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A STUDY OF THE LITERACY PRACTICES OF RURAL FARM MALE ADOLESCENTS

by

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Abstract

Concerns have been expressed about assessment results that report girls outscoring boys on standardized achievement testing in reading and writing and boys outscoring girls in mathematics and science. This study explored how Western Canadian rural farm boys understand and practice multiple literacies in their everyday lives and what it means for them to be 'literate' in today's world. The research was a qualitative ethnographic study of the culture of six rural farm boys. *Thick description* was used to explain the event and the context of the event. The fieldwork involved collecting print and digital artifacts that depicted the boys' literacy practices and conducting interviews and conversations. The boys lead very literate lives. However, their notions of what literacy is are rooted in the ideas of literacy as a technical skill and literacy as school knowledge. The boys, who did not see themselves as readers, engaged in transactional reading and writing outside of school, motivated by personal and group interests and by a curiosity to learn knowledge about the world in which they live, a need to be with their peers, and a desire to build social capital in their settings. The boys used literacy to do the social work of gender, of defining themselves, and of placing themselves in their families and peer groups and among their schoolmates with a gendered identity. A gender-based disconnect in reading and writing activities has emerged from our schools. If we want students to embrace school-based print literacy and to make it part of their lives, then competence is simply not enough. Educators must find ways to help students discover pleasure in reading and writing well by offering them assignments and opportunities to recognize that

what brings them pleasure is connected to experience, competence, and challenge. The chasm between school literacy and literacy for personal purposes demonstrates the need for curriculum designers to find ways to utilize the digital mode of communication. Curriculum writers must begin to view literacy as a social practice rather than as a set of technical skills so that these rural male adolescents can see themselves as literate people.

Acknowledgements

The flat, sun-warmed prairie reaches to the horizon. In a land of infinite beauty and danger, prairie people are shaped by weather and distance and time that is measured in sunrises and seasons. Life in this land is peaceful, and yet I needed to know what was beyond. Many have supported my academic journey into the unknown.

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most enjoyable segments of my journey. I wish each of my research boys the very best in their lives and literacy journeys.

To my family, thank you for your unwavering belief in my academic journey. I wish to acknowledge my adult children, who have encouraged, responded to, and supported my efforts. I have appreciated your good humor when I have consulted you about how to deal with the trials of being a mature adult student. Finally, I wish to thank my husband, who understood that I needed to follow my academic desires when sometimes the toughest parts were leaving home to start on my 5 ½-hour drives to Edmonton. Our daily, late-night, 30-minute phone calls sustained our relationship, and you were my sympathetic audience. Thank you for keeping the home fires burning while I was fulfilling my life's desire. We must create a new 'normal' now, and I look forward to this part of our life together.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

My Story

My teaching experience at the middle-years level was in rural schools in small prairie towns where there were few strangers and a strong sense of community, and everyone worked together and cared about each other. I taught for 15 years in a school with a small student body of just over 100 students, a caring staff, and very supportive parents. People often said that this school provided a private-school education within the public-school system. Each child was cared for throughout his or her school career, and both the strong and the struggling students had many supports. The school culture supported each student's participation in the academic life of the school as well as in the sports and/or music activities. The expectation of our school community was that every child would graduate from Grade 12, and this expectation fulfilled itself year after year.

Both boys and girls in this central prairie school appeared to achieve equally well, as evidenced by the names on the honor roll in the front foyer of the school and by their enrolment in postsecondary education opportunities. At the time I had thought that how boys and girls participated in the school-based literacy activities differed, that girls read fiction and boys read more nonfiction. I observed the girls talking about their school-based reading with friends, whereas boys seldom discussed school-based reading with each other. It appeared that

more boys, especially at the primary level, received help from teacher associates or from the special education teacher.

Part of my teaching philosophy was to connect the classroom and the world outside the classroom. Each year my class and I attended many live-theatre events, participated in outdoor education trips, and traveled to many historic and scenic areas. Both boys and girls showed tremendous excitement as we read everything we could to become informed before we left on our trips. The differences showed later. The boys' and the girls' writing after these trips became more motivated, more animated, and more intense. Most of the girls continued to write well for school-based assignments, but some of the boys lost enthusiasm for their writing without these sustained, continual outside experiences. The boys' literacy practices appeared to be more purposeful for immediate learning and use, whereas the girls' literacy practices appeared to thrive on momentum from within them.

At the time, media headlines[1] in the early part of the 21st century reported that girls were consistently outscoring boys on standardized achievement testing in reading and writing, and boys were outscoring girls in mathematics and science. I began to question the media reports: What kinds of reading and writing and thinking were boys doing that allowed them to outperform girls on the mathematics and science tests? What kinds of reading and writing and thinking were girls doing that allowed them to outperform boys on the reading and writing

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[1] The girls performed significantly better than the boys did in reading tests conducted with 15-year-old students in 2000 in OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment ([PISA] Statistics Canada, 2001).

tests? Why were boys not doing well on the standardized literacy tests? What exactly does *doing well* mean? Which boys were not doing well, and what exactly was the difference between doing well and not doing well? Who set the standards? Did the people who created the testing documents really know what went on in the classroom? Did they really know how everyday classroom literacy practice connected or failed to connect with the official curriculum?

The Position of Rural Youth

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), best known for its publications and statistics, represents 30 countries directly and 70 countries indirectly and assists policy makers in making decisions on global trade, education, and science issues. The OECD developed a tool to provide governments in over 30 countries that were concerned about providing effective universal elementary and secondary schooling with information about their students' achievements and their education systems. The tool, known as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), involves a

> comparative analysis of the skilled level of students near the end of their compulsory education . . . [and] exploration of the ways that skills vary across different social and economic groups and the factors that influence the level and distribution of skills within and between the countries. (Statistics Canada, 2004, p. 10)

The PISA provided indicators of the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in reading literacy, mathematical literacy, and scientific literacy through common international tests.

Governments in 32 countries participated in PISA 2000. The assessment "focused mainly on reading, with the reading test giving three sub-scores labeled

retrieving information, interpreting, and reflecting" (Statistics Canada, 2004, p. 10). In the 2000 assessment, Canadian students performed well, ranking second to Finland. Girls performed significantly better than boys did on the reading test in all countries and in all provinces of Canada.

Another significant difference emerged to compound the issue. Across Canada, urban students performed better in reading than students from rural schools did. Locally in Saskatchewan, although rural students' achievement in reading was significantly lower than that of their urban cousins, the rural students outperformed their urban counterparts in mathematics and science test achievements. Currently, no data compare gender with rural-urban school location in the categories of reading, mathematics, or science.

Additionally, high school dropout rates in Canada are higher in rural areas. During the 2004-2005 school year, the dropout rate for rural students (16.4%) was nearly twice as high as for urban students (9.2%; Bowlby, 2005). With regard to gender, provincially, in Saskatchewan, 12% of boys drop out of school before completing Grade 12, compared to 7% of girls. The school-leaving trends for rural males have often limited their future employment options in rural Saskatchewan. The perspectives of the boys themselves on this issue have not yet been documented.

The very serious economic, political, and weather-related challenges that Saskatchewan farmers face have been well documented, and it may come as little surprise that the future is uncertain. Farming is expensive to take up and is not the career of choice for many youth. Younger farmers are frequently unable to afford

land purchases, and older farmers are often unable to find buyers for their land so
that they can retire. Saskatchewan Job Futures (n.d.) recently stated:

> Prior to 1998, the employment for farmers and farm managers was
> reasonably good; better than it had been. Coupled with the near-collapse
> of the Asian market and reduced world grain prices in the late nineties, the
> discovery of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE or "Mad Cow"
> disease) early in this decade has damaged the farm economy more
> quickly—and more significantly—than most analysts expected. Even if
> conditions improve, the ill effects of this downturn may close many more
> Canadian farms in the near future. Still, it is difficult to accurately forecast
> employment trends in the Agricultural industry. Climatic conditions or
> drastic fluctuations in grain or livestock prices can result in employment
> numbers that are much higher or lower than expected. (Trends and
> Outlooks section, ¶ 5)

Boys and literacy and subtle variations of this theme have occupied the
attention of the public, the media, and scholars for the last two decades.
Questioning why this interest has occurred, Wallace (2005) commented on
standardized testing: "The clean simplicity of numbers is powerful. The evidence
of quantifiable results *seems* indisputable and these results feed other powerful
discourses that shape our understanding of the 'boy problem'" (p. 1). Workplace
realities that require higher literacy levels, legislation that enforces equity, and
consumer-driven lifestyles have brought the issue of males and literacy to the
forefront.

Young people in Saskatchewan have realized the effects of globalization
on rural farms and communities. Young men can no longer depend on becoming
involved in agriculture with their parents because even their parents struggle to
hold on to the family farm by taking off-farm jobs or diversifying into farm-based
businesses. Crises in agriculture such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad
cow disease), drought, and crop disease have eroded the farming economy.

Government agendas to depopulate the rural areas in the interests of efficient delivery of heath and education services have contributed to the uncertainty. Big business's move to vertical farming organizations has also had an impact on the viability of the family farms.

Many young rural male adolescents must now look beyond the farm and home community for postsecondary education and employment opportunities. Therefore, it is of immediate and extreme importance that the literacy practices of rural farm male adolescents be investigated to adequately prepare them for the new challenges of rural farm life or occupations and careers away from the rural agricultural life they have known. It is also crucial that we learn how the students view these issues.

I am the daughter of a farmer, and I married into a farming family. Both of my children chose careers in the sciences and mathematics in the city. I observed many other young people moving to the urban areas for more education and for jobs that financially rewarded their efforts. I wondered what the future held for farming and for the young men who must now make serious decisions about their future. I wondered what literacy practices these young men practiced in a school setting and what literacy practices these same young men engaged in out of school. How did they see themselves as consumers and creators of knowledge for their future?

I had envisioned that I would follow a smooth pathway in my doctoral research. I naïvely believed that I would observe, learn, question, speculate, collect, and converse in a fluid, cooperative environment as I moved through the

data-collection processes. Many surprises were in store for me that I will discuss in later chapters.

Statement of the Problem

Much has been written about the problems that boys experience in school. Media attention has focused on reporting testing scores that reveal a gender difference in literacy scores, and boys fare poorly. These concerns and panic are based on essentialist mindsets and are fueled by the results of assessments of what boys are not doing, while leaving unsaid what boys are doing to be successful and literate. Research into gender-based literacy issues is a provocative area, and school boards across Canada are interested in the phenomena. Research is needed that looks at the complexities of gender and literacy and that problematizes hegemonic masculinities. Definitions of literacy vary, as do expectations in classrooms and on assessment documents. The media and research often do not account for barriers to literacy. With these ideas in mind, I attempted to understand how Western Canadian rural farm boys understand and practice multiple literacies in their everyday lives and what it means for them to be 'literate' in today's world. My questions included the following:

1. What does it mean for rural farm male adolescents to be literate in today's world?

2. How do these boys participate in school literacy events?

3. How do these boys practice literacy out of school?

4. How do boys use literacy to explore and create their identities?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is a learning theory that emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning. Learning is viewed as an active process in which learners actively make meaning through social interactions with others and the environment in which they live. The knowledge that they create is socially and culturally constructed and is constantly evolving as its users create, share, and collaborate on it. This statement is contrary to the idea that knowledge is a fixed entity with governing laws and principles 'out there' waiting to be discovered.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) described social constructivism as an interpretive paradigm to inform and guide research in the humanities and the social sciences. A paradigm is a human construction that represents, simply, one's basic beliefs or worldview. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) added to the concept of worldview: "All research is interpretative, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (p. 13). The social constructivist paradigm is consistent with my worldview that knowledge and meaning are historically constructed through social processes in social groups of human beings that include family, kinship, friendship, church, school, clubs, sports, and political groups. These groups construct knowledge with and for each other, cooperatively and collaboratively, and create a culture of shared artifacts with shared culturally specific meanings. The concept of social constructivist inquiry is also a good fit for me as a researcher because it emphasizes the importance of culture and geographical and social context in understanding what

occurs in a group of learners and then constructing knowledge based on those premises.

Lave and Wenger (1991) made three assumptions about social constructivism. First, reality is constructed through human social activity by using cultural tools such as language, logic, and mathematics. Group members work together to describe the reality. Second, knowledge is a human product that the group members socially and culturally construct by creating meaning through their social interactions and the environment in which they are situated. Third, social constructivist advocates view learning as a social process that develops historically. Meaningful learning occurs when the group members work together in social interactions over time.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) noted that the aim or purpose of social constructivist inquiry is to understand the reformulations of the constructions that people, including the inquirer, hold as they move towards a consensus, but yet are open to new interpretations as more information becomes available over time. The researcher is mainly positioned in the role of participant, but in interviews and some discussion can function as a facilitator. My research utilized my voice, whereas the voices of the participants constructed and reconstructed their reality.

Lave and Wenger (1991) stated that "learning involves the construction of identities" and that "one way to think of learning is as the historical production, transformation and change of persons" (pp. 51-52. The assertion is that, without human activity around us, we would not be able to understand ourselves and our world.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) work fits with the social constructivist paradigm. They used the term "situated activity" (p. 29) to describe an environment in which learners are exposed to practices in which their primary role is to observe and receive instruction about the activities. Beginning learners are first observers of the desired behavior and participate in minimal ways. As they become more skilled and experienced, their level of participation increases, and they fully participate in the activities that lead to achieving the common goals of the group. The concept of apprenticeships can be used to describe the situated learning activities. Guidance, supervision, and modeling of the desired activity by more knowledgeable others are the main principles. In the process the learner begins to create an identity that is similar to the community of workers and begins to feel like a productive, legitimate member of the group. The practice of situated learning activities creates an environment in which "knowing is inherent in the growth and transformation of identities and it is located in relations among practitioners, their practice, the artifacts of that practice, and the social organization . . . of the community of practice" (p. 122). Packer and Goicoechea (2000) explained that "learning involves becoming a member of a community, constructing knowledge at various levels of expertise as a participant, and the transformation of both the person and his social world" (p. 227).

Social constructivist thinking has emerged from the work of Vygotsky and Dewey (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Their work indicates that children construct their personal knowledge and understandings of the world in which they live from association with concrete objects and with more knowledgeable others.

Vygotsky's term *zone of proximal development* refers to the idea that construction of knowledge is always mediated in social interactions with others. He believed that it is the process of engagement with others that allows learners to refine their thinking and learning through the shared use of language and sharing of ideas. Dewey viewed social constructivist learning as a sociocultural process in collaboration with others rather than as an isolated activity that is independent of the social contexts around it. To Dewey, the place of experience or context in the learning milieu was important.

Social constructivism is based on the importance of human consciousness and the blending of human thoughts, beliefs, ideas, concepts, and languages. Social constructivism helps to create a meaningful world for humans because they have constructed it.

The works of Vygotsky and Dewey provide the main theoretical framework for this study. Britton's theory of written discourse adds further depth. Vygotsky and Dewey emphasized the social nature of learning and the social relations that surround the learning, with learners actively constructing their own knowledge. Dewey described the experiential learning theory, which emphasizes the context in which learning takes place. Britton's theory explains the functionalism of writing.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory arose from the work of Vygotsky (1978), a Russian psychologist who devised a theoretical framework to understand the development of perception, attention, memory, and language. The sociocultural theory was

based on the premise that learning is developmental, social, and mediated by tools. He presented a situative/sociocultural view of knowing and learning that focuses on the way that knowledge is distributed among group members, the practices in which they participate, and the tools and methods that they use. He emphasized that social interaction comes before social development and that understanding and cognition are the resulting products of social behavior. Vygotsky argued that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. Vygotsky identified the social setting of humans as of utmost importance in the cognition and learning process. The social interactions of a community enable the development and acquisition of language because the social interactions of the learning environment are vital to the learning process. Children learn first through interaction with other children and adults, and then through assimilation and/or accommodation of that knowledge into the child's mental learning frameworks. To emphasize the importance of learning through social interaction with others, Vygotsky explained that "the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge" (p. 24). Again acknowledging the importance of social interaction with more knowledgeable others, he asserted, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level" (p. 57). His assertions assist us in understanding the acquisition of voluntary attention, logical memory, and the formation of concepts.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory also includes the zone of proximal development, which has important ramifications for educators. The zone of proximal development, according to Vygotsky, is the distance between the child's ability to perform a task or solve a problem with adult or peer guidance and the child's ability to perform the task or solve a problem independently. The distance between the actual developmental level and the potential developmental level, known as the zone of proximal development, "defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow" (p. 86). Vygotsky observed that human learning "presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (p. 88).

Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) noted that humans have distinguished themselves through the development of language/thought systems and the use of tools. He contended that tools are an external triumph over nature and that man "make[s them] serve his ends" (p. 7)—to bring about changes to the environment. Vygotsky added that humans have also mediated their social environment with the use of "sign systems (language, writing, number systems" (p. 7) to facilitate their cultural and societal development. Because Vygotsky understood learning as a social process, he emphasized dialogue and the many roles of language in instruction and mediated learning with others: "Although children are dependent on lengthy nurturance and caretaking, they are active participants in their own learning within the supportive contexts of family and community" (p. 132).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory impacted the development of constructivism, an idea that guided my research and that I discuss later.

Dewey's Theory of Experiential Education

The experiential education learning theory emerged from the work of Dewey (1916/1966), who observed at the beginning of the 20th century that there is a disconnect between the life of the student outside the school and the demands of the school curriculum. Then, as now, technology was leaping forward with improved function and design in communication and entertainment tools. Dewey saw the problem not in what education is, but in how the process of education is done. The experiential learning theory is based on the premise that education serves a broader social purpose, which is to help students become effective members of society, and thus the provision of educational experiences that enable them to become valued, equal, and responsible members of society is most important:

> A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of the actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. (Dewey, 1929, p. 40)

School sometimes becomes a barrier for children to overcome rather than a means to an end. Dewey would ask us to imagine what school literacy programs might look like if they were more informed by the present-day literacy needs of our students. Then, truly, education might become "a process of living and not a preparation for future living" (Dewey, 1929, p. 293). The experiential learning theory requires teachers who are cognizant of the past experiences that students

take to the classroom and who then are able to design and provide quality

educational experiences that are relevant and meaningful to the students.

Britton's Theory of Written Discourse Function

Britton's theory of written discourse function, which is widely used in

research on writing, also adds to my framework. James Britton (1971)

significantly influenced the way we understand teaching and learning in language

arts today. He investigated how talk and literacy are interrelated in the school

classroom.

Britton (1971) emphasized that oral language production "as a way of

representing the world is inextricably interwoven with other forms of

representation" (p. 206). He firmly believed that humans use language in ways "of

classifying or representing experience" (p. 206). By representing events,

experiences, and feelings with words, human beings make sense of their world.

Britton postulated that as we talk about "events—present, past, or imagined—we

shape them in the light of, and incorporate them into, the body of our experience"

(p. 207) and that making sense of the world in which we live by thinking and

speaking and, later, writing about the events that we experience helps us to

function effectively.

Britton (1971) stressed the importance of students' using language, both

oral and written, "to explore, organize, and refine their ideas, about themselves

and their subject matter" (Durst & Newell, 1989, p. 375). He believed that

children used language as a way of representing their worlds as both participants

and spectators. Britton developed a schema (Figure 1) that Applebee (1981) later

utilized to depict the participant/spectator role and to organize the three main

function categories of language.

Participant role   Spectator role

_____I_____

Transactional   Expressive   Poetic
Informational   Personal   Imaginative
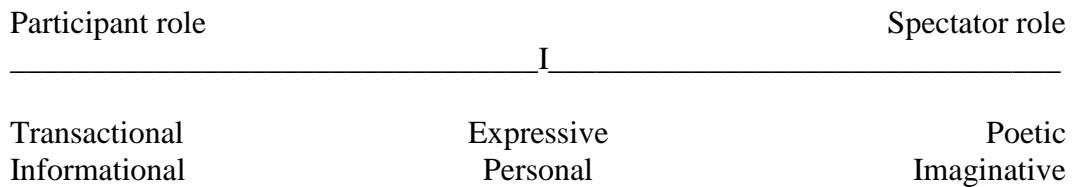
Figure 1. Britton's (1971) schema of the three function categories of language.

Britton (1971) observed that when humans use language to accomplish a

goal, they assume the participant role. They use language "to recount or recreate

real or imagined experience in order to inform, or teach, or make plans or solicit

help, or achieve any other practical outcome" (p. 209). In day-to-day living,

ordinary persons use a great deal of oral and written language to organize,

manage, and take responsibility for their lives. Making lists, calculating money,

and reading newspapers and signs are examples of transactional and informational

tasks. Therefore, at its most extreme, the participant role is part of the

transactional forms of language to inform or persuade others or to record and

convey information or ideas for self or others. At the other end of the spectrum, as

spectators, humans are "concerned with events not now taking place (past events

or imagined events" (p. 209) as a way of pursuing the personal need to rehearse

the past or predict the future. Storytelling, retelling of personal experiences, and

writing stories are examples of casual forms of the spectator role. The expressive

forms of language focus on the interests, activities, and feelings of the speaker or

writer. Britton noted that expressive language describes the way that humans rehearse our life by exchanging our opinions, observations, and attitudes with others. Expressive language assumes a shared space between speakers and/or writers. Stories, plays, songs, and poetry are examples of experiences in the poetic form of language.

In the transmission model of teaching, which dominated Britain in the 1970s, teachers provided students with meanings from outside the students' personal experiences. Britton (1971) advocated the social constructivist view of teaching, which offers students multiple opportunities to explore and reflect on their learning rather than to reproduce what is given to them. He believed that the most effective way for students to access their thinking is to be able to use their everyday language and personal experiences to make meaning of the world. Britton urged teachers to consider "language across the curriculum" (p. 218) in "an undertaking that must call into question some very general matters concerning teachers' objectives, as well as some very particular demands made on children as they move from one lesson to another in the day's programme" (p. 218).

Change, however, was slow, because curricula needed to be refashioned to represent the increased emphasis on oral and written speech production. As teachers began to realize the benefits of this paradigm, they began to modify their classroom practice. Britton (1971) encouraged teachers with his hope that

> expressive language may be increasingly seen to play a key role in all learning (even the most subject-oriented) as well as in learning to use language; and that the educational value of spectator role activities may come to be better understood and more convincingly argued. (p. 218)

Britton (1971) believed that students need to be supported in their learning to have positive experiences and that "casting a web of language over experience is a primary act of cognitive control that learners can only fashion for themselves" (Pradl, 2004, p. 521). Teachers have been caught in the tension between understanding that language is the medium for learning and needing to be cognizant of time restraints in the school day. Britton's theory of written discourse function has contributed to my understanding of how writing is learned and taught.

Literacy as a Social Practice

The theory of literacy as a social practice (Barton, 1994; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1993) has influenced my thinking and my research. Barton examined the construct of literacy as it is used in homes, in workplaces, and in social situations. He proposed that because the social nature of people drives the use of literacy, the concepts of literacy events and literacy practices can be used to further understand our use of literacies. Barton developed a social view of literacy or the concept of literacy as a social practice that situates literacy activities:

1. Literacy is a social activity and can best be described in terms of the literacy practices which people draw upon in literacy events.
2. People have different literacies which they make use of associated with different domains of life. Examining different cultures or historical periods reveals more literacies.
3. People's literacy practices are situated in broader social relations. This makes it necessary to describe the social setting of literacy events, including the ways in which social institutions support particular literacies. (pp. 34-35)

Literacy events and literacy practices are key to understanding Barton's (1994) view. Building on the work of Hymes (1962) and Heath (1983), Barton

defined a literacy event as an occasion on which a person "attempts to comprehend or produce graphic signs, either alone or with others" (p. 36). Literacy practices are the "general cultural ways of utilizing literacy which people draw upon in a literacy event" (p. 37). For example, two young males studying a small-engine repair manual together is a literacy event. In deciding who will do what, where, when, and how, as well as in talking about diagrams and text, the two males make use of their literacy practices.

Barton (2001) explored "how people act within a textually mediated social world" (p. 95) and noted that literacy practices in the home, workplace, and community intersect and overlap. People need particular literacies and use literacy in different ways in varying environments. The situations in which individuals find themselves also impact literacy practices. Just as people appropriately adjust their language registers when they speak, they also adjust their literacy practices. An important paradigm shift occurs when educators begin to understand that literacy is more than a set of fixed abilities and that our literacy roles are embedded in institutions of power and culture (i.e., family, church, school, state, corporate).

The New London Group (1996) validated Barton's work by describing a view of mind, society, and learning that "is based on the assumption that the human mind is embodied, situated, and critical" (p. 11). They believed that human knowledge is developed as "embedded in social, cultural, and material contexts" (p. 11) and is created and used in specific cultures and communities. For adolescent students, this ranges from the school classroom to the gymnasium to

peer gatherings to their homes. The New London Group reported that because students and teachers have faced a rapidly changing social environment in the classroom and in their private lives, a new approach to teaching literacy was necessary. They devised a "theoretical overview of the connections between the changing social environment of the world and the 'what' and 'how' of literacy pedagogy" (p. 14).

Literacy pedagogy has traditionally meant teaching and learning to read and write in "page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language" (New London Group, 1996, p. 1). Historically, this pedagogy centered on language represented in print by a system of rules and phonetic letter correspondence and on writing language, but with the introduction and use of new technologies and visual texts into school literacies and home literacies, we now encounter, use, and interpret multiple kinds of literacies that are embedded in multimodal texts. The term *multimodal*, as Kress (1997) first used it, links language, literacy, oral texts, and visual images in that it refers to meaning that may be created through any or all of linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial means.

The New London Group (1996) coined the term *multiliteracies* to describe literacy in today's world. This term addresses the idea of "textual multiplicity," which includes the "multiplicity of communication channels and mass media, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity" (p. 2). The first idea suggests that meaning is made in ways that are multimodal; that is, the written method is combined with visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning. A student encounters multiliteracies online while searching for information, shopping, or

communicating. The second idea refers to our increasing exposure to cultural and linguistic diversity as mobility, immigration, and worldwide communication enables a multitude of literacy events.

The New London Group (1996) also saw teachers and students as active participants in social change and active designers of their "social futures" (p. 6). Active participants in social change have traditionally questioned values, identity, and power as part of the construction and critique of multiliteracies in texts. Literacy in the work life of people has changed as new technology has based new social relationships on collaboration and cooperation. Formal, rigid, written relationships in the workplace are being replaced with informal, oral discourse; and younger employees are frequently more adept at computer literacies than some of the career employees are. Literacy in the public life has changed from a focus on narrow definitions of the use of literacy to definitions that include space for differences in culture, language, and technology. The mass-media culture and communication and information networks have impacted private lives, and with the advent of Google and similar tools, what was once private is now becoming more public. The defining lines of our lives have become blurred. Work has moved into the private home space, and the details of personal lives are now moved into the global public space through electronic media. Learning and literacy are now being viewed in the context of participation in social activities.

Identity Through Literacy

Identity is relational. People make claims about their identity by aligning themselves or contrasting themselves with others. Who we are within our family

may differ slightly from who we are with our friends and who we are at work or at school. Gee (2001) proposed that, metaphorically speaking, we have a sort of "identity kit which comes complete with instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (p. 526). The instructions on how to play an appropriate and comfortable social role include saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations that make up a Discourse with a capital D. A Discourse incorporates words, act, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social markers such as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. Gee observed that children are enculturated or apprenticed into acquiring our primary Discourse. Our birth family, who has supposedly already acquired the primary or dominant Discourse, initially supports and scaffolds our behavior, socialization, and introduction to the cultural markers. Our dominant Discourse then is the first lens through which humans see the world. We then can acquire secondary or nondominant Discourses as we attend church, school, clubs, or workplaces. These nondominant Discourses have the potential to allow individuals to acquire social capital or goods such as money, prestige, and status. Nondominant Discourses can also give individuals a secure place within a desired social network such as a friendship circle or a club. Gee (1996) argued that Discourses are connected to "displays of identity" (p. 10). Each institution also has its Discourse that the participants must learn.

Schools, workplaces, sports teams, and clubs all have their way of being, including language, attitudes, and ways of being. These often include *social languages* that are "connected to a specific sort of social activities and to a

specific socially situated identity" (Gee, 2001, p. 718). The social languages are of utmost importance, because "to know a particular social language is either to be able to 'do' a particular identity, using that social language, or to be able to recognize such an identity, when we do not want to or cannot actively participate" (p. 718). Socialization into a Discourse helps to acquire a cultural model that defines for the participant what counts as normal and natural and what is deviant and inappropriate. The social languages and cultural models help to define a Discourse for a person. The discourses and literacies provide people with a way of knowing, of making meaning, and of 'performing identity.' Identities are created and built within the web of social interactions within family, community, and school or workplace.

Fields or settings are settings in which literacy practices take place. The two main fields are in school, in which the teachers hold much of the cultural capital, and out of school, in which the adolescents and adults in their lives collaborate to create and share the cultural capital and build social relationships. Cultural capital is in the forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person is perceived to have, which, in turn, gives them a higher status in the family, in the community, and in the school. Social capital is created by purposeful actions, utilizing literacy practices with and for others. The use of literacies has assisted in shaping identities and developing shared interests with friends. Assorted literacy materials are used as social currency to maintain social connections and strengthen identities. Narrative-writing stories; cell-phone

texting; computer-class assignments; magazines, both commercial and advertising material; and photographic images are social currency.

  An emerging idea from the New Literacy Studies asks researchers to think of literacy as a social practice (Street, 2003). The concept of literacy as a social practice must be differentiated from the concept of literacy as a set of skills and a body of knowledge to be imparted to others or the acquisition of the technical skills of reading and writing. Either thought suggests power relations, a dominant literacy, and who is marginalized. In recent times the concept of literacy as a set of skills and a body of knowledge to be imparted can be more fully understood in places where European and or Western conceptions of literacy have been imposed on and intruded into other cultures. Literacy as a social practice is about 'knowledge' that addresses the ways of knowing reading and writing and of identity and of being in this world. The concept of literacy as a social practice offers a more culturally sensitive and responsive view because literacy practices vary and change from one context to another. Social practices are shaped by the context of work, school, home life, and social relations. Literacy as a social practice invites researchers to be attentive to text, power, and the identity of the users. Street argued that literacy is more complex than the literacy found in school curricula, which often reduces literacy to a set of sequential, mechanistic skills that do not recognize the richness and multiplicity of literacy practices in people's lives. Street also asked us to pay attention to the space of literacy practice; in particular, the school, home, work, and social worlds of literacy; the identities of the individuals; and the artifacts that the individuals use. The everyday meanings

and uses of literacy in specific cultural contexts define the concept of literacy as a social practice. Street attended closely to the issues of power when he posed the following questions: "What are the power relations among the participants? What are the resources? Where are people going if they take on one literacy rather than another? How do recipients challenge the dominant conceptions of literacy?" (Street, 2005, p. 418).

My theoretical framework is based on my worldview of social constructivism: that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed with others within a contextual environment. My experiences as an educator have validated the idea that language, both oral and written, provides the tools that students use to learn and construct knowledge about themselves and their worlds. Language enables students to represent their thoughts in social interactions with peers and with more knowledgeable others who care about and for them. Language also is an important tool in providing the base for written discourse both in school and out of school. The easy availability of electronic devices has moved much communication into electronic modes.

Social constructivism, sociocultural theory, experiential education, the theory of written discourse, and literacy as a social practice worked together to inform the study and support my analysis. Social constructivist thinking that centers on the idea that knowledge is mediated in social interactions with others values the voices of students and the importance of creating knowledge with others. The metanarratives of rural farm male adolescents were challenged and informed as I moved through my study with the students. The literate worlds in

which these students lived, including both in school and out of school, and the

social media in which these students were beginning to participate out of school

were be understood more fully. It is from these perspectives that I constructed my

study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There is concern in North America, Britain, and Australia about boys' performance in literacy achievement. By using alarmist headlines and reporting selective data, multiple media have suggested that a literacy crisis exists in the schools and societies. Educators and parents have felt increased anxiety about boys' underachievement in reading and writing tests. Why boys are seemingly now underachieving seems to be the question that has risen out of this panic. I will briefly review the performance of school boys in England from the 17th century to the 20th century and then localize the review to Canada and Saskatchewan in the 19th and 20th centuries. I will describe how the meaning and construction of the concept literacy has evolved through time moving from being thought of as a technical skill to considering literary as a social practice. I explore the concepts of gender, masculinity, and hegemonic masculinity as they relate to school and education. I name three possibilities as described by researchers for boys' underachievement in school. Lastly, I will explore the literature that pertains to boys and their writing performance in school and how some boys use school writing as a way to create their social identity and social position within the classroom.

Historical Perspectives

As early as the 17th century, John Locke (as cited in Cohen, 1998) noted "young men's failure to master Latin" (p. 21) and young girls' mastering of French "just by 'pratling' [*sic*] it with their governesses" (p. 21). In the 18th

century, John Bennett (as cited in Cohen, 1998) contended that "qualities such as vivacity and quickness are distinctive evidence of the inferiority of the female mind" (p. 25) and that the belief that because "boys were thoughtful and deep, they appeared slow" (p. 25) marked them as actually having potential for the future. Males' and females' social and economic roles of the times differed somewhat according to their class in society from those of today.

Cohen (1998) suggested that research from the 1800s indicated that if boys achieved well in academic pursuits, it was because of their innate intellect. However, if boys did not achieve well, external factors such as "pedagogy, methods, texts, [or] teachers" (p. 20) could be blamed. It is interesting to note that if girls failed, it was thought to be because their innate intelligence rendered them unfit to keep up with the curriculum demands.

Cohen (1998) elaborated on the concept of overstrain, which figured predominantly in the late 19th century based on the idea that a person has a finite amount of energy. Even then, girls achieved higher results in the mathematics exams of the time. There was concern that "woman's eager nature to work too hard and greater consciousness during adolescence led her to take too much out of herself when she is being educated" (p. 27). It was felt that girls were subject to overstrain because of their industriousness and conscientious and that "a girl broods over her tasks and reproaches herself for her imperfections" (p. 27). However, boys seemed not to be subject to overstrain because "it was well known that most boys, especially at the period of adolescence, have a habit of 'healthy

idleness'" (p. 27). Thus, it was thought an index of a boy's mental health was his underachievement in school tasks.

Rural education in Canada and Saskatchewan developed in similar fashion through the 19th and 20th centuries. The history of schooling in Saskatchewan was fraught with tensions of political agendas. As early as the 1820s the Hudson's Bay Company encouraged missionaries to establish schools primarily for Aboriginal children. These missionaries were "agents of European civilization" (Littlejohn, 2006, p. 65) and used evangelism and schooling to further the cultural assimilation agenda of the fur-trading company.

A great deal of legislative activity occurred between 1875 and 1905. Schools were given local governance and administration authority; however, responsibility for courses of study and curriculum was the mandate of the territorial and later of the provincial departments. The curriculum was to remain "nondenominational Christian and the language of instruction English" (Scharf, 2006, p. 7). With large numbers of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe rapidly populating the isolated agricultural regions of the province at the beginning of the 20th century, the centralized school system "perceived [the] need to assimilate the large number of non-English speaking immigrants who settled in western Canada" (pp. 6-7). Woven through the history of Saskatchewan were underlying political agendas related to Aboriginal and Métis education, French-language instruction, and Christian separate schools. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 and the corresponding rise in Canadian nationalism continued the

pressure to assimilate prairie school children into the English, nondenominational public school system in Saskatchewan.

Access to schooling depended on the availability of qualified teachers, geographical proximity to schools, religious affiliation, and the student's need to assist in the family's survival. Urbanization and the need for workers in factories, along with the two World Wars, emphasized the need for Canadian children's access to school in the 20th century. Issues that arose included intelligence testing, the working-class-male disadvantage, the female advantage, and, finally, the male disadvantage (Cohen, 1998).

Today, the paradigm of achievement by gender varies by socioeconomic status and parental support. Some students still view academic success as effortless achievement, and others, as a product of hard work and effort. I will now review the meanings of literacy throughout Western history and how they have evolved.

Literacy Framework

The word *literacy* originated from the Latin words *litteratus < littera*, meaning "letter." Multiple meanings for literacy have emerged through the years. People have been confused over the meaning of *literacy* and they have struggled to define it. Literacy is a phenomenon that has carried powerful social and cultural connotations and contexts for both the reader and the writer. It has multiple histories and multiple definitions. Willis (1997) identified three broad aspects of literacy in Western thinking: "literacy as a skill; literacy-as-school knowledge; and literacy as a social and cultural construct" (p. 388).

First, literacy as a skill has evoked simple definitions. Willis (1997) noted, "Literacy as the ability to read and write is, perhaps, the most common definition of literacy" (p. 388). The ability to read and to make marks on paper suggest that literacy is a set of specific, context-free skills. One problem with this simple definition is the failure to connect the skills of literacy to the "social and cultural contexts that influence people's access to literacy" (p. 388). Historically, reigning groups worked to restrict access to literacy by taking a multitiered approach to education. School was available to the children of wealthy urban families, whereas rural, working-class families found that at times access to literacy was restricted by gender, race, ethnicity, language, and geographical location. Literacy was therefore used as a way to socially control poorer and marginalized people.

Second, literacy as school knowledge was framed by definitions of reading and writing: Fluent oral reading indicated comprehension and fine penmanship, and good grammar indicated good writing. Efforts to measure literacy achievement through intelligence testing and standardized testing have suggested that literacy is a set of cognitive skills that can be measured and interpreted. However, literacy-as-school-knowledge is biased toward particular "ways of knowing, learning styles, and communication patterns" (Willis, 1997, p. 391). The testing, unfortunately, did not acknowledge any ideological, cultural, social, linguistic, and economic contexts. Literacy-as-school-knowledge has been used to privilege some groups and disadvantage others. Currently, the multiplicity of students' experiences in classrooms because of immigration and class structure has became an issue that needs to be addressed. Educators and curriculum writers

have begun to acknowledge, respect, and create curriculum spaces for this multiplicity and inclusion of prior knowledge that children take to the classroom.

Third, literacy has recently begun to be viewed as a social and cultural construct. Since the late 1960s, educators have begun to think seriously about a definition of literacy that includes the influences of social and cultural contexts. The voices of Freire and Giroux have helped me to understand this thinking. Paulo Freire (1970) wrote that literacy is "a strategy of liberation [that] teaches people to read not only the word but also the world" (p. 141). In this context, literacy has been used to gain knowledge and access to power, to attain citizenship, and to fight oppression. Giroux (1993) proposed that literacy is neither a skill nor a knowledge but, rather, "an emerging act of consciousness and resistance" (p. 392).

The changes in thinking about literacy education have occurred as we have evolved from the behaviorist concept or the banking model of education to the social constructivist model of education in some parts of North America. But the concept of literacy has been slow to change in today's schools. Previously, the concept of literacy was driven by political, cultural, racial, gender, geographical, and economic forces. The influence of education as a commercial commodity, the globalization of the media, and communication technologies have resulted in and are driving new ways of looking at literacy. Shifting paradigms in the functions of literacy have impacted how boys and girls respond to the demands of the school.

A fourth definition of literacy, informed by the new millennium and the new literacies in the global context, has emerged. Electronic and digital literacies

have added another dimension to the social lives of students. As digital literacies have increased in scope and function, schools and teachers have found themselves being left behind because students' knowledge has led the way. Fearing that the gap between what schools expect and what students actually know is widening, Luke (2003) asserted that

> we need a critical approach to literacy education that is about engaging with texts and discourses as a means of bridging space and time, critically understanding and altering the connections between the local and the global, moving between cultures and communities, and developing transnational understandings and collaborations. (p. 22)

Historically, schools have been constructed to make students receivers of knowledge. However, students are currently participants in "social practices in which texts [i.e., meaningful stretches of language] are constructed, transmitted, received, modified, shared and otherwise engaged, within processes employing codes which are digitized electronically, primarily by computers" (Rowan, Knobel, Bigum, & Lankshear, 2002, p. 87). The primary function of digital literacies for young people has changed from learning literacy in school to participating in the "social practices that shape and are shaped by them [digital literacies]" (p. 88).

Literacy has multiple histories, multiple definitions, and multiple paths. Luke (1999) contended that "the capacity to handle, manipulate, control, and work with text and discourses—in print, verbal, visual, and multimedia forms—is increasingly replacing the capacity to work with our hands as our primary mode of production" (p. 213). Educators, parents, and students need to question current curricula and classroom practices to ensure that literacy practices become and

remain relevant to students. I will now discuss the concepts of gender, masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, and the development of a metanarrative as they pertain to school.

Gender Framework

Gender has not been well defined and therefore has not been well understood. Gender refers to a set of qualities and behaviors associated with females or males. Gender roles, learned and affected by factors such as culture, education, ethnicity, class, and economics, vary widely within and among cultures.

A discussion of gender is necessary in an expanded view of literacy. Social scientists have agreed that gender, a category of identity, is a socially constructed concept. Social and cultural forces have created, maintained, transformed, invented, and reworked the construction of gender. Thorne (1999) stated that "the social construction of gender is an active and ongoing process" (p. 4), and Skelton (2001) agreed that "gender identity is not 'fixed' but changes across sites, time, culture" (p. 22). Although one's sex is a biological determination, one's gender involves an understanding of how one performs the role of a boy or a girl and the appropriate practices (Connell, 1996; Pirie, 2002; Rowan et al., 2002).

Thorne (1999), Rowan et al., (2002), and Peterson (2001) have shown that we "do gender" (Thorne, 1999, p. 5) in everyday life: "Gendered behaviors are learned, . . . a social product" (Rowan et al., 2002, p. 44); and "Gender is a quality that is learned and then reaffirmed through the public performance of

those behaviors and speech patterns that are accepted as masculine or feminine"
(Peterson, 2001, p. 452). Blair (2000) demonstrated that the genderlects in one
classroom were "a very important part of establishing identity and . . . central to
the relations of power" (p. 317) as well as "a very important part of 'doing
gender'" (p. 321). When children play at recess in same-sex groups and work in
class in mixed-sex-groups, the importance of gender increases and diminishes.
Adults remind children of their gender by grouping them by gender and
cautioning them about ways to behave, talk, and think. Gender is not something
that one passively 'is' or 'has'; we "do gender" (Thorne, 1999, p. 5) every minute
of every day as we participate in our social and work activities.

No one singular definition of masculinity exists in the world today.
Concepts of masculinity have changed historically and depend on culture and
social context. Boys and men are shaped and conditioned by the society in which
they live as they play out their gender roles. Weaver-Hightower (2003) stated that
"individuals and social groups create and adapt versions of masculinity for their
own uses within their own cultural frames" (p. 480). The concept of masculinity
has been dynamic, fluid, and shifting in response to multiple factors. Connell
(1996) reminded researchers that masculinity is not a biological entity that exists
prior to society; rather, "masculinities are ways that societies interpret and employ
male bodies" (p. 211).

Connell (1996), an Australian sociologist who coined the term *hegemonic
masculinity*, described it as "the form of masculinity that is culturally dominant in
a given setting" (p. 209). Gilbert and Gilbert (1998), Martino (2001), Smith and

Wilhelm (2002), and Pirie (2002) explored the term; Pirie noted that hegemonic masculinity is of particular concern to a certain location and that it is "a standard against which other forms of masculinity have to be measured" (p. 15). Schools have been considered agents in the making of masculinities because it is in schools that visible "intersecting of relationships" (Connell, 1996, p. 214) occurs through the relationships of power, division of labor, patterns of emotion, and symbolization. Power relations in terms of authority and supervision, and dominance and control have been and are observable in the media, in society, and in schools. The academic curriculum contains subject knowledge perceived as male, such as mathematics, the sciences, and industrial arts; or as female, such as the humanities, the arts, and home economics. Uniforms and dress codes mark gender, as does the designation of areas of the school as either male or female. Gymnasiums and science and computer labs are perceived as being masculine areas, whereas fine arts rooms and hallway seating niches are considered feminine areas. Connell claimed that hegemonic masculinity needs only to be the most "highly visible" (p. 209) to have power and influence and assert privilege over other forms of masculinity and over women.

Researchers, including Gilbert and Gilbert (1998), Alloway and Gilbert (1997), and Mac An Ghaill (1994), believed that boys have suffered from definitions of masculinity that are, according to Smith and Wilhelm (2002), "hegemonic, culturally embedded and harmful to both boys and girls" (p. 9). Hegemonic forms have served to claim privilege over women and marginalize some boys who enact masculinity differently because of race, sexuality, or

socioeconomic status. Hegemonic masculinity impedes some boys' progress in academic pursuits when "patterns of dominance, harassment and control over resources" (Connell, 1996, p. 213) create fear and paralysis in the hearts and minds of those boys.

Metanarratives

A metanarrative is a culturally shaped construction of a story that helps people to understand how the world works. It is the 'story' that we compose and revise in our minds and in conjunction with others of our personal and social knowledge of our lives to make sense of the world in which we live. However, although metanarratives help us to make sense of our world, they can also perpetuate misunderstandings and misinformation about our world. Postmodernist thought has challenged metanarratives, and theorists have argued for a multiplicity of theoretical standpoints to replace metanarratives by focusing on specific local contexts as well as the diversity of human experience. Metanarratives usually do not include marginalized voices or minority voices. The voices of rural farm male adolescents have not been a part of the stories of Canada except in local contexts and their voices may have been marginalized by the voices of male adolescents in urban settings.

Metanarratives are "conceptual maps that locate us, or give us a sense of location and hence orientation" (Hruby, 2001, p. 60). These narratives are sometimes referred to as *master* or *grand* narratives, stories about stories, all-encompassing stories, classic texts, or archetypal accounts of historical records. They can also be frameworks upon which individuals can order their own

experiences and thoughts. These narratives may be stories that legitimize versions of the 'truth' and may sometimes embody unacceptable views of historical development in terms of progress to a specific goal or specific belief. Metanarratives are ways of thinking that dismiss the naturally existing chaos and disorder of the universe or ignore the variety of human existence. The notion of masculinity, or what it means to be a male, is a metanarrative in many cultures.

The academic literature has suggested that boys experience tensions in their literacy lives at school. I have chosen three explanations for these perceived tensions. As well, I will review the concept of *flow* and how it informs boys' literacy practices.

Tensions in the Literacy School Life of Boys

It must be noted that there are patterns to the variations in boys' performance in school. Boys who have done well in the school system have received significant emotional support from their families, have had a positive male role model in their lives, and have attended schools characterized by "emotionally and physically safe learning environments" (McGivney, 2004, p. 47). In a Canadian family literacy study, Phillips, Hayden, and Norris (2006) found that "children of parents with higher educational levels have higher literacy levels and much of the benefit comes with high school completion" (p. 124). Statistically, boys have been described as victims of the school system; but later in life, men appear to succeed in the world of work. Men have contributed to their workplace advantage by earning more university degrees, higher salaries, fewer career interruptions, and more promotions than their female counterparts have.

However, some boys have fared poorly within the school setting. That boys' problems within and without the school setting have affected their achievement levels cannot be ignored. Social problems within the school, including being bullied and being labeled by the education system as having learning problems, have contributed to their failures. The literature suggested at least three possible reasons for boys' underachievement in school situations: (a) their view of schools as feminine (b) the Eurocentric choice of fiction texts, and (c) the school's rejection of preferred male reading and writing topics.

School as Feminine

Newkirk (2002) believed that one of the reasons that boys do poorly is that they view school—in particular, the study of reading and writing—as feminine. Young children usually see their mothers, female relatives, and female teachers reading books, whereas they observe their fathers reading newspapers and machinery manuals. "Studies of family literacy show conclusively that reading, particularly book reading, is predominantly a female activity . . . . So while reading in all forms is not perceived as feminized, the type of reading typically favored in schools clearly is" (p. 42). Because hegemonic versions of masculinity "usually define themselves as being not female" (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, p. 12), boys have rejected literacy as practiced through reading and writing. Martino and Palotta-Chiarolli (2003), Cherland (1994), Millard (1997), and Alloway and Gilbert (1998) suggested that boys observe literacy as a passive and private act. Martino and Palotta-Chiarolli clarified this statement:

> Boys' involvement in reading is limited by a gender regime in which masculinity and femininity are defined as opposites understood in terms of the following dualisms—active/passive, public/private, and outside/inside. They construct reading as a passive activity which is set in opposition to other practices such as sport [or video games] which they consider to be more appropriate or enjoyable. (p. 242)

Literacy classes may also create male resistance to learning and participation. The focus of study in these classes has been "narrative, emotional response, expressivity, and creativity; . . . and [these classes] are, perhaps, importantly, most often taught by females" (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, p. 16). Some researchers have used this belief to explain why boys are reluctant to participate in literacy classes by responding to readings or talking about their feelings.

An examination of the ways in which reading and writing are taught would provide educators with more information to effectively include the males who cannot become interested and involved in current school literacy practices. Martino and Palotta-Chiarolli (2003) suggested that "attempts need to be made in the English classroom to interrogate gender regimes and provide boys with an opportunity to critically evaluate the effects and impact of masculinities in their own lives and in the lives of others" (p. 242).

It is interesting that the North American concept of school originated as a masculine practice. The first school teachers were predominantly male, and the first students were male children from the privileged classes. Young boys were taught literacy in the form of reading, writing, and mathematics. Later on, schooling for girls included music, deportment, and artistic endeavors. Females soon became predominant as classroom teachers, and males assumed supervisory

positions. Although more females are assuming positions of authority, males have still figured predominantly in the power structures of present-day schools. The traditional male concept of confrontational discipline and punishment existed in many schools in the 20th century; however, schools are now implementing a variety of awareness programs to minimize this problem.

Choice of Text

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) reminded readers that "what it means to be literate has changed considerably over time" (p. 17). In mid 19th-century England, working-class people saw literacy as a way to improve working conditions and achieve political power. The upper class, fearful of the power and knowledge that the working class was acquiring, established compulsory public schools and directed that the school literacy curriculum include the study of English narrative literature. This subverted the working people's desire to learn to read for functional purposes and perform basic mathematics calculations.

The use of Eurocentric narrative fiction has remained the basis of the senior English language arts (ELA) courses in many educational jurisdictions in North America today. The curricula have remained steadfast in upholding the status quo of this literature and are very slow in acknowledging other forms and origins of literacy. Narrative texts become "canonized in part because they are difficult. Densely textured works invite nuanced interpretations" (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004, p. 458), which many students of both genders find difficult. Smith and Wilhelm cautioned:

>They [data] cause us to wonder why so many texts are used that are difficult for students in terms of the distance from their reading experience, lived experience, and from the potential for use through thinking, being, and acting. Our data cause us to wonder why the literature taught in schools is not complemented more often by popular cultural texts over which students feel more authority. (p. 460)

Added to this is the need to broaden cultural and diverse perspectives in a diverse world. Exposure to and involvement in literature that promotes diverse cultural perspectives would invite more discussion and be more relevant to both girls and boys in an increasingly global society. One of the problems with boys' reading and writing is that they are "rejecting particular kinds of literacy practices and those literary texts that are officially sanctioned within schools" (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997, p. 55). The boys whom Smith and Wilhelm (2004) studied condemned the literacy activities in school as "schoolish and insufficiently social behaviour" (p. 78). Perhaps this indicates a disconnect between the lives and literacy needs of students and the demands of present-day curricula. Today researchers, educators, teachers, parents, and students are aware of the perceived mismatch between boys' digital literacies out of school and the narrative fiction literacies that they are expected to learn in school. In their urban Canadian study Blair and Sanford (2008) demonstrated boys' active pursuit of digital texts. Little has changed with regard to the connection between the real-life world of present-day students and the real world of the classroom over several hundred years. The occasions for reading and writing and the conditions under which particular texts are used appear to be the issues here.

Martino (1998) and Mac an Ghaill (1994) concluded that boys reject literacy because it is a feminized practice. However, Smith and Wilhelm (2004)

observed that American boys reject literacy because "it is 'schoolish'" (p. 460).

Smith and Wilhelm noted that, in contrast,

> home literacies were characterized by the boys' use of texts that were appropriately challenging in ways that extended their competence in actual use; school literacy was characterized by the boys as "encountering texts that they found too difficult for reasons that remained obscure to them." (p. 460)

Rejection of Male Interests

Teachers have continued to use Eurocentric narrative fiction and to value writing about such literature that noted educators have considered "not only intellectually superior to other forms of literacy but also *morally* superior" (Williams, 2004, p. 512). Peterson (2004) and Newkirk (2002) suggested that schools have continued to prize narrow genres of writing and that girls more easily do the type of writing valued in today's curricula that focuses on relationships between people, character development, and emotional responses. In contrast, boys' writing themes include conflict, war, humor, fantasy, absurdity, and escapism. Some teachers have banned the topics that boys favor in the hope that they will begin to produce writing that focuses more on people and character development. Newkirk elaborated on this point:

> The decision (if it is a conscious decision) to exclude these forms of reading and writing is based on a number of deeply held beliefs: that there is a contemporary crisis of declining moral value and academic standards; that the influence of popular culture is a cause as well as a symptom of this decline; and that the intrusion of this culture into the classroom would be wasteful and maybe even dangerous. (pp. xvi-xvii)

Anderson, Labbo, and Martinez-Roldan (2003) wondered whether "banning writing topics that are most appealing to boys will promulgate the idea

that writing is for girls" (p. 224). At the very least, it paralyzes the desire of boys

to write. A closer look at male writing has uncovered that fact that "the features of

writing that are found in boys' writing are not found in school writing assessment

rubrics so boys' writing may not count as real writing in school" (Peterson, 2004,

p. 34). Boys' writing, as evidenced time and time again, includes text that

> demonstrate[s] the quick, cinematic pace of an action movie or cartoon,
> emphasize[s] the exaggerated and absurd with some slapstick and sound
> effects tossed in for audience appeal and, show[s] loyalties to popular
> youth culture to affirm the writer's membership within youth culture.
> (p. 34)

Well-planned and well-structured learning environments and lessons

foster the creation of spaces such as writing workshops that encourage both boys

and girls to feel more competent about their writing and to be able to practice the

craft of writing.

Flow and Out-of-School Literacies

Boys who seem uninterested or do poorly in school literacies may engage

in literacy practices outside of the school that are not recognized in "the context of

institutional school literacy" (Williams, 2004, p. 512). Magazines, comics,

collector cards, and vehicle or machinery manuals have not been counted as real

reading materials for school purposes. There is a disconnect, as well, with writing

activities. Few situations in real life call for the writing of persuasive, descriptive,

or expository essays. Newkirk (2002) argued:

> By defining, teaching, and evaluating literacy in narrow ways—even
> under the banner of 'choice' and a student-centered curriculum—we have
> failed to support, or even allow, in our literacy programs the tastes, values,
> and learning styles of many boys. More specifically, we have discouraged,
> devalued, or even prohibited the genres of reading and writing that are

most popular with many boys, stories that include violence, parody, and bodily humor. (p. xvi)

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) referred to the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), a psychologist who researched the concept of *flow*, which he described as "the joy, creativity, the process of total involvement with life" (p. xi), in his discussion of the need to make writing situations authentic for students. Flow is "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (p. 4). Boys use the four conditions of flow—"a sense of control and competence, an appropriate challenge, clear goals and feedback, and a focus on the immediate" (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, p. 53)—to describe their literacy experiences outside of school. The authors studied boys' reading outside of school and described it as being "personally purposeful, taking place in a real context, with assistance provided by others to meet a shared goal, with the learning being applied immediately in that context" (p. 84).

Blair and Sanford (2004) applied the concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. xi) to boys' school literacy practices. This concept appears to be the foundation for school boys' active engagement in literacy practices. Blair and Sanford based their research on Alloway and Gilbert's (1997) premise that what it means to be literate is constantly being negotiated as people become increasingly affected by technological and informational change. These authors assumed that boys resist many school-based practices by transforming assigned literacy work into what Blair and Sanford described as "something more personally fun, engaging, meaningful, humorous, active, and purposeful" (p. 453). This idea coincides with Csikszentmihalyi's ideas about flow.

In their study of boys' practices and behaviors with respect to literacy in the classroom, in hallways, and on the playground, Blair and Sanford (2004) found that the boys were "morphing" (p. 452) their literacy practices. The boys were adapting and reshaping their literacy practices by using characters from their out-of-school literacies to match their writing interests, by livening up the activity, by changing and converting their teachers' instructions, and by including elements of humor and satire in their writing. Blair and Sanford explored and defined boys' morphing as transforming time to work on aspects of school literacies that appeal to them, transforming the purpose of the assignment to suit their interests, and transforming literacy events into social capital (p. 454).

Blair and Sanford (2004) also suggested that the literacy classroom has numerous implications. The connections between out-of-school and in-school literacies need to be developed and capitalized upon. Alternative texts and literacies can then be adapted more readily and meaningfully for the classroom. The complexity of the texts in which boys engage out of school also needs to be recognized. These authors suggested that the literacy practices in which boys are currently engaging on their own may be more valuable to them in their future workplace than are the literacy practices in which teachers expect them to engage now in the school setting and that it is time to reconsider the school literacies in light of a changing world.

In a study of young surgeons, Rosser, J. C., Jr., Lynch, P. J., Cuddihy, L., Gentile, D. A., Klonsky, J., & Merrell, R. (2007) concluded that "video game skill correlates with laparoscopic surgical skills" (p. 181). The young doctors who

played video games demonstrated increased dexterity and accuracy with laparoscopy tools. This suggests that there may be advantages to some of the digital gaming and literacy practices. As educators, we need to present more opportunities for awareness, analysis, and action with regard to issues of gender. We need to prepare teachers to read their classrooms with gendered lenses, and we need to encourage students to see the multiplicities of perspective.

I now turn to a discussion of boys' school writing and how their writing has caused much frustration for everyone concerned.

Writing and Boys

Standardized tests indicate boys' consistent underachievement, particularly in the written portions. Classroom teachers have expressed frustration over what and how boys write. Recently, researchers (Blair & Sanford, 2004; Finders, 1997; Peterson, 2001; Williams, 2004) have arrived at three explanations for boys' writing: gender and socialization, the production of sociocultural capital, and underlife.

Gender and Socialization

Peterson (2001) and Williams (2004) noted that children and adolescents write purposefully, the objectives of which may not be instantly visible to an adult's casual glance. Cultural home life, social relationships, and popular media have shaped students' writing. According to Peterson, "The very language that writers use to write their narratives is laced with cultural meanings, as it reflects the social contexts within which those writers have participated and their ways of seeing the world learned through that participation" (p. 452). Dyson's (1989)

research with primary children revealed similar narratives that reflected the

children's culture and argued that their writing involved the intersection of their

multiple worlds. Bakhtin (1981) termed this writing, which represents the use of a

child's various language systems, *heteroglossic* (p. 293)—a diversity of voices

and styles. Language use in the home, the community, and the school may have a

different discourse depending on purpose and audience, and heteroglossic writing

will emerge in a student's writing.

Multiple researchers, including Williams (2004), Newkirk (2002),

Peterson (2001), and Blair (1998), noted gender differences in topics, themes, and

forms in boys' and girls' writing. In their study of primary elementary school

children, Gilbert and Rowe (1989) reported that "girls write fairy tales and animal

stories and boys write episodic visual style narratives" (p. 78), and Peterson

observed in middle-years students that, "in addition, teachers and researchers

noted that the topics of girls' writing involved relationships within their

immediate experience, and boys' writing topics involved activities beyond their

lived experience" (p. 451). Furthermore,

> the students explained that girls usually wrote about friends, family, pets,
> and personal experiences such as going to the mall, taking dance lessons,
> and breaking a leg by falling out of a tree, whereas boys usually wrote
> about sports, space, mythical creatures, adventure, and animals. (p. 453)

Williams (2004) stated, "I am consistently intrigued by the ways that culture, this

time in the form of gender identity and socialization, influences how children

engage in literacy practices" (pp. 511-512).

Blair (1998) suggested that, as children become adolescents, they write the

realities of their lives into their school literacy work. In her study of middle-years

girls in an urban neighborhood, she observed that "the multiple realities of their lives as girls, . . . as young women in a working-class neighborhood and the media experiences of their times were reflected in their texts" (p. 17). Blair realized that the young writers' choices of topics, which reflected gendered voices and covered issues in the home and beyond the home and school, did not fit the previous frameworks for younger girls. The young girls' "writing included everything from philosophical discussions (about death and loss) to extreme acts of violence (physical assault, suicide)" (p. 14), in addition to the expected topics of personal relationships and experiences. These girls were writing to make sense of their lives and to explore their gendered positions in life at home and at school. The classroom was a safe space for them to explore their gender and cultural socialization through their classroom writing.

Boys' writing about violence has not been accepted as appropriate, and their writing about action, violence, death, and destruction has often caused concern for teachers. Historically, one role of schools has to been to socialize and acculturate students to help them to become good citizens. Newkirk (2002) expressed the concern that "when violence is banned in boys' writing, the argument, though rarely spelled out, is that the representation of violence (even when fictional) causes more violence" (p. 15). Adults have been fearful that males will not be able to distinguish between violence in their composed stories and violence in real life. There appears to be a double standard in that females are allowed to write about socially sensitive issues, but boys are perceived as not being able to control their actions. It is possible that boys are writing in a

gendered way to reflect the composition of their gendered identities. Classroom teachers, administrators, and curriculum writers have not had the opportunity to engage in dialogue on this issue.

Sociocultural Capital

Blair and Sanford (2004) proposed that children write in specific ways to provide themselves with "socio-cultural capital" (p. 457). Sociocultural capital is any form of knowledge, skill, education, or any other advantages that give people higher status in their community. Each classroom and school playground consists of a social community (Blair & Sanford, 2004; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Williams, 2004). The children live within a social hierarchy and thus need to locate and secure their place and their social relationships in these worlds. In the classroom, Pollack (1998) pointed out, "boys tend to show love for others through action rather than words. It is not coincidental that the names of the heroes in the story are also the names of the author's classroom friends" (p. 227). Blair and Sanford also noted that the boys in their study used what they had learned in school and were "shaping it for their own purposes, fulfilling their need to position themselves in the world and support relationships with their peers" (p. 454).

Boys' narratives have been read as endorsing individualism, aggression, and the violent resolution of disputes. Yet the writing of these 'violent' stories may have involved "playful collaboration among clusters of friends; Dyson called this camaraderie the 'social work' of literacy" (Newkirk, 2002, p. 18). Williams (2004) also observed that "another appeal of action-oriented literacy practices for

boys is the way they can use them to make social connections" (p. 513). Thus, they have enhanced and maintained their image among their classmates as well as their social friendships in the classroom and on the playground.

Underlife

Finders (1997) identified two literacy systems that operate in a junior high classroom of adolescent girls:

> sanctioned literacies (those literacies that are recognized, circulated, and sanctioned by adults in authority) and . . . the literate underlife (those practices that refuse in some way to accept the official view, practices designed and enacted to challenge and disrupt the official expectations). (p. 24)

Note writing and paper-airplane construction are two examples. Finders termed this the *underlife* of the students and suggested that it serves a particular need. In her study of four females in a Midwestern school in the United States, she found that the "literate underlife, those literate practices that occur away from and in resistance to the institution of schooling, became a useful tool to mark status and document one as an insider in this group" (p. 55). Belonging to a particular social group was important for these girls' social identity and social interactions.

More recently, e-mail, MSN chat, text messaging, and blogging are electronic forms of underlife that have evolved. Adolescents come to school with backpacks containing iPods, cell phones, personal DVD players, video games, and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* cards. Blair and Sanford (2004) believed that the literate underlife gives boys opportunities to "find personal interest, action, success, fun, and purpose . . . [and] to find personal meaning" (p. 454). Out-of-school literacies, or

the literate underlife, give boys satisfaction and immediate fulfillment, which does not happen with school-sanctioned literacies.

Attempts to understand the school achievements of boys in Western European and North American history have been filled with frustration. The meaning of literacy has evolved over the last four centuries. Socioeconomic conditions have changed as the knowledge, technology, and service careers subsume agriculture in importance. Boys' academic achievements, both their strengths and deficits, have been the subject of extensive literature investigations. Digital literacies now cast their web over the world of work and play. Questions such as the literacy practices that are important now, how we approach them, and what success for both boys and girls looks like are relevant. As we move into the 21st century, these discussions must continue.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The focus of my research was on what it means for Western Canadian rural farm boys to be 'literate' in today's world and how they understand and practice multiple literacies in their everyday lives. I began with the following questions:

1. What does it mean for rural farm male adolescents to be literate in today's world?

2. How do these boys participate in school literacy events?

3. How do these boys practice literacy out of school?

4. What are the personal literacy practices in which they engage for pleasure, for communication, for education, and for entertainment?

Introduction

Because I wanted to study and learn about the literacy practices of rural male adolescents, my primary research site was a school, but I also knew that I would need to focus on the boys' literacy practices outside the classroom. Researchers have paid some attention to other groups of boys in Canada (e.g., urban boys, boys in poverty, Aboriginal boys, boys who speak English as a second language) as they have become interested in them, but my interest was rural boys. Because of shifts in the economics of the agricultural industry, the economic attraction of jobs in the resource industry, and the increased importance of knowledge as capital, a study of the literacies of rural adolescent males is very important, and I wanted to focus on the contexts of literacy and the nature of

learning of which rural boys are a part. In this chapter I outline my research design and my stance as a researcher, supply the methodological details of my study, and discuss the ethical concerns and the limitations of the study.

Research Design

Creswell (2005) defined research designs as procedures for collecting, analyzing, and reporting research in quantitative and qualitative research (p. 597). Creswell's research design applies to either of the two larger fields of research. However, the definition implies a clinical aspect that does not take into account the space that is necessary for human emotion and human sensitivity. My knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research helped me to choose a qualitative research design that I felt would best fit with my idea of care for young students and of research that I felt would be most suitable for my learning and working paradigm. I also believed that a qualitative research design would best help me to answer my research questions. Creswell stated that an ethnographic design includes a qualitative procedure for describing, analyzing, and interpreting a cultural group's shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop over time. The term *ethnography* literally means "writing about people." My choice of an ethnographic design meant that I would be able to better understand the literacies of the young adolescent boys over time in their classrooms, schools, community spaces, and homes from the perspectives of these boys.

I chose to employ an ethnographic research framework for my study to allow me to focus on the literacy activities of the culture of rural farm boys. Of utmost importance to this statement is the word *culture*, which is "everything

having to do with human behavior and belief" (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tech, 1993, p. 5). I knew that I might not be able to access *everything* that my research subjects would read and write, but I was confident that I would be able to engage in a thorough examination of most of their literacy practices. Additionally, an ethnographic study "uncovers and describes beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure the behavior of a group" (Merriam, 1998, p. 13). I wanted to look beyond the actual literacy artifacts in the lives of these young men and engage in thoughtful conversation with them about their perceptions of their literate worlds. In my study I addressed some or all of the following: "beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, emotions, verbal and nonverbal means of communication, social networks, behaviors of the group of individuals with friends, family and associates" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 4), as well as the use of technology, the creation of artifacts, and the "patterned use of space and time" (p. 4) in the lives of the boys. Ethnography "is a particularly human endeavor; unlike other approaches to research, the *researcher* is the primary tool for collecting primary data" (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999, p. xvi). Ethnography allowed me to have extended one-on-one and small-group interactions with the rural boys to discover and explore rich opportunities to describe their literacies. To understand the patterns, I spent considerable time in the field observing, interviewing, conversing, and gathering documents.

My research study is an ethnographic case study that focused on developing an in-depth understanding of several individuals to understand the phenomenon of the literacy practices of rural male adolescents. According to

Creswell (2005), a case study may be the study "of an individual or several individuals" (p. 450). Six students formed my case study. The case or bounded system was set within the students' and my shared cultural perspective (Creswell, 2005) based on extensive data collection. *Bounded* means that I separated the case out for research and clearly defined it in terms of time, place, or physical boundaries (p. 439). The six boys formed a bounded case in the context of a particular school in a particular time in history, and the literacy activities and literacy events in which they participated were the objects of my attention. These six boys agreed to participate in the study, bounded by a period of four months of classroom and school literacy events and four more months of classroom, community, farm, and home life events in which observable literacy activities were the focus.

My study was *descriptive* because "the end product of a case study is a rich 'thick' description of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). *Thick description* is a term that anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973, pp. 9-10) originated to describe his method of doing ethnography. Thick description means "the complete, literal description of the incident" (pp. 29-30) that explains not only the incident, but also the context of the incident so that the incident becomes meaningful to someone who is not part of the cultural group and perhaps does not understand the practices and discourses of the group.

I also used a reflective journal to describe, think about, and analyze situations and events. In particular, when something puzzled me or bothered me, I

wrote about my participation in the event to try to uncover more data or further my thinking. Later I would reread my reflections and add further thoughts.

This case study was an *instrumental case* because it helped me to "illuminate a particular issue" (Creswell, 2005, p. 439). The literacy events and literacy activities of rural farm male adolescents and the sociocultural, historical, and economic contexts in which this study was situated comprised a unique phenomenon that has not been studied in Canada and needed attention to further inform educators' understandings of young males' literacy understandings and practices. Ethnographically speaking, I wanted to create a sociocultural interpretation of the data following the guidance of Merriam (1998, p. 14). I wanted to re-create for the reader "the shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge and behaviors" (p. 14) of the participant group of boys. My intent was to write a sociocultural analysis of the data, with genuine concern for the cultural context of the participants, the rural Canadian prairie school, and the community based on one particular historical, social, and economic context.

Researcher Stance

> Ethnographic researchers hold an identity that is never fully coterminous with the individuals who are members of the community or research setting in question. (Schensul et al., 1999, p. 71)

At the beginning of and all through the study I engaged in a personal struggle to identify who I was within the research site. Before I began my doctoral studies, I was secure in knowing that I had been a successful middle years teacher, a curriculum workshop provider, and a sports coach. I am a mother of two children, the wife of a grain farmer, and a White, middle-class, mature woman. As

much as I thought that I had many experiences in common with rural adolescent

boys, Schensul et al., (1999) reminded me that, "regardless of their group

membership or identification, no researcher can be fully identified with members

of the group under study" (p. 71). I knew that I needed to use some of my

background knowledge and experience to probe for information and know when

to ask questions. I also needed to step out of my past lived experiences as a

classroom teacher to avoid relating to them as a teacher and be more effective as a

researcher.

But what does a researcher look like? I did not want to be viewed as a

teacher, but I wanted to be viewed as someone who is interested in the literate

activities in which these students participate. I remember one computer class in

which the first activity was keyboarding practice. I moved around the classroom

to watch the students work. Without thinking, I leaned over the shoulder of one

student and whispered, "Fingers on home row, please." I instantly regretted my

words, but I was unable to take them back. But it was a good and easy lesson for

me to clarify the literate activity that I wanted to observe and to have a clear

purpose for moving around the classroom other than the purpose of general

teacher surveillance.

I did not want to be viewed as an authority figure who would monitor the

students' behavior. I wanted them to be able to have a casual hallway

conversation with me or to continue their normal social routines without being

self-conscious about my being there. At times the classroom teacher would leave

the room. The volume level of the conversation would rise, the physical activity

in the room would increase as the children left their seats to move around, and on a few occasions pandemonium broke loose. At first the students looked at me as they began their carnivalistic behavior. I learned to lower my head and write about what I was hearing, or to intently read the textbook that the children were using. I continually reminded myself of ways to remain neutral.

One moment of internal celebration occurred when one of the teachers told me that the students asked when that tall lady was coming back to see them. Momentarily, anyway, I had shed the thick, heavy, teacher coat. I also vacillated back and forth internally when I saw substitute or classroom teachers mete out unjust discipline. My inner self reacted as I observed unfair and questionable actions and reactions of teacher and students being played out in the classroom. When I observed bullying in the classroom or in the hallway, I wanted to intervene to make things 'right.' I would return home later in the day feeling very troubled, and these negative feelings would bother me for days.

Methodological Details

Gaining Access

The procedure for gaining access that Creswell (2005) outlined is filled with strong assertive verbs, including *receive*, *locate*, *identify*, and *guarantee*. I selected this particular central-prairie school division because, first, it contained many schools with a large percentage of rural children; and second, the division official was very interested in my research. I contacted her and met her personally in July to give her a paper copy of my proposal, answer her questions, and respond to her concerns about the research project. She suggested two schools as

possible research sites. I chose the larger school on the premise that I would have

a larger pool of candidates with whom to work. My experience of gaining access

to a school was positive and warmly welcoming.

Research Site

I conducted my research in a prekindergarten to Grade 12 school of almost

400 students located in a central-prairie town. The school advertises itself as

being able to offer its students a wide range of academic, extracurricular, and

social opportunities. About one third of the students are bussed in from the rural

areas, and two thirds come from the town. Most of the town students come from

working-class families employed in the light-industry and retail sector. The rest of

the students' parents are employed in the healthcare, education, and business

industries in town. The farm children are descendants of immigrants from the

British Isles and the northern European countries of Russia, Germany, and

Ukraine. The ethnicity of the town children is similar, with the addition of Asian

and Arab families.

The large Grade 8 class had been split into two medium-size classes, and I

arbitrarily chose one classroom because it had a larger number of boys. The

Grade 8 students in this classroom were very vocal and very eager to participate

in my study. However, only three of the boys lived on farms in the context of

working farm families. I asked for and gained immediate access to the second

Grade 8 classroom and found three more willing students. I now had six eager

young men in two separate classrooms in the same school. My research group had

grown larger than I had envisioned, and the boys were more vocal and energetic

than I had thought possible. I wondered whether I had too many candidates, but I reassured myself that even if one or two moved, fell ill, or lost interest in the study, I would still have enough students to do a thorough and in-depth job on my study.

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) noted that ethnographers and case study researchers typically live in the institutions or with the groups that they are studying for extended periods of time because "it takes considerable time to become acquainted with the participants; understand the dynamics of their interaction; understand how they relate to the physical and material environment; and elicit the meanings, goals, and objectives that are important to the participants" (p. 85). I attended the students in the two classrooms three to four days a week for four months and then one or two times a week for four more months. I observed the students in language arts, social studies, science, mathematics, physical education, and art classes. Understanding the dynamics of their interactions and how they related to the physical and material environment of their school, community, and home was challenging because the dynamics and the relationships were fluid and ever changing. I also attended events in the school and the community, where literacy activities were evident, and I visited selected students in their homes.

Participant Selection

In the two Grade 8 classrooms, each with an approximate enrolment of 15 students split evenly between males and females, I invited the boys' participation through personal conversations and letters of invitation (Appendix A). The

students, with their parents, decided whether or not to consent to participate in my study (see Appendix B for the consent forms). Three boys in each classroom who lived on farms agreed to be part of the study. None of the six boys had been retained, and all were at the appropriate age for the eighth grade.

Collection of Data

I spent considerable time at the school site, where the boys worked and played in the classroom, the school gym, the computer lab, the playground, and the hallways and at sites outside of school. My field work involved collecting information about their literacy practices in the classroom, school, farm homes, and community events.

Creswell (2005) advised researchers to "collect extensive data using multiple forms of data collection such as observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials" (p. 450). In line with an ethnographic approach, some of the field work consisted of collecting *emic* data (Schwandt, 2001)—the local language, the ways of social expression, and the boys' personal words, thoughts, and stories. I wrote my field notes about the boys' activities and social interactions within the classroom and in the hallway. I noted the clothes that the boys wore, what they carried, and what they ate or drank during the class breaks or in class. I noted their reactions to different teachers, different seating arrangements, different events in the school, and different rooms in the school. I wrote rough notes on classroom conversations as accurately as I could and expanded on them later in the day.

I interviewed the boys many times (see Appendix C for the interview questions), singly, in pairs, and in groups of three or more. I audiotaped the individual interviews and typed the transcripts, and I handwrote jottings during the group interviews. The boys happily completed a survey (Appendix D) on their electronic digital lives and the magazines that they liked. They also completed the formal Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995) and the Writer Self-Perception Scale (Bottomley, Henk, & Melnick, 1997/1998) to help me to glean more information on their thinking about literacy. I collected several forms of writing that the boys produced for subject areas such as language arts (Appendix E), social studies, and health and copies of electronic assignments for computer classes. I also collected school newsletters, copies of the local newspaper when one or more of the boys were featured in the news columns, and literacy documents from their activities outside the classroom such as in 4-H (Appendix F), Cadets, and Hunter Safety.

Some of the fieldwork also involved collecting *etic* data (Schwandt, 2001), which included my personal interpretations of the activities of the participants. At times I was puzzled or disturbed by what I saw or heard, and I felt that writing about it to record my thoughts about and reactions to situations would help me to understand it more. I wrote to record exactly what I had seen or heard and the behaviors of the people concerned. I continued to write when I realized that my reflective writing added to my understandings. Sometimes it was much later when I was involved in another activity that I would begin to make sense of a troubling issue or event.

My data collection consisted of participant observations and informal conversations with the research subjects, teachers, and parents; formal interviews; and field notes that focused on the literacy events in which these boys participated. As a "participant observer" (Spradley, 1980, p. 54), I had two purposes: "(1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (2) to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation" (p. 54). My level of participation was moderate to "maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation" (p. 60). In some instances, however, I had to make conscious decisions to become detached from the situation at hand. The class members were particularly rude to a substitute teacher one afternoon to the point that she was holding back tears, and I felt her frustration. I quietly gathered up my things and left the room. On another day a substitute teacher made an erroneous judgment call about a student's behavior, and, although the student in her gaze did not complain, the rest of the class did. At one point she looked at me for verification, and I looked away. I could not stake my territory; I had to remain on the sidelines for all intents and purposes. What did it mean to be a participant observer? It clearly meant not identifying with the role of the teacher. My ability to collect samples of schoolwork from a few students proved to be elusive at times. I returned again and again to have conversations with students with the intended outcome of collecting more samples of their writing. I now wonder whether I had used my 'teacher gaze' to elicit the desired documents from the students.

I also examined documents such as notebooks, writing folders, notes, and other school writing in process. I conducted literacy digs (Taylor, 2000) with the boys in their backpacks and lockers and photo copied images of the documents. We listed and photographed the contents of their backpacks and lockers. I watched their literacy practices of recreational reading, writing, record keeping, Internet use, and instant messaging and their use of video games and digital devices. In addition, I observed the prevalent literacy practices in which they engaged on the farm in repairing machinery and managing livestock feed supplies. I attended many community events and organized activities such as Cadets, 4-H, and Big Horn Night in which the boys participated and in which literacy was part of the event.

Data Analysis

My analysis consisted of both "description and thematic development" (Creswell, 2005, p. 441). Because I had six participants, I needed to organize the overwhelming amount of information in a way that was meaningful to me and accurate to the purpose. Creswell cautioned that good charts should not duplicate the text, show only the essential facts, leave out distracting details, be easy to read and understand, and be carefully planned and prepared. I used charting to "portray the complex relationships among the variables in my study" (p. 589). The charts gave me a condensation or essence of the information on aspects of the boys' literacy practices. I read and reread the charts and frequently needed to spend time away from them. When I returned to the charts, relationships and themes would emerge that appeared to be meaningful. I coded with sticky notes emergent

themes that seemed essential and formed a master list of these themes. I also

wrote descriptive interpretations of the boys and their activities and, with multiple

readings and reflective thinking, extracted and developed themes by coding key

words. I then began to write an "interpretation in ethnography" (p. 447), which

involved organizing the themes and analyzing the information for new

understandings about the literate lives of farm male adolescents. I considered the

literacies in the rural farm context in relation to these practices as situated

literacies (Gee, 2004).

Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I needed to ensure

that my findings and interpretations were accurate, and I validated them by

triangulation and member checking. Triangulation is the process of "corroborating

evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection"

(Creswell, 2005, p. 252) by examining multiple sources of information to develop

accurate and credible reports. Member checking is a process in which I asked the

participants in my study to check the accuracy of the accounts that I wrote from

my observations. After I transcribed an interview and a conversation, I returned

the script to each boy to read for accuracy and to seek approval of the script for

use in my writing.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2005) advised researchers to "engage in ethical practices"

(p. 11) in all stages of the research process. I completed the departmental Ethics

Review Application at my university, and my ethics application was approved to

conduct my research in a school and home setting. My request to the school

division was approved orally in person by the school division official. I informed the participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without adverse effects on their school efforts. Consent forms (Appendix B) that they read and understood and that both the boys and their parents signed ensured informed consent on their parts. I approached the school counselor(s) to introduce myself and my purpose for being in the school. I also wanted to ensure their support for the research participants if the students disclosed personal sensitive information or if bullying was involved. Through the use of pseudonyms, I have made every effort to guarantee the participants' confidentiality and anonymity, which was my major concern. In small prairie towns everyone knows everyone else. Family history, family health and wealth, and family connections are the threads that weave together to form close-knit communities. I have struggled with what I should include in my findings, all the while keeping in mind my larger questions on literacy practices. I also wondered how my research would benefit my participants. I knew that I would write a dissertation with recommendations for educational praxis, but what about the boys? My final and closing interviews with the boys reassured me that they had benefited from their involvement. I will return to this later in the dissertation.

Limitations

Every piece of research has limitations that may be influenced by factors such as the researcher's collection and interpretation of the data and the participants' willingness to share or withhold information. Mine has several. I did not meet the boys until October. I wondered whether being with them from the

start of the school year would allow me to better understand the life of these Grade 8 boys. I also needed to respect the fact that sometimes they did not have time for me, whether it was their turn in the gym at noon, weekend hockey tournaments that necessitated their doing homework at noon, or in-school suspensions; these all restricted my access to their lives.

I also moved back on forth on a continuum in my writing. At times I thought that I had something in which other literacy researchers would be very interested, whereas at other times I thought that I might be satisfied to let things go and abandon my dissertation work because I felt that what I was seeing and hearing and learning in my research was of small consequence. At these times my family heard me out and encouraged me to continue. Their support renewed my enthusiasm, and I felt motivated to continue to honor the contributions of my research boys.

No study is perfect, and I think about the might-have-beens. I think about questions that I did not ask at the right time, about literacy documents for which I did not ask, and about events and interactions that I did not write down immediately after they occurred. In some instances I felt that I needed to respect the privacy of families in their homes, and thus I needed to let go of some possibilities to talk and write about. I want to think that my awareness of these missing points has sharpened my faculties for my next research study.

CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTION OF 'BOY'

Introduction to the Community and the School

Firmly rooted in west-central rural Canada, Bedford School draws its student population from the town in which it is located and from the surrounding tiny villages and family farms within a 30-mile radius. In the summer the rolling hills, interspersed with alkali and freshwater sloughs on two sides of the town, contrast with good farmland dotted with poplar and aspen bluffs and sprawling pastures covered with native prairie grasses on the remaining two edges. The sound of a train slowly chugging through the south end of town is a reminder that the town got its start when it was designated as one of the home terminals where train crews changed. A thriving grain-processing plant and a commercial greenhouse anchor the east side of town, and grain elevators stand along the rail tracks to the south of town. A major highway and a secondary highway, intersecting on the north side of town, help to keep the town's businesses viable and provide transportation corridors to all parts of the province. Farm machinery dealerships, bulk fuel stations, and fertilizer depots line the blacktop highways leading into town. Gas stations provide fuel, confectionary supplies, and lottery tickets to the local people as well as to traffic moving on to other parts of the province. The older residential areas, with wide, tree-lined streets, contain smaller homes mixed with taller, two-story homes. The newer residential areas contain larger stucco-covered homes spaced closer together on the wide streets. The presence of a hospital and several care home facilities make this a town in which senior citizens can retire and still have access to needed health services. A healthy

mix of single-career individuals, working-class and professional families, and senior citizens produces a vibrant life to the residential and business-community life of the town.

At the northern edge of this prairie town, the preschool to Grade 12 school occupies a large tract of land and provides services to approximately 400 students. A large football field, a memorial park, an elementary children's playground, a community college, and a Roman Catholic separate school share the plot of land. The morning quiet of the space around the school is broken by the sounds of quiet diesel engines and large tires crunching the gravel as noisy orange school buses with standard gearshifts lumber up the west street side of the school. Here they stop to deposit their precious cargo of students each morning, returning later in the day to take the students home safely. Parades of town students alternately stride purposefully or dawdle their way to and from school two times a day. One third of the students are from rural areas, and the remaining two thirds live in town.

Historically, this was the home of Cree people who followed the buffalo. The intrusion of European and French fur traders disturbed the life of the Aboriginal people and led to the creation of the Land of Treaty Six in 1876. With the coming of the CPR railroad in 1907 and the Grand Trunk Railroad in 1908, the population of Bedford grew rapidly; it was incorporated as a village in 1909. The Cree people were dispersed to reservations north and west of this community.

Bedford became the center of commerce for the large agricultural population who lived within the area in the 20th century. Mechanization, with

tractors replacing horses after World War II, made it possible for farmers to increase the size of their farms. Drought in the 1960s, the decommissioning of rural elevators and the railroads in the 1970s, the high interest rates in the 1980s, and changes in grain-marketing procedures in the 1990s caused many farmers to rethink the viability of their farms. Very often they sold their farms to neighbors or relatives and moved to town in search of paid employment. When once there was a family on every quarter section of land in this part of Saskatchewan at the beginning of the 20th century, now family farms are located miles apart.

The school advertises itself as providing a wide range of academic, extracurricular, and social opportunities to its students. The student body from the rural area is an amalgamation of children that began a few generations ago with the closing of one-room country schools and continued into the 20th and 21st centuries because schools in small villages were no longer deemed viable because of aging buildings, perceived reduced student opportunities, and increased maintenance and professional costs.

The livelihoods of the families whose children attend this school include a mix of professional, middle-class, and working-class occupations and assisted-living programs. A reality of the economy of the time is that most of the boys' parents who are engaged in rural agriculture have to work off the farm in a part-time, seasonal, or full-time capacity.

The students in the Grade 7 to 12 wings of the school are divided into single grades, with some grades split into two classrooms because of high enrolments. The students have a homeroom teacher, a home classroom, and

assigned locker spaces. They receive instruction in math and language arts in their home classroom and move to other designated classrooms at the breaks for social studies, science, health, computers, physical education, industrial arts, home economics, and art instruction. The school day is divided into six separate time slots of 55 minutes each during which the students attend daily classes in the required areas of study. The students navigate the school hallways from room to room for instruction from several different teachers, with varied rules and expectations within the larger framework of the school's educational policy handbook.

The bused students enter the school through the north door, which leads into the junior high wing of the school. The school, whose main entrance faces west, presents an attractive exterior appearance of light stonework, dark-green trim, and tinted glass. Inside the school a large bright common area welcomes visitors, and the gym entrance across the area is anchored by attractive trophy and display cases. To the left is the library and the hallway to the high school wings, and to the right are the office and reception areas and the hallway to the elementary wing of the school.

The children in this study were embedded in the context of a story of six boys who live on rural family farms, their literacy journeys, and their life in an eighth-grade classroom. I had prepared myself with theories of literacy, theories of gender, and ways of individuals' and groups' construction of knowledge. I learned much about each of these three areas and had many more questions when I was finished than when I started. Surprises occurred along the way, such as how

incidents in the lives of the boys affected me or how something seemingly trivial at the time proved important later on. I begin the story of my research with a discussion of the classroom context and the personal identity of these boys, followed by the roles that gender and masculinity play in their lives.

Each grade has a homeroom near the students' hallway lockers. The wide hallways are brightly lit with recessed fluorescent lighting. The walls are covered in cream tiles, with bits of beige and green flecks of color, and the flooring is beige tile. An oak-like wooden bench hugs the wall directly across from the lockers, painted in alternating colors of green, beige, and cream. Each classroom door contains a window, and green miniblinds cover the length of the vertical sidelight. Inside each classroom the fluorescent lighting creates an antiseptic feeling. Clean, new, one-piece desks with arm support, work surface, and a wire-mesh bookshelf underneath the seat are arranged in rows. A whiteboard with dry-erase markers is at the front of the classroom, and a greenboard with chalk lines the wall to the left. Three green-tinted windows control the sun's radiation into the classroom and permit a view of the staff and student parking lot and beyond. A seldom-used wooden teacher's desk and chair occupy a back corner of the classroom. Student-made posters that detail facts and figures about their favorite hockey teams are displayed easy-reading distance above the bulletin board at the back of the classroom. An overhead projector on a mobile cart guards a bookshelf containing magazines, paper, and a few textbooks. The students have several teachers for the required school subjects, gather their books from their lockers,

and move from classroom to classroom to lab to gymnasium at the breaks for their instruction.

Introducing the Boys

Sam

Sam is a young man with short, dark hair, large eyes, and a cupid mouth who wore clothes that, although fashionably loose and baggy in an urban setting, were a little out of place in a rural school. He is the youngest child in a larger family of a mother and father, four older brothers, and one older sister. His siblings live away from home and work but frequently return home between jobs.

Sam attended school in the city of Silverplains for K to Grade 5 and then Bedford School for Grades 6 to 8. His father, who completed Grade 12, had worked for a transportation company in the city but was not working because of an illness. Sam's mother, who also completed Grade 12, worked at a local store in town. Sam and his parents had moved from the city to his paternal grandparents' farm to live and work on the farm while his father recovered. At the time of this study Sam lived on a farm nine miles from town. He got on the bus every morning at 8:15 a.m. and arrived home at 4:00 p.m. When I asked him to name his three best friends at school, Sam named another quiet Grade 8 boy and a girl, who was an outsider to the rest of the class, two students who, like him, lived on the fringes of the social and academic life of the school. Sam counted air cadets as his one activity outside the school.

David

David is a slightly built but athletic young man with shaggy, blond hair and a ready smile for everyone. He dressed in sports-logo shirts and blue jeans and walked confidently down the hallway. David has a younger brother in Grade 2 and a sister in playschool. David had attended Bedford School since kindergarten. His father, who completed Grade 12 and took courses in heavy-equipment operation and water treatment, worked on the family farm. His mother, also a Grade 12 graduate, worked at a local business and had completed insurance courses.

David's family farm is five miles from town, and he had a short, 15-minute bus ride to town. David confidently named three of his classmates with outgoing personalities as his best friends. His out-of-school activities included 4-H, hunter safety class, minor hockey, and a babysitting class, which he had recently completed. David was captain of his minor hockey team. He took the babysitting class so that he can take care of his younger siblings if his parents were working and so that he would know what to do in case of an emergency. He was on the school volleyball and badminton sports teams.

Keith

Keith is an athletic young man who swaggered down the hall. His voice could usually be heard before he was seen as he chatted up friends and moved around the school. His shaggy, blond hair frames a fine, sharp-featured face. He has two older sisters who, like him, are very blond and very attractive.

Keith had attended Bedford School since kindergarten. His mother, who had completed Grade 12 and training as an educational assistant, worked at one of the local schools. Keith's father, who also completed Grade 12, had started university but decided that it was not suitable for him. He then took a welding course so that he could work in the oilfields. Keith's father now farmed full time. Keith lived on the family farm two miles from town. He did not ride on the school bus because his mother worked at a local school in the area, and he rode with her in the car to and from town. Sometimes he went home on the bus if his mother had a meeting after school.

When I asked Keith to describe himself at school, he accurately called himself "a visitor. I like to talk and visit with my friends." I asked him to name three of his best friends, and he named three chatty and personable students. When he was at home, Keith liked to text his friends and talk to everyone. His out-of-school activities included hunter safety class, minor hockey, and hunting and fishing with his father. He liked volleyball and badminton and tried out for the school teams.

Cal

Cal is six feet tall with reddish, curly hair and a ruddy complexion. His longish, heart-shaped face, adorned occasionally with black-framed glasses, sports a ready smile. Cal has a special radar for food and can locate food within a 50-foot radius. He towers above most of the Grade 8 students because he is one of the fortunate few boys to grow taller than the girls at this point. Perhaps his

eternal search for food and snacks is a side effect of his growth spurt. Cal has two older sisters and is the youngest child in his family.

Cal had attended Bedford School since kindergarten. His mother, who completed Grade 12 and four years of university, worked at the local hospital as an RN. Cal's father completed Grade 11 and a welding course and now worked seasonally as a welder. Cal lived on the family farm eight miles from town and got on the bus at 8:25 every morning and arrived at home at 3:55 every afternoon. He sat at the back of the bus because that was where he liked to sit.

When I asked Cal to describe himself, he shrugged his shoulders and looked down at the floor. He looked at me shyly and said, "I don't want to be here [at school]. I would rather be at home. I like doing stupid things with my friends. I am hilarious." Cal's three best friends were Ron and Walter, the other two boys in my study from this classroom, and a confident student from the other Grade 8 classroom. Cal completed the hunter safety class and took part in minor hockey. He also took archery lessons on a regular basis, sponsored by the local archery store in town.

Ron

Ron, a sturdily built boy, is growing taller, with broadening shoulders, but yet retains traces of baby fat on his face. Ron, like Cal and Keith, has two older sisters and is the youngest in his family of three siblings.

Ron had attended Bedford School from kindergarten to Grade 8. His mother completed her Grade 12 and a hairdressing course and was currently working in town as a hairdresser. Ron's father completed Grade 11 and worked

away from home seasonally on the rigs. He had completed courses such as Hydrogen Sulfide Training (H2S), first aid, and Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), which were all necessary for his work.

Ron lived on a farm 15 miles from town and got on the school bus at 8:10 every morning. He arrived home in the afternoon between 4:00 and 4:10 p.m. He sat at the back of the bus because the bus driver seated him there when Ron was in kindergarten.

When I asked Ron to describe himself, he chuckled and said, "Well, at school, I am funny, stupid; . . . no, . . . joking. At home, I am funny, . . . capable. When I'm with friends, I am funny, I guess, I like to make them laugh." Ron named Cal and Walter, two other boys in my study, and a confident athlete who is also in Grade 8, as his best friends. Ron's out-of-school activities included hunter safety and archery, a sport he shared with Cal. He had tried out for the badminton team at school.

Walter

Walter is a slightly built, but lean and muscular young man. He strode through the hallways purposefully in his plaid shirt and blue jeans, surveying the crowds in the hallway. Walter is the third son in a family of four boys.

Walter had attended a nearby school for Grades K to 2 until it closed, and he attended Bedford School from Grade 3 to the present time. His mother completed Grade 12 and some college-level courses and now worked at a local store in town. Walter's father completed Grade 11 and worked seasonally on the

rigs. He completed courses necessary for his line of work such as H2S, first aid, and WHMIS.

Walter and his family lived 21 miles from town. Walter and his brothers got on the school bus at 8:00 a.m. and arrived home at 4:30 every afternoon. He sat wherever he wanted to sit on the school bus. The family also had a house in town to accommodate his mother's work schedules and the in-school and out-of-school activities of four active young boys. Walter's out-of-school activities included weekly cadets, hunter safety classes, and piano lessons. He did not try out for school sports teams even though he enjoyed school sports and was good at them.

Walter described himself as a little awkward at school—"maybe a little weird," he added. He considered himself funny, with a good sense of humor when he was with friends, and a good athlete. When I asked Walter to name his three best friends, he did not hesitate to name Ron and Cal, two boys in my study, as well as another excellent academic student, also in Grade 8.

Career Thoughts

At the time of the study the students were in Grade 8, and Grade 12 graduation was four years away. I asked them to tell me about their career choices. All six boys wanted to complete Grade 12. They named older brothers and young men in the community to whom they looked up and who had completed Grade 12. All of the boys told me that their parents wanted them to stay in school. One boy said that his grandmother has encouraged him to think about going to university. Three of the boys wanted to study for a trade and get

their journeyman certification, or "ticket," as they called it. Two expressed an interest in attending university, and one had not thought about further education after Grade 12.

Ron wanted to take Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science & Technology (SIAST) training to study welding or mechanics. His plans were to work in the oil patch and then return to farm with his father and then, eventually, on his own. Cal also wanted to study welding at SIAST and named the company SUNCOR at Fort MacMurray as a possible future employer. He thought that he would make welding his life's occupation and indicated that he had no desire to farm, because, as he told me, "It's pretty isolated out there." Sam wanted to train as a mechanic because his older brothers had, but he was not sure what kind of mechanic he wanted to be. He knew that he could take his training at SIAST or by joining the Canadian army through a training program. Keith thought that he might work on the rigs immediately after Grade 12 and then do as his father had done by becoming a seasonal employee in Alberta and returning home to the family farm from April to November. Walter and David, who were the two top students at the time of this research, expressed an interest in attending university because their families wanted them to do so, and they could get a good education. Walter was interested in being a computer technician and being able to troubleshoot computers and manage computer networks. David also wanted to attend university. When I questioned him about his interests, he replied, "Well, I haven't really thought about that yet."

Construction of Boyhood and Masculine Codes

Gender and Masculinity

Gender is an important aspect of life. Gender roles, as determined by the particular sociopolitical and historical contexts of this rural area, have changed over time and have seldom been talked about or examined. For the purpose of this study, gender refers to a set of qualities and behaviors that society expects of females and males. Gender roles, although they are affected by factors such as culture, education, ethnicity, class, and economics, vary widely within and among cultures.

The construction of gender is necessary in an examination of the literacy lives of boys because some researchers believe that gender, a category of identity, is a socially constructed concept, whereas other researchers believe that gender is a biological determination. Social and cultural forces have created, maintained, transformed, invented, and reworked the construction of gender. Thorne (1999) stated that "the social construction of gender is an active and ongoing process" (p. 4), and Skelton (2001) agreed that "gender identity is not 'fixed' but changes across sites, time, culture" (p. 22). Whereas one's sex is a biological determination, one's gender is an understanding of how one performs the role of a boy or girl and what practices are appropriate (Connell, 1996; Hammett & Sanford, 2008; Pirie, 2002; Rowan et al., 2002).

The social construction of gender is an active and continuous social process with everyday social practices to explore, discard, own, and define. West and Zimmerman (1987), Cherland (1994), Peterson (2001), Rowan et al., (2002),

and Thorne (1999) have shown that we 'do gender' in everyday life: "Gendered behaviors are learned, . . . a social product" (Rowan et al., 2002, p. 44). Furthermore, "Gender is a quality that is learned and then reaffirmed through the public performance of those behaviors and speech patterns that are accepted as masculine or feminine" (Peterson, 2001, p. 452). Blair (2000) demonstrated how the talk, which she called "genderlects," in one Grade 8 classroom with girls was "a very important part of establishing identity and it was central to the relations of power" (p. 317), as well as "a very important part of 'doing gender'" (p. 321). Gender is not something that one passively 'is' or 'has'; we "do gender" (Thorne, 1999, p. 5) every minute of every day as we participate in our social and work activities. Thorne noted that "when boys associate with boys and girls with girls, they have found a powerful way of 'doing gender,' of announcing and sustaining separate gender identities" (p. 60).

No one singular definition of masculinity exists in the world today. Concepts of masculinity have changed historically and depend on cultural and social contexts. Boys and men have been shaped and conditioned by the society in which they live as they play out their gender roles. Weaver-Hightower (2003) stated that "individuals and social groups create and adapt versions of masculinity for their own uses within their own cultural frames" (p. 480). The concept of masculinity has been dynamic, fluid, and shifting in response to multiple factors. Connell (1996) reminded the reader that masculinity is not a biological entity that existed prior to society; rather, "masculinities are ways that societies interpret and employ male bodies" (p. 211).

Connell (1996) was one of the first literacy researchers to use the term *hegemonic masculinity*: "The form of masculinity that is culturally dominant in a given setting is called *hegemonic masculinity*" (p. 209). Gilbert and Gilbert (1998), Martino (2001), Smith and Wilhelm (2002), and Pirie (2002) explored the term. Pirie noted that hegemonic masculinity is of particular concern to a certain location and is "a standard against which other forms of masculinity have to be measured" (p. 15). Schools have been considered agents in the making of masculinities because in schools the visible "intersecting of relationships" (Connell, 1996, p. 214) has occurred through the relationships of power, division of labor, patterns of emotion, and symbolization. Power relations in terms of authority and supervision, and dominance and control have been and are also observable in the media, in society, and in schools. The academic curriculum contains subject knowledge perceived as being male, such as the maths, sciences, and industrial arts; or of being female, such as the humanities, the arts, and home economics. Attire and unarticulated dress codes have marked gender, as has the designation of areas of the school as male or female. Gymnasiums, science classrooms, and computer labs have traditionally been perceived as masculine areas, whereas the feminine areas have traditionally been the fine arts rooms and hallway seating niches. Connell claimed that hegemonic masculinity needs only to be the most "highly visible" (p. 209) to have power and influence and assert privilege over other forms of masculinity and over women.

What it means to be a young man leaving childhood behind and entering the life of an adolescent teen is complicated. In this particular school in Western

rural Canada, what it means to be a male is a "social construction forged out of culture, ideology and history" (Jackson, 1998, p. 88). The boys in this study affirmed their gender and masculinity as a component of their identity in many ways, including their clothes, social actions, literacy practices, and use of school spaces.

Adolescence is a confusing time when teens need to express their individuality but also feel a pressing need to conform to their group's identity. The boys in this study expressed their individuality through their clothes, all the while conforming to the major styles prevalent throughout the school. For some of the boys, bunny hugs in neutral colors of navy blue, olive green, and black short- or long-sleeved T-shirts worn underneath the bunny hug with logos that represent sports and sports teams, snowmobiles, bikes, and farm machinery were popular, as was the Quiksilver logo from a popular store in town. Other boys favored Western denim jean jackets, lined with plaid flannel in the winter and unlined in the summer. All of the boys wore loose, baggy jeans in blue or black denim, much like their urban cousins. Some boys wore their hair in a longish cut just over their ears so that it fell into their eyes and curled around the nape of their necks. Other boys wore their hair a little shorter, out of their eyes, longer than a brush cut, and long enough to comb. The boys wore runners to school in dark hues of navy, steel grey, or black and personalized them with different-colored shoelaces.

Stance in Public Places

There are many lessons and learning for students inside and outside the classrooms. Boys and girls learn how to use the spaces in the school to perform gender and socialize in culturally appropriate and gendered ways. O Donoghue (2007) noted that " learning happens in places at school which are neither named as learning spaces nor used as official learning places" (p. 62). The boys in my research study used spaces in the classroom, in the hallways, in the library, and on the playground to practice their identities as young, rural male adolescents.

One aspect of North American adolescence is the shift of importance of the support roles of family members to the increasing strength of ties with same-sex peers. I observed three of the boys in my study travelling the hallways together as a friendship group. Two of the boys travelled in groups of two or three with other boys in their classroom, and one boy travelled with a girl or a friend from a Grade 7 classroom. To better understand this behavior, I asked the boys about the importance of having friends at school. Each of the boys agreed that it is important to have friends, but not for the reason that I thought. One boy explained:

> It is important to have friends so that you don't get pushed around. You gotta walk down the hallway slowly with your shoulders back, and you can make eye contact but not too long because you don't want to make anybody mad. If it is the short break between classes, you gotta get your books and run, but otherwise you gotta walk down the hallway, because if you run, people are going to trip you. It is just better to be with a friend and, if you can, to have two friends. People will take you on if you are by yourself, but they think twice about taking you on if you are with someone or in a group.

This boy viewed having friends as providing protection and security by occupying a larger space in the hallways. Three boys would occupy a larger space than one boy would, and it appeared that three boys were more in control of the space around them as they walked the hallways. Ron and his friends had established boundaries around them for distinct physical and social purposes. The boundaries signified a safe and protected space for the three male occupants within.

Similar to O Donoghue's (2007) suggestion, the hallways in this school provide spaces and places where identities and masculinities are performed on a daily basis. O Donoghue asserted that the hallways "tend to be viewed as mere settings, a backdrop or stage where masculinities are played out" (p. 66). I found that, at first glance, there appeared to be over 100 students simply moving through the hallways, randomly exchanging texts and notebooks at their lockers, grabbing handfuls of food, and laughing and shouting their way to the next class. On closer inspection it became obvious that the boys occupied the area around the lockers and most of the central hallway, whereas the girls claimed small bits of space at the lockers and most of the wooden benches on the opposite wall. The boys interacted with boys and the girls with girls. Informal boundaries were formed between the genders, but, as Thorne (1999) observed:

> Gender boundaries have a shifting presence, but when evoked, they are accompanied by stylized forms of action, a sense of performance, mixed and ambiguous meanings (the situations often teeter between play and aggression, and heterosexual meanings lurk within other definitions) and by an array of intense emotions: excitement, playful elation, anger, desire, shame, and fear. (p. 66)

Occasionally with the youths in my study in this school, there was some boundary work in which the direct actions of one gender sometimes resulted in crossing the

boundaries or sometimes in strengthening the bonds behind boundaries. I will give examples of spaces where informal learning occurred and boundary work between males and females was enacted.

The school hallways are wide and brightly lit. Lockers line one side of the hallway, and long wooden benches attached to the wall line the opposite side. Before school and at breaks, these hallways become a bustling, noisy space filled with students supervised by a minimum of two teachers.

At one mid morning break, many of the girls retrieved food from their lockers and were sitting quietly on the benches with their friends, eating their snacks and watching the boys at the lockers. The boys stood around in the hallway with their male friends. At the beginning of Grade 8 these boys and girls occupied separate areas in the hallways and needed a direct and often extreme reason to interact with each other.

That fall morning Keith eyed a group of sports-minded girls who played on a hockey team. He adjusted his clothes, ran his fingers through his sandy blond hair, took one last look around the hallway, walked purposefully over to the girls seated on the bench, and asked, "How about that game?" He had an older sister on this team, had watched the game on the weekend, and now at school replayed part of the game for his audience. "Yeah, the other team had no defense. The score was 20-0. All's that I can say is 'Get an offence, eh?'" Keith stood in front of the girls with a wide smile, waiting for their affirmation of his conclusion. The girls nodded and smiled at him.

David sauntered over to where Keith was entertaining the girls with his hockey monologue. David reached over and grabbed a library book from a girl seated on the bench. The girl's grip tightened, and both pulled on the book. David was pulled down and into the girl's personal space and made body contact with her. They both seemed surprised and shocked, and David quickly let go of the book, straightened up, and moved back.

In this social vignette each of the two boys were learning how to be masculine within the confines of a junior high school hallway and how to cross gender borders, albeit in opposite ways. Keith, the youngest in a family of three with two older, popular sisters, felt confident enough to physically move away from his male classmates towards the girls to relive a hockey game that most of them had attended at the local arena on the weekend. Keith "claimed space and asserted [him] with a style that mixed sexuality with claims to power" (Thorne, 1999, p. 73). Prior to telling his story, he had quickly groomed himself by adjusting his clothes and his hair and putting on a wide smile before he told his story to impress his intended female audience with his knowledge of hockey strategy. In contrast, David crossed the gender border when he moved over to the girls seated on the bench. He used invasion and crossed uninvited into the girl's personal space by grabbing her text and then by being pulled into her physical space to make body contact with her. By emphasizing physical strength and sexual aggression, David was creating an awareness of the gender border "through contact as well as avoidance" (p. 64). These two crossings of boundaries indicated the range of behaviors played out in the hallways.

Physical Play

Sometimes physical actions between and among boys can be interpreted as either fighting or playing. As a female adult, I was sometimes unsure how to interpret these actions that I observed. Thorne (1999) noted that boys give each other cues to signal the message that they are going to play fight or fight in earnest: "If the participants smile, restrain their physical force, use certain tones of voice, and engage in exaggerated movements, they can cue that it is a 'play fight' and therefore not to be taken seriously" (p. 78). The concept of play makes physical confrontations less serious, spontaneous, and perhaps even creative. The stakes are not as high and the consequences not as serious.

One snowy day in November, the Grade 8 class was in the library. All of the boys sat quietly and alternately lifted their eyes to watch the snow fall and then settled back to read their library books. When the bell rang, the students left the library to walk back to the hallway lockers in groups of twos and threes. There was idle conversation about going outside to test the snow. They picked up speed, stashed their library books in their lockers, and quickly moved outside onto the sidewalk. They gingerly scooped up the snow with their bare hands, made snowballs, and threw them back at the window in the school door at the students who had stayed inside. They threw snowballs at each other and then started face washing. Meanwhile, the Grade 8 girls stayed inside, retrieved their snacks, and talked quietly in small groups on the benches. They spent the break visiting with friends from other classrooms and grade levels. At the sound of the bell, the boys burst into the school, bringing with them the fresh smell of newly fallen snow.

Their faces and hands were red and glowing, and their energy levels appeared to have tripled. The boys stomped their shoes on the black entrance mat to shake the snow off before they reentered the classroom, all the while loudly retelling and replaying the fun outside.

Another day, at 10:58 in the hallway between classes, a couple of boys kicked around a *Harry Potter* book on the floor. No one bothered to pick it up, and it stayed on the floor beside a locker. Some of the boys playfully kneed each other in the groin as if enacting a male ritual here. Two boys would grin at each other, square off, and then attack each other, trying to knee the other person in his crotch. Another boy who was older and bigger pushed the smaller boys from behind with his two big hands while other boys got snacks from their lockers. Mr. Jones, a hallway supervisor, entered the hallway. He was a popular volleyball and basketball coach in the school, and the boys crowded around him to listen to what he had to say about a volleyball tournament. Before he talked to the boys, Mr. Jones gave David an involved handshake in greeting him, touching hands, fists, shoulders, and elbows. The boys formed an uneven circular group around Mr. Jones and listened intently. The horseplay stopped when Mr. Jones began to talk.

At another break some of the boys jostled with each other. Two boys made eye contact and squared their shoulders. Each boy lowered a leading shoulder and then shouldered a friend into the lockers, seemingly in fun with a friend. The boys continued to jostle and push each other around when no one was looking. The official word is that this was a "no-contact" hallway, but these incidents were commonplace. The boys stopped when a supervisor teacher walked through this

area. When the teacher moved on down the hallway, the rooster play between the boys continued. These examples of male interactions elucidated for me the gendered nature of males performing gender in public spaces.

This space in front of the lockers was a site where "masculinities [were] being shaped and played out from that of the pusher to the pushed to the onlooker to the knower and the knowing, . . . a confrontational and uncomfortable place" (O Donoghue , 2007, p. 68). This space, although intended to allow the teachers efficient surveillance of student behavior, was also a place where certain ideas of masculinity and of being Grade 8 boys were enacted and displayed for others to observe. The boys in this case were experimenting with aggression in same-gender play.

While I walked down the hallway before the 9:00 a.m. start of classes one morning, I noticed two distinct modes of behaviors. The girls sat on the wooden bench, made small talk with each other, admired their friends' clothes or hair, sat and looked at the boys, or looked in the books that they needed for the first class. A few girls sat and read quietly. The group of boys demonstrated the scientific principle of perpetual motion as they stood across the hallway from the girls, jostling each other around and against the lockers and slamming the locker doors. Later, I would find that the boys' behavior in classrooms contrasted with that of the girls equally as much.

One day in health period the teacher had given the students a class period to work on their comic-strip stories to illustrate some aspect of bullying. The boys were loud and dominated the discussions in the classroom as they worked on the

comic strips, talking about their hockey and hunting adventures. The girls sat silently and worked quietly in their desks. The girls sometimes stopped to borrow a marker or a pen from a friend, but they could have been single, solitary workers in cubicles. They paid little attention to anything else besides the assignment that was in front of them on their desks. Meanwhile, the boys got up, walked around the room, looked out the window, threw scrunched-up paper into the garbage can, and visited around the room to view their classmates' work.

In the second class period in which the students worked on their comic strips, a male classmate kept up a one-man routine of comedy, life observations, and arguments for anyone who would listen. He made some interesting observations and told some very witty anecdotes about after-school fun. The five girls sat quietly in their desks, worked at their artwork, listened to the teacher's occasional instructions, copied notes, and did not say anything at all to each other or to any of their male classmates.

These boys demonstrated gender-based resistance to the literacy events that the students were enacting in each classroom. The boys demonstrated resistance to the art-based assignment, whereas the girls complied. During the health class period that the teacher gave the students to create the bullying cartoon, the boys worked on the assignment but talked about their hockey and hunting adventures. The boys moved around the classroom to sightsee, dispose of paper, and survey their friends' progress in the assignment. The girls in this classroom worked quietly, stayed in their desks except to retrieve a marker, and displayed attentive body language and behavior towards the teacher.

The construction of boyhood in relation to girlhood in a junior high school hallway is interwoven with many threads, the most obvious of which is gender. Travelling to school on buses, hanging out in the hallways, and attending classes give the students mixed-gender opportunities for socialization and studying. However, at the class breaks and at noon breaks when they hung out, the junior high students formed same-gender groups for socialization. When students do this, they create "a sense of gender as dichotomy and opposition" (Thorne, 1999, p. 4). Gender dichotomies as basic social categories and personal identities create a line boundary of 'difference' that can be drawn in the busy life of a student.

Construction of the Other

On another day in health class the teacher recalled that at one time in school classrooms teachers conducted a morning health check in which they asked the children whether they had brushed their teeth and washed their hands. They also checked for dirt under the children's fingernails. Immediately, every one of the boys in the classroom began to role-play a scenario in which girls check their fingernails by holding out their hands, palm down and fingers outstretched, and boys check their fingernails by holding out their hands, palm up, with fingers bent at the first knuckle to show the fingernails. The teacher quickly moved on to another topic, and the boys lost interest in the demonstrations that they had constructed. The concept of defining oneself by describing the 'other' was evident.

The boys explored the social dynamics of gender and masculinity in their school, in their community, and in their families. In an ethnographic study Thorne

(1999) noted the "dichotomous nature of individual gender categories and identity: one is *either* a boy or a girl, never both" (p. 158). The boys were keenly aware of the use of clothing, speech, and social relations to define themselves as boy rather than girl.

Geographical proximity to several Hutterite colonies and the availability of television shows via satellite service gave the boys more opportunities to define themselves in relation to the other. Thorne (1999) observed:

> It is simpler to regard people as the Other; it means you don't have to think of them as human beings like yourself, with any hopes, fears, or vulnerabilities. They can be pasted into position like movie stills or pictures into an album. (p. 153)

These boys explored, reinforced, and affirmed their personal identities by exploring what they were *not* in terms of gender, of culture, and of sexuality. Girls, the Hutterian culture, and homosexuality provided further opportunities for them to define themselves. In the classroom conversations the boys alternately displayed curiosity, innocence, and prior knowledge.

Just as ethnic and religious differences can define boundaries, gender defines boundaries through the activities in the life of a young adolescent. Direct contact with 'the other' may reduce difference. In Saskatchewan, grain farmers who get to know their Hutterite neighbors soon realize that they share similar views and values about honest work, family, and community. However, contact with the other may also strengthen or further define the boundaries that separate the two groups. The communal way of living of the Hutterite people and the concept of grain farmers' individual ownership are stumbling blocks and further

define the boundaries between the two groups. The Grade 8 students were curious about the Hutterite culture and shared their knowledge at opportune times.

The warm, brightly lit classroom welcomed the students to the first class of the day on a Monday morning. The boys quickly derailed the health teacher's discussion of family roles into a discussion of the Hutterian culture. Several Hutterite colonies in the area demonstrate a culture contrast to the inhabitants of this Western central area of Saskatchewan. David told the class that sometimes the Hutterite boys come to town to play hockey against "the regular kids like us; not real hockey, but games of shinny . . . . [And] the boys dress normal like us, like, no black hats." He finished by noting that "the Hutterite boys have really nice hockey sticks and stuff for equipment." David was clarifying the other while finding similarities and differences.

The teacher continued the conversation by saying that he had sometimes seen Hutterite girls let their head kerchiefs slip down to show their hairstyle, and once he had seen three Hutterite girls with a Walkman. A classmate then remembered that he had seen a Hutterite boy who had worn had an Oilers jersey. He had been talking to a group of Hutterite boys, and one of the boys had said, "We can put them on now when we are out." Another classmate thought that the Sage Colony children do not do anything such as playing hockey. Instead, they run barefoot down the road, spin on clotheslines, and bounce on tractor tires. He shook his head and quietly whispered, "These kids are *different* from the Poplar Colony kids."

Sensing an opportunity to bring the class back to the discussion on family roles, the teacher focused the class by saying, "Our families and the Hutterites' families have expectations" in what appeared to be an attempt to respectfully validate and acknowledge their off-topic conversation, yet return to the provincially mandated health curriculum topic. David then reported that his family's farm was located beside that of the Hutterites, who owned pastureland, and "we helped them with their cattle. And Mike, the cattle boss, gave us a couple chickens." With a quick glance at the clock, the teacher gave the class their assignment to list 10 roles that they play in their families to build a picture of themselves as responsible family members.

Later, on another day in another health class, the discussion on family roles continued. The discussion turned again to the roles of family members. The teacher noted that a family could have two moms or two dads. All of the boys stopped talking to each other and began to listen to the teacher. The girls had already been listening intently to the teacher when he was talking about the traditional, socially accepted forms of family members and their roles. However, when the conversation took a turn, the boys began to listen. One student asked the teacher if he had seen the television show *Family Guy*. Landon and David both began to describe the show. Keith acted as the referee, looked at Danton, and urged, "Go, you, go." Danton explained that on one show two ladies had gone to the hospital and picked a jar of semen to have a baby. Several of the boys laughed and looked at each other uncomfortably. Some of the girls stared straight ahead, looked at the teacher, and remained silent. The teacher replied, "Well, I can see

you are uncomfortable talking about family roles we don't know too much about by all the laughing and giggling you are doing." Then he moved on to another part of the discussion.

The other is also a major construct in ideas of gender. The masculine and feminine roles that young adolescents assume are not fixed, rigid, or static; instead, the roles may depend on social class, culture, and ethnicity. Young adolescents find themselves actively negotiating what it means to be male and what it means to be female, and the boundaries and negotiations constantly shift and are redefined. Jackson (1998) stated that "heterosexual masculinities are defensively constructed by defining themselves in opposition to an excluded and subordinated 'other'" (p. 86).

One day in science class the students were working on science exam corrections, and David mentioned that a classmate had called Joe "gay." David acted this out for his friends and demonstrated with his right hand by making a limp wrist, which he did twice to make sure that he had everyone's attention. David verified that the classmate's story was true by noting that Joe was watching another male student's butt. The students around David looked first at him and then at Joe, who looked straight ahead at the teacher and gave no reaction at all.

The teacher noted that the class was becoming noisier and declared, "Okay, we are off topic here." She began to read aloud from the textbook for several minutes and then put previously prepared notes about crystals on the overhead for the students to copy into their loose-leaf pages. This did not diffuse the discussion, and while the students were busy copying the overhead notes,

David brought up the gay conversation again and demonstrated the limp wrist to

everyone around him. Three of his classmates joined him in a limp-wrist wave

while they copied notes on crystals. Joe continued to ignore them.

The boys were venturing into dangerous territory, using the science class

as a place to harass a classmate and possibly explore some uneasy feelings.

Jackson (1998) discussed traditional hegemonic masculinity as defined

> through the exclusion and oppression of those actors by whom it feels
> threatened (mainly women and homosexuals). It strengthens . . . its
> condition by jeering at what it most fears and takes refuge in the apparent
> solidarity and support of other heterosexual men in the group. (p. 80)

In this instance the boys appeared to be supported by their friends in provoking a

classmate, Joe, and Joe was being constructed as the "abnormal other" (p. 80) in

opposition to the majority heterosexual classmates. "Othering" was obvious in

this classroom.

According to Jackson (1998), the role of the heterosexual masculine

young adolescent is actively negotiated as a "relational process mainly between

masculine/feminine, heterosexual/ homosexual, white (skin color)/black (or other

skin color)" (p. 86). The health classroom was a venue for the boys to

demonstrate and define the gender borders of checking fingernails and a site that

minimized the teasing and physical violence that might occur in another place.

The boys explored their multiple gender identities in relation to the other:

to what they were *not* in conversations with each other and with their teachers.

The boys asserted that they were not Hutterites and they were not girls as they

explored their ideas of social relations in their lives. Social organization of family

and culture was becoming more visible to them, and their curiosity provoked

them to discuss what they knew, what they did not know, and what they were curious about in the context of the classroom settings.

In an ELA class Sam was very busy performing basketball tosses in the air with a scrunched-up piece of paper while Mr. Smith was busy with other students. Sam picked up the paper beside the garbage can, returned to his desk, juggled the scrunched-up paper ball, and repeated the basketball toss towards the garbage can. When he left his desk, he walked with his shoulders back, purposefully, and took large confident steps. He then returned to this desk to repeat this activity. The teacher reprimanded Sam for being out of his desk, and he protested loudly that he had to pick up the paper. Mr. Smith told him to leave the paper on the floor and then asked the whole class to pick up paper around the classroom and put it in the garbage can. Sam kept one eye on the teacher and one eye on his classmates, but he did not help his classmates. When Mr. Smith was out of Sam's line of sight, Sam stealthily moved over to the garbage can, retrieved his scrunched-up paper basketball, and once more successfully tossed it into the garbage can.

Sam was one of the youngest boys in the Grade 8 class. He is pleasant looking and was dressed in the fashion of the school. Jackson (1998) noted that "insecure boys, who are very much aware of their vulnerability, strive to display a hyper-masculine performance that will not only defend themselves from their fantasized weakness, but also gain the approval of the peer group" (p. 89). Sam did not take part in the regular physical education classes with his classmates, but I never learned why. Rather, he worked out in the weight room with a female student who was a friend. The trading card that Sam designed for computer class

was of the Great Khali, the tallest and most powerful man in the World Wrestling Federation. Sam spent almost one quarter of each class making, throwing, and retrieving his scrunched-up paper basketballs. He varied his delivery, including a backwards over-the-shoulder toss that was amazingly accurate. Sam was looking for some way to gain approval from his peers, even if it meant that he avoided schoolwork or resisted class-time expectations with his sporting underlife activities.

Once while the students were taking turns reading a story aloud, Sam got up from his desk, walked over to the blue recycle box, and moved it farther away from his desk to increase the challenge. Some of the boys sitting near the action noted his actions with a smile or a thumbs-up, but the teacher and other students did not notice. Later in another ELA class during a class discussion, Sam continued this game. Mr. Smith quietly told him to put his hands on his desk. When Mr. Smith was not looking, Sam tossed the scrunched-up paper into the blue recycle box and missed. He stretched out his leg, used his foot to scoop the ball of paper towards himself, and then tossed it towards the garbage can again. Mr. Smith stopped reading, looked at Sam, and said sternly, "Okay, you're done!" Sam followed along in his book and did not throw paper during the rest of the class.

In a later health class the teacher had given the students this one last class to work on the bullying cartoons. Some students had finished the work and were sitting around, visiting, and telling stories to each other about the hallways and the hockey rink and their ATV machines. The boys sat near one wall where the light

switch, the door, and the blue recycle bin were located. Sam edged closer to the group and began to make long, high lobs with his scrunched-up paper into the blue recycle bin. The boys did not include him in their conversation, and Sam made no attempt to be included. One of the boys silently began to scrunch up scrap paper and role-play basketball shots, followed by other members of the group as they continued to chat. The larger group of boys had formed a border around their conversation group and set the admittance at participation in and knowledge of hockey and ATV machines. Silently, one of the boys had extended the border and included Sam's game of toss-the-paper. The group of boys had confiscated Sam's game and his territory around the blue recycle bin. Was Sam seeing the border that the boys had created around the blue bin with their conversations, and was his shy, quiet paper-throwing efforts his attempt to be part of the group? Did his classmate purposely confiscate Sam's game and thus Sam's territory? The class ended soon after, and none of the boys acknowledged Sam's presence.

Bullying

One Thursday every class in the school attended a presentation at the local theatre on Main Street. Also in attendance were students from other schools. I believe that it says so much about what can go wrong, even when adults and teachers have the best of intentions in raising awareness of bullying and wanting to reduce the incidence of bullying.

A group of middle-years children and their teachers from a school in the city of Silverplains had researched and designed their own *Bullybusters* program,

a show designed to encourage students to take positive action against bullying. They took it on the road to present to other schools. The 300 Bedford School students entered the theatre, and their classroom teachers directed them to their seats. The primary and elementary grades went quietly to their seats, but some of the Grades 7 to 12 students did not want to sit in grade groups. They preferred to sit with their friends at the back rather than filling up the front and center seats where the teachers had directed them. The students formed a noisy, boisterous group as they complained loudly and continued to mill around and thwart the teachers' seating plan for like-grade groups.

While a child using forearm crutches awkwardly made his way up the steps of the stage to the microphone, several older students in the audience laughed out loud and made derogatory comments about the young man's mobility. As he climbed the steps and individual audience members jeered him, a teacher stepped forward to help him to climb to the stage. The afternoon then quickly deteriorated. He leaned into the microphone and invited everyone present to stand and sing *O Canada*, and the younger children and adults quickly stood. However, the older students half-heartedly stood while the young man on crutches sang in a rich, powerful voice. Only the younger children sang along with him.

The program began with a PowerPoint presentation that appeared to have been downloaded from the Internet. The narrator had an English accent. The students in the photographs in the slide show were not typical of rural Saskatchewan, but rather resembled students who might be found in an upper-class, urban cosmopolitan school of the 1980s. The music did not seem to match

the rhythm of the slide show and appeared to have been an add-on. The pictures of the school had some interesting architectural features that did not seem to fit with North American concepts of school spaces. The older students whispered, talked, and laughed about the accents of the voices and the dated hairstyles and clothes of the students in the PowerPoint slides.

The young visitors then presented a dramatic play about preventing bullying. Their little voices needed amplification and were lost in the big building. Again the older students snickered and laughed. I was seated amongst the high school students, and I was very embarrassed when the local students ignored the actors and began to talk out loud to each other during the presentation.

The teacher who had directed the show stood up and thanked the representatives of local businesses and organizations who had provided funds and services to take the show to the students in this school, and these audience members politely listened. She commented that her students had presented in many schools and that this was one of the toughest groups to whom they had presented. She concluded, "You have a lot of work to do."

As a group, the students stood and began to leave the theatre even though they had not been asked to do so. They then ambled back to the school, down the middle of the street and on both sidewalks in friendship groups despite the teachers' efforts to urge them to walk together on one side of the street. None of the classrooms in which I observed had follow-up activities to this presentation, and the classroom teachers took up the curriculum where they had left off the last day.

I noted that in the large, open space of the theater the students seemed to misbehave to show off in an attempt to gain the approval of their peers and solidify their position as students in charge. I wondered if being recognized as someone who minimized the importance of the presentation- in this case, the topic of bullying - may have given some students much-needed social acceptance. The Grade 8 students seemed to pair off as girls and boys jockeyed for position in the rows of theatre seats, and same-sex friendship groups sat wherever they desired. What had they actually learned during this hour away from the school?

A few days after the theatre presentation I talked to several of the boys who liked to visit with me at noon as a group rather than individually. I liked these times because the boys were very comfortable with each other and did not appear to hold anything back. Rather, they would sometimes add information to something that a friend had said, and everyone would agree. This behavior was in contrast to the other boys who preferred to be interviewed separately. Although I had tried to talk to them as a group, David did not want to talk in a group situation, and, consequently, we never did. I told the three boys that I had some light questions for them. They listened intently to each question, answered spontaneously, and appeared to be having fun with them. I introduced a few serious questions, which they all answered with the sureness of their youthful experiences. Then I said, "Now I have some tough questions for you." I paused and looked at them. "Is there bullying in this school?" Instantly, each boy's facial demeanor and body language changed, and the looks on their faces were very serious. They made direct eye contact with me as if to say, "Why are you asking

me this?" Their smiles disappeared, their shoulders tightened, and they brought

their hands together in front of them. The room became quiet as the laughing and

joking stopped. I regretted having to ask these questions, and I told the boys that I

knew that they were tough. I told them that if the questions made them feel too

uncomfortable, I would stop asking them. All three boys responded, "No, no. Go

ahead."

      The boys agreed with Ron when he said:

> Yeah, there is verbal and physical bullying here. People say mean stuff
> like "You're stupid," mainly because they don't like someone or someone
> isn't cool. There is physical bullying like pushing in the hallway, and
> yeah, there are fights, even if this is a no-touch school . . . . Yeah, it's
> stupid. Everyone does it. I mean, whether you mean it or not. It is just like
> a joke, like playing a game. Yeah, both girls and boys do it. Friends do it
> to friends, and people do it to people who aren't their friends. If it is your
> friend, you just laugh and give it right back. If it isn't your friend, you try
> to ignore it.

      Cal added, "Yeah, it's stupid. Everyone does it. Everywhere. About the

worst thing people do is call you names." I asked him, "So what is the worst name

someone would call you?" He looked down for a minute, then raised his head and

quietly replied, "Douchebag." Walter agreed:

> Yeah, it's stupid. It gets physical sometimes. Sometimes there is touching,
> like hitting. The worst is around the lockers when someone just goes up to
> you and pushes you into the locker or knees you. Then what do you do?

      When I talked to the other three boys individually, their behavior and

physical demeanor changed just as they had for the three boys to whom I had

talked as a group. Each boy tightened up to make his physical self smaller, and his

facial expression became more serious. I also told them that if the questions were

too tough, we could stop, but each boy said that it was all right, and we continued

to the end.

Sam also told me, "Yeah, there is bullying. Both boys and girls do it.

There is name calling . . . . The worst name is faggot. It gets physical too. The

worst is by the lockers. They come along and kick you; what can you do?"

Keith added:

> Yeah, there is lots of bullying around here, like verbal and physical. Like,
> you do verbal with your friends and it's okay, but you do verbal with
> people who are not your friends, and it is serious. A bad one is "greasy";
> like, it is about your appearance. There is physical, and that means fights.
> They could be in the hallway when there are no teachers around or at
> breaks when you go to your lockers, and it could be at lunch when there is
> no one around. You gotta give it back sometimes. Like, you gotta stand up
> for yourself. If you don't, then it gets worse.

David had a thoughtful look on his face and began to talk:

> Yeah, there is physical and verbal bullying; like, pushing around between
> the breaks around the lockers. It's especially bad after a rowdy class.
> There is name calling too, mostly to do about sex and family, like "You're
> gay" or . . . . And then stuff about your family, like your mother or your
> sisters. Why do people do it? Well, sometimes it is like joking around with
> friends; like, you do it to show you are friends with someone. But then you
> do it to people you don't like or who make you mad. I know it doesn't
> make sense, but . . . .

After I finished talking with the boys, I walked down the hallway to gather

my coat and the rest of my papers. I did not feel as happy and satisfied as I

usually did when I chatted with the boys at noon, and these conversations

bothered me for days. I kept seeing fear in the boys' faces—in their eyes; the way

that they tightened their mouths; the way that they stopped, thought, and searched

for words instead of talking to me in their usually easygoing ways. I wondered

how these conversations had impacted their lives as well.

On Halloween Day, at the break between the second and third classes, as I entered the school through the north-door entrance into the middle-years wing, I sensed a high energy level and heard the noise of feverish excitement. About half of the students had dressed in costumes and were strutting and posing. One boy wore a mask of hair that covered his forehead, eyes, nose, and the top half of his mouth. A group of boys passed this mask around and took turns wearing it and commenting on each other's appearance. Sam sauntered down the hallway in a black, shiny, imitation-leather coat; a black velvet top hat with a lavender ribbon; and dark sunglasses with shiny, silver Elvis frames and carried a walking stick with a gold handle and a gold-tipped bottom. Very few students paid attention to him even though it was obvious that he had spent a great deal of time and money on putting his costume together.

Some of the bigger boys went outside to chase each other around in the cool morning air. As the group raced outside, one of the larger boys grabbed Sam's walking stick and yelled, "I need this!" I had a terrible feeling in the pit of my stomach and wanted to intervene with "No! Give it back to him!" But I did not. I was a researcher. I was not a fellow student. I was not a hallway supervisor. Some of the students gathered at the windows at the entrance, watching the outside activities unfold. The entrance door opened, and the big student returned to the school door and handed the walking stick back to Sam; it was now in two pieces, and the student growled, "Thanks! It broke!" Sam's face turned red and his mouth quivered, but he said nothing. He looked at me, took the two pieces of

his walking stick to his locker, and shoved them onto the top shelf. He then stripped off the remainder of his costume and stuffed it into his locker.

The class bell rang, and Sam's shoulders slumped as he sat at the front of a row of desks by himself. The teacher entered the room and walked to the front to begin the class. Surveying the students, he asked enthusiastically, "Hey Sam, where are your Halloween duds? I heard they were spectacular!" Sam answered quietly, "In my locker," and his face reddened. "Halloween goes till noon," the teacher continued, unaware of the incident in the hallway. Sam sat quietly. One classmate whispered to another that a Grade 9 student had broken Sam's cane outside. The image of the swaggering little man was now replaced with that of a sad little boy who had been bullied. Sam's classmates did nothing but watch. They knew what had happened to their classmate, but no one told the teacher. The teacher began to teach.

Sam did not tell his teacher what had happened in the hallway. An older and physically stronger boy had confiscated and destroyed part of his property. Telling this story to a teacher would create a no-win situation for Sam and would probably further diminish his inferior social standing in the classroom. Children often use the term *tattling* on the playground and in the school. It is a negative term that suggests telling secrets and betraying one's own kind, and Sam wanted to fit in and be accepted by his classmates at any cost. Thorne (1999) noted that "sometimes the less powerful or those not trained to be physically aggressive have little recourse except to complain to adults" (p. 77). However, keeping from the teacher the story about the destruction of his silver cane, however painful it would

be to Sam considering that it would be shared in the hallway, might help him to gain acceptance or elevate his social standing among his classmates.

One person or a group of people can use bullying, a negative human behavior, to gain power over others. Examples in this school included sexual harassment—touching, groping, and teasing—and verbal insults—jeering, name calling, sexist jokes, and putdowns. Name calling, an aspect of verbal bullying, took on sexist overtones with references to homosexuality, vulnerable females, and women's personal hygiene products. Mothers and sisters, as well as female body parts associated with reproduction, were objects of ridicule. Misogyny or the hatred of all things feminine appeared to be an underlying theme in the name calling. By ridiculing the feminine, bullies hoped to make themselves appear stronger. Domination and control of others' behavior are concepts that are embedded in hegemonic masculinity. As well, hegemonic masculinity appears to be defined in opposition to the other—other forms of masculinity and all forms of femininity. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) wondered whether the concept of hegemonic masculinity includes "the rejection and disparaging of the feminine both in terms of women and any feminine qualities within men" (p. 189). The kinds of bullying prevalent in this junior high school validated their question.

We Are Friends, Too

It was the last full day of classes before June exams for the boys in my study. I had told them that we would have a 'pizza feed' the last day, and I wanted them all to come. I had booked a classroom, and 10 seconds after the bell rang, five of the six boys arrived: Walter, Cal, Ron, David, and Keith. Sam was not

with the group. Their eyes lit up when they saw the four extra-large pizzas, bottled water, and fresh fruit laid out on the table. I had set out paper plates, forks, and paper serviettes. They were a little shy and waited to be invited to the table. I said, "Okay, guys, what are we waiting for? Let's dig in!" And they did. They filled their plates with pizza and opened their bottles of cold water. We had just sat down when Sam peered around the doorframe. The boys yelled at him to come in, and he hesitantly entered the classroom. "Over here, Sam . . . . This is where you start. Come on and catch up to us!" I invited.

I let the conversation take its normal turns, and the boys talked about morning classes and what they were going to do after school. I asked them what their plans were for the summer. Sam shyly told us that he would be moving to the city of Silverplains. There were a few "Ooohs" from the boys. Walter broke the awkward silence with the question "Why?" Sam replied his family had sold their farm. The boys were rather shocked, and Cal broke the silence again by wondering out loud where Sam was going to live. Sam sensibly answered that they would live in a house. Cal looked down and then directly at Sam and replied that he knew *that*, but *where* were they going to live? Sam quietly volunteered that they had bought a house on the south side. Keith, who had been sitting silently, watching Sam, asked him what school he would attend. Sam hesitated and said that he was not sure yet, but that it would be one of the two new schools that had been built, either John Evans or Holy Trinity.

David moved his chair back from the table and advised Sam that he should begin to make friends as soon as he moved to Silverplains and not wait until

school started in August. Keith helpfully added that Sam should try to find some boys in his grade. Ron shook his head and spoke for the first time. He thought that it would be tough to move to Silverplains because he had heard that the students were bad there. Sam looked up from his pizza but did not say anything. Cal offered Sam some advice: that he should make at least two friends with whom he could walk around, because if one friend was sick at home, he still had the other friend. Ron added that Sam should put them on his friends list on MSN. Walter thoughtfully suggested that Sam could protect himself by having someone with whom he could walk down the hallway and that he should put his shoulders back. At this point, Walter squared his shoulders and demonstrated. Keith leaned forward and added that Sam should try to sit beside them in school. Sam put his head down and replied "Yeah, yeah" and looked a little embarrassed over all this attention from the boys.

As the lunch conversation unfolded before me, I knew instinctively that something important was happening here. The five boys, who for the whole school year had either ignored or bullied Sam, were now accepting him into their group. They were helping to make him strong for the next part of his school journey. What social processes were at play? Thorne (1999) suggested that when children associate in same-sex groups (boys with boys, girls with girls), they have "found a powerful way of doing gender, of announcing and sustaining separate gender identities" (p. 60). The boys had been members of the eighth grade in this school. Thorne observed in her study that once same-gender groups form, other processes emerge: "the dynamics of group loyalty, stereotyping of the other

group, and teasing of other individuals who try to violate patterns of separation"
(p. 61). In this vignette two processes were at play. First, the boys demonstrated
group loyalty by fearing for Sam's personal safety and giving him tips on how to
make friends and physically carry himself. They urged him to find friends before
school began and to develop an electronic communication network of friends. The
rural boys then stereotyped the urban boys by stating that it would be tough and
that the students were bad at that school. Second, the boys instinctively realized
that Sam could not look to his parents or his teachers as safe havens, that he
would need to actively create his own protected spaces in his new school.

This conversation was particularly important because to this point Sam
had been the one of the six boys who had been the victim of bullying. He did not
participate in the regular physical education games and activities but would,
instead, work out in the weight room. I had heard students from other classrooms
call him a shrimp and a little guy. He would stay in the lunch room at noon to eat
with his one or two friends until most of the other students had left to play games
in the gym or go to the computer classroom. Typically, the other boys in the
Grade 8 class ignored him, and the bullying came from students in other classes.
And now here they were, giving Sam advice on how to handle himself and how to
protect himself in a new school that they thought was tougher than the one that he
was attending.

CHAPTER 5: WHO I AM AS A READER AND A WRITER:

THE BOYS TALK ABOUT READING AND WRITING

In this chapter I examine how the boys view literacy and how they use literacy to assist with identity creation. The boys talked about the reading and writing that they performed in school. Their comments were balanced with the more formal results of the Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995) and the Writer Self-Perception Scale (Bottomley et al., 1997/1998). In my efforts to obtain a more in-depth understanding of their use of literacy, I analyzed one piece of narrative writing from each of the boys, and six prominent themes emerged. Three of the themes (humor, violence, and heroes) have been described in previous research literature, and three themes (playing fair, mathematical references, and family) have not. I will discuss these themes later in this chapter. When I superimposed the boys' stories on what I knew of them through their actions and our discussions, it became evident that some were creating their identities specifically as rural male adolescents and some more generally as male adolescents.

As the boys talked about their reading perceptions and experiences, it became clear that their views of the reading process were rooted in the reading models of the early 1970s. Gough's (1972) model stresses the importance of letter and word recognition. It includes, sequentially, letter-by letter processing, phonological recoding, word identification, and sentence recognition. LaBerge and Samuels' (1974) model includes the features of word identification that Gough described, but LaBerge and Samuels added the concept of automaticity of

word recognition as of utmost importance to reading comprehension. One of the boys' view of what reading is more closely followed Goodman's (1994) model, which emphasizes comprehension as readers bring all of their experiences and background knowledge to the text. Goodman noted that reading involves the interaction of readers with the text as they construct meaning. In the next section I will more fully describe the boys' views of reading.

Reading in School

The boys and I talked about the reading that they performed in school and what they thought reading is. Sam viewed it as something that teachers control and make him do and that he did not understand. He said he had no time to do reading. In answer to my question on what he liked about reading, he bluntly replied, "I don't like reading." Three of the boys held more traditional views of what reading involves. They cited identifying success in phonics, fluency, and word identification as important to reading. David had a phonetic view of what reading is: "[You] say out loud what it says; . . . translate what it says." David considered fluency a sign of a good reader and noted that "usually when you are reading something out loud, the teacher asks me to keep reading out loud; or if other people have trouble with words, I don't." Word identification figured prominently for Keith and Cal. Keith talked about reading at school: "Yeah, we just read the words on the page, . . . and it is stuff the teacher tells me to read." Cal thought that reading involves "looking at a book and reading the words on the page." Like Sam, Keith shared the view that he performed reading to please the teachers. Ron and Walter had moved beyond the phonics and word-identification

stages to think about reading in terms of personal interaction with the text as important. Ron was hard pressed to define reading, but he replied, "I dunno. Like looking at things, like reading, like what they are about and stuff, . . . like words on a page." Walter was more thoughtful about reading than the other boys were. He told me that reading is "like reading the word on a page and understanding the story and relating it to yourself."

Reading at school appears to have been an activity in which the boys had little choice. Sam told me, "Well, I read the stuff the teachers want me to read." Keith noted that he didn't like "the boring parts in the book that aren't really interesting . . . . Like, if there is a part that is just talking about the characters and stuff and their personalities and their stuff, and it just goes on and on." Cal did not like reading in social studies and science and said with a bit of a blush, "Uh, I don't like it that much, but we have to do it, so . . . ." Walter told me that he read at school "because I have to and also for enjoyment, and to waste time."

In our discussions on reading at school, only one of the boys mentioned that they read for enjoyment or to learn. In their opinions, school reading is teacher controlled, and they are directed what to read to learn and to enjoy. Each of the boys participated in Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), but only Ron discussed the DEAR process as a positive or a negative experience. I found this interesting because for eight weeks I had kept a log of what each boy was reading, and this exercise required that I talk with them about what they were reading. Ron said that at school he read for enjoyment in DEAR, and he liked it when the teacher let the class read it a little longer than the usual 15 minutes. He thought

that DEAR was sometimes a waste of time, but that it could be fun. Ron is a reader who enjoys sustained times for reading when it is easier for him to become engaged in the storyline, and he considered the timetable's allotted 15 minutes insufficient. Ron also read "textbooks and stuff, like what you have to do and not what I would like to do, but I guess I gotta do it because it's school."

What the Boys Read for DEAR Time

Every day after the lunch break, the whole school read for 15 minutes as part of the DEAR program. For eight weeks I recorded what the six boys read (Appendix G). I recorded their names, the book titles, and the authors of the books. Out of a possible 48 titles, I recorded 24 different titles. Each of the boys read different books, and *Jean Val Jean* and an English word dictionary were the only titles that were repeated. Some reasons for the lower number of book titles were that some of the boys were absent, some took more than one week to read a book, and some did not have a library book and, instead, chose a book in their lockers. They had checked 21 of the books out of the school library. The three books that were not from the school library were *The Snowboarder's Handbook* from a boy's personal collection at home, *Jean Val Jean*, and the English word dictionary, two titles used in the school curriculum.

I analyzed the books for themes of interest and identified seven: biographies of sports heroes, detective and mystery stories, humor, team sports, the supernatural, violence, and relationships. Three books were biographies of sports heroes. Sam continued his interest in wrestling by reading *The Great Khali*, and Keith and David chose *Mats Sundin* and *Joe Sakic*, respectively. David was

captain of his hockey team, and Keith played on the same team. The detective and mystery stories ranged from a believable fiction story, *The Great Pyramid Robbery*; to *Not a Trace*, in which teen male and female detectives work together to solve a mystery; to Gary Paulsen's science fiction thriller, *The Transall Saga.* Hockey, wrestling, baseball, swimming, snowboarding, and street racing were the predominant sports interests.

Humor figured as an important component of the boys' reading. Griffith's *The Day My Butt Went Psycho* is a story of Walter, the hero, who tries to save the world from butts gone berserk. The book is filled with much wordplay centering around "buttly wordplay," as Amazon.com (2010, Editorial Reviews: Amazon.com Review section, ¶ 3), a popular Internet bookseller, advertises it. Gordon Korman's *Go Jump in the Pool* features competition and humorous hijinks among the boys at the private school McDonald Hall and the private girls' school across the street as the boys try to raise money to build a swimming pool for their school. *Cup Crazy* details a hockey team that overcomes the obstacle of losing its captain and making do with the remaining players in the team's zany pursuit of the league championship cup.

Curiosity about the supernatural also figured in the boys' reading choices. Paulsen's *The Transall Saga* takes a science fiction turn when Mark, who is completing a solo desert camping trip, steps into a mysterious beam of light in his quest to return to his normal life, which is the plot of the remaining chapters. *More Ghost Stories of Alberta* by Smith was passed around as the boys read true stories of ghost sightings and haunted incidents in Alberta. Most of the boys were

already familiar with two similar books that were set in Saskatchewan. *The Haunted Shortstop* was the third book choice.

Relationships emerged as an important theme, although the boys did not talk about whether this is important to them when they choose or read books. Relationships from the boys' perspectives consist of boys who date girls, male and female teens who work together, boys' sports teams engaged in competitions, boys who are dealing with the actions of adult coaches and parents, and boys involved in bullying episodes. In *The Perfect Date*, the hero's girlfriend dies a tragic death, and he begins a relationship with a new girlfriend, who exhibits mysterious behavior. Opposition to parents and adults and the resulting personal relationships feature in two books. In *Running Loose* a teen boy is ejected from the football team for standing up to the coach, and his girlfriend is then killed in a car accident. *Rink Rivals* features twin brothers who move from a remote northern Canadian community to an urban city. Much to their parents' chagrin, one brother gives up playing the piano to play for the hockey team and impress a girlfriend, and the second brother begins to associate with a crowd with a bad reputation. The storyline of *Rookie of the Year* features a rookie pitcher who puts his baseball team in danger, and the book explores the web of relationships that make up a baseball team. A boy deals with his sadness after his parents' divorce, a move to live with his father, and the relationships that develop when he joins the local baseball team in Rich Wallace's *Southpaw*. Two books that deal with mature themes of violence and bullying are *Overdrive* and *See No Evil*. In *Overdrive* a street car race goes horribly wrong, and the hero, Jake, must make some difficult

choices in his life. In *See No Evil* a group of teens who are accidental witnesses to a bullying incident in which another teen is beaten mistakenly become involved in the investigation when one of them drops an ID card near the scene.

The boys told me that they chose books that are mainly about sports in which they enjoyed participating. Fourteen of the 24 books featured sports. The boys also thought that a book should have a good cover to interest them; good artwork draws them to choose up a book. Recommendations from a friend also help, but they all agreed that a book's cover should be interesting. They also liked books with a hero who, either alone or with friends, overcomes problems in nature or in his life. When I asked the boys whether it was important that their friends and classmates see what they were reading, they looked at me blankly. However, I observed the boys openly carrying their DEAR books to the classroom, waving them around, and leaving them in highly visible places on their desks and in their lockers with the doors open.

I asked the boys about the use of DEAR time. Ron felt that 15 minutes is not enough time to get into a book and begin to enjoy it, and he appreciated it when the ELA teacher gave them extra time to read. All six boys told me that sometimes they just stare at a book and pretend to read occasionally. Their reasons for this behavior varied from feeling ill or tired to being bullied at noon to being excited about what had happened in the gym at noon to what would happen after school with sports activities. The boys sometimes used this time to think over previous incidents, plan for the rest of the day, or just daydream. They agreed that it is important to "look like you are reading" to avoid attracting

attention from the supervising teacher. Cal did not enjoy DEAR time at all and alternated between a required ELA text and his dictionary.

Writing at School

Three major issues arose in the discussions on the kinds of writing that the boys performed in school. Every student expressed frustration with the fact that much of the writing that they did in the school context was teacher directed. Sam noted that that teachers

> make you write about a story that you just read, and you don't even like
> . . . and you have to write about it, and you don't really want to . . . .
> Like, they ask me to write about all the characters in the story and the
> events and the terms and then get the book back to the library.

These statements reveal that Sam felt that he had no choice and that he had no time to become engaged with the story he was reading. This type of classroom task was meaningless to him. All of the boys expressed concern about the practice of copying notes from an overhead into their notebooks. Keith explained: "Like when we are writing notes, just like when it is a whole bunch, and you have to get it done by the end of class, and it is really tiring and stuff." Cal agreed that most of his writing involved "writing notes down . . . that the teacher of that class makes up." I was very concerned that all of the six boys viewed the mechanical act of reproducing someone else's text as writing.

The second theme that arose in the writing discussion was the issue of freedom of choice in writing. Sam told me that "we can't write about what we want to write about," and "it is always what the teacher wants us to write about."

Keith was very aware of the two major kinds of writing that he was expected to do at school and told me:

> Like in ELA you write different stories and write character sketches and stuff, and in other classes you write notes and questions and stuff off the overheads . . . . In ELA it is that I like writing the stories because it is funner [*sic*] than copying the notes.

David liked it best in ELA when "usually you read something and write down your thoughts on it." A favorite assignment for all six boys involved drawing a cartoon strip about bullying in health. David commented that he liked the assignment "because I am a good writer and I am a good drawer, and when I combine those two things, it makes my work even better."

The boys commented on the draft writing that they produced in school. Draft writing appears to have been a very enjoyable process for most of the boys. Keith said, "Basically, I just start writing as fast as I can, and I don't worry about mistakes, and then I go back and then I fix them after." Like most youths, he used activities with which he was familiar to draw on for writing ideas, and most of his ideas came from "like the hobbies that I do, like hunting or sports, . . . that kind of stuff. Or only I like writing about sports and stuff." It is interesting that Ron enjoyed the aesthetics of writing stories: "I don't know. It is kind of hard to explain, but I like using the pen; maybe . . . the thinking and stuff." Writing sometimes frustrated him because of "how long it takes, and sometimes it gets really boring and stuff, . . . just looking up and then back down at your paper, . . . over and over." Walter shared that being creative and relating it to other people was easy for him when he wrote stories. He found it difficult "to make it short enough, because sometimes I just keep writing ideas. And then I will get an

idea later on in the story, and then I will have to go back and write it in." Sam was concerned about the audience for his writing: "I want to do just like stories and stuff that you don't have to do for marks and stuff, . . . like stories that the other kids don't see, . . . that maybe just the teacher would see." I wondered if he was expressing the fear that his classmates would be a harsh audience, and my thoughts were validated when he added that he wanted to write stories that were "make-believe" and about "little kids with magic powers and something that like." I noted that while the boys were engaged in the drafting stage of the writing process, there was more social interaction among the students, and the teacher assumed the role of assistant rather than authority figure to the students. The element of audience became more prominent in the draft-writing classes when the students shared their writing with their classmates.

I had some concerns about our discussions. I wanted the boys to tell me about the reading and writing that they performed in school. Although all six boys enjoyed their computer literacy class and appreciated their computer literacy teacher, not one mentioned assignments or activities in computer literacy that involved reading and writing. In consultation with the boys, I collected two assignments that they had completed for their computer literacy class. All of the boys told me about the process of copying overhead notes into their notebooks, which they considered writing. David expanded on this idea in noting that sometimes in science "you will write down the mental notes that you find on your experiments." However, Keith justified the copying of overhead notes by telling me that the teachers asked the students to copy notes "off the overhead to get it in

our head, and then it stays there, because if you don't write it, it just passes through, and then we have it to study."

The boys had multiple opportunities to bring their personal experiences and their interpretations of concepts to their assignments. Computer class was popular and enjoyable where they were able to create multimodal representations of their knowledge. One such assignment was the creation of a trading card, and in health class the students created a pen-and-paper, handwritten, and hand-drawn cartoon to show acceptable ways to deal with bullying. However, they did not understand that these forms of assignments also require writing.

Trading Cards

Mr. A., the computer studies teacher, assigned the class a project to create a trading card about a personality they admired. Mr. A., well known throughout the school for his devotion to the Saskatchewan Roughrider football team, had created for the students a sample trading card that featured the popular Saskatchewan Roughrider football player Andy Fantuz as a model. He gave the students two classes and part of a third to research, design, and electronically submit their trading cards to him.

Sam chose the Great Khali, a World Wrestling Entertainment! ([WWE] formerly known as the World Wrestling Federation) personality. The front of the card featured the WWE logo and an image of the muscular, bare-chested, long-haired Khali superimposed over a second image to create an illusion of depth. The back of the trading card featured the Great Khali with his arms raised over his head in a triumphant pose, the logo of the WWE federation, and phrases that read

"The Strongest Man of India," "Great Khali hails from the Dhirana village of Himachel Pradesh India," "tallest and most powerful wrestlers [*sic*] ever to set foot in the World Wrestling Federation," and "The Great Khali has also worked in a film in Hollywood called *The Longest Yard*." Sam had read the book *The Great Khali* in DEAR time and had spent a considerable amount of in-class time 'googling' for information on his hero. He chose the images and logo to add to his card during the first class. In the second class Sam searched for information on the Great Khali and cut and pasted sentences and phrases directly from Web sites onto his trading card. This was one of the few assignments that Sam completed and handed in to his teacher.

Keith's trading card featured the Toronto Maple Leafs' star centre hockey player Mats Sundin. The front of the card, created in shades of blue to represent the Toronto Maple Leafs, featured Sundin's name in large print centered at the top and his position, center, in the middle of the lower part of the card. Keith placed the Toronto Maple Leafs logo in the upper left-hand corner and the NHL logo and another Toronto Maple Leafs logo in the upper right-hand corner. The card featured a background picture of a smiling Mats Sundin on the left-hand side of the card and a determined-looking Sundin skating with his stick in a raised position on the right-hand side of the card. The back of the card, also in shades of Toronto Maple Leaf blue, featured text only and cited important statistics in Sundin's hockey career. Keith included Sundin's height of "6' 5 [*sic*]," "shoots right," "born febuary [*sic*]13, 1971," "weight 231 [pounds]," and the number of goals, assists, and points that he had accumulated. Like Sam, Keith had read a

biography of Mats Sundin in DEAR time recently. Keith quickly created his trading card and spent the remainder of the class time playing interactive games from the Addicting Games Web site.

David also created his trading card about a sports hero. He chose Joe Sakic, a star player for the Colorado Avalanche hockey team. On the front of the card, with a maroon background, the predominant color of the Colorado Avalanche hockey uniform, David placed the logos of the NHL and the Colorado Avalanche hockey team and the word *TAPPS*, the brand name of sports trading cards. A picture of Sakic raising the Stanley Cup, an emblem of supremacy in the hockey world, and an image of the back of Sakic's hockey jersey featuring the player's name and number 19 were at each side of an image of Sakic dressed in the maroon, blue, and white Colorado uniform, skating aggressively up the ice with his hockey stick. The back of the card featured a studio portrait of Sakic in his hockey uniform, holding his hockey stick. Below this image were important statistics from Sakic's career, including goals, assists, and points accumulated, along with his nickname, Burnaby Joe. David, who was the captain of his minor hockey team, had also recently chosen to read a biography of Joe Sakic in DEAR time.

Ron chose to illustrate a trading card for the Kawasaki 2006 Kfx 400, a high-performance racing quad. The front of the trading card featured a Kawasaki lime-green background with the stylized black Kawasaki logo at the left side of the card and a black image of the four wheeler on the right side. The colors on the back of the card were reversed, with Kawasaki lime-green lettering on a black

background. Ron repeated the name of the vehicle on the reverse side, Kawasaki 2000 Kfx 400; the logo for the Kawasaki racing team; and the slogan "Let the good times roll," which had been featured in television advertisements. Ron owned a Kawasaki motorbike, and his parents collected literature from many bike dealers and had taken the booklets and pamphlets home to read and discuss them with Ron before they made a decision on a bike to purchase. Ron still had this collection of literature in his room at home and occasionally looked at it.

Cal created a Pokémon trading card. Mewtwo, a Pokémon character, was featured on the front of the trading card, colored in purple and black. The back of the trading card showed an aggressive-looking Mewtwo with statistics for Level 100, categorized as fully trained, beneficial, neutral, and hindering. The images of the Pokémon character filled most of the trading card's front and back. Cal had overlapped the mathematical statistics on the back of the card by placing them at a diagonal from Mewtwo's right shoulder to his left foot, much like a sash of honor. When Cal was in Grades 1 and 2, he had owned Pokémon trading cards; and when he no longer wanted them, he gave them to a male cousin. Cal enjoyed playing the computer game *Pokémon Crater*, which he could play by himself or with other gamers who were online at the same time that he was. He liked to play the game at school and played it at home when he could.

Cal laughed nervously when he described his card to me. I asked him about that, and he said that he thought Pokémon was for "little kids." I asked him what he would create if he had a second chance. He looked thoughtful and then said that he might like to create a trading card for a snow machine. He and his dad

had purchased a Polaris Skidoo RMK 700 in 2007, and he enjoyed driving and riding the snow machine.

Walter also created a Pokémon trading card for this class assignment. He illustrated Metal Mewtwo, a character that he said was cloned from Mew. Fire-red letters on a lime-green background identified the Pokémon character's name at the top of the trading card. He placed two separate images of Metal Mewtwo on the front of the card with the text image *Pokémon Trading Cards* on the lower right-hand side of the card to show its commercial value. The rear of the card featured two images of Metal Mewtwo in combination with some statistics. Walter described Metal Mewtwo's physicality as "Species: Genetic"; "Height: 6' 07'""; and "Weight: 269 pounds." Black letters on a purple background proclaimed Mewtwo's powers in mathematical terms. Walter said the idea came from the Pokémon Crater online game. He added that the game was not online any longer because the person who had created it for the Web site had shut down the site.

Walter and Cal were close friends and sat beside each other in the computer classroom. They decided together that they could make the Pokémon trading cards quickly and then have more time to play school-approved games during class time.

For the trading card assignment the boys continued to create their social identities through the use of in-school literacy and out-of-school literacy and interests. The boys were using their interests in their "identity kit" (Gee, 2000, 2001, 2004) to describe and define their place in the school classroom. They used

particular *social languages* "connected to a specific sort of social activities and to a specific socially situated identity" (Gee, 2001, p. 718). With their trading cards they explored and used language specific to their interests of wrestling, hockey, Pokémon, and racing bikes in socially and academically appropriate situations.

Bullying Cartoons

Shortly after the school students attended the public presentation on bullying, the Grade 8 health teacher created an assignment for the students to depict a true-to-life situation of bullying and a positive response to the bullying. The teacher and students had been examining positive ways to deal with conflict and bullying. I was able to obtain three of the six assignments. I will describe the storyline of each of the cartoons and then comment on the content.

Keith's cartoon, labeled *Emotions*, depicted a dating incident. A boy asked a girl to go out with him. When the girl said no, the boy pushed her up against the wall. The girl freed herself and ran. A second boy, who was bigger and identified himself as the girl's brother, intervened and said, "You are bugging my sister!" The next frame showed the brother beating the boy on the ground and the girl in the background saying "Stop!"

Keith placed the males in the dominant roles and the female in a passive role. The two males used force to try to obtain compliance. The first male did not listen to the female when she said no to his request, and the two males did not stop fighting when the girl said "Stop!"

David's cartoon, *Dream Life*, was split on half pages. He labeled the left-hand side of the page "At the park: real life" and the right-hand side "At the park:

Kyle's imagination." In Episode 1, Kyle met three friends in the park. Three of the boys threatened to beat up the fourth, and the beating ensued. In "Kyle's Imagination," when the boys met at the park, the three boys invited the fourth to go to the movies with them. Episode 2 showed the three boys in the park threatening to set the fourth boy's cat on fire. In "Kyle's Imagination" the three boys offered to help the fourth boy's cat. Episode 3 depicted Kyle reporting the bullying to his classroom teacher. The second frame showed the three bullies clapping chalkboard erasers together to clean them. David's final frame contained three statements: "Bullying is a much bigger problem than clapping erasers. Think about how bad the victim feels. Stop bullying!"

David's cartoon displayed physical violence among children and possible animal cruelty. The misfit between what happened in the cartoon and what the artist wanted to happen was interesting. There appeared to be a silence and no connection among the three parallel stories. The connection between bullying and cleaning chalkboard erasers seems to have been tenuous and perhaps a message from the artist about ineffective ways of dealing with bullying.

Sam's cartoon featured two boys who told a third boy to "Get out of here!" and "Go away!" A fight ensued between two of the boys while the third boy chanted, "Fight! Fight! Fight!" The two boys, laughing as they left the victim crying on the ground, noticed a teacher approaching. The teacher tried to catch the two boys, but they outran him. The next frame showed a teacher, one of the aggressors, and the victim's parent. The parent overrode the conversation by threatening to go to court. The final frame showed the teacher on the witness

stand as a boy entered the courtroom and shot the two aggressor boys. The lawyer said, "Your oner [*sic*], my clients are dead." Sam's cartoon continued the theme of using violence to solve problems. The adults in his cartoon are seen as ineffective.

The boys explored the themes of dating violence, physical violence, verbal violence, and animal cruelty in their cartoons. They depicted adults as weak and ineffective and suggesting inappropriate methods instead of offering positive actions to solve the problem. There was no evidence in these cartoons of suggestions of positive ways to handle the conflict inherent in bullying. Two of the three cartoons portrayed a group bullying a lone individual or animal. A female, a single person, and a pet were the victims. The boys' suggested solution was simply to use more violence to address the bullying. The class experiences and discussions and the public presentation had no effect on the boys' perceptions of solutions to bullying incidents.

I asked each boy individually to discuss his bullying cartoon with me. Each boy looked thoughtfully at his creation and quietly told me that he would rather not. I asked some gentle questions to discover why. The boys' answers varied. Two said that it was not their best work, and one bluntly said that he just would rather not. Clearly, bullying and the portrayal of bullying incidents were sensitive and emotional issues for the boys.

The boys' enjoyment of the writing process, especially in the drafting stage, was evident in our discussions. Most of the boys gave me a draft copy in addition to the copy that they gave their classroom teacher. Adventure and action

stories with hero themes were popular. David wrote *Million Dollar Smile*, a crime story involving Ninjas, policemen, and heirs to an estate. Ron wrote *Supercross*, a fairly complicated story about motocross racing in which he accurately described the competitive sport of motocross racing, with an underlying theme of positive ways to handle conflict in relationships. Walter produced *Get Down . . . Get Extreme*, about a hero, Jude Chew, a university graduate with a computer science degree who excelled at football, BMX bike riding, and snowboarding. Keith wrote *The Hunting Adventure*, a true story about a trophy deer that he had bagged earlier in the fall and planned to take to the Big Horn Night at Walcott in a few weeks. Cal created *The Hunt*, the story of a family's successful deer hunt. Sam gave me two pieces of factual writing on bicycles that were identical except for the fact that in one he had cut and pasted pictures of bicycles beside the text. He did not give me a copy of the narrative story that he had promised me about "two little kids that had magic powers."

Writing Themselves Into Being . . .

Our identity matters, and through identity, humans make sense of their multiple worlds and their life experiences. Vygotsky (1978) noted that humans interact in society and internalize social practices, knowledge of, and beliefs about the world and about themselves as a consequence of their interactions. The formation and awareness of identity as socially constructed are important parts of being in the world. Literacy researchers have demonstrated that people who consider themselves competent enact very particular social practices to mark their identity as competent members of a particular community of practice (Cherland,

1994; Finders, 1997). As Lave and Wenger (1991) explained, "Learning . . . is a process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practice. Developing an identity as a member of a community and becoming knowledgably skillful are part of the same process" (p. 65). Blair and Sanford (2004) described literacy as "a dominant social practice through which the boys in our study shaped their identities and developed and maintained close personal relationships" (p. 457). Williams (2002) concurred that every writer in every piece of writing constructs an identity for an audience: "Writing is a deliberate construction and expression of identity on a page (or on a screen)" (p. 180).

The rural boys in this study also used literacy to shape their identities and strengthen personal relationships. In the next section I will describe and analyze the narrative stories that the boys wrote for ELA class and discuss their writing as a powerful social and psychological tool to construct and maintain their identities. Family relationships, hero character representation, aggressiveness, and humor were emerging themes in the boys' writing about who they see themselves as being. Mathematical references were also an interesting feature that the boys used to frame many of their stories. Five of the six boys gave me their stories, and for this research I used two hunting adventure stories, two sports-hero adventure stories, and one action-fantasy adventure story. Their stories are interestingly titled *The Hunting Adventure*, *The Hunt*, *Supercross*, *Get Down . . . Get Extreme*, and *Million Dollar $mile*.

Heroes With Relationships

All the stories featured male characters as heroes who engaged in physical and social contests to assert their power. They acted primarily alone, but with the support of loyal family members and friends. Boys and men in roles of father, son, brother, uncle, friend, mentor, coach, husband, and policeman predominated in their stories. Newkirk (2002) argued that boys' narratives are often read as endorsing individualism, aggression, and the violent resolution of disputes. Yet the writing of these 'violent' stories may have involved "playful collaboration among clusters of friends" (p. 18). Dyson (1993) called this camaraderie the "social work" of literacy (p. 18). Williams (2004) also observed that "another appeal of action-oriented literacy practices for boys is the way they can use them to make social connections" (p. 513). Thus, they could enhance and maintain their images among their classmates as well as their social friendships in the classroom and on the playground. Each of the five stories from these farm youths featured strong, supportive, and loyal relationships among the male characters and between the husbands and wives. Family relationships figured as important pieces of the boys' writing. In one story the husband as the hero mediated between two adult women who were embroiled in a dispute. The two hunting stories featured loving father-son relationships. One story told about two brothers who lost their parents and were cast as caring and supportive of each other. Another story featured the lone male as an academic and sports hero with the support of loyal male mentors and coaches.

David's story, *Million Dollar $mile*, featured mild-mannered Jerry in the background as his wife, Betty, and her cousin Gina battled for an inheritance. Jerry accompanied Betty, answered the telephone, and dismissed the police to do some detective work of his own. Initially, Jerry was written in a supporting role. *"'See you Jerry, I'm going to the reading of the will,' said Betty. 'Okay, good luck, and drive safely!' replied Jerry."* Eventually, he rescued Betty in a physical showdown with the Ninjas so that she could claim her inheritance. Jerry read as the Clark Kent/Superman character in the story. David described the showdown: *"Jerry burst through the front door wielding a baseball bat . . . . Jerry wasn't letting anyone or anything come between him and his wife. He was decking ninjas and smashing walls everywhere. 'I'll save you, Betty!' bellowed Jerry."*

Keith's father and son characters have a warm and loving relationship as evidenced by the easy give-and-take conversation between them. He described the father and son as *"two boys driving down the road"* who are focused on the goal of getting that *"big buck"* and working together. Jeremy's father's dialogue showed care for his son and a fatherly attitude with phrases such as *"Get to bed, son"* and *"We have a long day ahead of us tomorrow."* As the story progressed, the father went to town for mule deer tags and purposely took the smaller 5 x 5 buck so that his son could take the big one. He helped his son to learn the ways of being an adult:

> *"Can you go start the truck?" Don asked his son?*
> *"Ya, sure," Jeremy replied.*
> *Jeremy went out and started the truck and then they let it warn up for*
> *a bout 10 minutes. Jeremy loaded his dad's and his gun and then he came*
> *back in to get his coveralls on.*

Jeremy's father drove him around to hunt and gave him choices about which deer to shoot. Don and Jeremy worked together to skin, gut, and cut up the mule deer carcasses. The story demonstrated the father and son working together as a team.

Cal's story, *The Hunt*, featured a father, son, and a family friend who were cooperating on a deer hunt. The men worked together, taking turns to scout areas for possible wildlife and taking agreed-upon turns in hunting:

> *Donny shot at the deer. The deer started to run and Donny shot again and killed him. He walked up to the deer and put his tags on (the animal) and they gutted him.*
> *They got in the truck and went to a small frozen slough and now that Donny had shot his deer, he was going to push it* [walk through the trees to 'push' the deer out into the open so his hunting partners could safely shoot the animals].

An invisible thread is woven throughout the story of the male characters trusting each other while hunting, gutting the animals, and tagging them, which implies prior communication. They collaborated and worked together.

Ron's story, *Supercross*, was about two brothers who helped each other in the Supercross racing circuit. Naplion (*sic*), the older brother, was Pedro's surrogate parent as well as a racetrack coach because the boys had lost their parents in an accident. Naplion moved between the role of coach—*"You better be getting on that practice race or you will not get the hang of this track because it is a hard one"*—and supportive brother when he responded to Pedro's triumphant wins in the race and the fight: *"That was pretty sweet."* The number that Pedro wore on his back once belonged to his father, which signifies yet another male bond.

Walter included the use of a mentor and a coach who helped the hero, Jude Chew, to achieve his goals. For the sports of football and BMX riding, Walter acknowledged the coach's and mentor's contributions to Jude's successes:

> *"Jude, get out there. Don't mess up or you're off the team!" yelled coach Kent Austin.*
>   *"I will never let you down, coach!" replied Jude Chew. He made 759 passes and ran 90 touchdowns. The coach loved him.*
>   *"I am sorry everybody, but I have to retire from being a BMX rider. I have found another calling. The spot light is now going to the man that taught me almost everything I know and the man that brought me into the sport: Dave Mirra!" shouted Jude into the microphone.*

Walter has three brothers and a father who all share the same interests in finding old cars and trucks and working on them together to rebuild them to running condition. He was familiar with the concept of learning from others and wrote it into his narrative.

These boys wrote their family members and friends into their stories who supported the boys in their quests to perform heroic actions. The student writers acknowledged the importance of their fathers, their uncles, and their peers who assisted them to live, work, and play within a social hierarchy at school and at home in their community. In the classroom, Newkirk (2002) observed two boys who wrote each other into their stories in the hope of "maintaining a channel of friendship" (p. 296). Having family members assisting them to achieve their goals in hunting, in sports activities, and in their fantasy adventures projected an image of security and social solidarity to the readers of their writing.

Boys' narratives have been read as endorsing individualism, aggression, and the violent resolution of disputes. Newkirk (2002) asked whether the question was really about the depiction of violence, or was it "a matter of taste? Is it all

about violence or just 'low class' violence in the more popular media"

(p. 296).Williams (2004) also observed that "another appeal of action-oriented

literacy practices for boys is the way they can use them to make social

connections" (p. 513). Thus, the boys have written about and made public their

social image among their classmates as well as their social friendships in the

classroom, on the playground, and with their families and friends.

The Characters Play Fair

Researchers such as Pollack (1998), Newkirk (2002), and Williams (2004)

have observed that much of boys' writing weighs heavily in violence and action

and more lightly in character development. In contrast, the rural boys in my study

wrote narratives with some violence, but there were also many references to

character development, a sense of right over wrong, being law-abiding citizens,

and fair play. In their rural community they overcome social isolation through

tightly knit relationships characterized by communication with and support for

neighbors and friends. Doing the 'right' thing very often ensures survival and the

continued approval of their neighbors. Williams also observed that the

"construction and display of gender identity is of huge importance to young men"

(p. 512). In these narratives from boys in rural Saskatchewan, the individual and

group identities that they described the most in their story writing were of positive

characters.

David's story, *Million Dollar $mile,* featured two cousins battling over

their uncle's estate. The evil cousin enlisted the aid of Ninjas to steal the painting

and a copy of the will that left the estate to the good cousin. Gina, the evil cousin,

plotted and attempted to carry out the execution of Betty, the good cousin. Betty's husband, Jerry, located the hideaway and successfully battled the Ninja in a fight that began with the ceremonial bow. David also cast policemen in a positive role as they supported Jerry's and Betty's efforts to gain their rightful inheritance:

> *"I'm sorry, miss, I just can't let you in, boss's orders!" explained a police officer (as he guarded a crime scene).*
> *"Here's what we found in your wife's car, Mr. Gunther. I am very, deeply sorry," said a police officer (as he gave Jerry Gunther his wife's bracelet, driver's license, and some coins).*

Gina, the greedy sister, who enlisted the aid of Ninja warriors, was sent to jail: *"'Gina, we have a letter for you!' announced a prison guard (as he handed Gina a letter from her sister who was the rightful heiress to a fortune)."* This 'good wins out over evil' and the sense of what is ethically right resonated in this story.

Keith's story, *The Hunting Adventure*, demonstrated an awareness of personal responsibility and the need to abide by the law. The hero went out hunting on the weekends, after school, and on a Friday when "there is no school." The two hunters in this story did not hunt mule deer until after they had gone to town to purchase the required mule deer tags, which, by law, must be affixed to the hide after the mule deer has been shot. The protagonist knew that breaking the law could have resulted in the guns being confiscated, charges being laid, and hunting privileges being suspended for a period of time. The story mirrored Keith's real-life interests. Taking the hunter safety course to learn the rules and regulations of hunting as well as safe hunting practices had helped to formalize Keith's initiation into the adult sport of wild-life hunting and the rules and

regulations that go with it. He had a great deal of experience hunting with a responsible and safe hunter such as his father, who reinforced the seriousness and responsibility of being knowledgeable about hunting and the laws. Keith knew how the game was played, and he wrote that into his narrative.

Cal's story, *The Hunt*, displayed an awareness of personal responsibility in hunting wildlife. He referred to legal hunting times such as one half hour before sunrise. He also noted that each time a deer was shot, the hunter had to tag the hide. The tag is a seal purchased with the deer hunting license and the habitat certificate to identify the animal as the hunter's. Each activity in the story had its unspoken rules. For example, after Donny, the main character, shot his deer, he knew that it was his turn to "push the bush," or walk through the bush to scare out the deer so that a hunter stationed at the opposite end could shoot it. Cal demonstrated through Donny's actions in the narrative that hunting was more than driving around in a warm pickup truck, that it included a great deal of walking. In the story the hunters gutted the animal immediately and loaded it into the truck. Obviously from his life experience, he described the good meat-handling sense to gut the animal as soon as he shot it to cool the meat off more quickly and prevent the growth of harmful bacteria.

In Ron's story, *Supercross*, the hero, Pedro, demonstrated positive ways of handling conflicts. In a motorbike race, Pedro ignored the rude and illegal actions of his nemesis, Brad. At another time Pedro demonstrated defensive riding techniques and concentrated on winning the race. The hero's calm demeanor contrasted with Brad's escalating anger and lost temper. Finally, on the third

provocation, when Brad challenged Pedro to a fistfight, Pedro accepted the challenge. Throughout the story Pedro remained focused on his goal of winning the motorbike race by ignoring distractions. Staying in control of his emotions made Pedro a hero in Ron's story.

Williams (2003) observed that "writers always construct an identity when [they] write, even if it is the default identity of the dominant culture" (p. 181), and that the identity that a writer constructs is shaped by the context and culture in which he or she lives. The writer is keenly aware of the possible audiences; in this case, classroom teachers, peers, and parents. Children use language as a way of representing the world as participants and spectators, and these students wanted to write their worlds with the heroes winning and being successful by being honest and fair and following the rules. Britton (1971) theorized that, as we talk about "events—present, past, or imagined—we shape them in the light of, and incorporate them into, the body of our experience" (p. 207) and that making sense of the world in which we live by thinking and speaking and, later, writing about the events that we experience helps us to function effectively. Clearly, these male adolescents lived in a rural culture in which honesty, fairness, and cooperation were evident, observed, and lived every day.

Humor

Much of the writing of these boys contained humor and humorous references. Newkirk (2002) observed that "the student who can engineer humor within the context of an action story almost invariably gains status" (p. 299) among his friends. Many forms of humor were evident in these stories.

Humor abounded in David's story, *Million Dollar $mile*. The rich uncle owned a hairless cat, Mr. Fluff, and his niece changed instantaneously from being grief stricken to apologetic when a police officer asked her to leave the scene of her uncle's passing.

> *"I'm sorry, miss, I just can't let you in, boss's orders!" explained the police officer.*
> *"But I have to go in there, he's my uncle!" pleaded Betty. Betty broke through the officer's grasp, and ran full out to her dead Uncle Arthur. Crying she threw herself on him. "Why'd you have to go, why?" bawled Betty.*
> *"Excuse me," interrupted the officer, "I'm sorry but, I'll have to ask you to leave."*
> *"Okay," replied Betty. "Sorry if I caused any problems."*

A violent Ninja who had been hired to kill people showed an unexpected appreciation for a painting:

> *"What do you mean you didn't know?" commanded Gina. "Don't tell me you forgot that you were carrying a twenty pound, fifty million dollar painting?" she yelled.*
> *"I'm sorry, it was just so nice" pleaded Chai Mang, the Ninja leader who killed Arthur.*

Keith's story, *The Hunting Adventure*, contained dry humor. When the father and son walked up to a deer that the son had fatally shot, Keith observed, *'For sure there was no way that deer was going anywhere."* Cal's hunting story also contained good-natured ribbing among the three hunters about the accuracy of their shots. One said, *"You couldn't hit the broad side of a barn,"* and Jack replied, *"At least when I shoot, I don't hit them in the guts."*

Walter demonstrated his humor by having fun with word play and names. Walter used the name of his popular, young ELA teacher for one of Jude Chew's opponents in a sporting event, Psymon Powell (a play on the name of television

personality Simon Cowell of *American Idol* fame) and Dodge Charger (the name of a recently resurrected sports car) as another opponent over whom he triumphed. The hero's name, Jude Chew, also may have been a sly reference to the name given to chewing tobacco, which some people had begun to use after the health scare of smoking cigarettes. These humorous references serve to develop social capital amongst the boys in the classroom because they parody real life.

Violence

Violence in these stories and in stories that other boys have written in other language arts classrooms have set teachers on edge thinking about what is socially acceptable within the parameters of a classroom (Blair & Kelly, in press; Kendrick & McKay, 2003). Teachers have often suggested that boys cannot distinguish between violence in stories and violence in real life and that in real life they might enact the violence that they write about. In fact, even many of the canons of literature such as the work of Shakespeare and the stories of the Christian Bible contain violence, and children see these discrepancies. The boys in this study said that in their stories the action that I, as an adult, interpreted as violence was the "glue" that held the plot of their stories together. Newkirk (2002) argued that "suspense, not random violence, is the engine for the fictions boys truly like" (p. 130). In the stories these rural boys have written, they used violence purposefully to create suspense so that they could be bigger and stronger and so that right could triumph over evil in the end. These themes of great "physical strength and violence that are central to hegemonic constructions of masculinity" (Thorne, 1999, p. 86) figured prominently in the boys' narrative-writing stories.

David used extreme physical violence in his action stories. In his narrative, Jerry's elderly Uncle Arthur *"was struck in the back of the neck by a flying ninja kick."* Betty, the kind niece, was driving along the freeway when *"the ninjas (who) were wise to her sharp moves, hit her little Honda into the ditch. Betty's car rolled and she* was *knocked unconscious."* Jerry, her husband, avenged his wife's accident with violence. The action continued: *"As Chai Mang bowed, Jerry kicked him in the teeth."* The fight then moved to a balcony ledge: *"Chai Mang fell, cursing, onto the roof of a screeching red Monte Carlo which belonged to Gina."* Threats followed when the evil Gina threatened a Ninja, *"You'd better hope that the will is still set in my name, because if it isn't (Uncle) Arthur won't be the only one dead around here!"* Implied violence was also evident when the chief Ninja told his followers to stay back when he went to attack Jerry because he *'wants to take care of this one myself.'"* The boys liked to write these action packed thrillers for the enjoyment of their peers to read for self-satisfaction.

Ron's story, *Supercross*, contained a graphic description of a fistfight between two young men. Pedro had been avoiding this confrontation throughout the story, but on Brad's third provocation, *"'Well, since you are so funny, let's fight.'"* Pedro answered, *"'OK, 'cause I am sick of your crap.'"* Ron wrote, *"Brad had a bloody nose, two black eyes, and a broken nose. Brad had blood all over his shirt and pants. Pedro had blood all over him but it was not his."* He wrote this detailed description of the fight to illustrate his hero's way of

"assuming freedoms, powers, and competencies" (Newkirk, 2002, p. 179) to triumph over the story's antagonist.

Adult readers Boys' sometimes label writing as containing violence. Newkirk (2002) noted that "what adults see as 'violence' is often termed 'action' and 'adventure' by the youthful writers and the writers saw various forms of threat, contest, and combat as essential elements of their story" (p. 175). In Ron's story the protagonist used calming language and positive body postures to defuse an escalating angry situation. Having exhausted these previous options, and nearing the end of his story, Ron used the language of physical combat to solve the problem when he challenged his opponent: *"'Well, since you think you're so funny, let's fight.'"* The boys' writing sometimes served to "confer a status on the writer" (p. 177) as friends eagerly anticipated what would happen next in their story and wanted to be one of the first draft readers in the classroom. David always had his choice of friends with whom to work in ELA class because of the colorfulness of his writing. David's writing also served "to celebrate and solidify friendship groups" (p. 179) in the classroom because he could choose with whom he wanted to work during drafting time.

Mathematical References: 1 234 567 Touchdowns

Each of the stories contained many mathematical references to provide a frame for understanding the characters' actions and the plot lines and to create tension. In David's story, *Million Dollar $mile*, Betty received $400 million for getting the painting back and $600 million from her Uncle's will. David was an excellent math student, but at the conclusion of the story he used a 'turn' on the

million-dollar-smile phrase and left us to calculate that it truly was a *Million Dollar $mile*, although my math said that it was a $1 billion smile when Betty received "an extra 400 million dollars added onto the 600 million from our dear old Uncle Arthur."

Keith's story, *The Hunting Adventure*, contained many correct and appropriate mathematical references. The hunting regulations stated that hunting was legally allowed up to one half hour after sunset, and Keith included many references to late-afternoon times that created tension because of the time slipping away and the hunters' decreased chances of getting a big deer. He described a logical sequence in the days of hunting in his story:

> *Tomorrow* [Friday] *Jeremy didn't have school so his dad was going to take him up north* . . . *. It was Friday night and Jeremy still didn't have his white tail* . . . *. Jeremy was getting worried because he only had till next Saturday to get his buck.*

At first the two men drove around looking for deer; then they hunted a 5 x 5 buck, mule deer, and, finally, Jeremy's trophy 6 x 6 whitetail trophy deer. Keith made a specific mathematical reference to the gun size used for hunting: *"Jeremy and Jeremy's dad Don where [*sic*] cleaning up the 270's* [.270 Winchester rifle] *and sighting them in."* Keith also referred to the numbers used to measure the antlers when his young hero's father informally scored the antlers. He noted, *"On Sunday morning Jeremy wanted to know what his deer would score so Don scored it. It scored 175."*

Cal framed his story, *The Hunt*, with time sequences. It was important to him to note that they arose early, at 6:30 a.m., picked up their friend Jack at 7:15 a.m., and arrived at the hunting place at 7:45 a.m. Cal wrote that the hunters

waited for legal hunting time to start, which was a half hour before sunrise, and he described the deer by the size of their antlers, which ranged from 5 x 5 to 7 x 7 to 6 x 4 to 6 x 6.

Ron also used math in his story, *Supercross*. He identified the bikes' sizes in ccs or cubic centimeters and the Glenhellen Race Track by the track's length and the numbers of obstacles. Ron wrote, *"There is [*sic*] two tracks at Glenhellen, the first track is 1.5 km long. There is 3 Jump the Humps, 2 Whoops sections, and 6 Table Tops."* The number that Pedro wore on his back once belonged to his father, which showed familial loyalty and pride. Ron named three of Pedro's major corporate sponsors in the story and used ordinal numbers to describe placements in the race itself as Pedro jockeyed for position to finally take the lead. Ron's numbers served specifically to place his hero as a winner because of the number of corporate sponsors: *"Pedro has 3 sponsers [*sic*] which are Monster Energy, DC Shoe Company USA and Chevrolet Motors."*

Walter framed his hero Jude Chew's accomplishments with mathematical references. Referring to Chew's football career, Walter reported that he had *"completed 4 972 passes and scored 1 234 567 touchdowns"* in three years to help win three successive Grey Cups for the Saskatchewan Roughriders. Walter also described Chew's accomplishments in boxing in mathematical terms. The hero's record was 109-1-1, and he had one-punch knockouts in all but two fights. He timed all of the fights at less than 14 seconds, with the exception of a 4:59 fight that ended in a knockout in the fifth round. Chew owned a *"26 000"* square foot home with 5 stories, 10 bedrooms, 2 kitchens, and 5 living rooms. Walter

paid attention to a great deal of mathematical detail in his story to create a sense of sporting achievements and the material attainments of real estate that go with the sporting efforts.

These boys were constructing their rural and farm youth identities in writing their narrative stories of hunting and sports and fantasy. They were also positioning themselves as doing things that men do. In their families, in their community, and in their classrooms, hunting and sports were popular activities for participation and popular topics for discussion. The girls in this community sometimes participated in these activities, but the domains of hunting and sports were largely identified as masculine. Williams (2003) observed that "people whose identities don't fit the scripts of the dominant culture's narrative often are silenced" (p. 181). Sam expressed his desire to me earlier to write a story about two small children with magical powers. Martino (2001) agreed with Pollack's (1998) observation that "a boy writing in this way would be extraordinarily vulnerable. His very status as a male might possibly be called into question" (p. 121). I wondered whether he feared that he might be teased, ridiculed, or ignored if he wrote and shared what his heart wanted him to write. A 'What if?' question that I have asked myself is "What if I had pushed Sam further to explore this mystery?"

I Belong to a Family

David is part of a close, loving, multigenerational family, and in his story, *The Million Dollar $mile* two nieces squabbled over a dear elderly uncle's inheritance. David loved to watch the Ninja Turtles when he was younger, and

now that he was often babysitting his younger brother and sister, he found himself watching the Ninja Turtles once more, but enjoying the animated television cartoons for the violence and the physical strategies. David also reads extensively and has a good sense of humor. He cut-and-pasted a picture of the Mona Lisa on his story cover page, which served to remind the reader of the uncle's ownership of the valuable painting. He is an excellent math student, and at the conclusion of the story, he left us to calculate that it truly was a *Million Dollar $mile*.

Keith is an sociable fellow who could usually be found visiting up and down the school hallways in multigrade and mixed-gender friendship groups. His story, *The Hunting Adventure*, detailed the methodical plan that Keith and his father used to get *"that big buck."* They worked together cooperatively to hunt the deer they wanted for trophy purposes.

Hunting is one of Cal's interests, and he and his family hunt for sport and for food. Because Cal and his family are Métis, they have legal hunting rights and responsibilities. Cal and his family and extended family are very close, and this closeness is evident in the story. The father and son and their neighbor hunted together and took turns being the marksman and then walking through the trees to scare out the deer for their hunting partners. Cal always knows the right thing to do at school and frequently turns himself in for Study Hall, unlike other students who 'go missing.' Although Cal sometimes did not complete his assignments, he would usually tell his teachers before his classes started. In his story *The Hunt*, the theme of adherence to the Saskatchewan hunting regulations is very evident. The hunters *"sat until legal hunting time,"* and when they killed a deer, *"Jack put his*

tags on." (Every deer hide must be tagged with a portion of the hunting license.) Cal also has a quiet, but funny sense of humor with his friends, as did the people in his story.

Ron described himself as easy going and as a friend to many people. He is often the peacemaker in conflicts in the classroom and usually the student who does the right thing even though it might not be the popular thing to do. Ron's hero in his story, *Supercross*, lived with his brother because their parents had died in a car accident when they were traveling to Edmonton. Ron created a fictional nontypical family situation of two older teenagers who supported each other in a close fraternal relationship.

Walter, like his story-written hero, is an honor-roll student at school who often turns in perfect or nearly perfect exams and papers. Walter has three brothers and a father who all share the same interests. They find old cars and trucks and rebuild them together to make them run. Walter is familiar with the concept of learning from others (mentors and coaches) in his farm family home, and he incorporated the idea of mentors and coaches into his story, *Get Down . . . Get Extreme*, for each of the sports in which his fictional hero engaged.

Summary

Each of the boys expressed the frustration that their school reading and writing are teacher-directed and that they have only segmented short blocks of time to accomplish their work. The boys bemoaned the lack of two conditions of flow—"a sense of control and competence . . . and a focus on the immediate" (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, p. 53)—to describe their literacy experiences of reading

and writing at school. However, the process of draft writing appeals to and engages the boys in meaningful activities. Cultural home life, social relationships, and popular media provide experiences that influence and shape the students' writing. According to Peterson (2001), "The very language that writers use to write their narratives is laced with cultural meanings, as it reflects the social contexts within which those writers have participated and their ways of seeing the world learned through that participation" (p. 452). Dyson (1989) explained in her research with primary children that their writing involved the intersection of multiple worlds. These boys use the intersection of their multiple worlds of television, sports hockey teams, Pokémon trading cards and the associated online gaming, and hunting to create their stories and school assignments. Blair (1998) suggested that, as children become adolescents, they write the realities of their lives into their school literacy work. These boys wrote about the processes of positioning themselves as rural male adolescents within their school, their family, and their communities. The ELA teachers in these classrooms gave these boys the freedom to write their life realities and life experiences into their stories, and the boys explored their shifting identities in writing the narrative stories. Five of these boys accepted the invitation and the challenge to write their worlds and thus become more engaged in the craft of writing.

CHAPTER 6: OUT-OF-SCHOOL LITERACIES

The boys in this study have created their identities partly as rural male adolescents who use literacy to create social capital and, in turn, forge social connections with people around them. For this research I identified the fields, or settings, in which the boys' literacy practices occur. The two main fields are in school and out of school. The teachers hold much of the cultural capital of the in-school field prescribed in the school curriculum in the choice of texts and literacy practices that I described in Chapter 5. In this chapter I will discuss the out-of-school field where the adolescents and adults in the boys' lives collaborate and cooperate to create and share the cultural capital and build social relationships.

Adolescents work in specific ways to provide themselves with "socio-cultural capital" (Blair & Sanford, 2004, p. 457), any form of knowledge, skill, education, and advantages that give them higher status in their family, in the community, and in the school. They create social capital through the purposeful actions of utilizing literacy practices with and for others. The concept of audience is important. The audiences of the literacy practices in which the boys participate out of school include friends, family, neighbors, fellow hunters, and interested adults within the school. At times there is an overlap when the out-of-school literacies spread into the school literacy zone. For example, a thoughtful teacher recognized the importance of the digital prints of his deer hunt that Keith took to school and asked his permission to display them on the bulletin board. The boys

wrote their hunting experiences into narrative texts in ELA classes. A few boys

brought farm auction catalogues to school for reading in DEAR time.

They internalize literacy practices, as well as knowledge of and beliefs

about the world and themselves to create their identities. Gee (1996) termed these

ways of knowing, doing, thinking, reading, and writing *discourses*. The

discourses and literacies have provided the boys with a way of knowing, of

making meaning, and of 'performing identity.' They have created and built their

identities within the web of social interactions within their families, their

community, and their school. Identity is relational. The boys made claims about

their identity by aligning themselves or contrasting themselves with others. Who

they are within their family might differ slightly from who they are with their

friends and who they are at work or at school. Gee (2001) proposed that,

metaphorically speaking, we have a sort of "identity kit which comes complete

with instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular

role that others will recognize" (p. 526). The use of cell phones and computers,

the choice of reading material, and participation in family hobby and working

activities and the formal activities of 4-H and hunting help the boys to create their

social and cultural identities.

Cell Phones R Us

Three of the six boys carried cell phones with them. Sam did not carry a

cell phone because he told me that he had no one to call and no one wanted to call

him. Walter did not have a cell phone, but his brother in Grade 11, and Walter

sometimes asked his brother for his phone to call home instead of using the

school's free public telephones. David told me that he and his parents talked so much in the morning about what everyone was doing that day that they did not need cell phones. Later in the year David bought a cell phone. Keith, Ron, and Cal each carried phones and took great pride in telling me about them. I detected a bit of 'phone envy' amongst the boys generally, and a few were a little reluctant to share the features of their phones with me with others watching.

The boys had personalized their cell phones with downloaded ring tones such as "Hypnotized" by Akon and "Groovy Baby" from the *Austin Powers* movie. They used their cell phones to text-message friends, to play games when they were bored, and to call friends for fun. They used the alarm and calendar features and connected to the Internet to e-mail friends. They took pictures of their friends "doing goofy things" with their cell phones and e-mailed them to friends. Cal sometimes took videos of his friends that he posted to YouTube.

Keith said that his parents had given him his cell phone to stay in touch with them, but that he used it mainly to call his friends. He used the text-messaging features sparingly, because his two older sisters had run up substantial text-messaging bills, and his parents were not happy about that. Ron had also received his cell phone to stay in touch with his parents, but he good-naturedly admitted that his parents called him more than he called them. The boys had received their cell phones to call their parents if they were in trouble or so that their parents could check up on them, but they all expressed a preference for texting their friends. All of the boys agreed that that they talked to and texted their friends more than they used their phones to connect with their parents.

The boys noted that texting assisted them with their friendships and social relationships. Ron said, "Well, it's something to do when you are on the bus and you know you are going to see your friend in half an hour. Just kind of saying hello before you get to school." Ron also told me:

> If you are in town and you are going over to the rink, you would text somebody, like "where r u?" So that it is kind of like starting to talk to them before you get there. That way you have somebody to hang out with instead of being by yourself.

Cal agreed:

> Sometimes you just don't want to talk to your friends, but you still want them to know that you are there, so you text them. Sometimes phoning them to talk is 'duh.' I like to gossip, too. Like, I say, "Who was talking to who.?"

"Cell phones eclipse telephone formalities" and, as Keith added, "It is quicker, and you don't have to do the 'Hello, how are you? stuff. You can just say 'Meet me by the lockers' or 'Can I borrow your math?'"

The Nielsen Mobile report (Harris, 2008) noted that youth in the United States who were aged 13 to 17 in September 2008 sent eight times more text messages than actual cell phone calls. The Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association (Harris, 2008) collected data in Canada to track the number of usage minutes instead of calls made, but the Nielsen Mobile survey analysts agreed that the usage numbers of a similar group of Canadian youth would parallel those of the American youth. Timothy Blackmore, an associate professor at the University of Western Ontario, thought that the increase in texting might be a result of the teens' "dodging difficult or time-consuming situations that might otherwise be endured in a voice exchange" (p. A9).

When I asked the boys to think about cell phones of the future, they thought that they would be more important for texting than talking because storing and accessing text messages is easier than storing and accessing voice messages. They also noted that it is currently cheaper to text someone than to make a voice call and that, if they keep their costs down, their parents are happy. The boys also reported that their parents had given them their cell phones to ensure their safety if the boys were ever in trouble and to be able to reach them at all times. I asked them whether they had ever turned their cell phones off to avoid talking to their parents. They looked surprised and said no because they might lose their cell phones if they did that. All of the boys told me that they text and talk to their friends much more than they do to their parents. For these boys, the cell phone is a tool that has helped them to create their social reality and social relationships in and out of school more than an instrument to ensure their personal safety.

Computers

The boys' access to the Internet and electronic literacies at home was limited by three factors. First, dialup service available to rural farm customers is slow compared to the high-speed service and wireless capabilities available to urban consumers. Second, dialup service requires the use of the household telephone land line, and users cannot use the telephone and the Internet at the same time. Third, four of the six families had one single computer per household. They had to share the computer with the other family members and consider that the other family members also needed the telephone land line for social and

business purposes. Internet access is costly, and Internet usage competes for time with family telephone usage.

All of the boys had e-mail addresses, one through the school e-mail system and several for personal use through Hotmail. They had chosen Hotmail because their friends had Hotmail addresses, their siblings had helped them to get started in Hotmail, and Hotmail has an easy-to-use Livechat system called *MSN*. Hotmail is easily accessible and quickly learned, and the majority of their friends use it.

All of the boys chatted on MSN with friends, and their Friends' List consisted primarily of friends from school, friends from organized activities such as hockey and cadets, and relatives who live in other parts of Canada. Sam told me that "at Cadet Camp I met a whole bunch of people, so I added their names to my MSN Friends' List." David, who was very busy with school and sporting activities, told me that he had "18 [friends] right now, but I haven't been on very long." Keith, who travelled extensively for his sisters' and his own hockey games, had about 250 contacts on MSN. I told him that he was pretty connected, and he smiled and replied, "Yeah. I have people from like all the way from BC and from three other towns. I have friends that I played hockey with." Walter thought that his contacts on Facebook numbered "in the high 40s or low 50s right now." Most of his contacts were family members and relatives with whom he liked to stay in touch. David had not started to use Facebook when I first met him, but he said, "I am planning on getting started on it, but my mom already does it." Later on in the year, David began to use Facebook.

Friends are important to these boys. Electronic communications in the forms of e-mail, MSN live chat, and Facebook are the literacy tools that they used to construct social relationships with others, although, initially, they did not view these forms of digital communication as reading and writing. These digital literacy tools assist in the "formation of [their] identities as male teenager[s]" (Love & Hamston, 2003, p. 170) in a central, rural, prairie community.

I asked the boys which sites they visited on the computer at home and why. Ron laughed and told me that he used Facebook and Hotmail to stay in contact with people and to see the "stuff" that people sent him. He liked pictures of "weird" things like accidents and animals and people doing "crazy stuff" and similar videos on YouTube. David used Facebook to stay in contact with friends. As a good hockey player and the captain of his minor hockey team, he also liked the NHL Web site to check statistics. Cal liked Facebook as well for the fun aspect of sending messages to his friends, joining groups, and being invited to join groups. He also liked Kijiji, a Web site forum that features free classified advertisements for snowmobiles and snowmobile parts and where he could check prices. Walter liked to play poker on Bebo at home, as well as use Facebook and Hotmail to stay in contact with friends and relatives. Keith used Kijiji to look for skidoos and skidoo parts. Like the rest of the boys, he especially liked to use Facebook and MSN to chat with friends. The boys' parents monitored their computer usage, and in each of their homes, the computer was in a public area such as the living room or on an office desk.

Gaming Systems

The six boys all had gaming systems at home, as well as a collection of games that ranged from modest to extensive. The gaming systems were all gifts from their parents or their aunties. Sam owned a Sega game system with five or six games that he had inherited from an older brother. David owned a PlayStation with over 100 games, but he had not played all of them because he did not have time. Keith had both a Nintendo system with about 30 games, a gift from his parents, and a Wii with seven games, a gift from an auntie. Ron owned a PlayStation 2 and five games. Walter and his three brothers shared a PlayStation 2 and a Nintendo gaming system and had about 15 games in total for the systems. Walter's family had a Sega system, but had given it away to cousins. Cal owned a PlayStation 2, a Nintendo, and a Sega with about 50 games for the three systems. Cal and his extended family traded and shared the gaming systems and the games.

Sanford and Blair (2007) noted that video games and home gaming systems hold both entertainment and social value for boys and that "the games provide a place for social interaction as well as individual challenges" (p. 208). However, in this study, video games and gaming systems did not figure prominently in the boys' lives. They told me that they did not play their gaming systems much and that they played the games only if it was too stormy to go outside or leave the farm and they had to stay inside. Sometimes they would play their systems with family members if they were bored. When they had visitors whom they did not know very well and they were looking for something to do, they would set up the gaming systems. After they went to school; attended to their

activities such as hockey, cadets, homework, and farm chores; and ate, slept, and showered, they had little time left in the day. Sanford and Blair observed that

> not all boys are alike . . . . They bring their unique experiences, and varying degrees of engagement . . . . Their experiences are in flux and multifaceted and highly contextual. (p. 211)

Gaming did not figure as an important part of these rural boys' lives.

Magazines, Newspapers, and Advertising Flyers

Both the boys and their family members most often read *The Western Producer*, a 72-page newspaper that advertises itself as "Serving Western Canadian Farm Families Since 1923." Most of the boys turned to the Classifieds section first. They loved to peruse the listings of trucks first, then cars, snowmobiles, and all-terrain vehicles that were for sale. They found such details as make, model, number of kilometers, options, and asking price interesting to compare. The boys paid close attention to the location of the town or city in the advertisement to determine how far away the vehicle was. They also read the advertisements to compare the prices of their family's farm trucks and tractors and of the trucks of older boys in the school and the community. For the same reasons they found advertisements for recreational vehicles such as snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles interesting to read. The boys enjoyed the photographs in the newspaper of real farms and real people, as well as new farm machinery that was being used in the fields. All of the boys found the photos of farm animals and prairie wildlife interesting. They were well versed in these genres of informational literature and seemed to enjoy learning from their reading. The boys each had a personal reason for reading this newspaper, and it was useful in building social

and cultural capital with their family and their friends. They preferred to read newspapers and magazines because the reading experiences gave them "immediate pragmatic and social investment," which has contributed to "the construction of their [rural], masculine identities at this point in their lives" (Love & Hamston, 2003, p. 162).

Walter and Ron reported that everyone in their families read the weekly *Western Producer*, and Cal, David, and Keith noted that their fathers were the primary consumers of the newspaper. Each of the boys said that they talked with their fathers about what they read in the classified sections of this newspaper and with their friends about what they had found for sale in the classified advertisements.

In the early spring and the late summer auction companies send out colorful, illustrated catalogues of farm auctions in Western Canada, which the boys enjoyed reading, especially if an upcoming auction would be held in their area. They knew that their fathers would probably attend the auction sale and that, if they were fortunate, they might attend as well. The boys noted the make, model, horsepower, and features of tractors in the sale catalogues to compare them to their own family's and their neighbors' machinery. Knowing what their machinery was worth seemed to give them a feeling of satisfaction and of being knowledgeable. Ron's locker literacy dig (Taylor, 2000) revealed an auction catalogue, and he reported that he read it on the school bus with a few friends to share the text and images and took it to school and into his classroom to read during DEAR time. He thought that the 15 minutes of DEAR time was not long

enough to enjoy reading a novel, and he wanted to read something in which he could immediately become involved. The auction catalogue was obviously meaningful to his life, and he connected to this genre of text.

Hunting wildlife is a popular activity in this central rural Saskatchewan community and strongly connected to the out-of-school literacies. Five of the research boys participated in hunting activities with their family members. Associated with the actual wildlife hunts were the all-important preparatory activities that involved several formal and informal literacy activities. It was necessary that they attend hunter safety classes, pass the exam to earn a certificate, and purchase legal hunting licenses. Knowledge of safe gun handling and adherence to the provincial hunting regulations were also mandatory.

Hunting magazines were another favorite genre of the boys' reading material. Popular hunting magazines such as *The Outdoor Edge* and *Western Sportsman* were in some of the boys' homes. Some of the families subscribed to these magazines, some received the magazines as part of their membership privileges in their local Wildlife Association Club, and some of the boys purchased individual copies of the magazine at the local convenience store.

These magazines featured stories written by hunters and were illustrated with pictures of successful wildlife hunts. One of Keith's uncles had been featured in a magazine, and Keith kept a copy of the magazine in his locker or in his book binder at school, and his family had another copy at home. Many of the boys read and reread this issue during DEAR time at school. The boys also wanted to stay up to date by reading the articles on hunting laws and changes in

hunting regulations. Articles that promoted new hunting gear were also popular. The boys knew that these articles would not be available in their local hunting store for some time, so they would have to order the new products from mail-order houses. Kelly and Blair (in press) observed that magazines "represent some intertextual connections and multimodal references" and that boys like to read magazines because they "represent a change from the academic forms of literature such as chapter books and narrative fiction novels that were honored in school zones."

4-H Club

David, an active and energetic blond, tousle-haired 13-year-old, shared the family farm with his mother, father, and two younger sisters. David's mother and father were both actively involved in 4-H. His mom, Laura, had grown up in town, but quickly became immersed in farm life after her marriage to her husband, Mitch. They operated the family farm that they had purchased from his father, who had built up a solid reputation for breeding good cattle.

Laura was the general leader of the Bedford Multiple 4-H Club, and Mitch was the leader of the Beef Project, to which 17 young people belonged. The Junior Beef Project was for 9- to 12-year-olds; the Intermediate, of which David was a member, was for 13- to 15-year-olds; and the Senior Beef Project was for 16- to 21-year-olds.

Belonging to 4-H meant that David attended club meetings to organize activities, attended social activities, worked at fundraisers, participated in Speech Day, and attended workshops connected to the raising and care of cattle. The 4-H

members annually chose a president, treasurer, secretary, and news reporter, much like any other club. The meetings gave them opportunities to learn basic parliamentary procedure, as well as to show respect for other ideas and to practice positive ways to solve conflict. Social activities were a big part of the 4-H Club. Formal social activities included the Halloween party, the Christmas party, and informal social activities such as lunches and visiting after the meetings.

Fundraising was required to buy jackets as well as to pay for judging fees and awards. David and his fellow club members held a hot dog sale at the local Fields store and hosted a food booth at the local car show. Community service projects included delivering Meals on Wheels to local senior citizens. The 4-H club members also worked for the better part of a day loading and distributing to local farm customers at a local depot bales of trees from the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration farms at Indian Head, SK, in the spring.

Some of the learning activities included seminars led by local business people or adults and parents who had knowledge that the children needed. A local feed supply business sponsored a seminar on feeding calves for optimum gain. The students traveled to Saskatoon to attend Vetavision, an annual show sponsored by the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan.

The members learned about completing their project books, and throughout the year older 4-H club members and their project leaders helped them to keep their books up to date. Building tack boxes to keep their animals' grooming needs was a day filled with fun, hard work, and the satisfaction of

having created a practical and useful accessory to show cattle in the ring. As well, two afternoons were designated to hands-on practice of proper leading etiquette and the grooming and clipping of their project animals. The year ended with the 4-H Achievement Day in June, when the members brought their animals together to be judged by individuals certified in judging show livestock.

In his 4-H project book, David recorded his activities for his Beef Project. It included basic information necessary for informed club members to be successful and to respect civil law. A section on how to estimate the weight of beef animals included information on math and measurement calculations. He also reviewed transportation regulations because he could transport his livestock only with the necessary legal paperwork completed. The 4-H calves needed to be hauled to other farms for clipping demonstrations, handling workshops, and, of course, Achievement Days.

David kept a handwritten record in spaces on designated pages in his project book of general club meetings, Beef Project meetings, and special 4-H activities such as parties, fundraisers, service projects, and speech afternoons. The general club meeting involved all of the young people in the Beef and Light Horse Projects. Then the individual project members held their meeting following the general meeting. More meetings were held on different weekend afternoons, especially if they involved hands-on activities. According to David's handwritten notes, he attended five out of seven general club meetings and nine out of nine Beef Project meetings.

David's project book also included a members' manual of 115 pages comprised of units of information. Each unit had an "Organizer Page" with three or four topics listed: "In this unit, you will learn about . . . ." This manual was required reading for the children, and the members discussed the selected pages at the meetings. Pages were also devoted to a description of the animal that the members had chosen for their project, as well as the monthly feeding charts and subsequent weight-gain charts that they completed. David was also required to keep track of expenses for his beef steer. A series of monthly charts from December to June specified the required quantities of feed per month, the price per unit of feed, and the total costs; and on the final page the members summarized the feed costs, health costs, and miscellaneous costs. Their next calculations were the sale price of the 4-H animal minus the estimated costs. David was required to weigh his animal at the beginning and the completion of the project. He also wrote a half-page narrative summary that described the kinds of feed that his steer had consumed, the grooming, the training, and experiences with his animal's behavior. Finally, David wrote an evaluation of his experiences in the 4-H Beef project.

David also included a copy of his speech about the Stanley Cup in his project book. (Appendix F). He had won certificates at three levels for the quality of his written speech, his outgoing personality, and his natural affinity for speaking to groups. Certificates were an important part of David's project book and included a 4-H membership certificate and a certificate of participation in the

public speaking contest at the local club level, the district level, and the regional

level.

David also included pictures of the Achievement Day in which he had

participated and of meetings and social events that he had attended. The pictures

showed groups of children dressed in their Halloween costumes playing games,

members participating in grooming and clipping workshops, and his attendance at

Vetavision at the University of Saskatchewan. He had color pictures of himself

preparing his animal for show, and the last pictures were of David being presented

with trophies that he had earned.

The project members completed a reflection list at the end of the year that

offered them an opportunity to look back on the knowledge and skills that they

had learned. The list included the following:

> Set goals for myself, how to organize, knowledge in my project area, be
> proud of my accomplishments, try new things, accept change, how to keep
> records for my project, finish things I have started, take responsibility for
> my words and actions, where to search for information for my project,
> deal with winning and losing gracefully, how to make informed choices
> and decisions, listen to others, how to participate in or run a business
> meeting, work with others, public speaking skills, make new friends, be an
> effective committee worker, help others succeed, understand my strengths
> and limitations, respect the feelings of others, take responsibility for my
> club's well-being by helping where I can, and work with my club to
> complete a community service project.

David liked the hands-on activities because he knew that they would help

him to become a better groomer, handler, and shower in the ring. He said that he

was motivated because of his family's reputation for good beef cattle and his

choice of a good beef calf from the family herd. He also enjoyed the friendly

competition at the end of the year with his friends and neighbors. He reported that

his mother and father enjoyed helping him with his project, and he enjoyed spending time, especially with his father, when he worked on his calf. Completing the record book was sometimes an afterthought, he admitted, because he was so busy with school, school sports, and hockey. But he knew that he had to complete it as an essential component of his 4-H Beef Project.

On a warm, spring afternoon I visited David and his calf at the family farm. David gave me a pair of rubber boots to wear in the corrals, and he slid his feet into his own chore boots. We walked from the comfortable farmhouse to the corrals. David had been spending a great deal of time with his calf, and when we walked towards the corral, his calf ran towards him. The calf stopped and lifted his head into the air when he saw me, but he soon forgot about me and sidled closer to David to look for treats. David slipped the leather halter over the calf's head to control him, and the calf responded by licking David's jeans. He used the halter lead and the show stick to show me his progress in leading his calf. He told me that at first he would tie up his calf and brush him and talk to him so that the calf would get used to his voice, enjoy being groomed, and respond better to his training. Then David moved on to leading his calf to feed and fresh water so that the calf would enjoy walking and get a reward at the end. He told me that he had to remain calm himself because his calf reacted to his feelings, and if he was impatient and tired, the calf would not cooperate as much.

David did very well at the 4-H Achievement Day and moved on to show his beef calf in Saskatoon. When his calf sold, his family put a picture of him and his calf in the local paper to thank the buyer. David explained that this was done

when members won to advertise the good cattle on their farms and to thank the buyers, who were often owners of local businesses in the community. David's mother clipped the picture and thank-you note out of the local paper for him to insert into the last page of his 4-H record book.

Driving and Fixing Cars

Walter is the third son in a family of four boys. He remembered learning to drive by sitting on his older brother's lap and holding onto the steering wheel of the family's Dodge Ram half-ton truck. Walter's family had told him that he was four years old when he began to drive while he was sitting on his brother's knee. Now Walter drove a tractor with a front-end loader mounted on it to move bales into the feed yard for the cattle. He told me that he also drove tractors to help with baling in the fall.

Walter and his brothers would find lawnmower engines and restore them to working order. They rescued engines from discarded lawnmowers, and occasionally engines were given to them. They then "souped up" the engine to produce more power and installed them in go-carts that the boys built and raced. Most of their races were against each other on the family farm.

Walter's father had found a 1977 Pontiac Catalina to repair and restore. The boys were fortunate that the previous owner of this car had left a service manual, and they used it when they worked on the engine and transmission. The boys scoured the advertisements in the *Western Producer* for parts for the car and posted phone numbers of salvage companies beside the phone. Occasionally, one of Walter's brothers posted an advertisement on Kijiji, a free Web-based service

for buying, selling, and trading merchandise and services. Walter and his brothers

enjoyed reading replies from other people who had parts that they needed. The

family sometimes checked out eBay for parts as well. Walter noted that he had to

learn who to trust on eBay when he was buying car-repair parts online.

Small Engine Repair

Keith liked to work on small engines on the farm. Both the lawnmower

and a grain auger had four-cycle gas engines, and he changed the spark plugs,

changed the oil, cleaned the air filters, and sometimes cleaned the carburetor on

these engines. When I visited Keith, he took me to the machine shop where the

lawnmower was set up on a workbench. He explained that, because the

lawnmower had a one-cylinder engine, it had only one spark plug to change;

whereas a two-cylinder engine would have two spark plugs. He looked through a

toolbox and selected a 13/16" deep socket wrench to remove the old spark plug.

He ripped open a small cardboard box that contained the new spark plug,

positioned it in the empty socket, and tightened it with the same 13/16" wrench.

When he had tightened it, he picked up the old spark plug and the empty

cardboard box and tossed them into the garbage barrel.

Keith then checked the air filter on the lawnmower and saw that it was

dirty. Because the air filter was made of paper, he plugged in the air compressor

near the outside door. He then picked up the hose and angled the air nozzle

towards the filter, squeezed the trigger, and blew out the dust particles with short

bursts of compressed air. He replaced the hose-and-trigger apparatus on a wall

hook and clicked the air filter back into place.

When Keith had an entire afternoon to work, sometimes he would clean out the carburetor. He explained that the switch from leaded to unleaded gasoline had caused a problem. Unleaded gas went stale in an engine that had not been used for more than a couple months and caused a gum to build up in the carburetor. The float in the carburetor would stick, and the gas would not flow through, which would cause the engine to stall. Keith liked to take the carburetor apart and scrape out the sticky substance by using a small, sharp knife or the tip of a small screwdriver. He said that after he put it back together, he felt good when the engine ran smoothly again and he knew that he had been able to fix the problem.

In the maintenance books that came with each piece of machinery, Keith liked to study the diagrams and read the accompanying text. He thought that anybody with common sense could figure out the engine parts by looking at the diagrams and then looking at the engine. He liked maintenance books because of the well-labeled diagrams and corresponding text. The diagrams are simple black-line diagrams labeled with the names of parts. Keith had learned how to do simple maintenance by working with his father, reading the engine-maintenance manual, and working on it by himself. When he was younger, he watched his father work, and his father sometimes asked him to get a wrench for him, which made Keith feel important.

Reading and Helping at Harvest

Ron liked to read fiction books about boys and outdoor adventures and kept a personal collection of fiction books on a neatly arranged bookshelf in his

room. Most of his collected books were by Eric Wilson and Gary Paulsen. His collection of Paulsen books included *Hatchet*, *The River*, *Brian's Winter*, and *Woodsong*. Ron wanted to buy *Hatchet: The Return* next, and he liked to buy books when the Scholastic Book Fair came to his school. Ron also had a few Eric Wilson books on his shelf. He showed me the Web site (http://www.members .shaw.ca/ericwilsonweb/books.htm) that listed the books that Eric Wilson had written. The Web site invited the reader to "Click on any of the titles listed below, and you can read the first chapter of the book." Ron said that he read the first chapter of each of the books and then cut and pasted all of the first chapters into a Word document on his computer. I asked whether he ever looked at the document again. He thought for a minute and told me that he did not. He simply liked knowing that he had the collection of first chapters; furthermore, he really did not like Eric Wilson's writing as much as he liked Gary Paulsen's.

Driving was also an important part of Ron's life on the farm. Because it is a two-generation farm, Ron has had an opportunity to work with his parents and grandparents. He thought that he was about six or seven years old when his father showed him how to drive the family's half-ton truck in the field and avoid running into something.

Now that he was older, Ron liked harvest time best. He drove the grain truck after school and on weekends to help his father. Ron's grandmother and father operated the combines, Ron trucked the grain from the fields to the yard, and Ron's grandfather unloaded the grain into the granary. He said that he had not yet learned to take the grain "on the run," which means that the combine operator

would dump the load into the truck as both were moving at the same speed and in the same direction in the field. He liked to visit with his grandmother or his father when they unloaded grain into his truck, and sometimes they gave him messages to pass on to other family members. Ron liked to truck grain for his family in the fall because it made him feel in control, and it was "a rush." Sometimes having to make decisions about what to do also made him feel important, grown up, and independent.

Hunting

Knowing the hunting world is a valued literacy in this community. Keith and his father often hunted together. They spent weekday mornings before school, afternoons, and weekends looking for a set of trophy deer antlers. His family also made smoked beef-venison jerky for a snacking treat. Late one afternoon in hunting season, Keith shot a deer that he thought might place in the top three at a competition. His father positioned the deer carcass on the truck bed and composed a trophy picture with Keith holding up the antlers to raise the head of the deer. His mother photographed him from four different angles and printed the pictures on the family-computer printer. The next day Keith took the pictures to school to show the students up and down the hallway. The boys gathered around him to listen to his successful hunting story and offer their opinions on whether he would win a prize for the size of the antlers. Most of the comments were favorable. Mr. S., the classroom teacher, walked by, and when he saw the boys and the pictures, he stopped to listen to the replay of the successful hunting story and to appreciate Keith's pictures. The teacher asked whether he could post the pictures

on the bulletin board in the classroom, and Keith was quietly very pleased that he had been asked. In a few minutes the pictures were on display for everyone to see, and now the audience included the female classmates who had been sitting on the benches in the hallway. The photographic images served as social currency for Keith, who used them to create and strengthen his identity as a hunter, to construct himself as literate in this venue, and to give him a higher status in his family, community, and school.

Hunter safety classes were an important part of the education of these rural farm boys. Almost every family owned guns, and most engaged in hunting wild game for meat and trophy purposes. The fall hunting season for whitetail and mule deer was an exciting time for hunters in this prairie region. To be able to hunt legally and safely, the boys were required to attend hunter safety classes and pass the required exam. Each year the classes were held at the community college twice a week for two hours in the evening, and the boys looked forward to them. One parent, usually the fathers of the boys, accompanied the boys to the twice-weekly classes. Lectures; class discussions; learning from a text; the examination of artifacts such as hides, guns, and ammunition; and perhaps a visit to a hunting range provided the boys with a variety of learning experiences. The boys were required to purchase the hunter safety textbook, which they kept in their bedrooms and read regularly. Each chapter began, "In this chapter you will learn . . . [how to identify parts of a rifle, how to load a gun, etc.]," and the questions at the beginning of the chapter gave them a glimpse into its content The boys also appreciated that the diagrams explained the text and vice versa and that they were

in proximity to each other. Tompkins (2008) identified four qualities of good informational books as accuracy, organization, design, and style. In particular, the "illustrations should complement the text, and explanations should accompany each illustration" (p. 281). The boys appreciated these aspects of visual learning and literacy that were prevalent in the hunter safety instruction manual.

The boys enjoyed the lectures and the class discussions because the conversation in the hunter safety class always stayed on topic. They learned how to load a gun safely and measure antlers for competition purposes. The timing of the classes was important, and they were held in the fall before hunting season began so that they could take the classes and then go hunting with their fathers. Passing a final written exam to complete the course earned them an official certificate and a signed card to add to their wallets. They were now eligible to purchase a provincial hunting license to give them the legal authority to hunt.

A powerful example of the status of these hunting literacies was evident at the social gathering that wraps up hunting season on the prairies. One icy-cold late afternoon in December, a couple inches of snow lay on the ground, and everything was frozen. Big Horn Night, a well-attended social event, marked the official end to the hunting season. It would involve official measurements of antlers for record books, the awarding of trophies, a tasty community supper, and visiting. The local ladies had already been at the community hall for a couple of hours setting up tables and chairs and setting out the slow cookers full of chili, which was soon bubbling hot. The men hauled the boxes of beer and hard liquor into the bar area and set out the plastic cups, liquor tickets, and cash box.

The poster advertised the event as a chili-and-bun supper for $5.00, starting at 5:30, with the measuring of the deer antlers starting at 6:30 p.m. and the awarding of the prizes after that. This evening of competition, according to the poster, was "open to Canadian residents only and to Saskatchewan deer only." Two men who had been trained for this purpose scored Whitetail deer heads that had 2007 Habitat Certificates. The poster also stated that the owner of the winning deer head had to be in attendance to collect a prize. The categories were (a) Overall Typical (b) Nontypical (c) Good Ole Boys (55+) Typical (d) Good Ole Boys (55+) Nontypical (e) Ladies Typical (f) Ladies Nontypical (g) Youth 16 and under Typical, and (h) Youth 16 and under Nontypical. (*Typical* means that the antlers are symmetrical).

On entering the community hall, the hunters took their deer heads or antler racks to be tagged so that they could officially enter the contest. They had to complete a form for each antler rack that included their names and the category in which they wanted to compete. A local farmer kept the entry table of deer antlers organized, ensured that the hunters completed each form correctly, and collected the $5 entry fee.

This was a popular family community event with food, socializing, and good-natured competition. The whitetail deer heads and antlers were displayed on tables covered with white plastic that lined the left side of the hall and the front of the room. Along the right side at the front was a table with large rectangular slow cookers filled with chili con carne and large stainless-steel bowls filled with split buns and covered with a tea towel. Plastic tubs of Imperial margarine and white

ice cream pails overflowing with plastic cutlery were arranged neatly. White

Styrofoam cups, stir sticks, a can of evaporated milk, and boxes of sugar cubes

were placed beside the coffee urn. Two rows of tables were set up in the middle

of the hall with chairs on each side of the tables for the people to sit at to drink,

eat supper, visit with their neighbors, and watch the measuring procedures. This

was a social event that validated the knowledge and practices of literacy in

hunting, and it was framed as a competition.

At the front of the hall behind the plastic-covered table stood the two men

who were the official scorers, two men who recorded the measurements on

individual entry sheets, and a woman at the microphone who was in charge of

announcements. The official scorers used devices that resembled measuring tapes

and recorded the exact measurements on a separate sheet for each rack of antlers.

Many of the men wore blue jeans with T-shirts underneath flannel shirts.

Their ball caps displayed the names of local businesses and machinery companies,

as well as sports team logos, especially of the Saskatchewan Roughriders, who

had just won the Grey Cup a few weeks earlier. These clothes functioned as

literacy artifacts to provide information about and/or promote products and

businesses. Most of the women were dressed in warm fleece sweaters over lace-

trimmed T-shirts, hair styled with hairspray, light makeup, and, of course, clean

and freshly pressed blue jeans. The attire was gender specific, and the community

members conformed to their gendered representation.

Keith entered the hall about 8:00 p.m. with his father, his uncle, and two

cousins. After he and his father had entered his deer antlers in the contest, Keith

and his family walked around the two tables of antler trophies to see how big the other antlers were. Then they moved over to the long food table, helped themselves to the chili supper, and sat down together to eat.

As the night wore on, the frozen deer heads began to thaw. Because the antlers were from male deer, or bucks, a musky odor mixed with the scent of blood and wild hide began to emanate from the trophy tables. The warmth of the room thawed the frozen blood, which collected on the plastic tarp under each deer head. The scene was an annual event and a ritualistic part of rural culture, and no one appeared offended by the juxtaposition of dead animal heads on one side of the large room and the buffet tables containing the fixings for the chili supper on the other side of the large room.

Young teen girls in groups of two and three ate supper together and shyly glanced at the young men, who were more interested in the labeled and tagged deer heads on the plastic covered tables. The girls later purposefully moved around the hall, stopping here and there to check in with their parents and to chat with some of the youth who were standing around the trophy tables. Later, some of the girls would stop near the young men seated at tables or on chairs positioned in rough circles near the centre back of the hall. Occasionally, a young man would gallantly reach out, pull in a chair, and motion to a girl to sit down. Sometimes two girls would giggle and sit down on one chair. Traditional gender roles were evident on this evening. In school the young men occupied the center of the hallways for their own purposes of socializing, eating, and horseplay, and in the rural hall they sat in a circular group on the wooden chairs at the centre back of

the hall. In the school hallways the girls sat on the benches along the wall, visiting with each other, and, occasionally, a boy or group of boys would move towards the girls to socialize. In the rural hall the boys made the social overtures first by motioning the girls toward empty chairs to join the group. Again, gender played out as the males controlled the larger social spaces and invited the females into the social spaces.

The microphone system was not working well. The woman announcer's voice was muffled, and she had to compete with the rising volume of adult male voices fuelled by excitement and alcohol. Draws were made throughout the evening for door prizes donated by local businesses. Then it was time to announce the names of the hunters who had won prizes for the largest deer antlers. As the winners in each category were announced, they would make their way to the stage, receive their plaques, and have their pictures taken for the record books and the local newspaper. Keith's entry did not place at this competition, but a week later another of his antler sets would win him a trophy and his picture in the local newspaper. Competition, winning, and recognition and validation from their peers and in the larger community from the local newspaper were important in the construction of hegemonic masculinity in this rural community.

After the winners had been announced, the crowd began to thin out as people dressed to go home, gathered up their deer heads and crockpots, and headed for the door. Some of the crowd stayed until the bar closed while the local families cleaned up the kitchen, took down the folding tables, and stacked the chairs. The 22nd Annual Big Horn Night was over for another year. The opening

and closing rituals of a community event that reified the values of this rural way of living and being were important.

As a researcher in this community, I encountered a few surprises. They were surprises because I did not anticipate them, but, in retrospect, I realized that there were good reasons for them. I have often thought that if I had been more aware of the circumstances, I would have been more prepared. However, my innocence served me well.

The first surprise involved the topic of guns in one of my discussions with the boys. I had prepared my list of informal questions, such as "What kind of gun did you first learn to shoot?" "What kind of gun do you hunt gophers with?" and "What kind of gun do you take deer hunting?" The boys nonchalantly blocked me with innocuous phrases such as "I forget," "It was a long time ago," "It is my dad's gun," or "It is my uncle's gun." I was curious about why they would not tell me about the guns that their families owned, and one day I decided to be direct. On a cold winter noon hour the six boys and I were sitting in a loose circle in a vacant classroom. I asked them, "Okay, guys, can you tell me about the guns you go hunting with?" All six boys looked down at their hands, at the floor, at their feet, and then at each other. The room was courtroom quiet. "What's going on? Did I say something wrong?" I asked softly. One of the boys told me that his father's guns were not registered with the federal National Gun Registry, and two other boys' fathers had registered only a few of their guns. I realized that the boys were being very truthful and open with me, trusting me with this information. I told them that this was okay and that I knew that that was common practice, and I

changed the topic. I asked them what the National Gun Registry was, and they all had a similar story, obviously one that they had heard from their families and in their community. They said it was the federal government's reaction to a disturbed man in Montreal who had shot a number of female engineering students, and the government thought that having every gun registered would make life safer for women. I asked them why they thought that that was not acceptable, and their answers surprised me. They wondered why everyone had to "pay" for one man's actions because "all guys aren't like that one crazy guy." Their limited analysis of the genderedness of this event surprised me. They lived in a context in which the use of guns was normal and gun violence against humans was limited, and it was now easier for me to understand their reluctance to talk. In a community that lived out a form of hegemonic masculinity forged on the safe and responsible use of firearms, it was understandable that they could not tap into another framework to view this event.

One of the boys then asked me whether I knew what Saskatchewan's "weapon of choice" was. I shook my head and replied that I did not. "Knives!" he said triumphantly. The boys wondered aloud whether there might be a National Knife Registry if someone went on a rampage with a knife. The code of silence was alive and well with this group of Saskatchewan farm boys. How and where had they learned the cultural behavior of silence when confronted with questions and situations that potentially threatened their way of understanding life?

Summary

Blair and Sanford (2004) and Newkirk (2002) argued that the literacies that boys practice are intensely social and that relationships grow out of the use of these literacies. They concluded that boys are more likely to read material that can be transported into conversations with their friends. When the boys in this study read hunting magazines and auction catalogues in class, in the hallway, or on the bus, they usually shared the text and images with two or three friends. The literacies associated with hunting enabled these boys to identify friends with like interests and to strengthen those relationships through continued interactions. Kendrick and McKay (2003) suggested that students negotiate their literacy learning within various relations of power and status in the classroom and the school. The boys' use of literacies associated with hunting helped them to shape their identities and develop shared interests with their friends. They used assorted literacy materials as a social currency to maintain their social connections and strengthen their identities. Narrative writing stories, cell phone texting, computer class assignments, both commercial magazines and advertising material, and photographic images were their social currency.

The social capital appeared to be more valuable to the boys when they could share it with multiple audiences. Their writing for school purposes had a limited audience of the teacher and a few other students in the classroom. Reading hunting magazines, and attending social events such as hunter safety class and Big Horn Night allowed these boys to share their literacies with others on multiple occasions and thus create more social capital connections. The boys in

this study created their identities as rural male adolescents who used literacy to

create social capital and, in turn, used social capital to create social connections

with the people around them. They internalized their literacy practices, knowledge

of, and beliefs about the world and themselves to create their identities within the

web of social interactions within their families, their community, and their school.

CHAPTER 7: LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

Reflections on the Research Experience

Permission had been granted to conduct my research on the literacy practices of rural farm boys for my doctoral dissertation, and I had been warmly welcomed to the school district and the school. I had been a successful classroom teacher, and I was now almost midway through my doctoral program. Along the way, several of my professors had kindly noted my strong 'teacher voice" in my thinking and writing. I became more aware of my teacher voice, and I realized that I would need to shed the speech, mannerisms, and postures of a teacher and assume a researcher stance. Almost each day that I was in the school, I had to deliberately think through my researcher stance and role.

On my very first visit to the school, I had been invited to share in the camaraderie and support of the people in the school staffroom. I politely avoided going there on the first day because I did not want to miss the opportunity to gain my initial impressions of the students, the hallways, and the classrooms. I also knew from my previous experience as a teacher that there was another kind of 'school talk' in the staffroom, and I did not want those conversations to influence my perceptions of the school, the teachers, and the students. I also wanted to avoid issues of confidentiality. Later on, I realized that I had made a fortunate decision. I did not want the students to see me entering and leaving the school staffroom because I did not want them to perceive me as "one of them" (the teachers). The boys and I were developing our relationships, and I wanted to be true to what I had told them: that I *was* interested as a researcher in the kinds of

reading and writing that they were doing in and out of school. I did not want them to harbor any fear that I might tell another adult what we had talked about or that I might compromise our relationships based on literacy in any way.

Initially, I was given a small room that was officially labeled as an Interview Room to talk to the boys. Most of the people who stood in the school hallway could see who was entering or exiting through the door, so privacy was compromised. Inside, the room appeared to be a makeshift audiovisual equipment storage room, with some AV equipment scattered about in the small space. The room was chilly and had a large, noisy fan, so that two people who sat across the table from each other would have to strain to hear each other. The conversations that I taped on my audiocassette player sounded like we were talking through a large metal road culvert. At the first interviews the boys and I put on our jackets because of the lack of heat, and we chatted briefly. I knew that this was not going to work, so the second day of interviews I asked whether I could use a school classroom. I was given the Grade 8 homeroom, with no questions asked. The classroom was just the right temperature, no noisy fans were blowing, and the boys felt very comfortable in the larger, open space of their homeroom.

I made a deliberate decision to leave my outdoor footwear on the shelves where the students put theirs and to carry my coat with me rather than taking it to the staffroom. I left my coat hung over a chair or a desk and my book bag in the classroom so that the students could see me leaving my presence among them. I would leave a few papers on my desk, with the seating plan, time of day, and notes about the weather and who was absent to satisfy idle curiosity.

My relationships with the teachers proved to be a surprise. I had talked with the subject teachers to inform them of the study and to reassure them that I was interested in only the behaviors, conversations, and literacy products of the boys. Each teacher seemed very comfortable with me in the classroom. Occasionally, a teacher would ask me what I thought of the lesson or whether I thought the students understood the lesson or the quantity of homework was sufficient. They usually asked the question after the students had been given independent seatwork to do; and, of course, the students were listening intently to our adult conversations. I reassured the teachers that I was not there to observe their teaching, but that I was interested only in the literacy activities of the students.

I had been given full use of the photocopy machine to make copies of the writing in which I was interested. Each teacher was aware of the assignments that I chose to copy and asked whether I was finding what I needed. I reassured them that the students were doing very well and commented that I was fortunate to have so much from which to choose. The computer teacher was especially helpful and copied the files of the electronic assignments to my memory stick for me. He seemed pleased when I asked for certain assignments and gave me the files promptly.

In the late fall I was observing a French class. The regular teacher was ill that day, and a substitute teacher replaced her. The students were extremely disruptive and rude to her. She was doing her best to manage 20 students whose main mission was to subvert the class as much as possible. I wondered whether

the students were showing off for me or whether they treated all substitute teachers this way. After 10 minutes of bedlam, she stood quietly at the overhead projector at the front of the room and looked at me with her eyes full of tears. The students noticed this look between the two adults and momentarily quieted down. I picked up my coat and bag and left the classroom in the direction of a school exit opposite the main office. As I walked down the hall, I felt hollow and dark inside for having abandoned a teacher whom I would have considered a colleague at one time. I was angry at the students for their deliberate disruptive behavior, which they had not shown before. I did not see the substitute teacher at the school again.

The boys soon became comfortable talking to me in the warmer, more open spaces of their classroom. However, they usually limited conversations in the hallway to questions about in which class I would see them or whether I would play floor hockey with them in the gym or whether we would get together at noon. Sometimes students would see me, signal that they had just remembered something, go to their lockers, retrieve papers, and give them to me. It was usually a writing piece that I had asked for earlier in the week or in the day. It was a wonderful morning when Sam approached me with a math exam on which he had received 100% and asked whether I wanted to make a copy of it. I did! Later in the month I asked the boys for a piece of narrative writing, and David gave me his story, *Million Dollar $mile*. A few days later he found me in a hallway and gave me a copy of his latest version, which he was handing in to his classroom teacher for evaluation. At the end of the year the boys and I conducted literacy

digs in their school hallway lockers. I listed what we found and photocopied artifacts that I thought might be helpful to me. Cal gave me his three-ring zippered binder full of notes and papers. I insisted that his parents would be very interested in his work, but he replied that he wanted me to have it. Sometimes the best gifts were the unexpected gifts!

I saw many events unfold in the hallways and in the classrooms. I saw teachers and students having authentic, caring conversations, and I saw teachers and students having fun together. As I sat on the benches or hung out in the hallway, waiting to start a conversation, I saw and heard students bullying each other even though the supervision was adequate. No adult could possibly monitor every interaction in the hallways. Many questions went through my mind when I observed bullying, and I wondered how the rest of the day would unfold for the students. I knew that my intervention as a guest in the school would be seen as interference and perhaps intensify the issues. A voice ran through my head to remind my conscience that *if I didn't do something about a problem, I was part of the problem.*

I became very unsettled after I talked to the boys about their bullying experiences. Images of the boys as they tightened up their shoulders, swallowed hard, held their fists together in their laps, and answered my questions so bravely, telling me to continue asking questions about bullying, continued to rotate through my mind on a slick, continuous loop of movie reel. As I moved through the interviews on bullying, I continually second-guessed myself about the best way to talk to the boys. Each conversation was similar yet so different, and I did

not have a one-template-fits-all answer. I began to feel ill, and when I returned home each day, I walked outdoors on a seldom-used prairie trail to try to clear my head, to justify what I was doing, and to figure out how to be sensitive to the boys. I was clearly in physical and emotional pain. Writing up my jot notes, transcribing the interviews, and journaling for my peace of mind occupied a great deal of my time and kept my mind busy. But the images still crept into my brain at unexpected and inopportune times: just before I went to sleep, while I was reading, or while I was driving. I thought about what the boys had told me and realized that they had their own support groups to deal with their issues in their own way and that if they needed outside intervention, they were informed enough to know who to ask. My emotions that were stirred up because of my research were difficult to deal with and still bring up mixed feelings when I revisit the texts I wrote.

A difficult part of the pre-research phase for me was crafting the interview questions. Looking back at the first sets of questions I wrote, I believe that at the time they resembled police interrogation questions. I needed to turn them into more direct, honest inquiries, but how? I knew what information I wanted to elicit from the boys, and I thought of many ways to word the questions. The pre-interview welcome and small talk would set the stage. Attentive listening skills manifest in my body posture, my eye contact, and my supportive oral responses were important. The positioning of the tape player, pencils, and paper on the table added to the atmosphere. I also knew that just one question would not be the golden key that would elicit all that I wanted to know about the subject. As the

year progressed, the boys found it comfortable to talk with me singly and in groups of two and three. We visited in the hallways, on the benches, and sometimes in the classrooms at school in full view of the general student population. It was in these informal, unscheduled interviews that I was sometimes able to return to a question, generally and then specifically, to ask the boys. And it was in these informal, unscheduled meetings that the boys were very forthcoming, relaxed, and happy to talk to me about anything I wanted to know. I realized the importance of jotting notes to myself about what I wanted to know more about so that when the opportunity arose, I would be able to capitalize on it.

I had presumed that my research study would follow a linear path where I would choose my research topic, find a location and research subjects, collect and analyze the data, and write up my findings. I wanted to learn more about the literacy practices of rural male adolescents. As I observed and collected my data and began to write, the study took on a life of its own. As much as I tried to focus on the actual literacy practices themselves, I could not ignore the social and cultural context in which the boys were embedded. Creating a social identity and finding a place in the particular social and cultural context were crucial in the boys' lives. I soon realized that all of the data that I had collected about social and cultural contexts would have as much importance as the actual reading and writing that the boys were doing. After I allowed the social and cultural context piece to take its place in my study, the pieces of the literacy puzzle fit together more easily. I now had answers for the boys' literacy choices, thoughts, and behaviors.

Keeping oral trust about unsettling family and life events, I discovered unintentionally through conversation with the boys, posed a few problems. In our conversations I allowed the boys to speak, I acknowledged their information, and I asked how they were feeling. I always asked whether they felt that they needed a counselor, and even when they replied in the negative, I reminded them of the counselor's name and how they could access his services. Because of the size of the research school and the closeness of the rural communities, I did not use the information if I felt that it would not add to the study or if it would compromise the anonymity of the research subjects.

I have focused on relationships in this discussion of my reflections on the research process and my role in the research process. Relationship building was the most important piece of my research. I felt honored to hear the students' stories and to read their work. I was privileged to be able to spend time with them talking about books and reading and writing and drawing. Gee (2001) suggested that learning anything requires a shift in identity. Over the months that I spent with the boys, I noted their identities shifting and changing in response to events and other people in their life. My learning required a shift in my identity, and I remain open to the possibilities of seeing more.

Summary of Research Findings

Social constructivism as a learning theory emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning, which is viewed as an active process in which learners actively make meanings through social interactions with others and with the environment in which they live. Such is the world of the six rural male adolescents in this

research study. They understand learning as a social process that emphasizes dialogue and the many roles of language in instruction in mediated learning with others. The concepts of social constructivism and a textually mediated world informed my research study. In the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Dewey (1929) that resulted in social constructivist thinking, they claimed that children construct their personal knowledge and understandings of the world in which they live from association with concrete objects and with more knowledgeable others. The social interactions with others and the environment in which they live colors and shapes their learning. The more knowledgeable others for the boys in my study include their family members, peers, community group leaders, schoolmates, and teachers. The activities in which they engage, such as 4-H, Cadets, hunting, hockey, electronic communication, and reading text-dense commercial advertising material, are facilitated and made more interesting with concrete realia suitable to the particular activity. The social settings in which the research boys engage in literacy practices require dialogue between and among adults, peers, and other group members. The social settings influence the kinds of dialogue and social interactions in which the boys engage. Repairing machinery in the farm yard, learning to drive a truck, navigating a Web page, using a cell phone, participating in Air Cadets meetings and babysitting classes, completing hunter safety classes, and attending ice hockey practices at the arena each requires its own language and mode of interactions. These are their sociocultural worlds. The boys are usually motivated by a curiosity to learn knowledge for the world in which they live, a need to be with their peers, and a desire to build social capital

in their settings. The classrooms in the public school that the boys attend are also social settings, albeit carefully micromanaged, time-bound, artificial settings with rigid rules of compliance and passivity, limited opportunities for social interactions, and the almost exclusive use of printed text.

Outside the school, conversation is the 'carrier' of knowledge. The boys use dialogue to build social relationships and to determine and assess prior knowledge. They use conversation in combination with gestures, images, sounds, realia, and some print text to impart knowledge. Inside the school, teachers use their oral language and print text to teach formal lessons, relying on the students' body postures and absence of questions to determine whether they have been successful. The boys think that computer literacy class is the best class next to gym, but computers and their capabilities are used very little in the other school subjects. Part of the problem is limited resources for a large population, and printed text on paper is the preferred information carrier.

Most of the reading in which the boys engage outside of school is transactional and motivated by personal and group interests. Advertising print in flyers, magazines, and newspapers attracts the boys' interests and provides text-dense pages for them to peruse. Web pages containing multimodal presentations of text including informational text with diagrams, images, numbers, and words in commercial sales formats are popular, along with the mathematical representations of sports statistics for hockey, wrestling, and football found in newspapers, magazines, and online. In school, ELA classes are taught using print-

dense text pages with common fonts and few images. The school presentation of text is privileged by the school as more valuable.

The boys' writing outside of school, although minimal in quantity, serves functional purposes for recording information. Transactional writing in 4-H, hunter safety classes, and recording information about hockey statistics and trucks is the most common. Each of the boys has a skewed idea of what in-school writing is. The boys believe that copying notes from an overhead transparency or from the whiteboard is writing. They believe that writing is a reproduction of someone else's efforts, and, despite further questioning, they did not view their narrative story writing efforts in ELA classes, the creation of sports trading cards in computer class, or the design of a poster in social studies as writing. The situating of power might have played out here as the boys might have thought that writing is an activity that someone else performs and performs well. It is interesting that one of the six boys noted that "sometimes the teachers make us write to find out what we know." Again, the issue of power surfaced in this boy's thinking that writing is something that teachers "make them do."

The theory of written discourse that emerged from Britton's work in Great Britain in the 1970s has greatly influenced the way we understand teaching and learning in language arts classes and how writing is taught in schools today. A key phrase that Britton (1971) used is that using oral language and written language is a way of "representing the world" (p. 206) and that children make sense of the world in which they live by thinking and speaking and, later, writing about the events that they experience. The rural boys in my study use written

language in the form of narrative story writing to "cast and recast gender"

(Anderson, 2002, p. 226). The boys experience, interpret, and write their real and

imaginary social interactions and social identities. The boys talk, read, and write

"in response to, in spite of, and/or in order to manage themselves, their

relationships, and the contexts and concomitant expectations that they inhabit"

(p. 395). In Dyson's (1989, 1993) words, the boys use literacy to do the social

work of gender, to define themselves, and to place themselves in their families

and their peer groups and among their schoolmates with a gendered identity.

Britton also contended that writing is a way of pursuing the personal need to

rehearse the past or predict the future. The boys in this research created colorful

narrative stories filled with images and actions and dialogue of their real lives and

their imaginary lives, yet colored with themes of close family relationships and

respect for nature and law enforcement agencies.

Willis (1997) described three functions of literacy: "literacy as a skill;

literacy-as-school-knowledge; and literacy as a social and cultural context"

(p. 388). When I questioned them, the boys equated literacy with a skill in their

response that literacy is the ability to read and write. The school views literacy as

a commodity to be given to the students, enhanced with skill and drill, and

evaluated. In the boys' everyday lives, however, literacy is an activity embedded

within their social and cultural contexts. The disconnect between in-school

literacies and out-of-school literacies occurs because the boys, unwittingly, have

two agendas in play. One is their daily performance of the male gender and the

ways that males in their families and their communities use literacy; the second is

the boys' view of "literacy as a social practice rather than the construction of print-based material" (Faulkner, 2005, p. 112). The literacy practices in which the boys engage at home and in the community are embedded in the social contexts in which the boys live. Street (2005) also asked researchers to pay attention to the space of literacy practice; in particular, the school, home, work, and social worlds of literacy; the identities of the individuals; and the artifacts that the individuals use. The everyday meanings and uses of literacy in specific cultural contexts define the concept of literacy as a social practice.

The boys have learned the basic skills model of English in school, which is usually for the audience of one teacher and is narrow and limiting and reproduces someone else's work. Out of school the boys are freer to use English as a means to an end to achieve the goal of participation in Cadets, 4-H, hockey, or hunting activities. The "notions of teenage boys as 'agentful,' . . . where teenage boys shape leisure reading practices" (Love & Hamston, 2003, p. 161), align with their wishes to assume growing independence in other aspects of their lives. In their family, peer, and community groups, the boys use literacy to enact gender and masculinity; in short, they use using literacy to do their identity work. Their specific ways of "thinking, believing, valuing, acting, interacting, and, often, ways of coordinating and being coordinated by other people, objects, tools, settings, and technologies" (Gee, 2000, p. 413) contribute to their identity work.

The metanarrative of hegemonic masculinity is the 'story' that the boys compose, revise, participate in, and listen to in their rural community. Elements of the metanarrative include the boys' clothing, their personal grooming, their social

activities of being with the male and female gender and their family, and their choice of in-school and out-of-school activities. Gee (2001) proposed that, metaphorically speaking, we have a sort of "identity kit which comes complete with instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (p. 526). The boys work to construct their identity. The influence of adult males in their families and in gender-specific, socially accepted activities is very important to these boys as well. Each of the choices that they make conforms to the voices of what was previously accepted as being a rural male adolescent in their school and their community. There was no room for diverse voices or for exploring being different unless it was to further explore and enhance what was already the norm. What began as a study of the literacy practices of rural farm male adolescents morphed into a study of how these boys use literacy as a social practice to perform gender and establish their identities as rural male, heterosexual adolescents.

Implications for Future Teaching Practice

Any study is usually validated by the question of the significance of learnings. Although I focused my researcher lens on the students, some findings emerged that have implications for teaching practice in the classroom and for preservice teachers. Purposeful work and connection to personal interests emerged as the two major implications.

The boys reported that they enjoyed assignments framed as purposeful, interesting, and potentially useful to their future and expressed frustration with random busy work with little purpose. The integration of multimodal ways of

creating their products adds to their interest and enthusiasm. The boys appreciate knowing beforehand the exact parameters of an assignment so that they can fulfill the required expectations.

Being able to incorporate their personal interests into the school assignments is important to the boys. They identified choice in the texts that they read and the areas of interest and topics that they are required to research as very important. Classes and assignments in which the boys can integrate the interests that they have developed out of school are the most meaningful and important to them. If one believes that knowledge always begins with interest, then curricula must continue to be written to allow the incorporation of personal interests.

Three implications for preservice teacher education emerged: the important of audience in writing, the perception of what a writer is, and the creation of safe discussion spaces. The boys consider having an audience to share their draft work with as very meaningful. They appreciate being able to share their drafts with peer audiences to try out ideas and get immediate feedback in designing their work. The concept of the peer audience then gives them the confidence to share their work with the larger audience in the classroom, knowing that the teacher is aware that they have already received some approval from and guidance in their work from their peers.

Education for preservice teachers needs to move the concept of *writer* from a private practice to a social practice. The prevailing idea that a writer is a person who works in a solitary place, isolated from human connection, needs to be updated. Writing could become much more appealing if it were framed as a

social practice in school, because the students know and utilize writing as a social practice out of school even if they are not able to verbalize the concept. They would then understand writing in school as a way to collaborate on a project rather than its being framed as a means to an end.

Finally, education for preservice teachers needs to support them before they go into the schools by giving them the resources and practices to open up safe discussion spaces for the students. Differences in regard to race, gender, religion, and culture sometimes separate students and perpetuate stereotypes. A great deal of excellent children's literature has been published to help teachers to initiate and open discussions in an honest and straightforward manner. Also included in this support process should be an opportunity for preservice teachers to examine their personal beliefs and think about social justice for all.

Implications for Future Research

My research study has left me with more questions than answers. The boys' interest in and use of recreational reading materials filled with mathematics, existing paradigms of what reading and writing are, and where the girls figure in this study of gender and literacy are, for me, the large issues that remain unanswered.

The boys' out-of-school literacies include extended and concentrated engagement with mathematics. Mail advertisement flyers, the farming newspaper, sports statistics, 4-H, and their personal-interest magazines that use the language of mathematics are all literacy artifacts that the boys encounter in their everyday lives. I observed the boys in mathematics classes as they read and solved

problems and equations. A future research area might be the kinds of reading and thinking that the boys do when they encounter numerical texts in their recreational reading. I also wonder about the grade-appropriate provincial learning assessments in mathematics and whether there might be some information in those results that would be of use to me to further understand the reasons that the boys incorporate mathematics and write so confidently in mathematical language in their narrative writing pieces.

A second research area might be the reasons that the boys hold so firmly to the idea that reading is reading only if they consume narrative fiction. Historically, Canadian education curriculums have used European fiction, poetry, and drama. Some North American and Canadian content has been infused into the courses of study as new curriculums are rewritten. Earlier definitions of literacy framed reading as the private enjoyment of novels and books that contain narrative fiction stories. However, newer curriculums have been written to increase the students' understanding of and appreciation for environmental print and expository text. Time and time again it appeared that the research boys thought that they were reading only if they were reading fiction novels. I had to work very hard to encourage them to think about what they are doing when they have a newspaper, a magazine, or an instruction manual or when they look at Web pages. I wondered about the invisible influence of a traditional paradigm that was at work here. Was it preconceived notions from their parents, teachers, or friends that led them to believe that reading is reading only if they have a narrative fiction

novel in front of them? What would a literacy study look like that would extend the notion of reading to include more than narrative text?

I observed the boys incorporating writing forms that, although visible in daily life, are not always recognized in the school's curricula. I regret that I did not ask the teachers for their assessment rubrics for the narrative stories, the health cartoons, and the electronic assignments. That would have been another part of the research ethics form that I would have needed to think about, and the shape of my research would have changed. I have also wondered about Sam's progress in his new school and whether that school has a program to elicit his creative thinking skills. Although he was classified as needing support, I do not know whether anyone recognized his other-than-school literacy skills. I wonder why he was so able to complete his electronic trading card with greater-than-average interest in his efforts, but found it extremely difficult to create narrative stories. I have also thought deeply about what I should have done to prevent Sam from slipping through the cracks in school.

The relationality of gender in my research study proved to be difficult for me to think and write about. The students in this research actively position themselves as male by the activities they choose, the clothes they wear, and the spaces they occupy. They also position themselves as male by actively avoiding any behaviors that appear to them to be female. Could this study somehow contribute to social justice so that each gender has a more level and respectful world in which to learn, work, and play? Do men and women and boys and girls need to position themselves as dominant/submissive and powerful/less powerful?

If we give time and attention to how rural male adolescents construct their identities through their literacy practices, would it not be time to ask how rural female adolescents construct their identities through their literacy practices?

I have thought about the areas to which I did not give equal attention in the literacy lives of the boys, including the lists of Internet Web sites that they visit at home and at school. I regret not having had deeper conversations with the boys about the texts that they enjoy and do not enjoy. To rework Gee's (2001) words, a shift in identity requires learning, and I want to believe that I have become more aware of designing conversations around 'text.'

Narrative reading and narrative writing are forms of literacy that are valued in school literacy (Willis, 1997). The publishing industry has mass-produced narrative books for the entertainment of readers in private life. Writing in private life has been for individual pleasure, and some writers have been published. The boys in the research study consume narrative fiction while in school, but do not produce narrative writing in their private lives. Adults who love reading narrative stories and who put pencil to paper in their private lives find navigating the culture of school literacies very pleasurable. These boys reported that the reading and writing that they do in school is a necessary response to teachers' expectations. They appear to be passive consumers of the education process. Teachers, curriculum writers, and assessment creators have wondered about the disconnect between school literacy and literacy in private life. There have been and there are students who have not been entertained and challenged by

print literacies, and these are the students who score poorly on provincial assessments. Williams (2004/2005) commented:

> Yet if we want students to embrace print literacy, to excel at it and make it a part of their lives, then competence is simply not enough. We must find ways to help students discover pleasure in reading and writing well. If we don't consider pleasure more thoughtfully and talk about it with students more explicitly, we should not expect students to love what we love just because we tell them they should . . . . If we offer students assignments and opportunities to recognize that what brings them pleasure is connected to experience, competence and challenge, we can make a better case that the more experienced they become in reading and writing, the more pleasurable they will find the activities. (pp. 339-342)

Reading the world, reading life and work spaces, and reading and writing in digital form are necessities of life for young rural male adolescents. In some schools computers are still being used as electronic typewriters and convenient encyclopedias; however, in other schools computers and Internet usage have changed how curriculums are interpreted and presented. It is important that curriculum designers "find ways to bring a study of reading in this mode into the program" (Love & Hamston, 2003, p. 174). The advent of digital communication and its accessibility to more individuals has allowed young people to take up literacy practices in their private lives in the form of social media. Will there always be a chasm between school literacy and literacy for personal purposes, or will more attention be paid to "how the public defines literacy, how they think about the purposes for which literacy is used, and how they imagine literacy is practiced" (Willis, 1997, p. 392)?

These boys perform their out-of-school literacies to create, and enhance their gendered identities and to practice their cultural identities as rural male adolescents. They take their personal lives to their school hallways and

classrooms to continue to find and to perform their gendered places in their social worlds. Perhaps when curriculum writers begin to look at literacy as a social practice rather than as a set of skills to internalize, literacy will take on more significance for these rural male adolescents.

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APPENDIX A: LETTERS OF INVITATION

TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

INVITATION LETTER TO PARENT/GUARDIAN
OF CHILD PARTICIPANT

Dear parent/guardian of a Bedford School Grade 8 student:

I would like to invite your child to take part in a research project on literacy. If you choose to allow your child to participate, you will help me understand how students understand literacy practices such as reading and writing in their lives. This research project will be used to help me write a dissertation for my Doctoral degree at the University of Alberta in the area of language and literacy in our schools.

Participation in this research would include the following: I will observe your child in the classroom in his Language Arts classes, as well as other classes where there is an emphasis on reading and writing. Your child will also be interviewed about reading and writing which I may audiotape. This would be to make it easier for me to write my notes. I would honor your request to listen to the tape at any time.

I will fully comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants found here: http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html.

I want to make sure that you know there is no problem if you decide you do not want your child to participate in this project. You may also have your child stop the project at any time and none of your child's interview data or classroom participation information will be used. Confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed. I will use pseudonyms when I write about the research results and I will ensure that personal identities are protected. Transcripts and consent forms will be kept locked in a location away from the school and will be destroyed after five years. No teacher or staff member at Bedford School will see the transcripts or consent forms at any time. Results of this study will be used to write my dissertation for my doctoral degree. I may also share parts of my doctoral research about literacy with others through research articles or conference presentations.

If you give your consent to your child's participation, please sign the **STUDENT RESEARCH – Parent Consent Form A** and have your child sign the **STUDENT RESEARCH – Student Consent Form B** and return the forms to me.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Brenda Kelly (brenda.kelly@ualberta.ca or xxx-xxx-xxxx), my advisor, Dr. Heather Blair (hblair@ualberta.ca or xxx-xxx-xxxx) or the graduate coordinator, Dr. Jill McClay (jill.mcclay@ualberta.ca or xxx-xxx-xxxx).

Thank you for considering your child's participation in this project.

Mrs. Brenda Kelly

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

INVITATION LETTER TO CHILD PARTICIPANT

Dear Grade 8 student:

I would like to invite you to take part in a research project on literacy If you choose to participate, you will help me understand how students understand literacy practices such as reading and writing in their lives. This research project will be used to help me write a dissertation for my Doctoral degree at the University of Alberta in the area of language and literacy in our schools.

If you choose to participate, I will observe you in the classroom in your Language Arts classes three days per week, as well as in other classes where there is an emphasis on reading and writing. I may also interview you about how you understand reading and writing and I may audiotape the interview. This would be to make it easier for me to write my notes. I would honor your request to listen to the tape at any time.

I will fully comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants found here: http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html.

I want to make sure that you know there is no problem if you decide you do not want to participate in this project. You may also quit the project at any time and none of your interview data or classroom participation information will be used. Confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed. I will use pseudonyms when I write about the research results and I will ensure that personal identities are protected. Transcripts and consent forms will be kept locked in a location away from the school and will be destroyed after five years. No teacher or staff at Bedford School will see the transcripts of consent forms at any time. Results of this study will be used to write my dissertation for my doctoral degree.
I may also share parts of my doctoral research about literacy with others through research articles, conference presentations, or workshops.

If you consent to your participation in this project, please sign the **STUDENT RESEARCH – Student Consent Form B** and return the forms to me.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Brenda Kelly (brenda.kelly@ualberta.ca or xxx-xxx-xxxx), my advisor, Dr. Heather Blair (hblair@ualberta.ca or xxx-xxx-xxxx) or the graduate coordinator, Dr. Jill McClay (jill.mcclay@ualberta.ca or xxx-xxx-xxxx).

Thank you for letting me tell you about my project.

Mrs. Brenda Kelly

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORMS TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

STUDENT RESEARCH – Parent Consent FORM A

I, _____ **(print parent/guardian name),** consent
to allow my child, _____ **(print student name**) to
be part of the 'Study of the Literacy Practices of Rural Adolescents' research
project being done by Brenda Kelly as part of her research for her Doctoral degree
in the Faculty of Education through the University of Alberta.

I understand, in the interests of my child, that:
- There are no negative consequences for deciding not to participate in the project.
- I or my child can stop being in the research project at any time.
- My child may be audio-recorded in the interviews about his literacy understandings.
- My child may ask that what he/she says in any transcript be removed.
- All information gathered will be kept private and confidential.
- My child's identity will be guarded with a pseudonym and removal of any information that may personally identify him/her in the written research.
- All information will be kept locked in a location away from the school and will be destroyed after five years.
- No teachers at Bedford School will have access to information from this study at any time.

I also understand that results of this research will be used towards Brenda Kelly's
Ph.D. dissertation and may be shared in professional meetings with teachers in
presentations, and written articles the standards of the Research Ethics Board of
the Faculties of Education and Extension at the University of Alberta will be
followed.

_____ **I consent to my child's participation** in this research on the literacy
practices of rural adolescents.
_____ **I do not wish my child to participate** in this research.

_____ _____
(parent signature)   (date)

You have been given two (2) copies of this information letter and consent form
(B). Please sign and return the <u>white </u>consent form and keep the <u>blue</u> copy for
your own records.

STUDENT RESEARCH – Student Consent FORM B

I, _____**(print student name),** consent to be part of the 'Study of the Literacy Practices of Rural Adolescents' research project being done by Brenda Kelly as part of her research for her Doctoral degree in the Faculty of Education through the University of Alberta.

I understand that:

- There are no negative consequences for deciding not to participate in the project.
- I may be audio-recorded in the interviews about my literacy understandings.
- I may ask that what I say in any transcript be removed.
- All information gathered will be kept private and confidential.
- My identity will be guarded with a pseudonym and removal of any information that may personally identify me in the written research.
- All information will be kept locked in a location away from the school and will be destroyed after five years.
- No teachers at Bedford School will have access to information from this study at any time.

I also understand that results of this research will be used towards Brenda Kelly's Ph.D. dissertation and may be shared in professional meetings with teachers in presentations and written articles where the standards of the Research Ethics Board of the Faculties of Education and Extension at the University of Alberta will be followed.

With my parents' permission, I agree to participate in this research about the literacy practices of young people, and I may withdraw at any time.

_____   _____

(student signature)   (date)

You have been given two (2) copies of this information letter and consent form (B).
Please sign and return the <u>white</u> consent form and keep the <u>blue</u> copy for your own records.

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Individual Interview Questions

Reading

1. What is reading to you?
2. Tell me about the reading you do in school.
3. Why do you read at school?
4. What do you like? What do you not like?
5. What is easy for you? What is difficult?
6. Tell me about reading with the computer.
7. Do you read at home? Tell me about that.
8. If you could read anything you wanted what would it be?
9. What do you think reading can give you?
10. What do you want reading to do for you?

Writing

1. What is writing to you?
2. Tell me about the writing you do in school.
3. Why do you write at school?
4. What do you like? What do you not like?
5. What is easy for you? What is difficult?
6. Tell me about writing with the computer.
7. Do you write at home? Tell me about that.
8. If you could write anything you wanted what would it be?
9. What do you think writing can give you?
10. What do you want writing to do for you?

Groups of two or three

Bullying

1. Is there bullying in this school?
2. What kinds of bullying are there?
3. Tell me about it.
4. Do you bully?
5. How do you protect yourself from bullying?
6. What is being done about it?
7. What would you do to fix this problem?

Cell Phones

1. Tell me about your use of cell phones (when, where, why, who).
2. Can you tell me or show me the applications on your phone?
3. How does this work?
4. How have you personalized your phone?
5. What else can you show me or tell me?

APPENDIX D: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Electronic Life Survey

1. How many computers are in your house?   _____

2. Do you have a computer in your room?   Yes   No

3. What service do you have?   Dial up   High Speed

4. Do you go on the Internet almost every day?   Yes   No
   For how long? (time in minutes or hrs.)   _____

5. Have you ever bought anything off EBay?   Yes   No

6. Do you shop online?   Yes   No

7. If yes, where do you shop online?   _____

8. Do you have an email address ?   Yes   No

9. If Yes, how many email addresses?   _____

10. Do you go on MSN or other chat places?   Yes   No

11. If yes, how many identities do you have?   _____

12. Do you play online games?   Yes   No

13. If so, name a favorite one.   _____

14. How many land-line telephones are in your house?   _____

15. Do you have a telephone in your room?   Yes   No

16. How many cell phones does your family own?   _____

17. Do you use a cell phone?   Yes   No

18. If so, why . . . ?
        Call friends   Contact with parents   Text message   Download music
        Surf the net   Play games   Download videos   Other: _____

19. How many television sets are in your home?   _____

20. Do you use the dish or cable services?   Dish   Cable

21. Does your family have a VCR?   Yes   No

22. Does your family have a DVD player?   Yes   No

23. How do you listen to music?   MP3   iPOd   Computer
                                                         Other: _____

24. Name one of your favorite singers/band   _____

25. Does your family own a GPS?   Yes   No

26. Name your 2 most favorite school subjects.

_____   _____

27. Does your family have a gaming system?   Yes   No

28. What do you have?   PlayStation3   Nintendo   XBox360   Sega   Wii

29. How many games do you have for it?   _____

30. Name two of your favorite games.

_____   _____

31. Does your family have a printer?   Yes   No

32. Does your family have a scanner?   Yes   No

33. Do you or your family own a digital camera?   Yes   No

34. Do you or your family have a USB key?   Yes   No

35. Does your family have a fax machine?   Yes   No

36. How many AM radios are there in your house?   _____

37. Do you have Sirius satellite radio in any vehicles?   Yes   No

38. Do you visit social networking sites?   Yes   No

39. If so, which ones?   Facebook   MySpace   Other: _____

Is there anything electronic in your life I have forgotten? Tell me about that.

Thank you!

(Created by Brenda Kelly, 2008)

APPENDIX E: BOYS' STORIES

Bikes
By Sam

There are some of the things you can do on a bike. If u wanted you could go slow because when u go slow you have more power. On a bike you can crash into things like a pole or you can fall and that is like falling you can do a bunny hop and that is when you jump up on your back tire and land on the back tire again. There are lots of things u can do on a bike and they are called tricks.

There are lots of places you can go on a bike and here are some of them. You can go long distances on a bike and you can go fast to the place you want to go. You can go short distances fast or slow but if you r in a hurry you want to go fast, and is you are not in a hurry you can go slow. On a bike you can go off jumps and do tricks and you can enter contests to see who can do better tricks. On a bike there are lots of places you can go but there is sometimes a hill you need to go over to get to the place you want to and if you go slow over the hill because it gives you more power and than you can go over it.

Biking can mean a lot to people but I will tell you some of the things people think of when they think of biking. Biking can mean fast to people because you can go places fast. It can mean risk take because when you are going fast you have the chance of getting heart. It can mean dangerous because when u get heart you may not recover to the way you were. Biking is extreme to some people because of when you go in the mountains.

Million Dollar $mile
By David

Prologue

"Please Uncle Arthur, who's done more for you, me or Gina?" asked a determined Betty Gunther.

"Well Betty, Gina did help me move out of my old house. Although you did help me find my beloved cat Mr. Fluff when he had run away. I guess I'll sleep on it."

"Oh thank you Uncle Arthur, even if you don't change your will, you'll still be the best uncle ever! In my books anyway!" she recited.

*   *   *   *   *   *   *

"Well Mr. Fluff, I hope that I made the right decision," complained Arthur Dupree to his hairless cat Mr. Fluff. Mr. Fluff just purred.

Suddenly there was a loud crack and ninjas jumped through the window. Mr. Fluff hissed and Arthur ran for the phone. Before he could dial 911 he was struck in the back of the neck by a flying ninja kick.

Another ninja grabbed a painting and jumped back out of the window. Arthur tries to stop him, but three other ninjas swung from the ceiling fan. Arthur was truly doomed.

Chapter 1: A Mystery Unveiled

"Oh my gosh! Jerry come look, quick!" yelled a concerned Betty Gunther.

"Holy man, is that your Uncle Arthur's house?" asked her husband Jerry. "Hey where's that famous multi-million dollar painting of his?" Jerry tried to say. He couldn't finish because Betty was so concerned about her uncle that she cut him off.

"No way, come on Jerry, let's get over there right away!" commanded Betty.

*   *   *   *   *   *   *

"I'm sorry miss, I just can't let you in, boss's orders!" explained a police officer.

"But I have to go in there, he's my uncle!" pleaded Betty. Betty broke through the officer's grasp, and ran full out to her dead Uncle Arthur. Crying she threw herself on him, "Why'd you have to go, why?" bawled Betty.

"Excuse me," interrupted an officer, "I'm sorry but, I'll have to ask you to leave."

"Okay," replied Betty, "sorry of I cause any problems."

Chapter 2: The Shocks Continue

"What do you mean you didn't know?" commanded Gina, "Don't tell me you forgot that you were carrying a twenty pound, fifty million dollar painting!" she yelled.

"I'm sorry, it was just so nice!" pleaded Chai Mang, the leader of the ninjas who killed Arthur.

"You'd better hope that the will is still set in my name, because if it isn't. Arthur won't be the only one dead around here!" threatened Gina.

"Yes ma'am," whimpered Chai Mang.

*   *   *   *   *   *   *

"Betty, telephone!" yelled Jerry.

"Okay, one second," answered Betty, "Hello," she echoed. "Oh, okay. Thank you very much. Bye." she thanked. "Jerry they're reading the will on Saturday."

"Are you sure you want to go?" asked Jerry.

"Yeah, I think I'm ready," replied Betty. I'm just scared that that rude Gina Popowski is going to get my poor old Uncle Arthur's fortune instead of me.

I mean the only reason that she helped him move out was so she could steal a few priceless coins and ornaments."

* * * * * * *

"Here's the will Gina," said Chai Mang, quivering with fear.
"Thank you Chai Mang, " she replied, "nice job!"
"Oh that's okay," stated Chai Mang with more confidence, "it was easy.

* * * * * * *

"I cannot believe this!" exclaimed Gina, "The old man can't wipe his own butt, but he can change his will into the name of a whining little brat named Betty!" she complained. "Chai Manh!" she ordered. "We only have one option, gather your men!"
"Yes ma'man!" he replied.

Chapter 3: Wishful Thinking

"See you Jerry, I'm going to the reading of the will," said Betty.
"Okay, good luck, and drive *safe*ly!" replied Jerry.

* * * * * * *

"There she is!" Chai Mang reported. The ninjas were following Betty in their black van. Betty realized this and tried to lose them on the freeway. The ninjas were wise to her sharp moves and hit her little Honda into the ditch. Betty's car rolled and she was knocked unconscious.

* * * * * * *

When Betty awoke she was in a dark, musty room tied to a chair. Chai Mang and three others entered through a large, oak door, the light nearly blinded her. "Who are you and where am I" demanded Betty.
"I am Chai Mang, and you are in a chair," replied Chai Many giggling, the other ninjas laughed hysterically.

* * * * * * *

Here's what we found in your wife's car Mr. Gunther. I am very, deeply sorry," said a police officer, regrettingly.
"It's not your fault, just go do whatever you need to do, I'll deal with this," commanded Jerry, "Oh, officer."
"Yeah?" replied the officer.
"Thank you very much, I appreciate it!" The officer just smiled and drove away.

Jerry found a bracelet, driver's license, some coins, and a mysterious letter. Intrigues, he read it.

The letter told him where Betty was and that if any cops showed up that Betty would be killed. "I'll save you Betty!" shouted Jerry.

Chapter 4: Escape

Jerry burst through the front door wielding a baseball bat. As he did this his wife betty was silently sneaking through the dark, musty halls toward her husband, Both were oblivious of the situation.

Jerry wasn't letting anyone or anything come between him and his wife. He was decking ninjas and smashing walls everywhere.

"Where do you think you're going Mrs. Gunther?" laughed a grinning Chai Mang, maniacally. Betty screamed, the scream echoed through the building.

"Was that a scream?" pondered Jerry. Another scream. "Yes, that has to be!" he thought. "I'll save you Betty!" bellowed Jerry.

"Jerry is that you?" bawled Betty. "I'm in the A hall storage room!" she yelled. Jerry heard her and darted for the A hall storage facility.

Many ninjas had started to go after Jerry, but a satisfied Chai Mang called them off. "Hold steady men!" he barked, I want to take care of this one myself." Laughing in chorus the ninjas retreated.

Chapter 5: The Final Showdown

"Now we meet Jerry Gunther. I've been waiting for you!" chuckled Chai Mang.

"Enough talk, let's fight!" snapped Jerry.

"You are very eager young grasshopper," Chai Mang accused, "first we bow." As Chai Mang bowed Jerry kicked him in the teeth. "You are very dishonorable young grasshopper, now you must pay!" barked Chai Mang, spitting blood. Laughing Jerry tired to punch Chai Mang in the face, but Chai Mang's quickness he flipped Jerry onto his back.

Many blows were exchanged, including a violent kick to the neck of Jerry, and a deadly uppercut to Chai Mang's jaw. Jerry tried to kick Chai Mang in the chest, but Chai Mang grabbed his leg and threw him. Jerry slid on his back to a ledge. If he had slid another foot and a half, he would have plummented 50 feet to his death. Screaming with delight and anger, Chai Mang flew through the air, leg outstretched ready to kick Jerry over the ledge.

"I love you Jerry!" screamed Betty. With a sudden burst of strength and stamina Jerry grabbed Chai Mang's foot and swung him off the edge. Chai Many fell, cursing, onto the roof of a screeching, red Monte Carlo. Which, ironically, belonged to Gina Popowski. All of the ninjas fled, scared to face the cheering Jerry Gunther. They found the painting, and reported the situation to the police.

"Gina Popowski, we have a letter for you!" announced a prison guard. "Here you go!" It read:

Dear, Gina Popowski

Thank you for trying to commit such a violent crime, because of your actions I gained an extra 400 million dollars, added onto the 600 million from our dear old Uncle Arthur. Thank you very much for making me a billionaire!
Love: Betty Gunther

P.S. Now that famous painting isn't the only one wearing a million dollar smile!

The Hunting Adventure
by Keith

It was November 17, a day before hunting season. Jeremy and Jeremy's dad, Don, where clean up the 270's and sighting them in. Jeremy is 13 with blond hair and brown eyes. This would be Jeremy's second year of hunting. His dad was going to take him out on the first day it opened. It was late afternoon and Jeremy and his dad were going to sit out in the bush where his dad bated. They sat there for about an hour and then the first deer came out. It was a big fat doe. Followed by the doe cam out another doe and three fawns. It was just about dark when suddenly a buck came out. It wasn't that big it was only a 3x3. It got dark and Jeremy and his dad couldn't see so they headed home. When they got home they eat some supper and then watch television.

"Well son you should get to bed we have a long day ahead of us." Don told Jeremy.

"Ya you are right dad I should." He Replied.

So Jeremy went up to his room and set his alarm for 7:00.

Beep, Beep, Beep, the sound of Jeremy's alarm woke him up. He went and got this dad up and then he put his warm clothes on then went downstairs.

"Did you have a good sleep?" Appealed his dad.

"Ya it was alright he answered how was yours?"

"Good." Don replied.

"Can you go start the truck?" Don asked his son.

"Ya sure." Jeremy replied.

Jeremy went out and started the truck and then they let it warm up for a bout 10 minutes. Jeremy loaded his dads and his gun and then he went back in to get his coveralls on. Don got a thermos of coffee and then he got dress and they where off. They started up north and then they were going to work there way back home. They turned down a grid road and the first dear they was a 4x4.

"You taking him." Don asked Jeremy.

"No way its not big enough." he replied.

So after he didn't take that buck they kept driving down the road. They stopped at a stop sign.

"Stop." Jeremy shouted.

Don slammed on the brakes wat is it. he asked

"Look at that dear." Jeremy told him.

"Holly crap." Don replied.

There in the middle of the field stood a huge mule deer. They couldn't shoot him because they didn't have any tags for mule dear. After they looked at him for about 5 minutes he ran off.

"I guess I should go get us some mule dear tags." Don told his son.

"Ya it would be cool to s hot my first mule dear." Replied his son.

The two boys kept driving down the road they saw the sond white tail of the day. It was a doe and behind the doe was a buck. It was a 4x4 again. Once again Jeremy didn't won't to take him he wonted to wait. Don took a good look at him and was tempted to take him but he didn't. So they kept driving down the road. When they got back to the house they saw about 25 dear this morning. They saw a few bucks but they weren't big enough to take. After they ate lunch they went to town and got four mule dear tags. Two for each of them. So they headed out south to a bush called Argo bush. The first dear they saw was a white tail doe. They kept driving down the road and they saw a big fat mule deer doe. Jeremy got his 270 bolt action out of the truck and loaded it. Jeremy got out of the truck and set his stand up so he could get a good shot. he put the crosshairs on the doe. He shot and dropped the doe where it stood.

"Yes I got him." he shouted happily.

"Ya that you did." don replied.

They walked up to the to the dear and for sure there was no way she was going anywhere.

"Ok son I will go get the truck and then we will load him up." Don tolled his son.

"Ok." Jeremy replied.

Don went and got the truck and then they loaded the doe up. They took the doe back home and hung him up with the tractor. They skinned the doe and then they gutted him and left him for a little bit to cool down. At 4:00 Jeremy and his dad went out to he bush and sat out there for a little bit. It was 20 after 5 and the first dear came out it was a little buck. After that 6 does came out. Jeremy was looking around and straight in front of them stood a nice 5x5. Don got his gun out and got out of the truck. He put the stand up and shot at him. He hit him; he walked about 50 yards then fell down. They left the dear for about 10 minutes then they went to get him. Beside a bush there he was the 5x5 buck. They loaded him up and took him home. They cut the meat off both the dear.

Jeremy had to go to school the next day but his dad was going to take him out after school. The two boys went out to the same spot but nothing big came out because Don shot the 5x5 out there.

Tomorrow Jeremy didn't have school so his dad was going to take him up north.

Jeremy got up early the next morning to get a head start. At about 12:00 Jeremy saw a mule deer doe. He had one more tag and cold shoot one more. So Jeremy got out of the truck and put his stand up. He shot but he shot over top of him. The dear ran off. Jeremy didn't now how he missed that shot.

After the whole day was done the only saw about 10 deer but again no big ones.

It was Friday night and Jeremy still didn't have his white tail. They sat in the bush and once again nothing came out. Jeremy was getting worried he only

had till next Saturday to get his buck. Jeremy and his dad where going to get up early to go look for some deer. They got up at 7:00 and head south of town. Don and Jeremy both got there mule dear and took them all day to clean them. Days where going by fast and Jeremy still didn't have his buck.

It was Wednesday and Don was taking Jeremy out after school. They sat at the same spot that they always do. Nothing big came out.

It was Friday night and Jeremy and his dad headed out to there spot. Once again nothing big came out. It was Friday night and Jeremy try to go t sleep but he couldn't he was too worried that he wouldn't get his dear.

Jeremy drove around Saturday morning but they didn't see any dear. Jeremy was getting really worried. The two boys where going to the same spot that they always go to. It was 5 after 5 and nothing still didn't come out.

"We will wait till 5:30 and then we will head home." Don tolled his son.

Jeremy was getting really worried.

It was 5:26 and a 6x6 buck came out. Jeremy got out of the truck and shot him. It was a one shot kill. Jeremy and Don loaded the dear up and took him home. On Sunday morning Jeremy wonted to now wat his dear would score so Don scored it. It scored 175. Jeremy was so happy he shot a big dear. They took it to big horn night and Jeremy won a free head mount for his dear. Jeremy got it mounted and it is hanging in his room right now. After that year of hunting Jeremy kept going out and shooting big bucks.

The End

Supercross
By Ron

Pedro Micloven starts up his Kx 125 to start his practice race. Pedro is riding at the Glennhellen Motorcross Raceway. It is a very hot Canada Day. The 85 cc heat is up first. Then the 125 cc heat is after that. There is two tracks at Glennhellen, the first track is 1.5 km long. There is 3 Jump the Humps, 2 Whoops sections, and 6 Table Tops. This track is for the 85 cc class. The other track is 3 km long. There is 4 Jump the Humps, 3 Whoops sections, 6 Table Tops, and 2 Hill climbs. This track is for the 125 and 250 cc classes.

Pedro Micloven is 15 years old. He lives with his brother, Naplion, in Sonningdale, Saskatchewan. Pedro lives with his brother because his parents died in a car accident when they were going to Edmonton. They going to Edmonton because they were getting the newest FMF pipe for his bike.

Pedro's bike is a KX 125. It is green, white, and black. Pedro has 3 sponsers which are Monster Energy, DC Shoe Company USA, and Chevrolet Motor Products. His racing number is 69, that was fathers number before he died.

"Pedro," said Naplion, "You Better be getting on that practice race or you will not get the hang of this track because it is a hard one." Yeah, Yeah I'm going right now," said Pedro.

When Pedro got up to the starting gate when Brad Richardson rode up to him. He said, "you better watch your back because going to pay for what ur dad did…"And then he drove away. Pedro just shook his head and started the practice.

What Brad was talking about was that what happened between Brad's and Pedro's father. They were both racing to qualify for the championships a Calgary. They both neck and neck all through the race. But at the last turn before the finish line they collied. Brad's father broke his leg and four ribs because Pedro's fathers bike fell on top of him. He had to have 3 surgery's on his leg, and the result of that was that he could not race again.

Pedro got done his pracice race and was checking over everything on his bike when his friend Trip came over. "Hey Pedro, are you going to Drumheller next Saturday?" Asked Trip. "Um, Ya I think so. Are you?" answered Pedro. "Yeah I'm pretty sure." Said Trip.

"Would all racers that are in the 125 cc heat come to the starting line now." Spoke the announcer.

When Pedro got up to the he went to his position in the line up. Of course he was right beside Brad.

The 30 second warning was givin. "GO" said the annoncer. All the motocycles took off. Pedro was in fourth place. Three people passed him but he passed four and one of those people was Brad.

"Ohhh" said the crowd, when a rider biffed. Pedro past another rider. Now he was in second. Brad past one more rider, now he was in thrid place. They were now a half of km form the finish. Suddenly Brad came up beside Pedro and gave him the finger, and then elbowed him. Pedro just shook his head and punched it, he is now in first place.

Pedro went in the last turn when Brad came and tried to side slam him but Pedro saw him coming so he hit the brakes so Brad would miss him. Brad went right off the track.

Pedro punched it and then he went for the finish line. "WINNER!" said the annoncer. Pedro drove over to Naplion which who was cheering.

"You did it!" yelled Naplion. "Yupp, did you see Bread try and side swipe me but I braked? Said Pedro. "Yeah," said Naplion, "that was pretty sweet."

Right after they got back to there tent Brad came over. "What The ****" are you doing? I was going to the Nationals!" Well I guess you won't be going now because I won…." Said Pedro. "Well sense you think your so funny, let's fight." Said Brad. Ok cause I'm sick your crap." Yell Pedro

So they dropped the gloves. Brad was winning at the start but then Pedro snapped and beat the crap out of him. Brad had a Bloody nose, two black eye, and a broken nose. Brad had blood all over his shirt and pants, Pedro had blood all over him but it was not his.

"Well Brad, are you going to be retarded to me?" Said Pedro. "No." Said Brad. "Ok then leave." Said Pedro

"You kicked his butt man, that was sweet!" Said Naplion. Yupp, well I'm going to get changed." said Pedro. When Pedri came back out the said, "Well I'm glad Brad will not be a retard to us any more." "Ya me too, lets go to the Awards Ceremonie's." Said Naplion

THE END

The hunt
By Cal

One day Donny woke up to his alarm at 6:30 am. He woke up so early because he knew he was going hunting. Him and his dad, Billy, started to get ready and ate. After they ate, they called their friend Jack to see if he was ready, and he was. They left at 7:15 am and went to pick Jack up. They picked him up and were out to Argo bush at 7:45 am.

They sat until legal hunting time started and then got out of the truck to start their hunt. They walked into the bush and not 300 yards in they saw a nice 5x5 whitetail. Donny shot at the deer and gut shot him. The deer started to run and Donny shot again and killed him. He walked up to the deer and out his tags on and gutted him. They drug the deer back to the truck, they got in the truck and went to a small frozen slough and now that Donny shot his deer, he was going to push it. He pushed it and a 7x7 came out and Jack shot at it and missed. Donny walked out and said, "you couldn't hit the broad side of a barn," and Jack said "at least when I shoot I don't hit them in the guts." The dad came over and said "quit acting like a bunch of babies."

They all got back in the truck and went to find the deer for another shot. They saw the deer come out and went to head it off. When they got close to it, they stopped and Jack jumped out and shot and hit it. The deer went down and when they got close to it they realized it was a 6x4 and not him and points were broke off. Jack put his tags on, not being satisfied with the deer, and gutted him and loaded it.

They went to a bigger bush and Donny and Jack pushed it and a big 6x6 cane out and the dad, Billy, shot and did some damage when his browning 30-06 pump and dropped it. He walked up to the deer and guessed he was a typical 180 class deer.

When Donny and Jack got there they gutted it and put the tags on it. They loaded the deer and ended the season at that.

Get Down . . . Get Extreme!
By Walter

The Teaser:

Jude "The Dude" Chew is an amazing athlete. He has a metal, Goth snowboard. It has step-in bindings. On the front of the board, it has "Get" on the top and "Down" on the bottom. It is black from the very front to right behind the back boot slot where it goes into the black flames the rest is red. It has a red eye between the boot slots, and a picture of a sword between the words at the front. He has been snowboarding for 2 years, and is now the world's best snowboarder. He played football for 3 years. He became the MVP for the Saskatchewan Roughriders during the 3 ears he played, and won the Grey Cup for the 3rd time since he joined. He completed 4 972 passes and scored 1 234 567 touchdowns. He was number 32, and the best football player in the world. He was the best BMX

rider in the world. He won every competition he was in except for one. He got a $2 000 black Pork BMX out of the 4 in Canada. He has been in the UFC for 3 years. He holds the Welter Weight Belt. His record is 109-1-1. He got the belt on his 9th fight. He has had one punch knock-outs in all his fights except for 2. His quickest knock-out was 1 seconds in the 5th round. He wars black and red pants, black and red snowboarding boots, black and red shoes, and a black and red toque. He never wears a short except in football. He wears camouflage gloves. He has white boxers with red hearts. He has lime green hair. He has a flame tattoo on his back, and may other tattoos. He also has many piercings. His average is 100%. He created the "Snow Dude." It is when you make a snowman in the air and out it on the ground without breaking it. He has 26 billion dollars. His house is 5 stories. It has 10 bedrooms, 2 kitchens, and 5 living rooms. It is 26 000 square feet.

The Story:

After Jude Chew graduated from the University of Saskatchewan with a degree in computer science. He went into football. "Jude, get out there don't mess up or you're off the team!" yelled Kent Austin.

"I will never let you down coach!" said Jude Chew.

That day when the score was 63-0 for the B.C. Lions, it ended at 630-63 for the Saskatchewan Roughriders.

He made 759 passes and ran 90 touchdowns. The coach loved him. Over the months which turned into years he retired. He was nicknamed "The Dude" because he was nothing like an ordinary man.

After he retired, he went to BMX. He was taught by Dave Mirra. His first competition he lost to Dave Mirra by 5 points. The next competition he won by 5 points, then he kept winning by more every time. He dedicated all his wins to Dave Mirra.

"I am sorry everybody, but I have to retire from being a BMX rider. I have found another calling. The spot light is now going to the man that taught me almost everything I know, and also the man that brought me into the sport **DAVE MIRRA!!**" spoke Jude into the microphone. The crowd roared as Dave Mirra approached the microphone.

"The things Jude said are true. He also taught me things and was a great, loyal friend. I won't let Jude or you down." Said Dave Mirra.

The next day, the front page on every paper all over the world had 2 pictures. 1 of Jude and Dave shaking hands, and the other was Dave and Jude doing a backflip side by side.

When Jude went to the UFC he was taught by Georges "Rush" St. Pierre. Jude's loss and draw were to G.S.P. He was knock-out by G.S.P. in the first round. Then, the next time it went to a decision for a draw. Then Jude won. He quit UFC and gave his belt to G.S.P.

After the UFC, he went to a sport that would never get old. Something where you could always find something new, snowboarding.

He was taught by Shaun White. He also brought him in the sport of snowboarding. He got sponsored by Burton.

"Your good to go for the big times, now, Jude." Said Shaun.

"Where should I start?" asked Jude "The Dude" Chew.

"Go all the way down Everest and then you'll definitely be part of the Winter X-Games." Said Shaun White.

Jude was barely ahead in the competitions, but he got enough money for his dream board, and a trip to Mt. Everest.

It took him 3 days to get to the bottom, 72 hours of non-stop action. His dream board never even had a scratch on it.

During those 3 says, he practiced an unbeatable trick. In the final hour he mastered it. When he got to the bottom, everyone that supported him was there. The Saskatchewan Roughriders, Kent Austin, Georges St. Pierre, Dave Mirra, and including his new best rival, Shaun White, they all congratulated him and Shaun said that he would see him at the games, The games came 3 months later.

Jude was in 5th, with his tricks in first was Shaun White, in second was Psymon Powell, in 3rd was T.J. Wright, and in forth was Dodge Charger, Shaun was ahead by 5 000 points. The Shaun approached Jude.

"Better luck next year." said Shaun as he passed Jude.

Jude had one trick left. It came to his turn, the final run before it was all over, Jude went into the half pipe pulled a backflip 360 then, pulled White's special trick "The Torpedo," then he did it. He pulled off his trick he learned on Everest. Although he added a triple backflip 900 into it, he, pulled off the "Snow Dude." Jude won by 1 point for the gold. He kept winning his master tricks, and other tricks he picked up along the way,

Dedicated to: My dad.
Published by: The New Dimensions Inc.

APPENDIX F: DAVID'S 4-H SPEECH

Good Afternoon madam or Mr. Chairperson, honorable Judges, Ladies and Gentlemen, family and friends, fellow 4-H members. Today I would like to tell you about the Stanley cup.

It may not look it, but The Stanley cup is the oldest trophy competed for by professional athletes. It was donated by Sir Frederick Arthur Stanley aka Lord Stanley, who purchased the trophy to be presented to the champion hockey club of the dominion of Canada. He purchased for 10 Guineas (which was 50$ at the time), now the ring you get for winning it is worth more money, and they give out nearly 50 a year. The Montreal Amateur Athletic Association was the first to win it in 1893. It was originally referred to as the Challenge Cup the champions held onto the trophy until they lost their title to another team.

The National Hockey Association took possession of the cup in 1910 it has been the symbol of hockey supremacy. But Beginning in 1926 only NHL teams had the right to compete for the Stanley Cup. Montreal holds the record for most Stanley Cup Wins at 23, Toronto is 2nd with 13, and Detroit is 3rd with 10.

The cups appearance has been changed many times in its history, including the addition of many tiered bands or rings. The Stanley cup is the only sports trophy were all the names of the people on the championship team, are inscribed on bands of the trophy. Because of this bands are often retired to make room for new Championship Bands. Retired bands along with the original Stanley cup bowl are kept in Lord Stanley's Vault in the MCI Great Hall. The cup currently consists of three tiered bands, a bowl, a collar, and five barrel or uniform bands. The cup stands at 35 ¼ inches tall and weighs 34 ½ lbs.

The cup spends 24 hrs. with each member if the championship team (player or staff). The cup has traveled around the world including trips through the Rocky Mountains and stays in igloos in Nunavut. In the 1918-1919 season the Stanley cup was not presented to any team, because of the Spanish flu epidemic.

The Stanley Cup is the most famous of all sports trophies, and it is an NHL players dream to someday win one.

APPENDIX G: READING CHOICES FOR DEAR TIME

Sam:
The Perfect Date: R. L. Stine
The Great Pyramid Robbery: Author unknown
More Ghost Stories of Alberta: B. Smith
The Transall Saga: Gary Paulsen
Great Khali: Author unknown
The Transall Saga: Gary Paulsen
Not a Trace: Nora McClintock
See No Evil: Diane Young

Keith:
Winning Season: Rich Wallace
Absent
Rookie of the Year: John R. Tunis
Rookie of the Year: John R. Tunis
Mats Sundin: Author unknown
The Day My Butt Went Psycho: Andy Griffiths
The Day My Butt Went Psycho: Andy Griffiths
The Haunted Shortstop: Author Unknown

David:
Cup Crazy: Gordon Korman
Go Jump in the Pool: Gordon Korman
Go Jump in the Pool: Gordon Korman
Timberwolf Classic: Sigmund Brouwer
Joe Sakic: Author Unknown
Rink Rivals: Jacqueline Guest
Rink Rivals: Jacqueline Guest
SouthPaw: Rich Wallace

Walter:
Snowboarders Handbook: Author Unknown
Snowboarders Handbook: Author Unknown
Overdrive: E. Walters
Overdrive: E. Walters
Snowboarders Handbook: Author Unknown
Snowboarders Handbook: Author Unknown
Snowboarders Handbook: Author Unknown
Snowboarders Handbook: Author Unknown

Ron:
The Hobbit: J. R. R. Tolkien
The Hobbit: J. R. R. Tolkien
The Hobbit: J. R. R. Tolkien
Running Loose: Chris Crutcher

Running Loose: Chris Crutcher
Jean Val Jean: Solomon Cleaver
Jean Val Jean: Solomon Cleaver
Jean Val Jean: Solomon Cleaver

Cal:
Dictionary
Dictionary
Jean Val Jean: Solomon Cleaver
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Jean Val Jean: Solomon Cleaver
Jean Val Jean: Solomon Cleaver
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