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# Narrating the Literate Identities of Five Ninth Grade Boys on the School Landscape

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Narrating the Literate Identities of Five Ninth grade Boys on the School Landscape

Mary Rice

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Department of Teacher Education  
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## **Abstract**

### **Narrating the Literate Identities of Five Ninth grade Boys on the School Landscape**

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Department of Teacher Education

Master of Arts

I conducted a narrative inquiry with five ninth grade boys in my English class that I identified as displaying multiple literacies. The classes I taught the boys in were two sections of honors ninth grade English. The boys came from a variety of backgrounds and lived in various neighborhoods in the approximately 20,000-member community where we all live. The site of this research was the junior high school in Utah where the boys attend school and I had been employed for six years. After the research was collected, I conducted several negotiation sessions with the boys and their parents at the school, as well as in their homes. These negotiations facilitated a methodological concept I came to call distillation, which is an interim step for determining which narratives in an inquiry are emblematic.

My research centered on how these boys storied their literate identities. A review of literature revealed several lenses for conceptualizing the stories of these boys. An analysis of the stories I collected revealed that the boys' stories moved beyond current conceptions of either identity or literacy alone and instead offered a way of looking at literate identity as simultaneously being and doing literacy. In light of this definition, the boys' stories revealed plotlines that together described literate identity as a form of capital. The question of how the boys story themselves is ultimately answered using a meta-narrative about a boon, of gift, that emerges from mythic/archetypal literary criticism. Distribution of a desirable boon that will help society is the goal of a hero story. The boys narrate the ways in which they distribute literacy as a boon. The implications for this research include a need to examine classroom space in order to facilitate the deployment of literate identity capital, as well as space for living out the meta-narratives that these boys are composing.

**Keywords:** Adolescent boys, literate identity, boys' literacy, forms of capital

### **Acknowledgments**

After my first two years of teaching, where I had been assigned ninth grade language arts and English as a second language, I was scheduled to shift down one grade and teach eighth grade in addition to my ESL responsibilities. My seventh period class that year consisted of three girls and 27 boys. Calling forward all of my personal practical knowledge about how to settle that particular class proved to be insufficient. About mid-October, however, I discovered that this group of young people demonstrated reasonably adequate listening skills when one of them was telling a story.

The year after, my assignments changed again to include both eighth and ninth grade language arts. Once again, my last period of the day was filled with a majority of boys, most of whom I had taught the previous academic year, and again, almost no girls. This time I began early apprenticing the students into storytelling as a method of interesting them in the content of the class as well as each other. A group of boys, led by TG, CS, DS, MM, and PS—quickly emerged as talented storytellers, capable stewards of the course content, and socially magnanimous humans. I acknowledge the narrative genius of each of these boys, as well as those of their peers, in helping me to realize how much I could learn from a boy by listening to his stories.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

We were having a contest in geography. Your team wins when you get everyone over to your side by answering questions. You go against another person, answering the question the teacher asks. If you win, you get to pick a member of the other team to be on your team. Well, everyone was almost on my side, and so I intentionally lost so I could switch sides and then I gathered everyone onto my new side. I did this by challenging the other students who I knew usually gave right answers, and beating them (Reconstructed field note, April 2009).

### Playing the Literacy Game

Brandon narrated his involvement in the geography game during a storytelling session typical to our class. Brandon's story fascinates me because it demonstrates a host of literacies. According to Gee (2007) part of belonging to a larger community of *Discourse* is participating in the literacies common to that group. Since humans live in multiple contexts, this variability requires that they develop multiple sets of literacy skills as part of asserting membership in these various Discourses. However, Gee also points out that not all literacies and not all Discourses are equally valuable in society. Those developed in school, for instance, tend to be perceived as more valuable since they come with privilege while in school and also in gaining social status afterward, even when those literacies are not necessary for immediate daily living (Spring, 2005). Because of the complicated social and procedural rules surrounding it, school is often referred to as a game (e.g., Delpit, 1996).

The skills that Brandon deployed during the geography game are also skills that help him achieve success in school. Some of these skills include (a) the emotional sensitivity to discern the will of the class in continuing to play, (b) an awareness of what he would have to do to prolong

the game, (c) the social sophistication to decide who he wanted to move to his new team, (d) the ability to notice and capitalize on the decision-making processes of others, and of course, (e) geographic knowledge. These are also skills that are potentially valuable in contexts outside of the community.

Brandon's motivation for managing that class activity is also noteworthy. He was not trying to usurp power of the teacher, nor was he interested in making sure everyone saw how smart he was. One of his goals in prolonging the game was to keep the class from becoming boring. His major goal, however, was altruistic. As the game began, Brandon surveyed his opponents and assessed that this team would not be able to win because it had many of the students who struggled most in the class. He made a decision that he was going to transfer to the other side and bring his friends so that those other students could feel successful. While it is possible that a teacher could notice this same inequity and structure the entire class for success, this is not what happened. Therefore, Brandon lent his literacies to the class so they could continue playing regardless of their skill and feel success playing the game.

In my English class, the students viewed Brandon as a leader. They relied on him to provide insight into class discussions and to lead them in responsible decision-making when they are given choices in the curriculum made through class consensus. Students who demonstrate multiple literacies in school are often appreciated in school settings, but I wanted to do more than appreciate the abilities of students like Brandon. I wanted to develop some understanding about them.

### **Asking Questions about the Literacy Game**

As Brandon's teacher, I became interested in how students like Brandon know how to use discourse to drive classroom experiences in positive ways. Most researchers who study adolescent literacy, particularly boys' literacy, have studied struggling readers, and found that the multiple literacies of these students went largely unrecognized at school. For instance, Alvermann (2001a) found that her participants in an after-school reading program could not seem to figure out how to bring their literacies into school, which caused them, in terms of their literacy, to appear weak to teachers and thus be recommended for Alvermann's program. She conducted a similar study with other colleagues (2007) and found the same phenomenon where students who had been labeled as struggling could not share their literacies at school.

The readers that Alvermann and her colleagues (2007) studied were subjected to the perceptions of their skills as readers that were ascribed to them in school. In contrast, Brandon and other boys like him seem to command their own literacies in playing the school game. In addition, these boys are able to assist classmates in recognizing their own literacies in ways that position others for success. Even more astounding, these boys' storying of their literacy also pushes forward the discourse of the other students in the class. Such disparate perceptions between Alvermann's research participants and my own, begged several provocative questions because I have students like Alvermann's who live alongside students like Brandon. I wondered how some of my students who seem to exert considerable jurisdiction over their literate identity as well as the perceptions of their literacies manage to do so. I also wondered how the construction of literate identity in adolescence interfaced with identity development in general.

Finally, I was interested in what role the stories they tell could play in helping me as a teacher understand the literacy development of these students.

Brandon's explanation of the multiple literacies that he wielded so successfully in geography was also interesting because it was not an explanation at all. Instead, it was a story. As his teacher, I listened to the story and then unpacked all of the literacies that I could see. Next, I used the story and his explanation of it to read more carefully into Brandon's *literate identity*. Similarly, others have used stories to unpack ways of knowing. According to Clandinin & Connelly (1990, 2000), teachers' personal, practical knowledge is embodied in story. Clandinin and her colleagues (2006) label the stories that contain this knowledge that are told by teachers as "teachers' stories to live by" or "teachers' stories which represent teacher identity" (p. 7). Clandinin deliberately contrasts these with "stories of teachers," (p. 7) which are stories that are told about teachers—not by them. Clandinin and her colleagues use analogous language to assert that children likewise have "stories to live by" (p. 9) that represent their identity, as well as their attempts to fit in school. Further, just as there is a difference between "teachers' stories" and "stories of teachers," there are stories by children and stories about children.

I started attending to my own stories about children who have and use multiple Discourses successfully in school. However, I also knew that the stories I had about students could only take me so far in developing understandings about boys' literacy. If I really wanted to enlarge what I understood about Brandon and students like him, I needed to access the stories that belong to them either because they are the first person teller, or because they approve of, or consent to my retelling. These tellings and retellings form a constellation of stories (Craig, 2007). *Story constellations* are flexible groups of narratives that are broadened and deepened as they are retold and relived. Although Craig writes about story constellations to talk about school

reform, I perceive this as a term that could be helpful for describing the shape of a student's *literate narrative*. A literate narrative is a term I have come to use to describe the grouping of stories that frame the broader view of a student's literate identity.

Considering Clandinin and her colleagues' (2006) work with storying and identity, I wondered if Brandon had composed ways of knowing about his own literacy that could be unveiled through stories. I also wondered about the aspects of the identities of these boys that have to be well developed for them to display such literate prowess in the landscape of the classroom. The concept of landscape emerges from Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) work as a metaphor for talking about various ways in which stakeholders are positioned in schools. According to these researchers, every person has a different position on the landscape of school because of his or her unique life experiences. Therefore, each person also has a slightly different vantage point from which to view experiences and events that are entangled in the school experience. The differences in these vantage points open up spaces for making and displaying identity, according to Clandinin and her colleagues (2006).

When I speak of storying among my students, I mean the literal stories the students tell me in school, in addition to the larger narratives that are built metaphorically through actions, experiences, and products completed in class. The first story I shared from Brandon is an example of a story that Brandon told, but it is also a story about his actions in a class and the product (the continued game) that resulted. Other stories the participants in this inquiry told have similar implications for literacy and for interpreting the literate identity development processes they are undergoing. Not all stories the students tell are about school or literacy *per se*, even though these stories can be unpacked and reassembled to unveil aspects of literate identity. The

narratives gathered during this study were used to answer the question: How do several highly literate boys in my ninth grade honors classes story their literate identity?

I first became interested in Brandon's storied literate identity when he was an eighth grader in my language arts class. As I developed my research question, Brandon entered ninth grade and signed up for my honors English class. The curiosity I had about Brandon's literacy was also present with other students that I perceived could wield their literacy skills as effectively as he did. Eventually, I selected and invited four other participants who were also in my class as eighth graders and then were in my honors English class.

### **Enacting the Rules of the Narrative Inquiry Game**

The purpose of this section is to make explicit the representational form of narrative inquiry for readers at an early point in this thesis. In creating this section, I hope to assuage confusion regarding the seemingly atypical form of this thesis document. My aim is not to distinguish narrative inquiry from the conventions of other research entirely, but rather to reveal how the standard elements of research appear in this document, but are shaped differently. Unless otherwise noted, the explanations that follow come from the work of Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray-Orr (2007). The discussion about the format of this thesis is my interpretation of their framework.

“Narrative inquiry is so much more than deciding at the last minute that a paper or dissertation or talk would be more compelling if a researcher was to tell a story” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray-Orr, 2007, p. 31). Carefully conducted narrative inquiries are firmly grounded not only in collecting stories, but also in analyzing the stories by reliving and retelling them. The retelling, first for analysis, and second for meaning, is one of several fundamental aspects of narrative inquiry. In this section I will briefly describe the narrative traditions from



which narrative inquiry emerges. Then, I will convey the eight design elements requisite in a narrative inquiry research design, adding information about how those elements appear in my own study.

**Bringing forward the traditions from which narrative inquiry is built.** The foundation for narrative inquiry comes from Dewey's (1938) assertion that life and education are organically entwined. From this notion comes the concept of narrative inquiry as an interest in "lived experience—that is, in lives and how they are lived" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxii). In addition to the work of Dewey, narrative inquiry "has a long intellectual history both in and out of education" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 2). Contributions from other research fields include MacIntyre's (1981) ideas about narrative unity and Mitchell's (1981) comprehensive outline of the field of narratology. Several years later, Polkinghorne (1988) contributed an understanding of narrative analysis and Coles (1989) argued for the legitimacy of the literary ideas of narrative. Clandinin and Connelly built narrative inquiry as a research design from these notions that focused on educational research. They specify that, as researchers, knowing about our experiences and knowing about the academic literature relevant to our own questions can be brought together to create new understandings.

Considering the equal footing that collected narratives and the systematic inquiry in terms of professional literature hold, the format for reporting lived experience as story simultaneous to research is as follows: Provide background for a compelling story related to a research question. Share the story. Provide analysis of story in terms of existing research. Then, push to the meaning of the story.

As the inquiry progresses, researchers circle back to previously told stories to use them to interpret new stories. An inquiry ends by bringing all of the stories into apotheosis, meaning that

readers can gain a sense of closure, but that closure can also be reopened easily to form a new inquiry. My thesis follows this pattern in all sections, beginning in this chapter and continuing to the end of the document.

**Communicating the eight design elements of narrative inquiry.** There are eight design elements of narrative inquiry. Since narrative inquiry is organic, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact locations of these design elements. Indeed, every chapter should demonstrate all eight to some degree and so should most sections. In order to give a general idea of how these design elements work, however, I will name them and indicate some places in the text where they may appear.

The first design element is justification. Three types of justification are necessary, a personal justification, which is where the researcher explains how he or she became interested in the study. The major portion of my personal justification for this study is featured in chapter one where I have discussed why I am researching boys' stories of their literate identities. The personal justification is also embodied in the interweaving of stories throughout the thesis. The second justification is the social justification, which explains why the phenomenon under study is potentially valuable to the relevant community of researchers. While the social justification begins in the introduction, the major pieces are in chapters two and four where I outline the major arguments of the professional literature on boys' literate identity. As findings and discussion unfold, the social justification is also supported by interweaving strands of the academic literature with each other and with the stories. Finally, the practical justification explains how the inquiry is relevant to educational practice. This justification features most prominently in chapter seven where I discuss what I learned about boys' stories of their literate identities, but it also emerges across the document.

The second design element is naming the phenomenon under study. In other types of research, naming the phenomenon is framed as the research question, which in this study appears in chapter one. Since telling and retelling circle back, it becomes necessary to rename the phenomenon in chapters four, five, six, and seven.

The third element is an explanation of the methods. In order to support the reader, this section, as well as other sections this chapter, contain some explanation of methods. Most of the methods are articulated in chapter three. However, since chapter four discusses initial findings, which proved to be catalytic to uncovering understandings about allowing the boys to help shape meaning from the stories, it also conveys methods.

The fourth element is revealing analytic and interpretive processes. Specifically, the interpretive processes are the ways in which a researcher moves from field notes to field texts, and finally to research texts that are public. The discussion of this journey in my inquiry is almost completely contained in chapter three. Other small pieces about interpretation appear at the end of each of the findings chapters as justification for the findings.

The fifth element is positioning the inquiry in the context of existing research literature. Most methodologies require researchers to position their study in terms of the research relating directly to their topic. This is also required in narrative inquiry. Chapters two and four contain this positioning as the stories I collected both align with and run counter to the major arguments of the field of boys' literacy. In addition to this requirement, narrative inquirers must also position themselves in other programs of research that are relevant to their data. In my thesis, chapters five and six center on other programs of research, specifically Bordieus' (1986) notion of capital, Barthes' (2007) assertions of food as text, and Frye's (1957) arguments about literary heroes. Finally, narrative inquirers must position themselves in relation to other forms of inquiry.

Making the relationship between the structure and form in narrative inquiry in relation to a traditional thesis is the purpose of this section. Chapter six, for example, is a defense of the use of the tools from the field of literary criticism to inquire more deeply into narrative.

The sixth element involves offering some sense of what can be known and what cannot be known. A narrative inquirer places the emblematic narratives (Mischler, 1990) alongside the professional literature so that understandings can form while simultaneously realizing that one story cannot tell all about a phenomenon and neither can the research being used to interpret it. The fact that I negotiated the text with the boys may seem to allay the vastness of what cannot be known, but in reality, this circumstance only makes the vastness more prominent. The tension between asserting knowing, while saving room for wonder, is present in every chapter of this thesis, but is most distinct in chapter seven. This tension is also inherent to building a justification for any research question, which in my thesis appears in chapter one as I reveal my wonderings about boys' literacy, boys' stories, and boys' literate identity. In chapter five this sense of what can be known and what cannot be known appears as I reopen the research on boys' literacy and literate identity. In chapter two, I have carefully interspersed, or framed my discussion of the research against emblematic narratives of the boys. The tension between the boys' stories and the narratives of the research link the known, the unknown, and the unknowable together.

The seventh element is ethical considerations. While research involving human subjects must be submitted for review by boards of ethics, narrative inquirers must also negotiate their research texts with participants. The negotiation requisite in narrative inquiry highlights the ethical stakes. Since this negotiation takes place, narrative inquirers often write and present their research as if the participants were still alongside them, reading and hearing what they say. In

this thesis, I discuss the text negotiation process in chapter three, where I explain that the participants were highly involved in all phases of the research after collection had concluded. The results of this negotiation permeate the entire document, especially since the boys' feedback to me had a major impact on how I came to interpret, arrange, and retell their stories. (See Appendix A for a list of these stories.)

The eighth, or final element is the consideration of the representation of form. In narrative inquiry the process of bringing story and professional literature together is illustrated by the incorporation of stories and the descriptions of how the inquirer comes to meaning. This representation of form appears in every section of this thesis. The form is the essence, or soul, or narrative inquiry. Without the formal representation, the work is not sanctioned as narrative inquiry, although it may still be another type of research.

### **Collecting the Players**

Although it is customary not to provide details about participants in a thesis until other issues of methodology are discussed, the nature of narrative inquiry requires that I begin unpacking stories early on in this report (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray-Orr, 2007). This section, therefore, provides a short profile of me, as well as a general discussion about the situation from how I came to invite the participants.

**Me, as the teacher.** I earned my bachelor's degree in English from Brigham Young University, with minors in geography and linguistics. I did not complete coursework in education during my baccalaureate studies. During these years, I worked summers at a newspaper in Oregon and completed an internship with Ancestry.com. I also worked in the folklore archive at BYU and served as an associate publisher for an on-campus magazine with international circulation. I started my teaching career working with English learners on their writing. My

enjoyment of being with the students and improving their expressive skills motivated me to complete a teaching certification program and seek full time employment as a teacher. I have taught junior high for six years. I am the Alternative Languages Specialist at my junior high school, as well as the reading specialist. In addition to working with English learners and struggling readers I teach general education and honors sections of language arts. After two years of teaching at the junior high, I was offered an adjunct position at BYU in their program to endorse teacher candidates to work with English learners. My teaching assignments are all heavily grounded in working with students who have been given a variety of academically charged administrative designations. I see every day the ways in which some students win large and elaborate prizes in the game of school, while others walk away with not so much as a parting gift. (See Appendix B for an elaboration of my educational and professional training.)

**The assignment.** In order to introduce and describe my participants, I unite them around glimpses of their lives interspersed with an explanation of how they came into my class as ninth graders. One common experience for all of these participants was the summer reading assignment that is a tradition for students who take honors English classes at my school and is assigned by the teacher. My goal for the summer assignment is to help students enter the class with shared texts that can be immediately used to negotiate a curriculum of lives (Schwab, 1978). The act of choosing from a canon of texts prepares students for the first collective assignment, which is to select the literature that they would like to study as individual classes.

The summer assignment for this particular year consisted of choosing a pair of books to read. One member of the pair had been designated as either a classic or is classified as an informational text. The second member of the pair had been written recently and correlated thematically with the classic or informational text. After reading the pair, the students were

instructed to write an email to the author of the more recently published book. The contents of the email were not specified, but I suggested that they should talk about the author's book in terms of the other book in the pair. Then, during the year, students formed self-selected groups based on what books they read and organized a presentation to share with the rest of the class.

Each of the students who came into my study had a slightly different way of approaching the assignment that was related to their entry to the class. My description of these students, mingled with the story of their coming into my class, ignites several issues around literacy and identity that will become more relevant in subsequent chapters of this thesis. The narratives that emerge also provide a window into the entanglement between children's stories (their stories) and stories of children (my stories about them). This entanglement is important in discussing the methods for constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing the narratives for analysis.

**Brandon.** When the honors English position fell vacant at my school, students, parents, and administrators asked if I would fill it. I explained that I would not, citing my return to graduate school, and therefore my busy schedule. When Brandon heard that I would be teaching general education language arts, he opted not to sign up for honors during the spring enrollment cycle for the fall. He said that he liked to do projects and he knew that I did those. I urged him to take honors anyway because I was aware of the opportunity structure that taking advanced courses provides students. I actually gave all of my eighth grade students an extended speech about taking advantage of educational opportunities in high school and beyond. So, while I worried about the loftier principle of siphoning off students with large amounts of school-valued social and cultural capital, at the same time, I was distressed that students I knew were potentially missing chances to score points in the school game. When the administration asked me to teach the honors class for the third time, I consented. I told Brandon immediately. He

signed up soon after and completed the summer reading assignment on time. He even attended a signing by the author of one of the books he chose to read.

**Anthony.** As an eighth grader, Anthony had designed two days of instruction for his peers based on some extra reading he had done. However, Anthony did not sign up for honors English during spring enrollment. He came to visit me the first week of school and asked if he could enroll. I agreed that he should come into the class and gave him the summer assignment. Anthony asked me if I had any recommendations for the books he should read, and I offered him several choices. He selected his reading based on my suggestions. He finished the assignment several weeks after school began and was able to find a group for the presentation that needed extra members.

**Michael.** Michael's stage presence earned him the lead in the school's production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. Since the play was to be performed in the fall, the rehearsals were conducted during the summer. Some rehearsals lasted most of the day. Michael has a job after school. Michael also sang in the school's auditioned choir. In addition, Michael is heavily involved with the Boy Scouts of America. As I was collecting the stories during this inquiry, he held a leadership position for which he was technically too young. Summer is a busy time for Scouting. In the unit to which he belonged, campers are not allowed to bring media, including books. Michael's list of activities, coupled with his inability to multitask because of his troop's regulations made it difficult for Michael to do the assignment. Michael is a stickler for rules. He was prepared to leave the honors class because he had not completed the summer assignment. Because I had made adjustments for other students, and because I was becoming more wakeful about how crowded summers were for students with highly developed repertoires of literacies, I



allocated extra time to Michael and told him to stay in the class. As soon as *Fiddler on the Roof* scaled back rehearsals, Michael finished the assignment.

**Robert.** I met Robert at the birthday party of another junior high student when he was a seventh grader. When my husband and I are invited to such activities, we make an appearance, bring a gift, greet the young people, and then socialize with the adults. Robert came with the other students to welcome us when we arrived. Later on, Robert recognized me from the party when he was in the computer lab in the library at our school and asked my help in using a piece of equipment. By happenstance, Robert was assigned to my eighth grade class the following academic year. After his eighth grade year, Robert signed up for honors during spring enrollment and completed the summer assignment. When he could not find one of the books he wanted, he emailed me. I provided a copy that he read and then loaned to a friend so that friend could do his own summer reading assignment at another school.

**Alan.** Alan almost did not enroll in honors English because he assumed that he was too busy to complete the summer assignment. When he came to visit me at school toward the end of the summer, I learned that he really did have a busy life. He had a job helping another teacher after school, and he sang in the school's auditioned choir. In his neighborhood, Alan waters the plants for many of his neighbors as they travel through the summer or because they are elderly. He also has a hobby of filmmaking at which he works diligently. Finally, because he is social, he wanted to have space to spend time with friends.

When Alan said he was too busy to do the summer assignment, it was not a cover story (Craig & Olson, 2005). I told Alan that if he would like to be in the class, we could tailor a summer assignment for him. We negotiated an assignment where he could film a response rather than write one because he had done the reading required for the class. By the time we were done,

I thought he had designed a much more difficult assignment than I originally issued. However, this new assignment capitalized on his area of interest and allowed him to involve his family, friends, and neighbors with whom he wanted to socialize. Alan presented his film project on the last day of class his ninth grade year. He had taken hundreds of hours of footage for a 15-minute film adaptation of a folktale titled *Master Man* (Shepard & Wiseniewski, 2000).

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

This chapter provides an overview of the professional literature about identity, literate identity, and boys' in-school experiences with literacy. The review of literature provides spaces for thinking about my earlier descriptions of the participants and provides a social justification for my study. The specific topics of this review of literature are narrating identity, narrating literacy, narrating gendered literacy, and narrating masculine literate identity. As is customary in a narrative inquiry, I have embedded narratives collected during this study into professional literature.

#### **Narrating Adolescent Identity**

A large portion of this chapter relies heavily on a story that Robert told in class as a model to unpack, or organize and explain, stories that reveal identity. The use of Robert's story in this section demonstrates how stories can reveal metaphors for illuminating data. The story also plays an important role in this thesis because Robert, without knowing the research on adolescent identity, can tell a story that depicts perspectives of it. Providing this example helps make the argument that the stories collected in this inquiry can be used legitimately to dialogue with perspectives from professional literature. Later on in this thesis, this dialogue between the stories and the literature takes diverse directions. Before this happens, I want to provide an example where a story collected during this inquiry maps on to professional literature harmoniously. Since this story serves so many functions in this inquiry, it will also be referenced twice in chapter four and once in chapter seven.

Our class began with the students congratulating Robert on his storytelling. When I inquired further, I found out that Robert had started to tell the legend of Cupid and Psyche in a previous class, but he had run out of time. The rest of the students expressed interest

in hearing the story, either for the first time, or to know the end. Initially, his telling ebbed and flowed. He apologized for his lack of fluency and explained he was trying to provide us the parts of the story we would find the most interesting. Eventually he settled into a rhythm and finished 50 minutes later. (Reconstructed field note, December 2009).

Before unpacking this story, I will articulate the major paradigms in the field of adolescent literate identity. Like Robert, I am attempting to relate the pieces that might be most helpful to my audience's understanding of this field of research. As I reviewed the literature on literate identity, I discovered Moje and Luke's (2009) five metaphors of identity. Moje and Luke note that although these metaphors are used in literate identity research, they are not clearly distinguishable from research on identity in general, which is why they are included in this section about identity. These five metaphors are (1) identity as difference, (2) identity as self, or sense of self, (3) identity as mind or consciousness, (4) identity as narrative, and (5) identity as position. When I examined these metaphors, I determined that each of these was based on concepts of essentialism, which is a developmental view of how identity is built, or ascription, which describes existing identity. Lee and Anderson (2009) suggested the tension between essentialism and ascription in adolescent identity. Therefore, for the purposes of my study, I refer only to essentialist perspectives and ascribed perspectives.

The essentialist identity perspective in this study is based on the developmental theory of Erikson (1956). Many researchers have built on Erikson's work. He is usually credited with the identity as self, or organic sense of self, metaphor (Moje & Luke, 2009). Berzonsky (1989, 1997) offers plotlines for exploring the development of identity as Erikson proposed. The ascribed identity perspective represented in this thesis is from Gee (2001), who discusses identity as difference as well as position (Moje & Luke, 2009). Gee offers ways to look at existing identity.

In my own research, Gee's work provides a counterbalance to the Eriksonian reliance on intrinsic identity development by focusing on ascribed identity. I will describe both of these perspectives through the lens of retelling Robert's version of Cupid and Psyche after I preview them in more depth.

**Previewing the identity as self, or organic perspective.** According to Erikson (1956), identity development is the essential task of all humans, and it is fundamental to movement through adolescence. It is also termed an essentialist perspective because in Erikson's view, identity is essentially an inner construct. Although Erikson declined to define what he meant by achievement specifically, his work suggests that young people with achieved identities live out stories of productive lives as adults, especially in terms of their ability to make deep commitments to people and interests. Most researchers whose work I read discussing literate identity do so from an Eriksonian perspective of broader psychosocial identity development. According to Erikson, young people should engage in a period of systematic exploration of various identities in order to become the type of people who can eventually make deep commitments. He argues that adults should assist young people in their explorations by providing both emotional and physical space for such activities. In storying one's literacy, narrative space is one such space. The hindrance to this orientation in terms of defining literate identity is that Erikson intentionally avoided defining psychosocial identity. Therefore, making an extension of his work that encompasses literate identity is problematic. Even though Moje and Luke (2009) review the literature on literate identity, they do not provide a definition, instead suggesting the literate identity is more complicated than most frameworks allow for.

**Previewing the identity as difference perspective.** Identity as difference asserts that identities are relational, meaning that a person's identity is somewhat dependent on his or her

company. The identity as difference perspective therefore suggests that since identities are partially determined by context and humans live in multiple contexts, they possess multiple identities. When identities are based on difference, it follows that they are based on some evidence of identity that can be determined through observation. Gee's (2001) four ways of looking at identity exemplify an identity as difference perspective, since it requires either a judgment from an outsider or a self-assessment of identity. Gee's four lenses are ascribed since they look at identity already in place, but it is identity as difference because of the judgment required to determine difference.

**Returning to Cupid and Psyche.** Now that I have overviewed the paradigms of adolescent identity, I will return to Robert's telling of Cupid and Psyche, and then I will use the story to go into more depth about the identity paradigms. Robert's storytelling ability was a highly visible activity in our classroom. There was a tacit agreement among the students that space on the entire landscape of school should be made for it. Robert indicated that he found the story of Cupid and Psyche while exploring topics for a world civilization class where he opted to focus his efforts on Greek stories. The story of Cupid and Psyche is typically credited to Lucius Apuleius in his work, *The Transformation of Lucius* (Apuleius & Kenney, 1999). This is a collection of stories that are much like fairy tales or allegories, although they are often referred to as myths. Since Apuleius' version, there have been many other renditions of the story.

The version of the story that Robert found on the Internet and then retold for the class included the following details. Psyche is a woman whose beauty rivaled that of the goddess Venus. In her jealousy, Venus sends her son Cupid to curse Psyche so that she would fall in love with someone hideous. Instead, Cupid, who is incredibly beautiful himself, falls in love with the comely Psyche when he sees her. Eventually Psyche goes to a mountaintop where it has been

prophesied by the oracle that her husband will be waiting. She is taken up to live with Cupid where she is told to enjoy her surroundings but she cannot look at her master. Overcome by curiosity and the fact that she has been told by the oracle as well as her sisters that her husband is a monster, Psyche stretches toward Cupid in the night with her candle, accidentally burning his skin while revealing his beautiful face. When Cupid wakes, wounded, he flees the room through the window. Psyche searches the earth for Cupid, completing tasks for Venus to try to win her favor. Psyche is able to complete all the tasks. However, Venus is unmoved since she realizes that Cupid, along with other gods, is sending assistance to Psyche to complete some of the tasks. Eventually, Cupid and Psyche reconcile because Cupid wakes Psyche from a dangerous sleep that resulted from looking in a box that she retrieved from Persephone in the underworld as part of her errands for Venus. Due to pressure from the other gods, Venus relents and allows Cupid and Psyche to marry.

**Integrating Berzonsky's perspective on identity styles.** Using Erikson's (1956) argument for identity accomplishment through trying our identities as a frame, Berzonsky (1989, 1997) proposed that adolescents varied in their approaches to experimenting with identities. He called these approaches identity styles. The styles are (a) informational, where young people seek out experiences and evaluate them; (b) normative, where standards and expectations are largely determined by others, and (c) diffuse-avoidant, where procrastination and evasion stifle growth. These styles may be used to interpret identity because information seeking and normative behaviors will lead to the achievement of some type of identity and diffusion prevents achievement. Robert's retelling of the story of Cupid and Psyche opens a window into several of the psychological processes of adolescent identity development since this story's three major characters (Psyche, Cupid, and Venus) can be used to represent Berzonsky's styles.

Berzonsky's (1989, 1997) styles are very fluid. Young people are not locked into one style for any length of time. In the story, Cupid increases his willingness to assimilate new ideas about relationships, while Psyche begins to norm her own behavior against Cupid's. Venus' diffusion re-stories as normative when she bends to the will of her peers and allows Cupid to marry Psyche. These characters exhibit mainly one of Berzonsky's styles. What follows is an explanation of each of these three characters and their respective styles. Psyche is information seeking, Cupid is normative, and Venus is diffused.

***Information-seeking.*** A person who employs an information-seeking style sits at the edge of his or her knowledge, expecting to accommodate new ideas, thus, paradigms are challenged, and shifts occur. This is embodied in the character of Psyche. To her, all information is worth having, be it from her sisters or from the oracle. She goes to the mountaintop to meet her Cupid, having subscribed to the story that he was a monster, and not knowing whom he would be or how she would find him. Later, she acts on her desire to confirm or disaffirm the rumors that her husband was a monster. When she learned that he was not, she embarked on a journey. She was willing to go wherever necessary, including the Underworld, for the sake of knowing what she wanted to learn. Along the way, she continues to accept help from more capable others (gods) so that she can reach her goal. An open attitude towards new experiences is the core trait of the information-seeking style.

***Norming against others.*** Cupid, by contrast, exemplifies what Berzonsky (1989, 1997) calls a normative style of identity development. A person employing a normative style sits in the middle of his or her knowledge, assimilating, or entertaining new knowledge without really incorporating that knowledge. In narrative terms, a normative person accepts certain stories because they are prestigious or because they are told by a prestigious entity, while rejecting other



stories without interrogation. A normative person will not revise his or her worldview unless necessary, according to Berzonsky. At the beginning of the story Robert told, Cupid is sent to curse Psyche because he is obedient. Even when he could not follow through with Venus' plan, he still tried to follow certain rules of interaction between gods and mortals. His way to reconcile being in love with a mortal was to disallow her from seeing him.

When Psyche broke faith with their bargain and looked at him, he fled instantly—back to his mother—the person who instilled in him his worldview. For much of the story Cupid was unwilling to change his story of what it meant to be a god. One restriction of godhood was the ability to socialize with mortals, but caring about them was not permitted. Cupid was so hurt that Psyche did not honor his wish not to be seen because he cared about her and about what she thought of him. Cupid also had to confront the fact that he derived his status in the community from his beauty, but he did not want to be loved because he was easy to look at. It was unthinkable to him that Psyche could see him and love him for other reasons. Over-reliance on authority figures for decision-making and an awareness of status are hallmarks of a normative style.

***Diffusing and avoiding.*** Finally, a diffuse-avoidance style leads a person to abandon their knowledge base almost entirely and instead, haphazardly and unpredictably accept and reject stories without regard for outcomes. Venus displays a diffused identity style. Her jealousy stems from her need to tell the story that she is the most beautiful. She will not entertain a story in which Psyche could be perceived as handsome. Therefore, all of her efforts are directed towards denial and even sabotage. Unfortunately, what Venus fails to realize is that the energy that she expends to torture Psyche actually tells the story that Psyche is competition. Venus' wrath also earns Psyche the sympathy of the gods because of all of the attention that has been brought to

what is really a one-sided conflicting story. The desire to avoid confrontation until conflict reaches a boiling point and social distance increases are both characteristics that Berzonsky (1989, 1997) associates with diffusion.

**Mapping on Gee's Four Ways of Looking at Identity.** While Erikson (1956) and those who advanced his work emphasized the person with the identity in question as the actor, Gee emphasizes the person reading the identity as the actor. These four ways of looking at identity overlap in many ways. The story of Cupid and Psyche provides a context for understanding the commonalities in these four ways of looking at identity and calls attention to all four types posited by Gee as well as the ways in which these identities are entangled in one another.

***Nature Identity.*** Gee's (2001) first way comes from forces in Nature Identity (N-Identity). Concern about the physical beauty granted by nature permeates the story of Cupid and Psyche. Physical beauty is very much about N-Identity. Psyche and Venus embrace their beauty and use it to advance their social status. Gee also recognizes forces of nature like birth order, skin color and other physical features as part of N-Identity.

***Institution Identity.*** The concept of Institution Identity (I-Identity) is represented by the gods and the way that they can decide who becomes one and who does not. The gods in this story behave in ways that are very analogous to what Brandt (2001) calls the Sponsors of Literacy. These sponsors, Brandt argues, get to decide who gets additional literacy and who does not. Schools are primary sponsors of literacy in our society. In Psyche's society, the gods decide that Psyche can be among them. By convincing Venus to allow the marriage, they sponsor her. Another institution is the oracle. Through her prophesies, which are actually storied conceptualizations of the future, she gets to decide what opportunities are extended to whom. In Psyche's case, she was extended the story of a monster, a story that competed with the story of

the larger community wherein Cupid was a god. Besides religion and schools, Gee (2001) also recognizes organizations like fraternities as entities that grant I-Identities.

***Discourse Identity.*** Gee's (2001) third way to consider identity deals with individual traits and literacies a person can display while interacting with society. Gee calls this Discourse Identity (D-Identity). Psyche is a member of multiple discourse communities: one of them is religious, which is why she heeded the oracle, another is her family, which is why she was sensitive to her sisters' concerns about her husband. She gained access to more communities of discourse as she was wandering the earth to find her love. Finally, she is admitted into the Discourse of the gods when she is allowed to marry Cupid. Gee emphasizes that D-Identity is ascribed by oneself or by another based on speech or actions. One may have a D-Identity as being politically conservative based on speech and actions but not necessarily an I-Identity of being a member of a conservative political party.

***Affinity Identity.*** The final way of perceiving identity comes from the groups that we associate with, or our Affinity Identity (A-Identity). Cupid and Psyche form an affinity group through their mutual want of association with each other. The gods may comprise another affinity group since by the end of the story it is possible to join up with them. Gee (2001) also connects A-Identities to hobbies like stamp collecting, music playing, and sporting.

### **Narrating Adolescent Literacy**

This section of the review of literature uses two reflective assignments from the participants to unpack the professional literature on literacy, particularly in terms of the characteristics and habits of so-called good readers. Pairing the reflections with the research demonstrates how stories of boy's literacy skills from professional literature interface with boy's stories of their literacy skills. The first reflection is from Brandon.

I believe that I am good at making stories funny. In my story “My Terrible Vacation,” I spiced up the story while keeping it true and it was funny. I can also think on my feet well. When something unexpected comes up I can react quickly. I do this in Mock Trial. I also had to use this skill when we did the assignment where we had to make notes on the Odyssey. Although this was an Internet assignment, I did it without the Internet. I’m also good at connecting things. I can bring things together from one class or from other classes, or from things that have happened to me outside of class (reconstructed from Brandon’s in-class reflection and a clarifying conversation, December 2008).

The second reflection is from Michael. Both of these reflections were written on the same day as part of class assignment to review their work.

I did a good job writing the essay “How Problems Came to be” about the Odyssey. I really liked this essay because I feel that I was able to use language to prove my point. I also liked “Disneyland: Not the Happiest Place on Earth” because I was able to change it and revise it to make it better. The last favorite thing I wrote was “Expert in Creepy Monster Psychology” from when we read *Beowulf*. I just enjoyed writing this, which is rare for me. I enjoyed writing as a character. I decided to be a psychologist for this assignment because my brother is interested in that right now (reconstructed from Michael’s in-class reflection and a clarifying conversation, December 2008).

Brandon and Michael’s works echo several pieces of the professional literature on adolescent literacy because of the details contained in their reflections regarding their beliefs about their literate abilities and preferences. Many researchers agree that adolescent literacy skills should be context-based, comprehension-oriented, and grounded in skills relevant to their

experiences and goals throughout their lives (Alvermann, 2001b). Sections from Brandon and Michael's reflections offer insight into these tenets from their perspective as students.

**Describing the role of context for deploying literacy.** Portions of Brandon and Michael's reflections instantiate in-school literacy as a print-based endeavor. Defining literacy in terms of just print has come under criticism from scholars like Gee (2007). Instead of there being only one literacy, he argues, there are many literacies that vary by context. Others, like Moje and her colleagues (2008) and Alvermann (2007), promote Gee's recommendation and explain how educators might shift their paradigms to accommodate multiple literacies in the classroom. Since schools are storied as having a unique and demanding literacy, the fact that Brandon and Michael's reflections conform to these so-called outmoded models of print predicts some of their success in school.

Brandon's story from chapter one about mediating the geography game illustrates what it looks like when a host of literacy skills come together in school. Brandon's reflection for my class corroborates this story. Michael's multiple ways of knowing come from the fact that he liked three of his writing pieces for class, but each of them revolved around different plotlines, revealing and validating multiple types of literacy. One type, represented in Michael's first essay about Homer's *Odyssey* (Eickhoff, 2001), is about providing evidence for making an argument. Another type, represented in his narrative about Disneyland, is about revising and developing ideas. The third, represented by the character piece from *Beowulf*, is about acknowledging multiple perspectives and deriving pleasure from writing.

Brandon and Michael's reflections, however, also demonstrate a more complicated plotline about what constitutes literate behavior. Hull and Schultz (2001) quote Cole in their meta-analytic work: "Literacy is applying specific knowledge in specific contexts for specific

purposes” (p. 236). Cole’s definition fits well with Brandon’s statement about being able to think on his feet, especially when he needs to find creative ways to do assignments. Brandon also indicates that he can make connections between his out of school life and his in-school one.

Brandon’s self-reported ability to connect his home and school life is interesting in light of the meta-analytical work of Hull and Schultz (2001). These researchers reviewed 10 years worth of literacy work conducted in the 1990s from both journals and book-length projects. Early in their review, they warn that although they reviewed research on out-of-school contexts, it was difficult to disentangle in-school literacy from out-of-school literacy because the notion of context is not fixed. Some teachers are bringing stories of out-of-school literacies into the classroom, and some parents are forcing or reinforcing stories of in-school literacies at home. Brandon’s reflection exemplifies this tension, but also adds a new dimension. Hull and Schultz’s review only accounts for teachers using out-of-school literacies in school. They did not discuss the potential that when stories of out-of-school literacies percolate into the classroom, these infusions may be student-initiated. They could not because there were no articles with this orientation. Hull and Schultz also puzzled over the potential that students can bring literacy from school to other places; but again, they did not have enough material to do more than wonder.

Michael’s reflection suggests that he enjoys what Hull and Schultz (2001) refer to as bringing literacy outside of school. Michael indicates that he enjoyed the opportunity to make his point clear in one of his assignments. During negotiation, Michael clarified that he liked to be succinct because he enjoys argumentation and debate and is interested in government. Collins (1995) stressed that literacy is the ability to read, write, and participate in public policy. He opines that literacy should be contextualized acts that strive to achieve balance in social power among all groups.

Michael's in and out of school desire to participate in policy illustrates the complexity of the notion of in and out of school literacy. While Hull and Schultz's argument includes the fact that some school literacies take place away from school, they only mention this could be so if the parents initiate the use of those literacies—not the students. Hull and Schultz make the additional claim that the conceptual gaps in literacy exist because many of the studies were grounded in Marxist notions of exposing the hypocrisies of the majority culture against minority cultures. Providing evidence of Western colonization becomes sidetracked when the colonized are seen as people who can move literacies around within their community.

The post-colonial orientation to literacy did not end with the 1990s. In a more recent publication, Moje and her colleagues (2004) propose that there is place where literacies of home and community combine; this is called the first space. This first space merges with the literacies of school, which are the second space. The overlap of first space and second space is called the third space. The concept of three spaces is borrowed from Bhabha (1994) who is an influential post-colonial theorist. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Moje's argument about building the third space proposes that teachers are the principal actors in merging of in- and out- of school literacies and that they are the people keeping out certain first space literacies. When Brandon stated that he could bring "things together from other classes," and Michael reported choosing his character because of his brother's interest in psychology, they are revealing themselves as conduits for porting literacy to various places both in-school and out of it. These circumstances complicate the notion of spaces and the teacher as the only agent for merging home and school literacies.

**Studying reading comprehension in adolescents.** Motivation is a topic in reading comprehension that is relevant to adolescents (Alvermann, 2001b). Michael is honest about the

fact that he does not enjoy writing all the time, but he is open to doing the work, and he can also express pleasure in what he creates. Michael's willingness to do the work necessary to accomplish tasks, even ones he is not especially enthusiastic about, matches Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) description of motivation as being distinct from attitude and interest. Guthrie and Wigfield (1999) also link motivation for reading well to reading on comprehension tests. On a reading comprehension test, students use cognitive strategies to convey understandings of concepts using texts that they do not have a high intrinsic motivation to read. Guthrie and Wigfield's argument (1999, 2000) about testing indicates that part of displaying literacy in school is the ability to engage with texts, tests, and potentially even assignments that conflict with personal preferences and even personal will. Michael's engagement with the opportunity to be a character in one assignment suggests how his motivation to do something he perceived as challenging led to a more positive attitude about completing a task that he did not initially feel motivated to do. Taking on the persona of a character is also an opportunity to stake his identity in his learning, which is a motivational factor according to Smith and Wilhelm (2002). The other story Michael discussed in his reflection was about Disneyland. Michael said that he engaged with the task because he had the opportunity to improve the text. The cognitive challenge of being able to change his text overcame his dislike of the topic in general.

In a study of 117 fifth graders, Guthrie and Wigfield (1999) also found that when students are motivated to read, they engage in more reading, and their comprehension abilities increase. There are also quantitative studies linking high motivational goals, such as challenge and curiosity, to acquiring the ability to use deep processing strategies for text (Guthrie et. al., 1998; Meece & Holt, 1993; Pintrich et. al., 1993). Brandon, the other student whose reflection is



featured in this section, indicated that he reads a lot as well. The other participants in this inquiry also engage in wide reading, which percolated into their narratives as well throughout this study.

While the question of what good readers do has been well attended to, the questions of who good readers are and how good readers live in a classroom have not been. Studying what so-called good readers do (Pressley & Wharton-MacDonald, 1997) does not offer any additional insight because the definition of literacy is much too narrow. Reading skill, according to this research, would be the most important predictor of positive literate identity.

### **Expanding conceptions of literacy through the lifespan literacy perspective.**

Descriptions of good readers do not seem to consider reading from a lifespan perspective (Alexander, 1997, 2002). In a lifespan perspective, instead of surface-level strategies, good readers engage in the use of deep comprehension strategies to make meaning. These are the same deep comprehension strategies that Guthrie and his colleagues (1998) identified as providing motivation to read text that may otherwise not be engaging to certain students. Expert readers also have stores of knowledge about discrete topics (such as genetics) that increase alongside their domain-based knowledge, such as biology. These readers are less likely to be interested in situated reading, but more likely to be individually and intrinsically interested in reading.

Finally, the lifespan literacy perspectives indicate that proficient readers can contribute to the discourses of their personal interests. When readers express very specific interests earlier than teachers expect, these actions might be interpreted as resistance. Although the lifespan literacy perspective offers additional insights about what good reading is, again, it does not explicitly embrace literacies in a broad sense the way Gee (2007) does, and these descriptions do not seem to suggest any insight into the question of how proficient reading and identity are interrelated. Since identity is not on the table in Alexander's (1997, 2002) work, gender, a

fundamental aspect of identity (Erikson, 1956, Sternberg, 2007) and a major topic, or at least a byproduct in current literacy research, has been left unexplored.

### **Narrating Gendered Literacy Among Adolescents**

In this review of gendered literacy, I will use a story that Alan and I co-constructed in order to explore some of the issues around gendered literacy. A discussion of gendered literacy is not necessary merely because the participants are boys; rather it is important because boys' literacy is storied in the professional literature and popular culture differently from girls' literacy. Alan is the student who was introduced at the beginning of the thesis as joining the honors class late because he thought he was too busy to complete the summer assignment. Alan and I negotiated a summer assignment where he could film.

I played some music for the class today to show them how to read old poetry with prosody. Alan left class after the bell rang, but then returned with his iPod, wanting to use my speakers to play a song by one of his favorite bands. He asked me to listen to the song and then say what I thought it was about. I listened to the entire song and then told him that I had heard the singer in this band talk on television and the radio. Combining the lyrics of this new song with my past experiences seeing or hearing the singer, I told Alan that I sensed that the singer was trying to negotiate being both a rock star and a good man. Alan explained his friendship with some of the relatives of this singer, which made it possible for them to converse on occasion. In those conversations, the singer had talked to Alan about trying to re-introduce religion into his life. Alan and I agreed that it is very challenging to be incredibly famous and incredibly benevolent. Then, he went off to work (Reconstructed field note, November, 2008).

After Alan and I had the conversation about the singer who wanted to be a good man and a rock star, I became more fascinated with the fact that Alan enjoyed the Nigerian story *Master Man* (Shepard & Wiseniewski, 1999). Over the course of the inquiry and even before it began, Alan was willing to spend hours taking video footage in order to share it cinematographically with the class. *Master Man* is a story about a man who asserts that he is the most powerful, but his boasting is interrupted by another, larger man asserting he is the most powerful. Eventually the argument is settled by a giant—the true master man. This story is about how to decide which person is at the top of a hierarchy. However, it is also about pride because as soon as a character asserts superiority, another larger and better man humbles him, which represents a similar tension to the one that Alan and I articulated about the singer whose song we discussed. The exchange that ensued after Alan played me the song was not just a conversation about a rock star. It was a jointly narrated story about Alan as a young person who wanted to be at the top of a field that he felt required its most elite members engage in practices he believes are immoral. This section of the review of literature confronts the ways in which boys' literacy is portrayed. Alan's interest in the *Master Man* text can be brought up against many of the arguments in the field of boys' literacy.

**Articulating the achievement binary.** The field of boys' literacy interfaces directly with the field of girls' literacy, resulting in a gender-based achievement binary in both the professional literature and popular culture. One side of the binary tells the story that girls are underachieving in math. The other half of the binary tells a story that boys are underachieving in reading. The way this binary has been arbitrated suggests that the master man has yet to appear in the narrative of gender-focused achievement because both genders are storied as having a deficit. Sommers (2005) identified declining college participation and national test scores of boys as

cause for alarm. Empirical data on both sides of the binary tells a slightly altered version of this story, namely, that math scores for boys are only slightly higher, and reading scores for boys are only slightly lower (Husain & Millimet, 2009).

**Responding to girls' perceived shortcoming in the binary.** The research community's response for addressing girls and math has been to study girls who are successful with math. Seeking mentors for girls in math, especially other girls (e.g., Huguet & Regner, 2007; Riegler-Crum, Farkas & Muler, 2006) has been a high priority. Other interventions for supporting girls in math include targeted programs. A study by Kerr, Robinson, and Kurpius (2004), measured self-efficacy increases in at-risk girls during their participation in a math and science enrichment program. There are also programs such as math camps (e.g., Frost & Weist, 2007) for the entire spectrum of girls, from high achieving to high risk. These approaches continue on in university settings where women in math and science fields garner additional services to help them succeed.

**Responding to boys' perceived shortcoming in the binary.** The approach taken for addressing boys' lower reading scores, however, is markedly different. One study in particular found that teachers perceived boys as being typical for low-achievement and girls being considered typical for high achievement (Jones & Myhill, 2004). These findings are entangled with current methods for uncovering boys' literacy, which has been to study boys who are struggling readers or who do not deign to engage civilly with in-school literacy (e.g., Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). It is unclear as to whether boys who resist in-school literacy practices are studied because boys are storied as typical for low achievement, or because boys' status as so called low achievers in literacy makes it difficult to imagine narratives of boys engaging with in-school literacy practices in non-resistant ways. Regardless of the reason, boys' literacy,

especially their perceived resistance to literacy, has become the focus of much attention in both academia and popular culture (Weaver-Hightower, 2003).

Few studies feature boys who are successfully and enthusiastically reading in school. Most of these studies identify boys who are willing to talk about books, and then the researchers qualitatively formed themes based on the boys' elaborations about their choices and made some general assertions about why boys read. For example, Weih (2008) started a middle school book club for boys. His research questions were all about what books the boys liked to read and why they wanted to read those books. In a similar study of this nature by Cavazos-Kottke (2006), the researcher had no conversation whatsoever with the participants, all of whom were middle school boys. He merely watched them as they selected books in a library.

The recommendations that follow the results section in these types of studies typically include an enjoinder to subscribe to the story that boys like books about topics such sports and violence and therefore a classroom stocked with such materials will put the boys on the path to reading. Although the researchers have made efforts to identify boys who like reading and like to talk about reading (e.g., Cavazos-Kottke; 2006, Weih, 2008), they do not ask them to talk about anything other than what they like to read and a smattering of surface level questions about why. Studies of this nature represent potentially missed opportunities to see how boys with a myriad of literacies live in school.

Since boys who are willing to show their literacy at school are not often involved in research, it would seem difficult for the research community to say with any degree of certainty how to help boys who struggle to participate in school literacy. The ability to assert oneself as literate appears to be what students like Alvermann's (2001a) are lacking. Much of the research

conducted to disentangle the issue of boys' lower reading scores continues to be framed as a narrative of reluctance or refusal on the part of the boys.

Resistance to literacy is even the narrative about boys embraced by researchers when the participants are their own children and even when those boys like to read. In her case study of four home-schooled early adolescent boys, two of which were her own sons, Young (2000) attempted to study her experience of engaging four boys in Foucault-based critical literacy talk. The conversations focused on biographies of American presidents the boys had selected as leisure reading and reading associated with their affinity for soccer, which all the boys shared. She found the boys' behavior offensive when they tried to communicate their perceptions of the text. Young's data revealed that her sons, in particular, also exhibited behavior that she perceived as immature and made her uncomfortable, even though she felt competent as a feminist and a scholar. She ended her article with genuine concern and considerable uncertainty about how to enculturate boys into critical literacy practices which would help them assert more powerful literacy skills.

In a related study with more participants, Hamston and Love (2005) sought to explore the roots of resistance in boys. This three-year case study looked at two cohorts of boys aged 11 to 17. The first cohort had 91 participants and the second had 75. Unlike Alvermann's (2001a) and Moje's (2008) participants, who typically did not self-identify as readers, all of Hamston and Love's did. Hamston and Love were confounded that boys who liked to read in general would be resistant to reading in school.

Interestingly enough, no research could be found that positioned girls as resistant to math, although there is some documentation of girls' resistance to reading. In Reeves' (2004) reworking of her doctoral dissertation, Reeves conducted case studies of five students, two of

whom were females. While the male students were narrated through their resistance to reading the novels selected by their English teachers, the girls in this study were all avid readers of fiction who used reading as a way to deal with emotional trauma, and that became the focus of Reeves' work. Even when girls have dysfunctional reading habits, their actions are not storied as resistance the way that boys' are. In addition, researchers are not conducting studies that narrate the ways in which girls may be using empirical or quantitative skills outside of school, although there are many that discuss the ways in which both genders use reading and writing processes in out-of-school contexts (Alvermann, et. al., 2007). With such uneven storying of both boys and girls in the math/reading, binary, the whole issue of who is the master of what becomes very complicated.

Alvermann (2001a) argues that adolescents have literate identities, but the students in her after school reading programs may or may not be aware that they do. For instance, Alvermann discusses ways to give her male case study participant, Grady, ways to reconceptualize his literate identity. She recommends explicit conversations with students about their literate identities where they are guided to an awareness of what literacies they have, so that young people and adults can co-construct ways that these literacies can be valuable. Alvermann declines to frame her students as resistant to reading in general, but the students in her after school reading programs are often identified as resistant or struggling as readers in the school context.

### **Narrating Masculine Literate Identity in Adolescents**

The final section of this review of literature brings together the pieces of identity, literacy, and gender into a discussion about masculine literate identity in adolescents. The following reconstructed text, based on an email from Anthony and the text about which he was proudly

telling me, helps me re-articulate my research question and secure my stance in the research I reviewed for this study.

I participated in the General Assembly Plenary at the BYU MUN Conference today, and well, the committee I participated in won an award for the best-written position paper in said committee. Well, guess what? I WROTE IT!!!! (Reconstructed from electronic correspondence with Anthony, January 2009).

The following is a section from Anthony's paper that he refers to in the correspondence:

The topics before the General Assembly are: Advancing the Principle of Self-Determination through Electoral Assistance, and Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective Within and Outside the United Nations. The delegation from Azerbaijan feels that these topics are of utmost importance regarding both the establishment of Self-Determined governments for the security of individual rights in the international community.

Azerbaijan is very eager to work through these issues with other Member Nations to find effective solutions to these growing international concerns.

Anthony's enthusiasm for this work created under voluntary conditions stands in contrast to the narrative of boys as resistant to literacy. Not only was Anthony interested in writing the paper, he also was willing to do the work necessary to successfully imitate an international government document. Anthony's victory for his team with this paper did not come about because he was merely an adequate comprehender of text. While he chose to participate in the activity, he did not choose the country he wrote about or the topic of gender roles in governmental self-determination. He amalgamated years of practice and self-discipline into a text that he could be proud of and experts in that genre appreciated. The final section of this



review of literature links the pieces of identity, literacy, and masculinity to restate the research questions and justify this study.

**Bringing together the research pieces to justify studying boys.** The paradigm of resistance is potentially a reason why Alvermann's (2001a) case study participant, Grady, had difficulty interpreting himself as literate in the Discourse of school. Alvermann met Grady while running an after school reading program. In her article, she discusses the ways in which Grady exemplifies that experiences many of the students she met in the program have with bringing their literacies into school. By contrast, the proceeding two examples of Anthony's writing—his email to me and the piece from the Model United Nations essay—reveal that he has a fairly broad command of discourse in both his semi-formal correspondence to me, as well as his highly formal writing as part of Model United Nations. Not only has Anthony asserted himself in the sophisticated discourse, such as international politics, which is heavily grounded in in-school literacy, he has the literacy skills to inform me of his accomplishment and the will to do so, yet, inexplicably, boys like Anthony rarely participate in research where the focus is their literacy skills.

**Articulating lingering questions about boys' literate identity.** The professional literature on identity reveals that identity can be developed within a person (which I classified as essentialism) or ascribed by someone else. Essentialist views suggest that identity grows organically from actions on the part of the person developing it (Erikson, 1956). Ascribed views allow the person with the identity or some outsider to name that identity that already exists (Gee, 2001).

Professional literature on adolescent literacy relies heavily on separating home life as a context from school life as a context for their studies (Hull & Schultz, 2001) while asserting that

teachers should be bringing them together (Moje, et. al, 2004). That dichotomy is displayed most obviously in the reading comprehension studies that are tied to motivational research focusing on students' participation in literacy for school Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Guthrie, et, al., 1998; Pintrich, Marx & Boyle, 1993). Comprehension research blends into the lifespan literacy perspective (Alexander 2002), which emphasizes personal interest, and pursuing individual agendas. The reflections of Brandon and Michael disrupt this dichotomy by their descriptions of bringing literacy both out of and into school of their own accord, and that their lifetime literacy pursuits motivate them to engage in activities that they might not otherwise at school.

In terms of gendered literacy, many scholars propose an achievement binary where boys are underachieving in literacy (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Sommers, 2005; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). The studies conducted around this underachievement mostly frame boys as resistant to reading (Hamston & Love, 2005; Reeves, 2004). The studies of boys who enjoy reading revolve around asking the boys what they read, but not who they are as readers (Weih, 2008). When brought against Alan's story about being both a good and powerful man, stories of boys' reluctance are called into question.

Taking all of this information into account, the puzzle concerning boys' achievement and literate identity development remains: if researchers are concerned about uncovering boys' literate practices that lead to literate identity development and educational success, then why are they almost exclusively identifying and studying boys who struggle in school? Why are boys who read well and enjoy it being framed as resistant? Why is there not more inquiry into boys who are academically successful, motivated, interested, and positive about their hosts of literacy skills? I have formed my research question about the ways in which boys' story their literate

identity and selected the participants for this study as a response to this apparent lack of attention to the literate identities of boys who openly display multiple literacies.

**Determining the importance of this study.** Through the use of several examples of student work in this chapter, my study opposes the dominant narrative of resistance about boys and their literacy. I will offer an alternative view to the ways in which boys have been largely framed in the literature in terms of the boys' stories as I offer a definition of literate identity as *being and doing* in chapter four and then argue how this definition offers a more positive view than the current one of resistance. In chapter five, I explore how the boys in this inquiry exhibit plotlines of literacy as capital in the context of *being and doing* literacy. In chapter six, I will describe the ways in which highly literate boys story their literacies. The ways that the students story themselves offer insight into these specific students' literate lives and potentially even offers suggestions for understanding students who are not as successfully navigating a literate narrative.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

In chapter one, an overview of narrative inquiry was provided to support readers in making sense of the presentational format of this study. This chapter uses narratives collected while living alongside (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) the boys to build on the overview of narrative inquiry from chapter one. It discusses the specific aspects of narrative inquiry research design, including the ways in which participants are invited, stories are collected, recorded, and shifted from field notes to research texts that are negotiated into a final document. The first narrative in this chapter focuses on an experience I had with Anthony that will be used to explore the ways in which the participants and I interacted while living alongside one another, as well as how I came to invite them into the inquiry.

Anthony was often among the first to arrive to class, both as an eighth and ninth grader. On one particular day when he was in eighth grade, he exuberantly entered and immediately inquired as to whether I would like to see something interesting. Blithely, I replied that I was willing to see what he had, as long as it was not a bug. He grew quiet and sat down. His changed countenance drew my attention, and I went to sit next to him. I explained that in fact, I had misspoken and I would love to look at whatever he had to show me. He reached into his pocket and drew out a matchbox. When he slid the cover off, I saw about eight bugs in a bed of sawdust. Anthony explained that they had blown into the wood shop. Some of the other students were enacting mischief with the creatures and so he had saved them. We marveled at the bugs until the late bell rang. Later in the day, Anthony released the bugs back into the outdoors (Reconstructed from negotiation session with Anthony, August 2009).

I remember this incident because of how upset I was with myself for saying something I did not really mean and how that had silenced Anthony and then how relieved I was that I was able to go back and marvel with him, even though the bell was going to ring and class would need to start. As we talked, I sensed the bustling in my classroom as the other students had entered, but my primary focus was that boy and his bugs. Research on the ethical nature of teaching suggests that the plotline for forming relationships with students is called presence (Rogers & Raider-Roth, 2006). Presence refers to both a quality of attending, which means “to stretch toward” and to be in a state of “emptiness,” where a person enacting presence seems to focus on just the people he or she is with during a given time (Waks, 1995, p. 94-95). While Rogers and Raider-Roth discussed presence in the context of teaching, it is also an important concept for guiding a narrative inquiry. I had to function as a classroom teacher who was simultaneously collecting data. Since such careful attention is necessary to play both the role of classroom teacher and researcher, a high degree of focus is required. While it is essential in research to engage in presence with participants, it is also important as a teacher to allocate presence to other students as well. The difference between incidents of presence with participants versus non-participants is not in the quantity of attention paid to the students. Instead, the difference is in the manner of recording as well as the permission to analyze data and report findings in public settings.

My experience with Anthony and his bugs provides a context highlighting both the anticipated and unexpected metaphorical bugs inherent in a study with multiple participants, in multiple class sections, with multiple sources of data across several months where one individual enacts the role of teacher and researcher simultaneously. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology governing the study that attempted to answer my research question about how

the adolescent boys with positive literate identities story themselves. The first section discusses why ninth grade students are positioned well to participate in a study of literate identity as well as the criteria I used for inviting these particular participants. Subsequent sections describe the setting—both physical and ideological, the research design, as well as the methods of analysis unique to narrative inquiry.

### **Stretching Toward Participants**

The rationale for conducting a study of this nature with ninth graders emerges from Erikson's (1956) eight stages of man's attention to socialization for identity development. Adolescents, according to Erikson, are in a peculiar position, because it is the time where all the other stages of childhood have to be resolved again. Successful negotiation of the identity-making stage requires young people to consider stories of themselves in a variety of future roles as they explore those roles socially. Because the stages must be re-resolved, ninth graders, in a psychosocial sense, are potentially facing similar crises to those first encountered in ages two and three. In this stage, young people are trying to resolve tensions around balancing the need to assert themselves socially while monitoring their own actions to conform to acceptable societal norms.

In the story with Anthony and the bugs, Anthony faced several challenges in enacting his identity. First, he had to decide what to do when his peers were behaving malevolently towards the bugs, since he did not believe this was acceptable, and yet his interference could also lead to his peers rejecting him. Next, he had to decide whether to tell me. When he tried, I randomly named something I did not want to see. Ironically, that is what he had. My rejection posed another tension to his self-monitoring: what was he going to do with the bugs now that I had said they should not be in my class. He resolved this by withdrawing physically and socially. Then,

when I reneged and offered to see whatever it was he was harboring, Anthony again had to decide whether to reveal. Finally, Anthony still had to make a decision about what to do with the bugs over the long term. He opted to release them. In the course of only a few minutes of real time, Anthony had to make at least seven proactive and reactive behavioral decisions and decide what identity to enact. During this time, he was not only trying to make decisions about his own story; he had to make them about a set of creatures, his peers, and me.

Ninth graders are inclined to revisit experiences because of their place in the identity development process (Kalakoski & Nurmi, 1998). Students in the ninth grade are positioned to relive and retell aspects of their past experiences because they have been in school for some time and they are capable of explaining their thinking about these experiences because their cognitive development brings with it that ability. The story of Anthony and his bugs came from his eighth grade year, but I remembered it and asked him about it during a text negotiation session. Without much effort, Anthony produced a detailed account, which potentially would have been more difficult for a younger child. The fact that these students have been in school for so many years increases the likelihood that the stories that would be told during this inquiry would revolve around literacy because they have spent so much time in the school contexts that often demand the display of literacy skills in order to succeed in those contexts.

Once I had identified a research puzzle and determined that a narrative inquiry would allow me to answer it, I was aware that I needed to invite participants who would be able to live comfortably alongside one another and me in inquiry. If there were figurative bugs, I had to be able to see what an act like rescuing them might potentially reveal about identity development processes, especially in terms of literacy. Bateson (2004) referred to these bugs as zigzags, saying, “there is great temptation to edit out the discontinuities, to reshape our histories so they

look more coherent than they are ... “ (p. 73). When researchers make commitments to narrative inquiry, they also commit to acknowledging incoherence, as in Anthony’s and my negotiation around whether he should show me something that turned out to be bugs.

Since this inquiry examines how adolescent males with positive literate identity story themselves, I knew I needed to invite participants that confidently exhibited an array of literacies. This means that the participants in the inquiry were not selected purposefully based on demographic information. They represent a range in terms of their birthdays, birth order, family characteristics and structures, neighborhoods, mobility, ethnicity, and developmental timing. Instead, the participants were selected based on their prowess in three capacities: leadership, narrative, and authenticity, which capture the embodied construct of positive literate identity.

**Assuming leadership.** The first sign of adolescent male literate identity I sought in selecting participants was a capacity for leadership. Young people without a capacity for leadership are typically not positioned to display their literacies. The students in this study have leadership responsibilities at school, some of which are official, and some of which are unofficial. Official leadership includes elected positions to represent the school and participation in official activities at the school or community where recognition can be earned. Official leadership is often intentionally sought.

Unofficial leadership, by contrast, is achieved on the way to some other goal. One type of unofficial leadership in my class occurs during discussions. Students are nominated or self-nominate to sit in the padded teacher chair that I have dubbed the “sacred chair,” where they discourse, ask questions of the other members of the class, and call on others to participate. While this is happening, I sit in a student desk. When I want to speak, I have to raise my hand and be called on. Alvermann (1987) suggested that students would have more effective



discussions if they were able to participate without the teacher's interruptions. The participants in this inquiry played major roles in the class, both as leaders of discussion as well as participants when either their peers or I are leading the discussion before they were invited to participate in this inquiry.

Finally, I acknowledge leadership in my class in those students who provide the group cue as defined by Doyle and Sanford (1985). Students who provided group cues voluntarily express the will of the class in terms of negotiating assignments with the teacher, expressing preferences in curriculum, and dictating the pacing and timing of instruction. Each of these participants provided group cues.

**Purveying narrative.** The students in this inquiry were all students who told stories just to me or in a small group before, during, or after class. Conducting a narrative inquiry with students who were incapable or unconfident in their storytelling abilities would be difficult. Some students in my classes can narrate in front of the class, but cannot to me in a more one-on-one setting, and others would rather tell a story to just me rather than share it with the class. All of the participants in this inquiry are adept at telling stories to a variety of audiences as well as in one-on-one situations with peers or adults.

**Displaying authenticity.** When the boys agreed to join this inquiry, they had to agree to let me capture their participation in class at a higher level than I normally do in the course of my teaching. While this capturing was not public, it was still a circumstance that they could have been self-conscious about. Each of the participants had demonstrated that he was comfortable having attention focused onto him, even though some have personalities that are more reserved in general. Authenticity, therefore, is not about receiving attention as much as it is about being able to function comfortably while receiving attention. Capacities for authenticity were

determined by success in the other two capacities as well as participation in activities where attention would be brought to them, such as the school choir (four of five were members) and performance teams both athletic and academic. Informally, authenticity is revealed when students act like Anthony when he rescued the bugs. Unlike what many students would have done, Anthony interfered, rather than allow the bugs to be destroyed. In a similar manner, Brandon engaged in authenticity when he engaged his peers in the geography game discussed in chapter one.

### **Stretching Between Physical Settings and Narrative Spaces**

While it is traditional to offer detailed descriptions of communities and school demographics in educational studies, I have opted not to include them in this study. Sharing information of this nature is often helpful for contextualizing large-scale studies, but for only five participants, a set of statistical data does not reveal enough about them, their families, or the context of their learning experiences to be meaningful. A description of our classroom, coupled with the reporting of narratives and analysis across the course of this thesis provides a thicker description of the setting for this inquiry.

**Illustrating physical setting.** The physical setting for this inquiry was my classroom. It is a 30 by 35 foot room with one window and pinkish industrial carpet on the floor and one wall. Two of the other walls are physical plant brown brick and the final wall was dry walled white after the study had been completed. The previous year, it hosted wall carpet and had a bulletin board where I displayed student work. I have six bookshelves, brimming with books in multiple genres, including graphic novels, traditional novels, and functional and informational texts. A row of desktop computers lines the newly white wall. A whiteboard spans the front wall. Two sacred chairs, which are merely high stools, sit at both the front and back of the room. My

personal space consists of a kidney table, which is consistently stacked with student work and books, and a built-in desk for my computer. Along the same wall as my desk, there are cupboards full of stamps, craft paper, hole-punches, scissors, glue, tape, fabric, sidewalk chalk, glitter, clay, mini-paper cutters, and poster board. Friends have given almost all of these supplies to me. Thirty-five student desks, however, occupy most of the space in the room. According to local fire regulations, teachers are only allowed to display on 20 percent of their wall space. My teaching certificate and college degree take up some of this percentage. The rest is used for my ever-growing collection of drawings, photographs, notes, and other mementos that were gifts from students.

**Describing narrative spaces.** This section uses an experience from a day in class to describe the narrative spaces present in this inquiry. By narrative spaces, I am referring to the assumptions governing the methodology of narrative inquiry. Holding stories in this space during analysis allows the researcher to move around in the personal, practical, and social experiences of participants, while moving forward and backward in time within the context or place in the story (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The story below also uncovers several tensions and issues involved in the unpacking of stories during a narrative inquiry, which renders the telling of this story an opportunity to explore the design of this research.

We were having a class discussion and debriefing about some activity centers that centered on the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker (2003). Brandon was leading the discussion while classmates were raising hands to both pose questions and share insight into the story. As the students completed a round of exchanges on a topic, all the students would applaud to congratulate those who had just contributed to the discussion. After one round of clapping, Anthony raised his hand. When Brandon called on him, Anthony

announced, “Someday, I am going to be able to say that I clapped for these people before they were famous.” A kind of reverence fell over the classroom for several moments.

Then, the discussion continued (Reconstructed field note, April 2009).

Using stories in research is an untidy process for many reasons, but one particular complication is the notion of ownership and the delicate tension that emerges between assembling a biography versus an autobiography. In the preceding narrative, Anthony expresses appreciation for his classmates through his assertion that they will live noteworthy lives and that he will be able to say that he was a part of it. Anthony’s relationship with his peers is relational and grounded in care. Relationships of this nature tend to be even more difficult to disentangle in terms of biography versus autobiography because caring causes people to insert themselves in the story of someone else’s life.

The work of Valdés (1998) illustrates how researchers sometimes insert themselves into the lives of their participants. She was not very far into the data collection phase of her case study of two female English learners when she developed a story that these girls’ cognitive, linguistic, and social needs were not being met and she opted to advocate for them in school. Although she felt that her actions no longer allowed her to story herself as an objective researcher, the role that she initially imagined for herself, she resolved that it was unethical not to try to advocate for those girls. Part of Young’s (2000) difficulty with her study of her own sons was that she could not bear that her sons were talking about women in what she considered inappropriate ways. The fact that she studied her own children presented problem in maintaining a narrative of objectivity.

Narrative inquirers hold no such aspirations to non-interference; they actually intend to improve the lives of those living alongside them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As a classroom

teacher, I do not subscribe to a story that I could assume an objective stance in this research with my own students even if I wanted to. My narrative of my responsibilities as an educator in public school is to create a public by increasing the life chances of my students and preparing them for meaningful participation in society (Barber, 2000). Engaging in my inquiry with students should only increase my conviction to position them to meet their goals.

Rogers and Raider-Roth's (2006) discussion of presence is also relevant in a discussion of narrative spaces. Presence is the place where biography and autobiography merge in a classroom. When teachers and students share common experiences, teacher's stories and students' stories merge. During our class discussion, Anthony stretched towards his classmates with an attitude of emptiness so that he could fully take in what they said. The result of this was a reification of his care for them. His act also reinforced the class members' preexisting care for him. In their silence, they stretched towards Anthony. This is also an example of emptiness. In the moment of silence, the students could acknowledge and return Anthony's presence with them—a presence that existed to praise their work.

The introduction to this thesis depicts the various approaches that my participants took to complete the summer assignment. These descriptions suggest that my experiences with the students represent a type of autobiography because my life as a teacher yields stories where the participants are characters. Throughout this report, the collected stories are retold with varying degrees of autobiographical voice that allow me to explain, analyze and explore how their stories and my stories of them reveal how they are positioned on the literate landscape.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the tension between biography and autobiography as “nested knowing.” In this type of knowing, a researcher's stories and the participants' stories are not just coexisting narratives; the material of which the record is

composed are in fact stories that fold into one another to form layers where biography and autobiography entwine as the roles of narrative character and actor are passed back and forth in the account (Bal, 1997).

### **Stretching into Narrative Space through Research Design**

Using Anthony's comment and the class's response as a frame, I am able to further explain the research design for this inquiry. Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray-Orr (2007) proposed a three-dimensional narrative space that they also referred to as the commonplaces for narrative, as an analytic tool for unpacking meaning in stories that form part of a narrative inquiry. A story placed in this three-dimensional space enables an inquirer to push on elements of temporality, examine the inward (personal) and the outward (social) nature of the narrative, and then allow the narrative to shift across various dimensions of time within a particular place or context. These dimensions of narrative form the basis for research design in narrative inquiry.

**Acknowledging temporality.** Anthony's experience allows for temporality because it contained references to the future, past, and present simultaneously. This was done through his assertion that in the future, he will look to the past and remember the present. Dupré (1993) argues that a "one-directional move toward the future requires a constant reinterpretation of the past" (p. 127). By locating narratives of the present in the past and then orienting them toward the future, it is possible to simultaneously examine all three bands of time.

**Moving inward and outward.** The inward and outward nature of our class experience with Anthony adds further information as to how Anthony positions himself on the landscape of our classroom. Anthony made this assertion outwardly (socially) to the whole class after the inward (personal) understanding he had about the class. He perceived that he was in a group of people who were intelligent and sophisticated, and his comment to them asserted membership in

the classroom community. The class' response of silence was simultaneously inward because they did not choose to validate Anthony vocally. At the same time, their silence, followed by a renewal of the discussion, constituted an outward acceptance of what Anthony had said. It does not matter if anyone in the class really becomes famous; the important concept is the shared belief that they could be.

**Identifying place.** The notion of place also shifts during the story about Anthony. He shared with the class his expectations for a future place where members of the class held prominence outside of school, yet his assertion of such prominence took place in school while performing a class activity. Further, my decision to use this narrative about class that day takes the story out of our classroom and into another place—academia. Thus, temporality in narrative, inward and outward qualities, and location are three dimensions that fluctuate. Narratives a researcher selects to use in a narrative inquiry, therefore, have to have the elasticity to hold together in all three dimensions during analysis.

### **Stretching Procedures for Reporting and Negotiating Text Using Narrative Language**

The procedures for reporting and negotiating data in narrative inquiries are heavily grounded in an examination of ethical relationships. This section discusses these procedures for reporting and negotiating data from a relational standpoint. A reflection from Robert will guide the discussion about participant involvement in shaping the text of this thesis.

The creature in *Frankenstein* was not made human from his pulse and waking mind. A person is made human by the qualities of nurture, rather than the mechanisms of their bodies. What made the creature a living one was his beating heart, but what made him human were his thoughts and emotions. A human becomes so by emotional and mental power (Reconstructed from a free write by Robert, September, 2008).

The procedures of narrative inquiry are intentionally dynamic so that data can be gathered and analyzed in ways that are helpful for the researchers and humane for the participants. This section provides an overview of the intentions of the procedures of narrative inquiry, as well as a description of the tools for collection and an explanation of how I used these tools to conduct my own data collection and text negotiation.

**Recognizing the intentions of the procedures.** Robert's discussion of what makes a human draws attention to the way in which participants and their stories are represented in research. *Frankenstein* (Shelley & Karbiener, 1995) is the story of a scientist who creates a being with the intention that this being will behave a certain way. When the being he creates proves to have a will of his own, the scientist rejects his creation. The story ends tragically for both parties. Participants and their stories are not figures carved out of ivory. The procedures of narrative inquiry encourage researchers to move away from manipulating data in such a way as to make a point that is not defensible. In contrast, the people, the stories, and the storying, have to achieve a type of mimesis, or representation of nature. In this case, the nature being represented is the nature of the boy telling the story. The data and the representation of them form artistic images that derive significance from truth.

**Using the language of narrative.** One set of artistic tools is the language of literary analysis. Narrative inquirers interpret data using narrative, as well as through themes and language such as narrative plot, characterization, and/or metaphor. Using this language for unpacking narratives is found in the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). They also suggest discussion-promoting language such as "conflicting story" to describe plotlines that result in negativity or mistrust in schools and "competing story" (p. 125) to describe plotlines that are still in tension, but can coexist. In the negotiation of text during a narrative inquiry, it is important to



position the narratives as competing and not conflicting when there is not agreement. In this study, there were no narratives that the participants and I were unable to negotiate.

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) language is helpful for discussing space, place, and time using the metaphor of a professional knowledge landscape that centers on school. Experiences in schools and my classroom, by extension, can be conceived as plotlines that are influenced by many factors and are related to one another in complex and shifting ways from both moral and intellectual standpoints. Plotlines emerge around significant experiences that come to define beliefs about an event or phenomena. Clandinin and Connelly originally began using these terms to counter other research language that they found disingenuous to the people they worked and researched alongside. Using the language of plotline balances the boys' stories with the professional literature about boys' literacy. This equalization potentially raises the ethical capacity of the researcher in his or her orientation to stories from both places.

Merely using the inclusive-sounding terms, however, does not guarantee an ethical orientation toward the research participants. When Bakhtin, for instance, brought notions of dialogue and the zone of maximal contact to the field of rhetoric and composition, some misapplied his terms in ways that actually rendered his work irrelevant in the field of education (Mutusov, 2007). The misuse of Bakhtin's work warns that vocabulary without ethics behind it renders the resulting research untrustworthy. Through his ruminations on *Frankenstein*, Robert reminds narrative inquirers that although the language of narrative can be used to represent events, narrative inquiry describes actual human experiences.

**Negotiating the stories.** My role as a narrative inquirer and as a teacher is to orient towards the participants' stories in ways that not only connect to relevant professional literature and add to that body of knowledge but also takes into account the thinking and emotional beings

that accepted an invitation to participate. As a matter of protocol, I shared the data with them and invited feedback from them about which stories to share (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I conducted this text negotiation informally throughout the data collection period by asking the students to clarify details from stories they had told or by asking them questions about the work they were doing in my class. These are both typical behaviors for my interaction with students in general, although I was more deliberate in asking the students participating in my study for clarification because they were part of the inquiry, and I wanted to make sure my collection of stories was as complete as possible.

I began building an archive of the boys' stories and collecting new stories after the first semester of the school year. I finished collecting stories and adding to the archive the first week of May of that academic year. The more formal text negotiation of meaning and analysis of data took place after the school year had ended because I did not want the students to be concerned that their willingness to tell or not tell stories, or the interpretation of the story, would bear on their grade. I was also wakeful to the potential that focusing heavily on the inquiry during the school year would send signals that I did or did not want to hear certain kinds of stories, like I had done with Anthony when I initially told him I would look at anything but bugs. It might also have made the other students feel excluded and unimportant. As a result, I had to be alert to all these factors so that I could accurately represent the stories of participants while attending to the learning of the students not in my study.

When summer arrived, I did the formal analysis and wrote sections from the first three chapters of this thesis so I could show the participants not only what texts I wished to use, but also how I might use them. The participants added clarifying information during these meetings and made suggestions about how to draft other parts of the manuscript because, although

research of this nature is highly contextualized with the experiences of others in the class, it was necessary to minimize the references to other students who were not in the inquiry. As I finished sections of the writing, I sent them, usually via email, to the boy or boys who were prominently featured in that particular section for their approval. When I had compiled large sections of approved drafted copy, I sent them to all the participants, again, usually via email for commentary and review. The students responded to my manuscripts at their leisure, but they had read and re-read large portions of the manuscript by the final stages of its preparation.

**Addressing participant-researcher relationships.** I asked the participants to make sure that what I was writing about them was accurate and indicate that they felt comfortable with the material, but I tried to be clear that I did not intend for them to have to read what was becoming such a long document many times. Kanno (1997) engaged in a narrative inquiry with several of her adult students around issues of re-enculturation into Japanese society after they had lived away from Japan for an extended period of time. Kanno's participants were also very thorough in assisting her to write the report of her findings. Kanno justified this by explaining that she felt it was important to consider the reasons why her participants might have consented to be studied. In her view, research participants are often hoping to find out things about themselves and so negotiating their involvement is in accordance with the nature of narrative inquiry. For my research, this meant that the participants probably were able to conjecture whom else was in the study. When I realized this, I intimated to the participants that this knowledge came with some responsibility to be respectful of other people's desires to be known or unknown as part of the study. All of the participants took this responsibility seriously from what I could discern through my interactions with them.

The parents of these participants were also present during the major data sharing exchanges. Parent participation was important because students have a sense of how they wish to be represented in the present and parents have the wisdom to assess how their children would like to be depicted in the future. The role of parents was also important because many of the most powerful stories that emerged from my work with these students centered on their families. Parents were entitled to negotiate text with their children because of their status as parents, as well as because sometimes aspects of their lives factored prominently in the stories. Parents were also important in negotiating the potentially continuing relationship between the boys and me in this study after the inquiry is over and now that they are no longer in my class. Kanno (1997) told a story of herself as a research participant where she revealed very personal aspects of herself to a researcher and then, when the research had been completed, she saw the man who interviewed her on the street and tried to talk to him. He did not recognize her. As a response to this incident, Kanno determined that she would negotiate with her participants in setting the terms of the post-inquiry relationship in case they were people who want to be remembered and even interacted with long term. My participants are young; therefore, their parents are a necessary part of these negotiations.

Kanno's (1997) discussion of the participant-researcher relationship also opened up questions about why people, in my case, young people, voluntarily participate in research. Kanno suggests that participants, especially those who are involved in substantial projects requiring extended amounts of time on their part, do so because they want to learn something about themselves. According to her, they also may be interested in the opportunity to be fascinating to another person. To Kanno's hypothesis, I would also add that young people potentially participate because they have a drive for adult status. Indeed, Jay Mechling (Tucker, 2008) noted

that traditionally, much of young people's folklore in terms of verbal lore, performances, and material culture has been future-oriented. This suggests that children naturally seek opportunities to experiment with a variety of ways of being in their upcoming adult lives. One of these opportunities to participate in adult life may be participating in long-term inquiry. Finally, there is the potential that these young people in this inquiry had relational motivations for joining, whether it is a relationship to each other, to research, or to me.

Returning to Robert's reflection about *Frankenstein* and what thoughts and emotions constitute personification, I am reminded of the remarks of Rui, one of Kanno's (1997) participants. He said that researchers have to be willing to recognize that they are not telling stories about their participants from a detached place. Indeed, as the narrative unfolds, the identity of the researcher is carved out quite deeply. In the gathering, telling, retelling, analyzing, negotiating, and finally reporting with my participants and their families, my identity as a literate individual and as a teacher emerged as well. While I opted to try to focus on the participants' stories, embedded with mine about them, I had many opportunities to relive and retell slices of my own literate narrative to both the participants and those at the university who oversaw this work. I am also wakeful to the potential that a close reading of this work could be conducted that would draw out many of the Discourses that I assert knowledge in, which may include, but not be limited to, journalism, folklore, canonized Western literature, classical philosophy, and rhetoric. A reader may also be able to gain insight into my decision-making processes, and my beliefs about myself, my students, and the subject matter of my discipline.

### **Stretching Out the Stories through Analysis**

The process of reliving and retelling assists narrative inquirers in noticing subtle shifting as well as more glaring themes. A section of text lifted from an essay that Brandon wrote will be

used to unpack the methodological practices of documenting, analyzing, and reporting the narratives that emerged during this inquiry.

Homer's *Odyssey* is presented in a non-linear pattern because all of the really good stories are told that way. You have to go back in time to see how something happened and then you have to go forward again to see the outcome. In *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Two Towers*, Aragon, Legolas, Gimly, and Gandalf's story is written. Then you have to go back in time to Frodo and Sam's tale. The overturn of Isenguard is a flashback. This is the same in the *Odyssey*. The story is told in the present and through flashback. C.S. Lewis also uses this technique in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. A story written in this way makes the ending more climactic (Reconstructed from Brandon's essay, September 2008).

Data analysis in narrative inquiry is more cyclical than linear. The process of documentation requires careful collection, in addition to a commitment to relive and retell over the course of the inquiry as well as afterward. The pieces of this section explain the movement from the initial documentation to field texts and field notes, as well as the cycles of analysis in between, from which emblematic narratives emerge.

**Documenting shifting narrative.** Brandon's statement about what makes Homer's *Odyssey* good literature also illustrates the complexity of data analysis in a narrative inquiry. Common methodological dogma in quantitative analysis courses calls for researchers to specify a hypothesis to be tested. Hypothesis testing does not work well in narrative inquiry. The purpose of the study is driven by what the researcher is exploring and finds puzzling. Propositions change as the research progresses, requiring shifts in the way the stories are examined, as well as the way that the stories are revealed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As Brandon stated, using a non-linear pattern, along with analyzing stories in terms of other stories gives them a certain excitement. An additional, yet similar, perspective comes from Bakhtin (1981), who referred to three dimensions of story as past, present, and future. When retelling a story, Bakhtin believed that the narrative enters a zone of maximal contact. In this space, the three dimensions of time merge to the point where the present reaffirms the past and predicts the future simultaneously. The zone of maximal contact allows a multiplicity of stories to come together in ways that allow for narratives to emerge that push other stories forward. The beginnings of stories also shifted towards the middle while the ends of the stories constantly moved further into the future as I continued my interactions with the boys who participated. Additionally, the capture of the narratives, along with the retelling and reporting positioned the boys to amplify their literate identity and the skills related to the display of this identity.

Besides collecting the stories, I also kept notes of my personal reactions to the narratives as I was analyzing them. In his essay, Brandon pointed out how many stories have similar patterns that makes connecting them possible. Understanding such literature requires that stories come forward to be relived and retold in order to make sense of the plot and theme as well as move the story forward. By engaging in reflection during analysis, those commonalities among the data and with the professional literature come forward into the present.

**Shifting to field texts.** As reactions to the stories were nested within the original stories, the stories begin to move from field texts to research texts. The narratives were collected through concentrating the narratives into names and keywords from events that happened or stories that were told during class. After this step, the data was expanded back into narrative through reliving because I did not have the luxury of taking detailed field notes while teaching classes. However, this reliving was made easier by the fact that all of these students were in my last two class

periods of the day. Thus, I was able to record and expand narratives in close proximity to the setting in which they were presented during the collection period. These concentrated narratives were later reconstructed with the help of the participants at the end of the data collection period. Moving from field notes to field texts also required a renegotiation of the stories in terms of the topics that provided insight into the original research questions through the lens of the three-dimensional narrative space. Therefore, not every concentrated narrative was reconstituted, and not every reconstituted narrative was reconstructed.

**Emerging as emblematic narratives.** It is common in qualitative research to engage in a process of data reduction where data are coded strictly and lumped into categories. In my inquiry, I needed to negotiate the text with the participants, which meant that a typical reductive process would not meet the ethical obligations of this methodology. Therefore, the reductive process came to more closely resemble distillation. Distillation is the process of separating the more volatile parts of a substance from those that are more fixed. Purification is the goal of distillation. If the volatile parts of a substance are the most valuable to the distiller, then they have to be captured. When the desired substance has been collected it is considered purified. This process was important because the boys' stories were not in discrete pieces, but rather they were fragments of a larger story told across our experiences together and even across their lives before we all came together. The purification part of distillation is about finding the part of the larger story that can be interpreted to illuminate the research question. It is from the process of reliving and retelling/evaluating and negotiating that the volatile emblematic narratives (Mischler, 1990) appear. Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray-Orr (2007), building on Mischler's notion of emblematic narrative, noted that stories selected for inclusion in research often emerge because they will resonate with audiences as well as with the relevant research literature. This notion of resonance



was the final aspect of selecting narratives as emblematic from those that emerged as volatile. The emblematic narratives in this study were selected not only to resonate with the professional literature and academic audiences; they were also selected for their resonance with the boys individually, collectively, and with their families.

Before distilling the data, I determined the themes through a basic reductive process of listing and grouping narratives. Then, during distillation, I placed the stories in the three-dimensional narrative space. The narratives that were placed in three-dimensional narrative space demonstrated potential volatility through their internal consistency or their external relationship to other narratives that were collected. In a secondary distillation process, the participants and I negotiated the use and final construction of these stories and considered issues of audience response and resonance in selecting the final narratives to exalt as emblematic. The stories that emerged from distillation became the emblematic narratives that were unpacked in the three-dimensional narrative space and laid alongside the professional literature and the participants' lived experiences for readers so that I could develop and communicate understandings around my research questions.

At the beginning of this section, I used a section from Brandon's reflection about *The Odyssey* that suggests good literature has an anachronistic quality to it—that is, it goes back and forth in time. A narrative inquirer must go back and forth in time and among narratives to build a worthwhile story—the essence of the three-dimensional narrative space. Implicit in this suggestion to revisit stories is the assumption when looking at a story multiple times, new learning will potentially occur. As the narratives were subjected to these research processes of capture, concentration, reconstitution, and reconstruction, emblematic narratives were distilled and a cycle of reflection occurred which developed into the following three chapters of findings.

## **Narrating the Findings of the Study**

This inquiry became an exploration of how these boys storied their literate identities. The distilled boys' stories called into question the ways in which boys' literate identity has been characterized in the professional literature. In light of this understanding, chapter four becomes the place for explaining the definition of these boys' literate identity as being and doing literacy. Since literacy can be enacted and acted upon, it starts to function much like the forms of capital that already exist in the social sciences (Bourdieu, 1986). Chapter five, therefore, follows as an assertion of five plotlines revolving around being and doing literacy as capital that is revealed in their stories.

The most significant plotline of literacy as capital I termed *distribution of literacy*. By arguing that literacy as capital can be distributed through being and doing, I also make a case that literacy is akin to what Campbell (1973) refers to as a boon—a piece of divinity, or godliness that allows the holder to become more powerful. Boons and the structures for what can be done with a boon, as well as who can be a carrier of a boon and what happens to those who carry it, is located in the mythic/archetypal literary criticism tradition. This tradition emerged in the 1950s and reached its peak in the 1970s. Mythic/archetypal criticism builds on the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung and although it is still performed, it is not currently the most popular method of criticism (Cowles & Austin, 1994). Chapter six calls on that tradition to argue that the boys' stories represent comedic hero stories described by Frye (1957). Comedic heroes successfully distribute boons, but they also integrate social orders.

The answer to the research question, how do these boys story their literate identity? is that they do so comedically as a story of social integration. However, I cannot make that argument without first highlighting the boon as it emerges in the stories and explaining that the notion of

the boon is born out of the understanding that literacy functions as capital. The discussion of capital is difficult to justify unless I first unveil these boys' stories as ones of being and doing literacy. Defining literate identity as *being and doing* literacy is how I will begin the process of unpacking, or systematically organizing and explaining, my findings.

## Chapter Four

### Reliving and Retelling Professional Literature to Define Literate Identity

The findings of this study are reported in three separate chapters. Chapter four accommodates the existing research from chapter two by reliving and retelling the several aspects of the professional literature on boys' literacy that are troubled by the boys' stories I collected. These findings that conflict with the professional literature offer a definition of literate identity as simultaneously *being and doing literacy*. The fifth chapter articulates the plotlines of *literate identity as capital* that emerged from the boys' stories. Chapter six uses the plotlines from chapter five to answer how these boys story their literate identity using a meta-narrative from literary criticism proposed by Campbell (1973) and Frye (1957).

When I initially reviewed the professional literature concerning identity and literacy I intended to use the frameworks built by Berzonsky (1989, 1997) and Gee (2001) to explore the inward and outward aspects of their stories within the three dimensional narrative space. However, as I attempted to use these analysis frameworks to uncover meaning in the boys' storying of their literate identities, I found these systems for looking at identity, which are based on essentialist and ascribed paradigms, problematic. They did not account for the ways in which the boys in this study storied their literate identity. While considering why I was experiencing difficulty using these frameworks for analysis, I discovered that the boys' stories presented an embodied definition of the literate identity for these boys. The definition that the stories presented explained why the essentialist perspective of identity based on Erikson (1956) and expanded through Berzonsky as well as the ascribed perspective of identity represented by Gee, fell short in uncovering meaning for how these boys storied themselves.

An analysis of the stories collected during this inquiry defined the literate identity of these students as a self-initiated and maintained, yet socially regulated, literate narrative of being

and doing. This definition exposes the fault lines of essentialist and ascribed paradigms as well as other perspectives that fit in to these categories. It answers Moje and Luke's (2009) call for a more complex discussion of literacy and identity together. This chapter explores the problems I encountered while trying to employ the essentialist and ascribed perspectives I had initially planned to use.

### **Defining Literate Identity for These Boys**

The following narrative about Michael can be unpacked to reveal the constraints of employing essentialist and ascribed identity categories using the frameworks of Berzonsky (1989, 1997) and Gee (2001).

Michael arrived late to class one day. When other students noticed that Michael was late, they began to lament his absence. Several students who knew Michael's whereabouts explained to his disconcerted peers that Michael was in fact at school, but that he had been rehearsing a dance number for a performance and he was helping to clean up afterward, and thus, he would be late. One student rose up among the mourners, saying that Michael's absence was welcome because he had intentionally run into several other dance partnerships during the dancing in the last period. I defended Michael, saying that action did not sound like something he would engage in. As I was finishing my sentence, Michael entered and sat down. Giving Michael the opportunity to speak in his own behalf, I explained the charges against him with an assurance that I did not believe such a thing to be true. He nodded in agreement momentarily, but then he stopped, sat up straight, and spoke to the entire class:

“Here I was dancing with my partner and just having a good time, when he [referring to another boy] came dancing in my direction and hit me. But I admit that happened after I hit him first. So, I bumped him, but I really just did not think that he would care. And seriously, when I hit that other couple, I was aiming for him, not his partner. I made sure that I did not hit her.”

Class members began nodding their heads, seeming to accept his story. I thanked Michael for the clarification and began the day’s instruction.

(From an in-class conversation, April, 2009).

As I conducted an initial analysis of the stories to answer my research question about how these boys story their literate identities, I found that my stories of their literate identity in fact could be unpacked and coded using essentialist and ascribed codes like the ones proposed by Berzonsky (1989, 1997) and Gee (2001). Like Michael’s dancing experience, my stories of the boys and the boys’ stories of themselves kept bumping into each other. Then, when I tried to explain the meaning, essentialism and ascription became tightly entangled.

Michael’s story of his agentful, mischievous, yet non-malicious dancing was more complicated than my story that Michael would not hurt anyone, even though what I said was essentially true. His version is also more complex than his peers’ assertion of flagrant misconduct, although their report of his actions was technically accurate. The boys’ stories of literate identity portray them as agents simultaneously being and doing literate narratives of their identities. Using narrow categories fails to provide a way to come to satisfactory understandings of the meaning of the stories. In order for these perspectives to work, the stories have to be simplified. In doing so, they shift from being boys’ stories to stories of boys. In the story of

Michael's dancing, there are two choices for observers: me as the researcher who bases my judgment on my perceptions of Michael, or Michael's classmates who made their judgment of him based on what they believed they had seen him do on the dance floor as well as their past history with him. When Michael tells the story, however, he asserts himself as an agent and simultaneously confirms and contradicts both my story and that of his peers.

In chapter two, I used Robert's telling of Cupid, a god, and Psyche, a mortal, and their interactions with Cupid's mother, Venus, to illustrate Robert's non-conscious knowledge of the research literature on identity development. However, I also noted that Robert had modified his telling of this story in order to make it more accessible to the class. It was actually Robert's adaptation that interfaced well with the work of Berzonsky (1989, 1997) and Gee (2001). The story he would have told if he had not been trying to tailor it, might not have worked so well. Thus, Robert's telling of Cupid and Psyche illustrates how stories about a phenomenon might correspond to existing perspectives in research reasonably well, but only because they have been summarized or altered. Cupid and Psyche are figures of folktale. Although characters in stories are often suffused with meta-commentary by tellers, they cannot be asked to tell their story, nor can they say which aspects of the larger story of their adventure together represent them as literate beings. By contrast, the boys in the stories collected during this inquiry are real. They can sanction the telling of their stories as well as participate in the interpretations of these stories. Instead of being characters in my stories about them, the boys simultaneously act and narrate their stories while I interject the relevant professional literature. Together, negotiated the narration and reporting of these stories.

## **Reinterpreting Aspects of Literacy Research Where Literate Identity is Being and Doing**

Using boys' stories of their literate identity instead of my stories of boys' literate identity re-opened several issues in the professional literature first mentioned in chapter two. The remainder of this chapter explores the stories of previous research by placing them alongside the boys' stories. One of these stories comes from Anthony, who uses an analogy about reading that describes being and doing.

Reading literature above your skill level, with support, will quickly advance your reading skills. Let me use having large muscles as an example. The more heavily you use a muscle, the larger, and faster it will grow. Skills of any kind, including reading, will follow this rate (Reconstructed from Anthony's reflection, December 2009).

Anthony's narrative asserts *being* as an aspect of literate identity as he indicates that the goal of both reading and weightlifting is a state of being strong. However, in order to acquire those skills, Anthony argues that he must be *doing* something above his skills level, or in other words, something that challenges that him. However, he also believes that people must have muscles in the first place to lift something and a person must have reading skills, or in the larger context of this study, literate identity, in order to do something to fortify what is already present. Further, the manifestation of physical strength and reading prowess is the ability to do things, which he calls skills. This section troubles the research literature on the role of context in deploying literacy since Anthony assumes that he is the primary agent of skill development.

**Troubling the role of motivation in deploying literacy.** Scholars who conduct literacy research have developed an interest in what makes students identify themselves as readers as well as what students think that identity means. Anthony's story of proficiency with anything, including literacy, requires him to try. Alvermann (2001b) wrote a position paper for the National



Reading Conference on adolescent literacy, synthesizing research stories on what it means to be a literate adolescent as well as what it means to want to read in school for young people. Her recommendations for increasing motivation included choices in reading material and assignments as well as chances to engage with a variety of texts and discuss their reading, all of which are expressions of agency. Anthony's analogy states that he is the agent that must ultimately do the work to be strong. Not only must this work be done often, according to Anthony, it must also be work that is challenging. Discussions about student agency are often a footnote or non-existent in literacy studies. When agency is mentioned, it is often narrated as resistance, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

**Troubling lifespan literacy perspectives.** Currently, the most advanced stages of lifespan literacy development (Alexander, 2001) promote contributions to Discourses, usually in areas of self-selected specialization. Another definition of literacy that is similar is Cole's statement that "Literacy is applying specific knowledge in specific contexts for specific purposes" (Hull and Schultz, 2001, p. 236). Neither Alexander nor Cole leaves space for the story that the upper echelons of literacy prowess could potentially consist of strategically engineering chances for others to appear as experts. The boys' efforts to make others look more literate are explained further in chapter six. Anthony's reflection about building muscles by using them reveals his understanding that in order to acquire a skill a person must have multiple chances. He and the other participants in this study invest energy in garnering opportunities for themselves and providing them for others.

### **Re-narrating Masculine Literate Identity Among Adolescents**

Anthony's analogy comparing weightlifting and reading illustrates *being and doing* as a literate narrative of identity, while suggesting the ways in which the students in this inquiry act

as agents to deploy these narratives. Turning now to a story from Brandon, I demonstrate how being and doing literacy troubles the research literature on masculine literate identity.

I actually did read a book about football once. My teacher sent it home with me in a little bag. I think she picked it because it was the right reading level, but I would never choose that for myself. I did read it though. (Brandon, Reconstructed field note from a text negotiation session, July 2009).

In chapter two, I discussed the lack of research in boys' literacy with participants who were capable and willing readers. In the studies that did exist, the methodology consisted of (a) identifying boys who were good readers; (b) asking them what they enjoyed reading, and (c) inquiring about why they enjoyed those topics. This section troubles the perceived shortcoming of boys' literacy in the achievement binary. It also retells the literature on boys' use of agency to exhibit resistance to opportunities to acquire additional literacy skills in school.

**Troubling the perceived shortcoming of boys in the achievement binary.** In the multi-case study Reeves (2004) conducted of adolescent resistance to reading, she interviewed 25 prospective candidates, some of whom were boys who loved reading. She storied these boys at the conclusion of her study as literary men. However, her story after her interview with these boys was that they were not really engaging with the books their teacher was assigning any more than the participants she ultimately framed in her study were. Reeves did not choose any literary men to interview further, but her concluding statements from her research suggest that all 25 males and females had stories of intense dissatisfaction with their experiences with reading, especially with English class, but they liked reading in general, including the students whose stories of resistance she provided a thicker description of.

Brandon's elaboration of the time he read the football book exemplifies a very different general feeling present among all of the boys in my study in contrast to that of Reeves'. My participants have a story of trying to read anything a teacher gives them. Although they have not enjoyed every text across their school experiences, they make space for what they have found redeeming about their school reading. These students even express willingness to confront why they do not enjoy certain texts or certain aspects of texts. Evidence of this storying was shared in chapter two where both Brandon and Michael's reflections provided insights into how these boys story their own growth as literate people.

Brandon's story, where he was assigned a football book and read it, even though it did not fall into his category of interest, exposes some of the potential problems with assigning independent reading based singularly on the story of appropriate reading level. The story of reading level says that students are tested and assigned a number or letter. When students read books that correspond to that letter or number, reading development occurs and students enjoy the books because the books are neither too easy nor too hard. For Brandon, reading a book that he did not care for did not interfere with his development as a reader, while for other students, it might have.

It is also interesting to me that Brandon was assigned a book about football that matched his reading level. According to the professional literature on boys who are good readers, his teacher was subscribing to a research-based story. Assuming that there had been a limited number of books available in the classroom library at Brandon's level and that there was more than one person who could read at the same level as Brandon, someone had to take the football book. However, I wondered, would a female student at the same reading level have been given the same book? Alternatively, was that book selected from the classroom library for Brandon

because he was at a certain reading level *and* he is a boy? Brandon does not remember every book he was ever assigned to bring home and read in elementary school, but the football book is one that he does remember. Since Brandon stories a fundamental interest in reading, he decided to comply and read the book, which only validated his teacher's story that she was engaging in best practices; according to the training she had received, she was. Brandon's story of being given a football book reveals that being and doing a literate narrative of identity is sometimes about engaging in an action that suggests you are something that you are not. In Brandon's case, the something he was not is a football fan. Brandon's accepting of the football book and not requesting a different one, also potentially enabled some other student to have a book that was better suited to them. If this is the case, then Brandon's narrative may be a story about allowing other students to have access to topics they would enjoy while he engaged with one he did not.

Such a complicated story cannot be explored with essentialism or ascription because the meaning of the story is tangled in Brandon's outward response of compliance with his inward disinterest in the book. An essentialist perspective might focus on the compliance, calling it a normative identity building behavior where he tried to please the teacher. His compliance might also be read as information-seeking behavior because he was willing to try to read the book. The diffuse avoidance style might also be argued because of Brandon's disinterest. Ascriptive models also fail because they can only give you labeling information: the teacher saw Brandon's Nature as a boy as a reason to give him that book. The Institution of school assigned him a book. He did not care to apprentice himself into the Discourse of football, and he did not have an Affinity for football, so he was not interested in the book. After all that labeling, there is nowhere to move towards understanding Brandon's agency to be and do a literate narrative.

**Troubling the narrative of boys' agency as resistance.** Reviewing the research on boys' literacy revealed a connection between boys' use of their agency in terms of their literacy and an interpretation of that agency as resistance. Hamston and Love's (2005) study of boys' resistance argued that boys' resistance to reading was a matter of appropriating identity as well as in asserting agency. Young (2000) also discussed her participants' agency in resisting the socially inclusive perspectives she was trying to practice with them. In this section, I examine a story Robert and I negotiated to continue this chapter's exploration of being, doing, and agency.

The classes read "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant today, which is a French short story about a poor woman seeking for higher society. She goes to a ball with a borrowed necklace, which she loses, and has to work 20 years to replace, only to find out the necklace was fake. After the students read the story, I wrote the names of the characters on the board, along with the name of the author and asked for volunteers to hold a type of press conference where students, acting as characters, explained their actions. Robert wanted to be the author. When the students interrogated him, he answered boldly that he had written the female character as an expression of all womankind, who are materialistic, social climbing, dishonest, and in general, not very smart. The class reacted with mixture of gasps, silences, applause, dumbfounded gazes, and total indignation. Robert was undeterred. He pressed forward; calling out the woman's every action as doe-eyed exclusively feminine silliness. The class settled down after a minute or two as most students had begun looking through the story again to confirm or refute Robert's assertions (Reconstructed from a field note of Robert's participation in class, April 2009).

Robert's actions demonstrate an interesting dynamic in the display of literate identity. The story of Robert's role-play demonstrates the presence (Rogers & Raider-Roth, 2006) that a teacher must possess in order to decide how to support student talk in class, especially about other groups of people, but it is also a story about peeling back the layers of apparent unkindness to reveal agency. In the study of her sons, Young (2000) was overwhelmed by the lack of coherence she felt between what she had been trying to teach her sons and the socially inappropriate comments they were making when she tried to have critical literacy conversations with them. Robert appeared to story the same kind of chauvinism as Young's sons when he, posing as the author, openly blasted the female character in the story we read as a class. His story of this woman's absolute irrationality and inferiority stemming from her status as a female is much like what Young describes her sons as advocating.

Young's sons' actions may be evidence they can be the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity that Young was trying to stave off. The ability of the boys to appear a certain way does not mean that their being and doing in this case was completely genuine, as when Brandon read the football book he had been assigned but was not interested in. Young's sons may have even been trying to say things that represented stories that the authors of the books they read potentially subscribed to, which is what Robert was doing. Robert was delighted with the diversity of his peers' reactions to what he was saying. The brashness with which Robert dismissed and dismantled the woman in this story expressed what he thought was the author's opinion of women and caused his peers to sharpen their own reading of the story by revisiting the text. He grounded this story about the author in the text using the woman's actions and the way that the other characters reacted to her. The facility with which the hegemonic rhetoric spilled from the mouths of Young's sons indicates a similar mastery of oppressive language, but

not necessarily an attempt to promote it. If anything, their performance, as well as Robert's, told a competing story of the social inappropriateness of such comments, even if they could be supported with examples from literary text. Robert became the person who engaged in the action of saying what some others were thinking. As other students searched through the text to support or deny Robert's interpretation, the entire class engaged in an opportunity to increase their literacy skills. Thus, in this situation, Robert was both being literate and doing literacy.

When Robert volunteered to be Guy de Maupassant and answer questions as him, he entered into what Turner (1967) called a liminal space, which is a place between two social states where an initiate completes tasks and engages in complex thinking while others participate by supporting the initiate. Robert had to engage in the task of acting like the author, which required him to think complexly about what the author may have thought. In accordance with Turners' definition of liminal space, there were also two social states. One social state was the milieu of our class. The other state was the milieu in which Maupassant wrote "The Necklace." In a liminal space it is safe to say things and do things that cannot be said outside of that space because there is an understanding by both the initiate and the supporters who are present that the liminal ritual is not reality. Any commitments made in the liminal space can be ultimately accepted, but they can also be rejected. Liminal space is a place for mediating agency since it takes place outside of reality. It is a resistance-less place. Robert's statements do not have to be a representation of his beliefs since he is working in a liminal space, but he could adopt them later if he wishes. Returning to Young's study of her sons, those boys may not have known about liminal space, specifically, but they may have thought that since they were with their mother, they were in a space where they would be safe to say and do things that would be inelegant to say and do in other more public spaces.

The goal of participating in a liminal ritual is to experiment with identities safely. After many opportunities to experiment, participants eventually embrace an identity. A final literate identity may not present itself at all during the years that students attend school. When researchers speak of practicing literate identities, they do not advocate liminal experiences as spaces to practice, but instead, they argue for authentic experiences for experimenting with literacies. Alvermann (2001a), in her recommendations on adolescent literacy, cited many studies advocating authentic opportunities to enact literacy. Reeves (2004) also argued for authenticity in reading tasks. While authentic literacy tasks are certainly important, engaging solely in authentic tasks does not give students liminal experiences where they can practice being and doing literacy. The more authentic the activity, the more committed the students must already be to their literate identity in order to determine their level of participation.

**Reliving resistance as benevolence.** Many studies with findings that story boys' unwillingness to make sense of text have participants who self-identify as readers, which is an unsurprising conclusion when boys' willingness to read books on a shelf at school is the litmus test for whether they like to read in general. Not all boys who are storied as being in trouble in terms of their reading are ones with limited opportunity to read traditional texts. Hamston and Love (2005) identified all of their participants as young men who liked to read in general. They felt justified in framing their study around resistance because the boys also said that they did not care for the reading tasks that they were asked to do in school. Smith and Wilhelm (2000) have worked with similar boys who, as it turns out, have a host of literacies that are not being utilized in school. Smith and Wilhelm as well as others who have studied boys' literacy have had to label their participants resistant, struggling, or unskilled in order to study them and then they reframe their label because they find out the boys feel silenced.



Michael has also experienced the tension in trying to be and do a literate identity in school. The way that Michael addresses this tension has caused him to be labeled resistant. In science class Michael tells a story of marginalization because he does not subscribe to the story of evolution being presented to him in school. In the state where I live, biological evolution is a mandatory part of the curricular story and the classical Darwinian perspective is the only story that has been sanctioned. Another story, however, is told in the current biological community. This story is called the Neo-Darwinian Punctuated Equilibrium perspective (Eldredge & Gould, 1972). The plot of this story posits that change in organisms is not gradual, in fact is often rapid and sudden, making it difficult to say that one organism simply becomes another over time. This story seems much closer to what Michael describes when he talks to me about his understandings of evolution. Although his teachers are required to live out one story with students, Michael's story is legitimate in the scientific community and reveals potential for a deep understanding of the discourse of scientific thought, and yet, because he does not accept the classical Darwinian perspective, he is storied as resistant.

Instead of evidence of resistance, these narratives could also be read as a lack of narrative coherence (Clandinin, et. al., 2006). In each of these instances, the boys' narrative of some aspect of their identity bumped up against the narrative of school. When this happened, the boys chose to subscribe to their own narrative, even though they knew this might cost them opportunity. The competition between the narrative of school and individual narratives of personal identity is exemplified through Michael and Alan's failure to complete the summer assignment in a timely manner. The actions of both of these boys represent recognition of the expectations of school. They both believed it was important to do the summer assignment, but an inability to incorporate them due to their full schedules. Both determined that they would distribute their time in other

activities like Scouting for Michael, and socializing through projects for Alan. Both of these students had invested their identity in other projects, making my assignment less relevant.

Therefore, both solicited forbearance in completing the assignment.

Re-storying the situation reveals that both of the things these boys chose to do affected other people in more significant ways. By not attending the summer reading assignment, they made decisions that led to participation in the larger community of their neighborhoods and the school at the temporary expense of the community of our class. Michael used the summer to be in a dramatic play and work with young people in the scouting program. Both of these activities expanded and interacted with the literacies of others. Likewise, Alan used his summer to offer opportunities to others for building and strengthening their own literacy skills by allowing friends and neighbors to participate in filmmaking with him. The stories of these activities also demonstrate that neither these students' literacy skills, nor their priorities dwell exclusively with in-school literacies.

A simplistic view of Michael and Alan's resistance to the summer assignment can be told using Robert's retelling of Cupid and Psyche. When I was asked to be the honors teacher and issue the summer assignment, I was asked to be Venus, the authority figure who had the power to monitor the activities of others and support either essentialist or ascribed perspectives of looking at my incoming students. Part of my responsibilities as Venus was to separate some of the students, which included Alan and Michael, from Psyche over the summer. Psyche, in this reopened narrative, represents who the boys would rather be and the kinds of activities they would rather do as literate beings outside of school since, in the story, Psyche is a mortal and therefore is not bound to the gods' rules of being and doing. While I tried to draw these boys away from their preferred tasks with tasks of my own, the boys pursued Psyche instead. When

that happened, just as Venus, my options were limited. I could ascribe them identities as non-honors students, lamenting the fact that they had not developed the essential commitment to honors. There is also the possibility that later I would be forced to exalt Psyche. None of these options are very enticing. Even in this telling, the story of Cupid and Psyche, which represents essentialist and ascribed perspectives does not tell the whole story because Robert and Brandon completed the summer assignment without difficulty despite their own busy schedules, and Anthony joined the class late, completing his assignment soon after enrolling.

When resistance is a plotline for judging these boys' actions, I, as their teacher, am immediately implicated in their resistance, and the story quickly breaks down in interpretation as the narrative moves out of the zone of maximal contact (Bahktin, 1981) and into rigidity. When agency is the plotline, the boys and I can all be storied as considering options and making decisions that make sense to us and that consider our lived experiences. I can justify exalting the boys' proclivities for certain literacies that did not directly embrace their specific summer reading assignment since they use these literacies in school to benefit others and they can be justified in allocating their time in the manner in which they chose. Likewise, it did not make sense to me to silence Robert's assertions about the troubled nature of the female character in Maupassant's story, "The Necklace." Robert's diatribe caused the class to reopen their narrative about how to talk about groups of people, as well as how to engage in sustained comprehension of difficult texts since the students had to return to the story to confirm or deny Robert's assertions.

The boys' stories revealed aspects of their agency, which they used to engage in both being and doing a literate narrative of identity. Instances when their actions could be interpreted as resistant reveal they are deploying literacy when literate identity is framed as being and doing.

Rosenblatt (1982) articulated a bifurcated model for determining reading purposes. One purpose is efferent, or information-based. The other is aesthetic, which is based in pleasure and artistry. In these boys' stories, being and doing is a type of performance. It is not an efferent performance based in information delivery, which is the type of performance typically assessed in school settings. It is an aesthetic performance where they can show who they are and what they can do. The next chapter of this thesis uses the stories to identify the plotlines that the boys employ for being and doing literacy in ways that allow them to build and maintain a narrative of literate identity through performance. Preparation for this performance requires these boys to pull from plotlines featuring rich stores of capital.

## Chapter Five

### Commanding the Spoils of Literacy

This chapter is the second of three articulating my findings based on the stories I collected in response to my research question, “How do these boys with positive literate identity story themselves?” The previous chapter contained a discussion of what their stories suggested about defining literate identity for these boys. The boys’ stories of their literate identity evaded either essentialist or ascriptive narrative interpretations because their stories are ones of being and doing a literate identity, which do not easily map on to existing categories. By accepting the boys’ narrative as agentful being and doing, I was also able to uncover a set of plotlines that explain how being and doing work together to produce powerful literate identity narratives.

This chapter proposes a set of plotlines grounded in the boys’ stories that describe how the capital of literate identity helps these boys do the work that allows them to be known as and to behave as literate. Unlike the previous chapter, this chapter is not about defining the literate identity of these boys. Instead, it is about making visible the plotlines through which they story their literate identities in my classroom. In chapter four, Anthony proposed that challenging existing muscles enlarges what is already there. The extant muscles of literate identity for these boys can be described as various forms of capital. These plotlines for being and doing a narrative of literate identity are recognition of literate capital as such, solicitation of desired literate capital, collecting the pieces of literate capital together, integrating the pieces of literate capital to produce new capital, and distributing that literate capital to others. The first section of this chapter overviews various forms of metaphorical capital previously documented in the social sciences. The boys’ distilled narratives showcase the ways in which the participants manage their literate identity capital.

## Forms of Capital

Bourdieu (1986) was among the first to identify and explain the various forms of capital that exists in a society. He defines capital as “assets that are available for use in the production of further assets” (p. 241). The following explanation of capital provides background for making connections between Bourdieu’s forms of capital and the plotlines the boys in this study employ for displaying literate identity.

Bourdieu identifies three forms of capital: economic capital, or that which directly converts to money; social capital, a network of relationships with people that can potentially be mobilized for social advancement; and cultural capital, or forms of knowledge that will give an individual higher status in society. Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu (1986) subdivides into three types. The first type is embodied capital, which is the inherited, automatic, or non-conscious knowledge that a person has to meet their needs (Stern, 2004). This type of capital becomes part of a person’s character and way of thinking. The second type of is objectified cultural capital. People with objectified cultural capital own prestigious things. Other people recognize what they have as being valuable when objectified cultural capital is present. The final type is institutionalized cultural capital, where others recognize academic credentials or qualifications as being important.

In addition to Bourdieu’s (1986) work on economic, social, and cultural capital, Holmstrom, Karp, and Gray (2002) suggested that students in transition from secondary school settings to university settings would be more successful if they had stores of identity capital. The concept of identity capital initially comes from Côte (1996) who describes this type of capital as what individuals are willing to invest in who they are in terms of “ego strength, self efficacy, cognitive flexibility, self-monitoring, exploration of commitments and moral reasoning” (p. 425).

Since all of the students in this study are preparing for the transition into increasingly more adult roles, the concept of identity capital is worth considering in their narratives as well.

### **Revealing the Plotlines for Making Literate Identity Capital Visible**

The narratives suggest several of the plotlines for acquiring literate identity capital—an amalgamation of identity assets grounded in literacy skills that can be used to produce more assets of literate identity. Although each of the following stories is about only one boy, the stories have been selected as emblematic (Mischler, 1990) because all of the boys exhibit characteristics embodied in these narratives. In fact, after reading all of the stories that showcase all of the plotlines, it is possible to see all of the plotlines in all of the stories.

Based on my analysis of the boys' stories, I propose that the plotlines for changing literacy into literate identity capital are recognition, solicitation, collection, integration, and distribution. In economic terms, recognizing a good or a product as valuable is important for making strategic decisions about which goods to keep and which to eliminate. As in an economic market where only certain items are recognized as currency, not every form of literacy can be exchanged as currency in multiple contexts. The boys in this study were usually able to determine which literacy could be used as currency in which context.

In a market, when people desire goods that they do not have, they have to ask for, or solicit them. Building a literate identity is also an active process of asking. Often when students desire specific skills, they have to ask questions or for assistance in acquiring the skills.

Embedded in the concept of solicitation is exchange.

In a market, it is important to collect and organize goods in order to use them properly. My participants' stories reveal that they have engaged in such an inventory of their skills. Evidence of this literate identity inventory is the fact that they can discuss their skills at length, a

circumstance that contrasts with Alvermann's (2001a) students who do not realize the full measure of their literate repertoires.

Much like the process of organizing tangible capital, organizing literacy as capital allows individual literacies to be seen in relation to one another and integrated into one location for convenience of use. The integration process for literacy as capital results in a mix of in-school and out-of-school literacy, as Hull and Schultz (2001) discuss.

Finally, in a market, capital is ultimately distributed. Some of this distributed capital is in its final form. Other distributed goods are processed into other products. As literacies are processed and distributed as literate identity, other forms of capital are produced, including social, cultural, and more literate identity capital. The boys' stories suggest that they expend considerable amounts of energy of literacy as capital.

Although I have used a market economy analogy to preface the plotlines of being and doing a literate identity narrative, there are some noteworthy differences. The first difference is that in market economy the end goal is nearly always economic capital. In the boys' use of forms of capital, the end goal is a more cohesive narrative of their literate identity, i.e., more being and doing. Preserving and enlarging the being and doing of their literacy allows these boys to engage in a distributive action that actually helps them gain greater access to literate identity, instead of spending it, resulting in a loss, which could occur in a real world market. In other words, by spending their literate identity capital, they end up with more.

In order to illustrate how the boys' story function as stories of literate identity capital, I selected narratives with food as a motif. I chose to present the results of my analysis using narratives centering on food because doing so makes the forms of capital that inform the concept of literate identity highly visible. Food is a tangible good and experiences with food are highly



analogous to other processes in the classroom for maintaining and displaying literate identity capital. Barthes (2007), Levi-Strauss (2007), de Certeau and Giard (2007) as well as others support the interpretation of food as a text as well as the meaning-making processes that can occur by interpreting food exchanges among characters in narratives. Barthes asserted that food is a device used to declare aspects of cultural identity. Levi-Strauss articulated the more specific linguistically based semiotic processes for using food as text for sending other types of messages. de Certeau and Giard discuss the dual nature of an identity as both being a cook and doing cooking. In this inquiry, the stories of food function as a sign that signifies various forms of literate identity capital that these boys possess that make it possible to be literate and do literacy.

Exchanging food from the standpoint of literary theory often results in metaphorical community building between people in a story, which some have termed a type of communion or ritual (Foster, 2003). In the boys' narratives, the food sharing that takes place is emblematic not only because of the substance of the actual narratives but also because food is the topic. These stories may indeed reveal bonds among characters, but they also bond elements of plotlines of literate identity as capital into a coherent whole.

**Recognizing.** It is difficult for people to make any use of capital unless they can identify it. The participants in this study recognize the literate identity capital that they already have access to. They can also recognize the literate identity capital that they do not command, but wish to. Brandon's story about Black Forest cake is an example of the plotline of recognition as it relates to the development of literate identity capital.

Every year we go to the ethnic fair in Salt Lake because my dad is Swiss and run a booth. We had a very popular booth this year because we had deserts, one of which was Black

Forest chocolate cake. That is why I knew what that was when you had it (Reconstructed field note from a story told in class by Brandon, April 2009).

Brandon related the story detailed above during the spring. The previous fall, I had brought a piece of Black Forest chocolate cake for lunch that I did not care to eat, so I brought it to class thinking that someone would ask for it. Alas, the cake sat on the table in the back of the room for two class periods, and did not spark the interest of a single passerby. Brandon was the first person to mention it. When he admired the cake and recited the exact name of the dessert, I knew it should be his, so I told him to take it. Brandon offered several expressions of appreciation before heading out the door to his next class. After school, I was walking to the main office when I saw Brandon leaving school for the day. I asked if he liked the cake. Looking slightly forlorn, Brandon explained that when he had entered his next class with the tasty confection, everyone wanted a piece, and so he had given it, in smaller pieces, away in its entirety. Brandon was not troubled because he did not get cake. He was worried about what I would say when he revealed that he had given away something I had given to him. I was not upset that he had given it away, but I was troubled by the fact that Brandon had not been able to have any of the cake, so I went and got another piece, and took it to his house.

When Brandon told me the story of his family and their chocolate cake at the booth and I felt rather ridiculous for having gone to such lengths to give him something he already had access to. I had similar experiences with Brandon in class. In trying to purvey literacy to him, I sometimes found that he already possessed the skills I was trying to teach him. Another thing that usually happened with Brandon is also represented in the story of the chocolate cake. Sometimes I place what I think is the treat of literacy strategically in my classroom, waiting for someone to take it up, but when I am in possession of it, no one is interested in it. When Brandon

holds it, however, it is highly fascinating to all. When we were reading Bram Stoker's (2003) *Dracula*, for instance, I had trouble engaging the students in a conversation about why vampirism potentially should not be so alluring, despite the recent popularity of several vampire books in the young adult fiction market. When Brandon raised his hand and related one potential source of the vampire legend, the class immediately subscribed to the idea that vampirism could be a problematic literary obsession. Like the chocolate cake, the information that Brandon shared with the class was actually information that had grown out of an earlier conversation we had. When Brandon shared the information, he even said that I had. The cake, however, as well as the insight about vampirism was much sweeter coming from him.

There are several forms of capital at work in this story. The first is objectified cultural capital. The cake is a tangible thing that Brandon recognized as valuable and so did others, which is why they all wanted a share. Another form of capital evident is identity capital. Black Forest chocolate cake is an emblem of Brandon's heritage. He was able to recognize the cake as valuable because he had previous experience with it. Brandon's ability to recognize the chocolate cake's value is tied to his past experiences, particularly his family's Swiss heritage. Brandon recognizes literacy as capital in school and is able to take it up, because he is already in possession of, or has experience with it. When students recognize capital that they do not already possess at all, or in insufficient quantities, then they have to ask.

**Soliciting.** Those seeking other forms of capital, especially social capital in the form of relationships or cultural capital in the form of procedures for functioning in the community often must ask questions where they draw on the resources of other people. The students in this study actively request literate identity capital in addition to what they already possess or they ask how

to maximize their capital. Anthony's story about pie is an example of the plotline of solicitation as it relates to the development of literate identity capital.

The building representative for the teachers' association was handing out pies today to members of the teacher's association. Anthony saw these pies and asked if he could buy one. I wanted to give him one, but I could not because they were not my pies. I went to the building representative later and asked if there were any extras that I could buy for Anthony. He explained that he did not really care for pie and he gave me his. I took the pie to Anthony's house where he shared it with members of his family (Reconstructed field note, November 2008).

In the metaphor of literacy as a good, specifically food, Anthony's story illustrates how the boys in this study not only recognize literacy as goods, but they are working to actively solicit them. The forms of capital are also at work in this story because it involves a tangible item, in this case, a pie, that Anthony wants. He used social capital with me to try to offer economic capital for it. Refusing the economic capital, but embracing the strategy of exchange, I offered to buy the pie. The building representative did not recognize the pie as valuable for anything other than eating, and so he gave it to me for nothing.

Anthony often solicited my opinion about what he should read. Since I had been present to the types of books he typically selected on his own, I was very confident in suggesting *The Door Within* trilogy by Wayne Thomas Batson (2007). Anthony enjoyed the first of this series and asked me for the rest, which I had been planning to acquire, but had not yet. When I was able to obtain them, I brought them to Anthony. After he read them, he recommended them to another teacher. This other teacher loved the books as well. Anthony was very proud to tell me that his other teacher considers these books to be among his very favorite of all time. The transfer and

exchange of these books is built upon Anthony's willingness to solicit the literacy capital necessary to meet his needs. Solicitation was also present when Anthony requested to come into the honor's class. Anthony exhibited large amounts of literate identity capital in the way in which he approached me about registering as well as the way in which he handled the workload of the class afterward in order to move forward with the class during the year. Once students recognize and solicit the boons of literacy, they are positioned to collect and organize them.

**Collecting.** An essential activity for managing one's economic capital is keeping an inventory. A person must inventory their literate identity capital as well in order to use it wisely. Robert's won ton story is an example of the plotline of collection as it relates to the development of literate identity capital.

Here Mrs. Rice. Want a won ton? They are cold. I am sorry. I was supposed to bring a healthy snack for health class. They are baked and have creamed cheese. That is healthy, right? (Reconstructed from a conversation with Robert, March 2009).

Robert offered me the won tons before the class period had officially started. In a later conversation, he revealed that he had them left over from his health class and he intended that I should have them. However, when the rest of the students entered the room and saw Robert with the food, they became interested in it, the same way Brandon's classmates had been interested in the chocolate cake earlier in the year. They began asking for won tons, which Robert shared. Meanwhile, other students walked out of the class, and then reentered with their leftover food from health too. One student ran out in the hall shouting, "Don't put that stuff in your locker; bring it in here." By the time the class began, several types of food had been collected in the classroom and everyone was eating. Robert's won tons served as the catalyst for combining the resources of the class.

During the year, Robert collected and combined the literacies of the class through his willingness to lead discussions and tell stories. Whenever other people were at the front of the room leading discussions and they had trouble moving the dialogue forward, they looked to him for help, and he would offer a comment that would move the discussion forward or ask a question that changed its direction so that more people could participate. Sometimes, he intentionally said things that he hoped his classmates would react to in a variety of ways, thus igniting or re-igniting the issue at hand, as in the story of Robert's characterization of the female character from "The Necklace." Robert is also a frequent character in other students' writing. Sometimes he is fictionalized, and other times, he is an actor in their reflections about course assignments. Potentially, he functions as a character because his classmates consider him an important friend. They think they know him because he talks in class and because his talk enriches their classroom experience. Robert's presence as an actor in others' expository reflections functions as evidence that Robert's participation is vital to the literacy experiences of others. Robert collects his literate identity, which allows him to expand it.

Another interesting example of collection that relates directly to literacy is that Robert writes poetry, but unlike most boys who identify the poetry they write as song lyrics, Robert calls it poetry. According to Plato (2005) poetry is Divine Madness, or strange behavior brought about by the gods. In his work *Phaedrus*, Plato asserts that madness, rather than being negative, is actually a gift. The madness of poetry is the way that the gods give their best gifts to mortals. Since there is a cultural mysticism around poetry and poetics, my students tend to express to me that poetry is either really personal or totally out of their reach as writers. Robert could have said that the verse texts he wrote were song lyrics because he actually plays in a band and composes music as a function of his participation, but he did not. When Robert offhandedly mentioned to

the class that he worked on a poem over the weekend, the other students began bringing poems as reading material as well as writing poetry as an assignment choice in class. They also started bringing their poems to Robert and asking his advice. The tension for other students in deciding whether to collect and share the fruits of their Divine Madness was resolved when Robert shared his. When students have collected their literacies, they can start to integrate them.

**Integrating.** Making wise use of economic resources often requires dividing and recombining them in various ways in order to gain a more accurate picture of what resources are available. Social capital is also most powerful when social resources such as friends and acquaintances are brought together and introduced. However, some social resources are better left separate because friends in disparate parts of the community will have different types and levels of knowledge (Putnam, 2001). This diversity is optimal for maximizing personal opportunity because it gives a person access to multiple sources of information for solving problems. The boys in this study can transport and transform their literate identity capital to gain greater access to more information. Michael's cookie story is an example of the plotline of integration as it relates to the development of literate identity capital.

For mock trial practice after school I gave the students cookies I had bought at the store.

The team members liked to have a snack while planning their case. Michael had to leave early to get to work. He asked if he might have another cookie before leaving. I gave him three (Reconstructed field note, February 2009).

In their reflections, both Brandon and Michael iterated their ability to bring literacy from one area and integrate it into another. Brandon mentioned that quality as one of his strengths and Michael elaborated on how he did this when he described how he brought his affinity for debate into other contexts. In the narrative above, Michael solicits more cookies than the other students

received, but he also expects that he is going to do more work, and that some of that work is going to take place outside of the classroom in order to bring a richness of experience back into it. Michael's literate identity capital is highly integrated across multiple contexts, which advantages him because he is able to then garner more opportunities to present as a literate being.

Michael also used his affinity for debate when he, together with Anthony, led a debate in both of my honors classes about the censorship of Shakespeare. During this debate, Michael, serving as the chair, taught all of the students some basic rules of parliamentary procedure and then enforced the rules through the course of the debate as per the responsibilities of the chair. Anthony kept track of the placards, maintained the speakers' list, and tabulated the voting on the resolutions. Michael and Anthony learned this skill as part of their participation in the Model United Nations team at the junior high. They both integrated their affinity for debate into class.

Both of these boys also have plans to study the social sciences and perhaps enter policy or politics as a career. Michael, in particular, has a literacy steeped in looking at social systems, identifying inconsistencies, inefficiencies, even hypocrisies, and then planning ways to extinguish them. Michael has a job after school. He talks about his job a great deal, and has come up with a number of ways to improve working conditions, as well as productivity. It is very likely that Michael will be able to turn this literacy of policy into all four forms of capital: economic, social, cultural, and identity. Indeed, he is well on his way after an experience last year where he convinced his teacher from another class to excuse him from a unit of study he believed he had already mastered so that he could build curriculum for her. It was not that the topic of this curriculum was more compelling, but the chance to affect the way other people received instruction was. During this experience, Michael had to engage with more texts and



texts types than the other students did so that he could decide what would be presented. In effect, he integrated the ingredients from a variety of sources into a cookie for rest of the class.

Michael credits his brother with demonstrating how to use socialization to acquire literacy and then turn around and improve others' lives. Both of these boys serve as leaders in Scouting where they have been in charge of younger boys. Michael indicated that he integrates his narrative of what should happen in school when he approaches these campers. He believes that he can walk into a supervision situation and think either the boys are immature and untalented, or that they are bright and capable. Michael added that whatever he thinks he is going to get, he does. He wants people to think well of him, so he has also integrated that idea into his dealings with the younger scouts. Michael's approach to young Scouts shares a plotline with the work of Bullough and his colleagues (2002) in their perspective on teaching as prophesy. These authors believe that teachers have access to ways of seeing students in powerful ways, but only if they embrace a narrative of themselves as people who are entitled to look. Michael thinks he can combine his literacy skills in ways that will produce something valuable, and so he fulfills his own prophesy. Literacy acquisition is optimized when students are the agents who pull multiple literacies together. When students are able to integrate their literacies successfully, they begin to make products they are proud of and want to share. In fact, these boys with highly developed literate identities dispense their literacies in powerful ways.

**Distributing.** Although the students in this study engage in highly sophisticated practices for managing their literate identity capital, they are not capitalists whose primary goal is often building personal wealth. Instead, these participants distribute their capital to others at no cost to them. They are able to recoup what should be a loss of literate identity capital by building social and cultural capital that they combine with other literacies and restructure the resulting product

into new literate identity capital. Alan's candy story is an example of the plotline of distribution as it relates to the development of literate identity capital.

The students presented their projects today. Robert and his group planned and executed a game show. Alan volunteered to be the contestant. His task in the competition was to eat a lot of candy. Alan was glad to do this because he loves candy. He ate and ate and ate until I thought he would get sick. When he won and the prize was candy, he gave away the trophy candy to others in the class (Reconstructed field note, February 2009).

All of my research participants exhibited distributive behaviors with food that were analogous to the ways in which they enacted a literate identity narrative of being and doing: Brandon with the cake to his peers, Anthony with the pie to his family, Robert with the won tons, and Michael with the cookies. Alan's distributions are noteworthy because Alan targets people to distribute to and sometimes these people are his friends, but often they are not. Alan will participate in literate activities because he finds them intrinsically interesting, not because he wants a prize. In Alan's story of the game show candy, he admitted that while he liked sweets, he became so enthralled in the task that he lost track of how much he had earned. When he saw his pile of treats, it did not make sense to him to keep it all and so he began to disperse it to other class members. He could have gathered it up and taken it home, or only given it to close friends after school. Instead, Alan offered his earned confections to everyone. To him, the spoils and the tasks required to earn them are not substantially different. Accomplishing the task often becomes the prize, and so he gives away what others might label a prize.

Alan also enacted this distribution in the way in which he completed the summer assignment for entering the honors class. Another student was unable to do his presentation that was part of the assignment. This student brought the problem up in front of the entire class and

asked me what he should do. Alan raised his hand and explained that he was finishing up his film based on *Master Man* (Shepard & Wiseniewski, 2000) for his summer assignment. He had an extra part and offered it to the other boy. The part in the film was the part of the real Master Man, which consisted of walking on camera at the end of the film and declaring superiority to all other men. The filming took place and Alan brought his film in and showed the other honors students. The students spent time watching the film delighting in the cinematic triumph, but they were especially thrilled with this other student's performance as the Master Man. Many members of the class made special efforts to congratulate him and several started addressing him as Master Man. Remembering the previous conversation I had with Alan and which I discussed in chapter two of this thesis, I had a suspicion about how the filming should have gone and Alan confirmed it for me. Alan had saved the part of the Master Man for himself, but when he found out this other student was missing his presentation, Alan distributed the part of the Master Man—and the opportunity to be and do literate identity in a highly public way—instead.

Putnam (2001) talks of two types of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital is built through associating with people with whom a person has something in common with. Bridging social capital is built by reaching out to people with whom one has little in common. Alan's story is about bridging social capital. Kohlberg (1981) built a theory of moral development around a tight definition of rational behavior. In the early stages of moral development, according to Kohlberg, a person makes decisions about which actions to perform based on avoiding punishments and earning rewards. In later stages, they make moral choices based on rational conclusions about what is just. Alan would not score very high on Kohlberg's moral development scale. His actions are irrational. If justice had been served, Alan would have been recognized as the Master Man because it was his literacy assets that did the work to create

the film. As an alternative to Kohlberg, Gilligan and her colleagues (1990) proposed that sometimes individuals make decisions based on an ethic of care, a term that comes from the work of Noddings (2005). Using Gilligan's theory of moral development, Alan giving away his prizes of literacy because of a love of the task and concern for others becomes more rational. Seemingly irrational behavior that is unjust because of its complicated generosity is a motivating and overarching plotline for the distribution of literacy and exhibiting literate identity. All of these plotlines of literate identity capital (recognition, solicitation, collection, integration, distribution) rest on a foundation of care and not justice.

### **Amalgamating the Plotlines of Literate Identity as Capital**

The final narrative of this chapter was co-constructed by Robert and Alan at the beginning of class one day in the spring. This story embodies all of the plotlines that the boys employ to be and do a narrative of literate identity. Alan, who has a reputation for making sound effects while telling stories and while doing his schoolwork, walked into class just as the bell rang. He was making whistle-like noises.

Alan (*walking into class*): Does anyone know how to make the sound of a train whistle? I know that is a random thing, but I have always wanted to know; it is really bugging me.

Robert (*from his seat at the back of the room*): I bet my dad would know. He has a collection of trains in a special room. He used to work with trains. He knows everything about trains.

Alan (*now seated on the opposite side of the room, facing Robert*): Really? That sounds cool.

Mrs. Rice: A train sanctum; that sounds amazing.

Robert: Yeah. No one can go in there. Like, I have been in there once.

Alan: Huh.

*Pause*

Alan: Robert, I have been to your house.

Robert: No, you haven't.

Alan: Yes, I have. I went to Grand Elementary. We were a poor school and couldn't go on field trips so we walked places and one of them was your house.

Robert: No way, you haven't been to my house.

Alan: No, I have. We went to this white house and this guy showed us all of these trains in this special room. That has to be your dad.

Robert: No way, it wasn't my dad.

Alan: It has to be. He gave us soda.

Robert: Soda? That was my dad.

Alan: I know. There was this really nice man who showed us trains and gave us soda. And it was your dad.

Student 1: I think I went too.

Student 2: Me too!

Student 3: I didn't go there, but I went to another place where a woman showed us dolls.

Student 4: We did not go to people's houses on field trips, but we went to Reams.

Chorus of students: Field trips are so fun!

Student 5: Yeah. And talking about them, its like we're all connected.

*Pause*

Alan: Robert?

Robert: Yeah?

Alan: You know what I think is funny? You said that you have been in the train sanctum like once. Well that is how many times I have been in there and you are his son.

Robert: Yeah, that is funny. I know I can go in whenever I want, but it is a sanctum.

Alan: True.

(Reconstructed field note, May 2009).

**Recognizing.** Both students enacted a plotline of recognition, when they identified elements from the story that were valuable and then sought to explore these elements. Alan remembered that he had known a kind man who had shown his class interesting things and given them not food, like earlier stories in this chapter, but drink. Alan intimates that the nice man with the trains has to be Robert's father because Robert is Robert. He realizes that Robert was exactly the kind of person who would have a father like that. Robert had to reconstitute the details of Alan's account and then cohere them into a scenario that made it plausible that his father who loves trains and Alan's guy with the trains to be the same person. In so doing, Robert had to realize that his father was indeed a person who would show children his trains. Robert experienced tension because he has a narrative of his father as a private person and access to the train collection is privileged. Could his dad have really shown the trains like that? It was the detail of the soda that made the difference because Robert was more inclined to believe that his father would share soda than show his trains, but if he had shown children his trains, he would have given them soda. The recognition of the exclusive nature of these objects is expressed in Robert and Alan's adoption of my word "sanctum" to describe the train room.

**Soliciting.** Alan did not realize his simple question would cause Robert to re-open his narrative about his father. Alan solicited a type of literacy when he asked about how to make a

train sound. Alan's request elicited Robert's response that his father would know because his father is in a Discourse community that holds the literacy skills necessary for manipulating and imitating the sound of a train. There is also a solicitation in a lack of asking. Robert does not go into the sanctum because he knows his father sees the room and its contents as hallowed space. He feels he is honoring his father by not entering.

**Collecting.** The next plotline of displaying literate identity is collection. There are several forms of collection going on in this story. The first is a literal collection of trains because the trains exist and Robert's father gathered them over the years. In another sense, however, the collection of trains is analogous to the prize of literacy, which the boys have been collecting. The collection of trains embodies years of gathering items around a topic of interest, displaying those items under certain protocols, and then allowing others—including schoolchildren and me—to unpack and expand other forms of literacy, including the literacy of storytelling, the literacy of field trip taking, and the literacy of literate identity. In order to display a literate identity, one must enact the plotline of collecting items recognized as valuable which are solicited across time.

**Integrating.** The collecting in this story would not be as valuable, however, without the plotline of integration. The collaborative manner in which the story was told represents an integration of discourse. At first, this integration occurred between two people—Alan and Robert. Eventually, however, the entire class was positioned to participate in the narrative, either because they had also been to the sanctum, because they had been on a field trip, or because they had been to one of the places other students mentioned for some other reason. Other students were now free to integrate this experience with the trains into their larger experiences both in the school and in the community. A person's literate identity is integrated with the other layers, which Moje and Luke (2009) have referred to as "laminations." The integrative plotline in

literate identity brings forward the complexity of literacy and identity as separate concepts and as a joint effort because integration requires a builder of an identity to interweave pieces of literacy and context.

**Distributing.** Finally, Alan and Roberts' story of Robert's father's trains is distributive in a way that re-opens a plotline of literate identity and how it is displayed. Using narrative representations of identity in research usually requires that the researcher take a stance of using the narrative data collected as either a way to depict identity (i.e. stories of teachers) or as the identity itself (teachers' stories) represented by Clandinin and her colleagues (2006). The story of the trains resolves this tension. Although the trains were shown many years ago to a few people, everyone in the class now has access to the narrative about that trip. As previously stated, the trains themselves are tangible. The collection really exists. Even so, the collection is not usually visible to others, but it can be on certain occasions. The narratives about the trains, however, can be displayed for all. Anyone can know about the trains the same way that Robert talks about his poetry, but keeps most of the actual poems private. The distributive act is the story that Robert tells about his poems, but also the act that follows into the future as other people rely on his narrative about himself as a poet to be inspired to recognize, collect, or distribute their own poetry. The boy's stories in this study reveal that showing and telling, along with being and doing, are tightly interwoven in narrating literate identity.



## Chapter Six

### Appraising Literate Identity

The first chapter of findings explored the ways in which the boys' stories called into question ascribed and essentialist conceptions of identity for use in interpreting literate identity. Instead, the boys' stories suggested alternative plotlines for literate identity as being and doing. Therefore, the second chapter of findings outlined the boys' plotlines for displaying literate identity capital. The two previous chapters clarified the boys' literate identity, which allows me in this chapter to more directly explain how these boys story themselves.

Literate identity capital for these boys is composed of five plotlines: recognition, solicitation, collection, integration, and distribution. The major plotline for displaying literate identity capital, as discussed in chapter five, is distribution, since it encapsulates all of the other plotlines of literate identity capital. The plotline of distribution can be explored further using the concept of positioning. Harré and van Langenhove (1998) suggest two types of positioning. One type is self-positioning. The other is being positioned by other people. The distribution that these boys enact is a type of self-positioning. By positioning themselves in a plotline of *distribution of literacies*, the boys are able to be both characters as well as narrators as they enact the meta-narrative of being and doing a literate identity. This meta-narrative can be captured using Frye's (1957) conception of literary heroes, specifically comedic ones. This chapter explains Frye's tragic, ironic, comedic, and mythic heroes. It also justifies why a meta-narrative featuring literary heroes can be used to interpret stories of literate identity. Finally, this chapter demonstrates how the boys' stories from this inquiry are stories of comedic heroes. These boys not only are literate and do literacy, but they also distribute the boon, or gift of literacy to their communities.

In order to initiate an exploration of the boys' self-positioning in their literate narratives as comedic heroes, I will use a poem from Brandon to open up space on the literary landscape.

This space on the literary landscape outlines the ways in which characters in literature can be positioned when the plot of the story suggests distribution should occur. After exploring how characters function in literature, according to Frye (1957), I will demonstrate how the boys use a similar self-positioning in their narratives when literacy is the boon—intended for distribution.

#### The Moon, The Lake, and the Loon

Lily pads span the shore in a curtain of green,  
Accented by yellow flowers with watery sheen.

In the heart of the lake floats the black speckled loon—  
guardian and ghost beneath the silver twilight moon.

A sea of pine trees shield the outer world away  
from this inner earth unchanged day by day.

The lament of the loon pierces the heart and soul;  
capt'ring the body and mind beyond control.

Leaving haunted beauty, wishing to be back soon.  
In the land of the moon, the lake, and the loon.

(Brandon's in-class assignment, May 2009)

The poem is written in iambic pentameter with rhyming couplets. In poetry, when these two features appear together they are collectively called heroic couplets. Another interesting feature of this poem is that it actually has 11 syllables, instead of the 10 that are germane to heroic couplets. Some of the extra syllables quicken the rhythm or force the reader to focus on certain words or phrases. One such instance of this is in the first line of the second stanza where the accent stresses force the reader to emphasize the word “loon,” the subject of the poem. In line seven, Brandon's arrangement forces the reader to emphasize the word “soul.”

The Italian poet Dante, in his work *The Divine Comedy*, (Alighieri & Longfellow, 2008) also used the 11-syllable line pattern. This three-part poem chronicles Dante's journey through

the afterlife. Dante is a mortal in a place of non-mortals. He witnesses pain and feels sympathy. At the end of this long journey, he is welcomed to paradise. When the participants in this inquiry were in eighth grade, my classes read sections of *The Divine Comedy* at the request of several students who were not part of this study. This chapter stories the size of the prize of literacy and the type of literate identity that is displayed based on a person's relationship to that prize. The chapter unmask the literate identity of every individual who has a relationship to the prize of literacy with one word: Hero. The job of the hero in traditional heroic stories is to distribute boons or gifts from gods that help humankind become more powerful. Campbell (1973) proposed the idea of the boon as part of a larger complex cycle in his work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The plot that Campbell proposes a hero follows in a quest shares borders with the plotlines that were revealed in this study as the plotlines of being and doing literacy (i.e. recognition, solicitation, collection, integration, distribution). The work of Campbell and Frye (1957) around the idea of the literary hero is highly interconnected.

### **Examining Types of Heroes on the Literary Landscape**

Northrop Frye is a literary critic known for his 10-year labor in analyzing the poetry of William Blake. Most of his scholarly pursuits lasted a decade or more, resulting in dense prose describing the object of his study. The time Frye spent analyzing literature, along with the resulting texts where he explained his thinking, earned him a reputation for explaining text in ways that were as strict and coherent as the methods for using physics to explain nature (Frye, 1963). In his most famous work, Frye (1957) proposed that various types of heroes exist in literature with various powers of action in the stories about them. Frye determined that the characters in literature could be represented in four different ways: Tragic—fallen from heaven,

Ironic—dwelling in hell, Comedic—reintegrating with society, and Mythic—coming into heaven. These types of heroes are explained further in this section.

**Tragic heroes.** Tragic heroes are fallen. Although tragic heroes started their journey with advantages that should have led them to exaltation, they do not succeed in obtaining the boon that is their goal. The failure to acquire the boon results in separation from their society. The consequences of the tragic hero's fall are determined by whether they had what Frye (1957) referred to as high-mimetic or low-mimetic status. High mimetic heroes are leaders; low mimetic heroes are not. High-and low-mimetic constructs also exist among ironic and comedic heroes. High-mimetic tragic heroes often cause others to be separated from society as well because they were leaders. In fact, an entire society can fail as the result of a high-mimetic tragic hero's fall in literature. Low-mimetic tragic heroes slip into separation unnoticed. Tragic heroes hurt themselves and they hurt others by failing in their quest to retain the boon.

**Ironic heroes.** Ironic heroes end their stories in places where they cannot progress. Whether high mimetic or low, these heroes are not better than other men or their society. They typically look down on the world in a state of pity, but they are powerless to do anything about the injustice that they see. Ironic heroes are so called, because often they have partially succeeded and possess the boon, and are therefore, in a position to look down on others. While ironic heroes have the boon or boons, they cannot figure out how to use boons to improve society, or to improve their position among men. As a result, they often act as if they were less than they are (Frye, 1957). These heroes cannot fully access the boon. Sometimes, however, ironic heroes do not want to access the boon. No one benefits from the presence of an ironic hero because he mishandles the boon.

**Comedic heroes.** Comedic heroes engage in acts of reconciliation on their way to a desired destination. A comedic hero is storied as better than other men, but not necessarily his society. His heroic actions take him ultimately to a place where he can reintegrate into society and use the boon to perform some function, such as entertainment that leads to integration into a community. While the work of comedic heroes benefits others, the people benefitted are usually those who are intimately connected with him.

**Mythic heroes.** The mythic hero is storied as better than both the society that he lives in and better than other men. Mythic heroes are able to succeed and obtain the boon, despite inevitable obstacles. The difficult aspect of being a mythic hero is that the hero is also often asked to sacrifice himself for the society that he is superior to. He is able to do this because he subscribes to the story told to him from his youth that he is supposed to be the hero. A mythic hero has a strong narrative built over time about what the boon is and what he is supposed to do with it. It is the hero's ability to recognize, solicit, collect, integrate, and distribute boons that ultimately earn him respect, notoriety, and glory.

### **Identifying Heroes on the Literate Landscape**

Frye's (1957) explanation of the ways in which heroes function on a literary landscape illustrates students' relationship to the boon of literacy in general or literacies, which is being literate as well as how they engage with the boon or boons, which is doing literacy. Using literary theory to interpret human actions certainly has its limitations, but the precedent for this type of analogy has been set with the use of Bakhtin's (1981) work. Others using the work of Sigmund Freud have done the reverse. They used Freud's psychoanalytic theories about human behavior to interpret text. This practice was justified, according to Cowles and Austin (1994) because Freud used literature to explain and illustrate his ideas and because authors later wrote

texts that intentionally conformed to them. In this manner, the connection between literary theory and understanding human action has been authorized. Along with using literary theory, I employ a theory of classroom life from the work of Doyle and Sanford (1985). Combining Frye's work with Doyle and Sanford's, I will explore the literate identity as it functions in school for the boys in my study and propose a narrative of how it potentially functions for others.

**Exploring the types of heroes on the lunar landscape.** Doyle and Sanford (1985) story student experience with curriculum by referring to a classroom as a lunar landscape. Every curriculum has craters that are difficult to cross, which are analogous to concepts or tasks in a classroom. According to these researchers, when students arrive at a crater, they tend to gather around the rim and they will stay there until a teacher intervenes. What teachers typically do is fill in the sand of the crater, which dissolves the challenge of the activity. What superior teachers do instead, according to Doyle and Sanford, is design an activity that invites students to adopt a story where they can bring themselves to jump. If no one jumps far enough to eclipse the crater, the teacher pushes a student or two across the crater with a question or specially designed task that helps that one student to subscribe to the story necessary to jump. Other students will see how to get across, take up the story of the first student jumper, or of the curriculum, and then they will jump as well.

The notion of curriculum as a lunar landscape illustrates how students perform various acts of heroism on the entire landscape of literacy. It also provides a way to interpret student engagement with literacy in school as a heroic act. Whenever a student in a school interacts with a boon of literacy, that act initiates what can be interpreted as a heroic story with an accompanying literate identity. The story can be analyzed to explore the kind of literate identity

held by the student and sometimes how or whether the student distributes the boon or boons of literacy. The question then becomes, what kind of hero fills the plotline?

**Tragic heroes.** The story of a tragic hero has a plotline where the hero fails to ever cross the crater. Unlike mythic heroes that story their success, tragic heroes come into a story with sufficient literacy to succeed but instead, they succumb to a tragic flaw. They often embrace their own destruction, along with the destruction of others. It is possible to reemerge from tragedy, according to Frye (1957). However it is difficult to re-story after tragedy because in order to emerge as mythic, the hero must live in a plotline of irony and then move through a plotline of comedy, both of which will be explained later in this section. Michael acknowledged this difficulty and explained it in a class assignment where he opted to be a psychologist in a whole class dramatic presentation.

In *Frankenstein*, the monster tried to beg forgiveness, but Frankenstein rejected him. This is also why Grendel's society in *Beowulf* failed him. They did not give him a chance to redeem himself. Once he had gone down the path of tragedy, he could not come back (Reconstructed from Michael's in-class assignment, October 2008).

Michael's assertions about the creature in *Frankenstein* (Shelley & Karbinener, 2005) and Grendel in *Beowulf* (Hinds, 2007) illustrate tragic heroes. A tragic hero does not want his story told unless he has set a goal for redemption.

Using Frye's (1957) framework, coupled with Michael's insights, it is possible to see the difficulty in trying to escape the plotline of a tragic literate identity once a person has one. Incarcerated youth are perhaps the closest young people to being in tragedy, or separation from larger society. In a study by (Budweg & Schins, 1991) the authors described their attempts to engage their participants in conversations about books by reading about other people who were

unsuccessful with literacy and then became so. Eventually the researchers were able to assist the inmates in capturing their stories about their own experiences with literacy. One youth wrote a poem titled “There are no lazy children,” which was a lament about how he felt treated in school. It is through the expression of this bitterness that tragedy (separation) can move to irony (disillusionment), and later to comedy (integration).

Tragic figures also adopt stories that allow them to use their boons to separate themselves from others. There are some who use literacy to do this. In Finders’ (1997) study, she followed several girls from opposing social groups and found that some girls read books or wrote notes in class (which are acts of literacy) to separate themselves from their peers and their teachers. Another potential is that some students could use their high-mimetic leadership status to tell stories that lead others away from taking up the boons of literacy altogether.

**Ironic heroes.** When students are unable to access stories that allow them to proceed with the boons they possess, or recognize a boon as literacy but cannot capture it, they look down in irony. Another type of ironic story is that students may gather small boons of literacy, but never the largest prize that comes from distribution. The review of literature revealed that while it is generally acknowledged that students engage in the other four plotlines to present themselves as literate, distribution is absent from the discussion.

Integrating the lunar landscape analogy (Doyle & Sanford, 1985) with Frye’s (1957) work, an ironic hero may try to stop others from jumping the curricular craters, or they build a plotline wherein walking the long path around the crater instead seems easier. This walk around the crater is akin to not reading, being reluctant to read, or disrupting the curriculum that uses or develops literacy for others. Although Reeves (2004) did not select a 17-year-old boy named Andrew for more extensive study, her screening interview with him revealed that he abandoned



school reading tasks in the early part of his high school career. While moving through high school, Andrew lamented his lack of vocabulary skills that he believes he would have acquired if he had been willing to engage in the school reading tasks assigned to him. As a senior, Andrew was trying to reengage with text and re-story himself as a literate individual. Andrew's goal is noteworthy because it potentially represents a comedic turn in his self-storying. He adopted the narrative that the literate society and the opportunities for literacy present at school had something to offer him (vocabulary) and so he had opted to integrate back into that society. The contriteness with which Andrew stories his vocabulary development is potentially a way to return to the path of comedy as long as someone hears him and assists him in renarrating.

Ironic heroes often lack either an intrinsic or situational story that allows them to jump. All five students in Reeves' (2004) study of resistance to reading are potentially ironic heroes. All 25 students she interviewed to identify students for the more extensive study, except the student with a severe disability, had a story that they could read, and under the right conditions, they liked to. Many of the students Reeves interviewed also indicated that in elementary school they were avid readers, but they had crises in their personal lives that caused relocation and/or emotional distress and eventually they ceased to be interested in the literacy tasks assigned to them in school. These girls' stories from this study change from the use of reading as a method of personal improvement to one of them as victims in the hands of fate. These crises represent the kinds of trials that result in the types of stories that heroes face on their way to the ultimate boon. These trials often preclude the heroes from the opportunity to be in charge of their own story on the literate landscape.

**Comedic heroes.** When students subscribe to stories characteristic of mythic heroics, they can proceed through the process of soliciting more boons, collecting, integrating, and finally

distributing them. When students develop stories around using these boons to integrate into societies, they are comedic heroes. This ability is not tied up exclusively in reading skill. Students of all ability levels can story comedic literate identities. Comedic heroes will jump craters to attain literacy, but they do not have a well-developed story of making it to the other side. Their jumps are also heavily embedded in stories of infiltrating a sociological order; they want their efforts to help them belong to a group. Sometimes this group is an immediate group of friends in the school context. Other times, this group is the general literacy club, or people who participate in literate acts in school (Smith, 1987). Comedic heroes may also be attempting to learn the story of a specific Discourse (Gee, 2007), such as musicians, businesspeople, mathematicians, scientists, artists, or poets. During a text negotiation session, Michael was very specific about his willingness to participate in literate acts in school to help the learning in a class move forward. The following story serves as an example of the active preparation that Michael engaged in so that he could jump and support others in negotiating the crater.

I got into the habit of carrying newspapers because we had to do current events for history. I always have two or three newspapers in my binder. I read them when we have to read in school and I am without a book. There are also all sorts of articles that I can share in class (Michael, Reconstructed field note, July 2009).

Michael knows that by going and getting the newspaper and reading it, and also keeping it with him, he is positioned to participate as the occasion permits. Before the students in this inquiry arrive at the rim of a curricular crater, they are expecting to jump and to support other students in making the leap. This behavior is similar to that which Frye (1957) uses to describe comedic heroes' desire to integrate into communities. In school, the community represented is the

sociality of classroom life. Reading the newspaper in the first place evidences a desire to know about his society in a larger sense.

**Mythic heroes.** Mythic heroes have a story of making it over the crater, and they always do. Frye (1957) describes true mythic heroes as those who are more powerful than humans. On the literate landscape, these stories are about gathering some ultimate literate prize and then distributing it to others. Indeed, Frye has described the typical plot of a story with a mythic hero. This story starts out with a group of powerful immortals who feel bad for mankind as a whole, or a certain common person, so they decide to devise a way to divide their most powerful immortal so that the ordinary of their kind can have access to this power. In the myth of Cupid and Psyche that Robert told in chapter two of this thesis, Psyche becomes a goddess because the gods take pity on her and grant her access to their status. Distribution is the fundamental task of a mythic hero and the beneficiaries are always a large group of people. Along with comedic heroes, mythic heroes self-position as agentful literate beings.

### **Embracing a Heroic Destiny**

This chapter began with Brandon's poem "The Moon, the Lake, and the Loon." As an introduction to a discussion about the various types of heroes, I explained how the poem was structured in heroic couplets, much like the tales of the mythic heroes, and yet its syllabication matched Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The poem embodies the tension involved in becoming a hero with a mythic literate identity from being and doing the work of a comedic one. This tension can be seen in Brandon's stories, as well as those of the other participants in this inquiry. The content of the poem, however, also suggests another dimension to this tension. The loon out on the water is expressing grief, but the narrator of the poem sees the creature, hears the lament, and becomes enthralled. Campbell (1973) suggests that the hero on his quest often encounters helpers who

assist him intellectually and emotionally in obtaining the boon. The inevitable setbacks of Frye's (1957) heroes do not have to lead to tragedy, or separation. By allowing someone to participate in the lament—to hear the story—the hero can avoid tragedy and move toward reintegration with the group. The result of sharing a lament is Frye's method for retaining a comedic stance and moving towards a mythic one. On the literate landscape, setbacks in handling the boon of literacy do not necessarily lead to tragedy, either. In fact, the boys in my study position themselves in the stories that they tell as comedic heroes who self-position as agentful actors. Robert's story that follows is example of a potentially tragic story that became comedic.

A long time ago to me, but actually about only eight years, I wrote my very first completed story, *Superfoot*. It was nine pages long. Being your every-day seven year-old boy, the completion of a book that was over five pages long was an accomplishment beyond anything I had ever done.

Of course, as with many feelings of great accomplishment, this one did not last too long. In fact, it did not even last a day. It lasted right up until we all had to hand in our little masterpieces.

“Oh, it looks like Chance has the longest story here, everyone,” my teacher gushed.

“Thirteen full pages. You must have put a lot into this.”

That was the first thing I heard before I even turned my creation in. But surely I had the advantage right? I had total faith in Mrs. H. to see the comic genius on every page, cover to cover. I'd have to wait until the next day to hear her praise, but I could wait.

I will save you the trouble of relating the embarrassing talk I got in front of the whole class about the immaturity of this story, but I will say that I got half credit. Although I think it was unnecessary for a second grade teacher to be so critical, I was told to write

another story. Being seven years old and because my parents told me there was nothing wrong my story, I did not understand why she wanted me to write another one. I ended up writing the second installment of the *Superfoot* series. That one went over about as well as the first. (Robert, reconstructed from an in-class assignment, September 2008).

Robert's lament highlights several opportunities for him to embrace a plotline of tragedy. He thought that he had the boon of literacy in the form of the story he was so proud of. Before he turned his assignment in, it was judged, albeit indirectly, as inadequate. Instead of not turning in the assignment, which could have happened, Robert attempted a comedic turn by assuring himself that his teacher would see how glorious his writing was when she read it. Instead of integration into the society of his classroom like he planned, however, he was set apart for ridicule. At this point, Robert could have separated himself from the boon of story writing by determining to never write another story, throwing away his paper or, at the very least, abandoning his idea. Any of these acts would have represented a rejection of his self-positioning as a literate being while embracing the imposition on him of an ironic literate identity. Robert attempted another comedic turn by showing his parents. His parents hear him and told him that his story was fine, so once again Robert made a move for integration with his *Superfoot* boon by writing the second installment. That version was not any more popular than the first, but a reader can tell that Robert did not submit to being positioned as an ironic writer because his telling of the story is so clever. Throughout this story when Robert was faced with the choice between making a tragic turn towards separation, an ironic turn towards bitterness, or a comedic turn towards integrating back into the community, he elected to follow the advice of his helpers—his parents—and the result was comedy. The fact that Robert wrote this story as a teenager highlights the fact that, even after all this time, he was still lamenting. Robert never denied his

engagement in creative writing. He often revealed it casually as when he told the class he wrote a poem over the weekend. Even so, Robert did not often show others his creative writing. Robert's essay functioned as a space for him to chronicle his attempts to be comedic. Indeed, the fact that he wrote the essay about wanting to write was a comedic act.

This kind of heroic resilience also shows up in Alan's affinity for socialization.

So, we painted this guy's fence and we thought we were doing service and so we felt good, y'know. And then the guy went and sold his house (Alan, Reconstructed field note from an in-class conversation, March 2009).

Alan believes that his and his friends' effort would have had more intrinsic value if the man for whom they painted the fence were still living there, but he is not angry that the man moved. Alan's reaction illustrates the small distance between comedy and tragedy. This story could be read as a sad one in that Alan's neighbor potentially used him to improve his property under the guise of service when he may have really intended to profit from Alan's work. When Alan gave me permission to tell this story, however, he instructed me to make it clear that he thinks this story is funny since he and his friends found the move to be such unexpected thing to do. Alan thinks many things are funny. He wants other people to know about the humorous things he knows about, which is a major part of his motivation to engage in filmmaking. The filmmaking that Alan engages in is in his method of self-positioning because it captures him both being literate and doing literate activities. It also compels the other actors in his film to be and do comedic literate acts and demonstrate these acts to those who see his films. Alan's interest in this medium is grounded in documenting and demonstrating how to comically handle a boon. Alan, as well as the other participants told stories assisting others in transitioning to from irony to comedy (from exclusion to inclusion). Here is an example of Alan telling such a story about his father.

My dad works at an office building that gets a lot of weird calls. Whenever this happens, the other people in the office always give the phone to my dad. One day this guy called and said that the spirit of Elvis Pressley was in him. My dad asked the guy how he knew that. The guy said he knew Elvis was in him because he couldn't get "Ring of Fire" out of his head. My dad told the man he would be fine, because "Ring of Fire" was actually a Johnny Cash song. The man expressed a ton of relief to know this, thanked my dad, and hung up (Reconstructed from an in-class story told by Alan, April, 2009).

Alan's father has a reputation for handling calls in polite, reasonable ways that give the callers closure in a brief amount of time. He can read a caller and tell them the story that will assuage them, so his peers ask him to deploy this ability often. In this story, the way Alan's father did this was to ask a question so the man could explain his thinking. When Alan's father let the caller fulfill his lament, he was then able to help him move from the disillusionment of irony to the integration of comedy by re-storying the problem the caller articulated as not a problem at all. The lament in these boys' stories is the *limên*, or threshold, between irony and comedy.

At the beginning of this chapter Brandon articulated the lament in his poem about the loon by suggesting that a lament can draw onlookers who actually admire the lament. Robert's story of *Superfoot* demonstrates how the lament turns to comedy since it was only when Robert told his parents about the disappointing debut of his writing piece that they could make him feel better about it; better enough, in fact, to write the second installment. Alan's story of his father shows that not only do people develop comedic literate identities by distributing literacy, but as soon as they have these identities, they are asked to continue to distribute, only now, they are positioned to respond to the laments of others.

The last question to attend to, it would seem, is whether the students in this study, or any young person, can build a story of a mythic literate identity. Myth and irony stand opposite to one another as satisfaction versus disillusionment, the same way that comedy as integration opposes tragedy as separation. According to Frye (1957), people recognize mythic heroes because they take up the boon and were able to liberate those who are in bondage and exalt themselves. While the boys' stories contain examples of comedic heroic literate identity, they do not story themselves as mythic. However, when I showed the boys how I was going to use Frye's framework to explore their stories, they were very positive about the idea that they might be enacting literate identity that could lead to an ending resembling myth. Robert in particular expressed approval with the notion that everyone could be mythic.



## Chapter Seven

### Discussing Spaces for Literate Narratives

Since my study was a narrative inquiry, the final chapter of this thesis generalizes assertions about what can and what cannot be known (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray-Orr, 2007) about the ways in which these boys storied their literate identity. This chapter must also settle some practical questions about what this study could mean for improving the educational experiences of young people.

### Affirming What Can be Known About The Literate Identities of the Boys in This Study

The boys in this study are not like the literary men that Reeves (2004) describes from her study. According to Reeves, literary men are boys who pretend to read sophisticated texts but in reality do not. In contrast, the boys in my study negotiated many types of texts efficiently, and when they ran into problems they engaged in strategies to get to meaning. Their storytelling is one type of text they negotiate. Discussion is another type of text. Even their use of food is a type of text that they operated on in order to engage in acts of literacy.

An analysis of the boys' stories revealed that the work that they are doing with multiple types of text has an agentful quality to it. The word *agency* and its synonyms that suggest agency have been used intentionally throughout this document when referring specifically to these boys' stories, rather than words like control. In Wong's (2008) discussion about what makes a good learner from a philosophical standpoint, he argues that students who are successful in school often do exert certain amounts of control over the tasks they engage in. At the same time, successful learners also submit to learning experiences. The use of the word *agency* in this thesis is intended to suggest the decision-making process of when or what to control and when or what to submit to. Every narrative that emerged as volatile in the distillation process as these stories

were analyzed illustrates agentful processes, where control and submission are in constantly in consultation with each other.

### **Conceding What Cannot Be Known About the Literate Identities of the Boys in This Study**

While many understandings about these boys and their literacy, particularly their literate identity, can come from this inquiry, many phenomena are left as wonderings. One of these wonderings for most readers might be something like, “What will become of these boys?” At the end of the previous chapter, when I outlined what it might take to live out a mythic literate identity, I intimated a hopefulness that these boys would be able to continue to live out the kind of comedic stories that emerged as we lived alongside one another. While there were interludes of irony for all them, the boys were able to move back to comedy by drawing on their literate identity capital. I assume that they will continue to do so. Since the boys are agents, it is up to them as to whether they continue to story themselves comedically.

The boys’ stories also reveal that other people, who function like Campbell’s (1973) helpers, can provide support to young people in developing and maintaining a comedic literate identity. To offer a few examples, Michael’s brother helped him narrate his comedic literate identity. His brother’s actions provide a plotline that Michael can follow. Robert’s parents helped him negotiate irony when his teacher did not like *Superfoot*, the story he wrote while in second grade. Alan’s friends are willing to be filmed, which helps Alan tell comedic stories in multiple mediums. As the boys become older, it cannot be known what people will remain or emerge as witnesses of the laments of these literate comedians and has helpers who support them in making comedic turns.

### **Acknowledging What Can and Cannot Be Known about Adolescents not in this Study**

There are two categories of adolescents who were not in this study that I would like to address. The first category is adolescents who have been in my classes either during the school year that I conducted the inquiry, or whom I had taught previously. The other category is adolescents who I have never taught. I will start with some comments about all the other adolescents I have taught in terms of this study and then bridge to adolescents I have never had in class. In discussing adolescents I have taught, I will begin with boys, then, I will make some comments about girls. Finally, I will return to Alvermann's (2001a) work in order to consider the tendency of the professional literature on boys' literacy to frame boys as resistant, even though Alvermann's work does not really do that.

My acknowledgements page at the front of this thesis described the enriching, albeit challenging, experiences I had with a whole class largely populated by boys, and what I learned from them about the potential of boys' stories in a classroom. From my lived experiences with these boys, as with many others, I know that there are many boys who story their literate identity as comedic, although I acknowledge that readers who have not lived alongside us cannot know that. I also believe that even boys who I have taught, who have not been visibly comedic in their literate being and doing in my presence, could be in other circumstances with other teachers or in contexts outside of school. However, neither I, nor readers of this thesis can know that. In reliving my experiences with girls, I have also observed that they are equally capable of composing comedic literate identities and distributing literacy as a boon to their classmates.

Alvermann (2001a) believes Grady, her case study participant, about whose literate identity she is concerned, can begin to ascribe himself as literate if she or someone else assists him. She can know he is literate from her lived experience with him, but she cannot know that he

will ever embrace the type of literate identity that she knows he should have. While it is worth suggesting that other adolescents who were not in this study are capable of comedic literate identities, it cannot be known if they are really capable, or even if they are already doing so at perhaps even a higher level than the boys who participated in this inquiry. The review of literature revealed that boys are disproportionately narrated as resistant to literacy. In these stories of boys' literacy, the boys are narrated implicitly as ironic.

### **Articulating What Can and Cannot Be Known About Spaces for Literate Identity**

Facing what can be known and what cannot be known in a given study usually leads to some implications for practice as well as implications for further research. As I was concluding the text negotiations with the boys, Anthony suggested that some implications for this study should be about spaces for being and doing literacy, especially at school. Each of these boys has carved out multiple individual spaces for being and doing his literate identity. Some of these spaces are unique to individual boys, but most overlap with other participants and more than likely other boys their age. In my experiences as a teacher, displays of unique talents and interests coupled with overlapping ones give classes collective personalities which alters the way in which curriculum is negotiated and experienced, even if the lesson is taught similarly or texts and activities are standardized. Most of this discussion about spaces for living out comedic narratives of literate identity focuses on teachers as stewards of these spaces.

**Securing spaces through opportunities to be and do literacy.** The opportunity to learn (OTL) as a concept in education has been evolving since at least the 1960s. The OTL research suggests that when students are allotted more opportunities to learn, they learn more (e.g., Harrison, 1968). The final admonition from OTL researchers is often a call for an expanding definition of opportunity as well as a plea to educators to provide more opportunity of all types.

Following the line of logic of the OTL research, the students in this study composed their literate identities because they were given greater opportunity to story themselves as literate as well as to distribute literacy. If that is the case, then even hurtful experiences, like when Robert was asked to re-do his assignment because *Superfoot* was judged as inadequate, became an opportunity to relive and retell the story of his literate identity. The OTL research asks a question about what opportunities for storying are in the hands of the teacher in a classroom, which are in the hands of the student, which are in the hands of family members, and which are in the hands of those increasingly peripheral to the classroom milieu. Uncovering understandings about how teachers open opportunities on the landscape of the classroom for developing narratives of comedic literate identity may lead to more sophisticated strategies for dispensing occasions for students to compose comedic literate identities.

**Creating spaces for status as literate beings.** Huang's (2002) study of learning opportunities in a science class revealed that students with the highest social status in a group exhibited active learning in the ways in which they garnered opportunities to learn. Students of lower status in the class tended to story learning opportunities more passively. Considering these findings, it may be reasonable to assert that as students are composing drafts of their literate identities, they need status in order to garner opportunity. Teachers who are concerned with literacy have to be increasingly wakeful to the ways in which status as a literate person is distributed in the class. A degree of presence (Rogers & Raider-Roth, 2006) will also be necessary to hear the lament of irony as well as know what to do to move the lamenter's story to comedy.

Structuring classroom talk where students can be the central narrators in classroom discourse makes space for lamenting, but also for negotiating status. The boys in this study like

to talk in class. Even when they are silent, they are often trying to figure out a way to say something interesting. There are many emblematic narratives in this thesis that depict the boys using their classroom talk to garner status. The writings of other students about Robert's participation in class in their reflections and as a character in their fictional texts, describe Robert's status. Michael's status is revealed in the story where he clarifies how and why he bumped into people while dancing. The class could not go forward until Michael had arrived and spoken.

In chapter three, I indicated that I choose the individuals to invite into this inquiry partially based on their high status among their peers. These boys also engage in maneuvers to help others to re-story their status, such as when Alan, in producing a film for his summer reading assignment, elevated another person's status to that of Master Man. When Brandon extended the geography game, missing a question he knew and changing side to prolong the activity, the use of status was different. Brandon's concern increased the status of his fellow students by helping them win.

**Opening spaces for distribution.** One of the major findings in this study is that the boys intentionally exerted energy to help others construct identities as being and doing literacy, which I have termed distribution. The premise of distribution for these boys is that they located spaces for distribution within what they considered to be their own personal aptitudes. They create enriched literacy experiences for others in their society through their distributive acts.

In *Republic* (2004), Plato asserts that successful societies are built through identification of individual aptitudes or talents as a result of which people are positioned to display those aptitudes. Plato's work suggests effectiveness since Plato's other contributions to describing human experience, such as *arête* are embedded in human contentment. Aptitudes are explored

for personal happiness, which in turn, contributes to a satisfactory way of life for all in a community. The boys are happy when they are allowed to distribute by showing who they are and what they can do with literacy. This thesis and their participation in it is an example of the kind of distribution they take pleasure in. They are also happy when they can see who other people are and what they can do with literacy. Spaces engineered for such distribution are happy.

### **Creating Spaces for Teachers and Researchers to Examine Literate Identity**

This next section follows Anthony's suggested theme of spaces, but now the discussion will turn to spaces for exploring what still is unknown about boys' storied literate identity based on this study. The primary spaces for this exploration will be institutions of education in the general sense and then classrooms more specifically.

**Finding spaces in institutions.** Positioning all students to live comedic literate narratives will trouble many of the dominant narratives in schools. Educators may find several barriers to creating spaces for students to build literate identity. One barrier has been identified as collegial tyranny (Campbell, 2004). This concept describes the practice of some school officials' unwillingness to intrude on a colleague's territory when children are being harmed emotionally or intellectually, or their literacy or content knowledge remains undeveloped. Colleagues who abide the wishes of the children by engaging in such practices as allowing them to use personal technological devices for learning, choose their own books, and investigate selected learning topics, especially those not in the official curricular documents, however, are often storied as being too easy, incompetent, uncooperative, or unprofessional, according to Campbell. Future research into literate identity might examine the ways in which teachers explore, pry open, peek into, or reject their roles as space makers for students composing literate identities.

**Locating spaces in classrooms.** Another barrier that hinders students' ability to live out comedic literate identities is the plotline of quietude as an optimal learning environment. Professionals never or rarely tell the story of their classroom as a narrative of quietude. It is the word "engagement" that is typically used, which for many educators means quiet, although that is not necessarily the definition of engagement.

Even when engagement is not about silence, it is sometimes about following the strictly crafted plans of the teacher or following a provided curricular script. In my inquiry with these five participants, most of the moments where the boys enacted plotlines of literate identity capital emerge from moments where my script was not necessarily being followed. For instance, Alan and Robert's desire to work out the story of the identity of the trainman co-opted my plan for how to open the class. I had planned to greet the students and remind them of a list of choices of tasks they had for that day. Nevertheless, this moment also became a space where the class came together in ways that allowed its members to build on common experiences in preparation to engage in the tasks I had designed. Likewise, when another student was allowed to bring his problem of not giving a presentation to the forum of the class, Alan was able to distribute the means to solve this problem, and he knew that I would allow him to do that. The belief that these boys had that they could speak freely in class encouraged them to lead class discussions, assist others in leading class discussions, and open up their classmates to new ideas that developed everyone's thinking. As discussed in chapter four, when these boys spoke, the story that developed had a different from that of the teacher or researcher.

Students were allowed to choose from which physical position to lead those discussions and tell their stories. Robert, Alan, and Brandon felt perfectly comfortable being at the front of the class, whereas Michael and Anthony usually wanted to participate from their desks.



Sometimes the boys wanted to stand; other times, they wanted to sit. Still other times, they wandered around the room, participating in curricular tasks and talked. While they had classmates with whom they preferred to work, but they also were willing to adopt others into their group without my prompting. Most of the space I have discussed is of a theoretical and perhaps even psychological or emotional nature, yet other space—the space for sitting standing, walking, and talking—is physical. Future research in being and doing comedic literate identity might focus on the impact of these physical spaces.

Finally, the participants all shared experiences of being silenced for their literacy skills, as well as being embraced and rewarded for them during their education. Embracing the role of a teacher demands that curriculum be crafted for students, but an agenda that leaves no space for sharing and being and doing literacy may not support students in working their way out of ironic or through their comedic identities. Additional work in literate identity might zero in on how students cross and re-cross the threshold between ironic and comedic hero status.

### **Identifying the Limitations of the Study**

Attempting to describe the ways in which I—a teacher to these boys—witness, co-construct, and read, analyze and interpret these students' literate lives, presents several tensions. First, because I am the teacher of these students, there is a possibility that the participants shifted their storying, however slightly, during our work together. Although I attempted to be very clear with all of the boys that I would honor their preferences about the stories I wanted to share and topics I wished to discuss, my position as their teacher may have hindered their ability to refuse or refute information I wished to include. However, their parents were also involved in these negotiations and I waited until the students were no longer in my class and grade had been submitted before text negotiations occurred. Because the data was being collected, analyzed, and

interpreted by me as their teacher, there is also the possibility of bias in interpretation. However, I used the standards proposed by narrative inquiry methodology to attend to issues of trustworthiness.

Reeves (2004) embarked on such mediation of researcher and classroom teacher when she storied the ways in which her participants avoided the task of reading in school. Her place on the landscape as a classroom teacher competed with her role as a researcher, causing several tensions, one of which was Reeves' wish to congratulate her participant Valisha when she finally worked out the details of her graduation. Reeves commented that she wanted to show much more excitement than she did, but she worried it would threaten her status as an objective researcher.

My own place on the landscape as a practicing teacher also causes me to story events in certain ways and experience certain tensions, one of which was deciding how much delight to show with the elegant stories my students so generously shared during the year. Although I do not assert a position as a completely objective researcher, I still desire my work to appear serious and scholarly. It may be that acknowledging these tensions will cause the stories that emerged in this research to go unread, misread, or over-read by others. In his essay "Friendship," Ralph Waldo Emerson (1993), a key figure in the Transcendental movement, suggests that studying people requires a degree of removal to please other scholars that actually results in having to deny seeing people as they really are. Emerson's argument gave me permission to marvel not only at the ways in which these boys storied their literate identity, but also to be impressed with all facets of their lives. As Emerson asserts, seeing people as benevolent and virtuous is in fact, the most accurate way to see them.

A study of this intensity, however, does suggest the potential for intrusion into student space because adolescents are highly self-conscious (Sternberg, 2007), and literacy is a highly

personal topic for some. Although I embraced the methodological strategy of negotiation for determining which experiences to discuss and how those experiences would be interpreted, the possibility exists that some of the data caused the participants stress or embarrassment. Finally, this research may yield insights into the storying of these students, but it may not be generalizable to all.

### **Concluding Remarks: Sharing Literate Narratives**

Nothing would please me more than to simply create a story to share with others, something to keep some entertained, some comforted, and maybe even leave some changed (Robert, class assignment, Fall, 2008).

This excerpt is the end of the essay that Robert began with the story of *Superfoot*. Ending the piece of creative non-fiction with this wish conveys Robert's goal in creating and sharing stories that integrate his world with the world of others. It is the essential and ultimately comedic reflection of all of the participants in this inquiry. Indeed, his words provide a summation of a story to live by of all five of these boys. Clandinin and Connelly (1999) defined "stories to live by" as the intellectual thread necessary to link knowledge, context, and identity. In Robert's explanation of his goal for his own literacy, he makes it clear that an audience for his self-positioning as being and doing a comedic literate identity is insufficient. Instead, he desires an audience that will embrace a comedic literate identity as well by being different and changing their actions. His desire is not a demand or imposition. It is an invitation to share the plotline of a story he enjoys.

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) propose a shift toward narrative understanding of how that text shapes relationships with people and ideas, a concept they call *coherence*. Robert's aspiration is one of coherence of people and ideas through shifts in understanding that cause

reactions like a sense of being entertained or comforted, and a desire to live differently. The coherence that Clandinin and Connelly propose theoretically and Robert supports in practical terms is not an unhealthy state of stagnation, but rather a solid footing for confronting tension and moving forward.

The boys in this study have composed powerful stories to live by. They are determined to stay connected to these stories, the people who appear in them, and on some level, the people who hear them. Their stories to live by are comedic, or integrative, with a trajectory towards myth. The comedic nature of their current stories also opens up a plotline wherein these boys have stories to give. The process of gifting these stories during the year allowed other classmates to compose their own stories to live by. For people who read this work, the stories of these young people potentially uncover a deeper understanding of the multiple literacies, as well as the literate identities of a group of boys who manage to live and learn in a space called school.

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## Appendix A

This appendix is an attempt to overview the stories collected in this narrative inquiry that emerged as emblematic. Summarizing the stories decontextualizes them from each other and the professional literature and strips off the boys' voices and contributions to the writing, changing them to stories about boys. The purpose of including this list of what are now stories about boys is for use as a reference sheet as the stories are referred to across the document since there are many boys and many stories. This appendix may also reveal for some readers the starkness present in these summaries versus the liveliness of the boys' stories in the text.

### Chapter One

**Brandon, p. 10.** Noticing that two teams for a geography game were unevenly matched in terms of confidence in their competence, Brandon intentionally missed a question so he could switch sides and then bring other members over to his new side. This action prolonged the game so more reviewing of course material could occur. This story introduces Brandon as a person with interesting literacies that he is willing to display in school.

### Chapter Two

**Robert, p. 26.** Following up on a story he told in a world history class, Robert narrated an abbreviated version of the legend of Cupid and Psyche. Psyche is a beautiful mortal and Cupid is a beautiful immortal. Venus is jealous of their relationship. In the end, Psyche is granted immortality. I use this story to unpack the professional literature on adolescent identity development and then return to it later to illustrate the difference between stories of boys and boys' stories.

**Brandon, p. 35.** Brandon uses a reflective writing piece to assert that he enjoys being able to transfer his learning across contexts. This story suggests that students can be agentful in bringing literacies in and out of school.

**Michael, p. 35.** Michael uses a reflective writing piece to assert that he enjoys the ability to control his writing activities through revision and choice of topic. His writing suggests agentfulness in class participation.

**Alan, p. 41.** Alan played a song after school and initiated a conversation about the problem of trying to be a good man as well as a famous one. Alan's story reveals a tension that he offers a hint of resolution to in a later chapter.

**Alan, p. 42.** Alan took a project he began in eighth grade and worked on it all through his ninth grade year. The project was a film adaptation of a picture book called *Master Man* (Shepard & Wiseniewski, 1999). Alan's story illustrates his own attempt to resolve the tension of being both powerful and benevolent.

**Anthony, p. 47.** Anthony wrote me an email relating his excitement over earning recognition for a piece that he wrote as part of his participation on the Model United Nations team. The email has been paired with a section of the text for which his was honored.

### **Chapter Three**

**Anthony, p. 51.** Anthony came into my classroom early one day when he was in eighth grade. He asked me if I wanted to see something. Blithely, I indicated that I would look at anything except bugs. He had a matchbox with bugs in it. I apologized and we sat and marveled at the bugs. I used this narrative to reveal how the participants came to be invited and describe my interactions with them.

**Anthony and Brandon, p. 58.** Brandon was leading a class discussion about Bram Stoker's (2003) *Dracula*. When another student made an interesting contribution to the discussion, which caused the other students to applaud. Anthony voiced appreciation for the



class saying, “someday, I will be able to say that I clapped for these people.” I used this narrative to explain the narrative inquiry research design.

**Robert, p. 62.** In a reflection about Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Robert asserts the importance of valuing humans as thinking emotional beings. I used this piece to discuss the unique ethical dimensions of narrative inquiry.

**Brandon, p. 69.** Brandon’s expository essay about the multilayered plot of *The Odyssey* (Eikhoff, 2001) is used to reveal the cyclical nature of my data analysis procedures.

#### **Chapter Four**

**Michael, p. 76.** Michael arrived late to class one day. His classmates insisted that he had been unkind in the last class period by bumping into other couples while they were all dancing. I defended Michael, saying that he would not do such a mean thing. Michael informed us that we were all right, but we were also all wrong. This story was used to open an exploration of literacy as being and doing.

**Anthony, p. 78.** Anthony explained in an essay that gaining strength or skill in any activity requires effort on the part of the person who would like to obtain the particular skill. This explanation re-narrates motivation as agency.

**Brandon, p. 80.** Brandon explained how he had to read a book about football, a topic he did not enjoy. He did not complain or ask to switch and he was never asked if he enjoyed books on this topic. This narrative illustrates that when the students cannot help tell the story, then there is much left unknown about the meaning of the narrative.

**Robert, p. 84.** Robert engaged in a role-play based on Guy de Maupassant (2002) “The Necklace.” In this role-play, Robert played the part of the author. In his monologue, he said ungenerous things about women in order to explain the female character’s actions in the story.

The story of Robert's role-play illustrates the concept of liminal space (Turner, 1967) as a space for making identity. It also reopens the narrative of resistance in boys' literacy.

**Michael, p. 87.** Michael is labeled resistant because he does not subscribe to the Classical Darwinian view of evolution. Instead, his views are more closely aligned with the Neo-Darwinian Punctuated Equilibrium Perspective (Eldredge & Gould, 1972). This circumstance sheds further light on the typical story of resistance told in the professional literature on boys' literacy.

**Michael and Alan, p. 88.** Neither Michael nor Alan completed the summer reading assignment on time. This circumstance is narrated for the purpose of exploring acts that appear resistant, but are actually about distributing literacy to others.

## Chapter Five

**Brandon, p. 97.** I had a piece of chocolate cake in my room after lunch that I brought thinking someone would ask for it. Finally, Brandon took the cake. When he got to his next class with the cake, his classmates all wanted some. This story is about recognizing aspects of literacy as valuable. I connected this story to Brandon's habit of sharing insights from our one-on-one conversations with the rest of the class during discussion.

**Anthony, p. 99.** Anthony saw the pies that the teachers' association was giving away for the holidays. He asked if he could buy the pie and I told him that would not be necessary. I went to ask if I could buy a pie for Anthony and the head of the teacher's association gave me his, which I gave to Anthony. This story is about soliciting literacy processes. I connected this story to when Anthony came to me after to ask to be in honors English after the academic year had begun.

**Robert, p. 100.** Robert's health class engaged in an activity where they brought healthy snacks to class and shared them. Robert chose to bring Won Tons. After health, he still had leftover Won Tons and he brought them to me and asked if I wanted them. I accepted the Won Tons. As we were eating, others had entered the class, and seeing our food, returned to their lockers to retrieve food that they had brought to school with them for various reasons. This story is about collecting literacies. I connected this story to Robert's ability to mention literate acts that he engages in casually, and then later others in the class begin to reveal their engagement in those same acts, specifically poetry writing.

**Michael, p. 102.** After mock trial practice, Michael asked for an extra cookie to eat before he went to his job. This is a story about integrating literacies across contexts. I connected this story to the knowledge of parliamentary debate from Model United Nations that he brought into honors class and showed everyone how to do. Anthony also helped with introducing debate to the honors classes.

**Alan, p. 105.** Robert was running a game show and Alan won the grand prize, which was a large amount of candy. Instead of keeping the candy, Alan gave some to every person in the class. This story is about distribution of literacies to others. Later, when another student was unable to find a group for his summer reading presentation, he brought this fact to the class. Alan offered his peer a part in the film he had been working on for more than a year. The part Alan offered was the part that he had been saving for himself. This story represents distribution of literacy as well as opportunities to perform as literate.

**Robert and Alan, p. 107.** Alan entered class asking how to make the noise of a train whistle. Robert asserted that his father would know because his father loved trains and even had a room full of trains at their house. Alan then asserted that he had been to Robert's house on a

field trip and seen the trains. Robert responded that this would be impossible because his father does not often share the trains, even with him. Alan insisted, adding that the “train man” gave the children soda when they were finished looking. Robert changed his mind when he heard this and decided that Alan in fact, could have been at Robert’s house and seen the trains. This story connects recognition, solicitation, collection, integration, and distribution together.

## Chapter Six

**Brandon, p. 113.** Brandon wrote a poem about a lamenting loon out on the water. This poem is written in heroic couplets. I use this poem to introduce Frye’s (1957) literary heroes where I come to focus on the comedic hero as one who will display his distress in order to reintegrate into society.

**Michael, p. 118.** Michael wrote about two tragic heroes, Grendel in *Beowulf* and the creature in *Frankenstein*. His reflection illustrates Frye’s (1957) notion of the difficulty in re-emerging from tragedy.

**Michael, p. 121.** Michael describes his habit of reading the newspaper and bringing it to class so that he can participate as the need arises. This story illustrates his desire to integrate into society by reading the newspaper as well as the society of his peers by participating in class.

**Robert, p. 123.** Robert used in in-class writing assignment to discuss his attempts to get his teacher to notice and appreciate his writing. When he was in second grade, he was publically castigated for the content of his story titled *Superfoot*, he wrote a sequel and continues to write. This story is an example of the actions of Frye’s (1957) comedic heroes.

**Alan, p. 125.** Alan painted his neighbor’s fence only to have his neighbors sell the house and move instead of enjoying the good deed Alan had performed for them. Alan emphasized

how funny this circumstance is to him and indeed his desire to film is about the desire to share the comedy of his life with others.

**Alan, p. 126.** Alan tells the story of his father on the phone with a man who claims to be Elvis Presley because he has the song “Ring of Fire” stuck in his head. Alan’s father assuages the man by telling him that “Ring of Fire” is actually a Johnny Cash song. This story emphasizes the role of the lament in turning from irony to comedy as well as the responsibilities typically assigned to comedic heroes, which is to help others make comedic turns.

## **Chapter Seven**

**Robert, p. 138.** Robert closed an in-class assignment with his desire to be someone and do something that improved the lives and experiences of other people. His statement is also emblematic of all the boys’ stories to live by, which is that they have stories to give.

## **Appendix B**

### **Relevant Professional Training**

The following is a list of training activities that I have been involved in, which I believe have influenced my approach to teaching as well as the strategies, techniques, and activities that I employ in my classroom. I have organized my training chronologically.

#### **Teacher Education MA Program—Brigham Young University (2008-2010)**

By the time I completed data collection and executing the major drafting for this thesis, I had completed courses in developmental psychology, education for democracy, comprehension instruction, content area literacy, the history of literacy instruction, and literacy development from both emergent literacy and lifespan literacy perspectives.

#### **Engaging Classrooms Technology Training (2007-2008)**

My district offered thousands of dollars worth of technology materials and training for teachers who would submit proposals for technology-based curriculum and then commit to 6 hours of training per month for seven months. My proposal was selected, along with approximately 24 others in the district. Together, we worked on integrating constructivist curriculum with technology.

#### **Nebo Associates Program based on Moral Dimensions (2006-2007)**

My principal asked me to participate in this yearlong program, based on Goodlad's (1990) *Moral Dimensions of Education*. The program consisted of semi-monthly two-day long retreats focusing on the enactment of democratic principles in schools, coupled with semi-monthly visitations to other schools in the state to view the implementation of the moral dimensions.

#### **Secondary Literacy Institute with Jeff Wilhelm (2006-2007)**

Six teachers from my school spent six days during the summer at the institute together learning how to construct inquiry-based unit plans as well as implement peer coaching in department. Local districts also host twice yearly follow-up conferences. I attend these follow-up meetings once per year. I do not currently have a peer coach, but I did in the year following the training.

### **Teaching English Language Learners (TELL) Endorsement**

My post-baccalaureate training to become a teacher is almost entirely comprised of the TELL endorsement. Courses in this endorsement focus on developing second language skills according to a sociocultural perspective. This training was paid for by a shared grant through BYU and my school district.

### **Non-professional Training**

Before I became a teacher, I received training in folklore through coursework as well as working in the folklore archive at BYU. This training was instrumental in helping me to understand the ways in which humans form viable connections to one another. I was also in charge of the initial cataloging process for the personal narrative collection. Previous to working as a folklore archivist, I also had on-the-job training as a journalist, a discipline that shares borders with phenomenology. These two types of training have been most helpful in fostering the presence (Waks, 1995) to care about people, listen to what they say, and remember it afterward.