

# FROM STORYBOOKS TO GAMES, COMICS, BANDS, AND CHAPTER BOOKS: A YOUNG BOY'S APPROPRIATION OF LITERACY PRACTICES

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This case study addresses a middle class family's role in their son's literacy development through an investigation of the socio-cultural practices that support his literacy acquisition. Rogoff's socio-cultural framework, which proposes three planes of analysis for observation of human development, is used for the analysis. The literacy practices of Max (age 8) are the central focus. The analysis explores how community, interpersonal, and personal literacy activities connect to form holistic literacy practices for him. Insights into the nature of peer interactions around literacy, gender considerations in family literacy, and boys' out-of-school literacy practices emerge from this analysis.

Key words: socio-cultural perspectives on literacy; multiliteracies; family literacy; gender and literacy

L'étude de cas présentée ici porte sur le rôle de parents de classe moyenne dans le développement de la littératie de leur fils. Le cadre socioculturel de Rogoff, qui propose trois axes d'analyse pour l'observation du développement de l'être humain, est utilisé dans l'analyse des pratiques socioculturelles qui favorisent la littératie. L'article porte essentiellement sur les pratiques de littératie de Max (8 ans). L'auteur analyse le lien entre diverses activités communautaires, interpersonnelles et personnelles en matière de littératie et l'apparition subséquente de pratiques de littératie holistiques chez Max. L'analyse fournit des points de repère sur la littératie et les interactions entre des pairs, les différences entre les sexes et la littératie familiale ainsi que les pratiques de littératie chez les garçons en dehors du milieu scolaire.

Mots clés : perspectives socioculturelles sur la littératie, multilittératies, littératie familiale, littératie et sexes

The phrase lifelong reader has been ubiquitous in the literature on literacy instruction over the past three decades. Research demonstrates that the strongest readers, and the ones most likely to become lifelong readers, are those who engage deeply with reading (Guthrie, 2004) and read for pleasure outside of school (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1988). Furthermore, some research suggests that when children's vernacular literacy practices are acknowledged and respected, these practices "provide the foundation of prior knowledge and experience necessary for effective teaching and learning to take place in school" (Hall & Coles, 2001, p. 220). This acknowledgement of personal literacy practices is also important for fostering in children a conception of themselves as independent, successful readers and writers (Hall & Coles, 2001). An acknowledgement of the importance of out-of-school reading for many children leads to one of the questions considered in this study: what role do families play in encouraging an enduring engagement with literacy in their younger members?

Additionally, boys' literacy development has recently become an important topic in Western countries because of the apparent crisis in boys' literacy learning. Whether one subscribes to the notion of crisis regarding boys and literacy or not (see Foster, Kimmel, & Skelton, 2001; Martino, 2003), it is, nonetheless, an area of concern for many families and teachers. Recognizing that any attempt to understand the subject of boys' literacy requires more than a broad brush analysis of all boys, the purpose of this case study is to investigate the particular kinds of socio-cultural practices occurring in the context of a family and its wider community that support a middle class boy in his literacy development.

Investigating the socio-cultural background of young readers is fundamental to an understanding of that which helps them succeed with the more formal aspects of schooling (e.g., Heath, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Given Hall and Coles' (1999) findings that boys tend to read less than girls (a relatively stable trend over many decades, if not centuries, and a gap that increases as children grow up), developing an understanding of literacy practices in families whose boys do participate in a wide range of literacy activities may inform the current discussion of boys' literacy practices. This investigation thus aligns with the important

injunction to ask, "Which boys?" (Millard, 1997) in any investigation involving boys' literacy.

#### RESEARCH METHOD: CONTEXT AND DESIGN

##### *Participants*

I used an intensity case sampling strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to select a case that was information-rich to demonstrate the phenomenon of families whose boys are deeply engaged with literacy. The participants chosen for this study were a mother and father, Kay and Owen Holloway-Richards, and their two sons, Max and Sam, aged 8 and 5 respectively at the time of the study (pseudonyms have been assigned). Both parents were educated at the post-graduate level. Kay, a social worker, worked approximately half-time outside of the home. Owen worked as a social worker and taught on a sessional basis at a local university. Max attended third grade at a local primary school, where Sam also attended senior kindergarten. (The province in which the family resided offers half-day kindergarten for children aged 4 and 5, for a total of two years of publicly funded pre-primary education.) Although I reference members of Holloway-Richards family and their wider community such as extended family, peers, and teachers as a part of the socio-cultural approach to the study, the literacy practices of Max are the focal point for this case study.

##### *Setting*

The Holloway-Richards family resided in a resource-rich, middle class neighbourhood of a large urban area in central Canada. Their home was situated directly across the street from the elementary school the boys attended. The family frequented a public library, located beside the school, about a half-block from their home. A few doors away from the family's home, a former police station served as a thriving community centre; both boys had attended after-school and daycare care programs there. Inside the family's home, texts of all types were found in every room. These ranged from a large collection of music on compact disk, several video cassettes and DVDs of children's movies, and home movies, to notes in the kitchen and study and signs on the children's

bedroom door; to newspapers, magazines, and collections of books belonging to all members of the family, located throughout the house.

### *Design*

*Theoretical Framework.* Grounded in a socio-cultural approach to understanding literacy, I have used Rogoff's (1995) socio-cultural framework that proposes three planes of analysis for observation of human development. This framework builds on Vygotsky's conception of apprenticeship (Vygotsky, 1978), the theoretical work of Boas in cultural anthropology (1920, cited in Wertsch, Rio, & Alvarez, 1995), and Bakhtin's (1981) work in language and discourse. Rogoff (1995) describes three different planes of focus in socio-cultural activity: apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation. These planes correspond to the community or institutional, the interpersonal, and the personal respectively, which are inseparable and non-hierarchical and involve different "grains of focus within the whole socio-cultural activity" (p. 141). A detailed and rich understanding of literacy practices is made possible by employing the fine-grained analysis that this framework offers. A strength of Rogoff's work is its widened focus related to children's cognitive development. Although adult activity in apprenticing children in cognitive activities remains an important focal point, Rogoff moves beyond Vygotsky with the notion that attention must also focus on the "the active nature of children's own efforts to participate [in] and observe the skilled activities of their community" (p.149). In this manner, both children and adults are viewed as agentful participants in a child's cognitive development, which is seen as participatory appropriation through guided participation in a system of apprenticeship.

Within Rogoff's framework, activities or events are used as the unit of analysis, enabling the investigation of the inseparable relationship between the individual and the social and cultural environments: in this study the unit of analysis is the literacy event. Barton and Hamilton (2000) define literacy events as activities where literacy has a role. Literacy is defined in this study as "one of a range of communicative resources available to members of a community" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 10) and therefore conceives the texts utilized in literate practice

as emanating from a range of verbal, visual, and written forms of communication. I have also used Barton and Hamilton's (2000) conception of literacy practices as referring to what people do with literacy, or more specifically, "situated literacies" related to "cultural ways of utilising literacy" (p. 8). This conception includes the values, attitudes, and social relationships that shape people's understanding of literacy.

*Data Sources.* Data sources include my observations of the family's home and community within a four-block radius; video footage of Max reading with his parents, and a skit written and performed by Max and his peers; transcribed interviews with Max and his parents; and artefacts representative of his writing and drawing from the two-month period of the study. I conducted the semi-structured interviews with Max in two sessions; the semi-structured interviews with the parents were conducted separately and continued via e-mail through a series of back and forth conversations.

*Data Analysis.* I analyzed the data by first locating the literacy events and activities that connected to form holistic literacy practices, practices that frequently extend across time and location and involve a host of participants. These practices were analyzed using a matrix that coded the events and activities within each practice as demonstrations of apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation, noting where each event took place and who the participants were (see Appendix A). The final product was a set of seven different literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) taking place within two constellations: Max's family and the wider social constellation in which his family is embedded. I triangulated the thick descriptions of Max's literacy practices with recent research on boys' literacy practices to provide results that may be translatable (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) in understanding the literacy practices of other middle-class boys. I employed peer debriefing and member checking to establish the credibility of the study.

#### LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE FAMILY CONSTELLATION

Literacy events within his family constellation provide an excellent starting place to understand Max's literacy development. I have grouped

these events into larger units, conceptualized as literacy practices, in recognition of the understanding that they represent cultural ways of utilizing literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Literacy practices observed include enhancing the bedtime story and incorporating electronic literacy tools.

*Enhancing the Bedtime Story: The Element of Choice*

Related to Max's apprenticeship into the bedtime-story literacy practice is Owen's interest in introducing his sons to favourite novels from his own childhood and the family's interest in reading together popular favourites such as the *Harry Potter* series (e.g., Rowling, 1999). Owen stated, "I try to share my passion with the boys in the hope that it is contagious." Kay summed up her approach to genre selection:

We try very hard to meet our children where they are at, even if it means *Captain Underpants* [(Pilkey, 1997)], and *The Day My Butt Exploded* [sic] [(Griffiths, 2001)]. However, we get all the joys of *The Hobbit* [(Tolkien, 1937/1996)], which I had never read, and *Harry Potter* [(e.g., Rowling, 1999)], which we are ALL huge fans of. (Kay)

By engaging Max in this literature through their own passion for reading novels and time spent interacting with them (guided participation) during the bedtime story practice, Owen and Kay led Max to the place of participatory appropriation. As a result of this appropriation, Max took the novels he read at home (with Owen and Kay and on his own) to school to replace the levelled readers most of his third-grade peers were required to read in their literacy program. Max explained:

We have book bags and it's like levelled books: so you have the book at your certain level. But I'm at the highest level there is and I'm allowed to bring in my own books, any kind of book, just not if it's like Webster's College Dictionary! Anything I like. (Max)

Max elaborated that he often shared the content of what he was reading with his classmates during class reading time, evidence of his taking on an apprenticing role with his peers.

At the time of this study, Max cited *The Hobbit* (Tolkien, 1937/1996) and *Sinbad* (Fremont, 2003) as novels he read at home and took to school. *Sinbad* is one of his father's childhood favourites, and, as noted earlier, *The Hobbit* is a novel his mother cites as one that she missed in her growing up years. Through these practices, I note how the three planes of cultural activity, apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation, work holistically and in a recursive manner, within the family and extend outward to Max's peers.

#### *Incorporating Electronic Literacy Tools*

The Holloway-Richards family, as is true of many families, provided their children with an array of literacy tools beyond books. Paper, pens, markers, art supplies, and their own desks were all well-utilized by Max and his brother. The use of the computer as a literacy tool will be the focus of this section. From his earliest days, Max's parents used a home computer for work and pleasure. Apprenticed into the use of the computer for these purposes through observing his parents, Max was also guided in his use of this literacy tool through being shown how to find the letters on the keyboard, playing games on educational websites, and navigating the internet to find information for personal interest or school research. As an eight-year-old, Max used the computer to write plays and stories of his own and to visit websites related to his *Warhammer* (Games Workshop, n.d.) gaming interest.

His use of the computer as a literacy tool is an area where Max has moved from peripheral participation to taking on greater responsibility for managing the activity (Rogoff, 1995, p. 157) because it was mediated by his own expressed interests. For example, when asked if he enjoyed using the computer, he replied, "Well, it's kind of boring, unless I'm looking up information or on the Games Workshop website. That's the stuff I like to look at: the rest is really boring." After making the statement, "Typing's okay, depending on what I'm typing," Max launched into an enthusiastic explanation of a story he was writing on the home computer for several weeks. In describing the *Three Pigs' Adventure*, which he independently chose to write, Max said he planned to turn it into "a children's book like *Captain Underpants* (e.g., Pilkey, 1997), but more like the *Day My Butt Went Psycho* (Griffiths, 2001)

because it is going to be a longer chapter book." An excerpt (unedited) from the *Three Pigs' Adventure* demonstrates how Max has actively incorporated terminology and themes, such as battling giant toilets from the *Captain Underpants* series into his writing.

#### Chapter 1

##### Adventure

Once upon a time there were three little pigs. 2 were smart and 1 plain stupid. ALL wanted to take an adventure. So, they went into the woods of darkness and then got to the first gate. There was a man, whose name was John, at the gate. He told them they had to enter a code to get in. It was very easy. They left the woods and saw...a toilet. It was huge and scary. They ran back home for the night.

#### Chapter 2

But when they went back, they found out they were in pee world then the stupid pig said I forget the point of coming here. "Well" said the smart pig, "let's look around." "Okay," they said, "let's go." they said but they didn't know there was lots of danger ahead of themselves. Well it's a long story that happened a long time ago. one day.... (Max's story)

The story goes on to describe the pigs' adventure in a manner reminiscent of Tolkien's storytelling voice in *The Hobbit*. It then moves into a third chapter, which introduces characters from *The Hobbit*, reflecting another intertextual link in Max's writing. This example indicates Max independently appropriated the use of the computer as a literacy tool to suit his own personal needs and interests, while simultaneously incorporating his genre interests.

These two examples demonstrate some of the holistic literacy practices in Max's literate life as a member of his family. Simultaneously, they illustrate aspects of the socio-cultural foundation of Max's literacy practices both in the past and at the time of this study, while setting the



stage for understanding his enthusiasm for a wide range of literacy activity outside of the family constellation.

#### LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY CONSTELLATION

This section provides examples of Max's participatory appropriation of literate practice beyond his immediate family. Interconnected literacy events are grouped into the following literacy practices: extending genres of choice into personal writing, turning play into bookmaking, writing play scripts, developing cartooning skills, and song writing.

##### *Extending Genres of Choice into Personal Writing*

Max's parents' philosophy regarding what constitutes good reading material which translated into their willingness to read books such as *Adventures of Captain Underpants* (Pilkey, 1997) with their sons was shared by some of the families of Max's friends. This phenomenon within the family's wider socio-cultural constellation led to this series becoming a popular topic of discussion between Max and his friends, subsequently leading to their participatory appropriation of the reading activity through the co-construction of their own series of stories entitled, *Tushyman*. Max elaborated: "We made, me and some of my friends, we made up this superhero called Tushyman. He's related to Captain Underpants basically. And we write and draw comics for it. Stuff like that." Active participation, at the heart of participatory appropriation, is seen in the writing of these stories taking place at his own home and the homes of his peers, as well as during indoor recess at school (on days when inclement weather kept students indoors). This extended writing activity was a source of great fun and tremendous pride for Max and his friends over the period of about a year and a half, while they were in the second grade and the early part of the third grade.

##### *Turning Play into Bookmaking*

When Max was in the second grade, he and Owen read through *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (e.g., Snicket, 1999). The shared reading of this series followed the same pattern as the other novels introduced to Max by his parents: they started reading the novels together, and Max soon

took over, reading on his own. In this practice, Max likely became well-acquainted with the language and tone utilized in the series. The “unfortunate events” also became an activity around which Max and his friends organized their play. For example, a role-playing game, which took place on the school playground at recess, was deemed “so cool that we wanted to turn it into a book.” After talking about it for some time with one friend, Bradley, but not actually getting around to writing it, Max “just decided to start writing it” one day at home when he “was just wanting to write something.” The resultant piece, *Souls of Swords*, demonstrates Max’s participatory appropriation of the literate practice of transforming play into text, the appropriation of the words and tone of the *Series of Unfortunate Events* (e.g., Snicket, 1999), and incorporation of characters from *The Lord of the Rings*, along with the action of the playground game (see Figure 1).

Similarly, Max and his friend Mike began a new story entitled *Super Snowman*. Max elaborated: “He’s like a snowman that fights crime and stuff. Something like crime. Like what we play and stuff.” In both of these written products, Max worked interdependently with his peers, taking on active and dynamically changing roles as he and his friends used writing to capture the fun they experienced in their play. These stories provide another strong example of peer apprenticing; an illustration of Rogoff’s contention that the apprenticeship model does not solely comprise an adult to child transmission mode.

#### *Writing Play Scripts*

While still in the second grade, Max and his friends attended Cub Scout camp. Several months after the camp, Max’s school held a talent show where students auditioned for a part in a show to be presented to the whole school and their families. Max and three of the friends who attended the Cub Scout camp used their memory of a skit that they had seen to write a play script for the talent show. Their version of the skit, entitled *Big Red Lollipop*, was scribed in skit format by the mother of one of the boys. In this manner, the skit they had viewed at Cub Scout camp apprenticed them into the performance genre. Then through the mother’s help with the script-making, they took part in the guided participation needed to define their roles and practice the skit. This

guidance enabled them to confidently present their own skit for the talent show (participatory appropriation). In this example, cultural practices in the wider community guided and influenced the boys' literacy practice.

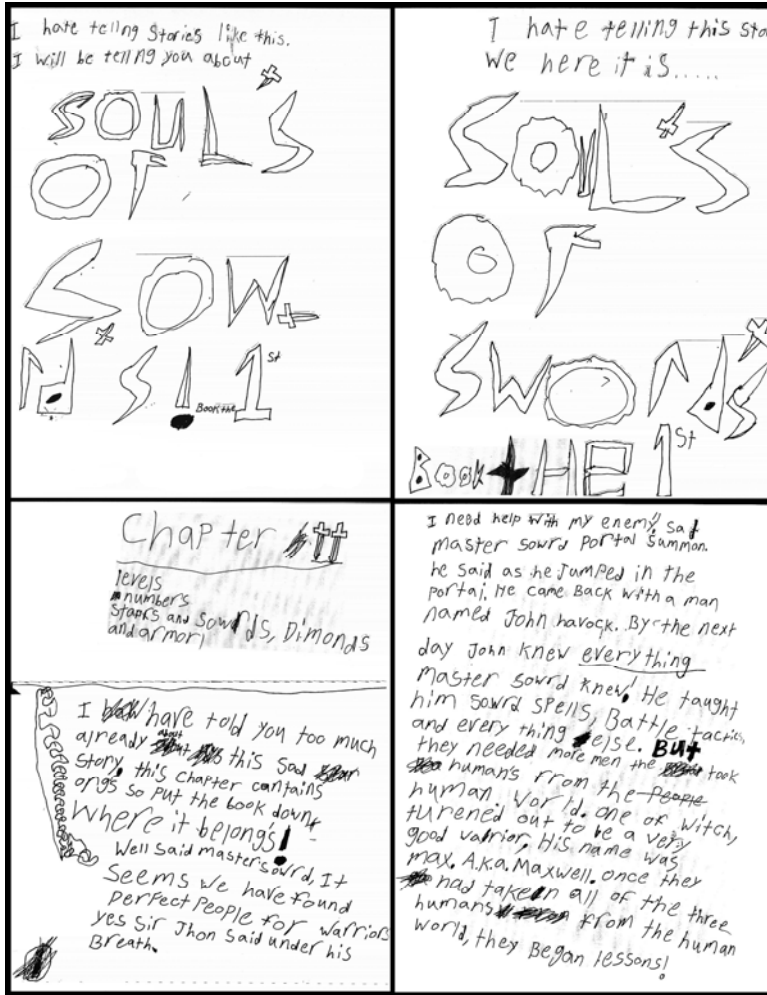


Figure 1: Souls of Swords

*Developing Cartooning Skills*

Owen and Kay had both grown up reading comic books, comic anthologies, and comic strips in the newspaper, in addition to other print forms of literature. In Kay's household, comics were not classified as "good literature" but were tolerated. Owen had among his possessions a collection of Calvin and Hobbes anthologies (e.g., Watterson, 1992) when he and Kay met; Max expressed interest in this collection at an early age. Comic strips in magazines were among his favourite texts to read when he was in kindergarten and grade one. In particular he enjoyed the Bionicle comic strips in Lego magazines, the comic strips found in Chickadee magazines, and the *Captain Underpants* series (Pilkey, 1997), which is written in a graphic novel format.

The librarian at Max's school had recently become concerned with finding alternative ways to engage boys in literacy. About two months before this study began, along with a father from the school community, she initiated a "boys only reading club." Comic books were used in the club as high interest reading material. Although Max had read comics and used cartooning in his bookmaking, as evidenced in the *Tushyman* series for example, he began experimenting, along with a friend, with more formal cartooning techniques outside the reading club, using a how-to-cartoon book (Hart, 1994). This cartooning book and the guided participation afforded by the study of comics as a genre in the boys' reading club launched Max into the pursuit of practising and perfecting his cartooning skills. As a result, his cartooning took on a more polished quality of which he was very proud. This activity sparked an interest in his younger brother Sam who proudly told me that his brother draws cartoons and that he himself had just "coloured a cartoon that was a small body and a big head duck that says 'Quack!'" Through his participatory appropriation of the cartoon genre, Max apprenticed his younger brother. Additionally, Kay reported that Max would take a cartooning course through a local community program, thereby taking part in another set of socio-cultural literacy activities that would lead him through apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation of the practice of cartooning at a higher level.

*Song Writing*

Owen has an electric guitar and amplifier with which he has experimented for many years. As a preschooler, Max became interested in playing with this guitar; at the age of seven he received his own electric guitar. Guided participation ensued as Max began to take guitar lessons and play band with his friends. Max also became very interested in rock star Bruce Springsteen, after Owen and Kay introduced him to his albums. Kay described this sharing as their endeavour to “feed [our sons’] interests whenever possible with written material. For example – Owen gave Max a magazine featuring Bruce Springsteen for his birthday [this year] as Max is a huge fan.” This phenomenon is also an example of what Owen described as an important part of their parental role in their children’s literacy development: “discussing what they are reading and what they are interested in to link interests to written materials.” These forms of apprenticeship and guided participation led Max to take his interest in Springsteen as a song-writer and his interest in making music to the level of participatory appropriation as he engaged in the personal literacy activity of writing a song.

once I left my house say-in I’m  
 goin away everybody cried so I said  
 I’m goin away but I don’t care  
 you ar

Chorus

you are my old town I am your  
 up town but I’m go-in away  
 go-in away. So tried I did again that’s  
 why I’m goin away goin away

so once I was around  
 The block and you came up to me  
 and I said

Chorus (Max)

This unedited draft of an untitled song written by Max demonstrates his participatory appropriation of song writing. Its lyrics, reminiscent of

Springsteen's style in *Lucky Town* (Springsteen, 1992), again provide a glimpse into the intertextual links Max utilizes in his writing.

Together, these examples of Max's literacy practices clearly support one of the premises of Rogoff's Planes of Socio-cultural Activity: the contention that it is not just adults who exercise agency in the child's cognitive development. Max's literacy development, as he interacts and engages with the wider community, very clearly demonstrates his own "active efforts to participate [in] and observe the skilled activities" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 149) of his community.

#### DISCUSSION

This case study demonstrates how one boy's literate practices move between being developed within his family constellation and within the context of his wider community. Comparing these practices with the extant literature on boys and literacy may help inform scholars' understanding of the kinds of socio-cultural practices in the home and community that support primary school-aged boys in their literacy development.

##### *Beyond the Bedtime Story*

The bedtime story, often viewed as a middle-class construction that prepares young children for classroom discourse (Gee, 1990; Heath, 1994), has been seen as important in family literate practice (Heath, 1983; Sulzby & Teale, 1991). This understanding, which has led to the privileging of the bedtime story as the primary literacy practice in which families should engage their preschool children, draws criticism in that its perceived pre-eminence has the tendency to deny the significance of other valuable literate practices in which many families engage, such as the oral tradition (Auerbach, 1997; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). In this case study, the practice of storybook reading undoubtedly has provided a means for younger family members to expand family literate practice into wider community literate practices with peers, in a variety of locations, reaching beyond classroom hours. But there may be more at work here: as Rogoff states, such "arrangements and engagements subsequently construct and transform cultural practices with each successive generation" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 148). The dialogic nature

(Bahktin, 1981) of storybook reading in the Holloway-Richards family is noteworthy in this regard. As Kay and Owen's own childhood favourite texts inform their use of the storybook ritual, the passing on of favourite stories is blended with new family favourites informed by their son's interests. This inter-generational dialogue from the parents' generation to Max's generation is reminiscent of the oral tradition. The dialogic nature of these stories in Max's life is evident, not only in his enjoyment of these family texts, but also in the way he incorporates elements of his parents' favourite texts into the stories and song lyrics he writes.

#### *"Good" Literature*

The enduring discussion of what constitutes acceptable literature for children is familiar to most educators. Furthermore, comic books themselves have been the subject of heated debate for decades (see Norton, 2003). The novel series, *Adventures of Captain Underpants*, from which Max and his friends made many intertextual links, has been challenged for its attention to bodily functions, and purported lack of respect for authority figures. Some titles in the series have been removed from the shelves of school libraries in some American school districts (e.g., American Library Association, 2002), though it has survived challenges elsewhere in the United States (e.g., American Library Association, 1999). Max's parents take the position that supporting his interest in such texts is one important component in engaging him with literacy. Indeed, this series played an important role in sparking interest in reading and writing for Max and his friends in his early school years, and was one catalyst for the cartoon writing/drawing Max continues to refine as a third-grade student.

Max's parents correlate their conscious choices around the kinds of texts they encourage Max to read with his success with in-school literacy. Could it be that a form of scaffolding may be helpful for Max in this regard? In addition to the positive associations Max is forming with literature considered acceptable within the literary canon, such as *The Hobbit* (Tolkien 1937/1996), Max's parents also encouraged him to engage with reading and writing texts that appealed to his sense of humour and personal interest, through a variety of literate practices, such as reading *Adventures of Captain Underpants* (e.g., Pilkey, 1997) and writing his own

version, *Tushyman*. Here again, Max's parents' conception of what counts as literature enabled Max to connect personal interest with a variety of types of narrative text. Canadian researchers have noted that this harnessing of personal interest is highly important for engaging boys with literacy (Blair & Sanford, 2004; Sokal, Katz, Adkins, Gladu, Jackson-Davis, & Kussin, 2005), and lends credence to Blair and Sanford's (2004) suggestion that finding ways to bring the out-of-school literacy practices of boys into the school curriculum, or "morphing literacy" (p.452) through the tapping of personal interest, incorporation of action, insurance of success, and being mindful of fun and purpose may go a long way toward keeping boys reading for a variety of purposes.

#### *Reading with Peers*

On the cusp of his intermediate school years, the importance of peers in Max's literate practices is evident. Max reported that he did not actually read with his friends, in school or out of school. However, there is ample evidence of Max's frequent participation in literacy events with his peers: a peer-to-peer system of apprenticeship. Not only is this practice frequent, it was a source of great pride and enjoyment for Max. All the examples of co-constructed texts discussed by Max were, to varying degrees, undertaken with peers. The fact that Max spent time engaged in literate activity with his peers, outside of school hours, lends support to the contention that peers play an "integral role ... in young children's literacy learning at home" (Kendrick, Anderson, Smythe, & MacKay, 2003, p. 252), a conclusion drawn from a study of first- and second-grade children, but nonetheless applicable to Max and his friends in the third grade as they continued to take an active role in each other's literate practice. The way in which Max and one friend planned to turn the action of play into a co-constructed text is one such example. Though Max did, in the end, write *Souls of Swords* by himself, the discussion around turning the game into a written story is a powerful example of peer-to-peer apprenticeship. The cartoon writing, which began with their *Tushyman* series in grade one and carried on into the third grade with the refining of their cartooning skills, is another example of peer apprenticeship. Although participants shifted in this peer-



apprenticeship system, there is nonetheless strong evidence of its existence.

#### *Gender and Family Literacy*

The findings in this study concur with Nutbrown and Hannon's (2003) family literacy study, which found that fathers play an important role in the literacy development of the children. Owen's prominent role in the system of apprenticeship to literate practice experienced by Max may lend support to a particular explanatory theory regarding the gender gap in literacy achievement reported by many Western nations (see Gambell & Hunter, 2000). The Division of Family Labor theory (Solsken, 1993) suggests that children reproduce their home experiences in their school literacy learning. Some studies are beginning to show the impact of the attitude of significant male role models toward reading as one of the most decisive factors in determining the attitudes of male children toward reading (Cartwright & Marshall, 2001, cited in Sokal, 2002). This certainly appears to be the case with this family; however, Max's mother's role in his literacy development is by no means negligible. As demonstrated in the data, Max's literate practice, while undoubtedly robustly shaped by his father's participation in the apprenticeship process, may be more accurately characterized as apprenticeship through guided participation into participatory appropriation through a range of cultural influences, those of his mother and father, as well as his peers, his extended family, and institutions such as preschool, school, daycare, and Cub Scouts: influences that encompass both male and female role models.

Issues of gender emerge when looking at the "boys only" book club Max participates in one lunch hour per week. Such groups are often premised on the line of thinking, present in some educational circles, that boys learn differently from girls and therefore their development is best facilitated in gender segregated situations (Sax, 2005). Reasoning such as this may have formed part of the rationale for the librarian's offering of the segregated club, although Kay observes that it was concern over boys' reading skills lagging behind girls' in Max's school that gave impetus to starting the club. It may be that such a club made participating in literate practice an acceptable or possibly a high-status

activity for the boys who took part in it. However, the gendered nature of the club, which was concerning to Max's father, is also problematized by others in the literacy research community (Foster, et al., 2001; Martino, 2003). It remains to be seen whether conducting boys' literacy clubs is helpful to their literacy development as a collective or whether it is a practice that merely fuels the gender regulatory functions in educational practice that progressive education seeks to eradicate (Young & Brozo, 2001).

#### *Out-of-School Literacy*

Time spent engaged with reading outside school hours is a characteristic of most good readers (Anderson, et al., 1988). Max's engagement with texts outside school and his above-average reading ability certainly seem to support this research. However, much of the literate practice in which Max so enthusiastically engaged did not revolve around literacy as it was typically practised in his classroom. This discrepancy may be a function of the questions asked in the interviews with Max, because his mother reported that the literacy instruction practised by his teachers has always encompassed a wide range of literate activity. Because Max made negligible reference to classroom literacy activities in our discussions, it may be important to ask whether this phenomenon signals the genesis of the kind of disjuncture often seen between out-of-school reading interests and the types of in-school reading adolescents are expected to participate in. Might the disjuncture begin much earlier than the adolescent years when, as appears to be the case with Max, as early as the third grade, out-of-school literate activity had greater power to captivate, motivate, and function as the medium for active participation in literate practice?

#### CONCLUSION

This case study has demonstrated some of the ways one child's literacy development is apprenticed through a range of community members, whose roles must be celebrated and supported. It adds to an understanding of the role of storybook reading in one middle-class family's literate practice by noting intertextual or dialogic links that appear to emanate from the practice of engaging in the bedtime story

ritual. This study suggests that the way his family views literature and what they did with these texts played an important role in Max's literacy development: his parents' stance provided a springboard for their son to expand his literate practice into wider community constellations. The kinds of literate activities that served to engage Max with literacy are shown here to be those that spring from personal interest and that incorporate the active play in which he and his peers engaged.

This study of the particular literacy practices of one family, focusing on the eldest son, is situated in nature and not generalizable to all populations. Nonetheless, the study highlights the possibilities of considering the strong positive role played by peers and the wider community beyond the family and school in the literacy development of young boys. It also encourages literacy scholars to think broadly in terms of the types of text they consider helpful for boys' literacy development. Finally, it raises questions about the genesis of the adolescent disjuncture between in-school and out-of-school literacy. As researchers concentrate on the active nature of their participation in literacy practices, which often stand outside of mainstream classroom literacy practices, they may find that other boys and their families are similarly engaged in rich and meaningful literacy practices.

#### *Further Research*

The role of peers in the development of boys' literate practice requires further investigation. Although Gregory (2001) documents the synergy between siblings acting as literacy teachers for each other and advocates that family literacy initiatives tap this rich resource, the numerous ways that Max and his peers mediated each others' literate practice suggests that family literacy research may find peer apprenticeship to be an important arrangement to investigate. Teachers will also want to capitalize upon these literate relationships.

Additionally, on a methodological note: when investigating children's literate activity with peers, literacy scholars need to be careful with their questioning. If they employ narrow conceptions of literacy, e.g., framing literacy as reading, as I did when first asking Max about reading with friends, they may receive answers that belie the reality of what is taking place in children's literate practice. This observation may

be particularly important for boys whose literate practices may not align themselves with mainstream classroom practices. Researchers must frame their research and their questioning of children so that at minimum, writing and drawing are seen as literate practices. Only through broadening their conception of literacy will literacy scholars begin to generate strong conclusions in the study of boys' literacy.

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## Appendix A

Sample of Data Analysis Matrix based on Rogoff, 1995

Extending Genres of Choice into Personal Writing (Literacy Practice)			
	Event/Activity	Location	Participant(s)
Apprentice-ship	1. Parents personal philosophy regarding "good literature"	1. Home	1. Mum, Dad, their own parents, societal expectations, guidelines regarding children's reading materials
	2. Read <i>Captain Underpants</i> series (2-3 years earlier) with parents	2. Home	2. Max, Mum, Dad
	3. Many of Max's friends have read <i>Captain Underpants</i> series with their parents	3. Friends homes	3. Max's friends, their parents
Guided Participation	1. Read <i>Captain Underpants</i> series independently	1. Home	1. Max
	2. Discuss <i>Captain Underpants</i> with friends	2. Home, friends' homes, school	2. Max, friends
Participatory Appropriation	1. Design and write <i>Tushyman</i> series of stories	1. School (in-door recess)	1. Max, friends
	2. Incorporate some of the language of <i>Captain Underpants</i> in <i>Three Pigs Adventures</i>	2. Home	2. Max