

**A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Children and Their Families in the  
Stanley Cup Reading Program**

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by

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## **Abstract**

This narrative inquiry began with my own experience as an elementary reading teacher, and more specifically, as a teacher who implemented a reading program based on the experiences of children and community. As such, it begins with queries into the experiences of three specific children and their families in the Stanley Cup Reading Program.

Through approximately three conversations per participant over the course of four months, several big ideas began to emerge in the research. These were: Identity Making, Intergenerational Reading, Familial Curriculum Making, Curriculum Making, Community Building, and Reading as an act of Belonging.

The significance of this research to teachers outside of reading instruction has multiple applications. These include the necessity to plan school programming according to the specific needs of families and communities in order to foster respectful cooperation between home and school, to be intentional about classroom spaces by incorporating children's out-of-school experiences inside the classroom, to acknowledge children's experiences in authentic and meaningful ways, and to implement academic programming that builds skills and confidence which in turn – builds identity.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Reflecting on my Changing Teacher Identity: Narrative Beginnings**

*When I was first hired as a teacher I began in mostly middle years classrooms; assigned a hodgepodge of classes ranging from Home Economics to Social Studies on top of a full complement of grades 6-9 English Language Arts. I enjoyed this type of teaching assignment – mostly for the English Language Arts component, but also because of the age of children I was assigned. Teaching this level of youth made sense to me. There were people who looked at me as though I had lost my mind when I told them I taught teenagers. I would admit that yes, they had a bit of an egocentric attitude and that they could be extremely emotional. But, they also used their egocentricity to push for changes they wanted to see made, their emotions to feel with depth and sincerity, and their uniqueness to dream large. I always felt that as much as I was teaching subject matter I loved, such as Shakespeare, crafting a persuasive argument and making piecrust in the occasional practical and implied arts class, I was also building lasting relationships that counted for as much, if not more than what I was teaching. I knew I made a difference and that the connections the youth and I created, mattered. When my dad passed away my students were there for me in an important way. When some of the first group of youth I ever taught got their drivers' license, I was their first phone call. When another group graduated, I was their guest speaker. In short, as much as I was occasionally frustrated by teenage angst, I was equally charmed by it and considered myself lucky to teach this age group.*

*I happily stayed caught up in my job and all things literature in the middle years wing of the school, oblivious to the rumblings going on in the elementary end. It wasn't until later on that I began to understand that a teacher had lost his job, parents were mad that their children seemed to be academically behind, and administration was left to deal with the fallout. In*

*particular - parents were upset over their children who didn't seem to reading at an appropriate level. Parents frequently complained their children did not seem to be spending any time reading, writing, or doing work that they felt pertained to the advancement of reading and writing skills such as phonics, spelling, or other such related work. Further to this, parents were frustrated that there never seemed to be any books coming home with their children and that their children simply did not spend any time reading or express any sincere desire to read. Finally, the largest and most frequent complaint by parents was that the children were not thriving in an environment marked by chaos and little to no classroom instruction.*

*At the end of the school year I was informed that I would no longer be teaching in my current assignment. My first thought was that I might be able to drop Science or Physical Education that wasn't really up my alley or that I would now be responsible for high school English. Imagine my surprise when I was told that I was going to be the new grade three and four teacher? I was upset. Horrified even. I did not ask for that. What did I know about little kids other than that they seemed to tattle, cry, and most certainly would not be able to understand what I was used to teaching? Perhaps it was unfair to feel this way. But I couldn't help it. I had never spent any significant time in the elementary grades as a preservice teacher, didn't have any young cousins, nephews, or nieces, and no siblings younger than me. To sum up, I had no experience with young children other than to see them in public spaces where I hadn't necessarily seen them at their best. The only personal experience I had was my own in elementary school and which to me was mostly miseducative...I much preferred my middle and high school experiences.*

*The bad news kept coming. I was informed that I would be teaching a split grade with 31 students. I was told to expect three quarters of my students to be reading at significantly below*

*grade level – some as low as grade one – and many students to be on special program plans. It would be my job to “fix the problem,” get them reading back at grade level, and do so within the year. It didn’t seem to matter that I didn’t have experience with this age group, with teaching students how to read, that I felt overwhelmed, or that I was largely unhappy with the whole situation. I felt like everything was thrown into my lap and I was supposed to be a miracle cure on a deadline.*

*I remember, over the summer writing to all of my students and telling them that together we could expect to accomplish great things over the course of the year. Inside I was wondering if this might wishful thinking and speculating how in the world I was actually going to accomplish anything at all when I didn’t even know where to start. I began to panic even as I was planning the year – all I really had was the curriculum to go on (because I didn’t have any real experience in these grades) and I didn’t feel like it was much help. I didn’t really know where the kids were at without having spent time with them and having actively taught them – so how could I effectively plan? I had to turn in a year plan, and I did, but it was just a plan of units I was expected to cover and things that I hoped to accomplish in theory. What happened over the year turned into a much larger education for all of us - the children I taught, their parents, and me - than what was written in that plan. At the same time I was panicking and wondering how I could ever hope to meet this challenge, I was also oddly invigorated. After all, I enjoyed a challenge. But - how in the world was I going to meet this one?*

### **Positioning the literacy problem as beginning with identity**

I knew that the children I taught needed support in reading and I knew that administration expected me to turn the problem around. I just was not altogether sure how to do that –

especially with students who already by grade 3 and 4, were largely disinterested in reading and who had classified themselves as nonreaders; especially those students who struggled with reading the most. I completed the DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) testing in early fall so that I had something concrete to report to parents at interview time, and was shocked at my findings – though I should have been prepared for a multitude of low test scores from what I had been told. Seeing the quantitative data in black and white was different than having only opinion and speculation to go on. It was October and the clock was ticking. Parents would be asking what my plan was to help their children. Administration would be checking in to see if I had made progress. I was my own worst critic – I knew I had been selected to help these children, but no existing program or anything I had tried up until that point had made a large enough impact on the children’s reading scores, interest to improve, or desire to read. Looking back to my own experience as a young student in school, I knew that without my mom to help me with reading at home, I would have struggled with the skill. I remembered reading programs to be mechanistic, had little to do with my personal experiences, and were almost always outside of my personal interests. Without having been able to make authentic connections to what I read, the possibility of genuine reading was not possible. By this I mean, that for children, once authentic connections are made, they are able to do more than just interpret text. They are able to comprehend, engage, interpret, internalize, and be involved in a host of other educative experiences that go hand-in-hand with reading and literacy. As a teacher of reading, I have found the same thing to be true as I did as a student. I cite lack of engagement with the materials provided, lack of enthusiasm with the overall idea of reading in general, students believing they cannot read, ‘one more program won’t help’ attitudes, lack of familial connection, not enough time for implementation of programming in classrooms, and a host of other similar reasons.

Perhaps all of these reasons can be traced back to children not connecting with the material in meaningful ways and not seeing themselves as readers.

When looking beyond a personal perspective to a national scale, statistics support that literacy programs have not adequately reached Canadian children in meaningful and effective ways. In Canada alone it was estimated that “four in ten high school youth have insufficient reading skills. Two in ten university graduates, five in ten adults, and six in ten immigrants also have insufficient literacy skills... While both levels of government are engaged in literacy programs, there is little evidence that it is working” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2011). The Canadian Council on Learning published a report which stated: “By 2031, more than 15 million Canadian adults – three million more than today – will have low literacy levels. The number of Canadian adults with low literacy levels will increase by 25 per cent in the next two decades creating a “literacy dilemma” if the problem isn’t addressed immediately” (Excellence in Literacy Foundation, n.d.).

New forms of educational research can be used to give different possibilities of closing this reported ‘literacy dilemma.’ In particular, narrative inquiry, a view that human experience is what makes the world around us able to be interpreted in meaningful ways, can be utilized (Connelly & Clandinin, 1992) to understand the experience of literacy by individuals. It seems to me, as Connelly and Clandinin’s (1992) research revealed, and as my own experience as a child and teacher have proven, that literacy programming that utilizes children’s personal experiences can make the process of reading more engaging, interesting, and meaningful. Not only can teachers be aware of and utilize personal experiences of the children they teach to make literacy more engaging, but they can be aware that it is through children’s experiences with literacy that their literate identities are constructed. Lin (2008) as cited in Moje & Luke (2009) said that

“Identity labels can be used to stereotype, privilege, or marginalize readers and writers as ‘struggling’ or ‘proficient’, as ‘creative’ or ‘deviant’” (p. 416). It is these identity labels that impact the type of person a child is, becomes, and sees themselves both in the classroom and in the future (Moje & Luke, 2009). When literacy gaps are present in the classroom, it is a teacher’s responsibility to first accept the idea “that learning literacy is more than simply practicing skills or transferring processes from one head to another. Learning, from a social and cultural perspective, involves people in participation, interaction, relationships, and contexts, all of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and others, identify, and are identified” (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 416). Once the teacher understands that the reading struggle in the classroom is more than a literacy dilemma, but more so a larger issue of identity, then meaningful work can begin.

## CHAPTER TWO

### My Research Wonder and the Supporting Literature

#### Positioning Literacy in the Community

The majority of the children in the school population where I work play hockey competitively (both boys and girls), often playing for local, provincial, and recreational teams. It is a major pastime and almost every family is involved in the sport from early fall right into late spring with some families enrolling their children into summer camps as well. Games and practices often take precedence over school initiatives, homework, and events. This is not seen as an anomaly amongst the parents; this is viewed as completely normal. After all, several hockey legends have been born and raised in this town – hockey is simply a way of life.

Hockey, then, was clearly the personal connection I needed and used to help make meaning in literacy. I figured, why not take the thing that is most meaningful outside of school and use it in school in their reading programming? It took a little while, but – with the help of the children - eventually a literacy program attentive to this community and familial interest was created. The program, which was called “The Stanley Cup Reading Program” (SCRP) and its guiding principles, were crafted entirely to parallel the National Hockey League. I felt that the SCRCP would help the children be more successful with literacy in school. I could see that children needed something to relate to that would engage them in the process of reading. The SCRCP had the annual potential to turn around low reading scores through engagement in reading, building positive reading identity, and allow for children to create meaningful curriculum – all through a team-building approach – or positive milieu. Family literacy, defined as “parents, children, and other family members learning together and in their community” (North West Territories Literacy Council, 2004), occurred through the SCRCP. Avid hockey families would

help their children at home with an allotted twenty minutes of reading per night (the length of a hockey period). However, the SCRP also helped bring the lives and experiences of families into the school subject of literacy in a way that it typically had not been attempted before in my current school milieu.

### **My Research Puzzle Defined**

Narrative inquirers must continually inquire into their experiences before, during, and after each inquiry in order to honor the reflexive and reflective nature of the methodology that is narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). Knowing this, it became important for me to write about and inquire into my own past experiences. Autobiographical writing, effectively reaching back into my experiences in the grade 3 and 4 combined classroom, allowed me to both understand and name my research puzzle. By attending to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space in which my own story has unfolded, I could understand my research with deeper clarity. William Chapman (1979) as quoted in Basso (1996) said, “The past is at its best when it takes us to places that counsel and instruct, that show us who we are by showing us where we have been, that remind us of our connections to *what happened here*” (p. 4).

My experiences as an elementary reading teacher, and more specifically, a teacher who implemented a reading program based on children and community experience, allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of identity, curriculum making, and milieu. My research puzzle then was to inquire into the experiences of children and their families in a literacy program shaped around a community’s interest. Two broader wonders were to inquire into ways that school and familial curriculum making (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011) could interconnect through reading programming and how home and school literacy experiences with reading helped shape children’s identities as readers. My wonderings extended to the ways in which classroom

community could be fostered through reading programming and what intergenerational implications exist for children of parents who are readers or non-readers. Given that this is an inquiry into identity making in relation to a reading program I became interested in diverse experiences, not only the experiences of children I understood as successful. How did children and families understand reading identity? How did the program support them or interrupt their identity making? What insights would families provide that would further shape my understanding of SCRIP in the lives of children?

### **Identity making in relation with literature**

I always enjoyed literature. Once I mastered the skill of reading by about grade three, I began to enjoy reading and became a voracious reader. I found that behind even the most boring cover, I learned something new, went somewhere I had never been before, discovered a new word or world, made friends with unique characters, and always wanted to know more once I had turned the last page. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was involved in the process of identity making around being a child and a reader (Huber, Keats Whelan, & Clandinin, 2003). As a teacher, I now understand that not every child appreciates literature. This can be for many reasons – the most significant in my experience, being that by the time a child gets to grade five, if reading has been difficult, they generally do not want to spend any more of their time with books. They have ceased to be interested because the task has always been hard. Likely, this disinterest happened much earlier than even grade five, but their resistance to literature is now manifested in different and more obvious ways than when they were smaller children. The driving force behind the SCRIP was not for children to find and read books that were all about hockey. Rather, the SCRIP aimed to meet children wherever they were on the literature scale and

get them started on a process of reading and identity-making using hockey as their motivator. This process happened in their homes and the community – not just in school.

Being taught literacy skills in order to become good readers as well as exposure to literature helped the children begin to form identities around reading. Teaching and building reading skills was primarily taught at school, while exposure to literature happened both in the classroom as well as the community at large:

The routine of reading aloud provides a needed sense of structure and stability to even chaotic days... Children growing up in today's fast-paced, disconnected world are in need of family customs and legacies. Although we tend to associate traditions with elaborate holiday celebrations, these can and should be an important part of our day to day lives...reading with your children provides the opportunity to shape your family's heritage by establishing traditions. These include when reading takes places as well as the books that are shared. (Giles & Wellhousen, 2005, p. 297)

Reading taking place in familial places and supported by family, can be understood as familial curriculum making. Familial curriculum making in support of a reading program is usually school curriculum making taken up by families. This is the typical form of at-home reading programs. The SCRIP differed in that it was shaped by interests outside of school, one that for many children began in a place outside of school, within the family. Familial curriculum making is “an account of parents'/families' and children's lives together in homes and communities where the parents and families are an integral part of the curricular process in which families, children/learners, subject matter, and home and community milieu are in dynamic interaction” (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011, p. 7-8). The intertwining of these curriculum-making worlds for children is a life making process in which identity making became

a central part. Identity making then, specifically around reading, concerns creating deeper understandings where teachers and family engage with children about who they are and who they are becoming as readers. I used the term identity making in order to understand that identities are always in the making; children's identities are not fixed. The SCRP, and by extension myself as a teacher, did not give children identities, rather they were supported to shape an identity around reading.

### **Reading is an act of Belonging**

In order for children to become better readers, they must be taught reading skills, have time to build those skills, and be exposed to quality literature. However, none of these can happen without assisting children as they progress through increasingly more difficult tasks. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) as quoted in Huber and Clandinin (2004) wrote that scaffolding is a process that “enables a child or novice to solve a task or achieve a goal that would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (p. 146). Huber and Clandinin (2004) used this definition as the starting point for their research where they used literature “to create spaces for children to scaffold new stories to live by, new identity stories” (p. 146). I used the SCRP in conjunction with teaching reading strategies and introducing new literature to my students and did so with the understanding that scaffolding would be an “intertwining of teaching and learning” (p. 146), keeping in mind that students do not just encounter literacy in school. James Gee (2007) as quoted in Harste (2014) wrote “children today are learning more literacy outside of school than inside” (p. 90). Knowing this, I understood that families needed to be involved in children's scaffolding process as well. Utilizing familial interactions as well as academic was a way for children to develop their reading identities as positively as possible. Kelly (1997) in Kaplan-Cadiero (2002) said that “Students involved in a critical literacy curriculum read the world and the word, by using

dialogue to engage texts and discourses inside and outside the classroom” (p. 377). It is important to note that the SCRP was not a critical literacy program but that some of the values of critical literacy were taken into account when putting the program together. It is in children’s everyday lives, with their families, and in opportunities taken at school, that children best learn “to read any text...from the perspective of their lives in relation to their present [and personal] experience” (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2002, p. 378).

Although the students involved in the SCRP were from predominantly white, middle-classed homes and not marginalized, they were also in upper-elementary school and deficient of proper reading skills. Deficiencies in reading skill are what engender a sense of belonging and can position children on the outside of their learning community. As Norton and Toohey (2002) in Moje & Luke (2000) pointed out, “Both what and how one reads and writes can have an impact on the type of person one is recognized as being and on how one sees oneself” (p. 416). So while at the same time that the SCRP aimed to allow for reflection and conversations with children about change and empowerment for both self and peers, it also aimed to help students become fully successful in reading the world. Its goal was to help children connect what they were reading to their personal experiences, acquire the necessary reading skills to read the world well, reflect on their journey with each other, and most of all gain a sense of belonging in their academic community.

### **How does the SCRP Work?**

In my classroom, reading strategies and literature were taught on a daily basis (or all year) and for six months of the year, or approximately the length of the regular hockey season, the SCRP. This schedule allows the children to settle into a new year of school, new general classroom expectations, and daily literacy work. When the children begin their own hockey

season, which generally coincides with that of the National Hockey League (NHL), we begin talking about the SCRP, its purpose, and negotiate how it will run for the season in our classroom. Generally, this is from approximately November to April. Many details are decided on at the beginning of the year, while other details are negotiated as the season progresses – much like changes are made to NHL teams in order to maximize each person on the team’s optimum potential. Literally everything about the SCRP has been crafted around the National Hockey League and has been negotiated as a class. Its basic principles, which have also been crafted as a class (and re-negotiated from year to year), are below.

- 1) In our ‘NHL’ there are 4 teams – (more or less depending on the population of a class in any given year). Each child must read individually, but works together to ‘score’ as a team. The players on each team work together to come up with a mutually acceptable team name. (Team naming is a place for critical literacy to happen. This is because the name the children choose for their team must be mutually agreed upon by all the children in that team and be a name that values diversity and promotes a just society. Before naming, we have a discussion about team names and the cultural connections and connotations related to that name. For example, The Chicago Blackhawks and other teams named in like manner are discussed and we talk about whether or not that team name and logo support human rights, equitable treatment of all groups and cultures and if they promote injustice. This discussions transfers into art when we create goalie masks and create logos. It transfers further into current events such as when the Bedford Road Redmen dropped their logo and changed their name to Bedford Road Bears.)
- 2) The object is to get to the other team’s net first - on the ice rink game board. The net represents a total monthly team score as decided by how many people there are on a team

x 20 minutes per night per individual – or as much reading as is negotiated by the class.

There are four sections on the rink as divided by red and blue lines and nets. The four sections also represent four weeks – typical for the average month, or the length of a ‘game.’ Titles of literature and page numbers are recorded along with time.

- 3) The center line represents the half-way mark.
- 4) The children in the room decide before the program starts on how to deal with ‘penalties’ and ‘game misconducts.’ This is negotiated yearly depending on class consensus. For example, if a player misses one night of reading in a week this is known as a ‘penalty’. Rather than the standard two minutes in the penalty box, the whole team is deducted 100 reading minutes from the team’s overall score. The other players on the team can cumulatively make this time up for the player who missed if they have read more than their 20 minutes per night.
- 5) If a student misses more than one night of reading in a week, this is known as ‘game misconduct’. Rather than be thrown out of the game as you would in the NHL, this person’s whole team is moved back to the first major red or blue line behind them. No matter how much is read by other members, the whole team must move back. The object is to get all students reading each and every night. Captains and assistant captains as well as the rest of the team work together to bolster the team as a whole. Though they all read as individuals, they function as a unit. A locker room feeling is the goal. Captains and assistant captains make positive contacts home, encourage the player who missed reading, and find ways to support. Note: Players who are sick, have commitments that prohibit reading, et cetera can make arrangements with the “owner” (parents and teacher) to not have a misconduct. Responsibility to self and team is important.

- 6) When a game misconduct occurs, the opposing team has an opportunity to score an extra 100 minutes. They may do this by appointing one member of their team to read out-loud one paragraph that the teacher chooses. If read error-free, the whole team will receive a bonus 100 points. The children know that the one paragraph will be chosen by the teacher and that the child chosen to read will be drawn randomly from a hat. However, the draw is not random and neither is the reading selection. The book is a selection that would have been worked on in class so that mastery is achievable and the draw is created with children of similar ability. Though the children are not privy to this information, when they are successful they can be encouraged.
- 7) Children can individually appear on the “3 Stars” wall in the hallway by getting ‘assists’. They do this by performing extraordinarily well. This can take many forms. For example: reading more than the designated amount of minutes per week, reading on the weekends when reading is not mandatory, being an exemplary team player by helping another player get their reading minutes in during the school day if they know they will not have time at home because of a busy evening, even having an ‘aha’ literacy moment in class. This public recognition is a great way for students to feel like they have been successful as an individual – outside of their ‘team.’ This action is akin to watching their favorite players perform well on the ice and then seeing this recognition of performance on their television screens. For children in the SCRP who have their names on the “3 Stars” Wall it helps to shape both individual and community spirit. When a child sees their picture posted they are not just proud of themselves, but this pride is showcased by team and whole class pride and positive reaction.

- 8) The first two teams to ‘score’ the total minutes of reading get their names on the Stanley Reading Cup. These cups are created in teams as art projects and are great team bonding projects preceding the start of the reading program. Although extra minutes are appreciated by those who read them, a team’s minutes are calculated strictly by the minutes that are required at the end of each round. When NHL playoffs occur and we have a reading celebration in our room, I calculate each player’s score (time read) and they receive a personalized certificate with their individual amount of minutes throughout the entire program, a book, and a bookmark with a quotation about reading. All team’s share in a celebratory cake NHL themed cake and any perks that NHL teams have sent over the course of the program. For example: a class set of signed pucks from The Winnipeg Jets.
- 9) Reading sheets (which tell how many minutes read and what book) must be handed in every Monday for calculation unless Monday is a holiday. Sheets must include a parent or guardian signatures. The form can be emailed or sent electronically by parents or guardians to the teacher. Calling home for a missing form does not count. Responsibility is key!

It was important to make families aware that school time is school time, but that the time they spend reading with their child was much appreciated. Hopefully the 20 minutes spent with literature can become enjoyable time together. A letter outlining the program and its negotiated rules is always sent home before the program starts if they have not already been informed of it at fall interviews. Parents are periodically apprised of their child’s overall progress by telephone over the course of the program, following the end of the program, and after spring DRA results.

Though it could be easy to see to view the SCRP as only a reward system, it was not designed that way. As Jongsma (1991) pointed out, critical literacy programs aim to develop collective and democratic voices where focus is placed on learners' experiences and where classrooms depend on increased responsibilities for learners (p. 518 & 519). These applications, along with children seeing identity within a community as a reward in and of itself was central to the SCRP.

Educators in other communities can see correlations with this research to their own local experience. For example, educators that live in a community that has a heavy emphasis on baseball could choose to create a reading program where all aspects focus on the National Baseball League, where the teacher tries to partner with baseball teams, and where local baseball players come in to speak to the students on the importance of reading in their lives, et cetera. Community interests do not need to be limited to sports related experiences. Reading programming could be centered around community interests of agriculture, horticulture, woodworking, beading, et cetera. No matter the local community interest, the teacher could focus the program around that community experience.

### **Supporting theory and literature: A Full Circle**

#### **Connecting Beyond the Classroom through Experience**

It has always been my belief that what happens in familial places can be a way to further academics in school. The teacher that can effectively use the familial interests of the children inside the classroom can more deeply engage them. John Dewey (1938) believed in capitalizing on experience. He believed that experience does not simply go on inside a person, but that

experience is what influences the formation of attitudes, desires, and purposes and that each experience has educational impact. Dewey felt that it was up to the educator to “be aware of the general principal of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions...[and] also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth” (p. 40). Dewey believed that teachers should know “how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile” (p. 40). Teachers have to become acquainted with communities in order to shape schooling to be responsive to children’s contexts, “a system of education based upon the necessary connection of education based upon experience must...if faithful to its principle...take these things constantly into account” (Dewey, 1938, p. 40).

Further to Dewey’s thoughts on experiences, Squire’s (2006) work, based specifically on gaming, showed that there were connections that could be made to any student interest that happened outside of the school building. Squires wrote, “A deeper look into gaming reveals a plethora of experiences available for children that are more or less unknown in school” (p. 19). Squire further argued, “educators (especially curriculum designers) ought to pay closer attention to videogames because they offer designed experiences, in which participants learn through a grammar of doing and being” (p. 19). Games “provide a set of experiences, with the assumption being that learners are active constructors of meaning with their own drives, goals, and motivations. Most good games afford multiple trajectories of participation and meaning making” (p. 24). In the way that games afford learning through experience, so too do other, familial experiences. I believe that regardless of whether it is video games, 4H, surfing, or hockey, using the experiences that children are engaging in with their families or in school can open up ways

for children to shape and sustain academic identity making. This allows for a deeper experiential learning, enjoyment in subject matter, and more opportunity to co-construct curriculum.

There are significant connections between using familial experiences to further academic meaning and identity. Carrol and Loumidis's (2001) study, found that children who participated in significantly more physical activity outside of school also perceived themselves to be more competent at physical activity. Their findings can easily relate to reading. The children with whom I work, who participated significantly in more reading experiences with their families, perceived themselves to be competent readers with stronger skills and identities as readers, in comparison to those with significantly less reading experiences with families. Carrol and Loumidis' study also showed that children are active constructors of meaning and they create identities for themselves before ever setting foot in school. The experiences that they have can be used positively by teachers as Squire (2006) suggested by being true to their lived experiences. The role of experiences in children's lives then, can be seen as a key component in their identity formation.

### **Identity: A Portrait in Process**

By the time children reach grade three and four, they have had three or four years of reading instruction at school in which they have storied themselves as successful readers – or not. They have also had ample time to realize that they have a reading identity that others have storied them with. These stories create a reading identity largely in place by the time I begin instructing them. In narrative terms, identity is understood as ‘stories to live by.’ These stories to live by “define who we are, what we do, and why” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Dewey (1938) said that people are constantly interacting with others, and these continuously interactive experiences change both people and the contexts in which they interact (Caine, Estefen, &

Clandinin, 2013). The story we have of ourselves is composed over time and recognizes the multiplicity of situations and experiences that we embody simultaneously. It is these multiple storylines we have of ourselves and that others have of us that create the complete understanding we come to have of ourselves (Huber & Whelan, 1999). By the time children have reached upper elementary school they have had ample opportunity for these continuous interactive experience with others which give them, not only a sense of self, but an academic identity as well. In short, our identity making abilities are formed by our stories to live by.

Knowing then, that identity making goes hand in hand with the stories children have of themselves and others have of them, links can be made to ability as well. “A person’s sense of efficacy, an individual’s belief about her capacity to perform a task including processes such as reading or writing, affects how well the person performs the task” (McCarthy, 2001, p. 122). How well a child believes him or herself to read is directly related to how well they will perform the actual task of reading. The children in the grade three/four room largely believed themselves to be incompetent readers. Though their reading levels were low, this did not mean that they were unable to read. What it did mean was that the children needed to believe that it was possible for them to be capable readers. Part of making this belief transition was by relating reading to hockey – something they could very much understand. For example: every adult who has become an NHL player did not start out playing NHL quality hockey. NHL players have to start at the local rink, go to every practice, and eventually play AA, AAA (levels of non-professional hockey), the world Hockey League (WHL), and so on. They never forget their equipment, they put in extra time on the ice if necessary, have achievable goals, coaches, trainers, and other professionals to help and support, et cetera. When the children and I talked through examples

like this and related it all back to reading, they could see that they too had the potential to become great at reading. Like hockey, reading is a combination of identity with skill.

Not only is skill tied to identity, an individual's story to live by is embedded within social, cultural, historical, and social justice contexts. Who we are is shaped by how the world sees us (Erikson, 1968 in McCarthy, 2001). Identity is defined as "a complex, cultural construct varying across settings and associated with particular discourses (Gee, 1990 and Street, 1994 in McCarthy, 2001, p. 125). Understood narratively then, identity - one's story to live by - is shaped by time, place, and sociality.

As a teacher, it was important for me to realize that children come into my classroom already 'branded' by others by a host of factors – not just by the depth of skill they have at reading. Who they really are, how they really feel about themselves and how they story themselves as readers can be tied to their socially constructed identity. Gee (1990) in McCarthy (2001) explained that language is more than just a set of rules used to help people communicate with one another. Rather, language – or being literate – "is an identity kit that signals membership in particular groups" (p. 125). As I teach children, it is important to remember that I am just "in the midst of [students'] lives, and in the midst of institutional, social, familial, linguistic, and social narratives. I engage for a time, over time, with [children] either alongside them in the living of their lives and in their telling of stories, or only as they tell their stories" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 203).

Just as children's literate identity of themselves goes hand-in-hand to the membership status they obtain in their peer group, the peer group (or community) the child is in goes hand-in-hand with their identity. Nicholas (1997) stated:

Community-building must become the heart of any school improvement effort. Whatever else is involved – improving teaching, developing sensible curricula, creating new forms of governance, providing more authentic assessment, empowering teachers and parents, increasing professionalism – it must rest on a foundation of community-building. (p. 198).

If authentic curriculum making is to be engaged in, if positive reading identity is to be formed, and before out-of-school experiences can be utilized in meaningful ways – classroom community – or milieu must be created. This creation is done by both the teacher and youth and should occur in an atmosphere grounded in critique, reflection, and a quest for more equitable relationships and interactions. The teacher must model for children respect for differences, thoughtful problem solving and effective engagement with difficult issues (Stribling, 2014).

Building community and curriculum happen simultaneously through the SCRP and must continually be reflected on in an effort to form more positive connections than what was had prior. It was in the quest for team spirit, cooperation, and heart that individual learning is happening, participation in the learning community is occurring, children's reading identities are further being cemented and their personal experiences are being brought from outside of the classroom to inside and given academic significance.

### **Building Bridges of Knowledge**

For me, equal to experience, it was important to address what was taught and how it was taught in my classroom. Children do not always have a lot of choice over their found

communities<sup>1</sup>. By this, I mean that they do not often have a choice of where they attend school, who they attend school with, and what classes they take, especially in elementary school. It became increasingly important to me that I attend with much consideration to not just what I teach, but why I teach it, and how I teach it.

Curriculum making is based on the work of Dewey, Jackson, and Schwab, and is a narrative term that attends to these scholars' work by Clandinin and Connelly (1988). Curriculum making attends to the idea that all teachers and their students come to school with wide and varied experiences and that these experiences shape learning opportunities and is further based on the work of Aoki (1993).

The Ministry publishes documents, known as the curriculum guides, which specifically outline what I must teach over the course of the school year. I try to understand that children come to school in the midst of their own unique experiences and also bring their own world into which other children have opportunity to travel. In order to support children to be world travelers as Lugones (1987) suggested, I must be constantly cognizant that both the children and I plan and live curriculum every day in the classroom.

Though the mandated curriculum, which is typically impersonal and originates outside of the classroom such as Ministry of Education or the school division office (Aoki, 1993) and “where students [and educators] become faceless others” (p. 265) I understood that curriculum could become something highly personalized for each individual and situation and when I purposefully made the transition from teaching what was strictly necessary to teaching to experience, I could become “an integral part of the curriculum constructed and enacted in

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<sup>1</sup> Lindemann Nelson's (1995) work speaks of both found and chosen communities. She distinguished the two in that *found* communities are those of place while *chosen* communities are those that an individual voluntarily forms or chooses to join.

classrooms” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1992, p. 363). In other words, it would only be at this point that the children and I could begin to create a curriculum that both adheres to what is Ministry mandated and what is important to the lives that they are living outside of school. In the grade three and four literature classroom with the SCRP, this transition occurred when children were able to co-create rules for the program, make reading teams, write personalized letters to the NHL, and so on as part of their reading program.

Joseph Schwab (1973), a scholar concerned with policy and implementation of curriculum, encouraged that curricular decisions be based on the four commonplaces of: teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu. These four commonplaces are intrinsically related and cannot be separated. For example, as the teacher in my classroom I had a deep understanding of the learners:

Their behavior and misbehavior in the classroom: what they take as “fair” or “unfair” in the course of teaching-learning: what rouses hopes, fears, and despairs with respect to learning: what the children are inclined to learn: what they disdain and what they see as relevant to their present and future lives, are better known by no one than the teacher. It is [me] who tries to teach them. It is [me] who lives with them for the better part of the day and the better part of the year. (Schwab, 1973, p. 245).

This quote spoke to more than just the significance of me knowing the children. It spoke to what underlies narrative inquiry itself: experience, relationship building, and stories created. The children and I spend a great deal of time together, begin to know one another, and then create stories based on our experiences together. It is these experiences over time that create reciprocal relationships. It helps to remember as Aoki (1993) alluded to that I as the teacher must intentionally involve the children in the curriculum making process. I can know the children well

and even have them help to co-create curriculum in a positive classroom atmosphere, but without the children being equally represented in this educational equation, curriculum is not meaningful nor co-constructed. It is important for me to understand that children are not invited to be co-composers of curriculum, but integral to its composition and therefore already present as part of the process.

Students can tell us things about the effects of what and how we teach which no others can. Second, their participation in curricular decision can provide a sense of proprietorship in their school lives, a realization that learning is something more than an arbitrary imposition, and that what they are asked to learn is more than the product of mere adult whim. (Schwab, 1973, p. 248).

Schubert (1986), also concerned with curriculum, believed that there are three curriculum orientations that an educator can fall under. These are: intellectual traditionalist, social behaviorist, and experientialist. The experientialist approach to curriculum holds that each individual's learning grows from his or her own experience. Schubert's (1986) ideas fit well under the narrative inquiry view of experience. This is because to be an experientialist educator, a teacher must consider student experience in what is taught – as well as enjoyment. I often ask myself, 'What would the children actually like to do?' I try my best to ask them and plan programming from there because I, like Schubert (1986) believe that, "Most of the time learning is fun if it is genuinely interesting to learners" (p.258). In relation to curriculum making, which is not a term Schubert uses, he stated,

In the daily life of teaching and learning, the teacher-student relationship is where curriculum is fashioned. Unfortunately too many teachers have learned to be

implementers of the ideas of others who are labeled experts, and too many students have learned to be receivers rather than creators of knowledge (p. 423).

Not only is learning what is enjoyable (when possible) important, but building relationships through curriculum is essential to what children experience at school. Aoki (1993) stated, “The curriculum-as-plan is the work of curriculum planners...which inevitably include their own interests and assumptions about ways of knowing and about how teachers and students are to be understood” (p. 202), but, my situation,

[i]s a site inhabited by students with proper names – like Andrew, Sarah, Margaret and Tom – who are...very human, unique beings. [I] know their uniqueness from having lived daily with them. And [I] know that their uniqueness disappears into the shadow when they are spoken of in the prosaically abstract language of the external curriculum planners who are, in a sense, condemned to plan for faceless people, students shorn of their uniqueness or for all teachers, who become generalized entities often defined in terms of generalized performance roles. (Aoki, 1993, p. 203).

The relationship the children and I created was essential to creating meaningful subject matter. Getting their input in how they learn and what they learn helps to make their learning not only of interest to them, but of deep and lasting meaning.

Adding to my repertoire of trying to be an educator that transforms education for her students and create what they learn in a co-constructed curriculum, I also adhered to Schubert’s (1986) idea of being an experientialist. I did this by involving a multitude of people including other educators, the children, families, community members, and individuals with particular curriculum knowledge where everyone acknowledges that they can both teach and learn from the

others in meaningful ways (Schubert, 1986). There is a saying that it is not always important to be “the sage onstage.” When considering curriculum making, it was very important to subscribe to this theory. “Within the context of the classroom...understanding of community rejects the idea that the [teacher] is necessarily more knowledgeable than the student, or that both parties should consider the [teacher] to be superior to the student in all aspects of their relationship” (Chee Keen Wong et al, 2013, p. 285). Belbase (2011) believed that teachers should shift their roles from simply being a transmitter of knowledge to one who motivates and engages students in activities and discussions relevant within the subjects of study. I consistently try to not just use the curriculum guides as a planned program of study, but use it to shape experience (Belbase, 2011). For example, the SCRP, utilized and capitalized on multiple ‘transmitters of knowledge’ and activities to construct effective experiences. These included but were not limited to: families helping children read at home, NHL administrators and players writing back to, Skyping with, and sending inspirational items to the children, local hockey players making guest read visits, and members of the community donating books. The larger community, which surrounded the children, helped them to further see the importance of literacy, see themselves as competent readers, and made curriculum relevant to their lives. Through these multiple perspectives, familial curriculum making was being accomplished, which could be in part understood as the process of a negotiated learning between the children, family, and community members as they interact[ed] in their home and community landscapes (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011).

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Methodology: Situating My Work in Narrative Inquiry**

This research was a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) into the stories to live by of the children in a class where I taught as they took up literacy work together. There are multiple connections between narrative inquiry and story,

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they are and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomena studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477)

Narrative inquiry occurs in the midst of storied lives and this research is grounded in the experiences of the children and their families in relation with literacy work. The experiences of the children involved with the SCRP, the families of the children, and myself as the teacher working alongside the children and their families were the foci of this research.

I was interested in the experiences, good or bad, of some of the children and families who were involved in the SCRP. Narrative inquiry allows for the experiences and lived stories of the participants to be the focal point of the research informing it in a holistic way. Bruner (2004) said that humans “are a species whose main purpose is to tell each other about the expected and the surprises that upset the expected, and we do that through the stories we tell” (p. 4). Field texts

(data) gathered in narrative inquiry research revealed both the expected and the unexpected because individual stories are being lived and told, and meaning was then created from those experiences through a process of retelling.

How is that meaning made? Narrative inquiry is a “collaboration between the researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Researchers cannot remove themselves from the inquiry, and inquire into their experiences alongside their participants (Clandinin, 2006). As a researcher, I have inquired into the experience of children whom I taught in my classroom as well as their families.

Inquiring into their experiences allowed me to attend to the research wonders of this project. Primarily: How did a reading program attentive to the experiences of children’s lives outside of school shape curriculum making experiences for children, families and teacher and the subsequent stories to live by, identities, of the children?

### **What does Narrative Inquiry do for Understanding Experience?**

Experience is the starting point for the narrative inquiry process which is grounded in Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience and subsequently shaped by Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) narrative view of experience. Dewey (1938) named the criteria of experience as interaction and continuity enacted in situations – this is echoed in narrative inquiry’s attention to temporality, place, and sociality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is the simultaneous exploration of temporality (description of a participant’s past, present, and future), space (specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of a place where the inquiry and events take place), and sociality (personal and social conditions of the inquirer and/or participant) (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry is a relational form of research with the researcher inevitably forming relationships with their participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). “The more focused on living the study, the more likely intense, intimate relations will develop among researchers and participants. It is possible to maintain distance, but it is difficult to do in long-term narrative inquiries of the living” (p. 482). Participants share their experiences with researchers through multiple methods including interviews, personal journals, stories, artifacts, conversations, and are captured by the researcher’s field notes.

The focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals’ experience, but also on the social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. Narrative inquirers study the individual’s experience in the world, and experience that is storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside one another, and writing and interpreting texts. (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 168)

With this in mind, I considered how the participant’s personal experiences would interact and interrelate to their social, cultural, and institutional stories. Each individual interview of each individual participant breathes life into the whole.

### **The Research Process**

This research was a narrative inquiry into the experiences of children and their parents who took part in the SCRP. Below is an outlined explanation of the research process for this project beginning with finding research participants to composing the final research text. Ethical considerations are also discussed.

## **Who are the Research Participants?**

The participants in this study were three middle years youth who experienced the SCRP in grade three/four and their mothers. The primary method of inviting the youth and their families to participate in this research was through personal and professional relationships built with them through my role as their teacher and community member. All of the participants lived in the community and youth were chosen because of their diverse experience with the SCRP. I included youth of all interests and engagement levels with the SCRP in order to shape a more complex understanding. It was not my intent to valorize SCRP but to understand it in relation to the youth. I interviewed participants three separate times over a four-month period in order to capture and understand their experiences.

As narrative inquirers we resist telling the good story, the story with beginnings and endings, with resolutions, and with illustrative powers. Life as it is lived is not neat, tidy, or formulaic. Nor does it easily fit within the confines and conventions of the good story... Instead being-in-relation guides our work and the stories of experience that arise from it. (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 583).

The three youth who were interviewed were all part of the program in its first year. I chose youth from this time period for several reasons. I would have lived alongside the students on a daily basis for a minimum of ten months and could ensure that they were part of the SCRP, but am not currently teaching them. Also, when students are distanced from the SCRP by maturity, they have the skill of backward thought and thoughtful reflection. It was my hope that the youth would be able to more meaningfully engage in the narrative process of reflecting on their experience given that time has passed. Lastly, having both taught and worked with the

youth in a non-teaching role as they moved out of my classroom, I have a strong level of familiarity and experience with them and their families.

### **Composing Field Texts**

Over the course of this inquiry, I attended to the stories and experiences of the youth as children and as familial participants. Attending to their experiences entailed listening to their narratives of experience when I met with each one personally. I recorded our conversations and at the same time, wrote field notes to coincide with those recorded conversations. This was the primary source of field texts. There were 18 planned conversations (three interviews per participant) ranging from thirty minutes to one hour; however, time needed was altered depending on the progression of the conversation and the lives of the participants. My participants were as follows: three students of differing success levels in reading and three family members (one for each of the students chosen) who took on reading responsibility with the child during the SCRP. The family members were all mothers. To assist in fluent dialogue, the parents and the youth were sometimes asked to jot down further thoughts and memories they had between planned conversations. I brought items to the planned conversations to facilitate discussion. These ‘memory box’ items such as photographs, letters of encouragement from sports teams, and other memorabilia were a “collection of items that trigger memories of important times, people, and events” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114).

### **Going from Field Text to Research Text**

Using narrative inquiry helped me to construct narratives of youth and families experiences. This research inquired into the experiences of the children (now youth) in a literacy program shaped around a community’s interest. This research further shows ways that

curriculum making, in relation with children and families, shapes school experience with reading and children's identities as readers. The research texts are the end result of the field texts and situate the experience of the participants within the larger social, cultural, and institutional narratives (Clandinin, 2013).

There is no final story that my research text will tell. "Understanding lives in motion creates openings for new relationships to emerge, for lives to unfold in unexpected ways, and for surprise and uncertainty to always be present" (Clandinin, 2013, p.205). Although I expected the research document structure to shift as the research progressed to potentially reveal new insights, its final product contains five specific chapters.

### **In The Midst**

A very important consideration when engaging in a narrative inquiry is the understanding that stories are always in the midst (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). When I began and completed research with participants, I understood the inquiry to be in the middle of their stories to live by which are continually being shaped and lived. Their lives and experiences have gone on prior to me engaging in the research process and will continue to go on now after the research is completed. As a narrative inquirer, I enter in the midst of the multiple stories of each participant, youth or adult, "Recognizing this also means that there will never be a final story and that each story and experience begs for a new story to be told, for the experience to be retold and also relived" (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, 175).

### **Relational Ethics**

Relational ethics must be considered when engaging in narrative inquiry. It is my duty to care for the stories of participants. Maintaining a relationship with my participants means being

constantly attentive to the ethical concerns and relational responsibilities of my work at all times. “The first responsibility of narrative inquirers is always to participants. The negotiations of entry and exit, as well as the representation of experience, are central ethical concerns” (Caine, Estefan & Caine, p. 579, 2013).

I used pseudonyms for the school and community I work in as well as the names of the youth and families I interviewed. Field notes, texts, narrative accounts, and all forms of final research texts were shared with the participants so they could verify their accounts. All of these details were shared with the participants before the start of the project through written and verbal communication and consent forms. I listened carefully and with respect to stories shared and as respectfully, and still in relationship, composed final research texts.

At all times I followed the University of Saskatchewan ethical guidelines to meet the institutional requirements for ethical work. This study was submitted for approval to the University of Saskatchewan’s ethic review committee.

### **The World at Large: Social Justifications**

Literacy is a life skill. The Ministry of Education in our province, in consultation with divisional representatives, has evaluated and correlated several leveled reading assessments currently in use across the province and established end-of-year benchmarks for Grades 1, 2, and 3. In the 2014-15 school year all school divisions have been asked to provide the reading level of each of their students in grades 1 to 3. Reading has become something highly assessed, but if a child or youth beyond grade 3 is not reading at grade level, has become largely disinterested with the reading process, and has storied him/herself as a non-reader, something must be done to

reverse this process. Teachers of children in the upper elementary classrooms should be able to look to other colleagues for ways to engage, ways to develop curriculum, ways to promote positive reading identities, and tools to promote positive classroom milieu. Beyond the direction set for reading instruction by the ministry I have a moral and ethical obligation (Maragalit, 2002) to help children be readers. We live in a society shaped by text that must be read and comprehended. Reading shapes success in many ways, identity is tied to reading, which can have a hand in this success.

There is a need to see that curriculum making does not only happen solely in classrooms, and school in general. Rather, curriculum making should be made visible in many places with many people in and out of schools (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). Children make meaning based on their unfolding understandings of themselves in their homes, school, and communities; their experiences move between these spaces. Every community has many teachers – though not all teachers are educators by trade. Programs like the SCRP, which allow for curriculum making and identity making to happen for children in familial places, must make visible and attend to both family and community.

In a time when teachers are searching for ways to make the mandated curriculum more engaging and inclusive, the SCRP is attentive to community interest, thus increasing enjoyment with the reading process. Though this programming ultimately meets mandated Ministry outcomes and indicators for literacy, the SCRP was co-created by the children and myself. Much choice and leadership is built into the program and as the program calls for changes, the children are integral to how those changes are implemented. The way the SCRP involves the children, families and community allows for children to begin to understand how curriculum is in relation with their lives. This is a space created for children to see curriculum as a tie to identity making,

to life writing, and as a way to be creative and engaged. Latta and Kim (2011) suggest that children, not just teachers, should be able to stray from that which is mandated. Once this shift occurs, children can begin to find out what is worth knowing for themselves versus learning strictly from the provincially mandated curriculum documents (Latta & Kim, 2011). Teachers then, need to know their students well enough that they are able to plan and co-compose curriculum. This has direct implications for identity making for children and youth in schools in relation to every subject, not just reading.

Finally, the SCRIP has social justifications related specifically to identity making. A child's sense of self is impacted greatly by how they see themselves as a reader and how they believe their peers and teacher view their abilities. We live in a world where we are constantly impacted not only by how we story ourselves and how others story us, but by how successful we are in relation to our literate identities. Information is everywhere and there are many things that require reading. From signs on the road, recipes, the price of gas, directions to an important location, books, news, billboards, and bills – the list is exhaustive. Almost everything with text containing information requires some level of reading ability. It is imperative that children story themselves as capable, strong, and proficient readers who not only read text, but can critically comprehend what they have read and use it effectively.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Identity Making and Familial Experience

This chapter introduces three mother and child pairings: Lyla and Reese, Madeline and Duncan, and Annie and Toby. The overarching threads of identity making and familial experiences with reading, as well as implications for intergenerational reading, are explored following the narrative accounts.

#### **Lyla and Reese: Reading as Familial Identity**

##### *Lyla.*

Lyla is a full-time accountant and has always been deeply interested in Reese's academic progress – especially progress related to reading, writing, and math. Lyla does not remember everything about Reese's primary years of school, but she does remember feeling increasingly frustrated before Reese reached grade four. Even though this frustration is already years in the past, speaking of her feelings about that time are expressed in her body language and tone of voice.<sup>2</sup> Lyla recalled that Reese was “never really working on reading and never talking about it and [we] just kind of sat there and wondered, “Well, what are you doing all day? What is going on?” (Research Conversation, Lyla & Natasha, October 6, 2015). This was a major source of conflict as Reese, someone who appeared to be academically proficient in other subject areas, was not seeming to make any progress or show any personal or scholastic interest in reading. By the time Reese had finished grade three and seemed to have simply plateaued rather than progressed, Lyla described her reaction as “concerned, stunned, and angry” (Research

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<sup>2</sup> Five years have passed in both Lyla and Reese's recollection – and with all participants involved in this research. Reese was in grade nine at the time of this interview and I taught her in grade four.

Conversation, Lyla & Natasha, October 27, 2015). Lyla had hoped that Reese would have progressed as she always had up to this point in school. For a child such as Reese, this meant that she would not just have met grade expectations but exceeded them, been exuberant about what she was learning in school by sharing her learnings, and told her parents about her experiences in school.

Lyla could have gone to the school to express her concerns. However, there were several forces at work. One, Lyla does not enjoy causing a scene or casting blame. The community was already talking about what was happening, or not, in the classroom. Some parents had already complained and Lyla wondered if causing more commotion could be a solution? Two, Lyla could speculate on her child's academic progress, but did not have any data to support her suspicions and frustrations until Reese completed a Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) test. Lyla recalled, "I can't remember when exactly, but I think it was after the first set of interviews and the reading scores were pretty disappointing. You know we all had a sense that things had gone pretty badly the year before. But you don't really know *how* badly... I just remember we didn't hear *anything* about reading scores. It was pretty frustrating" (Research Conversation, Lyla & Natasha, October 6, 2015).

Reading is of utmost importance to Lyla. She describes herself as an average reader, likely not an expert because she reads quickly and has good understanding but "isn't going to understand something that's written by a lawyer" (Research Conversation, Lyla & Natasha, December 8, 2015). When speaking about the importance of reading she quickly becomes passionate and it is easy to tell how much importance she places on it as a measurement of success. Through conversation about this topic, I found Lyla to be more animated than she was at any point during our conversations. She struggled to articulate her thoughts about why, to her,

reading was synonymous with success. She finally threw up her hands, laughed and said, “We don’t realize how much we read in a given day. I think if you don’t know how to appreciate a Picasso painting you’re probably going to do alright in society, whereas if you can’t, I don’t know, read a product label, how are you not going to kill yourself? I think it is the most important skill you get at school!” (Research Conversation, Lyla & Natasha, December 8, 2015). Though Lyla was making an exaggeration to prove her point, she was clear in her opinion – reading is essential to success.

Although Lyla said that they were often “trying to come up with ways to get [Reese] to read more which didn’t really work until [the] magic little program” (Research Conversation, Lyla & Natasha, October 27, 2015) in grade four, reading was always important in the Brown<sup>3</sup> family. Before bed, in the vehicle to hockey practice, casual reading around the house, and discussion of what was being read and by whom has always been a focus. The Stanley Cup Reading Program (SCRP) was a time when Reese “read a lot of stuff and found out that, hey, reading is kind of cool. She would read more voluntarily, and became a more skilled reader” (Research Conversation, Lyla & Natasha, October 6, 2015). Though Lyla and her husband had told Reese that reading was a wonderful thing to do, “she wasn’t really buying it” and the SCRCP made it so that “she started liking [reading] more. She would read voluntarily. It was something that was more interesting to her as opposed to something she was forced to do. All of a sudden we would notice that, “Hey! She’s gone to bed earlier to finish that book. So there’s definitely

***Reese.***

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<sup>3</sup> As with all first names and places, last names have also been changed to pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants involved this research.

Reese, now in grade nine, had much to say about her personal feelings and viewpoints regarding reading. She defines reading as “understanding others’ perspectives on anything – any topic” (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October, 2015). It is through reading, that a person can begin to understand what other people have thought and gain understanding into their insights. According to Reese, you can understand yourself better and give value to your own perspectives when you explore those of other people. This broadened definition of reading has expanded exponentially for Reese since being in and completing the Stanley Cup Reading Program (SCRCP).

Reese was not always an avid reader and when she was younger thought that reading was “looking at words” (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 6, 2015). When asked when this changed, Reese who could expound easily on most questions, sat quietly and paused for a long time before answering, “Like probably, probably, the reading program because during the program you are looking at words until you understand them better.” In Reese’s efforts to better understand words, she also began to have a deeper understanding of what she read and who she was becoming as a reader. She began forming her reading identity.

Throughout her younger years Reese tended to read fiction. Although the reading program encouraged reading anything at individual grade levels that interested students, it also introduced new genres to students to broaden their curiosity with reading. At this point Reese found her reading niche through which she has shaped her reading preferences. Reading for Reese at this stage of her life includes essays, biographies, and newspapers rather than fiction of any genre or texts that she admits to overlooking in her everyday life, such as cookbooks and billboards.

Reese sees that being a good reader is tied with being a good student. A reader and a student are similes and to be good at one, you must be good at the other. Reese knows that she is someone who can comprehend, predict, analyze, interpret, make connections, and perform other skills related to reading without difficulty. For her, reading should have a purpose, whether it is for school or for relaxing before bed – but it is seldom done just for leisure. “I wouldn’t say that I read for pleasure like every single day! I’ve read for pleasure before, but not, like, consistently. More for school I’d say” (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 6, 2015). School, now as a grade nine student, still plays a significant role in reading for Reese. “You go to school to learn to read – that’s the big value of school” (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 27, 2015). As Reese told me about the importance of reading in school, she became animated. According to Reese, to be successful in school (and also life), you must be a good reader.

Reese first began to see herself as a reader through the SCRCP. “I thought it was cool to tell people that I read and then go to school and it was for a Stanley Cup Reading Program and then explain how it all ties together” (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 6, 2015). Before the SCRCP Reese described herself as a non-reader who didn’t like to read. “You just sat there and read. You did nothing else with it, you just read for the sake of reading” (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 6, 2015). As someone who wants a purpose to read, interest and competition gave Reese the initial incentive to begin reading in a more productive way than she had before. Reese ruefully admits that at the beginning she “wanted to do it because I wanted to beat everybody else” (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 6, 2015). Upon reflection though, Reese commented, “When I look back on it now, the purpose wasn’t that. Nobody is going to remember who won in 2012. I think you’re more so

going to remember who improved their reading. I don't remember who won or lost. Everybody says, 'Oh that grade four program made you a better reader and I'm like 'Yeah!'' (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 27, 2015).

Following the co-created procedures of the SCRP was never a problem for Reese. One such procedure was completing fifteen minutes per night of reading. Completing the required fifteen minutes was an easy task for Reese who was interested in completing the time (and often more than the required time) in an effort to help her team advance. But, in completing the reading minutes, she also identifies that she became a more skilled reader, a more responsible classmate, and a more supportive teammate to her peers. Reese was someone who was never content to just do the minimum of what was required. She says, "I was kind of crazy about being the best and it [becoming a better reader] just sort of happened. Like yeah – you'll be a better reader with the more minutes you read. I became a better reader because I read a lot and because I wanted to be better than others" (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 27, 2015) As a grade nine student reflecting back on the SCRP, Reese now says that she does not remember who accomplished the most reading minutes, she just remembers that "the people in [her] class became more confident in their reading" and "the way they reacted to reading" (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 27, 2015). Now, in grade nine these effects are still in evidence to Reese. Not all of them are great readers in her opinion, but they are more confident and more willing to read.

### **Madeline and Duncan: Tensions with reading**

*Madeline.*

Madeline began this inquiry frustrated with the reading progress of her child. Madeline grew concerned that she had made the right decision about being a participant when she became aware through our interviews that Duncan, her son, was still deeply emotional about his reading experiences and cried big, silent tears when he would speak of his reading experiences. Reflecting back, Madeline knew that her son was behind in his reading and had for some time throughout Duncan's primary school experience, voiced concerns to the school and school board. It was very clear, as Madeline talked, that her frustration with Duncan's lack of reading progress runs deep. When she spoke about her reasons for frustration, she expressed that she was, and still is, very angry. It is hard to get over feeling this way when this elementary school problem is still affecting her grade nine son on a daily basis. It is this daily struggle that makes Madeline both mad and sad.

Duncan was behind in reading for many reasons, but he was really failed by the school division and the school itself in his education as far as I'm concerned. I can go into detail. They had a teacher in there that they did not monitor...I would say that ninety five percent of the supplies I sent at the beginning of the year came home intact. There was no work being done whatsoever throughout the entire year. I was angry! Very angry. That they could allow this to go on...and not intervene – do something – when they knew what was happening...I had a meeting with the school division and they verbally admitted to me that they knew about it and couldn't didn't do anything about it. But, they didn't do anything really to correct it... (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, October 12, 2015).

Further compounding Duncan's reading difficulties was the fact that he was younger than his peers. Madeline speculates if this was a further disadvantage which just added to his

existing weaknesses caused because of poor classroom experiences. Madeline said, “He was always on the weak side being a late December baby. But going into grade four at slightly better than grade one reading level was not acceptable under any circumstances” (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, October 12, 2015).

Madeline was hopeful that something good could come out of Duncan’s past experience and believed that the SCRP was the ticket.

It was bringing a program to what they are used to and at that stage, those kids’ primary interest was hockey because honestly, that was the most consistent thing in their lives ‘cause school consistently wasn’t. Teaching and learning certainly wasn’t because of the year they had just come off of. When you have a group of kids that play hockey together and have played hockey together and it’s been the most consistent thing in their life up until grade four, is being on that team playing with those people, it works in a small school where they all externally play hockey and together bring it back and apply it to something that they’re not overly interested in doing because they don’t like it, or they know they’re so far behind that they shy away from the whole reading concept. (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, October 12, 2015).

Madeline, even now, speaks desperately of wanting something, anything really – that would help Duncan become a better reader. If that was the SCRP or anything else that helped to do what nothing else up until that point had, she was on board and a proponent.

Reading for Madeline is a fundamental skill and one she believes everyone has to have in order to be successful. She also believes that you need to read to be able to do every other subject; to “get out in the real world” (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, November

18, 2015). She spoke candidly of connecting what you read to the conversations you have and being well-read.

To have a conversation with somebody that doesn't read, or when there is a huge difference level – and I can say that because I am in business and business is obviously a huge part of my whole career and is very different from what I am exposed to around me and sometimes you have to dumb down the conversation. I'm not saying that's because I'm an avid reader or because I'm successful in my career – because I'm not necessarily an avid reader... but it is hard to have a conversation with somebody. I really find that the books I know I should be reading – I hate them because they bore me to death. Like I should be reading *The Blue Ocean* or things like you know, um, *Necessary Endings* or I'm thinking of all these inspirational world leaders' type books and sometimes I just want stupid shit to read to keep my mind off other things. (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, November 18, 2015).

Although Madeline would say that being able to read well and converse with clarity is self-explanatory, and that “it is the basics for everything to function in the world” (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, November 18, 2015) she also recalls that she herself struggled with reading throughout school and University and had to really push herself to become good at the skill of reading. She got to the point where her “determination superseded her skills, but her skills finally caught up” (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, November 18, 2015). Even though Madeline would say that she has the skills of a reader, she does not see herself as one. Madeline's conversation suggested that, a parent, when you do not see yourself as a reader, it becomes very difficult to help your children see themselves as readers either. Madeline stated that she felt that going to the school to express her concerns was in her

power as a parent, but doing something concrete at home to help her child who was so far behind felt totally out of her purview. “Is it my responsibility to go to the school and say, “What can we do?” or Is it my responsibility to educate my child when I’m not skilled at that?” (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, November 18, 2015).

***Duncan.***

Duncan defined reading as anything that has to do with words - from newspapers, to letters, to hockey scores, to books. His answers are short and to the point when asked how his reading is going, but also heartbreakingly sad. The short “Not very good,” is followed up with reasons. He hates doing it, it does not interest him, it is hard, it is frustrating, he has to re-read over and over, and he is slow at it. Duncan remembers always needing a lot more time than his peers to get through a text, but as his grade level have risen disproportionality to his reading level, it is likely that reading has gotten increasingly harder and his frustration level almost insurmountable.

Even though Duncan finds reading a daunting task, he places great value on the subjects of English Language Arts and math. He gives an example: “If you’re building, say, a birdhouse. You’d need those measurements and math and stuff. And if you’re reading, like, you need to know what you’re reading if it is like a contract or stuff like that” (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, November 16, 2015). Not surprisingly, one of the classes that frustrates him the most in school is English. When asked why he doesn’t like it, Duncan answers that “all the work they do is pointless” and that they “should be doing way more important stuff like writing essays” (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, October 12, 2015). When he expounds on this, he mentions that he wishes they could spend more time on things they would be using later

on in life or engaging in things that are important outside of school. If they were, he would feel more successful.

The concept of success is never far from Duncan's mind. To him, to be able to read well means that you will be successful. There are two specific areas with which success can be measured – inside and outside of school. Duncan says that if you are a bad reader in school people “just go with it” but once you are out of school “they judge you ‘cause you are older and should be a standard reader” (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, November 16, 2015). Though he does not go into detail about what a “standard” reader might be, he makes it understood through other conversation that this must be someone who is the opposite of a bad reader, someone who is successful in reading and all that reading entails. Duncan does not see himself as a “standard” reader or a reader at all. In fact, when speaking about how he feels as a reader, Duncan becomes highly emotional. The simple response of “I don't like being a bad reader,” (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, November 16, 2015) is fraught with feelings. Duncan expresses that he feels embarrassed, sad, and less than his peers on a regular basis. Even though Duncan says people “just go with it” in school it is clear that he does not and cannot do the same.

Duncan's present identity of himself as a reader is negative, however, he does believe that a reading identity can change, that it is not static. “If I read daily, or even every other day for like an hour or something like that I could be a better reader” (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, November 16, 2015). This is something he says is up for consideration but he also says that he only reads during Drop Everything and Read<sup>4</sup> (DEAR) time in school. He says, “I just

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<sup>4</sup> Drop Everything and Read is a common reading practice in many classrooms. It is a focused reading time when individuals read anything they wish to read.

can't catch up with my reading," "I'm just slower than the other students," and "Right now I think I am not that great at reading" (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, November 16, 2015). All of this is true - it is difficult to sit down with a book and find the motivation to read when you do not identify with reading at all.

The last time that Duncan felt positive about reading was during the SCRP where he "felt like he wanted to do it" because "it was about hockey" (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, October 12, 2015). When asked if he began reading because he felt like reading or because of the theme, Duncan replies honestly that he started because he "just really liked hockey" (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, October 12, 2015). Being part of a team was especially important to Duncan and not letting his teammates down even more so. As such, he diligently put in his reading minutes. However, as he did so, something unexpected happened. "It got easier 'cause I read lots more than I used to" (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, October 12, 2015). As Duncan's reading minutes increased, he began to find the process of reading easier and explains this by saying, "I felt like I could read faster" (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, October 12, 2015).

Madeline expounded on what the SCRP did for Duncan. "Before the SCRP he would have zero interest in reading because he didn't think he was a good reader. And he wasn't a good reader. Because of that, he had no interest in it and wouldn't even want to try because he wouldn't want to fail. After, he was very eager. He had confidence built up in him because he was successful in the program" (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, October 12, 2015).

Success for Duncan according to his mother came in the form of being on a team. "He felt like he was in a safe zone having support around him" (Research Conversation, Madeline &

Natasha, October 12, 2015). When Duncan spoke of the SCRCP he visibly perked up (in comparison to speaking of how he typically feels about reading) and talked about motivation, encouragement, and respect. In reflecting back on being team captain and assistant captain for his team it is easy to tell that he still has pride in that role. He sits up straighter in his chair, looks me in the eye, and, even though he struggles to get it all out, says, “It encouraged me ‘cause uh, well it helped me ‘cause it made me want to read more ‘cause I felt like I was important to the team” (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, October 12, 2015).

Even though Duncan’s time with the SCRCP helped to increase his reading level, reading minutes, and engagement with the process of reading – past grade four things have not been so positive. For Madeline, she sees that the SCRCP “interrupted Duncan in grade four in the sense that he felt like he could accomplish [reading]. And then a new year, a new teacher, he drifted back to his normal way of thinking about himself... he’s backpedaled to think that he is a poor reader” (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, November 18, 2015). For Duncan, he just admits to reading only in class and only when he has to.

### **Annie and Toby: Conflicting ideas about the importance of reading**

#### ***Annie.***

Annie’s son Toby was told in an early primary grade that he would never be a good reader. This negative comment did not serve to help Toby become any better as a reader and was further impacted in later primary grades when Annie felt “like they didn’t do very much reading” and that he was just “being pushed through the system.” Annie became increasingly frustrated “with a system that isn’t really looking out for kids.” She “got the feeling that it was looking out

more for teachers and how everything correlated to their schedules rather than how everything worked out for the teachers and the kids” (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, October 8, 2015).

Although Annie would describe herself as a good reader, she doesn’t have time to read during the day because her life and her house are too hectic and busy. Rather, she reads at night when there is finally some downtime, but “no romance – nothing that is not real – all biographies and self-help. [She’s] a time manager person so if [she’s] going to sit and read, it needs to be something that is going to help [her]” (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, December 14, 2015). Furthermore, she describes her house as, “Not a reading house. We don’t have time to read. We are not home long enough to read. It is not a quiet house. If you go up to your room in our house it is usually because you are sick. You don’t ever really sit in your room. I never grew up in a reading house either...” (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, December 14, 2015). In such a busy family-centered environment, it is no wonder that Annie had expectations of the school to do something to help her child become a better reader and to do so in a collaborative way.

Annie describes the SCRP as a program “gauged towards kids and what they liked, geared towards their needs more so than the school. They got to pick their books, they got to help with the program, they got to make their Stanley Cup, they kind of got to make the rules, they got to make the consequences” (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, October 8, 2015). The program was important to Annie because she needed help to get Toby to read. She said, “I wish there was a reading program all the time where you read so many minutes. If they’re not interested in reading then they need to be pushed to do things” (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, October 8, 2015). Even though there often was not time to read at home, Annie’s

attitude toward reading seemed to be clearly set. Annie is emphatic when she states, “You need to read for everything you do! Technology, signing documents at banks. You have to read every day of your life – something” (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, November 3, 2015).

***Toby.***

When I asked Toby what he defined reading as, his chin immediately shot up, his head cocked to the side, and he somewhat incredulously and immediately blurted out, “Well - Open up a book and read!” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, October 8, 2015). He answered this like I should have known the information and he could not believe I would ask him something so elementary – he was expecting a harder question. I follow up by asking if he thought that reading was just books, and Toby said, “Anything that has words.” When he provided more details, he said that if you can read it and it has words, then that is reading. He added that “if it is flashy with color,” then “You’re going to want to go up to it and read it right?” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, October 8, 2015). Even though Toby has a very broad spectrum of what he knows reading to be, his personal reading choices might be considered narrow. The only subject that he likes to read about is hockey. As such, you might find him with a newspaper article, an internet blog, a tweet, or the very, very occasional biography – all about hockey.

Toby has somewhat conflicting values when it comes to identifying the importance of reading. He says that if you don’t read then you “won’t pan out in life and you won’t be able to do much” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, October 8, 2015). In terms of not doing much he gives the example of not being able to read soup labels and getting a different kind than you had intended, having a difficult time driving because you can’t read maps and signs, and not doing well in school. However, he also says that you could just ask for directions and help to

solve those aforementioned problems. According to Toby, teachers and parents have made it clear that reading is important - and it is - but “just to complete [his] school work” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, November 3, 2015). When asked for his opinion on whether or not *he* thought it was, Toby says, “Probably. I’d figure it out on my own. I’d have to read stuff to know what I’m doing” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, November 3, 2015). Toby states that he couldn’t just figure it out without practice though. Cementing his belief that reading is important, but no more so than anything else that is not that interesting - he places reading on the same level of importance as art, social studies, science, and all other namable subjects at his school because “if you can’t read, you can’t do any of the rest of that work” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, November 3, 2015).

As you can imagine then, reading is not one of the things that make Toby, Toby. In terms of reading identity, Toby does not identify himself as a reader at all – and does not feel badly that he doesn’t. He is indifferent to the fact that he does not like to read, does not really enjoy reading, and does not want to become any better than just passable at the skill of reading. He thinks that if he knows he is a bad reader and has a good attitude about it, “then it is about what I think, not what other people think. If I was all serious I would get mad and not read at all” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, December 14, 2015). He does not think that people will judge him as a person for his reading skills. In fact, he says “Just because you can’t read doesn’t mean they’ll change their mind about you” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, December 14, 2015). Annie adds to this by saying,

In the big picture, in his mind he doesn’t feel like he needs to be a good reader because he has other plans in his life like playing hockey and all that where he doesn’t correlate needing to read as a factor in moving on in his hockey. Which, isn’t right because he is

going to have to learn that if he decides to move on or gets the opportunity he is going to have to learn to read contracts and draft stuff. He is going to need to learn how to read it and comprehend it 'cause I'm not going to be there to do it for him. (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, November 3, 2015)

Regardless of Toby's thoughts about his reading identity, it doesn't stop Toby from having confidence in what little skill he does have as a reader. Toby thinks how he feels about reading is in direct relation to his confidence, and his confidence was never higher than when he was in the SCRP. "I didn't like reading at the start. I didn't think I was that great at it. At the end, once I got going, I thought I was better. More confident. I could read with flow and expression. I read stuff outside of school. That helped a lot. When your confidence is higher you want to keep reading more so you just keep getting better and better as a reader" (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, October 8, 2015).

Fun was also a big factor for Toby in determining whether or not he would read in the program. When asked for his opinion about using a community interest in a reading program Toby said, "I think it is a good idea because then the kids are more motivated with what they are doing in school instead of not paying attention to what isn't interesting to them or what they don't like" (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, October 8, 2015). When he spoke of his own viewpoint he said, "It was awesome. I love the sport and I enjoy it. I know about hockey clubs. It wasn't homework because I was enjoying what we were reading" (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, October 8, 2015).

Still, fun and confidence did not last past grade four. Although Toby still grabs the newspaper to read about a hockey game, player, or statistic he is interested in, Annie says that sustained reading has not been maintained past the SCRP. "He is not interested in reading. The

only thing that interests him is hockey so therefore you are very limited in what you can read. There isn't a whole lot of books out there. He knows he's not that good of a reader. But I think in his mind if he says he is then he is going to get to be better" (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, December 14, 2015).

### **Identity making and familial experiences with reading**

Children that struggle with the ability to read are often the same children that do not read with frequency in their homes and do not identify themselves as good readers. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) wrote,

Students who struggle begin to doubt their abilities. They expect to do poorly in reading, writing, and talking about text. The real dilemma is that lower-achieving students often exaggerate their limitations. Believing they are worse than they really are, they stop trying completely. Retreating from all text interactions, they reduce their own opportunity to do what they want to do more than anything – to be a good reader. Their low confidence undermines them even further in a cycle of doubt and failure. By middle school, breaking them of this cycle is a formidable challenge... (p.17).

Duncan does not see himself as a reader, and his insights and current reading experiences echo the words of Cambria and Guthrie.

Toby indicated, "Yeah. I read at home before I go to bed sometimes" (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, October 8, 2015). However, in a family dynamic that is as busy as Toby's family, it is difficult to fit reading in to the schedule. Annie stated that theirs was "Not a reading house. We don't have time to read. We are not home long enough to read" (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, December 14, 2015). Perhaps it isn't surprising that it isn't a

reading house. Annie takes care of five children, works, and says “I never grew up in a reading house either...” (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, December 14, 2015). Still, with a very busy schedule she finds time to read what Toby is reading and question him about it. “We’ll say, ‘Hey! Read this article on this junior hockey player.’ He’ll read it, but he still isn’t a good reader of details. So I’ll say, ‘So what did they say about his brother in that?’ He’ll read it and say, ‘I don’t know...’ I’ll say, ‘Oh really? I thought it said that he got...’ Then Toby will say, ‘Oh yeah! He did! That’s what it said.’ But, sometimes it is more or less, ‘I don’t want to talk about it.’” (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, December 14, 2015). “Confidence, which refers to belief in your capacity, is tied intimately with success” (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010, p.17). Toby wants to see himself as a reader but admits he is not.

As Carrol and Loumidis’s (2001) study found with physical education, children who participated in physical activity significantly more outside of school perceived themselves to be more competent with physical activity in school, the same can be extrapolated to reading. Reese commented, “Well my mom really likes reading – reads all the time just because. I wouldn’t say that my dad just picks up a book just because he likes reading. He will pleasure read if the book is about something he is really interested in. He’s more of a newspaper guy... Twitter. He gets a lot of his information from Twitter too” (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 6, 2015). Both Reese and her brother are steadily encouraged to read not only for school but for enjoyment and information also, before bed “as a good way to unwind at the end of the day” (Research Conversation, Natasha and Lyla, October 6, 2015). Reese stories herself as competent and at grade level with her reading. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) found that, “A student who reads fluently and understands well is also sure of [herself] as a reader. In and out of school,

people like things they do well” (p.17) The experiences that Reese has had in her family and in school has made it so that she sees herself as a reader.

When Duncan spoke of the culture of reading in his home, he stated “My sister used to read a lot. My brother doesn’t read that much. My mom, she reads before she goes to bed. Dad, doesn’t read really very much” (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, November 16, 2015). When he spoke of himself, he said, “At home I usually don’t read that much” (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, November 16, 2015). Perhaps because of the busyness of the household coupled with Duncan’s difficulty with reading, reading has been an avoided activity. When talking about whether or not conversations are had within the family about reading and whether or not Duncan can make connections with what he is reading to the world, other texts, and himself, Madeline stated: “Obviously I have to step in and do more for him...He has the potential but I don’t think he’s there” (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, November 18, 2015).

Reese, Duncan, and Toby show that familial reading experiences affect their corresponding perceived competence, skill levels, and identities. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) stated that there are three motivations to read: interest, confidence, and dedication. Being motivated to read and developing a positive reading identity can be tied to familial experiences. Willingham (2015) also wrote about the relationship between reading and motivation,

Raising a reader arguably begins and ends with motivation. If the child lacks decoding skills or the background knowledge to support comprehension, she’ll gain them through reading, and if she’s motivated, she’ll read. Motivation is fueled by positive attitudes and a concept of oneself as a reader. But the catch is that your child needs to

read (and to enjoy reading) to develop a positive attitude and a solid reading self-concept (p.57).

Motivation to read then is directly tied to the experiences one has with reading in the family setting. If reading in the home has not been promoted, nurtured, and encouraged - it will be difficult for children to find both the incentive to read and see themselves as readers.

### **Familial curriculum making: Shaping the identities of children**

Reese, Duncan, and Toby's reading identities and motivation to read have been impacted by their familial reading experiences, and families are impacted by the school and community. Familial literacy and familial curriculum making both shape the identity making of children and their families. Familial curriculum making (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011) shapes and is shaped by school curriculum making (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988). Identity making (Clandinin & Huber, 2004), related to reading, is shaped by understandings how the interaction of teachers and family engage with children about who they are and who they are becoming as readers. "Children learn best when the significant adults in their lives – parents, teachers, and other family and community members – work together to encourage and support them" (Comer & Haynes, 1997, p. 1). Though it may seem like common sense, the need for strong interaction between families and schools can be difficult to create and maintain. Society has created artificial distinctions about the roles that parents and teachers should play in how a child develops. There is a tendency to view schools as places that should educate academic endeavors and homes as places that should educate moral and emotional endeavors (Comer & Haynes, 1997). Yet, children do not stop learning about values, relationships, and academics – and attitudes about learning – regardless of where they are. When children are at home, in their community, or in their classrooms they continuously observe how the significant adults in their

lives treat one another, how decisions are made and implemented, and how problems are solved (Comer & Haynes, 1997). Schools alone cannot address all of a child's developmental needs. Meaningful involvement of parents and support from the community are essential in building strong partnerships to educate the whole child and solve issues when problems arise. "In many communities, parents are discouraged from spending time in classrooms and educators are expected to consult with family members only when a child is in trouble. The result, in too many cases, is misunderstanding, mistrust, and a lack of respect, so that when a child falls behind, teachers blame the parents and parents blame the teachers" (Comer & Haynes, 1997, p. 1).

Madeline wonders how to help Duncan who cries in grade nine when he speaks about his reading experiences both in the past and present. How can she ease his difficulty at this age? The books need to be easy to accommodate his reading level, so how can they accommodate his current interests? Would he only read them at home because of embarrassment everywhere else? Who could help if she doesn't feel equipped herself? Annie wonders how she can impress upon Toby the necessity of reading more than just *Hockey News* because she will not always be around to help him comprehend text. The questions these parents had when their children were in primary school were not answered by the school when they sought help. Mistrust in the system was created and all of the questions they still have are not being asked because they don't believe that anything different will be done a second time around. A vicious circle is created.

For parents there too is often fear of reprisal involved in making your issue known to the school which further impacts the familial/school relationship. "My approach was to approach the school and yeah, I regret it...in your action with this bureaucracy – there is punishment for that. If you don't toe the line and be a good little parent and not make any waves, then your kids will be fine. But if you have a challenge, watch out" (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha,

November 18, 2015). Without compromise on both sides – parent and school – children get lost in the middle and conflict is seldom revised. “It can take extraordinary effort to build strong relationships between families and educators. Schools have to reach out to families, making them feel welcome as full partners in the educational process. Families, in turn, have to make a commitment of time and energy to support their children both at home and at school” (Comer & Haynes, 1997, p.2).

Poor relationships between schools and families are not uncommon. Parents often experience failure during their own school days and are reluctant to set foot into their own children’s schools which makes trust difficult to maintain. Schools seldom have open door policies where parents can visit any time, and parents who play a vocal and active role in their children’s education are often branded as trouble makers (Comer & Haynes, 1997). Whatever the issue is between school and home, the starting point is to create opportunities where parents and teachers learn that they both have the children’s best interest at heart. When parents, educators, and communities as a whole work together to make decisions, it creates opportunities to work meaningfully together.

Participation on school-based planning and management teams gives parents a chance to learn about the professional side of schooling – to understand the inner workings of curriculum and instruction. It also allows them to educate school staff about the community and demonstrate that parents have much to offer if provided the opportunities to do so (Comer & Haynes, 1997, p.2).

Good relationships between school, community, parent, and child are essential to promoting academic success. If effort is not put into creating positive interrelations, children cannot perceive themselves to be successful.

## **Identity, Skill, and Other Subject Matter**

The stories that Reese, Duncan, and Toby live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), the multiple storylines they have of themselves and the storylines others have of them, shapes their understanding of their identity as readers (Huber & Whelan, 1999). Each child involved in this inquiry had a clear sense of who they are as readers because of the stories they have of themselves and the stories others have of them as well. Tied further to identity is skill. How well a child believes him or herself to read is directly relational to how well they will perform the actual task of reading (McCarthy, 2001). Whether or not a person voluntarily continues to complete a task they do not identify with or have skill at is also related to identity.

Although Reese, Duncan, and Toby all seem to have a firm sense of who they are as readers, which is closely tied to their skill levels as readers, identities are always in flux. “Literacy and identity are interdependent so that the students’ ability to progress and change are helped or hindered by their access or lack of access to a variety of literacy opportunities” (Educational Research, n.d., Accessed January 15, 2015). Reading is a prerequisite for many skills, academic and personal. To complete a variety of subjects taught in school you must be able to read. Children who story themselves as poor readers do not always story themselves as good students across other subject areas because reading is an essential skill to most subjects. The Commission on Adolescent Literacy of the International Reading Association recognized the importance of literacy in the lives of adolescents in a position statement stating, “Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will read and write more than any other time in human history. They will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives. They will need literacy to cope with

the flood of information they will find everywhere they turn” (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999, p. 3).

Skill, identity, and performance are intricately tied together. The SCRP allowed Reese, Duncan, and Toby to increase their skill level as readers. Increased skill elevated their performance of reading. When they were able to see both an increase in skill and performance, their perception of themselves as readers – their identity – positively shifted as well. Overall, the SCRP allowed Reese, Duncan and Toby to enjoy enhanced self-concept and motivation to read.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Within and Beyond Classroom Communities**

This chapter makes connections between the experiences of children and their families in an integrated familial/school curriculum making literacy program shaped around a community's interest. Curriculum making (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) traditionally focused on the experiences of children as students and teachers as educators in the context of the subject matters of school. Familial curriculum making (Clandinin, Murphy, & Huber, 2011) extends our focus as educators to the experiences within families and communities. The SCRIP married familial curriculum making to the curriculum making in the classroom in an overt manner through the common experience for the children of hockey. Schools and academic programming can overlook the importance of familial curriculum making and in so doing, neglect to “draw upon the relational, multiperspectival possibilities that already, inherently live in...classrooms” (Clandinin, Murphy, & Huber, 2011, p. 28). This chapter will also provide insight into how the SCRIP shaped a space for the children to be co-composers of curriculum and therefore, shapers of the classroom community. Not only should children have opportunity to engage with their academic programming by having a say in how and what they learn, they should also engage with one another through active participation in their academic community. As Handley et al. (2006), stated “[i]dentity construction occurs within (and across) communities” (p. 643). Furthermore, there is necessity to become intentional about creating not only programming that is responsive to children's lived experiences, but “curricular spaces in which we might intentionally engage with children and ourselves about who we are and about who we are becoming” (Huber, Keats Whelan, & Clandinin, 2003, p.306).

### **Shaping school programming around familial and community interests:**

The experiences a child encounters out-of-school can be viewed as opportunities to further academics in school. A teacher that effectively uses both familial and community interests of children in classroom practices can more deeply engage them in academic work. John Dewey (1938) believed in capitalizing on experience. He felt that it was up to the educator to “be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions...[and] also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth” (p. 40). Dewey believed that teachers should know “how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile” (p. 40). Teachers who wish to fully capitalize on children’s experiences must first acquaint themselves with the communities in which they teach in order to shape schooling that is responsive to children’s contexts. Dewey calls this responsiveness “a system of education based upon the necessary connection of education based upon experience must...if faithful to its principle...take these things constantly into account” (p. 40).

Further to Dewey’s thoughts on experiences, Squire’s (2006) work, based specifically on gaming, shows that there are connections that can be made to any student interest that happens directly outside of the school building. Squire wrote, “A deeper look into gaming reveals a plethora of experiences available for children that are more or less unknown in school” (p. 19). Squire further argued, “Educators (especially curriculum designers) ought to pay closer attention to videogames because they offer designed experiences, in which participants learn through a grammar of doing and being” (p. 19). Squire’s work proved that out-of-school experiences “provide a set of experiences, with the assumption being that learners are active constructors of

meaning with their own drives, goals, and motivations” (p. 24). In the way that games afford learning through experience, so too, do other familial experiences. Looking specifically at Reese, Duncan, Toby, their parents and the community in which they live - hockey was the familial and community experience that allowed one way for deeper learning to occur in the reading process.

Lyla, Reese’s mother, had definite opinions on the importance of making sure that community interests and what is happening in the community is reflected in the school and vice versa. As someone deeply interested in what is happening in her community, she was hoping for a program that would be effective enough to reach her daughter in a time when she required remedial help. “Because this is such a hockey orientated town, it was a really inspired choice as far as I’m concerned. I don’t know if a baseball [program] would have been as effective, or if ahh, I don’t know – skiing has fallen by the wayside here – I don’t know if something else would have been as effective” (Research Conversation, Lyla & Natasha, October 6, 2015). Lyla shared her thoughts on school and community partnerships in terms of creating reading programs. She said, “It is a great idea. You had a class full of what I would call non-readers when you started with them. They didn’t particularly like reading and they didn’t want to do very much of it, but uh, the program certainly changed that. All of a sudden these non-readers were much more interested in getting as much reading time in as they could and actually learn that reading isn’t so bad after all” (Research Conversation, Lyla & Natasha, October 6, 2015).

When asked if a reading program should reflect the interests of the community Madeline, Duncan’s mother stated, “I would say yes. Definitely. It is a big hockey community and that really is the only sport available to these kids outside of the school. Because of where we live and our location and for them to do anything other than hockey – you’re driving quite a ways to

do anything different. So, hockey is huge in our area” (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, October 12, 2015).

Annie, Toby’s mother, who is deeply invested in her community has much to say about the importance of having the community reflected in school programming. She said it is “Definitely [important] so that everyone can learn together and support one another. If the school is working against what the kids are interested in, there is no respect and nothing works well” (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, October 8, 2015). When asked what might have happened if another topic besides hockey were chosen for reading programming, Annie expounded on her thoughts: “Well it depends... you probably could have taught it, but it [hockey] made them read because they were interested. It was effective because for once the kids were interested... You had to do a workload to get where you needed to be and it was interesting for the kids. For Toby because it was something he was interested in. If it was... well, hockey is what his desire is I guess” (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, October 8, 2015).

Establishing connections between familial experiences, community happenings, and school programming is key in building experiences for children that support their academic needs. “Working together as full partners, parents, teachers, administrators, business people, and other community members can create an educational program that meets unique local needs and reflects the diversity within a school without compromising the high performance expectations and standards” (Comer & Haynes, p. 2, 1997).

Reese, Duncan, and Toby all spoke about their feelings of being involved with reading program in school that reflected the activities they enjoyed outside of school. When speaking with Reese, even now a clear sense of ownership, pride, and sense of accomplishment shine through her conversation:

Natasha: “So it was important to you that the SCRP looked like what the parents were doing, what the community was doing, what the kids were doing?”

Reese: “Yeah.”

Natasha: “Why was that important to you?”

Reese: “Well, I wouldn’t have liked it at all if it were, like, soccer!”

Natasha: “How come?”

Reese: “Because no one likes soccer around here. It’s just, not what you do.”

Natasha: “Ok. So, why is it so important then that we chose something that honored what you were interested in?”

Reese: “I thought it was cool to tell people that I read...and it was for a Stanley Cup Reading Program and then explain how it all ties together.”

Natasha: “Ok, so you told people that that was what you were doing?”

Reese: “Yeah.”

Natasha: “Why?”

Reese: “Well, like just your grandparents just to tell them that like ‘Oooh! I betcha you didn’t do that.’ Or, all my friends are pretty much older than me so when they had to do a book report I didn’t ‘cause we did something different. (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 6, 2015).

When I asked Duncan about how he felt about being involved with the SCRP, a program aimed at taking student out-of-school interest into the classroom, he had a simple – yet effective

– answer. He just said, “I felt like I wanted to do it...because it had to do with hockey”

(Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, October 12, 2015).

Toby expounded quite a bit more,

Natasha: I think it is important to make sure that what is happening in the community gets done at school. But that’s my opinion, what’s yours?”

Toby: “Yeah. I think so, because then kids are more motivated with what they’re doing in school instead of just sitting there paying attention to what isn’t interesting or what they don’t like.”

Natasha: “In terms of our reading program which we called the Stanley Cup Reading Program, we chose hockey, but should we have chosen something else?”

Toby: “I don’t think we should have picked something else because most of the kids in our grade played hockey and they enjoyed it, so I think we enjoyed it more and read more.”

Natasha: “Do you think if we lived somewhere else we could have chosen something different?”

Toby: “I think we could’ve if we lived in a bigger city or town.

Natasha: “So, if we lived in say, California, what could we have picked?”

Toby: “I’m thinking, like soccer. ‘Cause it’s year-round and it doesn’t get cold so they probably could play it year-round.” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, October 8, 2015).

The SCRIP focused on hockey because hockey was the out-of-school interest with which the community of students, as a whole, had the biggest connection. Hockey was both a familial experience and community experience that could be taken into the classroom and used as the common denominator of what could best be used to shape a reading program responsive to, as Dewey (1938) suggested, the children's life context. Hockey also was what the children used to actively construct meaning, use as personal motivation, and as a standard for individual goal setting. It stood to reason then, that hockey could be used as a vehicle to create school programming. Other communities could use whatever out-of-school local experience their communities and families engage in to create their school programming as Toby suggests, which speaks to their life context. Regardless of which out-of-school experience is chosen to create in school programming, one thing is clear: choose that which is of interest to families and communities for maximum student involvement.

Natasha: "I asked you a question last time. I asked what was the most important thing about the reading program to you and you said that it was fun."

Toby: "Uh-huh."

Natasha: "I said, 'What would have made it not fun?' and you said that you were going to think about it."

Toby: "Hockey. If you would have taken out hockey."

Natasha: "What in your mind would be the most boring reading program?"

Toby: "Something that I'm not interested in."

Natasha: “What should a teacher do if they are putting in place a reading program? What is the most important thing to you/students?”

Toby: “Put something in that kids like.” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, November 3, 2015).

Motivation to engage in a reading program like the SCRP involves connecting children’s out-of-school interests and enjoyment to school programming because interest and dedication are synergistic – just as Toby tells and we can find in existing research. “Interest leads to dedication and the dedication impacts achievement...when interest and confidence are harnessed to dedication, students will score highly on tests, get good grades, and be worthy citizens of the literate classroom” (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010, p. 20).

### **Co-constructing curriculum with program participants:**

Curriculum making<sup>5</sup> attends to the idea that all teachers and their students come to school with wide and varied experiences and that these experiences can shape learning opportunities. There are two specific curriculums that are experienced in classrooms. These are – the mandated curriculum originating from the Ministry of Education as Aoki (1993) speaks of - and the co-composed or constructed curriculum as Clandinin and Connelly (1988) speak of - which is created by teacher and children that adheres to both Ministry mandated outcomes as well as what is important to the lives children are living outside of school. Schwab’s (1973) four curriculum commonplaces of teacher, learner, subject matter and milieu, that Clandinin and Connelly (1992)

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<sup>5</sup> Curriculum making is based on the work of Dewey, Jackson, and Schwab, and is a narrative term that attends the relational importance of co-composing curriculum between children and teachers by Clandinin and Connelly (1988).

describe as “in dynamic interaction” (p. 392) and “as a course of life” (p. 393) are understood as important aspects of curriculum making. Clandinin and Connelly (1992) further suggested, that it is when teachers are able to make the transition from strictly mandated to co-constructed curriculum that they are able to become “an integral part” (p. 363) of what is taught and endorsed in classrooms

The SCRIP was a program aimed to adhere to both mandated outcomes as well as those interests that children were living outside of school in their families and in their community. It was fully co-constructed by teacher and children as its guidelines and any subsequent changes were jointly created and decided upon as a classroom team. As Aoki (1993) alluded to, it is the teacher that must intrinsically involve the children in the curriculum making process. The teacher has the ability to involve the children in the process, but without them being equally represented as co-composers of curriculum, curriculum is not meaningful nor co-constructed. If they are not integral to its composition, they do not feel like a valued part of the process and will likely not buy in to the overall purpose of the program they helped to create.

Reese stated, “The SCRIP was co-constructed because it was based in something that a lot of people in our class enjoyed. We all helped design it and make the rules. We got to pick our teams and choose captains” (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, January 29, 2016). When asked why it is important for students to have say in what they learn and how she feels when she gets a say, Reese specified, “It is important because *we* are the ones in the program. We want to make it something we like so we aren’t bored. Students feel valued I think when we get a say in what we learn. I feel like my opinion matters and is valued when I have a say. It makes me want to engage more in whatever we are doing because I helped make it” (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, January 29, 2016).

Duncan saw co-construction of curriculum, or working collectively to create a program as “building leadership skills...which is a good skill to have” (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, November 16, 2015). Expounding on his thoughts he stated that collectively creating a program “makes it more interesting” and that having a say in things “Is more fair. It is more fair to others because then they have an input into what you think and stuff” (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, November 16, 2015).

For Toby, it was the little things that he remembered most about co-constructing curriculum. He remembered getting to help advise me when I was trying to draw a to-scale NHL rink for the program and it being super important that I get all of the details right. He recalled being proud that a group of players expertise was called upon to make the details correct. “It seemed like real life. If you look at that rink and it doesn’t picture the same as a real hockey rink then what?” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, October 8, 2015). This was his motto for the whole program really. He wanted to be sure that everything aligned with the NHL so that it was as real as possible. He stated that he “wouldn’t have felt good” had he just been given rules to follow, even if the subject had been hockey “Because if I didn’t like some rules I couldn’t change them. And the other way if something was going wrong, or if other people had a problem with it too we could change it” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, December 14, 2015). Being given a voice that is actually heard, respected and acted upon, not just placated, matters to kids.

Even though the SCRP was co-constructed with children, families were an integral part of the program and their thoughts on co-construction were valued. Annie mentioned that as a parent she saw the SCRP as something that worked for teachers and kids – something different. When asked how, she explained:

It was gauged towards the kids and what they liked. They had more say in things. What is the word I'm looking for? It was geared towards them and their needs more so than the school and what the school needed. You were going to get more participation because the kids were being respected for the fact that you wanted them to be involved. They got to pick their books, they got to help with the program, make their Stanley Cups, they kind of got to make the rules, they got to make the consequences if they didn't. They are more engaged if it is important and they become more active in it. They are more apt to want to do it than be made to do it. (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, November 3, 2015).

In co-constructing curriculum, children are given a voice. According to Nicholls and Hazzard (1993), even young children are curriculum theorists and critics of schooling and should be given opportunity to collaborate on the purpose and formation of education. A structured opportunity for members of a class to make decisions about what, why, and how they are going to learn something provides several advantages. According to Kohn (1993), it "helps children feel respected by making it clear that their opinions matter; it builds a sense of belongingness and community; and it contributes to the development of social and cognitive skills such as perspective taking, conflict resolution, and rational analysis" (p. 9-10).

Joseph Schwab (1973), a scholar concerned with policy and implementation of curriculum, encouraged that making decisions about what is taught be based around the teacher, children, subject matter(s), and classroom community (milieu) which are intrinsically related. He wrote, "Students can tell us things about the effects of what and how we teach which no others can. Second, their participation in curricular decision can provide a sense of proprietorship in their school lives, a realization that learning is something more than an arbitrary

imposition, and that what they are asked to learn is more than the product of mere adult whim. (p. 248). Just as Toby expressed, Schubert also (1986) believed that, “Most of the time learning is fun if it is genuinely interesting to learners” (p.258).

It would be remiss to overlook the interconnectedness of family, community, in the co-construction of curriculum. Children cannot co-construct what they do not have experience with, nor can they enjoy learning that which they have co-constructed if the curriculum is outside of their life context. Lessard et al. (2014) wrote,

If curriculum making can be understood as life making and if an understanding of curriculum making can be broadened to understand curriculum making as occurring in multiple worlds, both in schools and outside of schools, then we can more intentionally engage questions and wonders about the multiple curriculum-making worlds that any one particular child/youth lives within. (p. 210)

Children come to school in the midst of their own unique experiences and also bring their own world into which other children have opportunity to travel. In order to both support and understand children as world travelers as Lugones (1987) suggested, then curriculum must reflect the worlds that children live in. This connects to Dewey’s (1938) thoughts on utilizing surroundings to create worthwhile experiences. Further to this, teachers must always work with consideration for the familial curriculum making worlds of children and youth (Clandinin, Murphy, & Huber, 2011).

Children negotiate curriculum, or gain understanding of what is taught, as they move “within and between familial and school contexts” (Clandinin, Murphy & Huber, 2011, p. 20). For children, there are two distinct curriculum-making worlds in which they find themselves; the

world of familial curriculum making and that of school curriculum making. Having "...an understanding that children travel between these two worlds each day carrying with them embodied tensions" (Murphy, Huber, & Clandinin, 2012, p. 227) helps us as educators to avoid "blaming and judging one another, those who live in the other world" (Murphy, Huber, & Clandinin, 2012, p. 227). I propose that though there are indeed inherent tensions between home and school and parents and teachers can work together to bridge the two curriculum worlds for children so that "all the experiences children have, both in and out of school, help shape their sense that someone cares about them, their feelings of self-worth and competency, their understanding of the world around them, and their beliefs about where they fit into the scheme of things" (Comer & Haynes, 1997, p. 1). As Clandinin and Connelly (1995) noted, sometimes the most educative experiences are often not the ones situated in curriculum-making worlds. Understanding and being responsive to what children are engaging in outside of school and utilizing those interests in school can often be the best link in helping children make sense of the two constructions they have of themselves within their two curriculums of home and the classroom.

Lessard, Caine, and Clandinin's (2015) research inquired into whether or not the curriculum-making worlds of Aboriginal youth could live in harmony, or if there was the possibility of seamlessness as the youth world travelled. Their findings were that the curriculum-making worlds of youth most often were in parallel, competing relationships that constructed themselves in conflicting ways. Though Lessard, Caine, and Clandinin's (2015) research is different from that of the SCRP, a similar question can be analyzed: Is it possible to seamlessly travel between the two worlds of familial and school curriculum making for children?

The SCRP took the community and family interest of hockey and shaped that interest into a reading program built entirely around the NHL. Children and families became invested in the program because its subject was a part of their lived experience. In this way, the SCRP sought to purposefully intersect the familial curriculum making world and the school curriculum-making world by involving the familial experience in school programming. Reading is, after all, a social process (Bloome, 1985) and families are an integral part of that social process,

Although there are differences in the ways in which families organize, value, think about, and do reading, it would be wrong to say that one way is better than the others. That would be saying that one culture is better than another... there can be cultural differences between ways of reading in school and ways of reading in students' communities. (p. 137-138)

Au (1980) cited in Bloome (1985) found that when teachers organized their reading classrooms in ways consistent with how children engaged with reading in their homes, students had a higher degree of both participation and achievement. Today, in much the same way as with Au's (1980) research, teachers can and should organize their reading programs in ways consistent with children's lived experiences inside their homes and communities in order to achieve higher values of participation, dedication, and overall achievement. Perhaps Madeline summed it up best when she said, "It was a good program just because it related to the kids. You know, the whole hockey idea and that's what most of the kids in the class were really into, and always have been into – was hockey...it was engaging" (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, October 12, 2015). If we seek to understand the experience of children's lives inside and outside of school and how these experiences intersect, we can be more responsive to how we can engage students in co-constructing meaningful curriculum.

### **Community is a negotiated space:**

As Berman (1990), in Kohn (1993) noted, “We teach reading, writing, and math [by having students do] them, but we teach democracy by lecture” (p.4). If authentic co-construction of curriculum is to be engaged in out-of and in- school experiences and utilized in meaningful ways – classroom community – or milieu must be actively and overtly created. This creating is done by both the teacher and children/youth, and should be “an atmosphere...grounded in critique, reflection, and a quest for more equitable relationships and interactions...modeling respect for differences, thoughtful problem solving and effective engagement with difficult issues” (Stribling, 2014 in Peck, 1987).

The SCRP simultaneously attempted to both build community and co-construct curriculum via a team approach. Building classroom community, or milieu, one of Schwab’s (1973) four commonplaces of curriculum, begins with building relationships. Relationships are built between the children and teacher and the children as a whole. “Relationships...are key. It’s not so much what it is that you teach the students, but what counts is the students knowing that you care about them...then they are willing to do what they need to do for you” (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010, p. 24). The relationship between the teacher/child and child/achievement levels is reciprocal. This is especially true for lower achievers. “Students who struggle need to connect with their teachers before they will put forth effort necessary for school success” (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010, p. 24). Both Madeline and Annie echo this sentiment.

Annie: “I think the important thing is knowing that your teacher is going to believe in you and have faith in you and push you along – like that trust is built. He [Toby] needs to know that his teacher is going to make him work hard, therefore he is going to...read hard, to get the results that he needs in order to get what he needs from his teacher.

Natasha: “Do you see it as reciprocal?”

Annie: “Yes. For sure.”

Natasha: “What is the ‘something’ that the teacher gives to the student?”

Annie: “Respect.”

Natasha: “How does that look, sound, feel?”

Annie: It makes them feel good. Is that what you mean? It is building a good trusting relationship which is what the kids need in order to thrive and develop and mature into the grades that come along next. They need that relationship with their teachers.”

(Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, October 8, 2015).

Madeline stated, “I saw the kids engage and want to do good for the teacher that was engaged with them. I’m not sure if I’m explaining this...but they had pride in how the teacher would be proud of them... they wanted to do this so there was pride from the teacher coming back to them” (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, November 18, 2015).

In the same way that the parents regard relationships with the teacher crucial to academic success, the students also understood that without a relationship built with their peers, the SCRP would not have been as effective. Just as the children worked hard to maintain a relationship with me, they also wanted to work hard to maintain their relationships with their peers.

Relationship building, appears to also be synergistic (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010) in that teachers can positively influence children, children positively influence their peers, and these relationships favorably influence academic performance. Murphy et al, (2009) in Cambria and Guthrie (2010) said, “When students see that teachers are supporting their active collaboration,

they become more cooperative and dedicate themselves to reading more conscientiously. Many partnerships, team efforts, group projects, and peer cooperatives have been shown to motivate students, and some have been shown to increase reading comprehension directly” (p. 27).

Duncan stated, “We were each other’s motivation and stuff like that.” When asked if he felt like he could have asked his peers for support at any time, he became very emotional and affirmed that, yes, he felt he could have. After giving him some time to gather his thoughts, the conversation continued like this:

Natasha: “You were captain [of your reading team] a few times. How did that make you feel?”

Duncan: “Like um, important. Like I – good. I felt like I could, ah, what’s the word? Like I did, ah just, it encouraged me ‘cause ah, they helped me ‘cause it made me want to read more ‘cause it felt like I was important to the team.” (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, October 12, 2015).

Duncan further mentions that being a part of the SCRP community felt, for him, just like being on a real hockey team because you get all the same feelings from your teammates, “motivation, encouragement, respect – and stuff like that” (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, November 16, 2015). For Toby, the importance of building community in the SCRP is simple: “Encourage[ment] probably. If we didn’t have teams no one would read. If you have teams you have people who will encourage other people to read” and for him personally, “You want to support them [your team] because if one guy or person doesn’t read, then your team is gonna be down in the dumps, because the other team would have read” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, November 3, 2015). For Reese, the necessity of building community is slightly

more complex. She spoke candidly about how it is only now as a grade nine student reflecting back on her time in the SCRP that she really understand the value of having a community of support. She stated, “At the time I just wanted them to get their 15 minutes and their sheet in on time, but looking back on it I see it as peers supporting each other...just encouraging them to read and put their time in, they actually are getting better at reading” (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 27, 2015).

Lave and Wenger (1991) in Wong et al (2013) advocated for community-based learning because they believed that learning involved the whole person – implying not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to community as well (p. 282). In their view, learning could not exist in isolation but was rather a system of relations among persons. Although there are several theories on how to build community in classrooms in ways that bring learners together, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theory is of primary interest because in contrast to other ways of building community, it “calls to attention the possibility for variation and even intra-community conflict” (Handley et al., 2006, p. 642). It also involves participatory practice and development of identity, which provides members of the community with a “sense of belonging and commitment” (Hadley et al, 2006, p. 642).

Participation is central to situated learning theory and I would argue, to building classroom community in any capacity. As Wenger (1998) suggested, participation refers to “not just local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities...and constructing identities in relation to these communities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). Hockey is a team sport and its very nature is a social community. Hockey is played in an environment that allows for social interactions among individuals and groups expanding, not only physical skill, but

fostering and promoting leadership, teamwork, and cooperation among individuals towards a common goal. Extrapolating these sports qualities to the classroom, participants in the SCRP were able to build positive reading identities through similar social interactions. Via teamwork, leadership, and cooperation, children are all working as individuals towards the common goal of reading. The action of committed reading is the participatory practice, which gives children a sense of belonging to the classroom community. As they read more and more, they develop an increased skill set, and these skills bring about an increased positive reading identity. The environment of the classroom community is, as Huber, Whelan, and Clandinin (2003) suggested, “a curricular space where we intentionally engage with children about who they are becoming” (p.306) and those identities are constantly in process of making.

Duncan and Toby, for example, were active participants in the SCRP and often took on leadership roles in their learning community. They, and their parents, began to see a shift in their reading identities through their active participation with the SCRP; from seeing themselves as non-readers to feeling more confident in their literacy skills. Past grade four, lack of participation in reading and the SCRP community also caused them to “drift back to [their] normal way of thinking about [themselves]” (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, November 18, 2015). Once outside of the space, or process of the SCRP, the identities that the children were forming were no longer viable. “Thus it is by participation in communities that individuals develop, adapt, and reconstruct their identities” (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993 in Handley et al., 2006, p. 645).

Building a community of learners is not without conflict though ‘community of learners’ may suggest an absence of tensions. “True communities include a variety of points of view. Individual differences are actually appreciated, and differences in opinions in community are

dealt with through consensus. Conflict and chaos are allowed to happen in constructive ways. Because so many frames of reference are allowed, a richer sense of reality is more likely to be approached” (Nicholas, 1997, p. 199) Although the children co-constructed the SCRCP, it would be negligent to forget that their school community is not the only community of which they are a member. Just as children walk between the two curriculum-making worlds of family and school, children are a part of multiple communities besides those of the home and school. Tensions cropped up on two fronts; those that occurred as we co-constructed and edited the rules of the SCRCP to suit our learning community and those that occurred as a result of the multiple communities the children found themselves a part of. For example, a child who is involved in multiple extracurricular activities/groups on several nights of the week might have neglected their responsibilities to the SCRCP causing tension with his/her team members. “Even where structural and normative commonalities have been produced, such as within an organization’s management, there may be considerable diversity” (Handley et al, 2006, p. 648). “The important issue became “how individuals manage their roles, actions, and relationships within multiple communities” (Handley et al, 2006, p. 647).

The SCRCP was co-constructed and negotiated as needed so as to develop democracy and active engagement in the learning community so that all members could be successful as readers. Reese was able to identify and appreciate the skills she learned through the SCRCP in grade four as being valuable to her now as a young adult. “Like directly addressing a problem rather than like, just pushing it off to the side was a big one” she laughed as she talked about learning to collaboratively solve problems with her peers when they arose (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, October 27, 2015).

Even though the parents were not inside of the classroom during the co-construction of the program (but were essential to its implementation at home) they weighed in on the topics of multiple communities and conflict. Annie commented, “It puts a groups of kids together that aren’t always together sometimes. You get to know more about them. It is good sometimes to be with different kids and see different dynamics” (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, December 14, 2015). Madeline stated that democratic and collective voice were developed in diverse students that had a common interest because, “They held each other accountable to their team...The kids built relationships with one another. If there was someone lagging behind – whatever – they needed everyone on the same page to move forward...The attraction was there and they were observant and cognizant of what their team members were doing” (Research Conversation, Madeline & Natasha, November 18, 2015).

It is clear then that the heart of communities of learners revolves around a journey of self-discovery that are interconnected and interwoven at every stage. Children must be actively involved, or be full participants in an academic program in order to consider the task meaningful. In order to consider a task meaningful, the child needs to have been involved in significant ways where their voice has been heard and their ideas recognized – co-construction of curriculum. The task must be relevant to their lived experience and their families and communities involved in tangible ways that create bridges between the familial and school curriculums – seamlessly walking between two curricular worlds. In this way we see that being a full participant is all about relationships – not just within communities of learning, but between communities of learning and that participating also means dealing appropriately with diversity. When we can see and understand the interrelation of these concepts, we not only form, but understand ourselves better inside these communities.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Identity in structures: Bringing it all together**

This thesis began with a narrative that highlighted a moment of tension in my own teaching experience. I went from being a middle years English Language Arts teacher to an elementary generalist with a problem to fix. To use a metaphor that fits in with this thesis, it felt like I had been a spectator in the stands of a hockey game to all of a sudden being on the ice – but with absolutely no equipment and no experience. At the same time as my shifting teaching identity was nerve wracking and upsetting, it was also oddly exciting. Working together with children, families, and the community to solve a literacy dilemma was important to me as a teacher and a provided me with an important learning experience. Following this narrative beginning, the chapter introduced the concepts of reading identity, familial curriculum making, co-constructed curriculum, and classroom community. It also provided an overview of the SCRP, gave relevant research literature, and placed this thesis in the broader research field.

My first findings chapter (chapter four) began by introducing the mother and child pairings of Lyla and Reese, Madeline and Duncan, and Annie and Toby. The chapter explored, for each pair, their individual thoughts about reading. This included the importance they placed on reading in school and at home and their reading identity. Following the narrative accounts, chapter four drew connections among the threads identified by the three pairs in their narratives. These threads were identity making, familial experiences with reading, and implications for intergenerational reading.

Chapter five extended the familial focus of reading in the classroom by attending to a dominant focus in the community. This chapter also provided insight into how the SCRP shaped a space for the children to be co-composers of curriculum and shapers of classroom community.

The final chapter (chapter six) considers the threads identified in all previous chapters and highlights through the SCRP identity making possibilities, curriculum making opportunities, intergenerational reading, and the ways in which classroom community was built. Connections between familial and academic curriculum making are investigated and finally, identity is re-explored so as to better understand how this thesis fits into the world at large.

### **Reflection on the Research Process**

This research was a learning opportunity for me that began as I recounted my own narrative; attending in a focused manner for the first time to my shifting teaching identity. Undertaking this research process makes me think in a deeper way than I had previously thought in regards to what reading meant to me, who I was as a reader, how I became that way, and how I teach reading because of my personal reading identity. These wonderings were essentially the impetus behind the SCRP program and shape this thesis. Reading for me has always been an integral part of my life. As a child, I loved to immerse myself in literature, get to know the characters as though they were my friends, and discuss plots as though they all held deep insights. A large part of my personal and professional life is devoted to academic tasks related to reading. Since I can remember, I have identified myself as a reader. When I was given a different teaching assignment out of my comfort zone I became increasingly aware that just because I identified as a reader, not everyone else did or wanted to be a reader. Knowing that my

experience would not be the experience of all children I began to wonder: If children identified themselves as good readers, would they also have the skills to be “good readers”? In other words, if all children had self-confidence as readers, would their skill levels grow? When I began interviewing parents and children for this research I wanted to understand their experiences with reading and our program in grade three. I wanted to know their personal thoughts on reading, reading identities, experiences with literature inside and outside of school, what was important to them in their homes and communities, and how that translated to lives lived. It was challenging to listen to parents express frustration with school; and children, now in middle school, cry during interviews because they still struggle with reading. Their stories of experience are empowering for me as a teacher. Knowledge of their experience allows for me to consider how I can make differences in school programming. I noted how open and honest the participants were during our conversations even though some of the conversations were emotionally taxing. Coming to know the participants as individuals rather than as simply former parents and students deepened my understanding of them as people and not just as school constructs. Listening to their stories, experiencing their emotions, and sharing in the research process shaped deeper means of communication. I became more cognizant in a way that I wasn’t before that everyone has a story and while I teach I am just in the midst of that story. Getting to know this story has helped me by better informing my practice.

### **Revisiting Key Terms**

The following sections consider the concepts that arose in this research in relation to the experiences of Lyla, Reese, Madeline, Duncan, Annie, and Toby. These include: Identity making, familial experiences with reading, intergenerational reading, familial/school curriculum

making, children as shapers of classroom community, critical literacy and social justice implications.

*Identity Making.* There are several facets to understanding identity making in terms of reading. Identity making can be looked at from an individual standpoint and from a familial standpoint. Individually, identity is related to self-confidence. In short, children who think they are good readers generally are because they have had their skills reinforced. Those children who doubt their abilities tend to have low achievement results (Cambria and Guthrie, 2010) and a self-perpetuating cycle is advanced as in the case of Duncan. Children who do not believe themselves to be good readers expect to do poorly on tasks related to reading. Often their confidence is lower than their actual skill and they tend to stop trying altogether; withdrawing from tasks they think they cannot do. Even though they really want to read, they are not practicing the skills which would allow them to take up reading in a more nuanced way.

Children who have self-confidence in reading tend to see themselves as readers – even if they do not have an overabundance of skill as Toby illustrated. Confidence has a strong influence on their ability to acquire skills, even if reading is a difficult concept. Belief in your own capacity – or confidence – is tied directly to success (Cambria and Guthrie, 2010). For those children, as Reese illustrated, who excel in reading, confidence is second nature and therefore, a positive reading identity is too.

Families impact reading success and therefore reading identity. When an adult begins reading to their child can predict later language abilities (Karrass, VanDeventer & Braungart-Rieker, 2003) and, as this research indicates, how much and how often a family reads can be an

gauge of how much a child will read as an adult. “Parents create the home environment for reading, they take the kids to libraries and bookstores, monitor media consumption, and serve as reading role models themselves. How well they do it determines their children’s future more than any single teacher” (Patterson, 2014, para. 1). Children who struggle with reading are often the same children who do not read with frequency in their homes and do not identify themselves as good readers. This is seen in this research with both Duncan and Toby. However, Reese, who identifies herself as a reader, is steadily encouraged to read and is part of a family that reads frequently.

This research indicated that identity is complex and that there is relation among identity, confidence, and families who read. Perhaps to truly understand our literate identity, we must first understand that identity is an intersectionality of multiple experiences. “We are not only the sum of our parts but also the sum of our experiences...intersectionality of identity means to view the world through multiple and intersecting lenses. In short, nothing is simple” (Berry, Kay & Lynn, 2010, p. 6). Families who read frequently produce children who identify themselves as readers. Children who identify themselves as readers tend to have high self-confidence related to reading. No matter our age, we enjoy doing things we do well. If we story ourselves as competent, self-assured readers we bring this self-identity to our reading lives.

*Intergenerational Reading.* Just as reading identity is impacted by families who read, intergenerational implications for reading are an aspect of families. As Toby mentioned in our conversations, children who read often are more likely to read as adults because, “they’ve been that way for a while so they’ll just keep doing it on their own” (Research Conversation, Toby & Natasha, December 12). Being motivated to read and developing a positive and lasting reading

identity is directly tied to familial experiences. Willingham (2015) wrote that no matter what reading skills may be lacking in children, they can be gained through reading and that through sustained reading, positive reading identities are developed.

*Familial Curriculum Making.* Familial curriculum making is “an account of parents’/families’ and children’s lives together in homes and communities where the parents and families are an integral part of the curricular process in which families, children/learners, subject matter, and home and community milieu are in dynamic interaction” (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011, p. 7-8). The children’s reading identities and skills have been impacted by their familial experiences. It is important to note that the families in this research were and are impacted by the school and communities of which they are a part. Children learn as they move between the worlds of the family and the school, and in relation to both places (Huber, Murphy & Clandinin, 2011). It is in the intertwining of these curriculum-making worlds for children that a life-making process, in which identity making becomes a central part, happens. Identity making then, specifically around reading, shapes understandings of how and where teachers and family engage with children about who they are and who they are becoming as readers. Children learn best when the significant adults in their lives all work in tandem to support them (Comer & Haynes, 1997). Exposure to literature happens in the home, the classroom and in the larger community (Giles & Wellhousen, 2005).

Even though our society has created specific divisions between school and home, both worlds working together is essential in supporting the development of reading for children as indicated in this research project. Meaningful involvement from parents, community, and school in all aspects of children’s learning help to educate the whole child (Comer and Haynes, 1997).

When looking specifically at reading programming, students benefit, as shown in this research, from an integrated approach supported by home and school. Programs where reading is sent home from the school with no utilization of family/community/home resources is not as effective as programs that are built upon strong partnerships. The SCRP differed from most familial reading programs by how it was shaped by interests outside of school attentive to the family and significantly by the children themselves.

*Curriculum Making.* Curriculum making (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) is based on the four commonplaces of: teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu (Schwab, 1973) which are intrinsically linked and inseparable. Children are able to inform the teacher about what is being taught and how it is being taught in ways no one else can. As Reese demonstrated through this research, “Students feel valued when we get a say in what we learn. I feel like my opinion matters and is valued when I have a say. It makes me want to engage more in whatever we are doing because I helped make it” (Research Conversation, Reese & Natasha, January 29, 2016). In order for curriculum to be meaningful in those four commonplaces, and for children to be able to inform the teacher, they have to have a sense of proprietorship over what they learn (Schwab, 1973). If what they are being asked to learn is strictly from the curriculum or that of adult dictation, learning becomes less meaningful. Teachers need to be able to “envision curriculum documents as story starters in which their own and their students’ lived curriculum stories come to life in context. Each teacher and each student has a unique life story constructed and reconstructed through their narratives of experience (Olson, 2000, p. 183). The purpose of the SCRP was to acknowledge both children’s lived experiences and curriculum making in a way that complemented each other so as to make their reading experiences more educative (Dewey,

1938). When children are not integral to the composition of curriculum (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) and are not a valued part of the process of its creation, they are not as likely to buy in.

Not only do the lived experiences of children and teachers need to be considered when looking at the subject being taught, but also the environment. Schubert's (1986) said that teachers should be experientialists because each individual's learning grows from his or her own experience. Considering what children like to do and who best can help them make learning interesting is essential to environment. Involving a multitude of people including other educators, the children, families, community members, and individuals with particular curriculum knowledge - where everyone acknowledges that they can both teach and learn from the others in meaningful ways (Schubert, 1986) is both being an experientialist educator and positively impacting environment.

Building relationships with children and the community at large is an essential part of curriculum making as well as community building. Both curriculum making and community building are interwoven with familial curriculum making. The SCRP married the curriculum making that happens in families to what happens in the classroom through the community focus of hockey. The SCRP also shaped a space for children to co-construct curriculum and therefore the classroom community through their active participation in creating the structure of the SCRP. As Schwab (1973) suggests, curriculum making was truly interwoven between teacher, child, subject, and environment.

*Community Building.* Building something implies that there has been a construction of a structure. When viewed in an academic light, community building involves creating spaces with

and for children where they feel valued, safe, appreciated, and where their experiences are intentionally being engaged in meaningful ways. Children co-construct curriculum based on their experience and their level of engagement is shaped by experiences that build on previous life experience in educative ways, leading to growth (Dewey, 1938). This research indicated that the children found their experiences with reading to be educative when they were able negotiate what they learn and how they learn it. Connecting children's out of school interests to school programming is important because interest impacts achievement and achievement impacts confidence (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). All of these factors impact identity.

Milieu has to be deliberately and actively attended to in classrooms. Though teachers can go about this in a multitude of different ways depending on the subject, program structures, students, and many other unique factors to their particular class – the variable of milieu understood generally, remains constant. Milieu is most supportive when it is relationship based. Meaningful involvement of all participants at the intrinsic level (Aoki, 1993) means that participants will feel valued. Without children and other stakeholders feeling valued in the classroom, programs like the SCRP will fail. As Reese, Duncan, Toby and their parents pointed out, it was their involvement that made the program fun, interesting, fair, and engaging. Because the children were allowed to help create the program they did not feel devalued or silenced. Opportunity to be heard, to collaborate, and to make decisions about what, why, and how children will learn something is well within the social and cognitive skill set of children (Nicholls & Hazzard, 1993) and should be capitalized on to improve overall milieu and to better inform curriculum making. The SCRP's whole structure was co-created by the children and teacher. As Duncan commented, "it build leaderships skills... which is a good skill to have" (Research Conversation, Duncan & Natasha, November 16, 2015) and Toby described as "Real

life...if something was going wrong we could change it” (Research Conversation, December 14, 2015). Annie specifically mentioned that trust was built in the creation and implementation of the SCRIP and that the reciprocal nature of co-constructing a program helped the teacher and child to develop and maintain a respectful relationship (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, October 8, 2015).

*Scaffolding Identity-making possibilities.* The co-construction of curriculum and creating spaces for children to be heard so that positive classroom communities are created is important – as is teaching and supporting reading skills and exposure to literature. However, these cannot happen without the scaffolding of these skills in both the familial and school worlds of the child. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) in Huber and Clandinin (2004) wrote that scaffolding is a process that “enables a child or novice to solve a task or achieve a goal that would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (p. 146). The SCRIP was used in conjunction with teaching reading strategies, introducing new literature to my students, and completing reading at home. But, it was used with the understanding that scaffolding was necessary in several places: the spaces co-created by the teacher and children in the classroom, the kinds of literature offered, and the conversations and writing children were encouraged to engage in (Huber & Clandinin, 2004). Scaffolding also took place in homes, where families helped children make spaces for literature and meaning from what they read.

The SCRIP did not intend to create a reading identity for children. In other words, just because the students were part of the program, did not mean that they would think of themselves as readers and assume a positive reading identity. However, the SCRIP was meant to scaffold the process of assuming a positive reading identity. Through a program based around their out-of-

school interest, children would be more engaged in reading. By being more engaged, students would read more, and by reading more, improve their skills. The improvement of skills built confidence, and confidence, as evidenced in the literature cited earlier, builds a positive reading identity. Reese showed how the identity scaffolding process worked for her and continued after the SCRP was complete. For Toby, and especially Duncan, the scaffolding of reading identity only worked during the duration of the SCRP. After the program was concluded, their reading identities and interest in reading became reduced. Without scaffolding, or assisting of skill and self-concept, Duncan and Toby were unable to maintain a positive reading identity.

*Implications for Belonging.* James Gee (2007) as quoted in Harste (2014) wrote “children today are learning more literacy outside of school than inside” (p. 90). It cannot be overlooked that children are continually immersed in text. From billboards to Twitter and blogs to pulsating headlines, children are bombarded with information. It is in children’s everyday lives, with their families, and in meaningful literacy moments at school, that children learn to read and make connections to texts, no matter what type of texts they encounter.

As Delpit (1995) in Cadiero-Kaplan (2002) indicated, “Students will be judged on their product, regardless of the process they utilized to achieve it” (p. 380). While the SCRP aimed to allow for reflection and conversations with children about change and empowerment for both self and peers, it also aimed to help students become more fully successful in reading the world. Its goal was to help children connect what they were reading to their personal experiences, acquire the necessary reading skills to read the world well, and reflect on their journey with each other. The majority of students experienced success, but others such as Duncan did not. In his present experience, now in a higher grade where students generally read proficiently, he does

not. Being devoid of grade level skills is still impacting his academic ability, self-confidence, and reading identity. As poet Adrienne Rich (1979) quoted in Shor (1999) said, “Language is power and ...those who suffer from injustice most are the least able to articulate their suffering... [T]he silent majority, if released into language, would not be content with a perpetuation of the conditions which have betrayed them” (p. 23). Duncan admits to feeling judged because of his reading abilities. Limited ability restricts Duncan’s access to his peer group and both of these further impede his self-confidence. Once Duncan advances past academic pursuits, he may still be plagued with low self-confidence and in other situations beyond his home community, he may continue to be judged based on his reading ability. Conversely, someone like Reese with a positive reading identity and strong sense of self-confidence lasting beyond the SCRP will likely not be marginalized because of her academic ability related to reading. Thus, critical literacy looks at the ethical center of teaching. “This ethical center was proposed many years ago by John Dewey who insisted that school and society must be based on cooperation, democratic relations, and egalitarian distribution of resources and authority” (Shore, 1999, p. 23). If school and society, and reading programs in particular, do not empower students – especially those of lower abilities – students cannot form positive identities and their very sense of self is negatively impacted. In essence, children must be skilled at reading enough to gain acceptance into the academic community. This acceptance gives them a sense of belonging with their peers and self-assurance in their abilities. Because we live in a society where text is everywhere and those texts need to be critically comprehended, children need to view themselves as competent, self-confident, and proficient in their abilities.

### **Final thoughts.**

There is no “one size fits all” program. Adjusting programs to the specific needs of families and communities is key to the creation of constructive family-school cooperation. “Schools should be sensitive to the realities faced by diverse families...schools must modify...to meet the needs of families. Educators also should be aware that what works well in one school may not work in another” (Barrera & Warner, 2006, p. 74). The same applies for programs attentive to communities. What works well in one, may not work in another even if the communities are side by side. Though the SCRIP worked well because the majority of the community was heavily engaged in hockey, other communities may have had other interests and thus other needs. One differing topic, or many congruent topics may have been chosen to meet familial and academic programming needs. For example, if the community was highly engaged in farming and 4H, this may have been chosen. If the community was surrounding a lake, perhaps waterskiing, fishing, and general lake themes could have been utilized.

It is important to be intentional about the negotiation of classroom spaces (Huber, Whelan, & Clandinin, 2003). To do so, the teacher must not neglect each child’s individual experiences. The SCRIP focused on the community interest and the children’s experience with hockey. Hockey is the one topic that glues this particular community together. However, failing to understand that not every child was 100% interested in hockey would be remiss. Though the vast majority of children were involved with the sport, there were some who were not. Though they could identify with hockey because of the community interest, a sibling’s interest, or a general understanding, some children may have preferred a topic closer to their preferred individual experience. The SCRIP was able to engage these students as much as their peers who were fully engaged with the sport of hockey. All students were able to participate fully in the

SCRP regardless of their interest level in hockey for several reasons. All students created the rules, collectively edited them if and when changes were required, were able to assume roles of leadership among their team but read as individuals, and supported their peers in their individual reading goals. As Reese commented, the students all became better and more confident readers regardless of their interest level in hockey.

It would be negligent of a teacher to disregard that children walk in two curriculum worlds. As they move within familial and school contexts (Clandinin, Murphy & Huber, 2011), they also carry inherent tensions between them (Clandinin, Murphy & Huber, 2011). It is in the working together between home and school that bridges these curriculum-making worlds and helps to make children's experiences educative (Comer & Haynes, 1997). When school programming, like the SCRIP is utilized to bring out of school interests into academic spaces, children can make better sense of the two constructions they have of themselves. As Reese, Duncan, and Toby indicated, they could engage with the SCRIP because it was something they liked, were inspired by, and something they could relate to inside and beyond the classroom walls. Not only can children make better sense of themselves and who they are becoming, when out of school interests are used to bridge gaps between the two curriculum making worlds, parents also feel a stronger sense of inclusion to school happenings.

Too often school and home are separate entities and parents feel alienated from what is happening in their child's classroom (Comer & Haynes, 1997). Prior to the SCRIP Lyla, Madeline, and Annie all had individual reasons for approaching, or not, the school with their concerns. When there is a lack of relationship between school and family, absence of trust and respect ensue and the result is that children fall behind (Comer & Haynes, 1997). When programming in classrooms, no matter what that programming is, makes an effort to involve all

stakeholders of education, academic success becomes possible for children. When parents participate and are given chances to learn about and provide their expertise in curriculum decisions, they feel like they are valued (Comer & Haynes, 1997). Annie described the SCRCP as a program that renewed respect between teacher and students and families and the school. Each parent expressed the importance that what was happening in the community be reflected in school programming. Annie perhaps said it best when she mentioned that programming that reflects the community is important, “So that everyone can learn together and support one another. If the school is working against what the kids are interested in, there is no respect and nothing works well” (Research Conversation, Annie & Natasha, October 8, 2015). Programming that allows for familial and community interactions to be interwoven into school curriculum making is a way for the school, families, and community to work more seamlessly.

It is important for schools and families to work together in respectful ways, and it is vital that children in the classroom also learn to build community. The SCRCP allowed for the children to do two important things that allowed for respectful relationships to be built. First, students were allowed to create how the SCRCP would function. Student choice and voice is something to be taken into academic programming no matter what subject or class – it is not limited to reading or theme-based program shaped around hockey, as was the SCRCP. Children need to be heard in ways authentic to their own experiences. Children are able to tell us about how our teaching affects them and their participation in what and how we are teaching gives them a sense of ownership (Schwab, 1973). This ownership is important to students. Reese commented that the SCRCP was important to her because it made students feel valued and that their opinions mattered. Children have the capacity to collaborate on the purpose and formation of education (Nicholls & Hazzard, 1993) and they should be allowed to do so. When they are given opportunities to

cooperate with the teacher they are able to make better meaning out of what we are asking them to learn, to feel like they matter, and to apply their learning since it is likely related to their experience.

The SCRP allowed for the children to build classroom community by creating support networks among their peers. Madeline commented that Duncan felt the most amount of success as a reader being in a team atmosphere. Duncan admitted the same. For him, being able to take on a leadership role was an uplifting and motivating experience. Students involved in the SCRP read as individuals but supported one another's personal reading goals as a team. The team provided support to each other and functioned as a community that helped the children build self-confidence. As each individual met and exceeded their reading goals their confidence improved and, as their confidence increased, their reading identity became more positive. For children that began the program with a positive reading identity, this was further cemented through the team/community atmosphere. For those children who struggled with reading and did not have a positive reading identity, as they progressed through the program, met their reading goals, and assumed leadership positions, this team atmosphere was key in building a positive reading identity. I trusted that together we could co-create a program and that they would be responsible in implementing it to meet their reading goals. The creation of the SCRP gave them responsibilities as individuals and made them accountable to the larger group. It also involved teaching reading skills in the classroom, their families, and the community. The interconnectedness of responsibility, accountability, and out of school interest resulted in the children, families, and the teacher shaping mutually supportive spaces for learning.

When strong support systems are created for children between home, school, and community, families are more inclined to see that the familial is represented in schools. When

there is an effort made to take out of school interests and apply them to the mandated curriculum (Aoki, 1993), children can make personal meaning out of their learning because their academics apply to their experience. When children are given a voice and responsibility in the classroom they feel respected and appreciated. When programming is in place that builds skill, skill can contribute to confidence, and confidence can shape identity in educative ways.

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### **A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Children and Their Families in the Stanley Cup Reading Program**

Dear Participant,

The proposed research attends to the lives of children and their families and is based on the community interest of hockey and its relation to a school reading program. I will inquire into the ways that curriculum is shaped, in relation with children and families, and how what is learned affects children's school experience and their identities as readers. This research will take place over approximately four months and deal with specific contexts such as how children and families understand reading identity, familial and school curriculum making, classroom community, and how the Stanley Cup Reading Program supports or interrupts children in their identity making process.

#### Proposed Research Purposes:

- *to inquire into the learning experiences of children and their families in a literacy program shaped around a community's interest*
- *to inquire into the ways that curriculum making, in relation with children and families, shapes school experience with reading and children's identities as readers*

Curriculum-making attends to the way curriculum is understood as a course of life (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) that also includes provincial curriculum guides. On the other hand, familial curriculum making occurs when families' and children's lives, together in homes and communities, form an integral part of the curricular process, shaping the course of a life, where the families, community, children, and subject matter are in relation to each other (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). The intertwining of these curriculum-making worlds for children is a life making process in which identity making becomes a central part. Identity making then, specifically around reading, concerns creating deeper understandings where teachers and family engage with children about who they are and who they are becoming as readers. This does not imply the absence of provincially mandated curriculum guides. This concept of curriculum is based on Schwab's (1973) commonplaces of curriculum of teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu (e.g. groups of learners together in one space). But according to Connelly and Clandinin (1988) curriculum would be much larger, encompassing the curriculum guides and also the

negotiated life of the classroom.

This research is narrative inquiry based. Narrative methods for the study of children, families and teachers' experiences of curriculum making consist of writing field texts and research texts. Field texts are texts created by participants (children and families) and researchers to represent experience. Narrative inquiry is a relational research methodology and thus the relational aspects of inquiry are central to both the composition of field texts and research texts. I propose to collect, construct, and analyze a variety of field texts—conversation transcripts with children and their families, field notes of events in the children's home and community spaces, field notes of events in school settings, children's and families' memory box items. Photographs, both archival/memory box photographs and recently taken photographs, will be used as starting points to inquire into and to represent aspects of participant and researcher experiences. Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role in the research.

The various field texts will include individual audio recorded and transcribed interviews, observations, and home visits (as negotiated by all parties).

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. This study will contribute to an understanding of how reading programs, attentive to community interests, can support children in their identity making process.

The field texts (data) generated over the course of this work will be kept in a locked cupboard in my locked home or on a password protected computer also kept in a locked or lockable space. Your name, school, and location of the research sites will be anonymous. When the field texts are no longer required they will be destroyed. In fact, all names and locations of the participants will be changed to pseudonyms in order to protect the confidentiality and locality of the participants in the study.

Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort. Should you wish to withdraw, you will not need to give any specific reason, but please let me, Natasha Cochran, know so that all data that has been collected in relation with you will be deleted or shredded. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until final research documents have been published. After this date, it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data. Final research documents may take the form of conference papers and journal publications. Prior to submission I will share all final research texts with you to obtain your approval for use of your data.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher using the information at the bottom of this letter. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca) (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.



Appendix B: Transcript Release Form



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**A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Children and Their Families in the Stanley Cup Reading Program**

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Description:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this research. I have been provided with the opportunity to add, edit, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate and feel comfortable approaching Natasha Cochran in this matter. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Natasha Cochran. By signing this form, I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Natasha Cochran to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Guardian of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	
<i>Researcher's Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>	

A copy of this form will be left with you and a copy will be taken by the researcher. For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact Natasha Cochran at [nsc320@usask.ca](mailto:nsc320@usask.ca).