

MODALITIES, SITES AND PRACTICES OF FAMILY LITERACY:  
A QUALITATIVE INTERPRETATION OF FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS THROUGH  
INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

A Dissertation

by

TIFFANY MARIE-HAMLIN LIPSETT

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2011

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

Modalities, Sites and Practices of Family Literacy:

A Qualitative Interpretation of Family Photographs through Interviews and Observations

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August 2011

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

## ABSTRACT

Modalities, Sites and Practices of Family Literacy:  
A Qualitative Interpretation of Family Photographs through Interviews and  
Observations. (August 2011)

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This qualitative arts-based research study explores family literacy experiences that occur in homes with adults and children through interviews, observations, and the visual analysis of photographs that document such experiences. I employ visual methodologies to examine how families view, experience, and talk about family literacy and literacy in their social and cultural lives. This study is guided by the following questions: 1) What social and cultural practices do families employ as they engage in literacy experiences in their homes? 2) How and where are social and cultural family literacy experiences visually represented? 3) How can visual representations of family literacy experiences be interpreted? The research that investigates sites of family literacy within the home, is limited in general, and even less research has used visual methodologies to examine literacy within the home. I chose to study family literacy sites, practices and experiences because I want to understand how society and culture influence literacy skills.

The narration and photographic interpretations produced themes that included: 1) family literacy is seen and examined by the adults in the families as “reading and writing”; 2) family literacy is seen and examined by the children in the families as “singing, playing, games and bedtime”; 3) the major place within the home for literacy is the bedroom and the site where literacy experiences occur is often the bed; 4) limited time is a factor for both personal reading and family literacy experiences; and last 5) multimodal forms are used throughout the day by all participants, both child and adult. The recommendations invite all families, community educators, policy makers, and artists to explore literacy with enthusiasm at the possibilities and avenues in which it can be viewed, used and lived.

DEDICATION

For Jason and Olivia

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose of Study**

This study examines family literacy experiences that occur in homes with adults and children through interviews, and the visual analysis of photographs that document such experiences. Through the methodological lens of visual literacy, sites and practices of family literacy can be interpreted to gain a better understanding of where and how literacy occurs as a social and cultural educational experience in the home.

#### **Statement of Problem**

The research that investigates sites of family literacy within the home has a limited amount of research using visual methodologies to examine literacy within the home. I chose to study family literacy sites, practices and experiences because I wanted to explore how society and culture influence literacy skills, in order to understand what role lived experiences and environment play in acquisition of literacy skills.

#### **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following questions:

- 1) What social and cultural practices do families employ as they engage in literacy experiences in their homes?

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This dissertation follows the style of *Art Education*.

2) How and where are social and cultural family literacy experiences represented visually?

3) How can visual representations of family literacy experiences be interpreted?

### **Theoretical Framework**

I situate this research within a postmodern constructivist worldview (Creswell, 2007; 2009). Creswell (2007) states, “In this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meaning directed toward certain objects or things” (p. 20).

*Situating the researcher within family literacy experiences.* Modeling Ulbricht’s (2007) self-assessment of visual and material cultural experiences, I use personal narrative as a means to “examine self in relation to the social context” (p. 60) and acknowledge my position within an arts-based research study (Sandell, 2009; Efland, 2002; Barrett, 2003; Duncum, 2002; Irwin & Cosson, 2004; Ulbricht, 2007).

Some of my earliest memories of family literacy experiences involve single modes and multimodes of literacy. Traditional multimodal literacy materials, including text-based works (i.e., books and magazines) and still photography (i.e., family photo albums, posters, magazines), contributed to my passion for reading as a literacy skill. Other modes of literacy specific to my childhood family literacy experiences included: videos, art works, songs, dances, and media (i.e., TV, *Speak and Spell*).

I remember my father and mother encouraging me to read to my younger brother at bedtime. I would practice reading aloud as he pointed to the pictures. Sometimes, my father would help me draw the pictures from the books, and I would create new stories



for my brother. Also, I recall a few nights where my brother and I would use a flashlight to look at the books when we presumed Mom and Dad were fast asleep.

This reflection and reflexive approach piqued my curiosity and pushed me to seek answers to how families spend time together in this time and space (literacy practices). Ulbricht (2007) uses self-assessment of visual and material culture to examine the context of experiences, along with books, photographs, magazines, toys, and artwork (both home and communities). For Ulbricht (2007), looking at these influences and “the environment of place, provides a framework for individual development” (p. 69).

My summation of my literacy experiences using this assessment is that reading was an evening ritual in my family, as was watching musicals, dancing, and listening to my father's extensive record collection. I believe these family practices nurtured and created a rich literacy environment within our home. In this way, my brother and I fostered a love of reading books and forms of artistic expression as interconnected, closely related activities. These modes of literacy and experiences moved past traditional media, such as paperbound books, and allowed for growth of literacy skills and cultural connections within my own family.

### **Defining Terms**

*Literacy.* The term literacy involves communicating within language that has meaning and context (Rowse, 2006). Meaning and context is developed by environment (Purcell-Gates, 2007), values placed on modes of communication (Jewitt, 2009) and personal experiences (Taylor, 1998). Furthermore, “literacy is a set of

practices and habits of mind that enable an ability to communicate effectively and affectively mediated through and in response to symbolic language” (Carpenter & Lipsett, unpublished). Other words used to describe literacy have included: cultural (Purcell-Gates, 2007; Gallagher, 2007), critical (Janks & Comber, 2006), family (Taylor, 1998), digital (Marsh, 2006), media (Kress, 2003) and visual (Elkins, 2003; Kell, 2006). Intertwining and linking more than one literacy term can be viewed as multimodal.

***Combining literacies and boundaries.*** Multimodal literacy (Marsh, 2006; New London Group, 2000; Jewitt, 2009) moves beyond text and into visual relationships with words, images and the significance of multiple literacies in many media (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2008; Metros, 2008 ; Sandell, 2009). Since multimodal literacy is often first learned within family experiences (Metros, 2008; Rowsell, 2006; Miller & Prins, 2009; Taylor, 1998; Sapin, Padak, & Baycich, 2008; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), understanding family literacy plays a significant role in developing a comprehensive way of thinking about literacy.

***Family literacy.*** The term family literacy “refers to the interactions of parents and children using language—talking, playing, exploring, limiting, soothing, explaining, encouraging, and nurturing” (Sapin, Padak, & Baycich, 2008, p. 1). These interactions also addresses what Rowsell (2006) describes as the use of “pleasure and comfort children experience with texts they use at home and out in the community to motivate them and offer opportunities to develop as readers and writers” (p.10). Miller and Prins (2009) agree that family literacy is used to define "intergenerational" (Rowsell, 2006) education that includes extended family, along with "grandparents, siblings, godparents,

aunts, uncles” (Miller & Prins, 2009, p.4) and caregivers, who are not limited to social workers, baby sitters, and guardians.

Furthermore, family literacy can be defined by the practice and interaction (Purcell-Gates; 2007; Gallagher, 2007; Taylor, 1998) of three components, with a fourth component extending into experiences when families are enrolled in a family literacy educational program and participate in parent educational classes. The three main components of family literacy are: adult, child, and interactive literacy activities (ILA) or parent and child (PAC) (Miller & Prins, 2009).

Another component that should be considered in family literacy is the site or place of the experience involving the three main components. I agree with Rowsell (2006) when she states:

There is a danger in viewing the home as an isolated domain or container that we enter and exit. Instead, I prefer to see the relationship between home and school or, more broadly, out-of-school and in school as fluid. These contexts move in and out of each other and bear traces of the other all the time. In a discussion of literacy out-of-school, we want to avoid the temptation to over simplify the differences; rather, we need to emphasize the similarities (p.10).

As sites and places “move in and out of each other” (Rowsell, 2006, p.10), we can use visual literacy to theoretically give social and cultural context a place in discourse (Purcell-Gates, 2007) of literacy skills within the family experiences.

***Linking visual literacy to family literacy.*** Since the methodological lens of this study is visual literacy, situating the term in relation to family literacy is important to show connections among terms within and for literacy skills. The term visual literacy “is embedded in the daily rituals and lived experiences of most learners and not exclusively limited to traditional constructs. Visual literacy is a way of understanding, appreciating, challenging, viewing, (re)interpreting, and ‘reading and writing’ the variety of images and experiences that comprise and represent our world” (Carpenter & Lipsett, unpublished).

***Practices within the home and lived experiences.*** Learning a new literacy skill at an early age before traditional classroom learning takes place can be considered emergent literacy. This type of literacy is a process that forms and shapes skills like reading and writing (Lonigan, 2004). Learned literacy skills experienced in the home slowly build on and with prior knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill, 1995; Falk & Dierking, 2001). Not only adults within the home, but also multimodal materials nurture prior knowledge and lived experiences.

***Multimodal sources that influence learning literacy skills.*** Tunnicliffe and Reiss (1998) states that the order of frequency to infrequency for sources of knowledge was notable in the students that were polled as “home, direct observation, TV, video, CD, then school and books.” This suggests not only materials of influence, but sites and spaces. Another source of influential modes include rous play and imitation. Through these literacy experiences the child gathers knowledge, ideas and concepts from

family (Smith, 1992). If the child has older sibling or friends, the imitation can range from tasks, to storytelling and even language repetition (Schauble, Beane, Coates, Martin, & Sterling, 1996). By imitation, repeating words and re-reading, a child learns by doing and enjoying the experience (Medrich, 1991; Anderson, 1995; Schauble et al., 1996; Wright, Anderson, Houston, Schmitt, & Linebarger, 2001).

Kellert (2002) states that children can learn, become engaged and obtain knowledge when stimuli and motivators are present. Parents who provide spaces in the home that are dedicated areas for family literacy experiences nurture positive reader friendly environments (Trelease, 2006; Landry & Smith, 2006). Lawson (2005) suggests that family involvement and friendly environments are critical for the writing developmental process. Lawson (2005) also points out a possible greater influence than that of family interactions (i.e. one-on-one reading sessions or read-alouds) is to provide a material rich environment to foster literacy skills. She elaborates by giving examples of positive literacy rich environments. Her suggestions include: providing different ways of articulating their stories; allowing verbal and written descriptions of lived events; sketching their story in picture format; making a three dimensional objects out of clay or painting. All of these family practices overlap, creating an experience that is inclusive of multimodal family literacy.

### **Design of Study**

This study examines four families in north Texas. Using an arts-based research approach (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Leavy, 2009; Liamputtong

& Rumbold, 2008; McNiff, 2009), I use visual methodologies (Rose, 2001; Prosser, 1998; Banks, 2001) and image analysis (Prosser, 1998; Jewitt, 2009; Kenney, 2009) to interpret photographs (Barrett, 2006) taken by parents and children within the homes of the participating families as a means to document literacy sites/places and practices. Throughout the duration of home visits, I (1) interviewed family members, (2) observed family literacy experiences and (3) examined how the site and situations exemplify the social and cultural literacy practices (Purcell-Gates, 2007) of these families in their own homes.

### **Organization of Study**

The remainder of the study is organized into four chapters, with supporting references and appendixes in the following manner. Chapter II presents a review of literature that examines the concept family literacy. Chapter III delineates the research design and methodology of the study. In this chapter, the research questions used to guide the study along with the interview questions, and determination of the families selected for the study are described. Chapter IV presents the results in the form of narration and photographs. Chapter V contains conclusions and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

This literature review examines the concept of family literacy. The first section, *Defining Family Literacy*, discusses the three main concepts of family literacy. The second section, *Multimodal Literacy*, describes the notion of family literacy as a critical part of the term and concept of multimodal literacy. The third section, *Examining Learning*, describes the attributes of learning from a pedagogical standpoint. Finally, the fourth section, *Authentic Literacy Practices*, which is the central focus of this research, considers looking at literacy tools of writing and drawing perspective as a means to bridge community, school and the home environment. This section also considers reading, story telling, and parent-child shared story-time as authentic practices for family literacy experiences. The final section concludes by mentioning how one might foster literacies through the relationship between parents and teachers.

***Importance of examining family literacy.*** We live our lives in webs of culture (Geertz, 1973). As we all connect and communicate, we pass in and out of our embodied cultures but remain in our own unique and individual lifeworlds (Efland, 2002). In order to function and communicate, we must understand the discursive nature of our communities, cultures, and the others' lifeworld. This comes with practice, familiarity and education. I believe family literacy is not just about understanding a field of research embodied in pedagogy or educational reform; it is about our embodied cultures that

begin within our families as we live with routines and rituals, and make informed, educated decisions through experience. Literacy is social and cultural and is embedded into how we see and live in the world (e.g. Taylor, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 2007).

### **Defining Family Literacy**

*Family literacy.* Within the field of research there are three main views of how the term ‘literacy’ is used and applied. All of these terms should be viewed as dynamic and evolving. The caveat to defining and exploring these terms is that they are all in a web, overlapping and not easily separated. Within this literature these terms and explanations are only limited in the sense of defining, but the very nature of literacy is grounded in shifts and changes in how one (or a group) defines and uses them.

The first way of viewing family literacy describes interactions of a unit of individuals that are involved in learning and performing skills in order to function in a social and cultural world. The second common use for family literacy refers to programming and/or interventions as they relate to learning within systems of emergent and intergenerational literacy, which subsequently transition into other literacies outside of the home learning environment. The third view of the term family literacy is defined as a transition from emergent reading skills (i.e., skills prior to formal reading) to an emphasis on the preparation for school readiness and school literacy (Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2001; Handel, 1999; Wasik, Hermann, Berry, Dobbins, Schimizzi, Smith, & et al., 2000).

Defining and redefining the term family literacy should allow for change and an on-going dialogue that involves parents, teachers, program directors, policy makers and



researchers. The term, with its multiple meanings, should be examined in the context of usage.

Ethnographic research, such as Taylor's (1998) groundbreaking family literacy study, shows that practice differs not only by communities in relation to social interactions, but also cultural practices. Her work shows that family literacy is much more than the traditional idea of learning reading and writing at home. It exposes home life and the culturally specific practices that require a wide range of motivators and skill sets. It opens up the possibility of acknowledging the uniqueness of family literacy experiences and the power of moving past simple encoding and decoding symbols and text in the field of literacy research (Bowman, 2002; Taylor, 1981; Taylor, 1998).

In this dissertation, the term family literacy refers to the “interactions of parents and children using language—talking, playing, exploring, limiting, soothing, explaining, encouraging, and nurturing” (Sapin, Padak, & Baycich, 2008, p. 1). These interactions also address what Rowsell (2006) describes as the use of the “pleasure and comfort children experience with texts they use at home and out in the community to motivate them and offer opportunities to develop as readers and writers” (p.10).

***Family literacy programs and initiatives.*** Currently, much work in family literacy has focused on programs or initiatives for promoting literacy. This study is specifically focused on the interactions that occur around literacy in the family. Unlike previous research in the field of family literacy, the current study does not focus on the bridging of school literacy experiences with family literacy experiences.

Some researchers define family literacy as a program or initiative by the practice and interaction (Purcell-Gates; 2007; Gallagher, 2007; Taylor, 1998) of four main components. The main components of family literacy programs are: adult, child, adult education and interactive literacy activities (ILA) or parent and child (PAC) (Miller & Prins, 2009). Some programs and initiatives include a fifth component in their design, requiring participation in parent educational classes.

Another component that should be considered in family literacy is the site or place of the experience involving the five main components. I agree with Rowsell (2006) when she states:

There is a danger in viewing the home as an isolated domain or container that we enter and exit. Instead, I prefer to see the relationship between home and school- or, more broadly, out-of-school and in school as fluid. These contexts move in and out of each other and bear traces of the other all the time. In a discussion of literacy out-of-school, we want to avoid the temptation to over simplify the differences; rather, we need to emphasize the similarities. (p.10)

As sites and places “move in and out of each other” (Rowsell, 2006, p.10), family literacy theoretically gives social and cultural context a place in discourse of literacy skills within the family experiences (Purcell-Gates, 1996; 2007).

***Family literacy as the crossover from emergent to school literacy.*** Learning a new literacy skill at an early age before traditional classroom learning takes place can be considered emergent literacy. This type of literacy is a process that forms and shapes

skills like reading and writing (Lonigan, 2004). Learned literacy skills experienced in the home slowly build knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill, 1995; Falk & Dierking, 2001). Adults within the home as well as multimodal materials nurture prior knowledge and lived experiences.

For Colombo (2004), the term family literacy is a concept that defines the bridge or crossover between emergent and school literacy. It is seen as a connection that links the parents and the school. This concept allows for parents to participate and become active in their child's education by understanding and helping their child succeed by working and developing skills at home that can directly benefit the skills and tasks required in academia. This type of literacy can create a partnership between the family and the school community. The importance of this definition lies in the process of sharing that occurs through relationships of community and family. It supports and expands the range of learning for the child by overlapping or integrating skills, tasks and expectations of modes of literacies. Furthermore, it can encourage dialogue about different ways of learning and teaching for all families. With this in mind, family literacy programs must address an expanded definition of literacy in all its complexity. One important observation is that within early childhood programs, emergent literacy is more commonly operationalized as beginning in the school context but more recently has included programs that begin in the home – particularly when children are enrolled as infants. Emergent literacy can begin in a “school” context as well as in the home context (Ferrerio & Teberosky, 1979).

All of these notions point toward a shift in viewing family literacy as a part of multiple literacies that cannot be separated or isolated, but using more than one mode of learning and experiencing life. The multi-faceted and complex idea of literacies being more than one and existing together is viewed as either using the term *literacies*, or *multimodal literacy*.

### **Multimodal Literacy**

***Literacy.*** Family literacy is a critical part of literacies in general. The term literacy involves communicating within language that has meaning and context (Rowell, 2006). Meaning and context is developed by environment (Purcell-Gates, 2007), values placed on modes of communication (Jewitt, 2009) and personal experiences (Taylor, 1998). As Law and Eckes (2000) define it, “Literacy is a social phenomenon that exists within a context; it is the ability to use one’s reading and writing skills to participate efficiently and effectively in today’s complex society” ( p. 87).

Furthermore, “literacy is a set of practices and habits of mind that enable an ability to communicate effectively and affectively, mediated through and in response to symbolic language” (Carpenter & Lipsett, unpublished). Other words used to describe literacy have included: cultural (Purcell-Gates, 2007; Gallagher, 2007), critical (Janks & Comber, 2006), family (Taylor, 1998), digital (Marsh, 2006), media (Kress, 2003) and visual (Elkins, 2003; Kell, 2006). Intertwining and linking more than one literacy term can be viewed as multimodal.

***Moving from the term literacy to literacies.*** When examining the concept of shifting from using the singular term literacy, learning, use of skills, and modes of

transmitting information are not isolated from one another in today's fast society. Therefore, in this dissertation I use the term multimodal literacy. I like the term *multimodal* because it encompasses the idea that we are not simply limited to only one source of skills and practices or one form of comprehension, but advocating for inclusion of society, culture, skills, modes, daily tasks, rituals and interaction between people, and people and tools (Auerbach, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001).

For each of these themes within multimodal literacy a different set of tasks and prior knowledge is needed to communicate. For example, daily tasks can include driving a car which requires understanding stop signs, signals, and street signs (Kress, 2003); reading print in newspapers, blogs, and menus (Jewitt, 2009); reading images and listening to audio script in video games, comics, icons, symbols (Elkins, 2003); and writing (Purcell-Gates, 2000), which is defined as symbolic language specific within a culture of society. This writing can include typing on a keyboard to write e-mails, use search engines or write dissertations. Other daily tasks include navigating digital and rotary phones, use of podcasts, and face-to-face interaction using verbal communication (Purcell-Gates, 1996) and nonverbal communication like gestures and body language (Elkins, 2003). The range of these tasks requires knowledge from a range of literacies and are rarely used in isolation, but rather overlap and are performed simultaneously (Law and Eckes, 2000). Multimodal literacy (New London Group, 2000; Marsh, 2006; Jewitt, 2009) moves beyond text and into visual relationships with words, images and the significance of multiple literacies in many media (Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2008; Metros, 2008; Jewitt, 2009; Sandell, 2009).

***Linking visual literacy to family literacy.*** Since the methodological lens of this study is visual literacy, situating the term in relation to family literacy is important to show connections among terms within and for literacy skills. The term visual literacy “is embedded in the daily rituals and lived experiences of most learners and not exclusively limited to traditional constructs. Visual literacy is a way of understanding, appreciating, challenging, viewing, (re)interpreting, and “reading and writing” the variety of images and experiences that comprise and represent our world” (Carpenter & Lipsett, unpublished).

***Intergenerational literacy within family literacy.*** Miller and Prins (2009) agree that family literacy is also used to define "intergenerational" (Rowell, 2006) education that includes extended family, along with "grandparents, siblings, godparents, aunts, and uncles" (Miller & Prins, 2009, p.4) and caregivers, who may also include social workers, baby sitters, and guardians.

While Weinstein (1998) views intergenerational literacy as an interchangeable term with family literacy used for the purpose of passing knowledge along from teacher to student (one generation to the next), this view isolates the child (student) from the family, parenting or schooling aspect of literacy. For example, in this case, the term applies to an activity that reconnects the generations through video or exposure to language that is available to the child (student) and not the adult.

For St. Pierre, Layzar & Barnes (1995), intergenerational literacy is a part of family literacy and the combination of the learned skills of both the child and the adult. Their view focuses on the literacy interaction of the whole family and does not isolate or

separate the adult from the child. Intergenerational literacy in this case acknowledges development of literacy skills by combining emergent literacy with parenting strategies, adult literacy, and supporting school related functions that create connections for the purpose of building literacy skills for the whole family.

### **Examining Learning**

This section discusses the learning process and the factors that play a major role along with sites and practices. This learning process initially takes place in the home and then expands into the wider realm of community and culture (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1979).

***Examining learning.*** Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) suggest that learning is an active process where motivation, metacognition and constructivism support understanding and transfer which lead to expertise. Motivation can occur at different levels. Challenges, orientation, and discipline will play a role in the willingness or desire to learn. Motivation is an inspiration or a cause for action brought about by rewards or punishments, or an internal need to stimulate.

***Motivation.*** Sarason (2004) also recognizes learning as an active process in which motivation and cognition are attributes. He suggests learning is an active process that occurs internally and overtly with productive factors of self-regard, motivation, cognition, emotion and creativity. Motivation creates an interest to reach a certain goal. If the individual wants to reach the goal he/she will assess what the knowledge base is and what has not been met yet. Other varying attributes that contribute to motivation are social impacts within the community and how the motivation makes the individual feel.

If the motivation leads to the individual learning something that in turn helps someone else out, that sense of goodwill may play a role in wanting to learn and do more (Bransford, et al., 2000).

Motivation is the willingness or wanting to learn, the desire to be noticed and understood by the teacher. Sarason (2004) validates motivation by not only mentioning situations where the student wants to learn more, but also the parents' interest in promoting learning. The first is an internal process. The student has an internal desire to achieve more, create more, and do more. The parents experience a very overt process of desiring more for their children, the students. Millard and Marsh (2001) suggest that motivation is a powerful way for both teachers and parents to introduce writing to children.

***Metacognition and cognition.*** Metacognition is the ability to monitor one's level of understanding and decide, when inadequate, to take steps to learn more (Bransford et al., 2000). The monitoring of understanding is a learning process. The individual can predict one's own performance based on whether or not they feel prepared for the task. Making that prediction involves learning how to judge one's own capability to acquire new knowledge and transfer or apply it to a situation or task.

Cognition relates directly to critical thinking. It is the mental process of knowing, including varying attributes such as awareness, perception, reasoning and judgment. The concept of awareness is the idea that a student can realize that he/she needs to gain knowledge. The teacher has awareness of what her students know and need to learn in a productive learning environment. A student can gain an idea about a concept or idea



through pre-constructed knowledge (Sarason 2004). This perception is part of an active process. Reasoning and judgment are very similar to understanding and expertise in that they both require higher order thinking skills.

***Constructivism.*** Constructivism is gathering knowledge based on what an individual already knows and, perhaps, what he or she has been previously taught. It is the process of building ideas and concepts on top of pre-constructed ways of thinking about those concepts (Bransford et al., 2000). This is a critical attribute to learning because constructivism can be an area where the individual could have misconceptions and ideas that do not align with the majority. The teacher is one variable attribute to constructivism. If the teacher creates a learning environment in which he/she can assess the student and builds a learner-centered environment, then that student is more likely to have a clearer understanding of concepts and ideas similar to the majority because the teacher can clear up any misconceptions the student might have (Smith, 1992). Also, I think it is important to acknowledge that it does not always take ‘an other’ to create a learner-centered environment. Learners (children, adults, etc.) can also experience ‘engagement’ with the ‘it’ – whatever that is in relation to the learner wanting to know more about it. Thus the learners may clear up misconceptions on their own, which, in turn, leads to constructing knowledge.

***Transferring.*** Understanding and transfer are integral in making learning an active process. An individual can generate reasonable arguments and explanations in an organized way that reflects a deep understanding of the subject matter (Bransford et al., 2000). This reflection allows the individual to draw analogies to other problems. This

understanding also leads to transfer of information into problem solving skills. A varying attribute to understanding is the level of flexibility in retrieving information for problem solving (Sarason, 2004).

***Expertise.*** Expertise is the formal attainment of learning. It is the product of noticing features and meaningful patterns and relationships of information that are not noticed by novices. The understanding of information and elements connected and organized around important concepts cannot be reduced to sets of isolated facts or propositions (Bransford et al., 2000).

***Emotion and creativity.*** Emotion and creativity are two concepts where Sarason (2004) and Bransford et al. (2000) differ in the defining attributes for learning. Through metacognition, creativity can begin with a puzzle to solve or a solution that needs to be obtained. Creativity pairs with emotion. A stimulated individual will show emotion when creativity is taking place. A varying attribute to both emotion and creativity is support from the environment. Whether it is a parent, a teacher or a physical area like home or classroom, the environment needs to be supportive of the student.

***Sites, places and environments of learning and experiences.*** The first stage of a child's learning happens with the family at home. Through play and imitation the child gathers knowledge, ideas and concepts from family (Smith, 1992). If the child has older sibling or friends, the imitation can range from tasks to storytelling and even language repetition (Schauble et al., 1996). Wales (1990) suggests examining children's drawings as a way to look at how the family and society influence the learning process.

Kellert (2002) states children can learn, become engaged, and obtain knowledge when stimuli and motivators are present. Parents who provide spaces in the home as dedicated areas for family literacy experiences, nurture positive, reader friendly environments (Trelease, 2006; Landry & Smith, 2006). Sarason (2004) points out the parents or family are associated with the active learning process. Sarason (2004) understands and explains the parental role in education and learning. His views articulate that even in the most unproductive learning environments, when all else should have failed, the one variable that made learning possible was the parent. Love and compassion motivated the parents to desire more for their children. The role of the learning environment in the active process depends on whether or not the environment is productive. Bransford et al. (2000) suggests a productive learning environment creates a place not only for the learner, but the community as well. Assessment plays a substantial role in determining the success of the learning process.

Sarason (2004) suggests that the productive environments need the support of not only the teacher and parents, but also the students. The students need to feel comfortable in their environment. They need to feel secure, ask questions, and want to learn. The varying attributes of the environments are the teacher's willingness to rethink, or as Sarason (2004) suggested, unlearn what has been taught. The feedback needs to be continuous, and continuous training and exposure to the visual environment will help establish reality in both the drawings and writings (Case & Okamoto, 1996). Additionally, time plays a role in learning environments. Time is what teachers, parents and students want, but never have. Part of the educational process (learning) is to allow

time for the student to develop (transfer) what they know into different “modes of representation” (Kendrick & McKay, 2004).

### **Authentic Literacy Practices and Experiences**

In this section, I examine authentic literacy practices that occur in the home and in school or community setting. The reason for examining authentic literacy practices is twofold. First, while this research is specific to practices and sites within the home, we cannot and should not consider these isolated events. Along with sites and practices within the home, families with school-age children learn from outside the home and we should consider the crossover as an important way to examine authentic experiences and practices. Second, while I recognize the importance of students acquiring the five pillars of literacy, phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2001), these do not naturally align with how literacy is portrayed/presented in the home. Therefore, I focus on four common modes of family literacy/literacy in homes and school: writing and drawing, reading, and storytelling. These modes are rich sources of learning and intertwined with the pillars of literacy (Bowman, 2002). For example, through writing, one reinforces knowledge of letters and comprehension. Through storytelling, one learns the structure of stories. Through reading books, one builds vocabulary (Johnson, 2000; Kinzer & Leander, 2003; Moll, 1994).

The first subsection, *Drawing and Drawing as Pre-writing*, looks at drawing as a mode to broaden literacy skills and to transition to writing. The second subsection, *Drawing and Writing*, examines these modes of communication. The fourth subsection,

looks at *Reading and Storytelling* as mode for interaction. The last subsection, *Bridging the gap between families, schools and communities*, looks at partnership of parents and teachers to create environments that nurture both school and the home.

***Drawing and drawing as pre-writing.*** Some researchers (Norris, Mokhtari, & Reichard, 1998) use drawing as a strategy for developing ideas for pre-writing activities. These activities use motivation and encouragement to engage the children.

McFadden (1998) suggests that narrative writing is using an imaginary account of happenings. This account is easy to adapt from everyday life, which makes it useful to teach vocabulary and grammar. Children are familiar with this style of language and performance. Performance for McFadden involves “discussing, telling, re-telling and revising” of narrative stories. Because writing is a slow process to aid in developing narrative composition, drawing becomes a tool. For example, if a student writes a sentence on a piece of paper, the student is only limited to the sentences in literal meaning. McFadden suggests that using drawing as an aid “reminds” the students of alternative ways they could tell the story. The pictorial portion helps promote many action verbs and a good story line, suggesting that drawing helps map out many alternate versions of the story line. Finally, the study discusses an overall positive view of the use of drawing as a way to tell and retell a story. The researchers conclude by stating that pictography, indeed, has “value.”

Adi-Japha and Freeman (2001) argue that while it is hard to know when children began drawing letters instead of circles and lines, there is a distinct system for both drawing and writing. They suggest that writing and drawing share the same hand

movements in relation to cortical systems. The study examines the notion that the brain should give separate areas to the “output” energy because the theoretical foundation of this work relies on the assumption that writing uses a “rule-bound” system and drawing uses a “combinational-bound system. A rule bound system would be faster because it is automated with a set of parameters, as opposed to drawing which allows for movements the bend and blend. This study also examined neuropatients who had to use drawing to form letters. The argument is that writing starts off depending on drawing skills, but emerges and becomes its own system. However, for some patients this process becomes reversed. The researchers gave patients a paper with letters already on the page. Each patient was asked to complete the word, which activates reading. By activating reading, the output should be writing. But because of limitations, the writing did not occur.

As Caldwell and Moore’s (1991) study indicates, drawing is a rehearsal for writing that allows for prior organization before the first stages of narrative writing begin. Using symbols and representational meanings to explain and outline a story helps children in the writing process. Using drawing, they also use the same stages of formal learning as within the outline process. Both methods let them test, evaluate and revise their stories before the final process begins.

One significant fact pointed out by this study is the availability of drawing to every teacher. The teacher who has limited resources can still turn to this creative and expressive activity to engage children. It was also suggested that even if the teacher has limited knowledge of drawing techniques, the process is still guided in the same manner in which an expert might guide a narrative art based activity. Furthermore, even in less

than desirable environments, the right prompting can help a child with writing skills, just as reassurance and positive motivation can help a child develop good visual representation. Another interesting fact pointed out by Caldwell and Moore is the idea that drawing is an invented process that is individualized. This process does not require learning “interpretation.” They go on to state that with enough original symbols, a learner can create original responses for the meanings and interpretations. Drawing can also help learners with complex vocabulary, by creating visual links to the meaning of words.

***Drawing and writing.*** A way to assess a child’s alternative conceptions in language learning is to have the student approach a concept with several styles of representation. Allowing the student to write and draw will help the teacher focus on the student as an individual (Sidelnick & Svoboda, 2000). Luke and Elkins (1998) discuss the importance of language skills and different modes of representation in today’s society. They suggest that a teacher needs to be educated in many forms of representation to meet the needs of students. Teachers need to understand that visual images are just as important for development as written words. Using this multiple literacy perspective, teachers can shape writing in an engaging way (Kendrick & McKay, 2004). According to Riddle (2009),

The inclusion of art, technology, and imagery adds power to traditional tools such as books, paper and pencils. Our students become actively engaged in visual, auditory and kinesthetic interpretation and production of information. As

we reach into their world, we transform the everyday business of teaching and learning into a shared, creative journey (p. 55).

Carroll (1991) began observing people as they write. She noticed that many adults doodle while they write and children use this doodling as a context for their writing. As adults, we do this as “thinking pauses.” She argues that young children are encouraged to take part in the process of drawing before writing, but with age, the task becomes less obvious. Still, some color in lines or circles on the edges of paper. Some make boxes or borders on the edges.

Furthermore, Carroll (1991) makes the case of drawing as a skill to enhance writing. She (1991) visited several schools to encourage and observe drawing before writing. She explained to the students that cave drawings, pictographs and birch bark manuscripts are all forms of visual writing. Carroll then showed the relationships between the images and learning. After reassuring the students that they did not need to be artists to draw, she had them work on their first task. They were to read a poem, and draw with their opposite writing hand. Then, after a few minutes, they discuss as a class what they drew. They observed connections between words and images. The students also made connections with unexpected images, and images that took on completely other story lines that did not have anything to do with the poem. She uses the phrase “read to me your story” when asking students to describe the images they have drawn. This is a great way to intrinsically show the relationship between reading, drawing and translating the images into writing. She suggests that teachers are giving students solutions to problems by using drawing as a tool and guideline for writing.



Levin and Bus (2003) state that the cultural tools of writing, drawing and representational information are used to express and communicate. While their study showed writing as a constrained activity, they found drawing has no limitations. They label the transition period between writing and drawing as the “drawing print stage”. The scoring was based on whether the representation was graphic, writing-like or symbolic.

The researchers also evaluated the placement of the writing or drawing on the page, color representation and correct number. Results in the writing portion of this comparison, specifically between Dutch and Israeli children, showed similar features in the development of the letters for both groups. The transformation was evident from the scribble to a form taking shape in the graphic portion. The older children in the groups showed random strings of letters to represent words. In both groups age was also a determinant in how well the pictures were developed and if words were added in with the pictures as descriptors. These findings are important because they demonstrate there is no cultural boundary between the link of literacy and visual communication if one is taught how to read images from different perspectives.

For example, one study (Case & Okamoto, 1996) that used drawing as a diagnostic tool can be used to look at the relationship between written communication and oral language. In the study, the researchers found that “representational development” could be reflected by the drawings. The researchers examined the cultural differences and the learning environments to create criteria for the diagnostic rubric.

In their study, Kendrick and McKay (2004) used drawing as a way to lead into discussion about personal experiences with literacy events. For example, a student would draw an image of a mom holding a book. This example would then be discussed, and possibly later written in a narrative format.

The research from the study suggests that children see literacy events as ways of communicating. Some children even suggested it was for personal entertainment. Some drawings showed clear examples of literacy events being used as motivation. One child drew herself writing to her dad who did not live with her. It was interesting to note how some drew about reading and others about writing, but few considered both for literacy events (Kendrick and McKay, 2004).

Short, Kauffman and Kahn (2000) also point out that if time allows, drawing helps establish the connection to language. Because learners come from all backgrounds and cultures, using drawing to help with language acquisition can help develop time management skills (Kendrick & McKay, 2004).

Lawson (2005) suggests family involvement and friendly environments are critical for the writing developmental process. Lawson (2005) also points out a possible greater influence than family interactions (i.e. one-on-one reading sessions or read alouds) have on the provision of a material rich environment that fosters literacy skills. She elaborates by giving examples of positive literacy rich environments which include: providing different ways of articulating their stories, allowing verbal and written descriptions of lived events, sketching their story in picture format, and making a three

dimensional object out of clay or painting. All of these family practices overlap and can create an experience that is inclusive of multimodal family literacy.

Millard and Marsh (2001) found that while children would write short stories, they would voluntarily sketch small drawings on the sides of their papers. At first the drawings were overlooked, since the focus of the research was writing. But, at a second glance, the researchers began to see visual stories that continued the theme or concept well after the lines and words on the page disappeared. The researchers found self-motivation as a framework for the visual stories.

After further examination of other collected written works, Millard and Marsh (2001) began to notice “interest and engagement” in certain students who were considered “disengaged” or having no real commitment to reading the stories when only their written languages were analyzed. It was argued that the information presented in visual pictorial format was often more informative and complete. Such research on the relationships between children’s pre-drawings, drawings, cognition, and literacy has taken place but is beyond the scope of this literature review.

***Bridging reading and writing.*** Reading and writing can be viewed from multiple angles and multiple lenses. By allowing interdisciplinary approaches to teaching language arts, a teacher can develop dynamic lessons (Efland, 2002; Riddle, 2009). Noden and Moss (1995) explain the meaning of being an interdisciplinary teacher: they suggest that by using an interdisciplinary approach, teachers can encourage and motivate students to learn from multiple perspectives. As the students use metacognition, they

start learning ways to express themselves. Therefore, in the right environment, they can use their imagination and creativity to develop artistic representations of concepts.

Noden and Moss (1995) suggest using visual narratives to introduce reading and writing. They argue that the “catalyst” for improvement in the language arts is the visual picture (image), whether it is a chart, graphic organizer or student art work (also see Efland, 2002). Allowing the students to explore writing and reading visually links the verbal with visual modes of expression.

A noteworthy idea from Noden and Moss (1995) is “show and tell,” but not in the traditional sense. They use the descriptive text in a story to “paint a picture” for the reader. In their study, teachers would have students chose text (words) that visually enhances the picture-story. By emphasizing the links between words and pictures, students are motivated to understand how authors paint visual images. Use of mental imagery within reading and writing processes can enhance students’ learning of specific skills. (Kress, 2003).

***Reading and storytelling.*** The concept of language as communication plays a vital role in learning. Bransford et al. (2000) points out that learning happens when the teacher realizes the need to look at communication as a barrier and a bridge. Social and economic varying attributes affect communication between student and teacher. Sarason (2004) points out the language of words and what they mean can also influence how a person learns and transfers knowledge.

Barrentine (1996) suggests that reading, storytelling and interactive read-alouds help children construct meanings and acquire life experiences. This goes beyond the

inference of what a child might understand or learn when reading a book alone or without interaction of an adult (Trelease, 2006).

The relationship established between words, vocabulary and phonetic aspects can be motivated by the ideas, concepts and creative fantasies that reading and storytelling from text and picture books create and achieve (Gambell, 2001). Children innately try to comprehend and interpret meanings and messages within text and picture books while reading and during read-alouds with adults. They make personal connections within the framework of the story, their own lives and the lives of the adults sharing the experience with them (Barrentine, 1996).

The site of the interaction, whether it is in the lap of an adult, the corner of a room where a bookshelf might be, or the comfort of a bed, creates a connection between the skill of reading and the enjoyment of creating a personal connection (Barrentine, 1996). This connection can have meaning and impact, which is a motivating factor for the child to acquire literacy skills (Gambrell, 2001).

By reading, writing, and drawing symbols, a learner can create original responses for the meanings and interpretations. Drawing can also help learners with complex vocabulary, by creating visual links to the meaning of words. Using visual literacy skills such as decoding and encoding allows an individual to communicate in our Western culture. A teacher can use narrative storytelling, journaling, writing with images, and drawing as pedagogical practices for incorporating literacy skills in their classroom.

***Bridging the gap between families, schools and communities.*** A reoccurring theme in the literature related to programming and interaction in family, as well as

emergent and intergenerational literacy, is how to connect parents and teachers. This aspect cannot be overlooked. Possible avenues can be explored when thinking about making the connection between families, teachers and communities, including the following.

Positive partnerships between parents and teachers can create dynamic learning and literacy environments for the student in and out of the traditional classroom settings, and in the home environment. This partnership is rewarding for two main reasons. The first reason is that a partnership creates dialogue and communication about the literacies used at school and the community. The second reason is that the partnership creates situations where the teacher can see the diverse cultural and social aspect of the family. This opens up dialogue and communication about formal and informal learning environments and places that nurture literacies and literacy skills.

*Parent involvement and fear of communication.* Tomlinson (1996) stresses the importance of retaining parent involvement. She suggests several key steps for creating a caring environment for parents. The first is providing a variety of activities as options for participating in school functions. Solomon and Rhodes (2001) discuss the time factor. Many parents have conflicting schedules with teacher meetings and activities that are scheduled during the day or early evening. So, having activities scheduled on different days at different times will give flexibility to the parent and encourage participation. Tomlinson (1996) discusses the importance of having a translator at the events for parents whose . This creates an environment where the parent can feel confident in the dialogue, and will not hesitate to ask questions.

Solomon and Rhodes (2001) also stressed the importance of having a translator present. This shows the parent that the school is a caring-centered environment in which the parent's opinion are valued and wanted (Tam and Hang, 2005). It also encourages continuous involvement from the parent because the parent knows their dialogue is understood.

Baskwill (1996) points out that continuous parent involvement is most important for effective communication. She uses dialogue journals as a way for her students' parents to communicate with her on a weekly basis. At first there was hesitation on the parents' part because they had "little confidence" in their writing abilities. But, as Fredericks and Rasinski (1990) point out, with a shared responsibility in how communication is handled, the parents will have control over how they create dialogue. Baskwill (1996) suggests that a teacher should start out with simple thoughts in the journal such as a story about what the family did during the weekend, or an event that relates to school. This way, the teacher learns a little about the family and the parent feels comfortable in writing the journal entry.

Illsley and Redford (2005) discuss fear and hesitation from the parents as New Community Schools implemented a new community initiative called "Drop in for Coffee." This program was a way for the teachers to create a common space where the teacher and parents could talk about the students and what the goals of education were at the school. Many parents said they did not join "groups," but that they would stop in for coffee. The program was a way for the parents to ask questions about student progress and what the expectations of the teacher were.

Another fear parents discussed was a fear of not understanding the educational system. Baskwill (1996) stated that parents in the study hesitated to ask questions about homework assignments in person because they did not want to ask “dumb” questions. She learned that through the dialogue journals the parents would ask questions and start to understand answers “from many points of view.” They also started to take pride in asking about different ways to supplement their child’s reading.

Creating a caring, safe environment for the parents is the first step in gaining trust and continuous participation. This can be done by establishing activities through the month and having a translator present for the parents who may not speak the same language as the teacher. Also having other ways of communicating like dialogue journals, gives parents a way of expressing concerns, and serves as a sounding board for future conversations. Also, having activities at the schools for personal growth will give the parents a place to become involved in education and hopefully become more active in their children’s educational development (Hanssen and Zimanyi, 2000).

*Parent involvement in decision making and the learning process.* The next step after establishing continuous involvement is to allow the parents to take part in decision making. This gives the parents a sense of responsibility. Fredericks and Rasinski (1990) explain that many program activities are scheduled around the convenience of the educators, not the family. This frustrates a lot of parents and caregivers because even if they want to be involved, they have time conflicts.

Allowing families to participate in decisions involving the education of their children brought about encouragement towards “progression and independence” as well



as motivation. It also allowed them to participate in the learning process (Illsley and Redford, 2005).

When allowed to be involved in decision making and school-related activities, parents draw on the “strength of observation,” which they have naturally cultivated over the years, and apply it to their understanding of their children’s literacy development (Baskwill, 1996). I find the idea to allow parents to have ownership over the learning process very appealing. Through her research project, Baskwill (1996) empowered the parents who often felt they had no control over what their children learned at school.

However, Tomlinson (1996) suggests that before a teacher allows parents to become involved in the decision-making process, the school should set up a resource center just for parents. The resource center could have books and computers with programs on the educational system and the dynamics that go into designing curriculum.

There should also be workshops on parenting skills and “ways to support children’s learning.” I think this is a great way for parents to become familiar with how a school works, and the expectations they should have of their child’s learning. I also like the idea that the resource center can become their own space, thus creating a sense of ownership and connectedness.

Illsley and Redford (2005) also discussed the benefits of decision making. The authors believe that a school can encourage learning outside the classroom by educating parents on how to facilitate students’ growth in literacy.

The success of one program over another may be due to one or two key modifications in how these opportunities are presented to the parents. Those programs

that have maintained the highest levels of parental engagement are those that promote a spirit of mutual respect between educators and parents (Fredericks and Rasinski, 1990). Programs that are geared toward community centered learning will probably be received in a positive light, as opposed to programs that seem desperate for “volunteer help” due to lack of teachers or funding.

Part of the learning process for teachers in regards to establishing parent involvement is their understanding of the culture of their community. Social visits and community projects will give the teacher insight to the culture of their community. Gathering data about the local employment, housing, and available family support will give the school an idea of where to start. Also, the learning process begins at home with the parent, so asking simple questions about books at home and/or games the students play will also give the teacher an idea of the home environment.

Solomon and Rhodes (2001) suggest that asking the parents about fears and concerns is a very important aspect of decision-making. Also, creating a framework of hopes and expectations gives the parents responsibilities within the classroom environment.

Involving parents in the decision making process is a very important aspect of working with parents. It creates teamwork and collaboration. Both parties are interested in fostering a good foundation for education. The parents feel like they are still a part of their children’s lives in the hours they are at school, and the teacher feels like the children are engaged in continuous learning outside of the classroom. It also allows both

parties to have current knowledge of what the student is learning and how that learning is taking place.

*Parents and the assessment process.* Feedback and revision need to be continuously given to the students and are also important in determining whether instruction has been successful. Training and encouraging parents to participate in opportunities for increasing the student's thinking and cognitive knowledge can dramatically affect the total development of the child (Fredericks and Rasinski, 1990). Goals set by both the teacher and the parent for assessment might include: discussion and clarity of tests and measurements, assessment of student's thinking and understanding in summative projects, and critical thinking skills (Solomon and Rhodes, 2001). These goals, once established, should complement the students, their learning environment, and the supporting role of family and community.

Fredericks and Rasinski (1990) suggest three principles for parent assessment: assessment should be an integral part of the curriculum, assessment needs to be on a regular basis, and assessment should be systematic.

The first principle of assessment is to have the parent become a part of the process by making it an extension of the curriculum, not an "add-on." This means that a teacher can give suggestions and guidelines for a parent to observe the child at home working on homework or projects. The teacher can ask the parent to monitor the process, or difficulties in a variety of ways. These can include journaling, checklists, and questionnaires (Baskwill, 1996).

The second principle is that assessment needs to be continuous (Fredericks and Rasinski, 1990). Continuous assessment is a comprehensive way to measure levels of learning from all aspects. Examples include learning in the classroom, in play, and at home from the family (Solomon and Rhodes, 2001). When explaining the importance of continuous assessment “parents need to understand that assessment can and will lead to sound curricular decisions” (Fredericks and Rasinski, 1990).

The third principle is that assessment should be systematic or organized. This means that teachers should train all the participating parents in the same way to monitor their child’s progress. Similarly, parents should not be expected to assess and monitor their children’ development without sufficient time or training. Practice and feedback from the teacher will allow the parents to learn by example. Keeping the assessment simple and organized will also help with dialogue about learning and give the parents a sense of leadership (Solomon and Rhodes, 2001).

Several successful ideas for assessment monitoring include involving parents in the design process of the evaluation tools. First, the parents can sets goals for their own children. The teacher can then work off these goals to establish expectations in the classroom. Then the teacher can ask parents to establish questions that rate homework. The feedback can be documented and referred back to throughout the year.

*The bridge.* Teachers have a responsibility to educate students to the best of their ability. Parents have the role of being a child’s first teachers and lifelong role models. Together both parties can create a caring-centered environment where the child can grow and learn critical thinking skills. If teachers and parents work together, they can create

an environment where the child is nurtured all day, everyday. Communication between the families and the school is the most important part of this process. Giving the parents many ways and different opportunities to participate in school projects and activities starts this process.

Teachers who understand the different needs of communities will gain trust and understanding from parents. Ways to achieve such trust and understanding include having translators present and allowing the parents to communicate face to face or through journaling. Allowing the parent to choose will make them feel comfortable in asking questions and communicating. Working with parents is the optimal way to create the best possible outcomes for learning and understanding.

This chapter has explored the concept and nature of family literacy as a mode, and a way of experiencing interactions within the home, community and the world. Highlights of learning and authentic practices within the home, which include the modes of reading, drawing and writing, are examined. These practices and modes extend past places in the home and into school, for school age children. Because of the importance of school and home connections, I examined the ways in which a teacher and community can collaborate. The next chapter, Chapter III, will examine the ways in which one can go about collecting data about family literacy.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Design of Study**

Inspired by Eisner's (1997) belief that "there is an intimate relationship between our conception of what the products of research are to look like and the way we go about doing research" (p.5), in this study I aim to address the conceptual notions of family literacy. This chapter outlines the conception of the research, strategies and methodologies used, methods, sample selection, timeline, data collection and how results are reported.

*Conception.* In this section, I describe the process and influences that led to the overall design and implementation of this study in a chronological manner. My interests are embedded in examining lived experiences of self, culture and community.

In 2008, as I began researching visual literacy for an arts-based research study, I noticed definitions of literacy shifting and changing with each reading (Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2008; Metros, 2008; Jewitt, 2009; Sandell, 2009). While reflecting and composing my own definition of literacy, I found comfort in knowing literacy can and should be fluid and dynamic. I began assessing the modes and mediums that influence and shape my daily interactions and experiences in relation to literacy. This led to reminiscing with my family about the modes and mediums I used as a child. While the recalled experiences and fond memories started out as oral conversations and textual e-mails back and forth, these exchanges ultimately lead to the act of digging into

boxes of old family pictures. These acts—digging, finding, organizing and reorganizing tangible old photographs from family scrapbooks, albums, desk drawers, top shelves, garage storage and wallet sleeves—are part of my lived experiences of recalling memories. While the photographic evidence of my childhood is largely made up of tangible Polaroid snapshots and 35mm film negatives, in adulthood these acts have evolved to sifting through computer files of pixelated digitalized photographs.

In 2009, I began focusing my research on literacy. As shown in Chapter II, the research brings together different fields of study, examines learning in the home, and bridges school and community. Furthermore, researchers are reshaping and redefining the experiences, tools, and extensions literacy brings to our lived experiences. While reading the literature, I found that the descriptions of families were often in the form of text-based descriptions, with little or no pictures throughout the documents. I wanted more. I wanted to see, to learn from looking and viewing into the lives of the families.

The research questions for this study arose out of a desire to view family literacy much in the same way as I experienced recalling and reminiscing about my own literacy within my home: visually. Two goals came out of my research questions: 1) for my reader-viewers to have the pleasure of looking, viewing and seeing the families through multiple forms of communication; and 2) to allow the study to emerge as an interaction between the families and myself.

*Strategies.* Kenney (2009), a professor in visual communications, suggests using reflexive and appropriate indicators for conducting quality visual ethnography. Using his suggestions and inspiration, I take the following approaches in my study:

1. I used triangulation by collecting data from interviews, observations and photographs.
2. I designed a timeline in which families have adequate time to take photographs, reflect on meaning and content, interview, and take more photographs.
3. I collaborated with the families on the meaning and significance of the photographs so my voice is not the only one telling the story.
4. I provided details to the reader/viewer. These details, culled from the interviews, observations, and photograph interpretations, allow the viewer a wide range of information. This is what Kenney (2009) and others call a thick description (Geertz, 1973). Kenney (2009) states that thick description “Reveals the intertwined layers of meaning that underlie what a particular person says and does, so it resembles the many strands of a cultural web” (p.161). Moreover, he asserts that “Photographs are an excellent means for providing thick description because they use vivid detail and transport readers into the situation or setting” (Kenney, 2009, p.161). In this dissertation, I use photographs as a visual means to illustrate culture of family literacy through the lens or point of view of the families.

***Methodologies.*** I used a qualitative approach for the design of my study (Figure 3.1). By means of an arts-based research approach (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Leavy, 2009; Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008; McNiff, 2009), I used visual methodologies (Rose, 2001; Prosser, 1998; Banks, 2001); image analysis (Prosser, 1998; Jewitt, 2009; Kenney, 2009); visual content analysis (Kenney, 2009); and photographic interpretation (Barrett, 2003; 2006) to examine photographs taken by parents and children within the homes of the participating families as a means to



document literacy sites/places and practices. I also used a qualitative (semi-structured) case study approach (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2009) to examine the data generated from interviews and observations.

Methodology	Method	Mode	Tools	(re)Presentational Form	Interpretation
Qualitative arts-based research methodology (Leavy, 2009)	Visual arts-based participatory method (Leavy, 2009)	Photographs	Digital Camera	Photo Essay	1. Image Analysis (coding by family; themes by researcher) 2. Visual Content Analysis (Weintraub, 2009) 3. Critical Interpretation (Barrett, 2006)
Qualitative (semi-structured) case study methodology (Merriam, 2009)	Interview Method (Creswell, 2009)	Transcripts of face to face interviews	Audio Recorder	Word Clouds	Textual Content Analysis (Creswell, 2009)
Qualitative (semi-structured) case study methodology (Merriam, 2009)	Observation Method (Creswell, 2009)	Field Notes	Pen and Paper; Video Recording	Text Description	Text Description (Merriam, 2009)

Figure 3.1 Design of Study

**Methods.** Three methods were used in this study for data collection: visual arts-based participatory method (Leavy, 2009), interview (Creswell, 2009), and observation (Creswell, 2009). Each of these three methods of data collection are outlined in Figure 3.1 and are described in detail in the sections that follow.

*Visual arts-based participatory method.* For the collection of the photographs, I used a visual arts-based participatory method (Leavy, 2009). In this method, the

participants are encouraged to take photographs as documentation, and to share their experiences. Their work, their creativity and voice become the data. The participants were invited and included in the process of redefining literacy.

Why represent family literacy visually? Images, iconography and representation of words are understood and spatially organized in different ways using different media (Mitchell, 1980). There is significance in the representation of language as storytelling and imagery because both are part of the larger shift (within visual culture and forms media) of how we communicate in a Western society (Prosser, 1998; Rose, 2001; Kress, 2003; Jewitt, 2009) driven by popular, visual and material culture (Ulbricht, 2007; Rowsell, 2006). Furthermore, using storytelling and imagery to communicate allows the individual to use personal experience and imagination to relate and interpret material (Barrett, 2003). While Mitchell (1980) argues that looking at images abstractly is not a functional methodology, he maintains that concrete embodiment of decoding and interpreting images is not only data-driven but also a research process. Visual imagery, in this case photography, emerges as a tool for redefining spaces for practice and experiences of community, family and culture (Street & Baker, 2006).

Photographs, however, do not take the place of vision (Leavy, 2009; Prosser, 1998; Mitchell, 1980; Banks 2001), nor do they replicate a moment with accuracy or validity (Prosser, 1998; Rose, 2001; Berger, 1977). What they can do is (re)present human vision and objectivity about an event or situation (Berger 1977; Mitchell, 1980; Emmison & Smith, 2002). Specifically, within family literacy and the context of the dissertation, photographs are taken from two points of view: that of an adult and that of a

child. Ulbricht's (2007) notion of the importance of visual and material culture can be applied to the use of photography as a research process:

When we look at a broad range of cultural forms to learn about histories and civilizations, we find that they are spatially and temporally located, and that many contextual variables contribute to their meanings. Furthermore, we learn that people do not all regard material culture in the same way (Ulbricht, 2007, p.60)

With Ulbricht's (2007) idea of diverse cultural forms, I set out to find an interview method that would help me learn about the families in the most affective way. I used the interview method influenced by Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2009) because it provides the participating adults and children an opportunity to tell stories, give descriptions and create narratives that give way to real word knowledge and experiences (Merriam, 1998; 2009). Creswell (2007) points out the practitioner of constructivist qualitative research should ask broad open-ended questions, examine "interaction among individuals," acknowledge their own position within the study, and point out their experiences (p. 21). The interviews ask questions about social and cultural traditions that influence the beliefs and practices of the families involved with and for literacy. The adult participants were asked the following questions:

- 1) What does the term literacy mean?
- 2) Where do you read with your children?
- 3) How do you communicate with people daily?
- 4) Where do you read and where do you keep reading materials?

The children were asked the following questions:

- 1) Where is your favorite place to read?
- 2) What is your favorite book and why?
- 3) What is your favorite time of day to read?

These questions were open-ended and often lead to stories that prompted me to ask more question about literacy practices. I was careful not to influence types of literacy or suggest modes of literacy.

*Observations.* The guidelines for my observation methods were influenced by Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2009), and used the work of Taylor (1998) and Schwandt (2007) for inspiration. Schwandt (2007) defines the method of observation as “eye witness accounts” about “human experience” (p. 211). Observations can include gestures (i.e., pointing), rooms, sites within the home, and activities (for example: children sitting in lap, children reading to each other, parents cooking and/or cleaning while helping a child read). Ulbricht (2007), and Taylor (1998) suggest other objects in the home such as artwork, posters, handwritten notes, books (textual, pictorial, novels, fiction), television, computers, reading areas, drawings and newspapers should be considered as other opportunities to observe. From a postmodern perspective, I agree with Schwandt (2007) who states, “They [postmodernists and poststructuralists] maintain that experience itself is composed or constructed and hence never stable and determinate such that it can be grasped in visual representations” (p. 212). As such, the combination of observations and interviews helped establish a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of family literacy when incorporated with photography.

In summary, during the home visits, I (1) interviewed family members, (2) observed family literacy experiences and (3) observed how the sites and situations exemplified the social and cultural literacy practices (Purcell-Gates, 2007) of participating families in their own homes.

### **Sample Selection**

The participants for this study were four families. In order to participate in the study, the families had to meet the following criteria:

- 1) They had to be engaged in literacy experiences a minimum of twice per week;
- 2) They had child(ren) who ranged in age from one year to eighteen years of age;
- 3) They had to be comfortable with video and audio recording during home visits and taking still photographs as data;
- 4) They did not have to fit a traditional family unit (mother and father), but could be comprised of a single parents and/or “involve family members such as grandparents, siblings, godparents, aunts, uncles” (Miller & Prins, 2009, p.4); and lastly,
- 5) They had to engage in experiences without prescribed practices from a literacy program or intervention initiative.

Using Taylor’s (1998) approach to purposeful sampling for case studies in family literacy, as the researcher, was able to “gain access to their lives without becoming too intrusive” (Taylor, 1981 as cited in Taylor 1998, p. 106). To do this, I considered the following when selecting the participants: 1) observation at times that were not obtrusive [i.e., dinner and bedtime]; 2) their extracurricular activities and schedules; and 3)

allowance of sufficient time for the children to get to know me and feel comfortable sharing information before beginning interviews (Taylor, 1998).

***How participants were chosen.*** The population for this study consisted of family and friends. In February 2010, a letter (see Appendix A) outlining the research and an Institutional Review Board informational sheet was sent to family and friends via personal e-mail and Facebook correspondence. The total number of invited participants was one hundred and forty-four (144): sixty-one (61) participants were contacted via e-mail and eight-three (83) via Facebook messaging. Once the initial contact was established, friends and family suggested and referred six (6) more individuals for me to contact for an overall total of one hundred and fifty (150) families. Of these one hundred and fifty (150) families, twenty-four (24) responded to the invitations, nine (9) were recruited via e-mail and fifteen (15) via Facebook messaging).

Next, a short survey (see Appendix B) was then sent to each of the twenty-four (24) interested families. The purpose of the survey was to narrow down the pool of interested participants based on the following criteria: the ages of the children, available time during the duration of the study, frequency of perceived family literacy experiences, and location in relation to where I reside.

Based on these criteria, twelve (12) of the twenty-four (24) families were selected as potential participants. I contacted each family via phone to explain the time commitment and the required interviews, observations and photography. By the second week of February 2010 the total was narrowed to five (5) families living in north Texas with children ranging in age from four (4) months to fourteen (14) years of age, and an

e-mail was sent to inform the families of the final selection (see Appendix C). The families that did not make the final selection also received an e-mail thanking them for their time (see Appendix D).

Out of the five (5) initial families, only one (1) family had reservations about allowing an outsider into their home to view their daily activities and experiences. Furthermore, this family's reservations extended past intrusion and delved into insecurities about parenting styles. As a result I was left with four (4) families for this study.

Three (3) of the final families had young children ranging from six (6) months to seven (7) years of age; the fourth family had a teenage daughter. One of the initial concerns with the parents of the teenage daughter was the available time their daughter had to participate in the study. They were concerned she would be limited in participation because she was involved in many extracurricular activities and had little time after homework and on weekends. The parents and I agreed that since their daughter was older than the other children in the other families study and no longer had "story time" with her parents or playtime with toys, we could alter the visitations in this case to times that fit her schedule.

The families will be introduced and examined in Chapter IV.

### **Timeline**

***Duration.*** The data collection process lasted four months, from February to May 2010, and included two additional visits in August and December of 2010. The data analysis was conducted in two parts: first from March until August 2010, and then again

from December 2010 to January 2011. The duration of the entire study from approval to written results was thirteen (13) months.

***Data collection.*** For the three families with young children, an interview and observation were conducted on the first visit. Then for two weeks after the initial interview, parents were asked to take photographs of what they viewed as family literacy experiences, and then send the data via e-mail to me. In the fourth week I conducted an e-mail interview. Follow-up questions were conducted week five (5) through week six (6). For the family with a teenage daughter, an interview was conducted on the first visit and a follow-up conversation took place via Skype, a software application that allows users to make voice calls over the Internet by video. The photographs taken by the families were collected via e-mail and stored on a CD as backup. The participants were asked to take photographs of their literacy experiences in their homes. They families documented the following with photographs:

- 1) Sites within the home wherein which they read and write,
- 2) Places where they keep materials for reading and writing, and
- 3) Photographs of child(ren) engaged in experiences and images of parents reading

***Data analysis and interpretation.*** The analysis and interpretation of data occurred in two phases: from March until August 2010, and then again from December 2010 to January 2011. The interviews were transcribed in March and April 2010. Along with the interviews, I examined the photographs to see what subject matter was depicted. In May 2010, I compiled the data into pools of meaningful segments (Creswell, 2009) and emergent themes (Merriam, 2009). Three themes emerged from all others with depth



of description and became part of the title of the dissertation: materials used within the home in literacy activities, practices of individual and joint reading/writing/playing, and places in the home the families considered sites of literacy experiences.

In September 2010, after many trial layouts of Chapter IV, it was decided to create a narrative to accompany the photographs for the purpose of validity and thick description of the families. For this purpose, the information the families provided along with the photographs is included as well. The viewer then has multiple forms of information on which to base their interpretations of the photographs.

For Chapter IV, the results are shown in three distinct sections within each family: narration, word clouds and the photographs. The narration was written by compiling information given to me via e-mail, surveys and interviews. I then added descriptive information to both the narrative and the photographs from observations. The interview transcripts were separated into words provided by the parents and then by the child. Then all the syntactical words were taken out. Next, the interviews were narrowed down into single words or phrases categorized by defining literacy, places, and practices or materials. I then imported them into a popular website, Wordle.com, (<http://wordle.com>) to aid in the design and layout of the word cloud. A word cloud is a visual representation of data used to illustrate frequency of words and text segments. I chose a layout that illustrates word frequency by the size of font. Other options that the site offers are colors, placement, and design of words to represent the use of words within the text. For this study, the size of the word reflects the number of times it was used in a direct response to a question from the interview, or a response to a question

asked in an email or in a survey. For example, one of the children in the study, Optimus Prime (pseudonym), used the word “read” eight (8) times out of 115 words used to answer questions about literacy. He used “meerkat manor”, “reading” and “home” six (6) times. For the other words displayed in the wordle, he used them between one (1) and five (5) times. The wordles in this research should be examined and observed with the idea in mind that these are representational displays of language used during the study. The idea behind using them was to show, in a visually stimulating image, the text portion of the question and answers. Each time Wordle.com is used, different graphical representations of the same words are produced. They appear in different order, different colors and shapes of arrangement.

Then, I began examining the photographs using Barrett’s (2006) process of interpretation as a guide to interpreting and understanding photographs. Barrett (2006) is a professor of art education who conducts research and teaches courses in art criticism and aesthetics. Informed by Barrett’s (2006) recent and more comprehensive work, I view interpretation as descriptive details that symbolize and reflect social and cultural life experiences within the context of family literacy. Barrett’s (2006) process was selected because it allows for flexibility and adaptability to various fields of study.

Barrett’s (2006) process for interpreting photographs begins with three layers of description: internal, original, and external. Internal description examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content. Original description reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and

information about the photographer. This description provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame. The third layer, external description, details the context in which the photograph or collection of photographs is presented. The text and information surrounding the photographs in this study frame the photographs within the context of family literacy and visual presentation. The external content of all photographs interpreted within this study and the entire collection of photographs (photo essays) have been included as a way to consider social and cultural life experiences. The entire collection can be found in the Appendix (sections E-H)

I asked each family to provide photographs of literacy in the home in the form of a photo essay. Because analysis of the photo essays is beyond the scope and feasibility of this study, the families were asked in September 2010 to choose three photographs that they felt best represented family literacy in their homes. I began my interpretation of the three photographs by using a quick write (Barrett, 2006). A quick write is a creative process in which the reader-viewer writes down whatever comes to mind while viewing the photograph. For this study, I first worked on the quick write in August 2010 for all of the photographs. I went back and reflected and added another quick write in January 2011. Next, I pulled the ideas and themes from the quick writes into layered descriptions. I then formed the descriptive part of the interpretation. After I described each family's three photographs, I pulled information and context from the interviews and observations. These interpretations are based on the three representative photographs, the photo essay collection, and what I learned from my review of the literature and my own experiences and knowledge about family literacy.

In this chapter, Chapter III, I have outlined the methodology I used to conduct the study. In Chapter IV, I provide the three types of results: narrative, word clouds and photographs.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

Family literacy transcends the divide between routine interactions, daily activities and approaches reading, writing, playing, singing and learning with nurturing and bonding. The development and support of literacy experiences within the home builds on the knowledge and strengths of adults while supporting the child's ability and imagination. In the previous chapters I have discussed the importance of redefining literacy to allow for movement and growth of the concept. I have situated knowledge of scholars into the context of this study. I have also discussed the practices and the extension of literacy into the classrooms and community. In this chapter, I highlight the results from the participating families.

Additionally, in this chapter I identify the major emerging themes and depict these themes as fixed findings. In most cases, many of the themes overlap, merge and change meanings. Readers should consider these themes as starting points for their interpretations of the narrative and photographs. The narratives and photographs are not mutually exclusive but are, rather, evolving, fluid and experienced simultaneously.

For each family, the results are shown in three distinct sections: narration, word clouds and the photographs. The narration section is a compilation of information given to me via e-mail, surveys and interviews. I provide background information about the families, a typical week, emerging themes and a narrative summary of their lives. All

participant names have been changed to pseudonyms. All three families with the toddlers chose their own pseudonyms; however, I chose the pseudonyms for the family with the teenager.

In the word cloud section, I provide a visual word cloud and a short textual description for each set of parents and one for the eldest child. A word cloud is a visual representation of data used to illustrate frequency of words and text segments. I created the word clouds by separating the transcripts of the interviews into words provided by the parents and then by the child. Then all the syntactical words were taken out. Next, the interviews were narrowed down into single words or phrases categorized by defining literacy, places, and practices or materials. I then imported them into a popular website, Wordle.com, (<http://wordle.com>) to aid in the design and layout of the word cloud. I chose a layout that illustrates word frequency by the size of font.

The last section of each family segment is the photograph section. In this section, I provide an interpretive analysis of three photographs taken by the families. Each photograph is titled with the family name and a simple description. Next, two quick writes are provided, one from August 2010, and the other from January 2011. A quick write is a creative process in which the viewer writes down whatever comes to mind while viewing the photograph. Then, each photograph is interpreted using Barrett's (2006) three layers of description (see Chapter III): internal, original, and external. For the internal description, I provided a simple five to seven sentence statement that states only the information needed to describe the subject and subject matter. For the original description, I detailed what I knew about the photograph, talked with the families and

found out more information, and then described everything in the photograph. By providing a rich description of the photograph, I highlight aspects of home life, persons, places and subtleties that make up the family literacy environments and experiences. And last, for the external description, I interpret the meaning of photograph. I acknowledge the final version of the dissertation, for the university thesis office, does not allow for creativity in the visual layout of photographs and text. The original intention was to present the reader with the title of the photograph first, so the reader would see the descriptive words the participants used for their interpretations of family literacy. Next, the reader would see the photography on a separate page, then followed by the details and description on the pages to follow. Unfortunately, I will not be able to do this because I am compelled to follow a standardized preset criteria. In future forms of the data, I will have the opportunity to present the findings in the form in which the research was designed to be viewed.

### **The Dieson Family**

*Introduction.* The Dieson Family is a lower middle class family. The man, Adam, and the woman, Eve, self identify as White Americans within the age range thirty to thirty-four (30-34). They live in a large southern state and are raising their two children, a son and daughter, in a suburb of a major metropolitan area. The eldest child, Optimus Prime, a young boy at the age of seven (7), who attends first grade in public school. The younger sibling, Athena, a young girl aged twenty (20) months, attends a daycare facility. Adam and Eve are both employed full-time. The family needs an afterschool caregiver between the end of school hours and the end of the parents'

workday for Optimus Prime. For the parents, the logical choice to provide this care is Adam's father, Grandfather Baggins.

A typical week in the Dieson household follows a loose routine of daily rituals that focus around mealtimes, work, school and bedtime. Athena still requires around-the-clock feedings and Adam and Eve take turns. While one is feeding in the mornings, the other is helping Optimus Prime prepare for school. Both parents have little time to devote to each other on any given day, but try to find time here and there to talk and/or spend time together.

***Emerging themes.*** During the interviews, observations, follow-up e-mail correspondence, and review of photographs three themes emerged for this family:

1. The parents give priority to the importance of personal space for their children.
2. The eldest child learns from watching TV, and reading print materials.
3. Family literacy is a practice almost exclusively done individually for three of the members; but done jointly, parent and child with the younger sibling Athena.

***Narration.*** As I drove up to the Dieson home, I glimpsed the glass front door and saw the young son, Optimus Prime, standing inside the door with a book in his hand. He greeted me and handed me the book as I walked in. "I picked this out because you're here to talk about books", he said, as he led me inside.

"Books? Only books?" I asked.



He shook his head vigorously side to side, without an answer, and took the book back. He immediately flipped through the pages and found one he liked, proceeding to point to words and sound them out phonetically. “Is this what you want to talk about, reading words?” he asked. He was eager to share.

As I walked into their home, I thought about what I had said to Eve on the phone the night before. Had I said I was going to talk about books or reading words? What words had I used to describe the interview?

Walking in the front door, I could see Eve ahead of me in the kitchen preparing a bottle for Athena. She heard Optimus Prime talking to me. “Hi,” she said, her hands full making a bottle for Athena. “Do I have time to give her this?” she asked, motioning toward Athena, who held tight to the cabinet nearby for balance. “Of course! Hello Athena!” I responded as I took in the little girl standing wobbly near her mother.

“Where would you like to conduct the interview? I need to get Optimus Prime settled down,” said Eve.

I asked, “What did you tell Optimus Prime about tonight and my being here?”

“I explained to him that the word *literacy* is about books and reading. I wanted him to think about reading and the books he likes so that he would be ready to answer questions when you came,” Eve responded.

At that point, Optimus Prime, still standing behind me with the book, chimed in on the conversation “Let’s go to my room and I’ll show you.” He led me down the hall to his bedroom and pointed to a stack of books he had put together for the interview. “I put these here for you to see,” he remarked, and looked for my reaction.

Optimus Prime and I left his bedroom, as little Athena toddled out of her bedroom holding on to the wall with one hand. With the other hand, she was barely hanging on to the cover of a book, leaving the pages splayed open and gently brushing the floor just beneath her. “This is her favorite book,” said Optimus Prime to me before looking back at the little girl, “Show her, Athena.” In this same hand that clutched the book, she carried a small doll. She dropped the book and the doll and gazed toward the floor where they lay, as if they had been taken from her by gravity. Is she trying to select the most important object to try to pick up, I asked myself, as I watched her balance bowed toddler legs to reach down to the floor.

I started to offer to help her, but before I could, Optimus Prime picked the book up, gave it to her and said, “Hold this” making the decision for her.

We sat in the living room. The Dieson family sat on the couch in their living room as I prepared my notes and questions. Optimus Prime played on the floor with his Transformer and looked up, “Am I going to be graded on what we talk about?” Adam and Eve laughed, “No” said Adam, as he and Eve reached for the same sippy cup to give Athena.

As we began the interview, it was apparent that Optimus Prime wanted me to know his room and his desk are a place for *his* reading. “I normally read in the evenings,” he answered, when asked what time of day is his favorite time for reading.

“Okay.” I said. “Do you like to read out here?” I asked, pointing to the living room where we sat. “Or maybe your bedroom, or mom and dad’s room?” He looked around as I continued, “Where’s your favorite place to read?”

“In my bedroom,” he said, certain.

“You like to read in your bedroom? Where in your bedroom?” I probed.

Optimus Prime nervously fingered the Transformer in his lap as we talked. “Like probably sometimes I like to do it on my desk,” he replied.

“You like to read at your desk,” I repeated, suddenly conscious that he was watching me take notes.

It is clear from our conversation that Adam and Eve want Optimus Prime to have care that consists of educational activities, like assistance with homework, and interaction that is personal and ritualistic. Optimus Prime’s grandfather, Adam’s father, provides these key attributes and creates a nurturing environment for his grandson to spend time learning and being around family. An added advantage to this arrangement is the bond that is created between the grandfather and his grandson bolstered by the abundance of daily time and interactions.

It is important to the grandfather to create structure for Optimus Prime during their afternoons together. Typically, he does this by starting with a snack and then helping Optimus Prime with homework. If spelling words are given during the week, they practice the words. On some days they play outside in the yard, plant in the garden, and on special days they read a novel together. The grandfather has a special interest in sharing J. R. R. Tolkien’s novels and Optimus Prime and he are reading *The Hobbit* together. Within the framework of intergenerational literacy, Adam’s parents are avid readers, and influence their grandson passing down a legacy, once shared with Adam.

“Is grandpa reading that to you now?” Eve asked Optimus Prime, when we talked

of Grandfather Baggins' favorite book, *The Hobbit*.

"He is, he is!" Optimus Prime exclaimed. He perked up as we talked about the book and Grandfather Baggins.

I made a note to study the relationship between Grandfather Baggins and the family further and moved on to the next question.

"Do you like to read alone, or with the family?" I asked Optimus Prime.

Eve spoke up, "I used to read to him all the time."

I looked at Optimus Prime, "Now do you read to mom and dad, or do they read to you?"

He bounced up and down in his seat, letting off extra energy from sitting with us. "Sometimes I read to mom and dad, sometimes they read to me," he said between bounces.

"Yeah? What do you like best?" I queried.

"What I like best is when they read to me," he said, making eye contact only as he answered questions before averting his gaze.

"When they read to you," I repeated. "Okay, do you like to read?" I asked, moving down my list of questions.

"Yeah," he replied, with no elaboration.

"Is reading sometimes hard?" I probed, looking for more explanation about his relationship with reading.

"Sometimes it is," he said. This time he avoided eye contact altogether.

"When it's hard what do you do to help yourself out? How do you get by?" I

asked, as I lowered my eyes to try and catch his.

“By asking a friend or if I was reading at home and I had a hard time I can ask someone,” he answered.

I followed, “And mom and dad would help you?”

“Yes,” he responded.

I was suddenly aware of the tedium in our exchange and turned back to Adam and Eve. Optimus Prime gave a visible sigh of relief as I moved on to the next question and directed it toward his parents.

“Okay. Now just right off the top of your head if you had to define literacy what would you think that that means?” I asked, looking only at the two adults. They sat together on the sofa, methodically placing objects on the coffee table to entice Athena. She circled the coffee table, taking careful steps while bracing herself, all the while moving toward the next object, a sippy cup, a toy, and a napkin.

Adam answered first. “Learning about books, education about books, learning how to read.”

Then Eve, “I would say learning how to read but also the different types of literature.”

“Okay. So how many hours a week do you guys have the opportunity to read, either individually with your son or as a family with your son and daughter?” I questioned, reading from my notes. I looked up and rephrased, “How many hours would you consider that you have a family activity that involves reading or writing?”

Adam answered, “Probably 1-2 hours.”

Eve finished his sentence, “A week, yes.”

“For us.” Adam clarified.

“For us, yes,” said Eve. “Of course, she gets exposed at school again, but yeah.”

“Optimus Prime is also at his Grandpa’s [Grandfather Baggins]” Adam added.

Eve spoke up “He does a lot of it there. I would say probably about two hours a week. And it’s broken up because a lot of times...”

Adam interjected, “15 minutes here, 15 minutes there.”

Eve continued to mention Athena’s participation in the shared time. “She’s not as interested as he may be at a certain time. She will be interested when he’s not. In fact, I’m waiting for her to grab one up there because she grabs it every night.” She motions toward print materials on top of the toy storage bin in the corner.

“She already moved it,” said Adam. Athena had been eyeing the print material in question while we talked.

Grandfather and Grandmother Baggins surround themselves in their home with literacy materials, where Optimus Prime spends a significant amount of time. Grandmother Baggins is a voracious reader, and hoards print materials as treasures, valuing them above space in the small home. The Baggins’, and especially Grandfather Baggins, endorse a shared literary experience beyond restriction of age levels and skills by introducing materials, which might be considered above a first-grade reading level to Optimus Prime at a young age. For this family, time is the sole limiting factor to literacy opportunities. Providing these opportunities for Optimus Prime satisfies Grandfather Baggins.

**Word clouds.** A word cloud is a visual representation of data used to illustrate frequency of words and text segments taken from interviews. I chose a layout that illustrates word frequency by the size of font. Other options that the site offers are colors, placement, and design of words to represent the use of words within the text. The word cloud of Adam and Eve (Figure 4.1) shows large words of: learning, Internet, book. Smaller in size, yet still large are: billboard, night, notes, word and hour. Optimus Prime's word cloud (Figure 4.2) has one large word: read. Smaller in size, yet still large are: letters, reading, TV, meerkat manor and home.

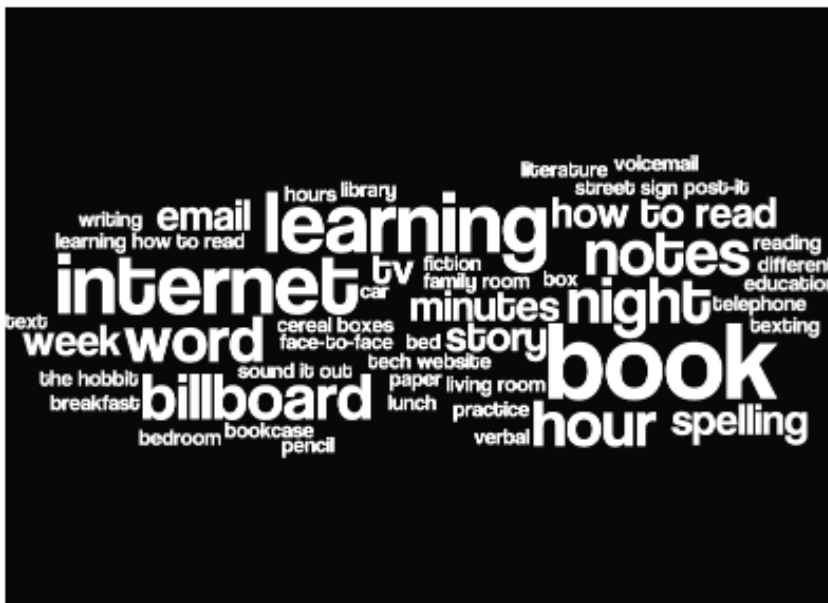


Figure 4.1 Dieson Family Parents' Word Cloud

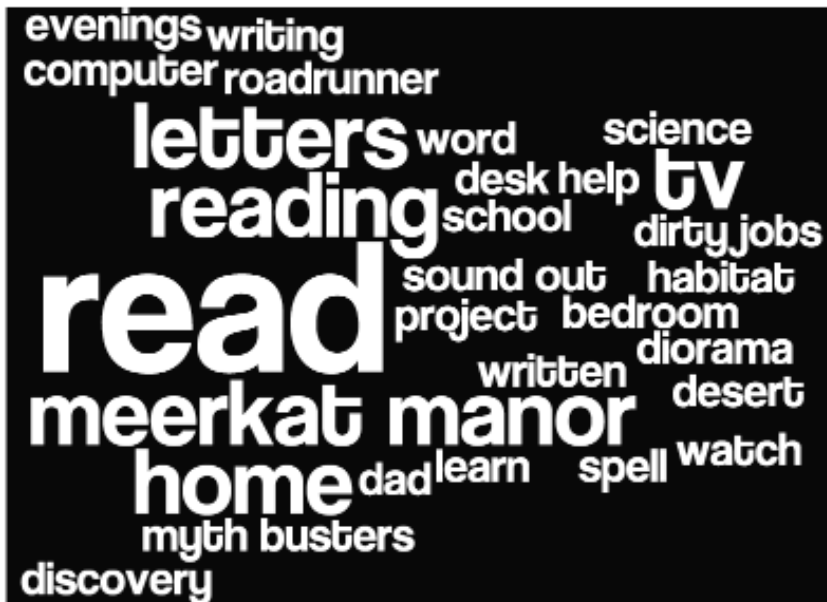


Figure 4.2 Optimus Prime's Word Cloud

*Photographs.* Three (3) photographs were chosen by Adam to represent his family. Adam stated:

I chose the photographs based on the family's favorite places to read and the interaction between parents and children. The children seem to be happiest when they have their own space to read, and these places represent their space for enjoyment. As my youngest has demonstrated in the last few months, the locations she likes to read have changed. However, she seems to take a sense of ownership or pride for the locations she reads in. My family and I have read more as a family (both scheduled and unscheduled) and have focused more on print than other sources since our interview. I do think we encourage more time to read since the interview. So in a short conclusion we have thought more about



family literacy, and placed more focus on books and print than we did prior to the interviews.

Quick Write (*August 2010*)

- 1) Studious
- 2) Passive reading

Quick Write (January 2011)

- 1) School-like posture
- 2) Adult-like desk and chairs
- 3) His private space



Figure 4.3 Dieson Family: Optimus Prime at His Desk

Internal context examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content.

This color digital photograph (Figure 4.3) is of a young boy sitting at a wooden desk, attentive to the bound print material lying open on the desk in front of him. The young boy is shown in profile within the extended space in the right-center of the frame. He is sitting rigid and upright on a blue swivel armless rolling chair with his hands resting on the pages of the open book before him. The desk and literacy materials are in the center and left center of the frame. The bound print material is positioned in the center.

Original context reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and information about the photographer. This description provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame.

This photograph is taken inside Dieson family home, looking in toward the left side of Optimus Prime's bedroom from the doorway. This photograph, taken in the evening during February 2010, was received as an e-mail attachment in March 2010. The format is 360X480 portrait positioned, 44KB, digitalized photograph. This photograph was taken by the mother, Eve, as a way to depict the place where Optimus Prime enjoys reading. In the foreground of the photograph on the lower left side next at the end of the desk, positioned up against the wall, is portion of a wooden adult chair. Hooked on the back post of the wooden chair are baseball caps. A spot lamp sitting on

the back edge of the desk illuminates the wall and part of the reading material. Lined up against the wall, on the back of the desk, are two trophies, an illegible framed letter, painted wooden initials, a small bowl and several unrecognizable objects. Pencils, papers, a bound book and a toy car are on the left side of the desk. In the background are stacks of toys and a storage hamper of basketballs. A portion of a wire storage rack is just inside in the edge of the right center of the frame. The walls are bare with the exception of a poster depicting the cartoon characters from the movie *Cars*, centered above the desk and a construction paper collage, above the wire storage rack. He is fully dressed in warm clothing that consists of tennis shoes, jeans, and a long sleeve under layer with a tan short-sleeved t-shirt. There is no evidence to suggest that this moment in time is part of a nighttime reading ritual before bed. Outside the field of view on the center right edge is a bookshelf where the child keeps materials (books and magazines) within arm's reach of the bed but not in the area where he interacts with the materials.

External context and interpretation details the context in which the photograph is taken and how it shows social and cultural life experiences.

The photograph shows two aspects of what Eve calls "their family literacy." First, by observing the scene from above, the lens gazes down at the scene with authority and sees as she does, where her son likes to read. Second, the son, Optimus Prime, wants the viewer to see how he can read by himself. The photograph shows his purposeful act of reading at the desk from the distance of the doorway, the edge of his domain. This private experience, captured within the frame, suggests that while being observed the young child displays what he wants the photographer to see of his interactions with the

materials and place. This display is reminiscent of what he thinks adults expect. Similar to school literacy experiences, the activity calls for studious attention and focus.

Quick Write (August 2010)

- 1) Intimacy;
- 2) Reading for pleasure;
- 3) Loving activity;
- 4) Spontaneity; and
- 5) Embracing the moment with a colorful book full of talking points

Quick Write (January 2011)

- 1) Rituals and creating moments
- 2) Feeling heartbeats
- 3) Tangible materials
- 4) A bond
- 5) Stillness except for the movement of the book
- 6) Active reading, more than a habit, time with daddy
- 7) Bodies together, touching



Figure 4.4 Dieson Family: Adam and Athena Reading Together

Internal context examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content.

This color digital photograph (Figure 4.4) is of an adult male with a young child seated in his lap, both gazing down at bound print material. Both the adult male and the young child sit on the floor in the center foreground. The adult male's arms encircle the young child. The adult male is holding the bound print material as the young child grasps the pages within reach. His right hand and some pages are blurred showing movement.

Original context reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and information about the photographer. This description

provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame.

This photograph is taken inside the Dieson family home, looking toward the kitchen from the living area near the couch. This photograph, taken in the evening during February 2010, was received as an e-mail attachment in March 2010. The format is 480X360 landscaped positioned, 43KB, digitalized photograph. The older child, Optimus Prime, as a way to show how and where his younger sister reads, took this photograph. Optimus Prime took several photographs of his sister grabbing books from her play area, and also of her bringing them to her father. He ultimately choose this photograph to be in the collection because he wants the viewer to see that she likes reading in her father's lap, and often crawls into his lap before giving him a book.

In the background, the tan carpet, the beige linoleum and the wooden veneer partial wall divide the space between the living room and the kitchen. There is no visible living room furniture or décor. The kitchen space includes a large pet crate with a tennis shoe box and basket on top positioned up against a beige wall next to the back door in the upper left of the frame. In the far upper left of the frame is a partial view of a high chair extending into the tan carpeted area. The wooden kitchen table is small and has three wooden chairs, only one visible immediately behind the adult male in the upper center of the frame. Behind the chairs are the washer and dryer with laundry on top. The father, Adam and his daughter, Athena, are in the center of the frame in compressed space with only his partial legs coming into view at the bottom center. Both family members are wearing daytime clothing. Adam is wearing a Mercedes Benz baseball hat,

a tan short sleeve shirt, a silver wristwatch, and jeans. Athena is wearing an aqua and blue knit long sleeve shirt. Adam is glancing down at a Dr. Seuss children's book, and his hands seem actively engaged in assisting Athena turning pages. Athena looks at the right-hand page through a view partially obscured by her hair.

External context and interpretation details the context in which the photograph is taken and how it shows social and cultural life experiences.

This photograph illustrates the place where the parents have indicated literacy activities take place. It also captures Athena engaged in a reading activity both defined and depicted by Optimus Prime. While Athena examines pictures, Adam both promotes questioning and responses about the photographs. Optimus Prime wants the viewer to see the father's willingness to engage in a literacy activity at a child's level (on the floor). Adam embraces intimacy and shared moments by having Athena's body so close to him in this literacy experience. Excluded from the frame are other literacy materials and places in the living room, including the couch, Athena's play corner, the TV, the computer desk, and the fireplace within the living room of the Dieson family home. These places, while indicated as important during my interactions with the parents, are not included in this photograph. Optimus Prime chose this close up of his family to illustrate the experience of literacy in the home along side showing that the place can be "as simple" as his father's lap.



Figure 4.5 Dieson Family: Athena's Corner

Quick Write (August 2010)

- 1) Spontaneous
- 2) Child's area
- 3) Most likely female

Quick Write (January 2011)

- 1) Small scale chair
- 2) Colorful
- 3) Blocked in; surrounded
- 4) Room within a room
- 5) Not orderly



Internal context examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content.

This color digital photograph (Figure 4.5) is of a child's space in the corner of a room. The child's space includes a small toddler sized fabric chair in the center and is the focal point. Just behind the toddler chair in the upper center, extending past the frame, is a colorful multi-sensory station. To the left of these two main objects is a plastic toy storage bin with a shelf of books and a sliding lid. There are multiple colorful objects stacked inside the open compartment of the toy storage bin. Various plastic toys are scattered in the center foreground on the tan carpeted floor.

Original context (reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and information about the photographer. This description provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame.)

This photograph was taken inside the Dieson family home, standing by the coffee table, looking toward the left side of the living room, in the corner between a sofa and a chair covered with a white sheet. This photograph, taken in the morning during March 2010, was received as an e-mail attachment in March 2010. The format is 480X360 landscaped positioned, 46KB, digitalized photograph. This photograph was taken by the father, Adam, to illustrate where his daughter, Athena, reads, learns and plays. Adam's intent for taking the picture without Athena's presence is to reveal the importance of the site itself. He took the photograph after she was done pulling toys out of the storage bin

and moved on to find other objects to manipulate. On the lower left corner of the frame is partial arm of a chair extending out of the view of the frame. The chair is covered with a white sheet. Next to the chair in the far left of the frame is the tan and purple toy storage bin. The bin is up against the living room wall and is partially obscured in the frame by the arm of the covered chair. On top of the toy storage are two stacks of books. The books are within Athena's reach while she is standing. She often moves the books from the shelf, to the floor, to the inside of the bin and back to the shelf. Next to the toy storage on the tan carpeted floor in the left center of the frame is a backpack, chocolate brown with bright pink polka dots. The backpack is closed and standing upright by itself. The focus of attention in the picture is the toddler size chair with purple fabric and a cartoon depiction of the female character Tinker Bell from *Peter Pan*. Tinker Bell is reminiscent of a pinup girl with her body angled toward the viewer showing her feminine curves and innocent yet flirtatious youth. The multi-sensory station is set in the back of the toddler chair, and is in the far corner. It would not be accessible to Athena without the assistance of an adult. The walls within the frame do not have any decoration and are beige white. The view of the wall is limited because the angle is seen from above. The entire right side of the frame is taken up by the partial view of a multicolor upholstered sofa arm. There is an unrecognizable red plush object covering a portion of the sofa arm in the upper far right corner of the frame. It could possibly be an adult sweater or a throw blanket. In the lower center foreground are several plastic objects, seemingly scattered with no organization or pattern. Some of the objects are identifiable: a toy car, a plastic child's cup and a yellow toy bird sitting in the chair.

External context and interpretation details the context in which the photograph is taken and how it shows social and cultural life experiences.

The father, Adam, captured both site and literacy materials that he views as key components to his daughter's literacy experiences. The family designated this space for her so she can be close to them, and they can keep an eye on her from the kitchen or while they watch TV. When it is time to clean up, she knows to put her toys and books back in this space. Over time and through repetition she takes ownership for her corner and more so her chair.

### **The Flynn Family**

***Introduction.*** The Flynn Family is a middle class family. The man, Lawrence, and the woman, Lindana, both self identify as White Americans within the age range thirty to thirty-four (30-34). They come from a large southern state and are raising their two sons, in an urban city in a major metropolitan area. Both Lawrence and Lindana have full time employment, and for the parents, the logical choice of caregiver is Lawrence's mother. The eldest child, Phineas, a young boy of five (5) attends a private pre-k school three (3) days a week. The younger sibling, Ferb, who is three (3), stays with Lawrence's mother during the day, joined by Phineas two days a week. .

A typical week in the Flynn household follows a hectic routine Lindana calls "just having typical boys." They start the mornings early preparing breakfast, getting Phineas ready for school and dropping off Ferb at his grandmother's house. Lindana and Lawrence share the responsibility of preparing dinner and playing with the boys when they get off work. The family plays outside, they watch movies, play board games and

even work out together. They visit the park down the street and often ride bikes and play basketball. The parents feel it is important to spark the young imaginations, so fantasy play and toys are a central part of their daily experiences. Phineas said, “Mom and Dad love to be silly with us. We love to be silly with them.”

***Emerging themes.*** During the interviews, observations follow up e-mail correspondence, and review of photographs three themes emerged for this family:

1. Books and magazines are read in the evening in bed.
2. There is excitement and pleasure in reading and story telling with everyone in the family taking turns.
3. Family literacy is a casual part of everyday life. It is a part of the evening ritual and weekend fun.

***Narration.*** I observed the family routine at homework time in the evening , with Phineas seated at the kitchen table. Both Lawrence and Lindana were in the middle of their evening ritual, transitioning from picking up the children from Grandmother’s house to preparing dinner for the family. Lindana was still in work clothes and was attempting to get Ferb into his bedroom to change his diaper. Lawrence was preparing tacos while prompting Phineas to show me some of his coloring worksheets from school. Lindana excused herself and went to change Ferb, and also to get into her “comfortable clothes.” While Lawrence and Lindana prepared the meal, Ferb and Phineas decided to grab their light sabers and run around the kitchen.

When the light saber battle had reached a momentary truce and I had everyone's attention, I began my questions, "All right. So where is your favorite place to read in the house?"

Phineas, the oldest boy, responded first, "On my bed."

He still had the toy in his hand and was practicing his moves. I continued, "You like to read on your bed. Do you like to read in the morning or at night?"

He looked back at me to answer, "Sometimes in the afternoons, sometimes in the morning."

"Do mom and dad ever read stories to you?" I asked.

This time he responded to the light saber, instead of me, "Only at nighttime."

I looked at the saber and then back at him, "At nighttime. What time of night? What are you doing?"

Phineas thought for a second, then answered, "4:30."

Lawrence spoke up, "No. Not 4:30," he said with a laugh. Phineas looked confused. After all, he did answer me with a time.

Lindana probed her son, "Morning, evening? Before bed? After dinner? When do we normally read together? After dinner? After bath? Before bed?"

"Before brushing teeth," Phineas replied. Now he was catching on.

As I stifled a giggle, I thought, children can be surprisingly literal. Then I moved on, "When you read with mom and dad, do you get to pick out the book or do they pick the book out?"

"I do sometimes. Dad does sometimes."

“Okay. And you get to pick it out too? Do you read to both of them at the same time or do they get their own bedtime stories?” I queried to Phineas.

Lindana answered, “It depends. We used to read to both of them and now they each want their own. That’s how we separate.”

I could feel light saber truce drawing to an end. “Okay. One more question. So Mommy and Daddy, do they read in the house?” I asked Phineas.

“Yes,” he responded, with a wiggle.

“Where do you think they like to read the best?” I asked.

Again, talking to the light saber, Phineas replied, “Mom reads in her room and sometimes when daddy is going in the bathroom pooping he reads a magazine.”

Lawrence turned white, “Give me credit, that’s not the only place. Come on. Where else? Do you know where else I do it?” he asked.

Phineas kept on, “On the couch. And in mommy and daddy’s bed.”

I smiled at Lawrence, and then continued, “Now, do you get to read in Mommy and Daddy’s bed and on the couch?”

“Yes,” said Phineas, with a bounce.

I clarified. “You get to read there, but your bedroom is your favorite place? On the bed.”

“Yes.” he said, as he leaped off the couch, toy weapon in hand.

Now that Phineas had taken his leave, I went on to ask Lawrence and Lindana about their personal sites and practices of literacy experiences without the children. Both

parents laughed in response. Time is the major limiting factor in their literacy experiences, and as a result, these experiences are few.

“How often do you, not necessarily as parents, but as individuals, get to read say on a weekly basis? Fun books.” I asked the adults. Ferb squirmed on Lindana’s lap.

“Before falling asleep,” she responded.

“Okay. So you get to read at night,” I stated.

Lawrence clarified, “You mean just on our own leisure, just anything?”

“Just a leisure book. Not necessarily something for work. Let’s phrase it that way. Other than work when do you get to read?” I replied to him.

Lindana looked to her husband, “You get to read a lot more than me.”

“Yeah. I read during my lunch hour.” Lawrence responded, “Yes. I read my books.”

“Can you listen to books on tape as you drive in? Do you have a preference? What you lean towards as far as both types?” I asked in reference to bound print materials or books on tape.

He thought for a minute, and then answered, “Fiction stuff. It’s a lot of detective stuff and whatever. John Sanford or James Patterson type books.”

I turned to Lindana, “What about you? Preference of books.”

“Both fiction,” she responded. “Fiction and mostly like murder mysteries and fun fantasy ones. Once I read Harry Potter, it was all I could do to put it down.”

“Are you reading anything or listening to anything right now?” I probed.

Lawrence spoke up first, “I’m listening to the Percy Jackson thing too. And then reading, what am I reading? James Patterson book right now.”

Lindana has little time for personal reading and admits that most of her reading is done on her iPhone in the morning while getting ready for work. When she does have time to curl up on the couch for personal reading, she prefers a tangible print-based material. “I read in the bathroom while getting ready, but not while I am pooping,” she said as she glanced in the direction of her husband.

*Word clouds.* The word cloud of Lindana and Lawrence (Figure 4.6) shows large words of: read, iPhone, and book. Smaller in size, yet still large are: ability, cookbook, e-mail, online, night, day. Phineas’ word cloud (Figure 4.7) has one large word: sing, bed. Smaller in size, yet still large are: sea serpent, dinosaurs, game, play, book numbers, and couch.

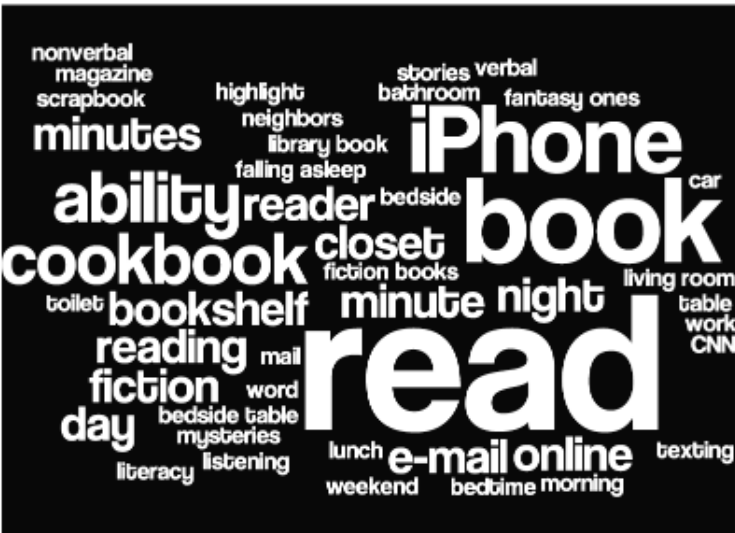


Figure 4.6 Flynn Family Parents’ Word Cloud



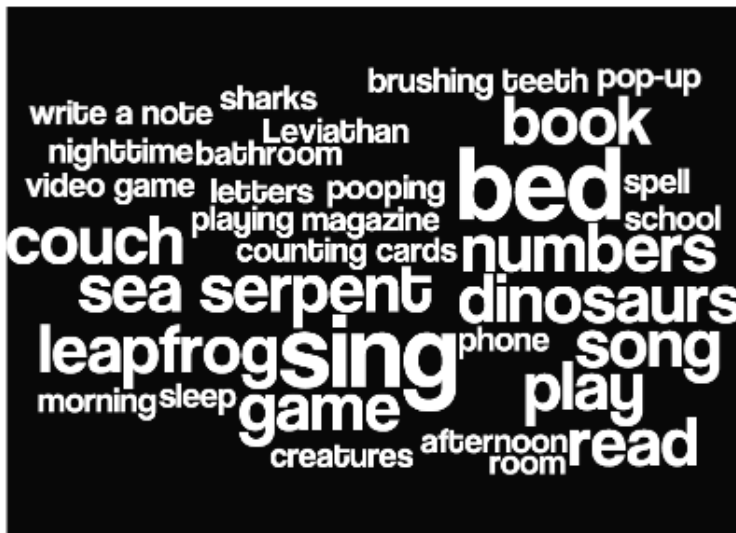


Figure 4.7 Phineas' Word Cloud

**Photographs.** Three (3) photographs were chosen by both Lawrence and Lindana to represent family literacy. They stated:

“Lawrence and I took a look, and below are the pics we selected. These photographs show playing games and many of the games we play promote counting and picture association. They also show books, magazines, and social media. These tend to be the main means by which our family reads. Reading together as a family and sharing stories. They also show reading for leisure. Personally it lets you escape, and shows our children reading is fun. We have books in all rooms and they are part of everyday life. Has our understanding of family literacy changed since the interviews? I feel we still hold it as being very important.”



Figure 4.8 Flynn Family: Shared Read-Aloud

Quick Write (*August 2010*)

- 1) Mother and her children
- 2) Closeness
- 3) Bedtime
- 4) Active reading

Quick Write (*January 2011*)

- 1) Shared focus
- 2) Shared experience
- 3) Togetherness
- 4) Enjoyment
- 5) Comfort

Internal context examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content.

This color digital photograph (Figure 4.8) is of an adult woman with two young boys sitting in her lap engaged with the bound print material. All three individuals are positioned in the center of the compressed frame. The adult female is seated with her arms intertwined between the boys' arms while holding the bound print material. The boys are sitting enclosed within the frame of her body.

Original context reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and information about the photographer. This description provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame.

This photograph is taken inside Flynn family home, in Phineas' bedroom. This photograph, taken in the evening during April 2010, was received as an e-mail attachment in April 2010. The format is 2304X1728 landscape positioned, 648KB, digital photograph. This photograph taken by the father, Lawrence, captures his family engaged in a reading activity where their nightly ritual often takes place. Several variations were taken of this experience. Other photographs were taken with extended space where more of the bed and wall are seen. One was zoomed in on just the boys and book with the mother's head partially out of view. For the final selection of photographs, four were taken. Other photographs of this same experience excluded the family and were of the bed in isolation.

In the background we see a light yellow wall and the bottom edge of a blue curtain in the upper left and center of the frame. Extending past the frame is the bottom corner of a pencil sketch of a swaddled newborn baby in a silver frame. In the far right bottom of the frame is a profile of a partial obscured stuffed Mickey Mouse doll resting on pillowcase. The three overlapping bodies take up the center of the frame. The mother, Lindana is sitting in the middle of the two young boys, her head leaning forward in close proximity of their faces. Lindana's mouth is close to their ears. All appear to look content and seem to be enjoying the moment. The mother's arms are wrapped around her boys, encircling and comforting them. This act of intimacy evokes an environment of security and reassurance. Lindana is wearing a long sleeved shirt and jeans with a socked toe peaking out from her crossed legs. The boys are wearing pajama tops and bottoms with cartoon characters and no socks. All three are sitting on what appears to be a bed shown in the bottom of the frame extending past the field of view. The bed comforter is navy blue with Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia and Darth Vader. In the background are a starry night and the Millennium Falcon space ship.

External context and interpretation details the context in which the photograph is taken and how it shows social and cultural life experiences.

This photograph depicts three important aspects of Flynn family literacy. First, it illustrates the place for in which shared read-alouds and story time take place, the older son's bed. Second, it provides an example of the type of literacy material most often used for the family's shared nighttime ritual, print material. In this case it is bound print material, a magazine. Other times it is a hardback or paperback book. And third, it shows

a literacy practice of reading aloud. The children listen and learn by hearing their mother read to them. Then boys take turns asking questions, reciting text and examining pictures. This image depicts a shared reading practice.



Figure 4.9 Flynn Family: Lindana's Literacy Materials

Quick Write (August 2010)

1) Simple pleasures

- 2) Entertainment
- 3) Staying current
- 4) Popular culture

Quick Write (January 2011)

- 1) Deliberately arranged
- 2) Purposefully
- 3) Personal interests
- 4) Gathering information
- 5) Ways of communicating pop culture

Internal context examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content.

This color digital photograph (Figure 4.9) is of different types of materials used to obtain information. There are three types of media layered in the compressed view of the center of the frame. Two of the three types are bound print material; the last type of material is digital multi-sensory. The modes are a magazine, a hardbound book and an electronic smart phone.

Original context (reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and information about the photographer. This description provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame.)

This photograph is taken inside the Flynn family home, in the living room, looking down in close proximity, at the materials and couch cushion. This photograph, taken in the evening during March 2010, was received as an e-mail attachment in March 2010. The format is 1728 X 2304 portrait positioned, 969KB, digital photograph. The mother, Lindana, took this photograph as way to document different types of literacy materials she interacts with on a weekly basis. One other photograph was taken to illustrate the same subject matter, in the final selection of family photographs but not used because it was out of focus and at a slightly different angle. The other photograph, in contrast to this one, was only showing the electronic smart phone in full view with the magazine and the hardbound book both extending past the frame.

For this photograph, the background, visual in all four corners and the right side of the frame, is a dark textural fabric of a sofa cushion. In the lower right corner extending out past the frame are fingers. The three materials are positioned on top of each other. The two bound print materials are fanned behind the smart phone. Vertical with the frame, the smart phone sits on top, in the center. The smart phone has identifiable features of an iPhone with the round center bottom button, the “home” button for the digital interface. The cover is a two toned pink and black. The screen shot is of an application that distributes local news. Behind the iPhone is a hardbound book, Dan Brown’s novel, *The Lost Symbol*. *People* magazine has headlines that read, “Beauty Finds,” “Great Buys” and “Style Watch.” These headlines, along with pictures of beautiful women and stylish shoes are intended to educate, entertain and provide current information about news and trends in popular culture.

External context and interpretation details the context in which the photograph is taken and how it shows social and cultural life experiences.

This photograph represents the materials Lindana utilizes to stay current and social within her personal life and community. These materials allow her to keep up with what the news applications deem relevant by providing stories and headlines that can constantly be refreshed and readily available at an arms length. This type of media is a tool for multimodal literacy. One of the mother's influences for entertainment and information is pop culture. While these influences can be utilized within multiple modes (such as television shows, movies, cartoons, internet websites, billboards, newspapers), she enjoys getting the current monthly subscription to *People* magazine. She wants to know what the celebrities and stars are doing, keep up with the latest fashion trends and look to the editors of *People* magazine for tips to help her enhance her beauty whether it be by the use of popular products or examples of proper behavior in the eyes of Western culture. At the time this photograph was taken, Dan Brown's novel was popular with people who enjoy reading mysteries and novels that blur truth and fiction. This type of reading provides Lindana with what she calls her "relaxing time," and her "getaway."

Quick Write (August 2010)

- 1) Together yet individual focus
- 2) Entertainment at the table
- 3) Attentive
- 4) Excitement

Quick Write (January 2011)



- 1) Multi-use device
- 2) Communal space
- 3) Involved and ignoring each other
- 4) Non verbal communication with facial expressions



Figure 4.10 Flynn Family: Phineas and Ferb at the Kitchen Table with iPhones

Internal context examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content.

This color digital photograph (Figure 4.10) is of two young boys occupied with smart phones, sitting at a wooden table. The table encompasses the majority of the frame diagonally from the left bottom corner to the far right center. In contrast to the large table in the center foreground extending out of the frame, the young boys appear small in the background by aesthetically being placed in the far left center and upper center of the frame.

Original context reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and information about the photographer. This description provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame.

This photograph is taken inside the Flynn family home, standing in the dining area between the front hallway and living room, looking from the corner of the table toward the kitchen and back sliding glass door (covered by curtains). This photograph was taken in the early evening before dinner during March 2010 and was received as an e-mail attachment in March 2010. The format is 1728 X 2304 portrait positioned, 856KB, digitalized photograph. This photograph taken by the mother, Lindana, captures where she observes her sons interacting with literacy materials. Out of the family's collection of photographs, this was the only one that showed the boys interacting with iPhones. When asked about this photograph, Lindana said the iPhones are used for individual time. Both parents encourage and promote family literacy not by individual time, but by using materials that the whole family can engage in. She wanted to depict

the time in which they use multi-sensory devices that can provide different forms and levels of learning.

In the background, darkened by the camera flash, on the far upper left extending out past the frame is a standing body partially visible. The frame shows a left leg in jeans and a partial view of crossed arms with only the left elbow and right hand visible. This is Lawrence standing behind and toward the back of the boys sitting at the table. Behind Lawrence is an iron chair up against a light colored wall with a small ledge and a picture above it. In the upper center of the frame is a large hanging fabric, curtains, obscuring the view of the sliding glass door that leads to the deck in the backyard. In the upper right of the frame we see a light switch and curtain tiebacks on the adjoining wall. In the far upper right extending past the frame is the edge of the fireplace mantel. On the table in the right center extending out past the frame is a candleholder. There is a golden and brown toned table runner that drapes across the center of the table. The runner extends from one end of the right side of the frame through the foreground to lower edge. There are various wrinkles and small food crumbs on both the table runner and the wooden surface. In the lower left is a pink plastic tumbler sitting on a torn paper towel at Phineas' right elbow. The brothers are sitting on wooden dining chairs occupied with their parents' iPhones. Ferb, the younger sibling, has his tongue stretched up over his upper lip tightly, looking intently at the iPhone in both hands. He is viewing the iPhone, not manipulating it. He has already changed into his pajamas for the evening in preparation for bedtime. Ferb is slightly turned toward his brother. Phineas holds the

iPhone in his left hand leaving his right hand partially free to manipulate the device. His face shows surprise.

External context and interpretation details the context in which the photograph is taken and how it shows social and cultural life experiences.

This photograph depicts a dining table as a place of gathering for family members. It also illustrates the use of materials as impromptu literacy activities serving a dual purpose of occupying active children and entertainment. Lawrence and Lindana often give the boys their iPhones for purposes of “education, entertainment, and occupying time while food preparations are being made.” Ferb’s body is slightly turned toward his older, more experienced brother; he is influenced by Phineas’ behavior and choices for literacy interactions. The parents said: “When it is time for bed, Phineas and Ferb talk about which book they want to read, but ultimately Ferb eagerly agrees with Phineas’ choices.” When it comes to iPhone applications, the choices are slightly different based on age appropriate interests and attention spans.

### **The Grant Family**

***Introduction.*** The Grant Family is an upper middle class family. The man, Will, and the woman, Grace, selfidentify as White Americans within the age range fifty to fifty-four (50-54). They live in a large southern state and are raising their daughter, in a major metropolitan area. The young teenager, Isabella, who is fourteen (14), attends a public magnet school. Will is employed full-time. Grace’s day is filled with many commitments and demands a routine to make sure everything gets done. Grace assists Isabella in her many hobbies, clubs and school commitments that span from choir,

singing lessons, violin lessons, to acting and theatrical productions for the community.

A typical week in the Grant household follows a routine of looking at the calendar to see where everyone is going to be on any given day at any given time. Grace and Will keep up with each other via smart phones and e-mails along with talking on the phone. Isabella prefers talking on the phone and texting, and during this research discovered using a Webcam to visit online with family across seas. During the school year, they spend their spare time with friends and each other. When Isabella is involved in a production, Will and Grace provides transportation to and from rehearsals. Isabella often can finish homework in class, but she uses time in between reciting lines to get ready for the next school day.

***Emerging themes.*** During the interviews, observations, follow-up e-mail correspondence, and review of photographs, three themes emerged for this family:

1. They define literacy as ongoing, all day event.
2. They never use one mode in isolation.
3. Family literacy is a practice that is both personal and collaborative.

***Narrative.*** The Grant family is engaging and lively. As I was preparing my notes and getting comfortable on the couch, all three family members were in the kitchen making tea.

“How do you take your tea?” Isabella asked me from the kitchen. “We all make ours differently,” she explained motioning back toward Grace and Will.

They consider their experiences with each other and their daily lives to all be literacy events. Will spends time in the car listening to audio books, listens to radio show

podcasts and loves movies. Grace loves movies and reading her Kindle while waiting on Isabella. Isabella considers all forms of digital media literacy materials.

“When I say the word literacy describe it to me. Tell me what you think it is. It doesn’t have to be a definition, you can just talk and communicate what you think literacy is,” I queried.

“Literacy could be the ability to read but also to sort of be up to date and life. I guess. And social status,” Isabella responded.

“Okay. I like that. That’s a very worldly definition. Exciting. So what is your favorite place to read within the home setting?”

“Don’t,” she cautioned, and shot a look of warning to Grace.

“Our friend said to her yesterday do you ever not read. But where is your favorite place?” Grace prodded.

“Oh how funny.” Isabella quipped, sarcastically.

Grace continued, “Come on.”

Isabella responded, “Okay.” All three members of the Grant family laughed.

I was beginning to see where this was leading, “By laughing I’m guessing it might be slightly embarrassing,” I said.

“And she didn’t get this habit from either of us but my dad was a big loo [Restroom] reader,” Grace answered. Isabella sat mortified.

“So would you consider that your favorite place to read in the home? Or the place that you spend the most time reading?” I asked, trying to sound as clinical as I could.

Isabella took a moment to regain her composure, then answered, “It definitely is

the place I spend the most time reading. My favorite place to read is sitting on my bed or laying on my bed.”

As we talked, it became clear that the public library is important to Isabella for two reasons. First, she believes that her friends feel as though printed materials are obsolete. She opposes this notion by supporting her local library and using their materials. Second, the possibilities for reading are limitless and she likes the idea of browsing until a book speaks to her. The vast selection and free availability of library books provide a resource from which to develop her literary views which is effectively unlimited.

Will and Grace both mentioned their individual relationships with Isabella and their interest in engaging each other and sharing literacy experiences.

I wanted to hear more, “So right now you have an active participation where one of you might see something that your daughter might like and say you actively engage and talk to her about it?” I asked.

It was Isabella who first responded, “Or my dad sometimes finds an article on the computer...”

Will spoke up, “She can listen to books, recorded books and really focus...”

I was surprised, “That’s something that I have not thought about somehow. That’s still considered active literacy; being able to listen to a book as well.” I took a note about this family and their use of audiobooks.

Will showed me a podcast on his iPhone, and said “This one is a radio play, we’re listening to it in five-minute increments” He looked at Isabella.

“Okay. That’s fun. Very unique. That’s fantastic,” I responded.

Isabella picked up her iPod and showed me one as well, “Or else I have *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, the whole...”

Will finished her sentence, “Radio show.”

“Yes. The whole radio show on that,” she finished.

Later in the conversation after discussing technology and mediums, the discussion between Grace and Isabella was about length of time.

Grace spoke up, “We haven’t talked about books, I read a lot of books on my Kindle and listen to recorded books a lot of the time. We have to talk about the differences though, the Kindle is nice because I can have a lot of books with me, the recorded books are nice because I can do other things while listening, but there’s nothing like flipping the pages curled up on the couch with a physical book.” She took one from the coffee table and clutched it to her chest, reminiscing. “I like historical fiction so often she will be studying history and just by coincidence Will will be listening to a book, a completely different book about the same period in history and I have read a book about the same subject.”

Isabella laughed, “It’s really funny because she will take this one book that I’ve read and it will take her three months to read it because she will be going through each page with a fine tooth comb picking it apart.”

“It doesn’t take me three months to read a book,” Grace quipped.

Isabella continued, “Then for me it’s like a week. I’m like, will you just finish reading my book?!”



“I can read the same book over and over and she can’t and it’s just really weird because she takes so much time and she has to analyze it, and for me I just read it for fun and I don’t really think-- I mean I think about it but I don’t go through it.”

“She retains it really well. Two years later she will still remember,” said Grace.

**Word clouds.** The word cloud of Grace and Will (Figure 4.11) shows large words of: read, book. Smaller in size, yet still large are: movie, reading and paper. Isabella’s word cloud (Figure 4.12) has three large words: reading, textbook, and night. Smaller in size, yet still large are: class, bed, read, book, play, and handout.

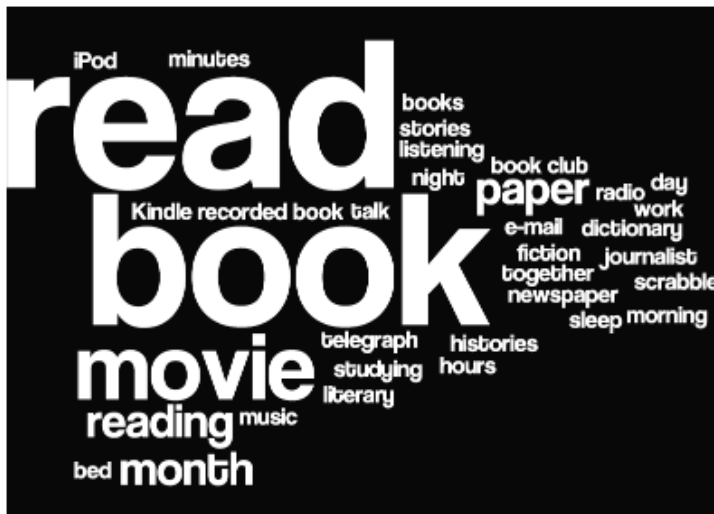


Figure 4.11 Grant Family Parents’ Word Cloud

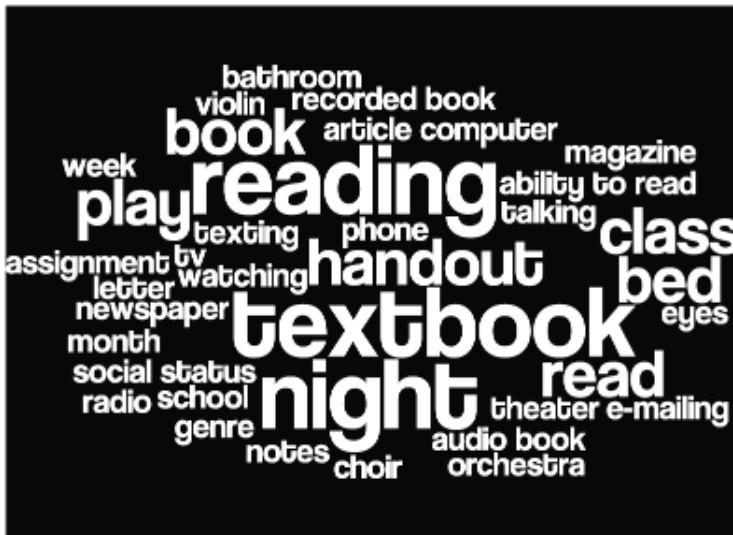


Figure 4.12 Isabella's Word Cloud

**Photographs.** Grace and Isabella chose three photographs and drafted a statement:

“Will is in Dallas for a conference, but Isabella and I have agreed on which three photos seem more interesting, and she likes the one of her bed as well. In hindsight we would have taken completely different ones, less self-conscious. If I could choose just 3 photos, I would choose Isabella's desk, because even though it's a bit embarrassing to be presented as a hoarder with ADD, the picture represents Isabella's huge range of interests, ability to work on several things at once, and commitment to the things she loves the most. Next would be, the picture of Isabella returning books to the library, because she has 15 years of history with public libraries, from infant story time at 3 months old to getting her 1st library card in 5th grade, and now ordering books online. And last, the picture of Will and Isabella with their gadgets surrounded by papers. Uber-

connectivity, selectively opting into modern life. Your research has made us take much more notice of literacy in general; where we come up short (we haven't managed to invest Isabella with much geographical literacy, for example, or to be interested in government issues), and where we've been fortunate, with Isabella being so drawn to reading materials at such an early age that we've never had to coax her to read. We have so much choice with such immediacy, that our biggest problem is prioritizing our time. It's so easy to spin your wheels with media hooks, and all those unread books waiting in the wings"



Figure 4.13 Grant Family: Isabella and Will on the Couch

Quick Write (*August 2010*)

- 1) Relaxed
- 2) Comfortable

3) Multi actions

4) Independently focused

Quick Write (January 2011)

1) Intimacy

2) Casual

3) Concentration

4) Items within arms length

5) Multimodal

6) Leisure

Internal context examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content.

This color digital photograph (Figure 4.13) is of an adolescent female and an adult male lounging on a couch independently occupied. The couch is positioned in the center of the frame extending out horizontally past the view. The female and male are positioned in the left and right of the frame. There are various materials in the bottom foreground and being independently occupied by the adolescent female and adult male.

Original context reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and information about the photographer. This description provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame.

This photograph is taken inside the Grant family home, in the living room,

looking at the couch from across the coffee table from the other couch. The kitchen is to the right, the fireplace and TV are to the left, and the front entryway is open and expanding outward behind the photographer. This photograph, taken in the evening during March 2010, was received as an e-mail attachment in March 2010. The format is 2592 X 1944 portrait positioned, 1.7MB, digitalized photograph. This photograph is taken by the mother, Grace, as a way to illustrate the place where they read and interact as a family. She wants to provide documentation of what a “typical relaxing evening” looks like in their home. In the upper right and center frame are closed white wooden blinds covering the large windows. On the far right, the blinds are partially opened revealing the night darkness. There is a lamp extending up from behind the right side of the winged high back taupe fabric sofa. The cylindrical lamp is cream with a stylized stem and leaf dimensional pattern. The lit shade is cream in a cone shape. The sofa takes up two thirds of the lower portion of the frame. It has a high winged back with front polished wooden arm caps. There are satin bolsters and fringed throw pillows. In the foreground is a glass top coffee table reflecting the objects on the surface. It has wooden turned legs partially obscured by various objects. The book *The Help* is extending past the view in the lower left corner of the table and the frame. On the left side of the glass coffee table are patterned table napkins, a glass mosaic candle holder, a green mug, a crystal wine goblet with amber liquid half full, newspaper comic strips, an entertainment TV guide schedule, and an unidentifiable book with a red flower on the cover. Isabella, the young adolescent female, is sitting on the left of the sofa with a laptop in her lap gazing toward the screen. She has an expression of concentration. Her hair is down and

she is wearing a blue t-shirt and her legs are covered with a red blanket. The adult male, her father Will, is lounging in side profile leaning against the side of the sofa in the right center of the frame. He is looking down through his glasses to his hands, which he later explained contained his smart phone. He has a stylus in his right hand is touching the screen. Just behind him draped over the sofa is a cord to charge his smart phone. He is wearing a navy and tan plaid robe. His navy pants are only visible at the knee. Both Isabella and Will are sitting in close proximity to one another, their bodies possibly touching at the legs.

External context and interpretation details the context in which the photograph is taken and how it shows social and cultural life experiences.

The photograph shows three aspects of what the Grants call “their family literacy.” First, the view within the frame is seen as Grace intends, her family in their surroundings and using their materials in such a manner where they can all be together. Second, the photograph documents the use of multimodal materials, which provide the family with different ways of obtaining information. And lastly, it captures the interpretation of literacy as a practice of both independence and collaboration of ideas and interests. This practice of joining together in a common place, each with their own materials to entertain and stimulate, can provide closeness between family members. This closeness eliminates the isolation one might feel if separated because of limited resources available to utilize for reading, learning and enjoyment.



Figure 4.14 Grant Family: Isabella's Desk

#### Quick Write (August 2010)

- 1) Important clutter
- 2) Pattern of time
- 3) Variety of objects

#### Quick Write (January 2011)

- 1) Many projects at once
- 2) Patience of the parents
- 3) Independence
- 4) Personality in personal space

Internal context examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content.

This color digital photograph (Figure 4.14) is of an antique wooden drop leaf desk almost entirely obscured by a haphazard collection of objects. The objects, bubble over the confines of the small desk, spilling over the edges and extend past the bottom foreground of the frame. The area above the desk also includes a white open wall rack in the upper center and left of the frame. The wall rack includes more objects.

Original context reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and information about the photographer. This description provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame.

This photograph is taken inside the Grant family home, in the female teenager's room, looking at her desk area from the foot of her bed. The wall is situated between the private bathroom and a bay window. The desk area and objects encompass the entire wall. This photograph, taken in the morning during February 2010, was received as an e-mail attachment in March 2010. The format is 3000X4000 portrait positioned, 3.8MB, digital photograph. The young teenager, Isabella, provides a glimpse of her personal possessions as way to show how and where her literacy experiences collide with her everyday life. Isabella took several photographs of her room, including her unmade bed, the floor surrounding her bed and desk, her private bathroom and reading bin next to the toilet, and the other walls in her room with more objects and print material strewn about.



She ultimately chose this photograph to be in the collection because of the angle and the compressed space of the focus on the desk. She wanted to “be honest” and show how her room looks, by choice, more often than not. Her mother, Grace, allows her daughter freedom to maintain her private space, while suggesting and nudging “habits of neatness.”

In the upper portion of the frame is a white open bookrack with horizontal spindles in place to hold the contents. The contents include various print materials bound and loose. They range from folders, books, magazines, mania envelope, artwork, posters and calendars all randomly positioned and forced behind the spindles. On the right side of the wall rack in the upper right corner of the frame are different forms of artistic expression including a pencil depiction of a face on white paper taped to the wall; a primary colored drawing of a parrot on a black piece of paper; a page torn out of a magazine that has a picture of a tiger that reads “Amazing animals;” a white and pencil unrecognizable sketch; a hand written note that extends past the field of view that has legible words of “to hope, to hate, to love, to sing.” The word “sing” has a bold black wavy line underneath it to emphasize the importance. All of these artistic expressions are taped to the wall with pieces of clear tape. The desk and contents take up the entire center and bottom foreground of the compressed frame. On the top of the wooden desk, on a small ledge are magazines in a holder, folders, spiral notebooks, four bound hardback print books, glass bottles of calligraphy ink, a decorated tusk, small polar bear figurine, tape, pencils, lip gloss, makeup bag, loose papers, cup with a feather and tiger figurine, a monkey pencil sharpener, small stones, and a stack of random loose and

bound materials with a cardboard box open on top. There are also various markers and unidentifiable objects. On the large drop leaf surface is a heap of items. The majority of possessions are bound paperback print materials. Some of them have the library identification sticker on the spine, other do not. There is a white stuffed lion, artist stretch pad, a bag, a grey sweatshirt, a receipt and various objects in the back obstructed from view. At the far bottom edge of the frame is the wall and tan carpet. On the carpet in the background under the desk is a pair of black plastic glasses with duck tape in the bridge, the symbol of “nerds.” There is also another shelf underneath the desk barely visible that holds a row of books placed traditionally upright and in a line. On the far right bottom of the frame is an edge of a white wicker chair extending out past the view.

External context and interpretation details the context in which the photograph is taken and how it shows social and cultural life experiences.

This photograph illustrates a place of convergence. In this case, convergence means the individual objects have a purpose and come together in her environment to help navigate daily experiences in her world. Because these objects function in ways that promote, facilitate and mediate literacy activities and experiences, the place becomes a corner stone for her definition of literacy. This place is unique in that literacy activities do not necessary take place at the site, but flow in and out of it. When asked in jest if she knew what was “under the surface of the heap” she said “Hhhmmm, yea, for the most part. The heap changes form everyday.” The heap, her creation, is in synch with her habits and eccentricities. The materials, for the time that they are morphed together, create a snapshot of both temporary possessions and meaningful, more permanent

objects that define her character. And in turn, they define her ways of looking at family literacy.



Figure 4.15 Grant Family: Isabella at the Library

Quick Write (August 2010)

- 1) Bright
- 2) Squinting
- 3) Act of importance

Quick Write (January 2011)

- 1) Deposit
- 2) Posed
- 3) Shared literacy materials
- 4) Be kind, rewind

### 5) Pirate, aarrgghh

Internal context examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content.

This color digital photograph (Figure 4.15) is of an adolescent female standing before a book drop, depositing bound print material. Her body posed in a side profile turning toward the lens. Her hands are active in the process of opening the depository chute and dropping four bound print materials. The depository metal case protrudes from a red brick and white cinder block wall.

Original context reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and information about the photographer. This description provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame.

This photograph is taken at a place other than the Grant family home, at their local public library. This photograph, taken in the morning during February 2010, was received as an e-mail attachment in March 2010. The format is 2592X1944 1.3MB landscaped positioned, 46KB, digitalized photograph. The mother, Grace, took this photograph to document where her daughter, Isabella, sources her materials. Grace's intent for taking the photograph is to reveal the importance of act and the significance of the place.

In the background, a red brick and white cinder block wall take up the majority of space from the right side past the center to the left side of the frame. On the center

right side of the frame is a white and teal printed sign that extends past the frame. The sign reads “24 Hour Book drop, Books, CDs, videocassette (s,) audiocassettes may be retu(rned) in this depository. All mate(rials) returned in the bookdro(p) will be credited for the day returned” (letters in parenthesis are obscured from view). On the far left center side of the frame is a terra cotta colored exterior door that is partially visible behind the brick and cinder block wall. On the door is a sign that is obscured except for the word “Staff.” Below this door is a concrete cylindrical structure. The light is casting a shadow from her body onto the brick and book drop. There are also shadows from the concrete cylindrical structure unto the brick and walkway, the roof unto the wall and breezeway, and the drop box edge unto the brick. In front of Isabella’s left arm on the brick wall are two squiggly spray painted grey and black lines. Isabella is casual in her body language and facial expression. The body is angled toward the lens and adjusted to show both her and the book drop. Her eyes are squinted, the right eyes completely closed because of the direction of the sun. This pose is opposite to the one that might be taken by a person on a vacation standing next to a landmark or architectural feature suggesting, “I was here, see me next to this important structure in place and time.” Isabella’s pose on the other hand, instead of standing next to a sign stating the place overtly, shows her next to the book drop, depicting her routine. Her clothing is casual with a layered t-shirt and dark cargo pants. Her hair is in a loose ponytail positioned into a bun with wispy pieces framing her face and neck.

External context and interpretation details the context in which the photograph is taken and how it shows social and cultural life experiences.

This photograph depicts the act of sharing and returning reading materials. The act is significant because it speaks to cultural literacy in that she shares books with other individuals in her community anonymously. They are linked through the pleasure and enjoyment of reading tangible print material, and with the opportunities to borrow various forms of materials. Using the library or other avenues for sharing modes of literacy is an embodied practice. It requires knowledge of how to navigate the coding and system of walls to locate specific interests and understanding the rules and etiquette for care and use of public property. For Isabella there is a sense of pride in looking, examining, choosing and stacking selected books to come home with her. There is also a sense of accomplishment in the amount of reading and the short time it takes her to select, read, and return materials back to the public domain. Children and adults of all ages, backgrounds and literacy skills can utilize a library. The community uses the library as a site for gathering together in a collection of literacy materials. This gathering evokes a shared practice. The photographer illustrates that the act of accomplishment comes from Isabella's completion and return of print materials. Returning the books is an active participation in a literacy experience. Instead of ordering books online, or reading from a technological device, or on a computer, she chooses to leave her home and overlap her family literacy practices with community sites.

### **The Slider Family**

***Introduction.*** The Slider Family is a middle class family. The man, Jack, and the woman, Jill, self identify as White Americans within the age range of thirty to thirty-four (30-34). They live in a large southern state and are raising their two children, a daughter

and son, in a suburb of a major metropolitan area. The eldest child, Gretel, a young girl, at the age of four (4), attends a private daycare/pre-school. The younger sibling, Hansel, a young boy aged seven (7) months, attends a daycare facility. Jack and Jill are employed full-time. Both Jack and Jill take turns picking up their children immediately after work. Most often it is Jill who starts dinner preparations and helps with homework while Jack is on his way home from his job, which sometimes requires him to stay late.

A typical week in the Slider household follows a strict schedule that focuses mainly around Jack and Jill's work hours. Gretel attends ballet and tap dance classes two days a week, and occasionally swims and plays with friends. Jill finds it hard to juggle getting Gretel to all the different locations, but ultimately says she "makes it work." Hansel looks up to his big sister. Gretel loves her little brother and brings him toys, stuffed animals and books at night so they can spend time together before bed. It is possible for Jack and Jill to have time together throughout the month because the grandparents have "sleepovers" for the children at least two nights a month.

***Emerging themes.*** During the interviews, observations, follow-up e-mail correspondence, and review of photographs three themes emerged for this family:

1. Reading is "fun time" with more than just bound print materials; it includes singing, dancing and rhymes.
2. Books are rewards, gifts, and considered part of becoming grown up.
3. Family literacy is an activity done every night around bedtime. It is both a way to end the day and be close to one another; other times it is a quiet individual activity.

*Narration.* As I arrived at the Slider family home, Jill was preparing dinner and Jack was changing Hansel's diaper. Jack hollered at me from the other room, "I'm glad you're here so you can come change this poopy diaper!"

"No thanks!" I said, giggling at the idea that I should snap a photo of the scene in the other bedroom.

"After I give the Hansel a bottle, I'll be right out," Jack laughed as he started asking Hansel how many more diapers he was going to go through in one day.

"Oh no, poopy diaper!" said Gretel. She was running around the house trying to show me her room, her toys, her books, her games, and her dolls. She was showing me the house as if it was hers alone.

From the kitchen, Jill just smiled: "Calm down, please, Gretel."

"Mommy, can I give Tiffany a piece of candy before dinner?" Gretel said as she was reaching her hand into a paper bag she received at a birthday party earlier in the day.

Then, before Jill could answer, Gretel whispered to me, "Mommy says I can't have anymore candy today, but if you have a piece I can grab one for me. Tell her you want a piece of gum."

"Jill, I would L O V E a piece of gum, it's my favorite. Just one before dinner, please?" I said with a smirk on my face. Jill sensed the tone of my voice and immediately whipped her head around and glanced toward Gretel. Gretel was already unwrapping the gum and putting it in her mouth.

"That's it. No more candy today. Tiffany is here it ask you questions and she can't do that if you are bouncing off the walls."



“Mommy, I can’t bounce of walls”.

I started to sit down on the couch and took out my notebook. “Gretel, come sit by me so we can talk.” I said as I was tapping the cushion next to me.

“Can I sit in your lap? Are we going to read books together? Mommy said you wanted to see my books. I told her you should read all of them to me.” And with that, she was running around the sofa and jumped over the side landing right in my lap, papers flying everywhere.

Jill came over and picked up Gretel, sitting on the couch and holding her tight in her lap. The interview began with the three of us practically sitting on top of one another with Gretel hugging both of us as Jack rounded the corner.

“What about when you both were younger, were you this jazzed about reading?” I asked Jack and Jill pointing toward Gretel who was already deciding which books I should read to her.

“I loved to read,” said Jill.

“I just didn’t want to,” answered Jack. “But Gretel loves to read, and we make sure to make time for it every night.”

Gretel understands reading as singing words and showing pictures. She is learning that the text on the page makes words she already uses. For Gretel, the act of picking a favorite book is not based on imagery or stories, but relates to her love of food in real life.

“Look, I’m going to show you, these are questions that I’m going to ask you and I wrote these just for you. So the first question is do you have a favorite book that you

like to read? Favorite book in the whole world.” I asked Gretel, and waited patiently for her answer.

She responded quickly, “All of them.”

Surprised, I repeated, “You like all of them? Is there one that you like mom and dad to read you more than the others at bedtime?”

“*Pinkalicious.*” she announced.

“Tell me why you like the book,” I asked. She seemed quite proud of her choice.

“Because it has cupcakes,” she explained.

Jill smiled and looked at Gretel, “Just tell her what it’s about. It’s about... what happens in the story? Tell her what the story is about. What happens?”

“It’s about Pinkalicious and her brother. And what happens at the end.” She handed me the book.

I turned to the last few pages, “Okay. Let’s look at the end.”

“Her brother turns pink.” She pointed to one of the illustrations of the character.

I looked back at her, “Why did he turn pink? What happened in the story to make him turn pink?”

“He ate too many cupcakes,” she concluded.

Then within a second she told her mom how she ate two cupcakes at the birthday party and how she wanted to make cupcakes this weekend. Jill looked at me and rolled her eyes. She said “I wish I could eat all that and still look as tall, skinny and cute as Gretel does.”

“Well, if I ran around and was as active as Gretel, I would need all that sugar to keep me going,” I said as I transitioned to asking Gretel about bedtime stories. This conversation led to read-alouds and story time for Gretel.

“I like mom and dad—I like mom and dad to watch me read. Then after I read, they read it to me,” Gretel explained. She was almost performing for me with each answer, dancing in front of me as I sat on the couch.

“So you read the story to them first and then they read it back to you?” I probed.

“Yes. I just show them the pictures like this.” She grabbed *Pinkalicious* off the floor and opened to an illustration. She pointed to the page, and looked at me.

“Do you tell them the story when you read to them? I asked.

“I don’t know the words.” Gretel answered.

“You don’t know the words but you tell them the story when you read?” I was interested to see her describe the reading process.

“Yes. I just show them the pictures,” she stated. “I point and tell them what happens, that’s all, it’s easy.”

I turned to Jack and Jill for the next question. Jill had asked this question a week ago on the phone when I called to tell her I was coming to interview and observe. She was nervous when asking, and I reassured her she would find the answer, her answer, for no answer was wrong. She just sighed.

“What is literacy? Explain it in your own words.” I said looking at Jill as she cringed and looked at Jack.

Jill answered: “I think first, obviously, reading...but then I also think learning. Yes. Pretty much. Learning. But to me it’s also centered around reading, I don’t know why I associate that with reading. Reading and writing. But with her [Gretel], yes, both, I guess. Reading and writing. She’s learning to write too.” She nodded as she answered the question.

Then there is the singing. Gretel learns by singing. She loves to sing. She sometimes sings her conversations. Jack explained “She sings everywhere. In the shower, in the tub, in the backyard, in the car and even at the store.”

Gretel began singing me songs that she is learning at her school, each about a different concept.

“Rain and snow come down and they hit the ground, soak into the earth or they hang around in puddles...” Gretel was singing and dancing the water cycle song. Jack sang along with her and motioned along with the song, mimicking rain and clouds with his hands. The father-daughter musical ended quickly as she sped through the lyrics.

“Are songs the way you learn?” I asked when she was finished.

She sang her answer, “Ye-es!”

This prompted me to ask about other forms and modes of literacy: “What other tools in the house do you think you guys use? I’m talking about anything.”

Jill responded, “The TV.”

Jack agreed, “She [Gretel] watches a lot of Sprout.”

“She learns a lot, not necessarily at home but through school she learns a lot in song,” Jill added.

I started to tie the two locations together, “So you guys say she learns at school but you guys participate at home by repetitiously practicing and singing.”

Jack explained, “We will hear her sing and she will be in the back seat and singing to herself. It’s like, what are you singing?”

I returned to the subject of reading. “So Jack, you don’t like to read?”

“I wish, I honestly wish that I enjoyed it, but I don’t. I do not enjoy reading. There’s never been...” he started to explain his aversion when Jill jumped in.

“You read magazines. He looks at the pictures,” Jill said looking at him and then back to me.

“I honestly don’t read. I know how to read, don’t get me wrong, I’m literate. I don’t know why. I wish it was different. I wish we got the paper every day and I could sit down and read the paper and find out what going on in the world. I wait until 10 o’clock at night. I just don’t have the patience to sit there.” He laughed as he described his relationship with reading.

Jill and Jack went on to say most of their reading is done on their iPhones or on the Internet. Only when the house was quiet late at night on a weekend or if the children were at their grandparents would Jill find time to read.

“I would love to crawl up on the couch with a good book and a glass of wine. Maybe a fiction novel or that good novel that I have read about. I can’t think of the name, but my friend is reading it. I thought to myself that would be a good book. But, she doesn’t have kids, so she has the luxury of reading whatever, whenever and wherever she wants.” Jill said as her voice trailed off. I wondered if she was imagining

herself on a beach under an umbrella with a drink in one hand and a paperback novel in the other.

Looking toward Gretel, who doesn't yet understand sitting under an umbrella with a good book as a relaxing literacy experience, I said: "Now where is your favorite place in the house to read? Where do you like to read?"

"Everywhere," she said firmly. After all, it was her house, one big space.

"Where is your favorite place? If you had to pick one place in the house that you'd like to read where would that be?" I repeated the question.

Gretel said thinking about the immediate moment, "In the couch."

"On the couch. That's your favorite spot?" I said looking toward Jill for confirmation.

"Not in bed? That's not your favorite spot?" Jill said knowing that Gretel was only looking around the living room because that is where we were sitting.

"Yep. Both," Gretel said, realizing she loves both places.

**Word clouds.** The word cloud of Jill and Jack (Figure 4.16) shows two levels of large words: reading being the largest, then computer slightly smaller. Smaller in size, yet still large are: TV, learning, writing, bedtime, book, and singing. Gretel's word cloud (Figure 4.17) has large words of: story, sound out, show them pictures and book.

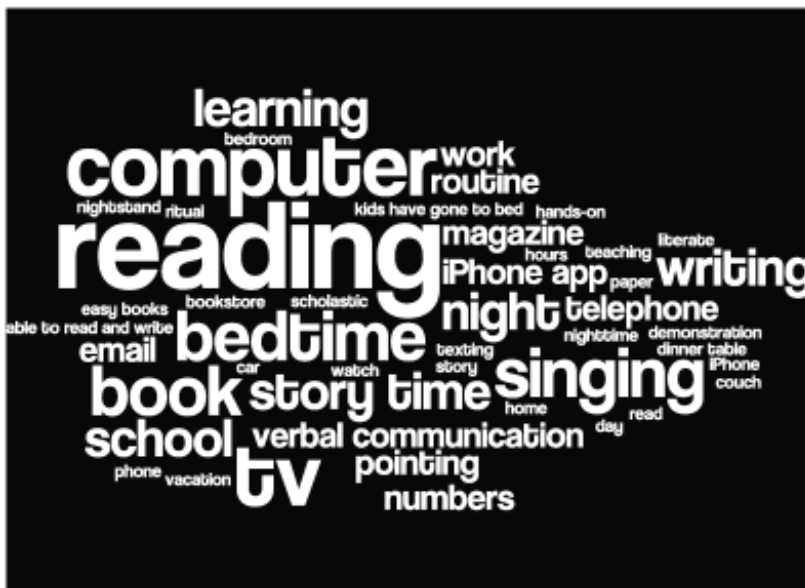


Figure 4.16 Slider Family Parents' Word Cloud



Figure 4.17 Gretel's Word Cloud

**Photographs.** Jill and Gretel chose three (3) photographs. Jill said:

“Gretel and I looked at all the photographs. She likes all the ones that

have her in them, of course. She said that she definitely wants the one of her in the bed because she is a big girl and she reads on her own. She also wants you to keep the one of her writing her name. And she wants to send you another picture with her name to put on your fridge. The last one I picked out because she and Hansel play together often. We have been reading a little more as a family since you have been here. You made me realize it is very, very important. I guess I took bedtime and stories for granted as just normal parts of our day.”



Figure 4.18 Slider Family: Gretel and Hansel on the Couch

Quick Write (*August 2010*)

- 1) Examining
- 2) Interested in what she is doing
- 3) Tolerance



### Quick Write (January 2011)

- 1) Toppled
- 2) Closeness
- 3) Willingness
- 4) A guide

Internal context examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content.

This color digital photograph (Figure 4.18) is of an infant and young female child gazing toward bound print material sitting together on a leather piece of furniture. The leather piece of furniture surrounds the two children within the frame and extends past the frame on the upper, right and lower sides. The bound print material is closed and they are gazing at the cover. Their bodies are leaning toward the right side of the frame.

Original context reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and information about the photographer. This description provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame.

This photograph is taken inside the Slider family home, in the living room, looking at the couch. The kitchen is directly behind the couch sectioned off by a bar counter top. Next to the couch on the right side is a child size small wooden table and chairs. This photograph, taken in the afternoon during February 2010, was received as an e-mail attachment in April 2010. The format is 4000 X 3000 landscaped positioned,

3.0MB, digital photograph. This photograph is taken by the mother, Jill, as way to depict “one” of the places where her two children play and read, both together and independently. She took three photographs of this same experience. In the other two, Hansel was sitting with his little body away from his older sister, and was not looking at the book. Jill said she wanted to show “the kids doing something together on the couch, a place they climb and bring all their toys and books”.

In the left far side of the frame in the center is the arm of the dark brown leather sofa, with the father’s arm in a red shirt just out of the field of view. In the top of the frame darkened by the flash is the doorway into the kitchen. The seams and stitching of the dark brown leather sofa are visible behind Gretel, the older daughter, and Hansel, the younger son. Gretel’s body is angled from the lower left through the center to the upper right side of the frame. Her chin rests on her chest while gazing down at the book in front of her. She is squished into the sofa with her shoulders up by her ears. She is slumped toward the right side of the frame with her right arm underneath the body of her younger brother. She is wearing jeans and a colorful patterned long sleeve knit shirt. Her left hand is outside the field of view in the far right lower corner of the frame along with the lower half of her body. Her right hand is touching the front cover of the bound print material. Hansel is wearing a long sleeve one-piece orange infant bodysuit. He is toppled over to the right side of the frame on top of Gretel’s right shoulder. His head tilts to rest on her shoulder and the side of her head. Her arm is propping his little body up. His right arm is up in the air as if to counterbalance his weight. His right foot up in the air, grabbing his father’s red shirt with his toes. His leg extends out of the frame in the

lower left corner. His left arm is resting on Gretel's right arm and thigh. His eyes are looking down and to his left at the bound print material in Gretel's hands.

External context and interpretation details the context in which the photograph is taken and how it shows social and cultural life experiences.

The photograph depicts what Jill understands family literacy to look like. She views family literacy as actions and times in which her children are specifically learning. She sees this photograph as an experience of siblings reading and looking at books and words together. This photograph shows an example of a literacy practice of sibling as teacher. In the afternoons and evenings, Gretel shows pictures to Hansel and says words out loud to help him learn. Jill and Jack believe that Gretel feels a sense of contribution from this activity. It provides her with a sense of place within the family. This photograph also depicts how bodies can be used in multiple ways to communicate. It also shows how the body is a part of an embodied practice in family literacy, in this case, to assist a younger sibling to see a printed material. Other ways would include sitting in laps, laying in bed together, reading side by side, and sitting facing each other where one is presenting to the other.



Figure 4.19 Slider Family: Gretel Practicing Her Name

Quick Write (August 2010)

- 1) Practice
- 2) Growing up
- 3) Colors make learning fun

Quick Write (January 2011)

- 1) Her space
- 2) Important milestone
- 3) Learning to control

Internal context examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content.

This color digital photograph (Figure 4.19) is of a young child at a child size wooden table writing letters with a marker. The child, in the far lower right corner of the frame, is writing with a fuchsia marker, a choice narrowed down from more than a dozen other colors. The letters are written on a white sheet of paper by a child's right hand.

Original context reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and information about the photographer. This description provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame.

This photograph is taken inside the Slider family home, in the living room, next to the back door, between the fireplace and the sofa. This photograph, taken in the evening during February 2010, was received as an e-mail attachment in March 2010. The format is 800 X 600 landscaped positioned, 54KB, digital photograph. Jill, the mother, took this photograph while Gretel was practicing her name. Jill took one other photograph of this literacy activity. When she asked Gretel which one she wanted to use Gretel said "This one (pointing to this photograph) because my "M" is bigger and it looks better than the other one". Gretel spends a lot of time choosing the perfect color of marker each time she practices her name. She often wants the paper displayed on the fridge. And throughout the week, she will decide if she no longer wants it up, and makes a new one. In the upper right corner of the frame are white closed window blinds with the edge of the windowsill just above the top of the wooden table top. In the upper left corner of the frame is the back of a child size wooden chair with a brown drape barely visible behind the chair. In the lower left corner of the frame is the wooden flooring. The

table takes up a large portion of the frame in the center with only the upper left corner in view. The top of Gretel's head, and left shoulder and arm are in the frame in the lower left corner. Her shirt is a long sleeve pastel ombre fabric. Her right hand and wrist are visible just past her head in the center of the frame. Her arms are both positioned in the center of the frame, her left hand flat against the left side of the white paper, holding down. Her right hand has a fuchsia marker writing a letter. The letters are positioned in the middle of the paper with an "M" and an "A" side by side; the "D" and the "O" below. There are markers scattered above and to the right of the paper some inside the marker boxes.

External context and interpretation details the context in which the photograph is taken and how it shows social and cultural life experiences.

This photograph illustrates an emerging milestone in learning and language. Gretel learns to write letters, and then put them together to have a written identity. This photograph depicts the evolution of repetition and practice to the common goal of learning text and written language to communicate. She will be able to navigate social and cultural practices of signatures and ownership. Jill sees this literacy activity, along with play and singing, as key attributes to a "healthy family learning environment."



Figure 4.20 Slider Family: Gretel at Bedtime

Quick Write (August 2010)

- 1) Colorful space
- 2) Independent reading
- 3) Assisted independent reading

Quick Write (January 2011)

- 1) Alone time
- 2) Read before bed
- 3) Winding down
- 4) Play learning
- 5) Interactive

Internal context examines the subject, which can be the theme or meaning; subject matter, which can be persons, objects or places; and the form, which can shape the content.

This color digital photograph (Figure 4.20) is of a young female child in her bed, under the covers, with a bound print material resting on her knees. The young child also has a stylus in her right hand pointed at the right page of the book. The child and bound book are in the center of the frame. Her bed is diagonally positioned from the upper right corner to the lower left corner extending out of the frame.

Original context reveals intent, influences, knowledge of time and space in which the photograph was taken, and information about the photographer. This description provides insight into not only what was included but also what was excluded from the frame.

This photograph is taken in the Slider family home, in the daughter Gretel's bedroom. This photograph, taken in the evening during March 2010, was received as an e-mail attachment in April 2010. The format is 800 X 600 43KB landscaped positioned, 46KB, digital photograph. The mother, Jill, took this photograph to document where her daughter, Gretel, reads by herself in the evening. Jill's intent for taking the photograph is to reveal the opportunities interactive books provide children. Gretel enjoys these types of books, and when she has chosen the book to read she says: "Mommy I don't need you to read to me tonight, I can read all by myself".

In the background, in the upper right frame behind the white arched headboard on the wall, are multicolored pastel stripes in colors of light pink, light blue, light purple,



and light yellow. These stripes are only on the wall behind Gretel's bed, the other three walls are light pink. There is a matching nightstand up against the wall. The nightstand is open and has books neatly stacked with the spines facing out. On the top of the nightstand is a pink and white radio and a metal-based lamp. The table lamp has a pink fabric and sparkly fringe around the bottom edge. The bed takes up the majority of the frame. The bed has a white arched headboard with notched side posts. In the right lower corner of the frame, the bed rail is visible. The bedding is quilted with flowers, butterflies and multiple patterns. The colors mimic the wall. Her sheets have ballerinas with alternating hair color and tutus. Gretel is wearing pajamas with the Disney Princesses and a ribbon trim. Gretel is propped up on two pillows, one with a decorative sham and the other matching her sheets. She has positioned her book in her lap so it can be closer to her. The stylus is in her right hand and she is holding the book down with her left hand. Her room also has a plastic play kitchenette, dollhouses, toys, and a three-tiered bookshelf next to her bed on the right.

External context and interpretation details the context in which the photograph is taken and how it shows social and cultural life experiences.

This photograph illustrates a family literacy practice of reading before bedtime. In this case the child, Gretel, is reading by herself with the aid of a multimodal book. This type of bound print material has electronic pages that when activated have audio that correlates with the words on the page. Gretel can touch the page with the accompanying stylus and the word will be read aloud to her. She can self-guide without having an adult present. For Gretel there is excitement in reading by herself. She

becomes “a big girl.” While she loves to have her parents read to her, this is what Jill calls an “important part of her week.” This photograph is significant because it speaks to cultural literacy in that it illustrates how a young child views being in a grown up world by being able to read on her own. Reading then becomes a signifier for growth and acceptance into a community.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter shows that much can be learned about literacy practices from photographic interpretations. The interpretations described in Chapter IV reflect multimodal literacy activities, body placement and the families’ understanding of family literacy. Furthermore, the interpretations may provide some indication of literacy experiences that have been ritualized in the home environment. In addition to interpreting photographs about family literacy experiences, and engaging the families in a conversation about literacy practices, materials and sites may contribute to self awareness, and may demonstrate for the viewer the importance of such practices, materials and sites in their social and cultural lives.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents select, major findings, implications and recommendations for future research in the field of education. To recap, this study highlights four families' literacy experiences by showcasing their interviews with narrative observation and photographs. In the review of literature I address the concept of literacy through defining the term in multiple ways and exploring the connection between home and school literacies, and linking the community for social and cultural connections.

In Chapter IV, the families' literacy experiences suggest that conceptions of literacy are largely described as reading and writing. The adults were initially apprehensive in defining literacy while giving interviews, but the photographs showed a multimodal and integrated literacy constructs. Collecting dialogue and interpreting observations and photographs in the context of family literacy provides a small snapshot of what family literacy experiences may be like for these middle class families. In this last chapter, Chapter V, I provide an avenue to describe the importance of these findings.

#### **Situating the Researcher Within Family Literacy Experiences Revisited**

During the early stages of the design and proposal of this research project I considered notions and concepts of family literacy within my own childhood literacy experiences. In Chapter I, I examined modes and materials my brother and I had access to during our early childhood. From this examination, the questions I proposed and

subsequently used were based within my own limited European-American culture. I was naïve to the concept of family as it relates to the first hand experience of developing and nurturing young minds and imaginations. For me, family is largely defined as a volatile supportive network filled with love, nurturing, guidance, a little bit of drama, and deeply rooted connections to history, identity and place. It was not until my teenage years that I realized the extent of the sacrifices my family made. No matter what was happening on any given day, my parents always managed to make time for literacy activities.

Throughout the early phases of research for this study, I developed notions of family literacy based on existing literature, by watching friends and family raise children, and remembering literacy experiences moments I engaged in with my family.

*My life experiences changed during the research.* At the onset of the interview phase, my husband and I learned we were going to have a baby. We had been hoping for an addition to our family for some time. This news, coming as I had completed the task of exhausting perceptions of family literacy for Chapter II, proved to be serendipitous. My preconceived ideas of literacy in our family entailed hard bound picture books, colorful artworks with alphabets, movie nights, singing and dancing, walking our neighborhood examining birds and trees, planting in the garden and the three of us laying in bed snuggling up with a book taking turns reading. While not exhaustive, this list was the beginning of how my husband and I envisioned our new world with a little child. While reflecting on our growing family, how could I develop a narrow traditional list for our unborn child, limiting the range and explanation of experiences to a defined list? It was interesting that those items on the list came to mind

first, even though I am arguing for multimodal literacy. Had my childhood literacy experiences also influenced the choices I made for the interview questions, and also for the interpretations I provided in Chapter IV? In light of expecting our first child, I started questioning what my beliefs were in regard to literacy and democratic education. While advocating for multimodal dynamic literacy and the need to shift ways of thinking, I was hanging on to my experiences and memories of literacy, largely made up of story book evenings and story telling adventures.

This study became an instant reminder that lived experiences shape ways of thinking. This lived experience is not solely my own. My visions of literacy activities with my husband, child and future children will be effected and affected by them, their experiences alone and as part of my family and who I become as an individual within family context/framework.

Subsequently, I decided to reexamine the photographs a few months after our daughter was born. The quick writes in Chapter IV show subtle differences in the ways in which I viewed the photographs. I noticed more of the physical closeness, more of the bond between parent and child. Instead of looking at the photographs with a deliberate examination of physical objects from the start, I looked for ways in which intimate relationships are formed as a result of sharing literacy experiences. I looked toward this study and research as a personal opportunity to grow and learn. After all, I was writing my dissertation on the concept of family literacy. My husband and I could use the best authentic practices to nurture and create a rich learning environment.

*From woman-researcher to mother-researcher.* As I was editing and revising

the narration portion of the study, I noticed that all families expressed literacy experiences in relation to time. Either they had little time to read independently, wished for more family time as they juggled work and home schedules or they set aside specific times during each day to devote to literacy activities. These factors in relation to time hit home with me as I was working on my dissertation, working twenty hours a week, and preparing our home for the arrival of our daughter. How would I incorporate an effective schedule of time management and literacy activities once she arrived? I started to wonder what other big questions would I have incorporated into the study with the new eagerness to explore how families cope with time and scheduling in their lives. For example, in what ways do parents navigate between prescribed school literacy practices and cultural practices? How do parents ultimately choose the right practices that best fit their family? Do parents choose or do these practices fit in as time moves along? What factors are included in their right practices; are they based on childhood experiences, researching websites, talking with friends, or asking teachers?

As I began conducting research (before becoming a mother-researcher), I was thinking and asking questions that were based on idealistic notions of literacy. I asked questions that were broad and general, wanting to get at the heart of family experiences, without knowing how to ask the details that make up their daily lives, and it was because I did not know what daily life would be like with children. Now as a mother, I am overwhelmed with questions. These questions spark new questions, concerns, worries, fears of the future, and a relentless wanting what is best for my child. I have been told that I am very laid back, and that just by my interactions with my daughter I am teaching

her in a playful manner. I play and laugh with her all day. I walk around and show her the flowers, bugs and birds in our garden. We have reading time twice a day. And she is only six months old.

***Our family literacy.*** As soon as our daughter, Olivia, was able to focus, I put high contrast black and white cards in her crib. These cards have images of butterflies, ladybugs, squirrels and dragonflies. Soon after, I started reading to her. I was reading literacy articles, book chapters and drafts of this study. She would listen and drift off to sleep. In the following months I was showing her books I have been saving for years, for our “future children.” When she was able to hold her head up and lay on her stomach I would put a blanket on the floor and surround her with cloth books. I learned that for these early months, what draws Olivia to the books are color, texture, taste and sound. The books I tend to put out for her to choose are the ones made of cloth, have textures and material she can grab, and places she can chew on. They have bright colors. There are few if any words. At five and half months, she started grabbing for my smart phone. We play music and watch videos together on the smart phone. Her toys are cloth dolls, rattles, a musical keyboard attached to the crib rails, and a wide variety of blocks, Taggie products and Sassy products. All of these objects aid in her development and are considered literacy materials. For example, rattles and objects that make noise aid in developing her sense of sound and toys that require her to manipulate assist in development of her motor skills. Objects that have colors, numbers or letters on them aid in developing first experiences with language, math and patterns.

She is now becoming social with her babbling and when we read together she

often starts babbling as soon as I start to read the book. I would have liked to get more detail from the four families in regard to how they read to their children. In what ways do they use language to complement the children's development? What other toys and objects are in the bedrooms? And how do they fit play-time into family activities?

*Photographs of our family literacy.* I decided to look back through the photographs we have taken of Olivia to see if literacy activities are evident. While these photographs were not taken within the context of this research, I believe it is important, and fitting to illustrate the beginning of Olivia's literacy experiences providing photographs that I have taken (the photo essay can be found in Appendix I). I chose to provide a few photographs that span her seven months illustrating her changing literacy experiences. The photographs depict places such as the bedroom, her crib, the floor in various rooms, my arms, and outside in the garden. The select materials include art-cards, dolls, books, smart phones and plants. Practices can be interpreted as reading, playing, singing and story telling. For me, the most significant place and practice of literacy occurs during nursing where the opportunity is always inviting to communicate verbally and nonverbally through touch and movements. I invite the reader or other scholars to use Barrett's (2006) interpretation process to explore other ways in which these photographs can provide a glimpse of our family literacy experiences.

*Where our family is now.* Olivia is now seven months old. She sees me with an iPhone; at a computer, and with tangible print everywhere. Her room has artwork, play space and has bins of toys and books. She is listening and watching the social interaction we have with friends and family. From my European-American culture I



share Mother Goose nursery rhythms while I give her a bath. I sing songs like: Itsy Bitsy Spider, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star and I'm Squishing up my Baby Bumble Bee. My husband plays jazz and rap for her via Pandora on his iPhone. We have not introduced her to anything on television, and my hope is that we will not for quite a while. Since she is now more aware of her surrounding, nursing is a time to babble, laugh and talk about our day. Every two hours I nurse her, and we pause and talk about what we did or will do in the next two-hour segment. This social exchange is teaching her cadence and exchanging sounds and expressions. When we are in the garden I point to flowers and repeat colors and sounds. If I pause in discussion she will respond with "dadada dada da" or "ba aba bababa." We are communicating through verbal/spoken language.

I acknowledge the materials and opportunities for specific practices described above and depicted in the photographs might reflect being very selective with respect to how "literate" my husband and I want our daughter to be. This description and photographs might also clash against my advocacy in this dissertation with the value of multimodal literacy. I agree. I am just now understanding how to incorporate literacy experiences into our daily lives and how to share knowledge between nursing and our routine.

As I write Chapter V, I reflect back to the results of this study, looking at three of the families with young children in a new way. Instead of looking at them from the outside, as I did as a woman and scholar, I now look at them through the lens of a mother and scholar. I look at their hard work and determination to nurture their families as a stepping stone. Reflecting on the photographs, I find myself wondering what Olivia

will be like. Will the practices and activities be similar or different than what I found in this study? By the time she is in elementary school what material will she be using? In what ways will future literature examine concepts of literacy? In what ways will my literacy experiences change from today? What materials will I use to continue learning and communicating? What new ways will Olivia and I find to share in literacy experiences? In what new ways might I use love, physical closeness and story telling to teach my daughter about the social and cultural world she is growing and developing in?

As a new mother I have an overwhelming sense of responsibility for life lessons, reading, teaching, and mothering. I see myself as a caregiver and much more. Similar to the four families in this research, the biggest issue for our literacy activities is also time. Between nursing sessions, I have little time to do anything, let alone read for pleasure. By the time nursing is over, the window for play, games, talking, changing diapers, running errands and cleaning becomes narrow. As she gets older, this window will widen and time frames will expand. Then my main question for the future will be: how do I navigate the waters of what is best for my child versus prescribed curriculum?

I see my experiences as a mother as an opportunity to reflect on this study in a way that would not have been possible one year ago. I now more fully understand the demands of daily obligations and responsibilities the other mothers in this study talked about early in the interviews. I now relate better to their desire to have more time for personal reading. I now see, feel and want the physical closeness that are part of sharing literacy experiences. These three ways of connecting to the families were not possible prior to my own lived experiences of motherhood during the final phase of this study.

## **Looking Back on the Summary of Study**

***Purpose of study.*** This study examined family literacy experiences that occur in homes with adults and children through researcher interviews, and the visual analysis of photographs that document such experiences. Through the methodological lens of visual literacy, sites and practices of family literacy were interpreted to gain a better understanding of where [sites] and how [practices] literacy occurs as a social and cultural educational experience in the homes.

***Statement of problem.*** The research that investigates sites of family literacy within the home has a limited amount of research in general, and even less research has used visual methodologies to examine literacy within the home. This study examines family literacy sites, practices and experiences to understand how society and culture influence literacy skills. This research is intended to help readers understand ways in which lived experiences and environment can play a role in acquisition of literacy skills.

***Research questions.*** This study is guided by the following three questions:

1) *What social and cultural practices do families employ as they engage in literacy experiences in their homes?* The purpose of this question was to determine the extent to which families communicate, explore their world and grow within literacy constructs. It was asked because I wanted to examine how the daily practices and activities are integrated into everyday life. In reflection, I only touched on the high points of perceived literacy experiences. This question was intended to reveal conceptual notions of family literacy. Each family provided their definition through interviews, and I aimed to provide an overall glimpse of how they view literacy.

2) *How and where are social and cultural family literacy experiences visually represented?* The purpose of this question was to find where in the home literacy takes place from the perspective of the photographer, whether it was the adult or child. The goal of this question was to provide information in the form of photographs so an assessment and interpretation could be made of objects, actions and places. This question was intended to reveal private spaces in the homes and how they are used for literacy experiences.

3) *How can visual representations of family literacy experiences be interpreted?* This question was asked to determine what methodology and methods could be utilized for this type of research. It was ultimately decided that a three-layer interpretation was the best approach for this small-scale research project.

***Review of methodology.*** I examined family literacy experiences of four families in north Texas. Through the methodological lens of visual literacy, I (1) interviewed family members, (2) observed family literacy experiences and (3) examined how the site and situations exemplify the social and cultural literacy practices of these families in their own homes.

***Limitations of methodology.*** The hardest part of this dissertation was narrowing down the data. It was difficult to make a decision about what information would stay in for the transcripts and what would not. It was just as difficult to decide on the final interpretation of each photograph as it changes with every examination. And the question that kept playing over and over in my mind was: When do you know you have exhausted all aspects of the ever-changing family literacy dynamic? Because the data

was gathered within a year, the study does not meet the definitions of longitudinal research. It is impossible for the findings in this study to be viewed as finite examples of authentic practices. This study should not be used to generalize about family literacy practices on a large scale because every family is unique. However, this study provides valuable, rich data on a small group of families and can therefore open the discussion to what families are doing and thinking in terms of literacy experiences.

### **Discussion**

In this section, I summarize the four families and their emerging themes. I then highlight three significant findings, and five major themes that transcended individual families.

***The Dieson family.*** Eve and Adam (ages 30-34) have a son Optimus Prime (age 7), and daughter, Athena (age 20 months). The emerging themes for this family are: 1) The parents give priority to the importance of personal space for their children; 2) The eldest child learns from watching TV, and reading print materials; and last, 3) Family literacy is a practice almost exclusively done individually for three of the members, but done jointly, parent and child with the younger sibling Athena. Their photo essay shows the bedrooms as main places for literacy, and books as the main materials.

***The Flynn family.*** Lawrence and Lindana (ages 30-34) have two sons, Phineas (age 5) and Ferb (age 3). The emerging themes for this family are: 1) Books and magazines are read in the evening in bed; 2) There is excitement and pleasure in reading and story telling with everyone in the family taking turns; and last, 3) Family literacy is a casual part of everyday life. It is a part of the evening ritual and weekend fun. Their

photo essay shows excitement for bedtime because it is story time.

***The Grant family.*** Grace and Will (ages 50-54) have a young teenager, Isabella (age 14). The emerging themes for this family are: 1) They define literacy as an ongoing, all day event; 2) They use different materials and overlap uses; and 3) Their photo essay shows literacy as a dynamic multimodal experience that is both personal and collaborative.

***The Slider family.*** Jill and Jack (ages 30-34) have a daughter, Gretel, (age 4), and a son Hansel (7 months). The emerging themes for this family are: 1) Reading is “fun time” with more than just bound print materials; it includes singing, dancing and rhymes; 2) Books are rewards, gifts, and considered part of becoming grown up; and last, 3) Family literacy is an activity done every night around bedtime. It is both a way to end the day and be close to one another; and other times it is a quiet individual activity. Their photo essay illustrated the partnership of the daughter and son in activities such as playing and reading picture books.

***Significant findings.*** There are three significant findings of this study. First, the interviews and photographs illustrate storybooks/picture books as an overwhelmingly large portion of literacy materials. Practices seem to revolve and expand from these bound printed materials. Second, every family in the study mentioned and expounded on the fact that time is a factor in all interactions and practices, and often limited or prohibited literacy experiences all together. And last, all of the families provide rich literacy environments where the child/ren was/were given the opportunity to choose their own reading materials.

*Storybooks.* The interaction with books (paper based) does not define family literacy practices in these middle class families, as books are only a portion of the materials used by these families. However, during interviews and examining photographs, bound print materials are found throughout. During the interviews, the adults in all four families discuss reading bound print material. The children all enjoy this type of material over any other during bedtime, and especially bedtime reading when parents or all the family is involved.

*Time.* All four families expressed a desire to have more time in their daily activities to devote to literacy experience. Because of limited time, literacy experiences are often in the form of the child quickly showing the pictures when reading the book to mom and dad, or hurrying through a nighttime story, so they got to bed on time. In the case with the three families with young children, all three mothers expressed a desire to have time to read for their own enjoyment and recreation. Both Jill and Eve noted they used to read before they had children. In the case of the Grants, the adults have a distinct advantage because of the age of their daughter. They are able to read recreationally and often share books with Isabella. Even with this advantage, they mentioned how busy they were, and if they had more time, they could read more books.

*Children's choice.* All four families valued and allowed their children to pick out their own books. The act of picking out books for the three families with young children is an exciting moment filled with independence and purpose. When asked about their favorite books, the older children all elaborated as to what features made certain books their favorite. The parents also indicated that certain books were chosen over

others, and few books were read over and over again. For example, Lindana pointed out that Phineas' favorite books had all been memorized. Isabella, the young teenager, also showed excitement while discussing picking out her books.

*Five major themes.* There are five major themes that emerge from this study. First, the families indicated the sites and places they feel literacy most often occurs. These places become part of the experiences and create learning environments. Second, the families elaborated on the types and uses of different materials. Third, there are specific activities and practices each family employs during their literacy experiences. Fourth, the photographs depict a physical connection between parent and child. And last, fifth, the families defined literacy through their interviews with a narrow focus, but broadened their notions through the use of photograph and conversations with me.

*Where literacy takes place.* All the children read in the evenings in their bedrooms. The bedrooms also become the specific location for the nighttime story book readings and read-alouds as shared experiences in the three families with younger children. In the interviews, all four families described the bedroom as a place for individual reading, and often housed reading materials close to the bed. The photographic essays depicted additional specific literacy sites in the homes, such as toilet, couch, desk, and kitchen table. These locations are part of what Taylor (1998) and Trelease (2006) call rich learning environments because each one provided the necessary structure and opportunities for learning facilitated with aid of the parents. The families indicated different literacy materials in more than one place; however, it appears that the main place in the home for many of their literacy experiences is the bedroom.



One significant difference in where families read is evident in the Grant family. They utilize the couch and living room as the main place for shared reading experiences. And while they share the same space, many times they are using the room for multiple functions all the while engaging in a literacy experience. For the other families, the children read in the bedroom either alone or with the parents in a single practice, with little to no overlap while being in the room. For these families the living room is another example of a location for multiple activities. For example, the Dieson family uses the living room for watching television and playing games. They keep materials for Athena out there, but do not use the space for group reading. None of the families indicated the kitchen as a place for shared reading.

It is possible that the bedroom is an important place for literacy experiences because this research shows family time in the comfort of the bed. Furthermore, Optimus Prime views his bedroom as personal space, and it is important to him that his desk and books are in his room, where he reads. Ownership of his bedroom space is important to him. Taylor (1998) points out the bedroom as a literacy site. Parents can read to their children while snuggling and putting them to sleep. The child is safe, comfortable and secure, free to listen, talk and dream about stories read, told and heard. The beds are the site of the literacy experiences and place to love one another and share each other's company.

*Literacy materials in the home.* Perhaps the most surprising and significant finding in this research is the use of storybooks specific to bedtime rituals and routines with younger children. The point here is not that I found the use of storybooks at

bedtime surprising, it is the idea that with all the available materials mentioned above, bound print materials are still a favorite choice for reading together and creating evening and bedtime rituals. In the context of reading in families, there is a large body of work of connecting family literacy to more academic or formal literacies, such as the skills of decoding, comprehension and writing. My research can be viewed as a contribution to the larger scope of reading by providing a connection between reading and learning of family practices—one such example of being bed rituals. It can also be viewed as transgenerational practice, such as a desire on part of these parents to change habits they grew up with or to repeat them with their own families or as cultural trends of reading and pre-writing.

With regard to the family literacy experiences, only Isabella discussed other materials she used during time available when winding down for the evening. Not that bound books have been replaced entirely, but this research shows that you see many other forms of print material as well – e.g., digital storybooks, gaming devices and smartphones. For example, smartphones can provide local news and information digitally, providing an alternative to newspapers. In addition, other materials prevalent in this research include games, magazines, computers and television.

The use of smartphones as a tool for literacy experiences allows for more opportunity and an almost limitless selection of choices for learning and entertainment. Recognizing the benefits smartphones provide, allows for a more complete picture of how families experience daily social and cultural interactions with others. Furthermore, often included in the use of digital devices is the use of specific applications. For

example, Will listens to songs, downloads podcasts and checks e-mail, all on his smartphone. All of these activities have applications readily available in one location. He can constantly engage with digital media and is rarely isolated to one mode at any given one time, but these materials tend to overlap. For Will and his family, the materials are not isolated to one site or place in the home, but rather the whole home is viewed as a place where literacy occurs. Levin and Bus (2003) examined cultural tools as ways of communicating. For the Dieson family literacy was also about communicating through e-mail and online. They extended these cultural tools into watching TV and learning from programs with their children. The Flynn family's use of computers, games, iPhone applications and movies is another example of overlapping materials in the same shared experience. They also use games and television as literacy experiences. The use of more than one material at a time illustrates what Kress (2003) defines as multimodal literacy. And the importance here is that the forms and modes are not isolated, but fluid just as Kress intends the concept and term to be used.

*Literacy practices and activities.* Throughout the literature on family literacy, authentic practices are described as rich sources of learning that also link home life with school (Bowman, 2002; Johnson, 2000). Authentic practices shown in this research are reading, writing, singing, and playing. For all four families children read on their own, children read together, and children read with their parents. Although there was not a significant difference observed across all families, it is interesting to note that Gretel read alone, but with assistance of a digital book that read out loud to her. Alternately, the shared reading experiences of the Slider family included singing and reading together.

Barrintine (1996) illustrates that story time as a shared event can create meaningful learning experiences. These learning experiences can trickle into the daily experiences and activities such as the Slider Families use of alternate forms of learning

Just as Handel (199) discussed, broadening the modes of communication and literacy create a transition from home literacy to readiness for school. The Flynn's accomplish this by using more than one mode of communication and many forms of literacy experiences to prepare their eldest child for school. The social aspect of literacy experiences can be considered important because of learning in classrooms and communities and can be considered diverse and meaningful. While bedtime reading activities are part of normal routine, many others involved experiences like watching TV programs as a family, webcasting and video linking are less formalized. Some of the experiences seem to be spontaneous, others are expected and needed to create structure in the children's lives.

*Physical connection created.* An interesting snapshot of literacy experiences emerge in the collection of photo essays. Specific relationships between parents and children are depicted such as hugging, sitting in laps, leaning on each other, mouths close to ears, and legs touching. However, since this is out of the scope of this dissertation, it will only be mentioned here that the photo essays showed overwhelming favoring of shared reading experiences where bodies were connected and touching. In the photographs provided for interpretation, it is notable that the families presented activities in which bonding was taking place. For example, in both the Dieson and Flynn Family photographic essays, the parents are embracing and holding the young bodies

during shared reading experiences. Another example of using the body in literacy experiences occurred during an interview with Jill and Gretel. Jill would hold Gretel close in her lap as we talked. At one point Gretel, picking a book out for me to examine, went right to my lap as the right place while I looked through her book. She immediately sat down facing away from my body, leaned her head on my chest, her hands resting on the edges of the book next to where I was holding the pages. The photographs also depict siblings as teachers with the use of bodies as a way to communicate. Taylor (1998) discusses the importance of intimacy in literacy experiences. I see the physical connection as a way to open communication about life, history and daily events. It is a way to show that you are present and listening. It is also a way to be close to the ones you love and enjoy moments that provide the foundation for learning.

*Defining literacy.* All the families used the words reading and writing at some point in the interviews as a way to describe literacy. For example, Jill and Eve view reading and writing as similar complementary activities that result in defining literacy. The importance of integrating reading and writing is evident in the literature. McFadden (1998) suggests that reading and writing formulate processes, and should be used in early learning. When asked about defining literacy as part of their daily experiences, the families similarly said they all read and know how to write. The words used to define literacy appear to be isolated and decontextualized from the actual overlapping ways in which it was presented in all three forms of data. For example, distinction was only made after photographs were assigned titles and families reviewed interviews and observations. Then, after reexamination, the families realized many different tools and

activities they were using throughout the day were and are considered literacy experiences. For example, Jack looked at the photograph of his children sitting on the couch together with a book. At first he said the photograph was not a literacy experience. But after asking Gretel what she was doing in the photograph, he learned she was reading to her brother. When he asked her about reading to Hansel, she said she does it all the time. Another example is when the Dieson family questioned whether or not the TV was part of my study. After asking them if they learn from the TV, and discussing ways other literacy materials are used, they agreed as a family that the TV was a major literacy material in their home. After follow up interviews via e-mail, all families indicated that literacy was much more than reading and writing, they considered it learning. They also noted they rarely use any one mode in isolation. The process and act of being a part of the study provides a foundation of family literacy reflection. The visualizing process that I went through, then showed the families, then collaborated on revisions, helped the families build their own literacy practices.

### **Implications and Future Research**

*What do the results of this study have to do with family literacy?* This research highlights the strengths between authentic, real world practices and the concept of literacy, in that the nature of literacy is dynamic, social and ever changing. The study aims to create a relationship between the modes of communication, daily life and family relationships. It highlights the dynamics of the four families and their own culture. For example, parents teach children to play, read, sing and write. These children who grow up with these lived experiences may one day become parents who teach their children to

do similar things based on positive (or negative) experiences within their memory of childhood.

*For literacy advocates, educators and intervention program directors.* This research provides key ideas for reflection. First, all four families in this study enjoy being around each other. The activities and experiences that they see as literacy experiences come naturally to them and flow in and out of daily routines. For example, bedtime and story time are times of excitement in the Flynn family household. The young boys look forward to story time with mom and dad. They jump on the bed with anticipation. Practitioners in the field of literacy can look at this example as a call to make opportunities available that are fun and desirable.

Second, parents and their children in this study want to be around each other. They want intimate relationships. For example, with the young children, the lap of an adult was the place to be for story time. Practitioners can offer advice in their interventions about different ways to use the body and intimacy while reading and teaching young children.

Third, this study argues for the bedroom as a social place of literacy experiences, a location deeply rooted in the four families cultures. The parents were read to at bedtime as children. They also read independently for recreation in their beds. The parents read to the children at night in the child's bed. In some instances, the children get to have story time in the parent's bed. This practice and experience creates love and affection in special moments, enhancing enthusiasm and motivation to read, play, sing and acquire skills for literacy. Accordingly, the documentation of family literacy through the use of

photographs could benefit educators and literacy instructors by understanding family literacy practices beyond their own. For example, this study highlights the relationship of parent and child while reading story books in the evening. With the use of photographs, an educator can view the different ways in which children hold the books, how the books are presented to the children or what actions (hand or facial gestures) the parents are doing while reading. Additionally, researchers can look at this point from the view of what challenges family literacy practice can face (e.g. single parent homes, homes where family's work schedules do not allow time together, such as the evening/bedtime if parents work split or nighttime shifts). Because of the socio-economic status of these four families, there is also a luxury of space within the homes. For example, Optimus Prime has his own room, with his own desk – many other children of this age do not have this luxury. I think it is important to note that what I saw in this study is not uncommon for middle-class, educated, employed, White Americans. What would this study look like if parents were strongly interested in their children's academic and literary futures, but had very low (or non-existent) literacy levels? There is a great deal of positive information gained from this study, but there also needs to be a way to re-frame these types of research findings for families who do not fit my sample. I believe there is much to learn here for children in less affluent circumstances (foster care, remedial care, incarcerated parents, major health issues, etc.), but there is also an underlying need to re-frame much of what I found and how it can be changed due to circumstances. There is also the link of these findings to educational settings. If families are reading at home with their children in close physicality, or in



very personal settings (i.e. the toilet), what does a school reading experience do for/to a child?

Furthermore, value and meaning from these interactions and personal accounts are viewed as authentic experiences and should be shared with the community. It provides researchers, practitioners and other families the framework to acknowledge the role of family and their environment. The children benefit by having an educator who values authentic beneficial life lessons rather than relegating literacy to a school-based practice. By being open to authentic practices and multimodal forms of learning, communication and experiences, an educator contributes to the curriculum through awareness of their students' personal interests and their place within a social and cultural context. This openness and connection can complement the curriculum by creating motivation and positive attitudes toward learning, all the while bridging daily rituals with skills learning in and out of the classroom.

Recommendations for literacy advocates, educators and intervention program directors. One idea to research and explore would be to investigate how literacy is viewed, observed, represented and applied in authentic ways by parents. Meaning, what words do parents use when asked to define literacy? What activities do parents do before an intervention that they identify as literacy experience? What would parents comment on after an intervention? I am referring to an intervention as an interruption and intrusion, and an outsider coming in to examine cultural and social practices. Program intervention directors may use this research as a way to look at how one might go about intruding lightly, with respect for families and their time. A prescribed curriculum that

meets the needs of each family when the opportunity is available to do so could be strengthened by looking at the weaknesses of my study. For example, earlier I mentioned underestimating how limited a mother's time is during the day. With designed interventions, this study could be a reflection of what happens when one does not know what questions to ask, or how to set up the design because one is an outsider to the culture. In this case, I was an outsider to motherhood. For future research, other important questions to consider could be: What do mothers ask other mothers? What advice do fathers give other fathers? How do grandparents and extended family get involved? What questions would caregivers have for parents about practices and activities?

Furthermore, this study looked only at White middle class Americans. Future research must include looking at a range of family types/structures, examining the ways in which different cultures use rituals and routines as a way to teach literacy skills. Would we see bedtime and story time as a way to end the day for other cultures? Would this time be limited or would it be set aside and allowed to go on as long as the family wanted? Would we see similarities or differences in read-alouds and oral storytelling without the aid of pictures? In what ways do family members differ in their presentation of the books as related to their language or cadence and expression in a-loud reading?

Additionally, all of the families in this study were middle class. Another perspective that should be examined is to seek out representation from multiple socio-economic levels. The researcher must examine the modes and materials available to the great diversity of lived lives. Questions could include: What does the home environment

look like? Whose knowledge is valued in these circumstances?

Finally, this study looked at only four families. What would a photographic interpretation look like in terms of increasing the number of families? Question could include: What similarities or differences appear as the number of families increases in participation of photograph essays? It is possible the data would overlap in some areas, as we have seen with this small set, but what about data in terms of defining the term literacy? What if we let the families define the terms, and in turn, define the expectations of the data before the collection of photographs?

*What do the results of this study have to do with arts-based research?* This study uses visual methodologies to gather visual data and to interpret visual representations of social and cultural practices. The overlapping and multi-level methodologies allow the reader to see from different perspectives and with different viewpoints. Furthermore, I asked families to create visual representations of these practices with technologies used by visual artists. This allowed participants to show their interpretations of family literacy and allowed the reader a glimpse into the reality of the personal lives of the participants', while embodying a practice, taking photographs. For example, Eve noted in a telephone conversation that the photographs made her much more aware of activities and practices that she and her husband engage in with their children. She elaborated on the fact that even after the interviews she still felt like they did little to no activities as a family. The act of visual participatory research became a vehicle for Eve to recognize the significance of practices for this study.

*For arts-based researchers.* My research also employed an arts-based research

methodology and presents some of the data in photo essay style along with Wordclouding. This study can be viewed as a stepping-stone for arts-based researchers to use visual literacy as a tool for inquiry and as a mode for communicating to the reader/viewer. For example, visual ways of knowing and communicating largely consume our visual culture and this research explores how these visual means are employed in the practice of making meaning and learning within arts-based research. Another example from this study relates to the families' practice of visual methodological skills. By describing the photographs and assigning themes, they had the potential to implicitly learn that their photographs conveyed meaning and intent. It is my belief that literacy empowers an individual, while using multimodal forms and styles of literacy adds richness to life experiences and gives artists inspiration.

In this research, photographs are interpreted as a way to contribute to the field of education. Another avenue for art educators to explore could be the use of digital technology in designing websites or blogs, where the photo essays could be made available as an online exhibition overlapping the interviews, and possible voice recording of the participants. This could be achieved by expanding the data set to include personal accounts of childhood, best practices the family wants to share, and book recommendations from the children. This would be important because it would create a multi-dimensional snapshot of the families' histories, identities and social and cultural practices. Also, equally important would be the inclusion of the shared views, beliefs and practices of different racial, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and geographic backgrounds, and not limiting the participant selection to the traditional family unit comprised of

female and male adults. This rich set of data could provide oral and visual history for generations. Best practices and traditions could be highlighted as ways to feature many diverse cultures. By having the data presented in the authentic voices of participants, and making it available online, current world views could be extended and not limited. New discoveries, issues and (re)defined terms could emerge. For example, an online exhibition in 2011 with the four families could feature voices and photographs of and by the children. Revisited a decade later, new ideas and reflection could be highlighted. Questions for this research could include: In what ways does an expecting mother define future literacy experiences? What would a video recorded house tour look like for expecting parents, describing future literacy places? What would a video diary of new parents' first year literacy experiences with their child look like? How do parents effectively schedule time for literacy activities? What would it look like to have these answers available in the form of a chart? In what ways do parents navigate between prescribed school literacy practices and cultural practices?

***What do the results of this study have to do with education?*** My research provides experiences and examples of family literacy from four middle class families. It depicts families in their home and showcases some of their social and cultural everyday life. Highlighting several materials, places and practices these families employ provides information about social and cultural connections. For example, this study describes the use of digital storybooks and smart phones as materials for literacy experiences. These two types of modes are not typically used in traditional classrooms as tools for learning. By providing this information, educators can reflect on how technology aids in learning

experiences. Educators can also reflect on the connections made between digital materials and how they can be used for reading and writing practices and for complementing traditional modes with paper and pencil.

Highlighting the bond between parents and children provides a snapshot of how love and nurturing foster relationships and a life long love of reading. For example, Adam was read *The Hobbit* at an early age. He remembers sitting and reading with his father even before he could read the words himself. Now, Optimus Prime, while reading the same book (the same hard bound copy) as his father, can sit close to his grandfather and the same kind of bond is created. Optimus Prime can also sit with Adam and discuss the story, but they can also share in the same experience of Grandfather Baggins having read to them. Similarly, in education, having a loving, supportive classroom environment can create and foster a love of life long learning. Educators can provide the foundation for children to learn life skills and use this study to start conversations about how others help their students learn.

*For educators.* There are a few key points underscored in this study. First, the families defined literacy as reading, writing and learning primarily with books. This might be the case in a traditional classroom setting, whether it is intended or not, because of prescribed curriculum, situated learning, and limited materials available (i.e. textbooks, worksheets and a white board). As the families became actively involved in the study (taking photographs) they began to realize other materials and practices were also literacy experiences in their everyday life. With this information, educators can design curriculum by being aware of other ways children experience literacy. Lessons

and activities can be planned with explicit and diverse social and cultural examples and connections to learning in the home.

Second, examples of using more than one material at the same time were found in the interviews and the photographs. In school, children are often taught subjects in isolation. They go from history to math to science class in succession. In this study, parents read books to their children that overlap in concept and subject. Parents also used multiple materials to learn and gather information. For example, Isabella and her parents use podcasts, audiobooks, radio shows, and movies to connect to what Isabella is learning in her history text. In school, she only uses worksheets, lectures from the teacher and reading assignments to gain knowledge about a particular place and time in history. Educators can use this knowledge and insight to design integrated curriculum and provide avenues in which the lessons learned in school could flow into the home life. These lessons would then extend into daily life and be supported by parents.

And last, the families' ideas and practices are important. They are valued and contribute to their community. I want to emphasize that throughout my research with the participating families I encountered various degrees of hesitation. Jill was quite certain she did not know what literacy meant, and was even less certain of "if she did" literacy with her children. Isabella knew literacy meant learning and communicating, but felt uneasy defining it because she was convinced that there was a "correct" [?] definition. During the course of the interviews and follow-ups, Isabella discovered literacy is everywhere, can be many things, can do many things and even suggested we call it "literacies." This example illustrates that parents and young adults understand literacy in

both complex and simplistic ways, yet they use different vocabulary to describe it. It also illustrates that there is a fear of not doing the right thing to teach children, and that for Jill, there is still a separation between learning at school and reading and playing at home.

For educators, two important takeaways come from this example. One, there has to be a way to be encouraging to parents about what they think education is and should be, about what they think literacy is, and how they practice and learn within the home. Second, families use different wording in causal language than scholars use in research. For example, Jill does not say to Gretel “Go grab a book and crawl into bed, it’s time to practice literacy.” Phineas does not look over at Ferb and say “I am going to stab you with my light saber if you don’t join me in the authentic literacy practice of shared reading.” The families in this study “do” literacy. They just call it other things. By talking to students and parents and asking questions about their social and cultural norms, educators can share in common language and can learn from discourse.

*Recommendations for educators, educational policy makers and curriculum developers.* One responsibility of educators, policy makers, and curriculum developers is to embody authentic practices and experiences of families as real world information to examine for growth and understanding. How can we do this in future research? One suggestion is a reflexive approach to teaching and developing learning tools that complement family experiences. For example, such professionals often make assumptions about homes and literacy practices because they cannot or are not really able to go in and observe with such detail. By being reflexive about one’s own biases,



limitations, and beliefs, one can identify possible hidden assumptions or ideas taken for granted. Assumptions with regard to literacy practices may be based on outdated literature or one's own positive or negative experiences with literacy at home. Assumptions are not wrong, but often times are not quite accurate. Using those assumptions, one could underestimate a family's literacy practice and/or not capitalize on ways to connect home and school literacy. An opportunity for research could be found in the assumptions literacy educators have about families' playtime, families' fun time, and families' daily routines. Questions could include: What do parents talk about with their children during playtime? What words do they use when asking the children what they would like to do and/or play with? What is the subject matter of parent and child interaction when correcting or helping children with their homework? In what ways do families describe their time with each other? A more detailed examination of discussions about how parents can incorporate materials at home for life learning is out of the scope of this recommendation and is seen as a broad question for many fields of study, but I suggest that research that looks at the home as a place and site for learning could open up literacy in a full dynamic approach to learning. The possibilities to examine the full photo essays in this research would provide a researcher with in-depth analysis of materials, movement, and gestures between individuals.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the concept of family literacy through the eyes of both the participants (adults and children) and myself. The study employed visual methodologies, to examine how families viewed, lived and talked about family literacy and literacy in

their social and cultural lives. The theoretical framework proposed using material and visual cultural modes and mediums as a way to examine social and cultural lives. This connects and links not only the families in the study, but also the viewer/reader of the study as active participants when looking at the data. This link can be taken even further and examined as a way of merging life worlds, and social and emotional experiences. The literature implies that external and internal situations and experiences affect family literacy. It implies families are unique and dynamic. It suggests there is no single way to define and (re)define literacy. Literacy is embedded within multiple levels of discourse, and these levels move in and out of fields of study, fields of work and fields of social and cultural experiences. While the themes varied between and within each family, the underlying conclusion of the data collected in this study is that family literacy is a living, active experience. It can be a shared experience within the home and a family unit and within the larger social and cultural worlds of school, community and worldly presumptions. Family literacy is based on experiences and daily routines/rituals, modes of communication, and availability of time and resources.

The photo essay and findings produced the following themes: family literacy is seen and examined by the adults in the families as “reading and writing”; family literacy is seen and examined by the children in the families as “singing, playing, games and bedtime; the major place within the home is the bedroom and the site that experiences occur is often the bed; limited time is a factor for both personal reading and family literacy experiences; and finally, multimodal forms are used throughout the day by all participants, both child and adult. It is the hope of this researcher that the

recommendations offered in this chapter invite families, community educators, policy makers, and artists to explore literacy with enthusiasm at the possibilities and avenues in which it can be viewed, used and lived.

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## APPENDIX A

## INITIAL EMAIL AND FACEBOOK LETTER

-----Original Message-----

From: Tiffany Lipsett [mailto:tlipsett@gmail.com]

Sent: Tuesday, February 02, 2010 5:14 PM

To: Tiffany Lipsett

Subject: Dissertation Help

Hello Friends and Family,

I am writing to see if you are interested in being part of my dissertation, or know of someone who would want to help.

I am looking for families with children (or child) between the ages of 1 and 18. They can be single parents, guardians or any other form of a family unit. The family can have one child or many siblings, including cousins. I would prefer to have families in the North Texas region, but would be willing to drive up to three hours away (Oklahoma all the way to South Texas).

I will need to visit only six times between now and April 1. These visits can be during home work time; play time; bed time story time or any other form of a family literacy activity and event.

If you are even remotely interested please let me know, and I can give you details about the research and HOW FUN IT IS!!!!!!

I am hoping to pull 12 families together, then narrow down to feature three families.

Below is the official Texas A&M University research information sheet.

## INFORMATION SHEET

Visual Modalities, Sites, and Practices of Family Literacy Experiences

## Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research.

You have been asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine family literacy experiences that occur in homes with adults and children. We want to look at where [sites] and how [practices] literacy occurs at home.

You were selected to be a possible participant because of your interest in family literacy practices and activities.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Take pictures of where you like to read, where you keep books/magazines, and other literacy materials.
2. Read books to your children while being video recorded (which includes audio) to gather information about family literacy activities; along with literacy skills children use while engaged in activities.
3. You and your children will be interviewed about reading, writing, literacy tools and personal accounts of literacy activities.

Your participation will be audio and video recorded. And still images (photographs) will also be taken during the home visits of you and your child(ren) interacting. Both the video and the photographs will be used in a public format (i.e. a scholarly peer-reviewed journal article). You will have the opportunity to view the final images before they are submitted for publication.

Once an article has been submitted and accepted for publication in a journal, control and distribution of images are under the property of the publishing company.

What are the risks involved in this study?

The risks associated with this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study,.

Do I have to participate?

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?

This study is neither confidential or anonymous. While you could be identified by your still images and video recording, your real names will not be used in the final report.

The records of this study will be kept on the personal computer of Tiffany Lipsett. Final image selection and video used in the final report will be shown to you before use in public format (published articles, or art exhibit).

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact:

Tiffany Lipsett

817-714-1313

tiffลิปsett@tamu.edu

tlipsett@gmail.com

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979)458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

### Participation

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. Once accepted into the study, you will be asked to sign two consent forms: one for you, one for your children.

## APPENDIX B

## SHORT SURVEY EMAIL AFTER INITIAL CONTACT/RESPONSE

## INDICATING INTEREST

Sent via e-mail February 3, 2010

Thank you (family name) for your interest in my study. Please fill out this short survey. By doing this you are assisting me in narrowing down my families.

If you could officially answer these initial questions, it would help.

1. How often, on average, in a seven day period do you engage in literacy events or activities with your children?
2. How often, on average, in a seven day period do your children, through their own initiative, engage in literacy activities (alone or with siblings)?
3. And last, what tools (materials) do they use?

Thanks, Tiffany

## APPENDIX C

## EMAIL LETTER TO FAMILIES IN STUDY

Sent February 9-12

(Family name),

Congratulations!

I have selected your family as one of my portraits for my dissertation. I would like to talk to you today or tomorrow about what the next five-six weeks will look like for both your family, and your extended family (grandparents, aunts and uncles). I am very excited at the prospect of featuring your family.

Please let me know when would be a good time to chat,

Tiff



## APPENDIX D

## EMAIL LETTER TO FAMILIES NOT IN STUDY

Sent February 9-12

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation study. I am overwhelmed at the support you and others have given me.

Your family was not selected as the final case study. The criteria was narrowed down to ages of children, availability of time, and location. I now have a full representation of ages.

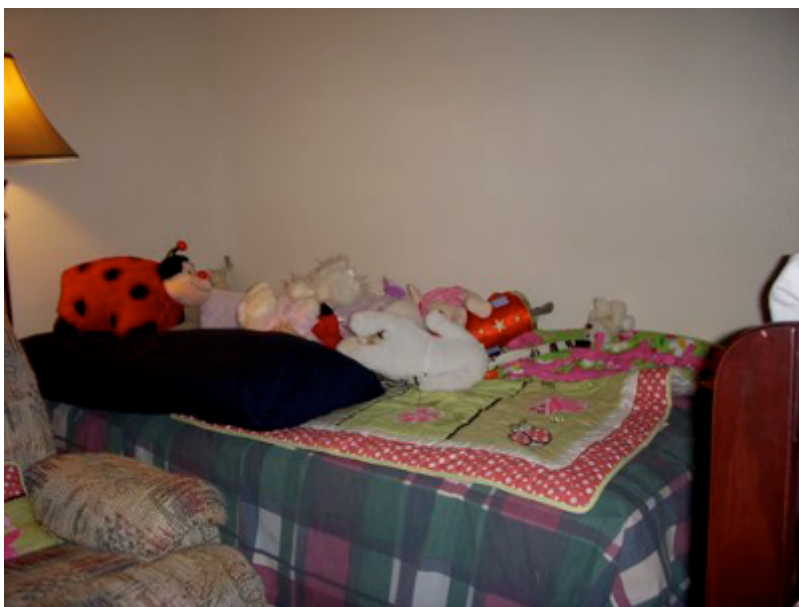
In the event a family has to drop out, I will keep you on my list to contact.

Thank you for the time you gave me.

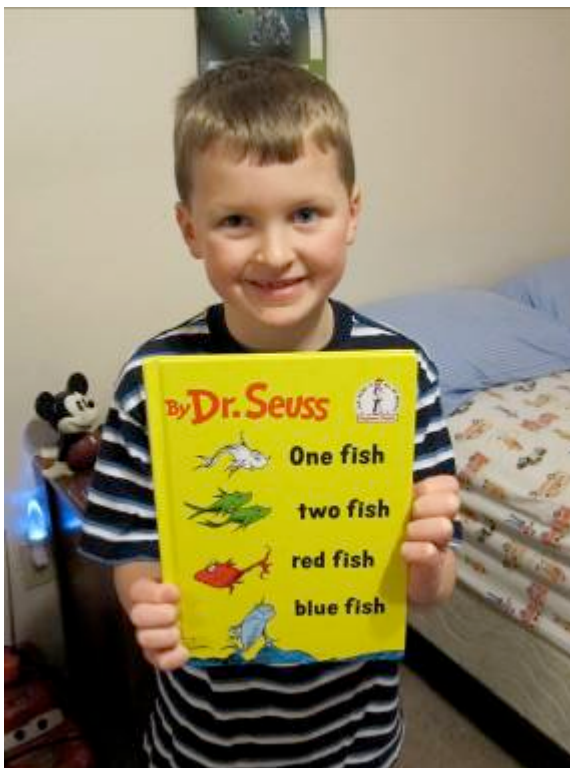
Tiffany

APPENDIX E  
THE DIESON FAMILY PHOTO ESSAY













APPENDIX F  
THE FLYNN FAMILY PHOTO ESSAY





















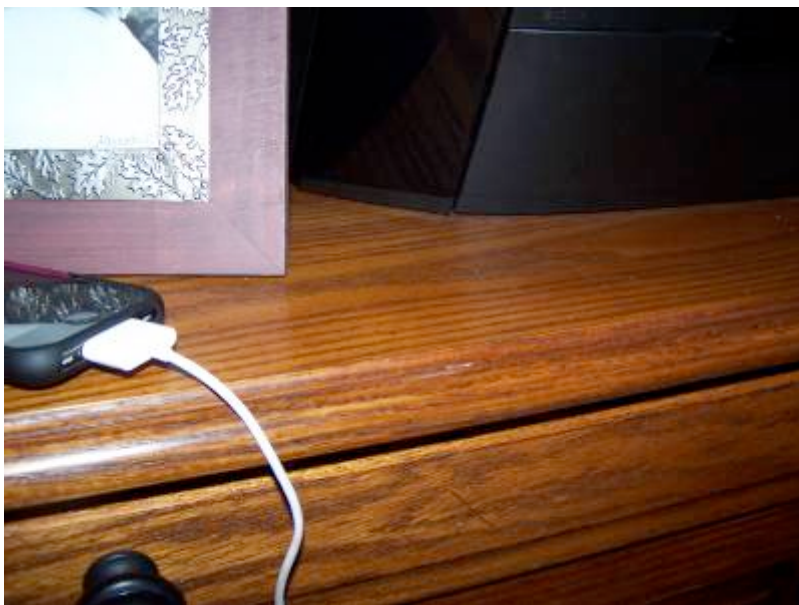


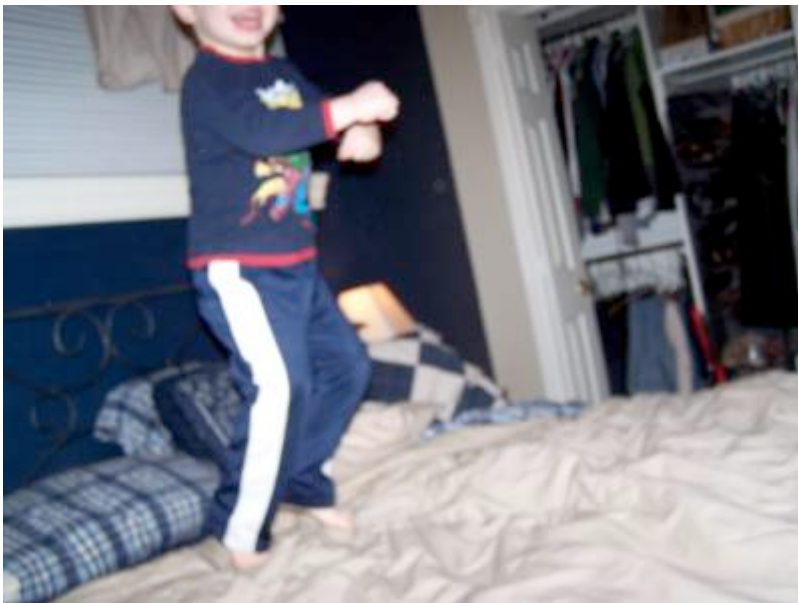


















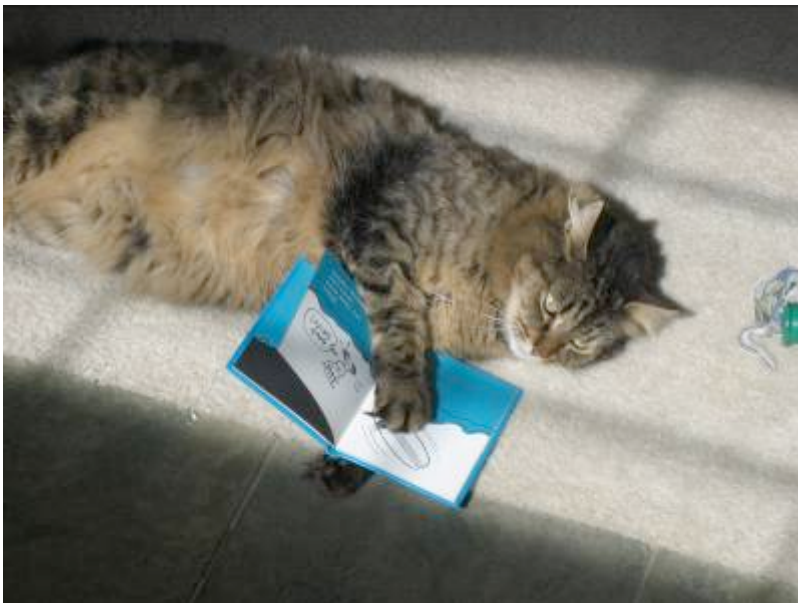




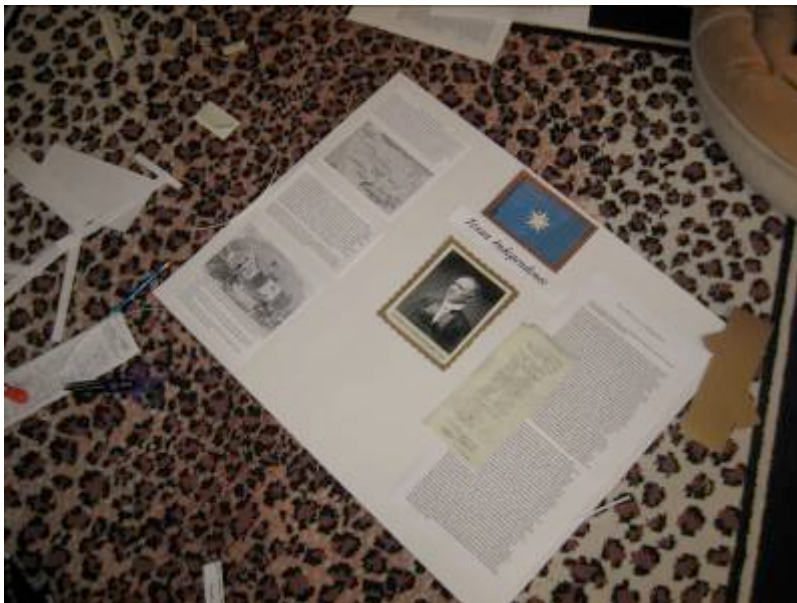
APPENDIX G  
THE GRANT FAMILY PHOTO ESSAY









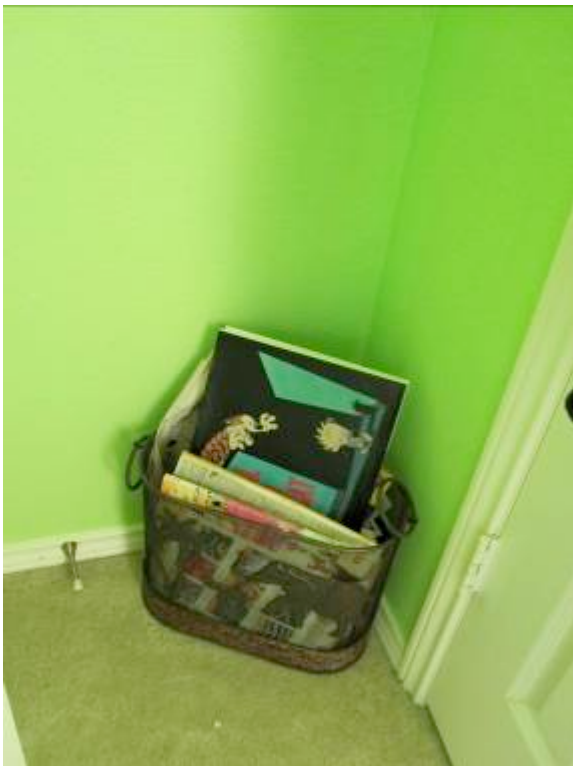


















APPENDIX H  
THE SLIDER FAMILY PHOTO ESSAY



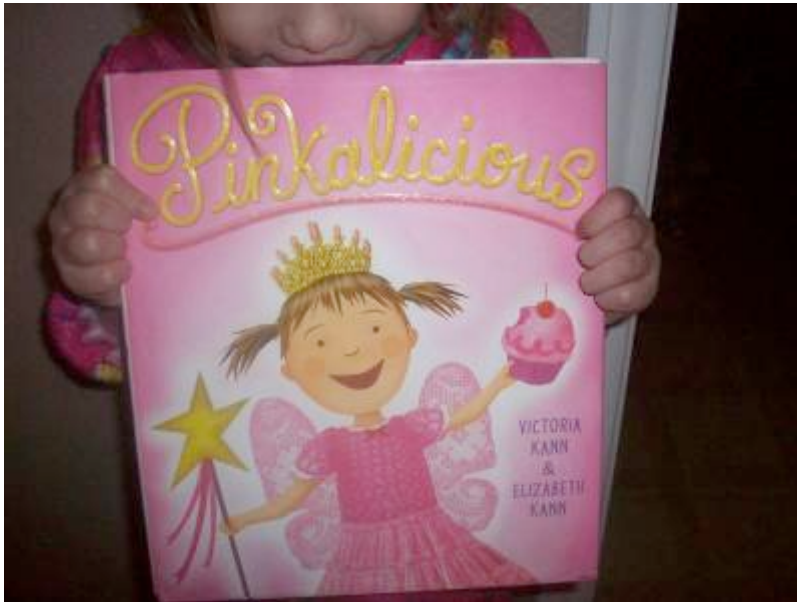






















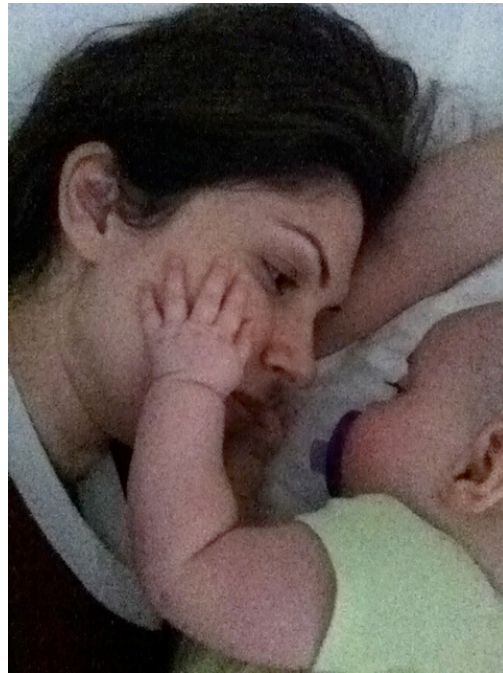
APPENDIX I  
MY PHOTO ESSAY





















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