Gee, J. P. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies*. London: Taylor & Francis.
Luke, A. (2003). Literacy and the other: A sociological approach to literacy research and policy in multilingual societies. *Reading Research Quarterly, 38*, 132–140.
U.S. Department of Education. (2004). *No Child Left Behind*. Retrieved May 1, 2004, from http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=pb

Chapter 8

Literacy and Choice: Urban Elementary Students' Perceptions of Links Between Home, School, and Community Literacy Practices

Jodene Kersten
California State Polytechnic University Pomona

At school you just have to do what the teacher says but at home you can read and write whatever you want.

—Kristen[1], age 10

I guess reading and writing in school helps for home ... but when the school day is done, it's like yay, carry on and go home!

—Katie, age 10

At the turn of the 20th century, Dewey (1902/1956) proposed a child-centered curriculum in response to rapid social changes from the industrial revolution, a worldwide market, and wider communication and distribution. He described the disconnect between the child and the curriculum as "the lack of any organic connection with what the child has already seen and felt and loved [which] makes the material purely formal and symbolic" (p. 24) and "the lack of motivation" (p. 25) in relation to a curriculum that was also "external, ready-make fashion, by the time it gets to the child" (p. 26).

[1]All children's names are pseudonyms.

Much of what Dewey discussed has become the accepted philosophy of education today.

Unfortunately, many of the "evils" he addressed are still present and impacting the academic success of children. The gap between the child and schooling is perpetuated by a prepackaged school curriculum, high-stakes testing, and failure to make connections between school and home life for children. In 1902 Dewey was speaking of all children. However, at the turn of the 21st century, the disconnect between schooling and children, predominantly those considered marginalized or without access to the dominant culture, has become a chasm.

In the introduction to Dewey's (1956) *The Child and the Curriculum*, Carmichael stated that during Dewey's lifetime, "it may be that the world changed more during this period of nearly a century than in any comparable time in history" (p. vi). Fifty years later, philosophers might agree that education has experienced yet another significant change due to rapid advances in technology and globalization. This begs the question of what schools are doing to prepare students for the 21st century. It is both timely and necessary to revisit Dewey's concern of whether schools are teaching the whole child, mind and body, by embracing the experiences and knowledge the children bring to the classroom.

Cope and Kalantzis (2000) describe the ways in which the world is changing and how "new demands are being placed upon people as makers of meaning in changing workplaces, as citizens in changing public spaces and in the changing dimensions of our community lives—our lifeworlds" (p. 4). They propose six design elements in the meaning-making process as well as four components of pedagogy to discuss how schools might address social change and prepare children. Schools can no longer adequately prepare students and ignore the variety of texts associated with information and multimedia technologies. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) acknowledge "... in the emergent reality, there are still real deficits, such as a lack of access to social power, wealth, and symbols of recognition. The role of pedagogy is to develop an epistemology of pluralism that provides access without people having to erase or leave behind different subjectivities" (p. 18).

In this case study, I explore these issues in the context of one elementary school with a group of children who would be considered marginalized in terms of their quality of education, socioeconomic status, and various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 2001).

This chapter is an attempt to examine the types of literacy events that occur between home, community, and school as well as the connections and disconnects. I address three questions: (a) Are the literacy experiences and knowledge of students valued in the educational system? (b) Are all students

being prepared to participate in a society that is rapidly changing? and (c) Are schools addressing the gap between the types of literacies valued by schools versus those valued by students? Luke (2003) describes this divide as a result of the "increasing diversity of background knowledge and competence, linguistic and cultural resources, available discourses and textual practices brought to and through classrooms and schools" (p. 137). He further states:

> The use and value of literacy for learners—the available discourses, background knowledges, repertoires of practices and motivation structures for learning and using literacy—are as contingent on those extra-educational social relations and linguistic markets that they inhabit before, during, and after school. (p. 137)

This study is framed by my belief that to ignore the literacy practices elementary students engage in outside of school is a disservice to students and fails to prepare them for life after formal schooling.

CASE STUDY: THE LITERACY SOCIAL ACTION GROUP

Participants

The site for participation in this study was an after-school program at an elementary school with a group of students who met once a week for 11 weeks. The participants were 7 female fifth-grade students at an urban elementary school (K–5). Their teacher selected 12 children to receive a letter from me, inviting them to participate in a small group as part of the after-school program. She had known these children as their third-grade teacher. The school is fairly small, so many students from the third-grade class were together for fifth grade. They were selected for the study based on the teacher's belief that (a) they were likely to want to participate in a group focused on reading and writing, and (b) their parents would allow their children to participate in the after-school program. Nine of these 12 students chose to attend the weekly group. Of these 9 students, 7 returned consent forms and chose to participate in the study. We met for a total of nine 2-hour sessions over 11 weeks.

The children ranged in age from 10 to 11 and spoke English as both their native and home language. They were all in the same fifth-grade classroom and several lived in the same neighborhoods and spent time together outside of school. Ethnically, the participants closely reflected the elementary school student body with two European Americans, three African Americans and two self-identified as "mixed" African American and European American.

The elementary after-school program depends on volunteers primarily from the teacher education program at the nearby university. Due to budget cuts at the district level and a limited number of volunteers, less than half of the students at the elementary school were able to participate in the program. When I asked to work with a small group of children, the coordinator of the program was anxious to remove nine more students from the wait list, and several students shared with me that their parents were relieved because of difficulties they experienced with child care. As a result, one of the participants could only attend if her younger sister could sit in with the group, which she did.

Researcher and Connection to Research Site

My roles and responsibilities at the elementary school were multiple and varied. As a doctoral student, I was employed through the university as a field instructor. My primary responsibility was to act as a liaison between the university, six mentor teachers, and six interns working toward their teaching certification. I observed interns and mentors one to two times a week and led a 2-hour seminar for interns once a week. The students in the fifth-grade class were familiar with me because I spent several hours in the classroom supporting the intern and working with the mentor teacher.

As a field instructor and leader of the after-school group, I needed to balance several roles. Many of the project participants saw me as their teacher and occasionally mentioned this to the intern who was also my seminar student. When I was visiting and observing my intern, many of the participants wanted to talk and share ideas with me, but this was often a distraction to the intern learning to teach. As a result, the children soon recognized when it was acceptable to speak with me, such as during recess and after school, and that I needed to be the intern's teacher when in their classroom.

As stated in the beginning of the chapter, the purpose of this study was to learn more about the literacy practices in the participants' homes and communities as well as the literacy practices in the school. Four weeks into the school year, I was asked by their fifth-grade teacher for support in developing a balanced literacy program because of my prior experience as a literacy specialist in the district and years of elementary teaching. After several meetings, we developed a literacy program that was implemented approximately the same time I began the after-school group and collecting data for this project. Thus, several of the school literacy practices mentioned by the students were co-created by me and their fifth-grade teacher. Whether these same practices would have occurred without my intervention is speculative. Therefore, most of the school literacy practices are intended to represent the curriculum and pedagogy prior to the balanced literacy program co-created by me and the teacher.

Building Trust and Group Cohesion

For our initial meeting, we used a classroom that is typically reserved for small groups or special meetings. Immediately the students felt unique. They were told by the director of the after-school program that they would not participate in the "power hour," an hour reserved for homework, because we would be writing in our group. Because most students do not have homework, and there is a ratio of 20 students to one tutor, they typically don't find the "power hour" useful. Therefore, they viewed the group as a privilege from the beginning.

Several students shared their excitement around reading and writing during the first group meeting. They were anxious to receive composition books to record their own literacy practices at home, in the community, and at school. They were also excited to keep their papers organized in a folder.

During the first meeting, I explained the purpose of the group. I told the children that I was a student at the local university and I was trying to learn more about their reading and writing activities in school, at home, and in their community. I explained that there was a possibility of writing about our experiences in a book, but that their names would be changed. I said I was a researcher and they would also be researchers in our group. From that point forward the students referred to themselves as "college researchers," which created some curiosity and envy by other students in their fifth-grade class. This title appeared to boost their status among peers.

After school, the participants began sitting together and sharing their writing in their composition books with each other and other students before going to their assigned rooms for the after-school program. Initially, cliques within the group were evident by where students chose to sit in our room and the students with whom they wanted to work. After a few sessions of repeatedly using group-building language such as "we" and "our group," changes occurred in how students began to work together and support one another. They eventually supported each other to finish tasks and encouraged one another to do their best. Many of the students' demeanors changed from defensive and making snide remarks to sensitive and offering help. Occasionally the participants were reminded that they were invited to this group and were expected to work as a team, which they eventually took to heart.

Nearly all of our sessions included extensive writing in the composition books. For some of the students, this was challenging because they struggled with reading and writing. During the first few weeks, I spent a great deal of time moving between three children in particular to help with their writing. Eventually, other children began working with the ones who wanted additional support and the participant pairings and groupings

were rarely the same. By the end of the sessions, participants saw themselves as a group willing to offer and accept help from others.

Participants as Researchers

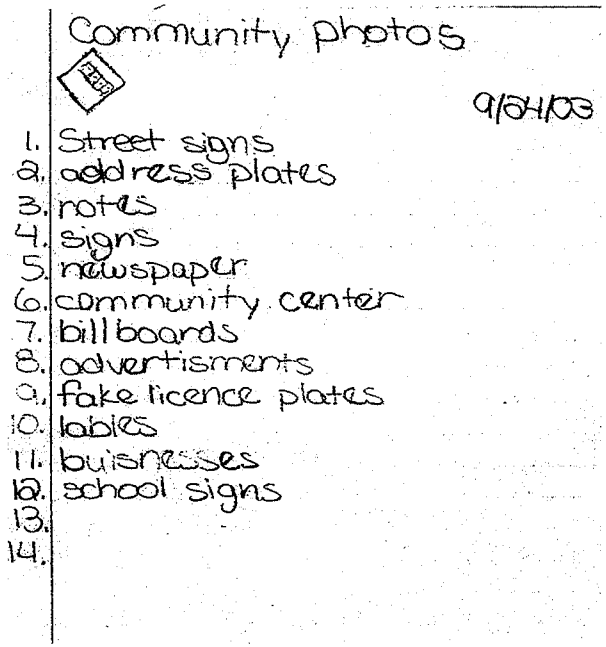
During the first session, two students asked what we should call the group because every after-school group had a name. We decided to call ourselves the Literacy Social Action Group. I explained the role of an ethnographic researcher and how they would research their own schools, communities, and homes. Essentially I was asking them to think as researchers by noticing reading and writing in everyday activities, or as Erickson (1986) explains, to see the "invisibility of everyday life" and to "make the familiar strange" (p. 121).

As the children thought more about their reading and writing activities in school and home, they became increasingly engaged with the project by sharing their observations when we met and recording their observations in their composition books. They began to notice the writing and reading activities of family and community members and to document these when possible. Following our individual formal interviews I asked the students to bring in literacy items they had mentioned, such as papers from church and magazines they read with a parent. These were then shared with the whole group. We discussed the importance of artifacts for documenting our personal notes and adding another example of print literacy to contribute additional meaning to their written words.

To document print literacy in their communities and homes, each child received a disposable camera during our second session. Because the district follows a school-of-choice policy, many of the students live in different neighborhoods so we needed to define *community*. We decided that community was the area where their home was located, where their family shopped for food and other goods, and where they spent the majority of their time outside of school. Although they lived in different communities, it was evident that the communities were similar in terms of demographics and the economic status of its community members. After establishing an understanding of community, we discussed what counted as "print literacy" and recorded these in the composition books. I added suggestions not mentioned by the participants, to develop a list of 13 examples (see Fig. 8.1).

After a week of taking photographs, the students' film was processed and photographs were returned so the students could glue their photographs to lined paper and write captions to describe the image as well as its importance in either their home or community. We assembled these 48 photographs in a binder with three sections labeled *home, community,* and *school.*

The majority of the photographs showed signs such as parking laws, street signs, and billboards. Several students photographed signs associ-


Community photos

9/24/03

1. Street signs
2. address plates
3. notes
4. signs
5. newspaper
6. community center
7. billboards
8. advertisments
9. fake licence plates
10. tables
11. buisnesses
12. school signs
13.
14.

Figure 8.1. Kristen recorded the list generated by the group, of "what counts as print literacy" in her notebook so she could refer to this when taking photographs in her school, at home, and in her community.

ated with the hospital located less than 3 miles from the school and the nuclear substation near the school. They were extremely concerned with safety and shared narratives of their own experiences in the hospital. One student took three pictures of the substation and said the signs were necessary or else, "people could die!" By the end of the three sessions of assembling our photo journal, the children from the same communities helped each other write captions, thereby combining the photographer's and other participants' ideas of the importance of the print literacy in the photograph (see Fig. 8.2).

The children were also asked to think about all the places they visited on a regular basis, which we decided was at least once or more per week, and to record all the reading and writing that occurred while they were present. As they shared their lists, we generated more ideas of locations and discussed how each child engaged in reading and writing in those places. The most commonly visited locations were grocery stores and fast-food restaurants; however, none of the students took photographs of these places. This may have been an instance when making the "familiar strange" was difficult though they all created lists of at least 10 or more locations that were not captured on film. When I specifically asked what they read or wrote in these places, they were able to share various responses; however, it was apparently difficult to think of these on their own or when they had the cameras.

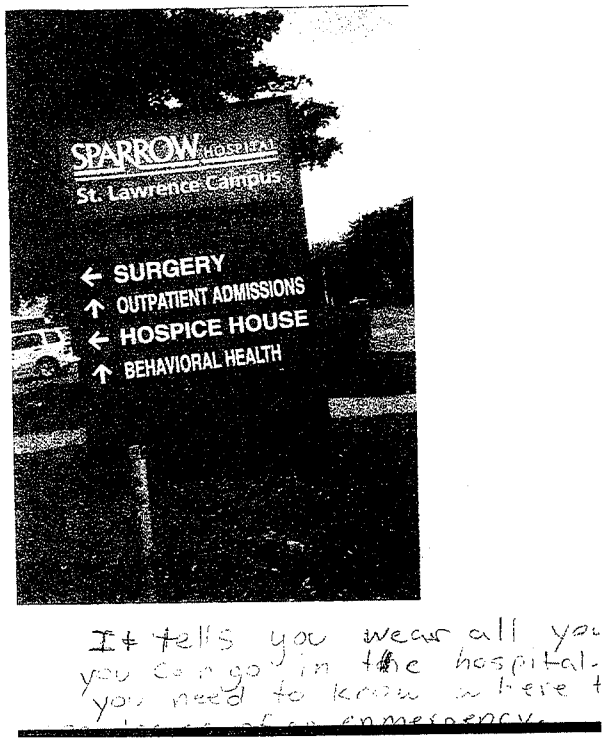


Figure 8.2. Participants took photographs of print literacy in their com- mu- nity. For the caption, Ranecia wrote "It tells you wear [*sic*] all you can go in the hospital. You need to know where to go in case of an emergency." Reprinted with permission.

During the third and fourth week, we collected and represented all of their data on posters in a way that showed reading and writing at school, in the community, and in their homes. In groups of three, they gathered the data and thought about how to organize it into manageable sections. As the students prepared the three posters—(a) reading and writing at school, (b) reading and writing at home, and (c) reading and writing in our communities—they added new data prompted by the current data. The groups continually consulted one another for clarification and ideas and revisited their own notes to complete their posters.

While developing into researchers, the participants continued to coalesce as a group. The majority of our time was spent working together to generate ideas, to reflect on their own reading and writing practices, and to consider the reading and writing practices of others in their communities, homes, and school. There were certainly moments when relations disintegrated, and I found myself disciplining my participants rather than mentoring them as ethnographers, but this was to be expected when working with fifth-grade students with a variety of personalities and strengths at the end of a long school day. Often at the last moment, I was pleasantly surprised by their eagerness to help one another and refocus on our agenda.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE HOME AND COMMUNITY

Religion

Church services and activities associated with church proved to be an important sociotextual domain for various literacy practices. Many participants were involved in several groups associated with church and had parents actively involved in their churches. When asked about reading and writing outside of school, Ranecia quickly listed all of her activities in church:

> Well, the thing is on Monday at church I have Young Women Rising, on Tuesday I have dance, Wednesday we have regular night service, Thursday we have choir rehearsal, Friday I don't do nothin' and I'm glad to have a rest! And then Saturday we sometimes have something and then on Sunday I have to come back!

When I asked Ranecia to think about all those days and what she reads, she quickly replied, "the Bible." When I asked her about specific groups, such as choir, she replied, "Yeah, we get these papers and we have to read them, and then in dance we have to read, um, the copy of the music but we have to make up ... things, then Young Women Rising she gives us a paper and we have to do all these skits and stuff ..."

Katie, who was also involved in several church activities, listed reading and writing practices primarily in Sunday school. These included reading directions and verses on worksheets as well as the Bible. Both participants have parents who are actively involved in church and who engage in a variety of reading and writing activities both in and outside of church. Ranecia saw her mother's role as a counselor for church members in their own home, which involved a great deal of reading and writing. Katie often observed her mother, who is one of the Sunday school teachers, reading in the classroom. Her mother also kept a chart for offerings or money and lists of visitors. Katie mentioned her father reading the words of songs printed on a piece of paper during the service and writing notes on the back. Her father was also responsible for recording the names of people who attended church on any particular day. At home, Katie saw her parents participating in a prayer group that involved writing, and her father often made labels for CDs for church.

Two other participants mentioned reading and writing in church, but with a lesser degree of involvement. Gabrielle spoke of reading church songs that were printed both in and out of songbooks and Kristen talked about reading music for choir. Their attendance appeared to be less consistent than Ranecia and Katie, but both girls found it worth mentioning in our conversations.

Shopping for Food and Clothing

When asked to make a list of all the places they visited regularly, which we defined as at least once a week, all the students included shopping for food and clothing. As a group they generated a list of nine grocery stores, which included stores that also sell clothing and other items. In preparation for the trip to the store, Katie and Gabrielle mentioned their mothers writing lists. When discussing trips to the store and reading and writing practices related to this location, participants talked about parents' reading and writing as well as their own. Jessica described the importance of reading at the store to which she often accompanied her family, including her Mom, Dad, and little sister. She explained:

> My dad has to read certain things at the store, like if he's trying to find a certain meat or how much it costs, like this one time when we were shopping we were looking for good meat and I saw this meat that was 2 or something for $2.00 and they were both one pound and my dad read it and he said that was a pretty good deal and he liked it because it was honey ham, because I told him the good deal for ham over there.

To stress the role of reading while shopping, Jessica offered the following example: "When we go to the grocery store we get cat litter and stuff like that but our cat, we have to know what kind of cat food to get or else some of them puke over it."

Jessica was not the only participant who was careful about reading labels and signs at the grocery store. Kristen and Gabrielle also commented on this important literacy function to make sure they were choosing the best, or right, item. Nakita explained how she and her mother shop for a social service that provides housing and groceries for young, single mothers. They receive a list and must refer to the list continually to make sure they are purchasing the right size diapers and correct type of baby food. Ranecia discussed how important it was for her to read the labels on the candy and food so "you know what you are getting" as well as the cost and size of the items when discussing purchases of clothing or shoes. Kristen and Gabrielle also made reference to the signs above the aisles as a way to navigate their way around the store and find particular items.

Eating Out

When asked to note all of the places they visit in a week and to record the reading and writing associated with each place, the children generated a list of 11 fast-food establishments, including McDonald's™, Kentucky Fried Chicken™, and Burger King™. No writing, according to my informants, occurs at these sites, but much reading does. When asked to discuss what they

read at fast-food sites, they produced an impressive list. All of the participants said that they read the menu to decide what they wanted to eat. Kristen and Ranecia discussed reading the price to calculate the final cost. Kristen said she would read the amount on the cash register and always kept her receipts in case she was given the wrong food. She then explained the importance of having a receipt in case she got food poisoning and needed to sue the fast-food restaurant. When I asked how often she kept her receipt, she replied, "always!"

Journaling and Creative Writing

Many participants wrote for pleasure outside of school. Their pleasure writing typically fell into one of two categories: *journaling, creative writing* or a combination of both. Jessica spoke in great detail about how she wrote in three different journals on a regular basis. She recorded stories in her diary and "personal things" in her composition book. Her father installed a program on her own computer, which was a Christmas present and located in her bedroom, so she could keep an electronic diary. When asked about the reading and writing practices of family members, she discussed her mother's Internet "life story," which is about Jessica's family. She spoke with pride about this and how guests can visit and read the ongoing story. Her computer diary sounded similar to her mother's activity. Like Jessica, Ranecia kept more than one journal or diary. She described her journal as an outlet to "write free-willing," her diary as "more personal," and a journal at church.

Many of the participants enjoyed writing various genres at home. Nakita described her writing as "chapter books" rather than stories but did not provide an explanation as to what the chapter books were about. She also mentioned writing songs and poetry. Katie talked about writing poetry and "writing about what people were doing, like my mom, sister and dad." Gabrielle, Jessica, and Katie shared their enjoyment of writing scary stories, which Katie compared to Stein's *Goosebumps* books and Jessica explained as, "Stories, like I was writing a Frankenstein story so I was using other people's theory of that ... but this time, I used the mad scientist, well actually the scientist was just lonely and he wanted his brother from the dead ...."All three emphasized the importance of making stories scary.

When Kristen described her story-writing process, she said, "I like to write stories about animals, because I have these little toy animals and dogs and stuff and I act them [the stories] out and then afterwards I write them ... Um, I actually have a couple books of them, well not books, real books, but I made like covers and stuff."

Kristen would then share these stories with her family members. She described three stories as one about teachers and kids, another about three

horses fighting for power, and the last one about an abandoned puppy. When asked what she reads outside of school, she mentioned the chapter books *Pony Pals*, by Betancourt, and *Puppy Patrol*, by Dale, which are similar to the themes of her own stories.

CHILDRENS' CONNECTIONS TO FAMILY MEMBERS' LITERACY PRACTICES

When asked about family members' home literacy practices, all the participants shared various and extensive activities of parents and siblings. The most common practice involved reading the local newspaper; however, only one participant had a daily newspaper delivered and her father is a journalist for that particular paper. Several other participants mentioned seeing family members reading the paper, as well as themselves reading sections such as the front page and comics, occasionally, but this required some effort to buy a copy from a local store. Katie's family bought a Sunday edition from the same local convenience store after church and the whole family read sections individually and together.

Many participants described their parents and older siblings as avid readers. Katie talked about her Mom and Dad reading books sent from her grandma and commented on how small the writing was, which led me to believe these were long chapter books. Kristen was able to share specific titles of books her mother was currently reading as well as the genre (historical fiction and nonfiction about sports) and the topics such as the Underground Railroad. She knew that her mother read these at night before she fell asleep and that this was a regular habit. She also knew her sister's favorite series were *Dear America* and *American Girls*. When asked what her family reads, Ranecia replied, "Books and books!" and explained her sister's voracious reading of chapter books. Gabrielle knew her mom had an office with many chapter books that she reads for fun. Both Ranecia and Gabrielle mentioned seeing an older sibling reading and writing essays as well as producing narratives for enjoyment, which they shared with their family. All the participants observed acts of reading and writing on a regular basis and engaged in similar practices to read a great deal of text and produce various text.

Entertainment: Media and Technology

All participants reported having at least one television in their home. When asked what they read outside of school, Katie, Nakita, and Gabrielle mentioned "reading" the television. When asked to clarify, Katie replied "the magazine (guide) and the one on TV." Both Katie and her dad read the summaries or captions to "find out about sports and movies," whereas

Nakita and Gabrielle read the closed captions. Katie and her dad also read video-game container cases and instructions to decide which game to play on Thursdays, or what they call "Daddy/Daughter" day when they spend the afternoon together playing video games. Ranecia mentioned "reading the television" by watching the news with her mom to learn about the weather.

It was not surprising that all the children mentioned having a television; however, I was surprised by how they did or did not use computer technology. Six participants reported having computers in the home but only three had access to the Internet. Ranecia mentioned reading e-mails on the computer with her mom and sister as well as proofreading e-mails before sending them. Each day, according to Ranecia, she was expected to spend 20 minutes using the computer for math, reading, and typing games. Jessica also used the computer regularly for her journal. Her mother writes an Internet "life story," pays bills and taxes electronically once a month, and "buys things off the Internet." This was the most extensive use of the computer compared to the other participants.

When asked if she uses a computer, Kristen replied that she has one in her home but is not allowed to use it. Her father, who is a newspaper journalist, uses the computer for "extra credit" at work. When at her grandma's house, Kristen uses the computer for The Print Shop® program to make brochures and create pictures. This was mainly for enjoyment and showed limited connections to school or to using the computer as a tool for acquiring information. Katie talked about having a computer but not being able to use it because of "power problems." However, she then stated that her dad makes stickers for her new books using the computer.

Literacy With Siblings

When asked about reading and writing outside of school, most participants focused on individual activities such as reading chapter books or writing their own journals, stories, and poems. However, when I asked about reading and writing in relation to others, all five of the seven participants with younger siblings talked about reading and writing with younger siblings, often while playing school. Two participants had a younger sister or brother who currently attended preschool. When I asked them to explain exactly how they "play school," their activity sounded like a replication of their own experiences in a very structured setting with a white board, homemade desk, and teacher as authority and keeper of knowledge. After 4 years of formal schooling, the participants had clear concepts of what school is supposed to look and sound like. Ranecia described her pretend school: "Regular writing ... like when you play school, I have a little sister and I play school with her. I write down like numbers, like I have a fake chalkboard,

then I write down numbers and letters, and then I write down their names and do attendance and stuff."

Kristen's description sounded very similar to Ranecia's when she talked about playing school with her 4-year-old brother and third-grade sister:

> I read to my little brother. We play this little game, preschool is what we call it, and I teach [brother] letters and [sister] acts like she's in preschool too, like she doesn't know the letters ... Yeah, I teach him letters and I read books to him and then I take out things, like I make these little words and say what's this letter, what's this letter, what's this letter.

Kristen and Ranecia each assumed the role of the teacher and saw it as their responsibility to teach their siblings their "numbers and letters" in this manner.

Three participants discussed reading aloud to younger siblings and spoke in great detail about their siblings' genre preferences. Gabrielle talked about her 4-year-old sister's preference for fairy tales, especially ones with princesses. Katie talked about reading picture books about Barney™, from Mayer's *Little Critters* series, and alphabet books to her 2-year-old sister. She was not sure if these had been her books when she was younger. Jessica discussed her role in teaching her 4-year-old sister to read in an extremely serious manner. The participants who both played school and read aloud to younger siblings regarded this activity as valuable. They saw themselves as having important roles in preparing their siblings for school and showed pride when discussing these literacy activities.

Literacy Within Adult Roles

Several participants shared their enjoyment of mimicking parental literacy practices, particularly of their mothers. Gabrielle often wrote grocery lists for her mom without consulting with her. Whether or not her mother used the lists was unclear. However, she mentioned seeing her mother write lists of things she needed to do as well as grocery lists. Ranecia mimicked her mother in terms of profession. Ranecia's mother is a counselor for church members but conducts many of her sessions in their home. Ranecia giggled as she talked about sneaking past her to go to the kitchen and listening while her mother was counseling. On her own, Ranecia liked to "counsel" people by asking questions about their "issues," then writing the answers down to "help them solve it," similar to the literacy practices of her mother.

Besides playing school and mimicking professional work, several participants engaged in reading and writing activities that mimicked family members' literacy practices associated with leisure and relaxation. Nakita and Ranecia talked about reading the magazines that their mothers read for fun for beauty tips, such as *Sister 2 Sister* and *Jet* magazines. Ranecia enjoyed

reading the directions, similar to Map Quest® directions from the Internet, while traveling to a new place and checking off the specific directions as they passed. Only one participant described an activity that involved the type of writing adults might do for a more utilitarian purpose. She explained how her mother, an athletic director and coach, has Kristen write to "help her." Kristen discussed how she: "Writes stuff for my mom, like sometimes she has me write lists of her students in her class and their attendance and stuff ... and then I also ... at cross country meets, my mom has me write things on the people names and what place they came in and stuff."

Whether or not Kristen's mother uses what Kristen has written is unclear; this type of writing mimicked what an adult might do and may have had real-life practical use as well.

SCHOOL LITERACY: BIMODAL EDUCATION IN ONE CLASSROOM

The literacy practices of school, described by the children, differed from their home literacies. Perhaps what is most interesting to note is the difference in the types of education the participants are receiving. Kristen participates in two gifted and talented programs intended for academically high achieving students in math, language arts, and science. Students are selected for this program based on standardized test scores, teacher recommendation, and grades. She was the only student in the group of participants who was in this program. When discussing the type of reading and writing practices in school, Kristen's list far exceeded the other participants' and the type of reading and writing she was exposed to in school was noticeably different from that of her classmates.

When asked to respond to the question, "What do you read in school?," the five participants who are not enrolled in the gifted and talented program stated the following: science, math, and social studies textbooks; worksheets; silent reading; the teacher's writing on the board; and the calendar. Two participants mentioned reading the print on the walls and posters "when you are bored." When asked which school reading activity they liked the best, four stated silent reading. Jessica said this was her favorite time because she "really enjoys reading fiction and biographies" and summarized a biography of Beatrix Potter that she recently finished. Gabrielle reported that her favorite reading activity was the time spent in her small reading group when they read books aloud, thought about predictions, summarizing and retelling what they read, and had time to read their own individual books. Kristen explained that her favorite reading and writing activities were related to the degree of choice. Other participants mentioned a preference for activities that they were able to choose and tended to be more authentic. When asked what their least favorite

reading activity was, two said textbooks, one said worksheets, and one said biographies.

Kristen's reading experiences varied a great deal from the other five participants, reflecting her attendance 4 days a week in the gifted and talented program. She discussed reading a passage about Archimedes and his contribution to science, investigations about heat and materials related to science, the novel *Old Yeller* by Gipson (1990) and self-evaluation charts as part of the academically highest book club group. Similar to the other participants, her favorite activity was silent reading but her least favorite activity was music because, "the music is complicated to read."

The participants varied in what they wrote, as well. The five participants who were not enrolled in the gifted and talented program discussed writing on worksheets and copying what the teacher wrote on the board. In contrast, Kristen discussed writing about experiments, plot graphs for an autobiography, and stories when she completed the assigned work. Four participants, including Kristen, shared that their favorite writing activity was journaling in the morning. Two stated their favorite writing activity was anything related to math.

The type of education Kristen is experiencing is markedly different than the other participants who are not in the gifted and talented program. One other student in the group, who was not part of the study, also participated in the gifted and talented program. She and Kristen were the only ones in the group with two parents with college degrees, suggesting a tracking system with social reproduction results (Bourdieu, 1986; Oakes, 1986).

FROM THE PARTICIPANTS' POINT OF VIEW: CONNECTIONS BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL LITERACY PRACTICES

One focus of this study was to look for connections between home and school literacy practices. Responses to three questions in the semistructured interview as well as informal conversations provided a great deal of insight as to how the participants viewed the home/community and school literacy connections and disconnects. In response to the question, "Does reading and writing in school prepare you for reading and writing outside of school?," the answers varied from an enthusiastic response by Nakita, who happens to struggle a great deal with in-school reading and writing, to Katie's nonchalant, flat response, and Jessica's focus on practicality. Nakita's response sounded practiced, as if she were repeating a mantra, when she said, "When you learn something in school you take it into your life and you remember it forever!"

Kristen, Jessica, and Ranecia could identify the usefulness of reading and writing at school and its connection to life outside of school. Kristen said, "Yeah, in Kindergarten I learned the ABCs which helped me to do reading

and writing later." Jessica related school literacy to daily activities and economics by stating, "Yeah, I think everything revolves around reading and writing because if you didn't know how to read you couldn't write checks or you could never read how much money you have and you couldn't pay for what you want." Jessica talked about money frequently and saw reading and writing as a tool to deal with financial dilemmas. Ranecia also saw reading and writing as a way to acquire goals beyond elementary and high school. She replied:

> Yes, because when the summer was getting to an end ... well, I don't know because after I do work at school I have to go home and do it at home ... it's going to help me be a doctor ... like learning hard words like *facetious* and *expeditiously* ... I don't know how to pronounce them, but ... what do they mean?

Katie did not see a strong connection. She was ambivalent when I asked if reading and writing in school prepares her for reading and writing outside of school. Her response was, "It helps me remember. I guess reading and writing in school helps for home ... but when the school day is done, it's like yay, carry on and go home and play with my dad and sister."

I also asked each child if reading and writing at school was similar or different from reading and writing outside of school to learn whether they viewed a connection between home and school. Again, their responses varied tremendously. They stated:

Nakita: Like in school you learn how to count your money, so if you like go to the store and you give a five dollar bill and it costs something, then you say, oh and I know I get back this amount of money.

Kristen: At school you just have to do what the teacher says but at home you can read and write whatever you want.

Jessica: Everything has to do with reading and writing ... it's possibly the same, like reading labels or books and stuff like that ... numbers too, math ...

Ranecia: Mmm-hmm, it's mostly the same type of writing, like mostly in school we're working in cursive and at home I'm working on cursive at home and that's the main focus.

Katie: Similar? Kind of hard, no ... I think, I don't write anything about math when I get home or reading, just what people are doing or stuff like that.

Unlike the other participants, Katie did not see a connection between the reading and writing she did at home and school. Katie's experiences and perspective of school is similar to what Lareau (2000) described in her research as the separation between some working-class families and school.

She found that many families "saw schooling as something that took place on the school site. They drew a clear line between school and home." (p. 115). Katie engaged in a tremendous amount of reading and writing at home and in her community such as reading chapter books, writing poetry, and participating in Sunday school. She saw her parents reading chapter books sent by her grandmother, as well as her mom teaching Sunday school, and both parents having an active role in church that required reading and writing. However, Katie did not identify a connection between her home and community literacy practices and those associated with school.

Learning to Read and Write

The participants have only been in school for 5½ years, but maintain vivid memories of learning to read and write. One question was intended to learn more about their personal experiences with learning to read and write. The responses to the question, "Do you remember your feelings about learning to read and write?," were surprising.

Kristen, who participates in the gifted and talented program, remembered the letters she had difficulty with and how she felt when she thought she was the only one who did not understand what was happening in Kindergarten. She stated, "Learning to read and write was hard at first because I felt like I didn't know what other people were doing ... like I remember being frustrated in kindergarten, like with the letters *g* ... and *k*." Jessica remembered details of reading with the reading specialist and seemed embarrassed when explaining how, "I had a tutor for reading ... at school and that helped me figure out writing. We started off small like with *Curious George* books, by Rey, in Mrs. B's room." Both Kristen and Jessica, who struggled with learning to read and write, are now avid writers and readers. In fact, they view themselves as competent readers and writers and proudly discuss their textual production. Kristen writes stories at home and plays preschool with her younger sister and brother to teach letters and numbers. Jessica keeps three journals, has read all of the *Harry Potter* books by Rowling, sees her mom engaged in a variety of writing practices, and is helping her sister learn how to read and write. The two participants who struggled the most with learning to read and write appeared to engage in more reading and writing outside of school than the other participants and were currently doing well in school. It's impossible to know whether the struggle to read and write strengthened their desire to read and write more, but it is an interesting pattern to consider.

Ranecia, who mentioned her professional goal of becoming a doctor, shared a great deal about her past as it related to the question. Since she changed caretakers at the time she learned how to read and write, this was a challenging question at first, but she quickly became adamant about her response. She stated, "Oh, I love reading and writing. Was it then ... or was it, I don't know. I think I learned it at home. I know for a fact it was my mom!" She connected this important phase in her life, of learning to read and write, to a personal relationship, and whether or not this was the one person who taught her to read and write was less important to her than her needing this to be true. It was evident that Ranecia knew the value of reading and writing and linked this to a very special person in her life, her adoptive mom.

Katie, who saw very little connection between home, school, and community literacy practices, shared an interesting analogy to how it felt to learn to read and write. She said, "I think I learned to write in preschool or before that, but I learned to read then, but I'm not sure. I learned how to read more in Kindergarten or first grade. When I first started I felt excited, just like when I was at lunch (and) Jessica was right there and I helped Jessica go across the monkey bars!"

This was surprising since most of Katie's discussions about school were not at all animated. She observed a great deal of reading and writing at home and engaged in reading and writing on her own, but school did not seem to excite her. She mentioned on several occasions that school is sometimes boring, which may explain her sense of disconnect between home, community, and school.

CONCLUSION

Most of the children in this study are experiencing disconnects between home and school literacy practices, which Dewey (1902/1956) discussed a century ago. This leads one to question how much schooling has changed to meet the needs of children. It is not surprising that the favorite reading and writing activities of the participants were related to choice. The children found the most satisfaction in silent reading at school because they could choose what to read. Their favorite writing activity was 20 minutes of journaling each morning because they were producers of their own text for their own purposes and they were relating this activity to what occurred outside of school. Kristen's statement, "At school you just have to do what the teacher says, but at home you can read and write whatever you want," rang true for all of the students.

As stated earlier, the purpose of this study was to gain insights into the personal meanings and values assigned to literacy in different contexts by young children who are attending an urban elementary school in an after-school program. There seems to be a common belief both inside and outside of formal education that certain children are not succeeding in school because they are unprepared (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The belief is that children who underachieve in school do not experience many

literacy events in their lives outside of school. For the children in this case study, nothing could be further from the truth.

The nine fifth-grade students from an inner-city, low-achieving elementary school were engaged in a wide variety of reading and writing in their homes and communities, many of these events reflecting the vast array of literacy events they experienced in their homes and communities. Five of the seven students read and wrote with younger siblings and saw their parents encouraging read-aloud activities with preschool age siblings. It is unreasonable to assume that five of these seven children are academically behind because they live in environments that do not include literacy use or because they are not engaged in literacy practices of their own outside of school.

In a chapter titled "Home, Learning and Education," Barton and Hamilton (1998) considered the connections or lack of between various domains. They state, "There is a distinctiveness to many home literacy practices, but what is more striking is the range of different literacies which are carried out in the home, including work and school literacies which are brought home where they mingle together" (p. 188). Playing school, keeping a journal, participating in Sunday school and church, were all examples of the different home and community literacies engaged in by the participants and look similar to schooling literacy practices.

Barton and Hamilton (1998) also discuss the types of modeling parents or caregivers provide, which in this case study happened frequently (e.g., writing e-mails, counseling for church, reading novels and magazines, and writing for a variety of purposes). They go on to claim that the term *family literacy* is part of a deficit model because it focuses on what low socioeconomic status (SES) families and children lack as compared to middle-class ones rather than on their strengths. Unfortunately, the construct of family literacy has taken this turn, a turn away from the original focus of family literacy research exemplified by that of Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), who documented similar rich literacy lives of low-SES families.

Purcell-Gates (1996) found a wide range of frequency and type of literacy events in low-SES homes and cautioned against essentialist claims. Some homes had virtually no reading and writing events and others had a great deal. It seems clear that for the children in this case study, it is not enough to believe that the participants were not doing well because they failed to read and write outside of school or experience literacy use before beginning formal schooling. Family literacy was entrenched in these participants' lives, suggesting the cause of their academic struggles lies beyond the individual and their families.

After conducting this study and learning more about the out-of-school literacy lives of these nine children, it becomes increasingly difficult to ignore Dewey's (1902/1956) philosophy about the school and the child. We need to "consider the relationship of the school to the life and development of the children in the school" (p. 31) in order to value the knowledge and literacy practices they bring to the classroom. In the district in which this study was situated, the children who appear to struggle most attend the least resourced urban schools with the highest rates of student mobility. In these schools, little choice is offered to teachers or students. High-stakes testing and prepackaged curriculum in this district, particularly the elementary school featured in this case study, limit the freedom of the teachers to shape pedagogy to the needs of their students, and the students are afforded less time for authentic textual production and authentic activities related to reading. This was blatantly obvious when comparing the reading and writing practices of the few children in the gifted and talented program with those who were not part of the program. The results of this analysis reveal that the children in the Literacy Social Action Group were highly engaged in a rich array of literacy practices in their homes and communities. I conclude that the onus is on schools and educators to acknowledge the values and literacy practices children are bringing to the classroom and use these to inform and shape pedagogy to move toward academic achievement for all students.

REFERENCES

American Girls series. New York: Pleasant Company Publications.

Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local literacies: Reading and writing in one community*. New York: Routledge.

Betancourt, J. *Pony Pals series*. New York: Scholastic.

Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Language & symbolic power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and design of social futures*. New York: Routledge.

Dale, J. *Puppy Patrol series*. New York: Scholastic.

Dear America series. New York: Scholastic.

Dewey, J. (1956). *The child and the curriculum & The school and society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1902)

Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed., p. 121). New York: Macmillan.

Gipson, F. (1990). *Old yeller*. New York: Harper Trophy.

Jet Magazine. Chicago: Johnson.

Lareau, A. (2000). *Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Luke, A. (2003). Literacy and the other: A sociological approach to literacy research and policy in multilingual societies. *Reading Research Quarterly, 38*(1), 132–141.

Mayer, M. *Little Critters series*. New York: Random House.

Oakes, J. (1986). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*. New Haven: Yale University Press.