own stories to describe how to shape the letters. For example, when teaching the lower case letter “e”, she told the following story: “A baseball player
hits a ball, goes to first, second and almost third base. ” Even though Jan used a scripted program for printing, but she also used own knowledge about the boys and their interests and changed the program to make the printing task engaging and interesting for the boys. At times, printing was presented as a valuable and worthwhile activity. At other times, she told the boys, “If you behave, we can work on your scripts. If not, then we’re going to do printing”.

Jan and the TA marked the boys’ printing and expected the boys to print on specific lines, using straight or curved lines where necessary and making sure that the letter touched the top and bottom lines. These types of expectations were not specifically transferred into other types of writing, where different lines or blank pages were given to the boys for their writing tasks. The boys also did printing on the blank notebook on the interactive whiteboard and formation of letters was not a concern at that time. During some whole group lessons, the boys gathered around the interactive whiteboard for lessons about the vowel sounds they were learning during that week. Jan would print words on the board with spaces and the boys would come up to the interactive whiteboard to fill in letters or call out the correct letters, but printing was not a focus during those activities. There was a lack of consistency between the teacher’s expectations for printing during weekly printing lessons and expectations for letter formation during authentic writing activities.

**Tensions During Other Literacy Practices**

**Story/script writing.**

Within the context of authentic literacy tasks such as story writing and scriptwriting, skills were sometimes taught. When Jan was modeling the parts of a story
and writing a collaborative story on the interactive whiteboard as she and the boys brainstormed ideas, she commented, "I can’t spell *through*… I don’t know how to…. does it matter?" The boys commented “No” and Jan said, “No, it doesn’t matter. . . it’s my rough copy – but let’s try” and she proceeded to ‘sound out’ the word and write it on the board for the boys to see. She often stopped as she wrote the story and asked the boys “how do you spell?”, especially when the words were simple. Another time, Jan stopped the whole class only once during a 25-minute storywriting block to comment to the class about capitals. “If the title is “at the school”, every word gets a capital for the first letter”. Jan believed that in order to be able to write, the boys must be taught these foundational skills, which they would eventually need to apply in more meaningful contexts.

**Research.**

At other times, she exposed the boys to complex texts to read or asked them to write ideas and ignored spelling when she was focused on ideas, immersing them in opportunities for authentic practice. During the space research, she gave each of the boys the same nonfiction book to use for their research: *Discover the Planets* by Cynthia Pratt Nicolson and Bill Slavin (2005). She paired the boys up with partners in the class and also with a Grade 4 class to help them navigate this text, but she also expected them to read parts of it and process it to write facts about the planet they chose to research. She would prompt them by telling them to find three interesting facts about their planet and that spelling didn’t matter. They were rewarded when they completed this task by being allowed to find more facts in other books on the bookshelf. When I asked Jan if there were other texts (graphic, digital) they could access to find facts, she said she wanted them all to have the chance to look for facts in books first.
**Focusing on new literacies.**

Sometimes, the literacy events were focused specifically around new literacies. One example was when Jan pulled up a world map on the interactive whiteboard during a discussion about structures as the boys tried to figure out where Russia was because they had done a 3D puzzle about a structure in Russia. During that lesson, Ivan came up and drew the equator on the map displayed on the interactive whiteboard in order to explain what he understood about the location of Russia. He knew where it was because “I have a map at my house and I use it.” Jan enthusiastically valued that knowledge and used it to help the boys understand the weather in Russia. During a unit on transportation, Jan set up a task on the interactive whiteboard where the boys touched the screen and linked to watch two short YouTube movies – one about a train in India and one about a train in Korea. Then, collaboratively with each other and the teacher, the boys were directed to talk about similarities and differences between the two types of trains and then compare and contrast the two movies by recording their ideas in a variety of ways on a Venn diagram (see Figure 4). Another example was when the boys worked collaboratively to send short e-mails to their parents in the computer lab. They talked with the boys next to them about ideas (think, pair, share) and also, when necessary, asked their peers questions such as “how do I get to the subject line?” or other technical questions after the whole group lesson.
Some new literacies were taught and used in a variety of new contexts. Many of the boys were able to log on to the computers using their own usernames and passwords. Steven was able to independently locate programs based on the visual icons, enter the initial screen and choose activities from a list. Jan would assign an activity such as, “Go to Bailey’s Book House (software for developing early literacy skills) and choose an activity” and the boys would navigate there. When they struggled, they would ask for help from peers and, occasionally, from teachers. When Austin couldn’t log on one day, he asked a teacher if he could work with a friend and proceeded to pull up a chair and start a conversation about the activity his friends was working on (“I think you should put the lemon over there. Come on, let’s try it”). Another activity involved choosing money
from a space on the interactive digital table and pushing it towards the middle to make different amounts. The boys had to attempt to count the money already in the middle, take turns and remove money if there was too much. They received digital feedback for the “correct” amount of money, as they created the amount in many various ways. For example, for twenty-three cents, some boys put in twenty-three pennies and others tried two dimes and three pennies. There were many different combinations. Some were done together and others were random based on whose turn it was. They boys had to negotiate in order to take turns and complete the task, and sometimes the work as a community of learners was more challenging then the learning activity.

The Teaching/Learning Relationship: Pedagogy Framing the Practices

The teacher structured the Grade 1 classroom as she defined the activities and opportunities for literacy learning based on her beliefs and understandings. The modes and media chosen by the teacher were crucial to shaping meaning and learning for her students. The “ways in which something is represented shape both what is to be learned, that is, the curriculum content, and how it is to be learned” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 241). The “how” of multiliteracies is outlined by the NLG in four areas. Of the 80 literacy practices I observed, they were evenly split between explicit/overt instruction, immersion in practices and transformed practice or application to new contexts. I observed a critical focus for a literacy lesson only one time. These four areas of the multiliteracies pedagogy are not meant to be used in a linear fashion, but may occur randomly and simultaneously. These areas may be related in complex ways and revisited at different levels (NLG, 2000) and this is how they functioned in this classroom. At times, the same activity involved situated practice (immersion in texts, activating background knowledge, sharing ideas),
overt instruction (the teacher working with a small group to teach the skills required for a task) and transformed practice (the students creating or using a novel text).

**Immersion in practices.**

Situated practice involves “immersion in meaningful practices within a community of learners who are capable of playing multiple and different roles based on their background and experiences” (NLG, 2000, p. 32). This also includes experts to support learning new information and the teacher providing learning activities that are meaningful and relevant to the students.

Jan immersed the boys in information and experiences when beginning a new inquiry unit. She referred to this practice as frontloading. For example, in the “Tell me a Story” unit, Jan read stories, showed short videos, told stories orally, deconstructed stories with the boys on the interactive whiteboard and wrote stories collaboratively with the whole group. Jan often tried to connect the topic of the story to the boy’s lives. When reading “The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse”, the conversation began by asking, “Who has been to the country?” “What would we see in the country?” Or, “Based on what you’ve seen, how is it different then the town?”

The boys had the opportunity to discuss new information and ask questions that would guide the unit. Throughout the unit, the boys brought in their own stories from home and Jan read them to the class or added them to the class library. Stories on CD were provided during literacy centres (the Talk centre) to provide opportunities for the boys to hear more stories. The boys interacted differently with the material based on their background. Some were more comfortable searching sites on the computers, others read together with partners or in small groups and others participated more in whole group
activities and discussions with the teacher and peers. In many cases, such as during read alouds, Jan questioned the boys and explained concepts and rules as well as demonstrating various skills by modeling using written, visual and oral texts and taking into account the students’ experiences. One example was when the boys were studying different types of stories, Jan read them fairy tales such as *The Three Little Pigs* and *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. They analyzed the text by deconstructing and comparing stories. She then showed them a video of the same story as they practiced these same skills with different texts and different peers using slightly different texts. Throughout this, the boys made personal comments connecting to the text, such as, “I have that story at home but the cover of my book is different” or “I saw that on TV with my brother”.

Another example was throughout the unit on structures. There were 3D structures in the room, children’s literature and nonfiction books on the topic of structures and even the screen savers were changed to show various structures in the world. Jan shared many photos and graphics about tall structures, freestanding structures and interesting structures. The boys discussed structures, built structures and read about structures in books and on the computer. They drew structures digitally and sorted graphics of structures on the interactive digital table. In the structures unit, one boy talked about his father, who was an architect, and the structure he had built. Another boy said his dad was building the rest stops for Highway 407. Each of these comments led to longer discussions with Jan and the class.

During literacy centres, the boys were often sent in small groups to computer programs that were relatively new to them. They explored the program with little guidance, choosing from menus that were often represented graphically. They asked each
other and the teacher and TA when they needed assistance with the program, but many boys just explored and helped each other, talking about their discoveries and experiences as they played with the programs.

**Explicit/overt instruction.**

This involves active intervention by educators to explicitly teach students, provide strategies to promote comprehension and interpretation of various modes and scaffolds students to construct new meanings around new texts. The goal is for students to gain conscious control over what they are learning or, to become independent.

Jan facilitated the learning for the boys in a variety of whole group, small group and one-one contexts. As well, the TA and teachers from the Centre for Learning scaffolded small group instruction in math, writing and reading. Jan would often do whole group lessons modeling a particular skill or strategy (for example, writing a proper sentence based on a brainstormed topic or using the pictures to help you understand a story read) and then the boys would be assigned a writing task or activity in order to try on their own. Three times during my observations, there were four teachers in the class at one time working with small groups on hands-on math activities that lead to the boys filling out worksheets from their math workbooks. Jan also provided overt instruction during literacy centres during guided reading. She sometimes chose texts just slightly above their current reading level and modeled different decoding skills or how to read with fluency. Then, the boys read individually as Jan listened and gave oral prompts to guide them.

Jan overlapped immersion in practices with overt/explicit instruction. In these cases, she actively scaffolded activities as she collaborated with students and supported
them as they became able to accomplish complex tasks and learn to control new learning (NLG, 2000). There were whole class discussions about writing sentences in stories, where Jan would take sentences from the boys’ stories and talk about how to write them with more detail, more juicy words or proper punctuation and conventions. Jan pointed out that “you have to use juicy words for your audience to really feel your story…you have to get to the guts of it…. that’s what a story should do for the reader”. She also pointed out that, “if your audience can’t read it, then what’s the point. When you get it ready for an audience, the spelling, capitals and everything have to be fixed”. Jan also conferenced with the boys one-one on their writing during revisions and editing, showing them how to make their stories more interesting and fixing conventions with them.

**Transformed practice.**

Application to new contexts involves setting contexts in which students can apply what they have learned to in new ways to new situations. This is also termed “redesigning” (NLG, 1996): students are adapting what they know to a new context where it is logical to do so. Jan used a video, “Talking word caper” by Leap Frog, to teach the boys about silent “e”. The boys predicted the outcome of the movie, used the interactive whiteboard pen to circle letters, added on to simple words and brainstormed new words. They later practiced this same skill on the interactive table, interactive whiteboard and computer in small, collaborative groups. This was apparent during home reading when the boys would try new books each night to apply skills they learned in class. After working with many different types of stories and brainstorming topics, each boy wrote his own story. During the space unit, each boy made his own mind map on the computer in the lab and added to it, changed it and worked with it throughout the unit as
they gained knowledge about space and the planets. This aspect was really the product part of the unit, when the boys created a new text, a drama presentation, a new graphic on the computer, a song, a shared reading to show to the class or a Venn diagram that sorted and analyzed two concepts. Each time, the boys were participating in transformed practice.

**Critical focus (framing).**

This involves helping students understand that all texts exist in relation to a given social/cultural/political context and that those elements influence the construction of the text as well as the message embedded in the text. Only once did I observe any critical analysis of texts in literacy instruction. This one instance was in reference to understanding the advertising on a YouTube website when the boys were watching a video to illustrate the theme of construction. As Jan was accessing a video on the interactive whiteboard, advertisements popped up for Sears home services and pool liners. Jan discussed this with the boys and told them this was one way that stores can advertise what they have to sell. She explained that they would see these advertisements every time they looked at YouTube videos. She showed them how to close these windows so they could watch the video they had chosen to watch. Critical framing was not an observable focus for this teacher.

**Collaboration and Feedback**

A collaborative activity is one in which those involved have to share and negotiate. The NLG (2000) writes that, “Students need also to develop the capacity to speak up, to negotiate, and to be able to engage critically” (p. 13). Therefore, I chose to
look at if and how students were collaborating in this classroom during literacy events and practices.

Of the 80 literacy practices I observed, many were assigned to the individual students at some point in the activity and, therefore, students were expected to produce individual work. However, within this context, peer and the teacher collaborated during the literacy events. Only once did I observe a collaborative parent-child interaction during my research.

**Dominance of teacher–peer–student collaboration.**

There was a great deal of talk and collaboration occurring in this class. At no time was the class completely silent as the boys worked on literacy activities. At times, a literacy practice could have involved the peers and the teacher and different points. Both types of collaboration were counted in approximately the same amounts. Peer-peer interactions and teacher-student interactions occurred almost with the same frequency. Collaboration occurred during reading, writing and speaking activities around a wide variety of texts and many of these events overlapped constantly throughout a given task.

The boys were often grouped, either at their tables (in a seating plan), in homogeneous groups for literacy centres or they would move themselves into groups for various activities such as sitting at the back conference table to write or gathering around a nonfiction book to talk search for facts during the unit on structures. When possible, the groups facilitated by the teacher or the TA. I observed a lot of on task talk around the activity which included questioning such as “How do I do this?”, commenting on each other’s work (“That’s cool”), showing each other what to try (“Do it this way…”)) and sharing ideas (“You should add that the Wimpy Kid gets home safely”). Teacher-student
interactions occurred constantly in the class. Many of the teacher-student interactions were around simple questioning, “What sound did all the words have?” or “Who can spell the third word? I’m not going to lie to you – it’s a hard one!” Other interactions involved higher order questioning such as, “Can anyone guess what the story will be about?” or “How did you know? What were your clues?” Jan also gave a great deal of feedback to the boys. The feedback was often general, such as “Excellent!” “I like it” or “interesting.” This helped motivate the boys towards risk-taking and completion of activities. As Jan would circulate around the classroom praising the boys’ efforts, I observed them re-focus on their work or re-focus their conversation on the task. As well, Jan gave the boys directions in tasks and in routines by interacting with them, such as telling them to “try it this way” or telling them “I like the way you’re getting your ideas down about Mars. Add one more idea about the weather on Mars. You can find it in this section. Read it to me and we’ll see if it makes sense”. Jan used technology often to provide feedback to the boys as they practiced skills through games that would give positive feedback (e.g., lights, stars, a happy face) when an answer was correct.

The fact that the boys worked in whole groups and small groups almost all the time facilitated collaboration. The digital tasks presented to the boys usually involved some negotiating and sharing of ideas. When one of the boys was stuck adding circles to his mind map on the computer in the computer lab, he requested support from the teacher and then from a friend, saying, “Luke, how do I do this?” Thanks!” Jan also encouraged the boys to collaborate with each other. During a whole group discussion about planets, Jan said “I want you to talk to the person next to you and tell me one fact you can tell me about this picture”. She then asked them after ten seconds to share their thoughts with the
whole group. She modeled this collaboration. When she was showing the boys how to
write point form notes, she often mentioned “asking a friend”, “telling a friend what you
think” or “checking with a teacher”.

On another day, when there were four teachers in the room, Jan split the boys up
into groups and assigned one teacher to each group. The task was for the group to choose
any book from the bookshelf and read it aloud. At the same time, the boys were asked to
write down a list of all the words they could find that had a “long i” sound. The teacher
scaffolded this activity and the boys worked collaboratively to come up with a long list of
words, commenting on each other’s words and telling the recorder how to spell words.
However, many of the boys were unable to pick long i words out of the book and Austin
continually called out words that did not fit that pattern. Giano was searching on the word
wall for long i words and choosing incorrect answers to share with the group. In my
group, Ivan was recording the words for the group and telling the boys if they were right
or wrong.

There were a number of instances of asking peers and the teacher how to spell
words while the boys were engaged in other literacy practices. This took up a great deal
of time and I heard it often from the boys. At times, I also observed pairs or small groups
of boys choosing social talk over doing an assigned task. This sometimes occurred
around the computer, for example, showing each other things such as their backgrounds
or pictures on the computer or what the computer could do by calling out, “Look at this!”
Tools and Texts Used to Mediate Literacy Learning

Of the 80 literacy practices I observed, oral text was used in almost all cases. Images, and digital print were used much less then oral text but in almost equal amounts, as well as some video and integrated texts. Static text (print, pictures) was used almost twice as often as digital text.

The tools used during these literacy events were speech and, in almost equal amounts traditional tools and digital tools.

Teacher’s wide definition of text.

Jan’s definition of text was “very broad…. anything that they’re using to communicate - to read and write – any way that they’re communicating. ” Jan used a variety of text resources during the literacy block. Jan determined the texts used in the classroom by “interest, quality, if it matches the unit of inquiry. ” She determined the texts students used “based on their interests and their ability. I’m not going to do anything arbitrary. ” The literature selections in the classroom were changed frequently as the unit of inquiry changed and were a combination of books chosen by the librarian to match the unit of inquiry and classroom books bought specifically to match the themes for the Grade 1 unit of inquiry.

Tension in choices of text.

The technology resources were also used many times throughout the day. The interactive whiteboard was used for small group work during the literacy block and for whole group lessons during the inquiry block. I only observed the students using the interactive whiteboard independently or in small groups during this dedicated literacy
time. Other than that, the teacher used the interactive whiteboard as she guided the lessons using this digital tool. Jan used many YouTube videos, the interactive pens, graphics, and photos of the boys, gallery lessons and digital print for whole group lessons. Jan used technology “to keep the boys interested. They need to know how to use technology and they love it.” I never observed the boys using technology during spelling activities or printing activities although the teacher occasionally did. Mostly, when the boys worked on tasks after whole group lessons, they worked with pencils and paper or in notebooks.

When Jan chose to teach the boys a current song and have them perform it for the parents, it was the boys who drove the choice of the song and the idea to perform it at all. She was able to show them different versions of videos for the song on YouTube and they were very attentive when watching these videos. Jan commented that, “The song (Dynamite) was what they want and they’re excited about learning it.” She then typed out the whole song and gave them each a print copy of the words. Once that was done, she had the boys highlight their lines on the scripts so they would know when it was their turn to sing and also so they could practice learning the words. The lyrics were very long and the boys were often not looking at the lyrics when they were practicing as they had already memorized the words from the song and videos.

Jan tried as much as possible to balance the resources chosen for a given activity by thinking about what interests them, how will “I get them where I want them to go – what skills do they need – how do I balance my literacies…what skills can I imbed, based on their interests?” Jan’s approach to small group activities to practice certain skills in the literacy block was supportive of the oral language component that mediated many
observable literacy events. There was also a lot of whole group instruction that used digital technology. During the whole group follow-up, Jan always incorporated or encouraged talk as the boys worked.

**The role of multimodal texts and tools.**

I examined which texts were dominant in the literacy practices of these boys. Jan used paper and books in her instruction during guided reading, printing and spelling instruction. Even more often than pencil/paper, Jan used digital tools to mediate learning but often the literacy practices were encouraged using print text. The boys’ literacy events were analyzed according to the types of text mediating the practice, and many of these discrete categories overlapped in the same practice. For example, prior to assigning a script writing task in which the boys were expected to work in groups writing parts of a script on large pieces of blank paper, Jan did a series of lessons on the interactive whiteboard where topics were brainstormed with the boys and recorded. Then, ideas were moved, erased, deleted and re-organized as the boys looked for links and themes.
Figure 5. Screenshot demonstrating a brainstorm of the setting for the collaborative script.

Jan also modeled sentence writing on the interactive whiteboard, using digital text to model what the boys were expected to do in print. One example was when Giano wanted to write, “Oh no! There are dinosaurs here to hurt us!” Jan brought Giano to the interactive whiteboard and wrote the sentence for him as they talked. When he dictated the sentence originally, he left out the word “are” and Jan added it in with a little arrow and then decided to erase a part of the sentence with the Interactive whiteboard eraser and re-write it to demonstrate this action to Giano. Jan used multiple tools or media in different ways at the same time. However, the boys were then expected to do their actual writing using pencils and erasers and in their notebooks or on pieces of blank paper.

Jan used oral text frequently during her pedagogical practices in conjunction with print or digital print. At times, the boys used parallel texts independently. For example, when reconstructing the story of the 3 Little Pigs on the interactive whiteboard, Austin searched the bookshelf for the story to “find about the houses…like the brick houses.”
He moved the elements of the story around on the interactive whiteboard, first decoding the text, sequencing while negotiating with peers, and matching the parts of the story with pictures displayed on the whiteboard.

Figure 6. Screenshot of a literacy activity that incorporated oral, graphic, print and digital text for retelling a story.

Jan also used real-life images as text. When the boys were studying structures, she taught them to understand the function of a structure by looking for clues in a 3-D model of the structure (“It’s a church because it has a cross on the top”).
Print/pictures were dominant in almost equal amounts with oral text, although oral text was incorporated into almost every practice. As noted in the theme on collaboration, oral language was present in the class as the boys negotiated meaning using different modes. Steven created personal meaning through his interactions with print and oral language. An example was when he was reading a book about hockey in the guided reading group and continually told another boy, “I play hockey too. I was a goalie. What position do you play? I was a goalie”. Pictures were also present in those print texts, and during guided reading the teacher prompted the boys to “use the pictures to help you figure out the words”. Graphics were present in the digital texts also. Sometimes, the boys created the graphics. An example was when they began with a blank screen and drew mind maps, which were interconnected circles with ideas in pictures and words. They searched in Google images to look for more graphics. The screen was also surrounded by various graphics that helped these young boys navigate the activity. Digital images, video or integrated digital text were used to mediate literacy events in this classroom. This means that they were the focus of the literacy event. During the space unit, the boys were directed to look through Google images for pictures of their planet and then write about what they saw in those pictures. Sometimes, the boys were asked to read stories online. An example was when all the boys attended the computer lab to learn the online reading program. In this program, they learned to login, receive their individualized reading list, turn the pages of the book and decode words online. If they were struggling or if they chose this option, they could click on an icon and have the book read to them. After only two brief lessons on this program, all of the boys observed
in the case study were able to navigate this integrated digital text independently and they even accessed it at home.

The media used in the classroom were pencil and paper, digital tools and oral language. In almost double the cases, speech was used as a tool during literacy practices and, often, it overlapped with other tools. Even when the boys worked on individual tasks, for example, when working online or accessing software at the classroom computers, they still worked in a small group (e.g., the groupings for the literacy centres). The digital tools were not always accessible to the boys and were only made available during certain tasks. The digital tools (e.g., interactive digital table and interactive whiteboards, computers) were available to the boys at different times but in equal amounts (the boys rotated through the centres and visited different centers of different days). The pencils, markers, etc., were housed in common bins in the middle of the tables and the boys could access them when needed.

**Topics**

In order to understand how the boys’ interests/identities were being incorporated into the topics in the classroom, the practices were analyzed for this variable. Of the 80 literacy practices analyzed, the topics that emerged through the analysis of the data were self/family (in almost equal amounts) and popular culture (in almost equal amounts). Curricular topics were dominant and occurred 62 times.

**Integration of self/family and pop culture topics.**

Jan’s pedagogical practice was driven mostly by curricular or inquiry topics but also included boys’ self/family topics and pop culture topics. She incorporated ideas from
pop culture topics as a driver for the boys’ writing and reading. One example was the use of the song “Dynamite” for shared/choral reading. This song was chosen because the boys kept requesting it as background music during lunch. After playing the audio alone, Jan started playing various versions of the video and the boys sang along during lunch. This interest and enthusiasm with the song was the reason Jan chose to incorporate it into the dramatic performance, telling me “If they like it, if they want to learn it, then it’s meaningful and it will be a success”. Another example was the idea for the script which was about playing video games on the Wii. The boys voted and chose that topics for the scriptwriting.

In another instance, on the interactive whiteboard, a group of boys were assigned the task of making as many small words as possible out of a large word by moving the letters around on the interactive whiteboard. One of the words was IMON. Jan asked, “What’s an imon?” The boys responded “It’s a go-go”, and Jan checked it off as a valid word.

Self/family topics included stories written about their brothers and conversations about connections to self. The boys wrote stories which included themselves as characters, characters from stories they read or characters from video games that they had at home. Giano wrote about Mario and Luigi. Ivan wrote about the Wimpy Kid. Steven wrote about and searched for pictures on the Internet of Sonic. Other topics were Candyland, race cars, dinosaurs, the Wii and playing hockey. The boys wrote on the blog about their families, communicating that they read to their mom, dad or brothers. During one instance at the computer centre, the boys wrote the names of all the baseball players they knew (calling out names to each other) and then searched for the vowel sounds in
those names. When Ivan was given the task of making a Chanukah placemat for the holidays, he stated, “I’m drawing the Wimpy Kid for Chanukah”. Austin wrote about the video game “Cars” during storywriting. He was able to retell the plot from beginning to end in detail, and this helped him understand the idea of story structure.

**The predominance of curricular topics.**

Most often, the curriculum was found to be the dominant topic of the literacy events in the classroom. Topics related to self/family and popular culture appeared in the data less often. Curricular topics included space, structures, storytelling and an inquiry unit on friendship. In the space unit, the boys were able to choose the planet they wanted to investigate and bring in resources from home. Steven and a classmate brought in printouts from the Internet about photons and the class proceeded to spend a few days learning about photons. They even created a photon playground in art and displayed it on the ceiling. The boys were given the opportunity to ask questions and express their interests related to those topics to drive some of the inquiries. For the structures unit, Steven’s question was “Why are skyscrapers so big?” and Austin’s question was “How do buildings not fall over and break?” Jan posted these questions in the classroom and chose materials such as nonfiction stories to address these questions. In this case, she also chose graphics to show on the interactive whiteboard (such as the highest structure in the world in Dubai, the CN Tower) to talk to the boys about structures and tall buildings. Therefore, within the curricular structure, there was room for the boys to involve themselves in the topics, express their questions and incorporate their ideas into the topics for learning.
Embedded Influences

The local use of literacy and contextualized influences on social practices are fundamental to understanding literacy. One related aspect in the multiliteracies framework is the importance of local context. Some researchers disagree that local and global contexts are two discrete realms (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Not everything that is a global context is also local but accessing a global connection always occurs within a local context. In this study, the local context includes the influences of the community/school, teacher peers and influences of the family.

Typically, literacy events are a means to an end and these events and practices do not exist in isolation – they are influenced by social goals or cultural practices. The data was viewed from the perspective of “whose influence?” was driving the practice, based on the understanding that literacy practices only have meaning in a social or cultural context. Analysis of the students’ literacy events data showed the influences of the school, teacher and peers were most dominant in shaping literacy practices. Teachers and peers were observed often as highly influential in the practices through social goals and cultural practices.

Whose influence?

In examining the influences on pedagogy, it became clear that the teacher’s pedagogical decisions are “patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 11). These institutions and relationships include the curriculum, socioeconomic class and expectations of the parents in the school, the relationships
between headmaster and teacher, teacher and parents and the various assumptions of all these stakeholders.

The school, teacher and peers had the main influence on literacy events in almost equal amounts. In a small number of instances, the influence of parents was apparent during literacy events in the classroom.

Along with the school curriculum and expectations, Jan’s choices of activities were the biggest influence on literacy events and practices. Also, peers had a big influence on literacy events simply because there was so much interaction involved in each event. From writing a story in a small group to overt instruction in whole groups to working on the computer looking for images, the boys constantly talked, negotiated and shared ideas and thoughts. If Jan would ask the boys to access a particular software program, she would also let them decide which games to play within that program, who to work with and if they were going to share their work. Therefore, there are many overlapping influences at play in these literacy events in this setting.

For example, the students and parents had input into the blog, which, in turn, influenced the teacher and peers. In the blog, the boys could access their friend’s comments, make comments for their friends and create entries about books. One mother wrote in an e-mail to Jan that:

At first I missed writing all of the books down that Jeffrey read. It was a nice routine for us and he felt so proud of his list. But now I see the excitement when he logs into the blog. He wants to add the book he read and he wants to see what his friends are reading. I hear them talking about their comments when they play together. It made reading the book exciting, because he wants to share something from it.
During the unit on structures, Jan took the class outside the school to one of the boy’s houses, which was under construction. The class met the boy’s mom there and heard all about their new house and how it was being constructed. The boys wrote “sticky note” poetry there by recording what they smelled, saw and heard at the construction site. They then returned to the classroom to create poems using their sticky note words. This was only possible and valuable because of the opportunities provided by the parents and particular community. Another time, Jan set up a Skype link with one of the boy’s fathers who was the owner of a construction company. The class Skyped with him, saw his office and asked many questions about his job. This created a local context for learning that embedded social interaction between parent, students and teacher and was mediated by the interactive whiteboard technology, the boys’ background knowledge about the topic and oral text.

As the teacher and the boys interacted with texts, their practices and events were socially situated in the context of this school. One example of a literacy event that was mediated by text but influenced by the school was a handout that Jan sent out to parents in late September. This colourful, digitally prepared “cheat sheet” outlined important information for parents. It included photos of the boys interacting on the interactive digital table, sitting in a circle in whole group meeting and doing art activities in the art room. This “cheat sheet” gave parents information about spelling strategies, what to do when you finish reading a book, math games, and information about library and home reading everyday from the leveled book bins in the class. There were also prompts for having conversations with their sons about school. I attended the curriculum night at the school and an open house in order to gain an understanding about the context for literacy
in this school. I was also, at times, able to access and read the school newsletter, which was written by teachers and administration and sent out to parents each week. This type of information given to parents demonstrates that literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broad social goals and situated within particular cultural practices. There are social meanings embedded in the choices of photos, the format chosen to present the information and the information stressed for parents by using subheadings and bold type.

The drama activities were heavily influenced by the culminating task of “showing the parents”. The boys performed for the parents twice in 3 months. Parents were very excited about the script writing and song presentation, sending e-mails to Jan, commenting about how wonderful this idea was and helping their sons at home with costumes, props and learning lines. Jan sent out many e-mails to parents about the boys’ progress in these two events, outlining dates, times and responsibilities.

**Linking to global contexts.**

As well, this teacher and these students interacted with some global contexts, and these contexts were accessed and used based on influences by the parents, teacher, school and peers. These global links were always related to digital media as this was the tool for access to the world. Some extensions to global connectedness included accessing online videos, sending a receiving e-mails and using Internet based programs on the computers. One example was the use of the Internet based math program. The boys could link to it from the computer lab, from the school computers or from home, doing math and collecting points. Jan could track their progress, create assignments and give feedback online. Another example was during the unit on constructing a story, Jan showed a video that demonstrated a pool being constructed. Then, she ran the video backwards to
demonstrate deconstruction as a precursor to a week spent deconstructing stories into parts (characters, setting, climax, resolution, ending). Another example was when the boys spent time in the computer lab learning how to send an e-mail to their families with a subject line and a message. Jan had previously collected all the e-mail addresses of the parents and shared them with the boys so they could communicate with their parents. They eventually decided to communicate with others (the headmaster, friends) and accessed those e-mails as well. Another global link was the school’s subscription to Mathletics, an online math practice and competition site where the boys could track their scores and view the scores of other same-aged students around the world. These global links were available to the boys because of their access to tools such as the interactive whiteboard, fee-based Internet programs and computers.

All of these contexts involved social interaction. Whether the interaction was at the classroom, local or global level, the boys were learning through social practices. One of the posters in the school states, “Our world’s getting smaller and infinitely more connected. We encourage our boys to be engaged members of both local and international communities.” In this Grade 1 class, overwhelmingly, the local context was the place for learning and collaboration.

**Parents’ Views About Valuable Literacy Activities at Home and School**

The parents shared their views about both school literacy and home literacy. The data contributed to the specific categories and themes that emerged in this study.
**School Literacy**

Parents valued a wide range of literacy practices at school. The data shows that what the parents valued at school was influenced by the teacher as well as school communications.

**Traditional print literacies.**

Parents clearly valued traditional print literacies more than new literacies. Every parent listed guided reading as one of the valuable literacy activities in the classroom. Parents are very familiar with this activity because Jan spent time explaining about guided reading and the home reading program on curriculum night at the beginning of the year. Aside from that, different parents listed different activities involving traditional print literacies. Ivan’s parents wrote that they valued drills, printing, weekly spelling dictations, reading at school and teacher’s reading and writing lessons. Giano’s parents valued the home reading program (leveled books) and the reading buddy program. It is interesting that Giano’s parent responded by including a program that was mentioned at curriculum night but actually never happened. There was no formal reading buddy program for this class. Once Jan paired the boys up with older boys to help them with their research. Therefore, it demonstrates how carefully parents listen to and value the messages from the teacher even if there is no evidence to support it. Austin’s parents valued the trips to the school library and story/play writing, which was actually a real struggle for Austin because of his difficulty with fine motor skills. They may have mentioned it because it was an area where Austin needed some instruction/support. Steven’s parents also mentioned story writing in their list of valuable literacy activities at school.
Enjoyment, confidence and fluency with difficult books.

Parents’ definition of successful literacy learning included enjoyment (three out of four parents wrote enjoyment), confidence (three out of four parents wrote about confidence) and all parents mentioned improving fluency and being able to read harder books easily. Based on communications from the school (e-mails from Jan, newsletters, curriculum night information), these parents of Grade 1 boys have been told repeatedly that learning to read fluently and with comprehension is a goal of the Grade 1 program. Two families specifically mentioned writing. Ivan’s parents wrote, “to write skillfully and neatly” and Austin’s parents wrote “to understand how to write a story and play”. Therefore, although parents’ definitions of successfully literacy learning were focused on enjoyment and confidence, they tended to see the teaching of traditional print literacies as the most valuable way to achieve this. It is interesting that two parents mentioned reading signs on stories, trucks or streets as an exciting part of literacy learning. This was shared by Jan in a parent communication early in the year when she wrote about the value of environmental print to support reading development.

It is also interesting to note that there were a number of instances in the data where parents expressed very positive remarks about the teacher. Some examples are, “Ms. Sharp’s brilliant idea” or “Whatever Ms. Sharp is doing – she is doing an amazing job” and “Jan is terrific in explaining phonetic rules in their terms…which they love and remember”. The parents definitely have confidence and trust in the teacher. In this context, these parents look to the teacher for guidance, support and knowledge about what’s best for their sons. There is a definite relationship between school and home values. I believe the relationship is reciprocal but the parent responses demonstrate that
the dominant influence is the school and the messages that parents receive from this prestigious school shape their own values.

**New literacies.**

Parents did mention some new literacies, but noticeably less often. Steven’s parents listed “using their imagination and sharing” as well as research as valuable activities. Steven’s parents were the only family to mention technology, stating that a valuable literacy activity is “anything where he gets to motivate himself with the computer is positive”. Steven had a particular interest in technology and, when his parents were notified in October that his reading needed to be improved, his father bought an ipad and downloaded books to read with Steven at night. This was praised by Jan constantly and Steven did seem more confident after his father got involved with his reading in this way.

Parents were all engaged with their children on the reading blog. When parents were asked at curriculum night if they preferred a reading log or blog, the parents almost unanimously chose the blog. That may have been due to pressure from other parents and Jan’s excitement when she showed parents the blog in September. As well, they voted for “log or blog” by a show of hands in the classroom after Jan’s presentation about the blog, so it is difficult to say whether the blog was valued or if the parents felt pressure to agree to the blog.

**Home Literacy**

At home, parents believed that reading at night and doing homework were the most valuable activities they could do to develop their son’s literacy skills. Homework
consisted mostly of studying for weekly spelling tests, reading at home (from the leveled book bins) and writing responses about at-home reading on the blog.

**Literacy together at home.**

In all cases, parents or other family members read with their son every night. All families explicitly mentioned a more capable reader (parent, older brother, grandparent) that read with each boy at night. Ivan’s parents mentioned that they watch him read and correct mistakes, if any. Steven and Giano’s parents mentioned that the boys also read to them. This collaborative activity was quite clearly an embedded routine in the lives of all the boys. Printing, cursive, drawing, notes, journal and homework were the categories mentioned in response to the question about what the boys write at home. In particular, Austin’s parents wrote that, since writing (printing) is a struggle for Austin, they don’t write for fun at home. Giano’s parents also mentioned that there is not as much focus on writing on their part because of time constraints. Giano’s parents shared that they focus on “homework/then reading”.

**Resources for home reading and writing: Print and technology.**

When asked about resources at home for reading and writing, certain kinds of texts and tools were clearly valued by parents. Picture books and storybooks were the dominant type of text and were mentioned by all the families for reading at home. All parents also mentioned books/notebooks as resources for reading/writing at home. All families wrote that their sons read at home each night from print texts, which included the leveled texts from school. Other print resources mentioned were newspapers (mentioned twice), magazines (such as *OWL* magazine, *Lego* magazine or *National Geographic Kids*), and a notebook or notepads with pens/pencils (mentioned twice).
Three of the families listed technology resources such as laptops or ipads, which were available at home. Austin’s parents wrote about a “Jolly Phonics” CD-Rom which is “wonderful to teach reading and spelling” and this was the only technology mentioned by Austin’s parents for reading/writing. In addition to listing the ipad as a resource, Steven’s family was the only family that commented that they download books on the ipad as well as read with their son on websites, which included razkids. When specifically asked about technology resources available at home, all the parents listed other tools such as the Wii, computers, IPods and iphones.

**Other uses for technology at home.**

There was no mention of technology when parents responded to questions about writing. Technology was used at home for a variety of purposes. Ivan’s parents mentioned watching cartoons, using the Internet to Google things of interest, look for games, and using IPods or iphones to listen to music or play games. Ivan’s mother also wrote that she disapproves of long hours with tech devices and encourages his other activities. Jan mentioned to me that two other boys in the class (that she knew of) had the same issue. When she was sending home information about an online reading program the school had purchased for home and school use, she said that some of the parents won’t like it. They think their kids spend too much time on the computer already. Steven’s parents wrote that he is very technologically literate and that he shops, plays games, watches movies, does Mathletics and the online reading program from school, using the ipad, iphone and IPod. Austin’s parents wrote that he “uses a laptop if we really need to work on a school task that he finds boring and repetitive – when Austin was learning to read we used it for the Jolly Phonics CD-Rom”.

No parents mentioned speech as a tool for literacy learning. The focus for texts and tools was clearly on print texts and the tools were a combination of traditional tools for writing and digital tools.

**Parent concerns about social skills.**

Another interesting finding was that the information from both parent teacher interviews/conferences was heavily weighted toward social issues and learning skills. Most of the questions asked of parents in the October survey involved social skills, for example, what upsets your son, how does your son feel about school? Of the six boxes on the parent–teacher conference sheet in February, four were devoted to routines and social/learning skills, and one was devoted to academic skills. Therefore, parents received and shared a great deal of information about personal growth and social skills in their communication with the school and this was a focus for both parents and the school. Often, when parents visited the school incidentally during the period of my observation, they would ask Jan questions such as “did he eat his snack” or “he didn’t get his homework yesterday” or “did he sit nicely in the group today”. This has always been a goal of early years education and appears to continue to be a goal for these boys and a lot of time is spent at school working with the boys to support social skills development.

**Summary**

This classroom was filled with resources for learning. Classroom books, the school library and technology resources combined to create many opportunities for students to engage in literacy practices in school. The resources were used for various purposes and through the choice of resources, the school and teacher communicated
which practices, knowledge and skills were valued in this school. The literacy practices and events occurred within the context of the school’s language curriculum, which was influenced by both the Ontario curriculum and the IB curriculum for the primary years.

The teacher’s beliefs about learning, her students and assessment and reporting were all important to understand the influences on her pedagogical choices. The parents’ input was also important to understand what they understood to be valuable literacy practices at school and at home. The boys and their experiences with literacy events and practices were important in this chapter to create an in-depth understanding of literacy events/practices in this Grade 1 class.

The teacher structured the classroom in various ways for the boys to participate in literacy events and practices. Through centre work and whole group lessons, the teacher and the boys interacted with available resources. Traditional print literacies and new literacies existed in tension with each other in the areas of spelling, printing, guided reading and the teaching of foundational skills such as writing. The teacher used three of the four areas of the multiliteracies pedagogy in her instruction in overlapping ways. She also valued and used multimodal text but a tension existed in the use of these texts; the teacher moved between the worlds of pencil and paper and relevant, meaningful experiences with graphic, digital and print texts. Collaboration was a key component of literacy practices and events in this class.
As stated by the NLG (2000), “the mission of education…is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life” (p. 9). This vision of education is based on a number of assumptions. One is the notion of literacy as a social practice. Another is the belief that students’ participation in Design, which describes the production and consumption of text in any modality, leads to positive outcomes for education. A third assumption is that a new pedagogical framework, the pedagogy of multiliteracies, is effective because it incorporates multiple ways to interact with students as teachers consider their own philosophical beliefs about teaching and an understanding of the contextualized ways students learn. The practical application of these views of literacy to primary classrooms is still being conceptualized.

In my research, I found that both the traditional view of literacy and the new literacies were significant parts of the lives of this group of boys in this resource rich classroom. Students’ literacy was shaped in particular ways for particular purposes for reading and writing, with a clear focus on print texts, decoding, reading comprehension and fluency instruction, printing and spelling. In 2011 in this classroom, print literacies continue to be highly valued; their high status in the mainstream culture makes that imperative (Janks, 2000). It is clear that some of the choices about resources and pedagogy were guided by claims of “political correctness, the canon of great literature, grammar, and back-to-basics” (NLG, 2000, p. 10). I observed decisions being made by the school and the teacher about the ways in which literacy was taught and which
resources were used in this Grade 1 classroom. Within this school that epitomized access and privilege, it was also apparent that print literacy was important, but not enough.

Students in this class participated in many practices that incorporated the new literacies. Students were expected to be skilled and knowledgeable in the foundational skills, but also approach tasks collaboratively, interact effectively using various modes of communication and interpret and produce digital texts across multiple modalities (Norton, 2005; Street, 2005). Along with traditional emergent literacy approaches, many of the teacher’s and students’ literacy practices in this classroom aligned with multiliteracies and new literacies theories. The teacher’s espoused beliefs drew on the background knowledge and home literacies of the students. She attempted to understand the identity of her individual learners alongside a wide understanding of texts and resources for teaching and learning. She immersed the boys in practices related to their interests using print and technology, provided overt instruction connected to the mandated knowledge and skills, and used integrated digital texts to provide opportunities for the boys to create new, meaningful texts. She taught the knowledge and skills she understood to be necessary for their future success in ways that incorporated many aspects of multiliteracies and theories of multimodality, conceiving of literacy as more than simply a linguistic pursuit (Jewitt, 2008).

**Defining Literacy Learning**

Literacy learning was defined by the teacher and parents in ways that incorporated traditional literacies and new literacies. For example, Jan followed published programs to teach and assess her students’ traditional print literacies such as printing, spelling and how to decode words in print. She used leveled readers as an important part of her
literacy program, even though the value she placed on them was inconsistent with the wide definition of texts she voiced. She used the overall themes and expectations in the curriculum to drive her instruction. Jan taught using traditional methods such as whole group meetings with teacher directed discussions around a storybook read aloud. However, she also incorporated the new literacies, providing authentic contexts to practice reading and writing, communication and collaboration. She incorporated the use of the interactive whiteboard, accessed the Internet, collaborated with the students to determine topics of interest for literacy practices and incorporated small group work that supported communication and collaboration.

The parents also expressed a desire for their sons to learn the traditional print literacies, but they understood that new literacies were an important part of the educational landscape in this class. Parents privileged print literacy over other forms, noting the importance they placed on home reading using leveled books, spelling, guided reading at school and printing. The parents wanted their sons to be successful. The parents valued the traditional print literacies more than the new literacies, citing their desire for their sons to develop enjoyment, confidence and fluency while reading, to become better story writers and to learn to spell and print proficiently in Grade 1. However, they also valued instruction that incorporated the ipad and online programs to teach and practice reading or math, the reading blog to respond to books read, the boys’ collaboration when writing scripts, realizing that new technologies were engaging for their sons.

All of this occurred in a particular type of social and cultural context for learning that contributed to this definition of literacy learning. Choices regarding structures,
programs, practices, or materials are much more than choices about how to achieve linguistic proficiency; they are also choices about how to distribute linguistic resources and about what value to attribute to linguistic forms and practices. In this classroom, pedagogical choices were embedded in the economic, political and social interests of these boys that have consequences for the lives of individuals as well as for the construction of social practices and relations of power (Heller & Martin Jones, 2001). Therefore, the types of literacy practices that were valued in the classroom may have been connected to the access and privilege afforded these boys, as explained in the following section.

**Access and Privilege**

The teacher and the boys had access to a wide variety of print and digital resources, both at school and at home. Whether they were interacting in small groups at the interactive whiteboard, reading books from the classroom literature library, borrowing books from the leveled book bins in the classroom or reading leveled books online in the computer lab, they had ongoing access to multimodal resources. The boys also had access to the knowledge necessary to be successful in school. Their parents read to them in the evening and helped them with homework. Steven’s father downloaded books of interest on the ipad. Giano’s parents provided tutoring for him because he was struggling to learn to read.

Access to resources for Design gave the teacher the ability to make different experiences available to the boys and use pedagogical designs that involved them to participate more fully in Design experiences which included using the Internet, having access to fee based online programs and collaborating on the digital interactive table. Jan
communicated with the parents by e-mail on a regular basis and then chose to teach these young boys how to apply their writing skills to access and use their personal e-mail accounts to send and receive messages to family and school. The resources for these Design experiences were available to these boys.

However, this school functioned in many ways as a traditional school. Schools as we know them, which were developed during the economic circumstances of the industrial revolution, were created to serve an assimilatory function (Dewey, 1966). The purpose and result of schooling was to sort students into “academic” or “non-academic” labels or streams. Academic success is still often narrowly defined by knowledge of content and application of skills that become increasingly more complex but are based in the foundational skills (Wolfe & Flewitt, 2010), and this was certainly true at this school. At this school, it was important that all students be able to use print and apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate proficiency with print in order to demonstrate school success.

As well, the structure of this school valued specific kinds of linguistic forms of capital and certain identities and supported certain practices that position students as “literate” (Gee, 1996). First, English was the dominant language and, in fact, there was no English as a Second Language Department accessible to the boys in the primary school. The dominance of English as the language of literacy instruction was one of the ways to provide the boys with access in the situated schooling of Ontario. This social situatedness is important in these findings. Although added languages were encouraged and were part of the curriculum, schooling was in English.

The school valued the global connections and the usage of technology as a tool to support literacy learning in Grade 1. They provided e-mail accounts for each student,
purchased online programs, linked their website between school and home and set e-newsletters and Internet links to families. However the school still valued “book learning” alongside the meaning-making potential of new technologies.

The fact that these privileged boys are positioned with promising social futures and high social standing lends voice to choices for other, possibly less advantaged students. Jan’s practices, planning and Design incorporated discussions about who the boys are and what the boys want to learn. These boys were provided with instruction that incorporated an awareness of student identity into the process of schooling, provided multiple, varied resources, attributed value to the important language forms and practices students engaged with and incorporated the foundational literacy skills. The experiences of these boys could be translated into programs for less advantaged students, as it is clear that these privileged boys are set up for success.

The findings in this study draw upon assumptions about the structure and purposes of learning and school and notions of community and collaboration. The students are of particular privilege, and they have a teacher who shares her beliefs in a system under the influence of various high status stakeholders. The high socio-economic class of these boys contributes to their possibilities for success (Collins et al., 2000). The choices made by students and the teacher in this class are embedded in the particular context of community, collaboration, pedagogy, assessment and parent involvement and expectations.
Theoretical and Practical Tensions in the Definition of Successful Literacy Learning

Literacy is defined in multiple ways. Luke and Freebody’s (2000) definition fits the findings of this study as they define literacy as “the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken, print and multimedia (p. 9). My research showed that literacy is layered and multifaceted and can incorporate the individual, the social context, and the multimodal design necessary for students to become literate. The graphic shown represents my view of the 21st century early literacy learner, based on evidence from this study.
Figure 7. Literacy learning in this classroom is characterized as a complex interaction between traditional and new skills, literacies, modes, contexts and practices.

As illustrated in the above model, Jan begins planning by considering her individual learners. She “starts with what my kids are capable of, what they can do and what they are interested in and then I plan...that is where I start from”. Through her use of students’ questions, students’ interests and her goal to “empower” students, Jan placed the learner in the center of her pedagogical plan. The graphic includes the foundational literacy skills, which is not meant to imply that these practices took place solely using
print texts or solely through overt instruction. Using print, digital and oral texts, students were able to interact in a wide variety of ways to practice these foundational skills. The literate knowledge and skills involved in reading, writing, listening, speaking and viewing were socially constructed as students communicated both face to face and online, in partners and small groups as well as with other adults. They collaborated to write, read and present information orally in literacy centres, at the classroom computers and when visiting the library and computer lab. The students created a wide variety of products using both print and digital resources, including scripts, stories and videos. Using the resources available to them, students worked on common tasks but also incorporated themselves and their identity to Re-design in various ways.

In this classroom students were simultaneously members of various communities of learners; they were collaborative in both the local and global contexts; social, participating in individual literacy practices which were embedded in the social and cultural context and community; and they also functioned as individuals, each as a member of the community making meaning with text based on individual identity. The process was mediated by the rich resources and multimodal texts produced and used in the student’s school and lifeworlds. A social practice perspective helps teachers and researchers understand children’s literate engagement as more than skills. Rather, this perspective considers students’ identities, their relationships, and the learning they negotiate while engaged in meaningful literacy practices.

**Collaborating, communicating and creating.**

The data showed that these boys were constantly collaborating in the classroom with each other and with their teachers, at home with siblings, parents and friends and
online with digital communities. The new literacies of the 21st century embrace the
digital world of students, imagine creativity as a crucial and necessary outcome of
education, examine the traditional notions of the cultures and texts of schools, integrate
critical thought, view literacies as local and situated and move away from the idea of
literacy as an autonomous neutral set of skills or competencies acquired through
schooling (Street, 1998). An essential part of this is communication and collaboration.

The classroom existed as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the
lives of these boys. The boys’ lives consisted of multiple, overlapping groups: families,
religious organizations, athletic teams, etc. As people pursue a shared interest over time,
practices unique to that endeavor are generated and members of the community construct
their identities within them (Crafton et al., 2007). The boys’ community of practice in the
school could be further broken down by their participation in small groups, their
participation in clubs and their participation with each other outside of school at parties
and play dates. Wenger (1998) states that participation in communities of practice shape
both experiences and competence, becoming part of what we do and who we are. In
communities of practice, learners rely on more experienced members of the community
to provide support through meaningful collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978). In this class, the
boys functioned as a community of practice around literacy events as well as social
events. The boys learned and played and interacted with each other and the teacher,
building friendships as well as their own social and literate identities.

The boys in this class were constantly involved in interactions with others,
working collaboratively towards common and individual goals. Even when they worked
on individual computers or in their notebooks to produce products, there was constant
social talk in the classroom, feedback and prompting from teachers, explaining, negotiating between peers and evidence of peers helping others. The boys’ literacy activities involved playful collaboration among groups of friends, a situation that Dyson (1993) terms the social work of literacy. The boys used language to explore and to learn to work together on common projects, often gathering around the computer, a book or other work to engage in conversation. Collaboration has a positive impact on learners. Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the social use of language as the very foundation of learning. Gee (2002) conceptualized an affinity-identity formed through experiences that are shared within the practices of “affinity groups”. Therefore, personal relationships and identities are formed through these crucial social interactions around literacy practices. One example of this was when one of the other boys asked Steven for help with technology. As he collaborated with them as an expert, he re-conceptualized his own identity as a literacy learner. Literacy learning is connected to relationships of language and power that recognize there are sociopolitical subtexts inherent in all literacy acts that shape both knowledge and identity (Friere, 1970; Kress, 2003). Although no one explicitly stated that expertise in technology or collaboration were required or valued skills in this classroom, the subtext was clear to Steven and his classmates.

In line with Vygotsky’s theory of sociocognitive development, oral language acted as a bridge to learning in virtually all situations as individual boys interacted with peers and teachers to construct meaning during literacy events. As the students invented and used language (Dyson, 1999), the literacy events occurred in a structured way in specific contexts, but were mediated by talk and social relationships. This allowed for the co-construction of knowledge that, as Cummins (2001) says, is fundamental for cognitive
development and effective learning. The teacher consciously set up learning for the whole group and provided opportunities for the boys to interact with each other to collaborate, communicate and create in the classroom and across the globe.

**Literacy Practices and Events in the Context of Early Literacy**

In Jan’s classroom, a great value was placed on the book as a tool for reading and the pencil and paper as tools for writing in Grade 1. This finding is not unique. Hassett (2006) and Marsh (2007) both found that early literacy instruction remained tightly tied to traditional forms of literacy, focusing on phonics and word recognition, in an age when new technologies and multimodal texts are flourishing. Parents’ comments and teacher practices proved that reading a storybook, writing a story or script and learning to print and spell were valued expressions of literacy learning in this classroom. What was unique about this teacher was that, although these traditional print literacies were very important in this classroom, Jan balanced these instrumental notions by transforming them into meaningful literacy practices by providing word work/spelling activities on the interactive whiteboard, showing students how to spell “magic e” words by showing an interactive movie, or teaching mini-lessons on writing by drawing on a video or using the interactive digital table to illustrate meaningful links to student knowledge. She assigned writing tasks but incorporated the boys’ interests and background knowledge into themes, brainstormed with the boys and encouraged them to predict the outcome of video stories, as well as continually encouraging the boys’ to ask questions which guided themes and content. This teaching was effective, as demonstrated by progress in the boys’ values, self-concepts and skills.
Tension Between Traditional and New Literacies

In this class, the traditional approach to teaching literacy skills was evident. One component of the pedagogical approach was the presentation of a set of perceived “neutral” skills (Street, 2008) such as spelling words, learning the sounds of the letters, printing using a standard printing program and learning to decode words in print using standard prompts (Clay, 2002) and common print based texts. The desired skills were determined as Jan and the team at the school consulted both the Ontario and the IB curriculum, both of which contained a taxonomy of categories of skills that were required in order for the boys to learn to read and write proficiently. Although these skills were taught to the whole group most of the time, each boy worked towards mastery of these skills at his own pace and with many varied opportunities for practice. When leveled books were bought for classroom reading, they were bought as packaged sets from the publisher and organized according to difficulty level rather than themes or genres. These books were presented to the boys as “home reading books” and the boys were asked to choose from among these books for nightly reading practice. The teacher never wondered aloud to me whether these books “fit” the boys as literate learners; rather they were books that were high interest for boys, current books, newly published and the parents valued these books as an important component of learning to read in Grade 1.

Existing in tension with this traditional pedagogical model was the ideological model based in the multiliteracies framework. Because the boys had access to so many resources at home and at school, in the school library, classroom and technology labs, online and print resources, digital screens and tables, as well as resources available to the boys at home, all of the boys were immersed in Design experiences with many different
types of text. Jan used the new technologies to model, demonstrate and provide multiple opportunities to practice the foundational skills involved in reading and writing, including word work, voice-recordings, responding to visual and audio texts, and exposure to texts that demonstrated global connections such as Internet links, e-mail and online collaboration. The boys were exposed to social and cultural contexts for learning that were valued in their school (Street, 1995). The combination of the teacher’s beliefs, access to resources, curricular goals laid out in Ontario and in the PYP, the school’s understandings about the best outcomes for these students, as well as parent’s beliefs about what successful literacy learning looked like in Grade 1, were all part of the social and cultural expectations about how successful literacy learning was defined.

These boys entered Grade 1 with broad and rich experiences with media and were ready to have their skills, knowledge and abilities further developed in school (Marsh, 2008). In this classroom and in their lifeworlds, students had access to multiple resources providing multiple opportunities for collaboration, choice, communication, connectivity, engagement and practice, all of which provided the social and cultural context in which to learn basic skills that will allow the boys to participate fully in the social and cultural context of school (NLG, 1996).

This study, which looked at literacy in practice, considers both the new multimodal technologies available for learning (Gee, 2004) and the new social and political dimensions of literacy (NLG, 2000) in order to understand how the boys engaged with literacy in this classroom.
The Teacher’s Pedagogical Practices

The teacher’s pedagogy in this classroom created a multifaceted teaching and learning relationship between her and the boys. The results showed that the boys were often engaged in activities that taught and provided practice with autonomous and instrumental skills, and the boys were content to practice these skills in the classroom. However, the teacher created an environment where these boys moved fluidly beyond traditional page and rule bound conceptualizations of literacy education, participating in “new conditions of literacy” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 242). Digital and print-based literacies existed together and, according to the teacher and the school, both are required. Students switched between genres quite easily and participated in multiple forms of meaning making. The parents’ views of literacy learning encompassed printing, spelling, drills and practice, homework, borrow-a-book and story reading at home. These practices were articulated goals of the teacher’s program, alongside the use of 21st century creative tools and activities that use the digital tools as a way to support students to create, collaborate, communicate, problem solve and use a wide variety of multimodal texts. For this teacher, there was no universal plan, assessment, method or text that guaranteed literacy success for the boys (Luke, 1998). Instead, this teacher’s instruction was a complex interaction between the mandated curriculum and the boys’ identities, opinions and interests. This guided the teacher to make textual choices and plan instructional interactions that were socially and academically meaningful to the group (Luke, 1998), but were also framed by the articulated goals of schooling.

The teacher’s structured assignment of whole group tasks, scaffolding of student learning using page-bound resources and assessment of students using standardized
assessment and individual assessments of skills existed in tension with her objectives to immerse the boys in meaningful practices, value their backgrounds and interests, use their questions to guide inquiry and provide access to multiple and varied resources where the boys could move fluidly between traditional literacy and the new literacies of the 21st century.

The boys were involved in a wide range of literacy events and practices. The events exposed them to many different 21st century creative texts and tools, supported oral language as a text for communication and learning, and gave them some access to the world through careful use of the Internet and digital text. The boys’ lifeworlds were valued at times in the class and they were often grouped in whole or small groups, and given the opportunity to pursue their own interests and ideas or integrate these interests and ideas into curriculum based learning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

This fits with the “how” of the pedagogy of multiliteracies, as “human knowledge is…part and parcel of collaborative interactions with others of diverse skills, backgrounds and perspectives joined together in a community of learners engaged in common practices centered on a specific domain of knowledge” (NLG, 2000, p. 30). There were many instances of situated practice, overt instruction and transformed practice, as the students were immersed in practices in a community of learners, received explicit instruction and then attempted to apply their new knowledge and skills in different contexts. In this class and with these young learners, the presentation of the literacy events were tightly controlled by the teacher, and to some extent, this may be justified. As Cope and Kalantzis (1993) note, situated practice can lead to practices that can vary quite significantly from each other and from curricular goals and some students can
spend large amounts of time pursuing “wrong” leads. In allowing too much latitude during situated practice, the guidance and control necessary to keep these boys “on track” might be lacking. Since the teacher perceives herself as responsible for the boys’ learning, she provided access to the resources and tools she believed were appropriate in order for the boys to participate in the varied literacy practices.

**The Teacher’s Skills and Beliefs**

Jan spoke often about valuing the boys’ questions, exposing them to many different ideas and concepts, and providing opportunities for the boys to create using print, digital technology and oral language, according to their interests. This teacher had the skills and to teach using traditional literacies and multimodal text and digital technology, however, she also had the belief that print literacy was not enough. Errington (2004) argues that teachers’ beliefs are the most important factor in determining the success of failure of any new approach to teaching. In my research, it became clear how important a teacher’s understandings, beliefs and contexts are to the process of literacy teaching and learning. Jan expressed that she was comfortable with technology and that she believed it was important. She attended professional development about technology use. She understood that integrating new literacies and student identity into her pedagogy was empowering for students, and she often said that empowerment was one of her goals.

In this classroom, literacy learning did not include an agenda for social justice or critical literacy. From the results in this study, the teacher, this school and these families did not express interest in questioning power relations and privileged access involved in literacy as social practice, as this would probably not serve the purposes of these learners. In fact, the teacher downplayed the access and privilege when she commented that, “they
are just like regular boys”. Jan based this belief on opinions that some behave, others don’t; that some are very advanced in skills and knowledge and others aren’t; and that some boys are further developed in social skills then others. Jan did not mention the fact that the access afforded these boys was different then the access afforded less privileged students. In addition, the foundational and traditional print literacies involved in reading, writing, listening and speaking as well as social skills related to “getting along” in Grade 1 are clearly important for all the stakeholders and viewed as one would view these skills in less privileged boys. Perhaps that is what they have determined to be important at this stage of the boys’ lives and development, and teacher choices emerged from that context. Therefore, the teacher’s beliefs, as well as the teacher’s own interests and skills are important when one examines pedagogical decisions made by the teacher.

**Tensions in the View of Literacy and Identity as Social Practice**

The literacy practices and events in the classroom were varied and involved the boys in collaborative practices with literacy as well as providing some opportunities for the boys to involve themselves in practices as individual learners. With all the resources available to them, literacy was a complex process of choosing resources, making them meaningful and working with others during literacy practices. For example, when the boys wrote scripts, they were immersed in practices with many different scripts as models, brainstormed their own ideas for the scripts together on the interactive whiteboard, made rough copies of their scripts in pairs, facilitated by other peers and the teacher, practiced printing and spelling words in the context of this experience, were scaffolded in their writing by the teacher, had their scripts at school and home and then performed a dramatic presentation of the play which combined the scripts of all the boys
into one show. The audience was composed of parents, siblings, teachers and other boys at the school. Finally, the school prepared a DVD of the show for each of the boys to take home, inscribed with the title of the show, class and date. Each of the boys was able to participate, integrating his own thoughts, knowledge and understandings into his portion of the script. Some of the boys wrote about racecars, some about dinosaurs, some about video games and some about hockey, integrating who they were and their own interests into the process. Luke (1995) wrote that “reading instruction is not about skills but about the construction of identity and social relations” (p. 95). The data showed that these worlds overlapped – skills were taught and language was used as the boys established themselves through social relations.

As the boys participated in literacy practices, they were recognized as particular types of learners. Giano was one of those students who risked literacy failure because he was not focused and his spelling and decoding skills were weak. Various discussions and explanations for this failure guided the choice by the teacher, parents and school to remediate his skills. Giano was removed from class each week to get extra reading practice and he had a reading tutor at home. He was also encouraged to work on spelling drills at home. He was praised generously as his skills began to improve. In fact, all the boys read books at home from the class library and had spelling tests each Friday to practice new spelling patterns by writing memorized words on a strip of paper. In these cases, curriculum, which was found to be one of the important influences on practice, reduced literacy to simple, mechanistic skills, which failed to do justice to the richness and complexity of actual literacy practices in people’s lives (Street, 1998). Giano actually had many rich experiences with texts outside of school. In this case, Giano’s home
background was treated as complementary to the goals of the school, which existed separately from an understanding of his home literacies. A true integration of these two literacies might change the process of schooling for Giano.

In Giano’s case, his parents reported that he had many different texts in his home life (magazines, digital texts in all forms) that he enjoyed and engaged with on a regular basis. These resources, practices and affinities were considered in some areas of the curriculum, but not when presenting the “curriculum of traditional print literacies”. In contrast, Ivan, who was spoken about as the most successful literacy learner in these case studies, was viewed as a very successful student. He read at a high level and wrote stories with ease, using conventional spelling and punctuation. He was often called upon to help other students or was given free time when he finished before others. He wanted to read harder books and was frustrated with having to read easy books at times. However, Ivan was not among the most proficient in the class with technology. He was more hesitant to attempt unknown programs, slower to produce with technology and often preferred to print his work as he knew he would be successful. Therefore, the skill based definition of literacy created narrow expectations of success for Ivan.

At the same time as Giano worked on improving his weak “literacy skills”, he worked in the classroom at other skills such as collaboration in a community of learners and he participated in many rich literacy practices. He was immersed in meaningful digital reading activities, spelling activities and collaborative activities that involved problem solving, open-ended questions and answers and writing about themes determined by him and his peers. Therefore, there was a tension between the notion of literacy as a set of skills and literacy as a rich, complex, active part of people’s lives.
The same tension existed for Ivan. Ivan was labeled as an excellent reader and writer, he always got 10/10 on his weekly spelling tests and his printing was so well done that he started learning cursive writing. However Ivan took fewer risks in the classroom and at home. His time on the computer was limited at home so he could spend time doing “more appropriate activities” like homework or cursive practice. Ivan was often unsure about how to use the classroom computer programs, and he would hesitate to ask for help. Ivan did participate in literacy centres, at the interactive whiteboard and interactive digital table; however, he was more focused on task completion then exploration and conversation. Therefore, the criteria used to define success in literacy learning existed in tension for both of these boys.

The same was true for resources. One point of access was the multiple resources, both at school and at home. Multimodality has emerged in response to the changing social and semiotic landscape (Jewitt, 2006). Linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, image, speech and print are referred to as modes, organized set of resources for meaning making. Often, these modes relate to each other in dynamic relationships. Electronic multimedia texts are integrated meaning making systems and therefore, are multimodal (NLG, 1996, 2000), and these multimodal texts are critically important in the NLG theory of Design. The multimodal design of texts available to them offered the boys different points of entry into texts and alternative possible paths through text, all of which conveyed multiple meanings (Jewitt, 2008). The teacher supported the boys to express their ideas, questions and opinions and let those guide both her inquiry and choices of themes in e.g., drama or story writing and directions during inquiry.
Particular types of texts were valued for different purposes and the teacher used the resources that were in the classroom and school, as well as those that the students brought into the classroom in particular ways. Fiction and theme related books were particularly valued in print text, and the guided reading collections prepared by publishers were also used for a particular purpose. The boys saw value in digital texts, oral texts and print texts and they used them in a variety of ways during literacy events. Print text had a particular role or purpose, which included reading books, printing, spelling and writing stories/scripts.

In the future, an examination of what counts as literacy across multiple social settings would be relevant to share with students. The boys seemed to know which practices were valued at this school and they participated willingly in valued practices. It is interesting that the boys were excited to demonstrate their reading ability when asked to read books with me, but none of the boys looked forward to guided reading instruction. The boys were happy to take leveled books home to read and then share the titles with me, but I did not observe any self-selected “book reading” time in the classroom. Aside from guided reading time (once a week for each boy), most of the time, reading was done by applying skills to nonfiction or theme related books, which were the most visible texts in the class. The print text valued in learning to read in this classroom was dominated by certain publishers and certain genres, which changed noticeably as the boys became better readers. They graduated from a wide variety of genres to mostly fiction text for home reading as their reading skills progressed. The balance between teaching reading skills (guided reading) and practicing these skills collaboratively on a variety of new texts, made it apparent that the boys’ choices and practices were embedded in certain
social and cultural values and goals, constructed by the environment, themselves, the tools, the home expectations and the teacher (Rowe, 2010).

The fact that the texts created by the students together with the teacher were shared with parents through the use of digital technology is important. In the past, when a text was produced, teachers owned the text. There was often a copy, which was kept at school and then, eventually, sent home at the end of a unit. In the case of the script writing or the song lyrics, the razkids website or Mathletics, the text was shared through e-mails and websites and, therefore, existed in multiple modes. The scripts were written on paper, then transcribed into a digital form, then printed off, highlighted by the boys, then e-mailed to parents. These practices made it possible to experience literacy in different communities of learners, each with different expectations. The results of this study show that in this resource rich 21st century Grade 1 classroom, the boys had the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of multimodal texts and tools and make meaning within the social context of their school and lifeworlds. The boys used literacy in a variety of purposeful ways – to break the code or use the semiotic systems in the written and oral texts they encountered to read, write and communicate; they engaged their prior knowledge and identity to construct meaning; they relied on their peers and teacher to support them as literacy learners. Findings also showed that, when given choice within directed tasks, these boys would often choose digital text to play, research, practice skills, read and write. They used text in collaborative situations and immersed themselves in social practices with other learners, all of which contributed the social construction of their literate identities.
As shown in this research, teaching 21st century early literacy learners can involve traditional print literacies in authentic social contexts. In conceptualizing literacy learning in this way, teachers can apply the pedagogy of multiliteracies in a meaningful, active, individualized way that allows students to bring their own backgrounds, identity and ways of learning literacy to the process, thereby shifting the mission of education.

**Implications**

**Implications for Multiliteracies Pedagogy**

In this research and in this setting, multiliteracies pedagogy supplements more traditional pedagogies, rather than replacing them. Teachers of early childhood have always used different and multimodal ways to represent meaning, including drawing, speech, movement and sound, pictures and print. The teacher spoke about technology as “one tool” and included the pencil, play dough, pastels, technology and paint as other tools that create a balance for young learners. Newer technologies added to choice of modes and media to represent ideas, but also added to the types of text that need to be available and used for instruction in a way that sets students up for full participation in literacy learning (Rowe, 2009).

Multiliteracies theory makes an assumption that, based on students’ situated knowledge, learning is contextualized for each and every literate learner, and that literacy only has meaning when cultural and social identities are considered and instruction is specific and differentiated for each learner’s cultural and linguistic differences. Therefore, language is used and reshaped through the different modes of meaning, especially those that differ from the norm and are valued within different cultures and
contexts. This involves a re-conceptualization of language as one mode of meaning that is influenced and contextualized in multiple ways. Language is constantly being used, reworked and remade by the individual to achieve cultural purposes (Jewitt, 2008). As the NLG (1996) states, “there cannot be one set of standards or skills that constitute the end of literacy learning, however taught” (p. 64). Multiliteracies pedagogy focuses objectively on the notion of individual learners’ participation in Design, while negotiating a number of discourses.

There are multiple implications in this understanding. First, identity, which includes all the cultural, linguistic and life experiences of each student, must be valued and incorporated when teaching literacies in the 21st century. As well, the teacher’s beliefs must be examined to understand how language, literacy, text and identity are viewed. Teachers need to examine their core beliefs and then receive extensive support to implement such a complex pedagogy (Lotherington, 2009).

Jan’s understanding of her role as a facilitator for a community of learners was to teach “the boys”. She often referred to “what the boys want” or “how the boys are progressing”, referencing the boys as a group rather than as individuals. Although the boys were observed, valued and assessed as individuals, there were common goals and outcomes for the boys as they participated in the literacy events in the classroom – either to complete the game on the interactive whiteboard, collaboratively construct or deconstruct the events of a simple story, or print on the lines with correct letter formation. As the results indicate, Jan spends a great deal of time getting to know the boys, asking about their interests, incorporating themes into the lessons that she teaches (e.g., Dynamite, Wimpy Kid, Video Games) and having them incorporate their individual ideas
where possible. Yet, the goals for their learning were determined by her understanding of the curriculum and involved common outcomes for each boy. Although Jan’s practice was framed in the best of intentions, there was an inconsistency here that might be worked out by a teacher who was knowledgeable in the area of multiliteracies pedagogy and social practice theory. The structure of school necessitates some grouping of students, some determination of what works for groups of students as what is valued and devalued as teachers make pedagogical choices about what to teach and how to teach (Janks, 2000; Tomlinson, 1999). In order to combine these two worlds effectively, teachers need to be engaged as critical participants in an examination of new cultures and media, to understand different social contexts along with students’ identities and to begin to make new decisions for their students to best incorporate who they are as learners and still honor the current function and purposes of elementary schooling. Practical examples for teachers involve collaborative planning that incorporates multiple opportunities for students to ask questions, examine viewpoints and clarify issues that are important to them as they engage with the many forms and types of texts that surround them.

**Implications for Redesigning**

The literacy practices were mediated by the teacher, curriculum and peers through collaboration and a pedagogy that supported a particular view of literacy success (Luke & Carrington, 2002), which involved both traditional and new literacies. School and home-based literacy practices were similar and seemed to compliment and inform each other (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Cumming-Potvin, 2007). In the context of the class in this study, the official institutional construction of literacy seemed to match the emergent
practices in students’ homes. This information is important when we consider the possibilities for students as designers.

Redesign, or learning, are hopefully the results of students’ interactions in schools (Simon, 2009). The Design-Re-design framework emphasizes that the process is relevant to texts in any modality using available designs, which are only shaped or limited by social and cultural experiences and access or choices. Therefore, when one adapts a recipe, incorporates a friend’s suggestion into writing, adds words to a song or collaborates to write a script, they are Re-designing and the importance of literacy and identity are prominent in the process (NLG, 2000). In order to produce Redesigns, readers/writers must call upon their knowledge of and experience with other texts, also known as Available Designs, of “conventions…in discourses, styles, genres, dialects, and voices” (NLG, 1996, p. 75). Therefore, one important implication is that the texts in students’ worlds, both at home and at school, are an integral part of the process of Redesign, and it is imperative that the teacher link the two worlds.

Another important consideration is the resources available for Designs. Jan made certain resources available at certain times. The boys were not always allowed to access digital technology (e.g., the interactive digital table, classroom computers, the literature shelves) depending on the activity. Some Available Designs are more easily accessed or used than others. In fact, Janks (2000) says that how those designs are highlighted by teachers are crucial to guide the process of learning, in the same way that overt instruction guides the process of learning. However, theorists qualify this by stating that a crucial first step involves rejecting a framework which positions certain literacy practices as neutral or universally good and others as problematic or wrong (NLG, 1996; Street,
2005). In my research, I found that the teacher, school and parents presented the boys with literacy practices that are determined to be “good” and the learning of these practices or redesigning using the available resources were communicated as the goal for success. One of the implications is that teachers must be aware of these issues; teachers must explicitly share goals for the literacy learning that address critical understandings of texts while valuing various practices. For example, supporting students to understand that the texts they are choosing for home reading are only one valid option and that other texts, which could be offered at school or at home, such as magazines, instruction booklets, and graphic texts, are also valid choices for learning to read. With this knowledge, students could become more active in the Re-design process.

**Implications for Integrating Critical Pedagogies**

As much as early years educators may want to wait to teach students critical skills in favour of more instrumental skills, technology is changing who students are, whether they are aware of it or not. It is essential for students to develop literate practices that enable them to investigate the authority of sites and critically examine ideas, information, values and attitudes in the text they read everyday (Anstey, 2002, p. 15). A result of “uncritical” use of texts is that identities and values are being shaped, often unconsciously. Students have the right to either accept or reject information and knowledge, but they need guidance from teachers and parents to understand their rights and roles. As students learn to critically analyze texts, question their authenticity, understanding how they were constructed to understand biases and silences in texts, they will become more well rounded learners.
In this study, one area that seemed to be lacking was the use of critical pedagogies. I did not observe the boys asking or responding to critical questions such as “Whose voice is heard or silenced?” or “Which perspective is this?” New definitions of literacy, text, collaboration, community and diversity need to be translated into practical actions for teachers through questioning, prompting and feedback. As a teacher myself for over 20 years, I know that the ideological theory, which goes beyond “equality of outcomes” or “using technology” must be translated into practice for teachers. Teachers need to become familiar with the Four Resources Model (Freebody & Luke, 1999) or the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (NLG, 1996, 2000) and the fact that all four areas of these models work together to support students’ literacy development, in addition to the traditional, easier and more comfortable pedagogies involved in overt instruction and situated practice. Both of these theories provide a framework for literacy learning in the 21st century; both models address the necessity for the foundational skills that were important in this classroom and to these parents, but also provide guidelines for integrating new technologies, thinking about literacy in a different way and sharing different perspectives about what counts as literacy.

Implications for Rethinking Assessment

In this classroom, success with traditional print literacies was valued as indicators of literacy learning. Jan was required to assess and evaluate the students as they reached certain criteria, which were outlined in the curriculum and the PYP. Technology was viewed as a necessary and engaging tool to support the learning of traditional print literacies in this particular social and cultural environment. Based on the curriculum categories and the skill and knowledge goals, there was a definite objective or purpose to
converge skills and knowledge to a common outcome to be assessed, and these outcomes were usually assessed using print texts. The current literature on assessment is based on individuals meeting particular learning goals and content standards for each subject and discipline (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Assessment occurs throughout the learning process to guide students towards learning goals, incorporating various forms of feedback about performance and learning in relation to goals (Earl, 2006). The overall and specific expectations represent the content standards, guided by established categories and criteria with which are used to assess and evaluate students’ learning. Learning includes the individual’s knowledge and understanding, critical and creative thinking, how the individual conveys meaning through communication and how he applies knowledge and skills between contexts (Ministry of Education of Ontario, 2010). Implications for further research necessitate the question, how do we assess literacy in Grade 1 classrooms if we place value on literacy as a social practice?

One suggestion to shift assessment is rooted in the work of Carr (2001) and her work with Learning Stories. Learning stories are rooted in the context of curriculum but are based on the idea that assessment “should be charted against a few broad learning dispositions rather than a plethora of narrow skills and knowledge and that these should provide an ongoing narrative picture of the child and a framework for discussion between practitioners, parents and children” (Paffard, 2010, p. 245). This type of conceptualization provides the opportunity to move away from specific content standards. Other researchers (Cummins, 2001; Lotherington, 2009; Wilhelm, 2004) advocate for the creation of rich and authentic learning products, the endpoint of a process guided by the interests of the teacher and students, interests embedded in the
social and cultural context. Assessment may look different for each student, depending on their identities, backgrounds, interests and progress towards goals. This still necessitates an examination of the types of goals valued in the literacy education of our students.

Another roadblock presented by current assessment practices is the nature of critical literacy. Critical literacy is difficult to assess and possibly teachers are weary of having students pose questions for which there are no clear-cut answers. It will take time and teacher education opportunities in order to effectively integrate critical practices into the fabric of early literacy instruction. In this study, where the dominant discourse is of conformity to norms, critical literacy rubs up against this discourse. Future research may look into unpacking teacher identities, experience and beliefs about literacy, language and culture, to understand how to shape, expand and further layer traditional literacies with new literacies, particularly in the area of assessment. As Jewitt explains, there is a need for further investigation of the layering of literacy practices as “an intertextual web of contexts and media rather than [simply] isolated sets of skills and competencies” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 255).

**Implications for Teacher Education**

Teacher education is another area to be re-examined in order to understand how to integrate new pedagogies. Courtland and Leslie (2010) studied the beliefs and practices of three literacy instructors in elementary teacher education. They found “a gap in course content and pedagogy concerning multimodalities, critical literacy, and students’ out-of-school literacies” (p. 28). Teacher educators’ beliefs and practices continue to portray a narrow view of social constructivism and early literacy teaching and learning bounded by oral language and print literacy using ministry documents. I agree with Kosnik and Beck
(2007) who contend that we need to prioritize our goals for literacy courses and
determine a new pedagogy for teacher education, one that includes the notion of literacy
as social practice. It is not necessary to exclude skills in order to include new ideas, out-
of-school literacies and instructional technology.

In the case of my study, Jan was particularly interested in new literacies and
instructional technology. However, in the same school, other teachers were not using
multimodal texts or these pedagogies in the same way. Teachers’ exposure to current
theories involving pedagogy and literacy learning are necessary in order to change
practice from incidental or added use of multimodal text to a rethinking of literacy
curriculum that considers the changing texts and practices that reflect the individuals
schools wish to educate (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2004; Street, 1998). In addition
to extensive professional development for teachers, one way this could be accomplished
is by creating future curriculums that include expectations for linking school and home
literacies based on a teacher’s understanding of students’ identities. In addition, practical
support for teachers about how this knowledge would affect appropriate pedagogical
choices with and for students would be crucial.

And Finally….

I opened my mail today and received an education update flyer from a well-
known American organization for curriculum development. The resources on the front of
their new booklist boasted new books and DVDs promising to support teachers as they
teach their students with a focus on 21st century learning skills for a globalized, digital
world, promoting creativity, innovation and assessment for the 21st century. One of the
biggest problems with these types of autonomous conceptions is that they rely on the idea
that attaining a specific “literacy” is the goal of education and will lead to economic prosperity or well-being. These types of programs neglect the inherent ideological and social context that is embedded in all literacy practices. As Janks (2008) states,

Language is not a neutral tool for communication but is everywhere implicated in the ways in which we read and write the world, the ways in which knowledge is produced and legitimated, and the ways in which a human subject is constructed as a complex set of identities. (p. 183)

There is a paradigm shift involved in combining sociocognitive perspectives and sociopolitical contexts, and this is necessarily more complex when this shift involves accountability and standardized outcomes, but does not necessarily value students as complex and varied – designers of their own social futures. As the NLG (1996) calls for “a curriculum that needs to mesh with different subjectivities” (p. 72), the current objective process of curriculum design and assessment of knowledge and skills based on supposed uniform expectations and taxonomies becomes questionable. The idea of varied outcomes as indicators of success (Bernhard, 2002) is an area for future research. Only through teacher education and research in schools with teachers and students will we be able to understand the many varied ways to bring meaning to students’ literacy learning in the 21st century.

Lewis Carroll wrote in the classic tale, Alice in Wonderland (1970, p. 52) “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to”, said the Cat. There is some degree of “knowing where you’re going” that a curriculum provides, and it will take time for stakeholders to feel comfortable with varied designs, multiple outcomes and critical text use. Any new curriculum approach will require input from stakeholders, including educators, parents and students. Prensky (2001) wrote that
this is not to say that the basics of reading, writing, logical thinking and mathematical skills will become obsolete, but new ways of teaching them will be required….we also need to include the ethics, politics, sociology, languages….as we invent digital native methodologies for all subjects, at all levels, using our students to guide us. (p. 2)

That will be the challenge that lies ahead for educators of young children.
REFERENCES


Kosnik, C., & Beck, C. (2007, April). Studying the practices of 10 literacy educators: Identifying common practices and beliefs, recognizing individual approaches and


Appendix A
Letter of Participation and Consent for Parents

September 1, 2010

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Toronto. I am conducting a research study on the use of a wide variety of print and digital texts to engage students in literacy learning in a Grade one classroom. Your child’s teacher has volunteered to participate in this study.

Since my research will take place in your child’s classroom beginning in October, 2010, I am asking for your consent to have your child participate in this study by participating in short interviews about literacy learning. All children will be asked for verbal assent prior to conducting any interviews.

I will be doing observations of the instruction in your child’s classroom. I will be interviewing each student that gives consent to find out about his home and school literacy practices. At times, I will be audiotaping or videotaping conversations. These tapes are for research purposes only. All tapes will be erased as soon as I have transcribed the dialogues from the tapes. In addition, all names will be replaced by pseudonyms. Therefore, all participants will remain completely anonymous. An executive summary of findings will be provided to the teacher and school administration, as well as to you if you indicate a wish to see the results on the consent form.

Studies such as this one will help teachers better understand how they can use a wide variety of print and digital texts to teach reading and writing and these types of studies provide much benefit for the educational community in general and for students in particular. Your participation in this study is, of course, voluntary and will in no way affect your child’s classroom or disrupt your child’s studies. This study presents no risk to the participants involved. You may withdraw your child from this study at any time without negative consequences. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact the Ethics Review Office at the University of Toronto at 416-946-3273, my OISE advisor, Shelley Stagg Peterson or myself.

Brenda Stein Dzaldov  Dr. Shelley Stagg Peterson
905-889-2411  Phone: 416-978-0329
Brenda.steindzaldov@utoronto.ca  Shelley.staggpeterson@utoronto.ca

Thank you.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

[ ] I wish to participate in the OISE/UT research project as outlined above.

Printed name: _____________________________  Date: _____________________________
Signature: ________________________________

[ ] I wish to receive an executive summary of the findings of the research upon its completion.

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Appendix B

Letter of Participation and Consent for Teacher

September 1, 2010

Teacher
School Address

Dear Jan:

I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Toronto. I am conducting a research study on the use of a wide variety of print and digital texts to engage students in literacy learning in a Grade one classroom. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

This letter is to request your consent for me to observe your instruction and interaction with your students as well as observe and converse with you. I will be present in our classroom at a mutually agreed upon time 1-2 times/week beginning in October, 2010, for approximately 6 months. As well, I will be asking you to participate in short interviews about your pedagogical decisions in your classroom.

At times, I will be audiotaping or videotaping conversations. These tapes are for research purposes only. All tapes will be erased as soon as I have transcribed the dialogues from the tapes. In addition, all names will be replaced by pseudonyms. Therefore, all participants will remain completely anonymous. I will conduct member checks with you on a regular basis as I interview you about my observations of your teaching. An executive summary of findings will be provided to you and school administration, as well as to parents if they indicate a wish to see the results on their consent form.

Studies such as this one will help teachers better understand how teachers can use a wide variety of print and digital texts to teach reading and writing and these types of studies provide much benefit for the educational community in general and for students in particular. Your participation in this study is, of course, voluntary and will in no way affect your classroom or disrupt the students’ studies. This study presents no risk to the participants involved. You may withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact the Ethics Review Office at the University of Toronto at 416-946-3273, my OISE advisor, Shelley Stagg Peterson or myself.

Brenda Stein Dzaldov    Dr. Shelley Stagg Peterson
905-889-2411    Phone: 416-978-0329
Brenda.steindzaldov@utoronto.ca    Shelley.staggpeterson@utoronto.ca

Thank you.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

[ ] I wish to participate in the OISE/UT research project as outlined above.

Printed name: _____________________________
Signature: ________________________________  Date: ________________________________
Appendix C
Letter of Consent for School Administrator

September 1, 2010

Principal
School Address

Dear Sir:

I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Toronto. I am conducting a research study on the use of a wide variety of print and digital texts to engage students in literacy learning in a Grade one classroom. Jan has agreed to participate in this study.

This letter is to request your consent for me to observe the instruction and interaction with the students in Ms. Sharp’s class. I will be present in our classroom at a mutually agreed upon time 1-2 times/week beginning in October, 2010, for approximately 6 months.

At times, I will be audiotaping or videotaping conversations. These tapes are for research purposes only. All tapes will be erased as soon as I have transcribed the dialogues from the tapes. In addition, all names will be replaced by pseudonyms. Therefore, all participants will remain completely anonymous. I will conduct member checks with Ms. Sharp on a regular basis as I interview her about my observations of her teaching. An executive summary of findings will be provided to Ms. Sharp and you, the school administration, as well as to parents if they indicate a wish to see the results on their consent form.

Studies such as this one will help teachers better understand how teachers can use a wide variety of print and digital texts to teach reading and writing and these types of studies provide much benefit for the educational community in general and for students in particular. Your school’s participation in this study is, of course, voluntary and will in no way affect the classroom or disrupt the students’ studies. This study presents no risk to the participants involved. You may withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact the Ethics Review Office at the University of Toronto at 416-946-3273, my OISE advisor, Shelley Stagg Peterson or myself.

Brenda Stein Dzaldov  Dr. Shelley Stagg Peterson
905-889-2411  Phone: 416-978-0329
Brenda.steindzaldov@utoronto.ca  Shelley.staggpeterson@utoronto.ca

Thank you.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

[ ] I wish to participate in the OISE/UT research project as outlined above.
Printed name: _____________________________
Signature: ___________________________  Date:

.............................................................
Reading Survey

Name: ________________________________

Sample: 1: I am in ____________
☐ Grade one
☐ Grade 2
☐ Grade 3
☐ Grade 4
☐ Grade 5

Sample 2: I am a ________________
☐ Boy
☐ Girl

1. My friends think I am ________________________
☐ a very good reader
☐ a good reader
☐ an OK reader
☐ a poor reader

2. Reading is something I like to do
☐ Never
☐ Not very often
☐ Sometimes
☐ Often

3. I read ____________________________
☐ not as well a my friends
☐ about the same as my friends
☐ a little better than my friends
☐ a lot better than my friends

4. My best friends think reading is ________________
☐ really fun
☐ fun
☐ OK to do
☐ no fun at all
5. When I come to a word I don’t know, I can ____________________
   □ almost always figure it out
   □ sometimes figure it out
   □ almost never figure it out
   □ never figure it out

6. I tell my friends about good books I read.
   □ I never do this
   □ I almost never do this
   □ I do this some of the time
   □ I do this a lot

7. When I am reading by myself, I understand ____________________
   □ almost everything I read
   □ some of what I read
   □ almost none of what I read
   □ none of what I read

8. People who read a lot are ____________________
   □ very interesting
   □ interesting
   □ not very interesting
   □ boring

9. I am ____________________
   □ a poor reader
   □ an OK reader
   □ a good reader
   □ a very good reader

10. I think libraries are ____________________
    □ a great place to spend time
    □ an interesting place to spend time
    □ an OK place to spend time
    □ a boring place to spend time

11. I worry about what other kids think about my reading
    □ every day
    □ almost every day
    □ once in a while
    □ never

12. Knowing how to read well is ____________________
    □ not very important
    □ sort of important
    □ important
    □ very important
13. When my teacher asks me a question about what I have read, I __________
☐ can never think of an answer
☐ have trouble thinking of an answer
☐ sometimes think of an answer
☐ always think of an answer

14. I think reading is __________________________
☐ a boring way to spend time
☐ an OK way to spend time
☐ an interesting way to spend time
☐ a great way to spend time

15. Reading is __________________________
☐ very easy for me
☐ kind of easy for me
☐ kind of hard for me
☐ very hard for me

16. When I grow up I will spend ________________
☐ none of my time reading
☐ very little of my time reading
☐ some of my time reading
☐ a lot of my time reading

17. When I am in a group talking about reading, I ________________
☐ almost never talk about my ideas
☐ sometimes talk about my ideas
☐ almost always talk about my ideas
☐ always talk about my ideas

18. I would like for my teacher to read books out loud to the class __________
☐ every day
☐ almost every day
☐ once in a while
☐ never

19. When I read out loud I am a __________
☐ poor reader
☐ OK reader
☐ good reader
☐ very good reader

20. When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel _______________________
☐ very happy
☐ sort of happy
☐ sort of unhappy
☐ unhappy
Writing Survey

Name: _______________________________     Date: __________________

Sample: 1: I am in ________________

☐ Grade one
☐ Grade 2
☐ Grade 3
☐ Grade 4
☐ Grade 5

Sample 2: I am a ________________

☐ Boy
☐ Girl

1. My friends think I am ____________________
   ☐ a very good writer
   ☐ a good writer
   ☐ an OK writer
   ☐ a poor writer

2. Writing is something I like to do
   ☐ Never
   ☐ Not very often
   ☐ Sometimes
   ☐ Often

3. I write __________________________
   ☐ not as well as my friends
   ☐ about the same as my friends
   ☐ a little better than my friends
   ☐ a lot better than my friends
4. My best friends think writing is _________________
   □ really fun
   □ fun
   □ OK to do
   □ no fun at all

5. When I come to a word I don’t know how to write, I can _________________
   □ almost always figure it out
   □ sometimes figure it out
   □ almost never figure it out
   □ never figure it out

6. I tell my friends about things I write.
   □ I never do this
   □ I almost never do this
   □ I do this some of the time
   □ I do this a lot

7. When I am writing by myself, I think what I write makes sense
   □ almost always
   □ some times
   □ almost never
   □ never

8. People who write a lot are _________________
   □ very interesting
   □ interesting
   □ not very interesting
   □ boring

9. I am _________________
   □ a poor writer
   □ an OK writer
   □ a good writer
   □ a very good writer

10. I think libraries are _________________
    □ a great place to spend time
    □ an interesting place to spend time
    □ an OK place to spend time
    □ a boring place to spend time

11. I worry about what other kids think about my writing
    □ every day
    □ almost every day
    □ once in a while
    □ never
12. Knowing how to write well is ________________
☐ not very important
☐ sort of important
☐ important
☐ very important

13. When my teacher asks me a question about what I have written, I _______
☐ can never think of an answer
☐ have trouble thinking of an answer
☐ sometimes think of an answer
☐ always think of an answer

14. I think writing is ________________
☐ a boring way to spend time
☐ an OK way to spend time
☐ an interesting way to spend time
☐ a great way to spend time

15. Writing is ________________
☐ very easy for me
☐ kind of easy for me
☐ kind of hard for me
☐ very hard for me

16. When I grow up I will spend ____________
☐ none of my time writing
☐ very little of my time writing
☐ some of my time writing
☐ a lot of my time writing

17. When I am in a group talking about writing, I ________________
☐ almost never talk about my ideas
☐ sometimes talk about my ideas
☐ almost always talk about my ideas
☐ always talk about my ideas

18. I would like for my teacher to teach writing to the class _________
☐ every day
☐ almost every day
☐ once in a while
☐ never
19. When I write, I am a _______
☐ poor writer
☐ OK writer
☐ good writer
☐ very good writer

20. When I get a chance to write at home or at school, I feel _______
☐ very happy
☐ sort of happy
☐ sort of unhappy
☐ unhappy
Appendix F
Parent Questionnaire

OISE/UT Doctoral Research Questionnaire
Learning in a 21st Century Classroom
Parent Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions in as much detail as possible. Please feel free to use as much space as you need. There are 2 pages.

1. Think of all the resources your child has at home for reading and writing. Please list as many as you can.

2. Do you read with your son at home? What do you read?

3. Do you write with your son at home? What do you write?

4. If you had to choose your son’s 3 main interests, what would they be?

5. What kind of technology does your child use at home? How does he use it?

6. Specifically, what activities are done at school that, in your opinion, are most helpful in developing your son’s literacy?

7. What is your definition of “successful literacy learning” in Grade one? Please give specific examples if you can.

8. What activities are done at home that, in your opinion, are most valuable in developing your son’s literacy?

9. What demonstrations of literacy learning (either at school or home) are you most excited about.
10. Can I contact you by phone or e-mail with follow-up questions? If yes, please provide the best way for me to contact you.

Please e-mail the completed questionnaire back to me at Brenda.steindzaldov@utoronto.ca. Thank you for your time and interest.

Brenda Stein Dzaldov, M.Ed.
Ph.D. (candidate)
Instructor, Initial Teacher Education
The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1V6
brenda.steindzaldov@utoronto.ca
Appendix G
School Questionnaire

Welcome to Grade one

Name of Son: _______________________________________________________

Siblings (names & ages): ____________________________________________

Does your son have any siblings at [this school]? If yes, which sibling and what class?

______________________________________________________________

Does he have any special interests?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

What makes him happy?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

What upsets him?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

How does he handle himself when he is upset?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________
How does your son feel about school?

What subjects does your son like in school?

Is there anything he might be anxious about in school?

Does your son like to read? If so, what?

What are your hopes/dreams for your son this year?

Do you have any questions?
### Appendix H
### Literacy Events and Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LITERACY EVENTS</th>
<th>Times observed</th>
<th>Types of literacy</th>
<th>Involvement of students</th>
<th>Involvement of adults</th>
<th>Involvement of other adults</th>
<th>Topic development</th>
<th>Text and tools used</th>
<th>Embedded references</th>
<th>Curriculum topics</th>
<th>Self-image</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assigned writing (e.g. stories, scripts, sentences, e-mail)</td>
<td>20 12 6 12 16 12 12 8 18</td>
<td>Traditional print literacy</td>
<td>New literacy</td>
<td>Engaged in own reading</td>
<td>Engaged in collaborative reading</td>
<td>Applicate to new genres</td>
<td>Digital print</td>
<td>Digital tools</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Digital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigned reading (guided, non-fiction, online)</td>
<td>12 12 2 10 6 10 6 8 12</td>
<td>Traditional print literacy</td>
<td>New literacy</td>
<td>Engaged in own reading</td>
<td>Engaged in collaborative reading</td>
<td>Applicate to new genres</td>
<td>Digital print</td>
<td>Digital tools</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Digital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared reading of poem, song (whole group)</td>
<td>2 2 2 2 2 2 0 0 2 1</td>
<td>Traditional print literacy</td>
<td>New literacy</td>
<td>Engaged in own reading</td>
<td>Engaged in collaborative reading</td>
<td>Applicate to new genres</td>
<td>Digital print</td>
<td>Digital tools</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Digital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared/modelled writing (whole group)</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3 3 0 0 3 0</td>
<td>Traditional print literacy</td>
<td>New literacy</td>
<td>Engaged in own reading</td>
<td>Engaged in collaborative reading</td>
<td>Applicate to new genres</td>
<td>Digital print</td>
<td>Digital tools</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Digital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama activities (practising song, presentation and play)</td>
<td>6 6 4 6 6 4 6 6 6 6</td>
<td>Traditional print literacy</td>
<td>New literacy</td>
<td>Engaged in own reading</td>
<td>Engaged in collaborative reading</td>
<td>Applicate to new genres</td>
<td>Digital print</td>
<td>Digital tools</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Digital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys’ participation in literacy centres</td>
<td>15 15 15 15 17 17 15 15</td>
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<td>New literacy</td>
<td>Engaged in own reading</td>
<td>Engaged in collaborative reading</td>
<td>Applicate to new genres</td>
<td>Digital print</td>
<td>Digital tools</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Digital</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spelling and word work</td>
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<td>New literacy</td>
<td>Engaged in own reading</td>
<td>Engaged in collaborative reading</td>
<td>Applicate to new genres</td>
<td>Digital print</td>
<td>Digital tools</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Digital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer lab activities (including blog)</td>
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<td>New literacy</td>
<td>Engaged in own reading</td>
<td>Engaged in collaborative reading</td>
<td>Applicate to new genres</td>
<td>Digital print</td>
<td>Digital tools</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Digital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social talk during literacy tasks</td>
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<td>Traditional print literacy</td>
<td>New literacy</td>
<td>Engaged in own reading</td>
<td>Engaged in collaborative reading</td>
<td>Applicate to new genres</td>
<td>Digital print</td>
<td>Digital tools</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Digital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Standardised Reading Assessment (EF &amp; PI)</td>
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<td>Traditional print literacy</td>
<td>New literacy</td>
<td>Engaged in own reading</td>
<td>Engaged in collaborative reading</td>
<td>Applicate to new genres</td>
<td>Digital print</td>
<td>Digital tools</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Digital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>80 10 68 39 55 53 54 1 51 66 1 60 25 9 27</td>
<td>Traditional print literacy</td>
<td>New literacy</td>
<td>Engaged in own reading</td>
<td>Engaged in collaborative reading</td>
<td>Applicate to new genres</td>
<td>Digital print</td>
<td>Digital tools</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Digital</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix I

Leveling Correlation Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level (Basil Level)</th>
<th>Fountas/Pinnell (FP) (*Transitional Level)</th>
<th>DRA Levels</th>
<th>ELL Levels*</th>
<th>PM Levels</th>
<th>Rigby Lit Levels</th>
<th>Rigby READS Instructional or Independent Level</th>
<th>Sails</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K (Kindergarten)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Starters One ***</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Early Kindergarten</td>
<td>Beginning: First Wave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (Grade 1*)</td>
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<td>Starters Two ***</td>
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<td>Kindergarten</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 (Pre-Primer)</td>
<td>C (Grade K*)</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3-4 Red</td>
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<td>Early Level: Red (C, D, E, F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>5 Red, 6 Yellow</td>
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<td>1-2</td>
<td>Yellow (E, F, G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>7 Yellow</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Blue (F, G, H, I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 (Primer)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>9-10 Blue</td>
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<td>1-4</td>
<td>Green (H, I, J)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>11 Blue, 12 Green</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Launched Fluency: Sherbert (J)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 2*</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>13-14 Green</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>Launched Fluency: Sherbert (K, I, M, N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>15-16 Orange</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>Fluency Level: Orange (K, I, M, N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Two</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17-18</td>
<td>17-18 Turquoise</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Turquoise (M, N)</td>
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<td>K</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19-20</td>
<td>19-20 Purple</td>
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<td>Purple (O, P)</td>
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<td>L (Grade 3*)</td>
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<td>21 Gold</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Gold (Q, R)</td>
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<td>M (Grade 3*)</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>22 Gold</td>
<td>16-17</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>MainSails 4 (Q, P, S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Three</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25 Silver</td>
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<td>MainSails 5 (S, T, U, V)</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>24 Silver</td>
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<td>R</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S (Grade 5*)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>28 Ruby</td>
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<td>Grade Five</td>
<td>T (Grade 4*)</td>
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<td>29 Sapphire</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>30 Sapphire</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This table roughly illustrates how these levels correlate to each other and to school grade levels. Teachers are encouraged to freely adjust this correlation according to their personal evaluation and professional judgment.

* Reading Recovery™ is a copyrighted leveling system. Please refer to the ELL (Early Intervention Level).