“PAPER DOESN’T JUDGE YOU”:
THE LITERACY PRACTICES OF THREE GIRLS
WHO ATTENDED AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

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Literacy practices can be considered powerful tools used to claim a space, establish an identity, or provide a voice in various social interactions. The goals of this study were to understand the literacy practices of three female young adults who attended an alternative school prior to my study in the spring of 2008. The study also explored the purposes for the literacy practices, the outcomes of the literacy practices, and the factors that seemed to influence their reading and writing.

I used a qualitative case study design method to explore the girls’ personal and school literacy. Data were obtained through observations; weekly interviews with each girl; interviews with family members, interviews with teachers, an interview with the girls’ probation officer; literacy vignettes; school documents; and the girls’ writing.

Findings established that the girls participated in varied and extensive personal literacy practices including the reading of novels and informational texts and the writing of poetry, letters, and notes. The girls’ personal literacy practices helped them cope with their emotions, reflect on their life events, establish and maintain social networks with peers, and communicate with family members. Although I found the girls had well-articulated purposes for participating in their personal literacy practices, their school literacy practices were often disconnected from their lives.
**Key words:** alternative school, detention center, personal literacy, school literacy, girls
To my mom
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CHAPTER I
DEFINING THE STUDY

* “It [reading] helps calm me down.” – Danielle

* “I write poems about the way I feel. It is just something to calm me down.” – Suzanne

* “It is easier to put it [your thoughts] on paper ’cause paper doesn’t judge you.” – Molly

The statements from Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly are varied, yet they represent some of the reasons these youth chose to participate in literacy practices. The girls’ statements contradict common sense ideas about the literacy practices of youth. Myths of adolescence as a time when youth are raging with hormones and rebelling against adults, in addition to misconceptions about how reading and writing are taught in middle and secondary schools, have left the field of young adult literacy ignored until recently (Moje, 2002b; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; R. Vacca, 1998). Since the 1990s there has been a call by literacy educators and literacy organizations to focus on the field of adolescent literacy (Moore et al., 1999; R. Vacca, 1998); however, the term adolescent literacy continues to be ambiguous as educators, researchers, and policy makers work to define the terms adolescent and literacy.

In the field of education, adolescence historically has been defined by a biological perspective, identifying adolescence as a period of one’s life (Finders, 1997; Moje, 2002a). Under this position, adolescents range from age 10 to 20 (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). The stance that adolescence is solely a biological stage in one’s life is shifting to a view of adolescence as a socially constructed phenomenon.
Defining adolescence as a generic time period ignores cultural and social influences (Finders, 1997). Often adolescence is portrayed as a time when youth are influenced by hormones, rebelling against adult culture and working to gain independence. Viewing adolescence as a socially constructed phenomenon recognizes the complexity of adolescence as youth renegotiate roles and relationships within multiple spaces, such as home and school (Finders, 1997). Because youth are less likely to rely as heavily on adult supervision and more likely to be gaining independence and making more decisions for themselves, they are constantly experiencing and engaged in identity construction. Moje (2002a) cautioned educators that although youth are engaged in identity work, studies focused on youth should not “emphasize becoming with a sense of some final, stable end product or identity” (p. 216).

Literacy practices are one form of identity expression. Defining literacy is complicated because a definition relies on what constitutes a literate individual and discussions about what “counts as texts” (Moje, 2002b, p. 107). These debates and discussions represent power linked to literacy. Who decides what is considered a literate act? Who decides what counts as text and what does not? These questions open the definition of literacy to more than just a skill or practice; literate practices can be considered powerful tools used to claim a space, establish an identity, or provide a voice in various social interactions. The ways one uses literacy can have a profound impact on whether a literacy practice and the event with which it is associated are valued (Moje et al., 2000). Moreover, some discussions of literacy and peoples’ literate practices raise issues related to who is excluded from these discussions of literacy. Because adolescence
as a time period is negatively portrayed as a hormonal, rebellious time in one’s life, many times the literacy practices of young adults are ignored. Moje (2002b) argued, “youth are often dismissed from the literacy education radar screen because it is assumed that their literacies and other practices are confused at best, and troubled or villainous at worst” (p. 99). Moje (2002a) blamed media for promoting youth as hormonal and a challenge to accepted adult culture. She contended these distortions allow for youth to be dismissed and ignored.

The misconceptions surrounding youth and their literacy practices extend into misconceptions about how reading and writing are taught, especially once students leave elementary school. Many assume reading and writing are learned in elementary school “only to be remediated in adulthood if not learned correctly in the early years” (Moje, 2002a, p. 213). Literacy researchers conclude that because of the primary focus on literacy during the early years of schooling, “the field of adolescent literacy has been neglected, misunderstood, and often marginalized” (R. Vacca, 1998, p. xv). During the last decade educators, researchers, and policy makers have begun to recognize and to attend to the complex literacy demands adolescents face (Moore et al., 1999; R. Vacca, 1998). Although literacy educators and researchers have begun to study the literacy practices of youth, there is a lack of research focused on the literacy practices of youth engaged in non-traditional schooling, such as alternative schools.

As educators, researchers, and policy-makers explore the complex literacy practices of youth, it is important not only to look at youth who are succeeding in school, but also those youth considered unsuccessful in the educational system. The National
Dropout Prevention Center (2009) insists educators and researchers learn more about youth, their lives and what keeps them engaged in school. Currently, 1.1 million youth, ages 16-19, do not have a high school diploma or equivalent General Education Development test certificate (GED; Aron, 2006). Students’ reasons for dropping out of school are often complex and are developed over time; however, The National Dropout Prevention Center (2009) has identified four domains related to youth dropping out of school: individual, family, school and community factors. For some educators, the number of youth dropping out of school proves public education is not meeting the needs of all students (Sekayi, 2001). And because most students who drop out of school have a history of disengagement from school, the National Dropout Prevention Center (2009) views some forms of alternative education as important in keeping youth engaged in school. Learning about youth in alternative school settings may provide important information regarding how to keep students engaged in learning before they decide to leave school.

Educators and researchers agree although there are successful models of alternative education that implement small class size, an emphasis on caring relationships and innovative curricular approaches, some models of alternative education actually may contribute to the number of youth who drop out of school each year (Brown, 2007; Christle, Nelson & Jolivette, 2004; Gregg, 1998; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). The concern is alternative education, especially schools serving students who have been suspended or expelled from schools, are reinforcing negative images of youth, and creating a tiered system of education (Brown, 2007; Christle et al., 2004; Gregg, 1998; Skiba & Knesting,
Sekayi (2001) noted that although alternative education “suggests an approach different from the norm,” for many “alternative means education for ‘bad kids’” (p. 414). Understanding the literacy practices of youth who have attended an alternative school may allow educators and youth to contest the negative stereotype surrounding students in alternative education.

**Statement and Significance of the Problem**

Because of negative perceptions surrounding alternative education, students in alternative school settings are viewed not only as disruptive but are considered to have low academic performance (Aron, 2006; Brown, 2007; Christle et al., 2004; McCall, 2003; Reimer & Cash, 2003; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Low-academic success in school, however, does not necessarily mean youth are not engaged in rich, individualized, and personal literacy activities. Literacy researchers have documented the discrepancy between youths’ in-school literacy practices and their personal literacy practices (Alvermann, 2001; Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 1999; Bean, Bean, & Bean, 1999; Bintz, 1993; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Myers, 1992; Moje, 2000; Moje et al., 2008; Worthy, 1998). Literacy researchers have noted students labeled reluctant readers in school actually were involved in significant personal literacy practices out of school (Beers, 1996; Bintz, 1993; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Moje, 2000; Worthy, 1998). Research surrounding youth and their literacy practices shows youth participate in literacy practices in order to strengthen their identity, create social networks and social capital, learn new and relevant information about their lives, and cope with life situations.
Much of the research on the literacy practices of youth has occurred within traditional school settings (Beers, 1996; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Moje, 2000; Moje et al., 2008; Myers, 1992; Sanford, 2005). And there has been a call for educators and researchers to focus also on the complex literacy practices of youth outside of the school setting (Alvermann, 2001). What is missing, however, is an understanding of the literacy practices of youth who have been educated in non-traditional school settings, such as alternative schools. Do educators and researchers assume that because these students have been dismissed from traditional education, they are not involved in literacy the way other youth might be? If educators and researchers choose not to learn about youth in alternative school settings, are they not perpetuating the cycle of inequities within schools? Better understanding of young adults’ literacy practices is important in recognizing their literacy identities. Because youth in alternative schools tend to be disengaged from school it is important to learn about their literacy practices. Valuing and understanding how young adults create meaning from their literacy practices can be used to engage them in traditional literacy practices. Delpit (1995/2006) and Moje (2000) called for the use youths’ lived experiences to help them understand and negotiate new learning experiences.

Studies focused on the literacy practices of youth educated in alternative schools would be useful for the field of literacy, because there has been a noted lack of research focused on students enrolled in alternative education (Bauman, 1998; Brown, 2007;
Gregg, 1998). Society’s assumptions about a population of students about whom not much is known or understood are dangerous (Bauman, 1998). A lack of research is also a concern because alternative education is a popular form of education, yet it has not been adequately assessed or evaluated (Bauman, 1998). Existing research on alternative schools, including exclusions from school and the dropout crisis, finds that a disproportionate number of minority males attend alternative schools, are expelled from school and drop out of school, compared to other racial, ethnic, and gender groups (Bauman, 1998; Gregg, 1998; Imich, 1994; King, Silvey, Holliday & Johnston, 1998; Sekayi, 2001).

Although educators should question and understand why this discrepancy exists, educators and researchers must learn about other student populations served by alternative education, particularly Caucasian girls. Fine and Macpherson (1994) explored how the available socially constructed roles for girls are divided into “good” girls and “bad” girls. “Good” girls are “nice” and do not express their opinions, whereas “all the ‘bad’ bits of femininity, social and sexual competitiveness, placed upon the ‘other,’ that is, other girls” (p. 239). Girls’ roles in society are, therefore, “neither biologically determined nor individually constructed” (Finders, 1997, p. 12), but socially constructed. Societal values shape the values of the school and classroom, and schools and classrooms become places where adolescents shape their gender identities (Williams, 2007). Because identity is not a stable construct, individuals can construct different identities in different contexts; students transitioning from alternative schools back to their home schools are navigating multiple contexts and experiences, possibly influencing their views on their
identities (Moje, 2002b). Educators should understand how these roles are negotiated, particularly for girls who have attended an alternative school because of “bad” behavior and who are now transitioning back to their home school because of their “good” behavior. Recognizing how students’ literacy practices may change as they shift identities and contexts is also important.

Because students’ behavior and views about themselves can shift as they navigate different settings, educators must understand why students flourish in certain settings and not others. Many students, although considered unsuccessful in mainstream education, are considered academically and behaviorally successful in alternative school settings (Bauman, 1998; McCall, 2003). Students’ transitions back to mainstream schools are critical to their eventual success or failure in school. Currie (2004) found literacy practices became resiliency factors for students with anti-social tendencies and those considered at-risk for dropping out of school. Educators need to examine all factors contributing to students’ success in schools and the support systems necessary to help students transition from an alternative school to their traditional home school (McCall, 2003).

A study examining the literacy practices of girls who have previously attended an alternative school has the potential to inform the educational community, in a detailed manner, about the role of literacy in the lives of girls. The goals of this study were to understand the literacy practices of three female young adults who previously attended an alternative school, prior to my study, in the spring of 2008. The study also explored the purpose for the literacy practice, the outcomes of the literacy practices for these young
adults, and the factors that seemed to influence their reading and writing. In order to do this, I conducted an in-depth analysis of each of the girl’s literacy practices.

**Definition of Terms**

*Literacy:* The reading and writing of print and non-print text.

*Practices:* Engagement in reading and/or writing activities

*Accomplish:* The intended or unintended outcome of one’s literacy practice.

*Context:* The environment or setting where literacy occurs

*Factors:* Influences on literacy. For example, family influence, peer influences, school requirements or life events.

*Type II Alternative Schools:* Those schools considered “last-chance” schools “whose distinguishing characteristic is discipline, which aims to segregate, contain, and reform disruptive students” (Raywid, 1994, p. 4).

*Juvenile Detention Center:* Short-term secure pre-adjudication and post-adjudication facility for youth.

*Probation:* A court-authorized release from jail

**Research Questions**

The following questions were guided by my pilot study, and were used as a basis for further investigation into the lives and literacy practices of three female youth who attended an alternative school, prior to my study, in the spring of 2008:

1. What are the literacy practices of three female young adults who have spent a portion of their schooling experience in an alternative school setting because of suspensions, expulsions, or court orders?
2. What are the girls’ purposes for engaging in these literacy practices?

3. What do the girls think their literacy practices accomplish?

4. What factors, including but not limited to family, peers, school literacy practices, and life events, influence the literacy practices of three female young adults?

**Summary**

My study explored the girls’ literacy practices, their purposes, the outcomes of engaging in these literacy practices, and factors that seemed to influence their reading and writing. Educators and researchers must work to examine both the in-school and personal literacy practices of youth. Youths’ literacy practices should be valued for their own sake, not just their contribution to a students’ academic success. Youth should be studied, because the time period in their life is rich with meaning making and identity construction. As educators and researchers continue to study the literacy practices of young adults, educators must recognize those youth who have been underrepresented in the literature, especially female students who have attended alternative schools.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this review of literature related to the study I discuss literacy as a social practice. Within this theory, I describe how literacy may be viewed from a sociocultural perspective. The relevant views on adolescent literacy, including a discussion of school literacy as opposed to out-of-school literacies, are then discussed. I examine four factors found to affect adolescents’ literacy practices: gender, socioeconomic status, family influences, and peer influences. An overview on the historical nature of alternative education is provided. I describe the research trends within alternative education and then explore the research on students’ transitions from alternative education back to mainstream educational settings. The preceding topics are summarized by linking the key topics of literacy and alternative education. Because many students involved in alternative education have been suspended or expelled from school, I include research focused on suspensions and expulsions.

Sociocultural Perspectives on Literacy

Literacy historically has been viewed as the act of reading and writing and the cognitive processing skills following (Finders, 1997; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004). A sociocultural perspective expands this view while acknowledging the “role of print and symbol systems as a necessary component of literacy, but also recognizes the learning and use of symbols as mediated and constituted by social systems and cultural practices” (Moje et al., 2008, p. 109). Vygotsky’s work provided a
Wertsch noted two basic themes emerging from Vygotsky’s writings: “higher mental functioning in the individual derives from social life; and the claim that human action, on both the social and individual places, is mediated by tools and signs” (p. 19). He explored how Bakhtin’s notion of voice extends on Vygotsky’s work to shape the sociocultural stance. Bakhtin’s work emphasized “the idea that voices always exist in a social milieu; there is no such thing as a voice that exists in total isolation from other voices” (p. 52). Therefore, any form of speech communication involves the speaker and the person being addressed.

From this view, literacy is a socially situated practice embedded in specific contexts with specific purposes (Bean et al., 1999; Finders, 1997; Moje et al., 2008; Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). Participants involved in the literate act socially construct meaning from their literate practice and the context in which the literacy practice took place (Bean et al., 1999; Finders, 1997; Myers, 1992; Moje et al., 2008, Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). Because literacy is socially situated, the literacy practice can be either accepted or rejected based on societal expectations (Finders, 1997).

The sociocultural view also broadens the notions of literacy as primarily the ability to read and write. Because language is socially situated, for youth, discussions of literacy practices are not just about the ability to read and write; Gee (2000) explained that literacy is more than just reading and writing; it encompasses “social languages” (p. 413). Social language is a “discourse peculiar to a specific stratum of society (professional, age group, etc.) within a given social system at a given time” (Wertsch,
Because social languages allow youth to “enact, recognize and negotiate different socially situated activities” an examination of youth’s literacy practices from a sociocultural perspective encompasses a discussion of identity-making, social interactions, space and power (Gee, 2000, p. 413).

When studying the literacy practices of youth from a sociocultural perspective, researchers must acknowledge the complexity of literacy in the lives of youth. Researchers must not only document youths’ use of literacy, but notice when, where, and why the literacy act occurs.

**Adolescent Literacy**

**School Literacy Versus Personal Literacy**

During the 1990s much of the literature noted the steady decline in reading attitudes in the middle school and high school years (ACT College Readiness, 2006; Bintz, 1993; National Endowment for the Arts, 2007); the suggestion that adolescents do not engage in literacy practices is a continuing conversation. The National Endowment for the Arts (2007) survey found young adults are reading generally fewer books than in previous years. The report also found a majority of high school students read only minimally for class and reading itself is a declining activity. The ACT College Readiness (2006) reported, based on the 2005 ACT-tested high school graduates, only half of ACT-tested high school students are prepared for college reading.

These reports raise concerns and questions surrounding the literacy practices and proficiencies of youth. The assumption is adolescents are not readers and if they are, they are not proficient readers; however, researchers have documented the complex literate
lives of young adults outside of the school contexts (Alvermann, 2001; Alvermann et al., 1999; Beers, 1996; Bintz, 1993; Worthy, 1998). Are the literacy practices of youth linked to school achievement? If they are not, what are the implications for educators? These statistics also raise questions of how educators and researchers measure literacy and if academic literacy alone is proof adolescents are or are not readers. These reports and discrepancies also raise questions about the definitions of literacy.

From a sociocultural standpoint, because the context surrounding literacy practices change as students move from school settings to out-of-school settings, the skills associated with literacy practices cannot necessarily be transferred from in-school to out-of-school (Myers, 1992). Bintz (1993) suggested the problem with the research on reading failure assumes reading behaviors are similar during in and out of school context, an argument he challenged.

Studies confirm out-of-school literacy practices are rich, highly individualized and personal (Alvermann, 2001; Alvermann et al., 1999; Bintz, 1993; Chandler, 1999; Myers, 1992; Worthy, 1998). In a study of personal literacy in school, Myers (1992) found students used literacy to negotiate their world and create social relationships. Notes, sports sections of newspaper, popular magazines, and the signing of yearbooks helped students create and maintain identities while also engaging in and navigating social relationships. Similarly, through a conversation with two adolescent boys, Worthy (1998) found these boys, labeled reluctant readers in school, were actually quite involved in their reading outside of school. The boys had informal book discussions, enjoyed individual book preferences, and read books recommended by peers. Bean et al. (1999)
described these practices as functional literacy, suggesting adolescents engage in literacy practices serving a purpose. Bean et al. had two adolescents keep a two-week tally of their literacy practices, including: reading novels, magazines, writing for school and pleasure, computer use, phone use, television, and video games. They found “adolescents allocate varying levels of energy and interests to literacy activities serving particular functions in their lives” (p. 445).

Alvermann (2001) wrote “adolescents often find their own reasons for becoming literate, reasons that go beyond reading to acquire school knowledge or mastery of academic text” (p. 20). Youths’ literacy practices are tied to their personal lives because they choose the reading and writing activities. The importance of choice has been documented repeatedly (Alvermann, 2001; Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; Bintz, 1993; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Mellon, 1990; Samuels, 1989; Worthy, 1998). Anderson et al. (1985) surveyed 276 gifted students who reported their reason for reading outside of school was because they could choose what they wanted to read. While researching the reading habits of 1,700 middle school students, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found choice was significantly aligned to positive reading experiences.

Youth choose to use literacy as a tool for learning (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Mellon, 1990; Samuels, 1989), both in school and to get information about their immediate or future worlds. Mellon (1990) found adolescents read for job preparation and learning outside of school. Strommen and Fowles Mates (2004) surveyed 151 students, 65 sixth grade students, and 86 ninth grade students, about their recreational
reading habits and found students love to read, identify themselves as readers, and regularly engage in reading.

In their study of 584 urban adolescents, Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) found students reported their leisure reading was for fun, for learning, and out of boredom. Students read to learn how to cope with life situations. They felt reading relieved boredom and provided escapism from stress in everyday life. Magazines were the preferred choice of reading because the topics in the magazines pertained to their lives.

Moje et al. (2008) reported a similar finding when youth discussed using literacy to learn to control emotions, to gain resilient characteristics, and to engage in self-expression. Like Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007), Moje et al. (2008) found youth read novels less than other types of reading materials. Students reported lack of time for reading at home as the reason novels are not read. These reports are significant because they show youth are reading; however, because novel reading is associated with school achievement, youth may not necessarily read materials that will help them succeed in school. They did, however, find 92% of the youth reported reading text outside of school, whereas 82% reported writing outside of school.

Although adolescents view their personal literacy practices as a relevant and necessary component in their lives, many times in-school literacy practices are viewed as meaningless (Alvermann, 2001; Alvermann et al., 1999; Bintz, 1993; Chandler, 1999; Myers, 1992; Worthy, 1998). Bean et al. (1999) explained “when there is a sharp divide between the culture of the school and the students who are the stakeholders in a school, students may choose to reject the official curriculum” (p. 446). In a study of literacy
practices in school, Myers (1992) found literacy took on dual roles in students’ lives; literacy practices in school produced “meaningless” text, whereas students’ personal literacy practices help students understand their lives and social situations. Nagle (1999) conducted a qualitative phenomenological interview study to learn about the literacy histories of 20 vocational high-school students. Many of the participants were involved in extensive reading and writing at home, although their literacy practices were not accepted at school, nor did out-of-school literacy practices translate into academic success.

Academic achievement is significant in how students view themselves as literate members of the school community. Many adolescents assume reading is completely tied into academic reading; therefore, because they do not view themselves as readers in school, they do not view themselves as readers out of school, even when they are involved in extensive literacy activities. While studying 384 adolescents, Pitcher et al. (2007) found discrepancies between students’ views of themselves as readers in and out of school. On surveys students identified themselves as non-readers; however, during interviews students discussed reading magazines, websites, and graphics. Their literate acts were immersed in particular social contexts; when these contexts conflicted with school, the adolescents did not recognize their significance. In their study of committed and reluctant male readers, Love and Hamston (2004) found the reluctant readers saw the long-term value of reading, but associated reading with school activities. The association with school caused the boys to reject many literate practices.

Students’ views of themselves as readers are also shaped by teachers’ expectations and perceptions in regards to their literacy abilities and achievements. Myers
(1992) found while in school, adolescents looked at literacy as having one meaning given to them by the teacher. Students viewed the reading and writing assignments as activities produced only for teacher satisfaction. Beers (1996) found a discrepancy between teachers’ views of reluctant readers and students’ views of their reading practices. Teachers assumed students who were not considered good readers in school were not readers outside of school; this was not always the case and certainly was not always how the students perceived themselves. The students did not understand why the teachers placed them in lower reading groups, especially when they viewed themselves as competent readers.

The findings from studies focused on youths’ in-school literacy practices and their personal literacy practices raise questions about how youth practice literacy and how educators assess their literacy practices in and out of the school context. Moje et al. (2008) argued youth “read and write when they have a well-articulated purpose, a purpose that is usually centered in a network of social activity” (p. 146); therefore, it is unfair to assess their literacy practices only by school achievement. In fact, as Alvermann (2001) went on to say “the possibility that as a culture we are making struggling readers out of some adolescents who for any number of reasons have turned their backs on a version of literacy called school literacy is a sobering thought” (p. 679).

Youth are engaged in literacy practices outside of school because they choose to do so. In school adolescents do not usually have the power of choice as to what they read and learn. As noted, some youth read and write for the teacher’s approval even when they do not see themselves reflected in their literacy practices while at school. Out of school,
however, youth use literacy to create social networks and relationships; communicate with other youth; learn about their world; and express their ideas, feelings, and emotions. Their literacy practices are personal and functional. These are not trivial motives, but powerful reasons for engaging in literacy practices.

**Gender, Literacy, and School**

Literacy practices have been consistently linked to gender identities (Moje et al., 2008). Discussions of gender are often included when educators and/or researchers state what adolescents are or should be reading. Parrish (1983) encouraged educators to include romantic fiction, regarded as a popular genre amongst adolescent females, as part of a balanced literacy program for girls. Her argument was grounded in the assumption that since females enjoy reading romantic fiction, if romantic fiction was allowed in school girls would be more apt to read. In a study of 80 ninth graders, Hafner, Palmer and Tullos (1986) found good readers read women’s development and homemaking magazines while poor readers read magazines classified as technical and mechanical. Although they did not explicitly discuss gender, it was subtly included in their definition surrounding competent and incompetent readers and their findings. The study seems to have replicated gender stereotyping; the “good” readers were reading magazines considered women’s magazines, whereas the “poor” readers were reading magazines associated with males.

While encouraging teachers to use newspapers to engage students in reading, Ammann and Mittelsteadt (1987) found the boys were most interested in sports, comics, or advertisements for cars, whereas girls were interested in sports, advice columns,
horoscopes, and entertainment. In a survey of adolescents Mellon (1990) found gender differences; the adolescents viewed girls as readers of romance whereas boys were readers of sports, war, and science fiction. Moje et al. (2008) discussed gender within their larger study of youth; they found female readers in particular selecting text featuring “the female voice” and “mirrored” their own experiences (p. 140).

As the growing trend of research examines gender roles and literacy, when compared to their male counterparts, studies have found females to be more avid readers (Anderson et al., 1985; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Moffitt & Wartella, 1992; Moje et al., 2008; Pitcher et al., 2007). This finding, however, has been countered. Love and Hamston (2004) argued the literacy practices of males are oversimplified because there is not just one aspect defining a person as a committed or reluctant reader. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) debunked the “boy code” generalizations by finding the boys were involved in extensive literacy practices.

Educators and researchers studying girls also have concerns about the notions that females are involved in more literacy practices than males. Sanford (2005) argued there is a recognition that boys fail to use traditional literacies as much as they rely on new literacies, defined as literacy practices relating to visual, multimodal, and digital texts. Girls, however, are continuing to become more engaged in print-based literacies, but not new literacy practices; she insisted new literacy practices are where girls fall behind boys. Because girls are conforming to school-based literacy practices, not the literacy practices they will eventually use in the workplace or in their own lives, their exclusion is masked by successful test scores. Williams (2007) countered Sanford’s (2005) argument by
claiming each year girls are becoming increasingly engaged in new literacies, especially online literacies. Williams (2007) noted girls tend to use their online literacy practices in a similar manner to their traditional print literacy practices; both types of literacy practices are used to build and sustain social relationships.

Discussions of girls’ literacy practices are often linked to their academic competence. *How Schools Shortchange Girls* (American Association of University Women, 1992) identified how girls receive less encouragement and attention in class, how boys sexually harass girls in school, and how the culture of competition in school is a strength for boys more so than for girls. This report also noted how girls were discouraged from the math and sciences; however, literacy seemed to be the girls’ strength as girls were regarded as more successful readers and writers than their male counterparts. Educators, however, have viewed girls’ success in literacy as a cultural paradox (Williams, 2007). Studies have shown girls usually write about issues that do not conflict with societal values and school values (Finders, 1997; Sanford, 2005; Williams, 2007). Educators argue that academic and literacy success reflects girls’ learning to be socially appropriate and to reproduce societal values and expectations (Finders, 1997; Sanford, 2005; Williams, 2007).

From a sociocultural stance the examination of gender is essential in understanding how youth engage in literacy. Researchers should note how adolescents are positioned in schools and if they are encouraged to participate or reject certain literacy practices based on their perceived gender roles.
Socioeconomic Status

Much of the early research on young adults focused on what students were reading outside of school. During the 1970s and early 1980s one method of identifying the reading habits of adolescents was by studying book purchases (Aaron, Miller, & Smith, 1975; Algra & Fillbrandt, 1970; Carter & Harris, 1982; Eberwein, 1973). In these studies, fiction, such as scary books, ghost stories, and realistic fiction about young people, was determined to be the most popular genre for young adults (Aaron et al., 1975; Algra & Fillbrandt, 1970; Carter & Harris, 1982; Eberwein, 1973). Although socioeconomic status is never explicitly discussed in the studies, making assumptions about adolescents’ reading habits by studying the books purchased excluded all adolescents without the material wealth to purchase books.

Moje et al. (2008) discussed a similar misconception in how researchers and educators now view youth’s multiple or new literacy practices. Many studies have explored how youth use the technological advances to engage in new literacy behaviors (Bean et al., 1999; Kist, 2005; Lewis & Fabos, 2004). The PEW Research Center Internet and American Life Project found close to 9 in 10 adolescents are Internet users and approximately 11 million adolescents go online daily (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005). Moje et al. (2008) found, however, a lack of Internet use and access among youth in a high poverty setting. Without dismissing the fact that many youth are “wired” and are engaged in important literacy practices through technology, they asked,

Given the large number of the nation’s youth who live in such settings, educators should question the increasingly popular notion that all youth are wired. Does
high use among middle- and upper-middle class youth mask the poor access of young people in high-poverty communities, whether urban or rural? (p. 127)

Studies such as Moje’s et al. (2008) are useful because they remind educators about the importance of understanding youths’ backgrounds in relation to their literacy practices. Although many times the socioeconomic status of youth is not explicitly stated in research, educators should be aware of how youths’ backgrounds impact their literacy practices.

**Family Practices and Literacy**

For youth, socioeconomic status is almost always defined by parents and/or family members. Parents have been found to be important factors in the reading habits of young adults (Chandler, 1999; Love & Hamston, 2004; Moje et al., 2008; Partin & Gillespie, 2002). Although Chandler originally set out to explore young adults’ in-school versus their out-of-school reading choices, she soon realized her study was leading her to examine further how parents influenced their children as readers. She found parents often supplied their adolescents with books and made future reading recommendations. Mellon (1990) found parents were not only buying reading materials for adolescents, but many adolescents claimed to read the materials parents read and kept in the home.

Positive reading models in the home can influence how youth engage in literacy. Although many times a literate home environment positively influences adolescents to read, this assumption is not necessarily true for all adolescents. Love and Hamston (2004) described the reading practices and attitudes of 166 teenage boys; the boys came from a middle-class, school-oriented culture and were competent readers; however, 75 boys
were considered reluctant readers whereas 91 were considered committed readers. Through parent interviews they found both sets of parents used the boys’ identities and interests to engage them in reading practices; for example, parents reported trying to nurture their sons’ reading habits by providing them with reading on their favorite hobbies, such as skateboarding, cars, and video-games, as well as diversifying their reading materials by providing the boys with magazines, CD-roms, and the Internet. Interestingly enough, mothers, more so than fathers, were responsible for providing their sons reading material and for facilitating conversations about reading.

In a survey of 160 tenth grade students, Partin and Gillespie (2002) found that the home literacy environment significantly impacts adolescents’ positive attitudes toward reading. They found parental involvement, reading material, and consistency of reading at home led to adolescents’ attitudes towards reading.

Family involvement is not always specific to parents, but can include adults and other community members as parental figures. M. Kelly (2001) studied a young adult male’s participation in church and an African drumming group. She found the church had a tremendous impact on the young man and his literacy practices; the dance, oral storytelling, and personal history provided the youth with particular tools and creativity. In this sense, literacy became more complex as it was connected to identity and community.

Family and other community members acting as parental figures can positively impact a youth’s interest and preference in literacy. These studies contest myths of adolescence as a time when youth sever ties from the adults in their lives (Chandler,
1999; Love & Hamston, 2004; M. Kelly, 2001; Moje et al., 2008; Partin & Gillespie, 2002). In fact, youths’ literacy practices were strengthened by their relationships with family members.

**Peer Influence**

The idea that literacy can allow for a connection among groups stems from work in New Literacy Studies, taking “literacy as its central unit of analysis” (Hull & Schultz, 2002, p. 21). Under New Literacy Studies, Gee (2000) defined discourse as ways of “thinking, believing, valuing, acting, interacting and often ways of coordinating and being coordinated by other semiotic systems, other people, various objects, tools, settings and technologies” (p. 413). Discourses are important because they allow people to show their alliance with particular groups or communities. For adolescents, peer and social groups may have their own significant discourses and literacy practices.

In their study of 160 tenth-grade students, Partin and Gillespie (2002) found a positive significance in peer influence and positive attitude toward reading. Peer influence was also important in Moje et al. (2008) study of over 1,000 youth living in high-poverty settings. Youth reported belonging to informal reading groups to discuss books and writing clubs to share written works. Youth with Internet access reported gaming communities used to read and write codes to support each other’s gaming activities. They described the importance of social networks and identity formation supported by literacy practices. Reading and writing allows adolescents to form “social capital,” allowing students access to “gaining information needed to enact or develop new identities” (p. 138). Social capital also allowed students to explore their cultural
heritage by participating in discussions relevant to their ethnicity. For example, youth in a dominantly Latino community learned about immigration laws and political issues; one adolescent explained learning about the immigration laws was necessary as she worked in helping her family sign legal papers.

Peers can also influence literacy practices neither sanctioned nor valued in society. In studying the literacy practices of youth involved in gangs, Moje (2000) found students were not only involved in graffiti writing, hand codes, and color codes, but also, poetry, journal writing, letter writing, and novel reading. These literacy practices allowed youth to identify with a peer community and to express their values, hopes, fears, and ideas. Graffiti and tagging practices were viewed as ways of “conveying, constructing, and maintaining identity, thought, and power” (p. 651).

Finders (1997) explored the literacy practices of five girls beginning in junior high, the “social queens” and the “tough cookies” (p. 21). She noted literacy practices were used to establish and maintain friendship circles and to present a particular representation of themselves. The teachers’ pedagogy reflected a student-centered approach, relying on reading and writing workshops; however, the classroom environment was not considered a “risk-free” environment as the girls’ literacy practices were dictated by social consequences (p. 118). She advocated for teachers to explicitly examine their pedagogy and to recognize the social constraints amongst students and peer groups.

A sociocultural perspective views literacy as occurring, not in isolation, but in social situations. Literacy as a contributor of social capital has been well documented
(Finders, 1997; Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Moje, 2000; Moje et al., 2008; Partin & Gillespie, 2002). When studying a youth’s purpose for reading, peer communities need to be recognized and explored as a possible influence.

Table 1 provides a summary of research examining the literacy practices of youth. These studies are significant because they provide educators an opportunity to learn why youth engage in literacy practices. As the table highlights, much of the research focused on youths’ literacy practices have occurred in traditional school settings. Missing from the research are the voices of youth who have been educated in non-traditional school settings, namely alternative schools.

**Alternative School Education**

**Why Alternative Education?**

American society’s values and fears have long dominated the conversation surrounding public education and the curriculum (Bellamy & Goodlad, 2008; Kliebard, 2004). Beginning in the 1890s the American school became viewed as the interceding institution between the family and social order; schools were viewed as the institutions teaching youth to live in an industrial society (Bellamy & Goodlad, 2008; Kliebard, 2004). Kliebard explained during the 20th century numerous political and social groups as well as individuals fought for the power to dictate the function and curriculum of American public schools. These groups of people projected their moral beliefs into the discussion of what should be taught in school. Interest groups were not the only influences on the curriculum of American public education; modern technology, immigration, and world events have impacted the curriculum of American schools
Table 1

**Summary of the Studies Focused on the Literacy Practices of Youth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Setting of Data Collection</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Personal literacy</th>
<th>In-school literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron, Miller, &amp; Smith (1975)</td>
<td>Juvenile Detention Center</td>
<td>450 males 13-19 yrs.</td>
<td>Book selection from library</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algra &amp; Fillbrandt (1970)</td>
<td>Traditional high school</td>
<td>9th - 11th</td>
<td>Book purchases found youth read stories about other youth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alvermann, Young, Green, &amp; Wisenbaker (1999)</td>
<td>Public library</td>
<td>20 adolescents</td>
<td>Importance of choice and variety of reading materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amman &amp; Mittelsteadt (1987)</td>
<td>Urban high school</td>
<td>Senior remedial reading class</td>
<td>Students prefer reading the newspaper in class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson, Tollefson, &amp; Gilbert (1985)</td>
<td>Traditional Schools</td>
<td>Gifted students Grades 1-12</td>
<td>Principle reason for reading is choice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beers (1996)</td>
<td>Traditional School</td>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>Negative reading attitudes in school did not always mean students had a negative attitude towards reading out of school.</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bintz (1993)</td>
<td>Traditional School</td>
<td>44 high school students</td>
<td>In-school reading was boring and uninteresting. Discrepancy between teacher and student views.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter &amp; Harris (1982)</td>
<td>IRA National Ballots</td>
<td>More than 10,000 students</td>
<td>Poll of the 1981 IRA’s Children’s Choice Awards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandler (1999)</td>
<td>Traditional School</td>
<td>12 high school seniors</td>
<td>How parents influence their child’s reading habits.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eberwein (1973)</td>
<td>Traditional Middle School</td>
<td>500 6th – 8th graders</td>
<td>Youth read fiction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finders (1997)</td>
<td>Traditional Junior high school</td>
<td>5 females</td>
<td>Literacy practices were influenced by peers and social situations.</td>
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</table>

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Table 1 (continued)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hinchman, Payne-Bourcy, Thomas, &amp; Ocott (2002)</td>
<td>Traditional high school</td>
<td>3 males</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gender, race, and class complicated their literacy practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hughes-Hassell &amp; Rodge (2007)</td>
<td>Urban middle school</td>
<td>584 middle school Students</td>
<td>72% students identified reading as a leisure activity. 78% of females read, while only 64% of males read.</td>
<td>Students prefer having a teacher read aloud and silent reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivey &amp; Broaddus (2001)</td>
<td>Traditional middle school</td>
<td>1,700 middle school students</td>
<td></td>
<td>Students preferring to have a teacher read aloud and silent reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis &amp; Fabos (2005)</td>
<td>Outside school, but traditional students</td>
<td>7 adolescents</td>
<td>IM gave students social capital.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love &amp; Hamston (2004)</td>
<td>Traditional high school in Australia</td>
<td>40 males</td>
<td>All boys grew up in literate home environments, but only some were willing to continue those practices.</td>
<td>Reading was associated with school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mellon (1990)</td>
<td>Traditional middle and and high school</td>
<td>700 students</td>
<td>70% read for pleasure. Parents were a reading influence. Magazines were a favorite reading material.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moffitt (1992)</td>
<td>Traditional high school</td>
<td>2 public, 1 private</td>
<td>78% read for leisure. Females read more than males.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 university related, &amp; 1 rural</td>
<td>Students from high and low socioeconomic status read more than students considered</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>school</td>
<td>in middle socioeconomic class.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Moje (2000)</td>
<td>Outside of school, but</td>
<td>5 males</td>
<td>Literacy allowed students to join communities. Unsanctioned literacy practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>attending traditional schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>allowed adolescents to gain power and do identity work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moje, Overby, Tysvaer,</td>
<td>Traditional public and</td>
<td>1,045 middle and high school</td>
<td>Extensive examination of personal literacy practices.</td>
<td>Extensive examination of school literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; Morris (2008)</td>
<td>and private schools</td>
<td>students</td>
<td></td>
<td>practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myers (1992)</td>
<td>Traditional middle school</td>
<td>8th grade students</td>
<td>Students used literacy to negotiate their social lives</td>
<td>Literacy had a correct meaning authorized by the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagle (1999)</td>
<td>Vocational high school</td>
<td>20 students</td>
<td>Participants were involved in extensive literacy practices at</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partin &amp; Gillespie (2002)</td>
<td>Traditional high school</td>
<td>160 tenth graders</td>
<td>The home literacy environment and peers significantly impacts adolescents’ attitudes toward.</td>
<td>home, although their literacy practices were not accepted at school, nor did they translate into academic success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitcher et al. (2007)</td>
<td>Traditional school students</td>
<td>384 adolescents</td>
<td>Females valued literacy more than males. Females’ value of reading increased w/age.</td>
<td>Discrepancy between personal and school literacy practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuels (1989)</td>
<td>IRA National Ballots</td>
<td>Young adults</td>
<td>Subject matter, genre, themes, and relevance were reasons students chose particular books.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strommen &amp; Fowles-Mates (2004)</td>
<td>Traditional middle and High school students</td>
<td>151 students</td>
<td>Readers have access to a wide variety of books and family members who love to read.</td>
<td>Readers did associate reading with school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worthy (1998)</td>
<td>Outside school; but traditional middle school students</td>
<td>2 males</td>
<td>Boys labeled reluctant readers in school were very involved in reading out of school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Bellamy & Goodlad, 2008; Kliebard, 2004). The view of schools as the savior of society has not diminished; cries surrounding global economies, the rapid pace of technological growth and other social changes, have continued to reinforce the idea that schools are the institutions that can remediate society’s problems (Bellamy & Goodlad, 2008; National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007).

Public education is considered to be the “cornerstone of learning” (Reimer & Cash, 2003, p. 2); however, Sanoff (1994) explained in our current technological society the high dropout rate illustrates the reality that public education does not meet the needs of all students. In addition, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in 2003 the following critical facts: 1.1 million youth aged 16 to 19 did not have a high school diploma (or General Education Development certificate) and were not enrolled in school, and in addition another 2.4 million people age 20 to 24 were in the same situation for a total of 3.5 million youth (Aron, 2006). Students dropping out of school were not always considered a societal concern. Mann (1986) cited the 1950s as a time when students dropping out were considered a solution; the schools were no longer responsible for students who were considered disruptive and resistant. Since the American economy has shifted from one with a need for unskilled labor to a job market requiring higher levels of skill and educational degrees, however, the dropout rate is considered a major social and economic problem (Dugger & Dugger, 1998). Although a number has not been formulated regarding the dropout rate in the United States (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2009), recent research suggests dropout predictors include poor academic
achievement, suspension and expulsions from school, retention, and alienation (Aron, 2006; Gregg, 1998).

Alternative education is being implemented as a means to keep students from dropping out until they are able to graduate (Dugger & Dugger, 1998). The key characteristics associated with keeping students in school, such as small class size, emphasis on caring relationships, clear rules and expectations, are also associated with alternative education (Lange & Sletten, 2002; National Dropout Prevention Center, 2009). Although many view alternative education as a way to accommodate the needs of students who are not being served by public education (Lange & Sletten, 2002; National Dropout Prevention Center, 2009), some educators and researchers question if alternative education is in fact meeting the needs of those students unable to succeed in traditional schools (Reimer & Cash, 2003). Educators and researchers are concerned that certain models of alternative education might actually be reinforcing negative stereotypes of youth, particularly minority youth; creating a segregated schooling system; producing a marginalized population of youth; and adding to the dropout rate by pushing students out of mainstream education (Brown, 2007; Christle et al., 2004; Gregg, 1998; Skiba & Knesting, 2001).

Origins of Alternative Education

Alternative education is broadly defined by Morley (1991) as “a perspective, not a procedure or program. It is based upon the belief that there are many ways to become educated, as well as many types of environments and structures within which this may occur” (p. 8). Alternative education became popular in the 1960s, although it was not a
new concept because wealthy and religious groups had been providing students with models of education different from the mainstream public education since early colonial America (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Reimer & Cash, 2003). In fact, John Dewey, with his emphasis on the individuality of learning, is considered the “father” of the alternative education movement (Reimer & Cash, 2003). Dewey tested his “progressive” theories on curriculum and education by creating the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, otherwise known as the Dewey School (Kliebard, 2004).

During the 1960s the civil rights movement served as a catalyst for schooling with a political and social agenda (Bauman, 1998; Franklin, 1992; Free, 2004; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Meyers, 1988; Raywid, 1999; Reimer & Cash, 2003). Political groups and advocates created alternative schools in the private sector to represent “innovation, small-scale, informal ambiance, and a departure from bureaucratic rules and procedures” (Raywid, 1994, p. 26). A popular example of alternative schools from the 1960s was Freedom Schools, community-based schools intended to provide high quality education to minority students (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Freedom schools were primarily opened in urban settings; however, schools began opening in suburban communities as well (Raywid, 1999). These schools shared the same philosophical tendency: blaming “the system” for not meeting the needs of the students (Free, 2004). Alternative schools in urban communities, however, focused on helping students who were unsuccessful at schools, primarily minority and poor students, while the suburban communities created alternative programs considered innovative and creative (Raywid, 1999). These alternative schools of the 1960s incorporated
desegregation plans with the realization that one form of education, especially a system alienating sectors of the population, would not be tolerated (Bauman, 1998; Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Alternative education continued to grow in the 1970s, because communities were committed to create schools unique to the population they served (Lange & Sletten, 2002). During this time the term “alternative school” was replaced with “magnet;” unique curriculum and instructional approaches were used to attract a larger portion of the community (Bauman, 1998, p. 258). Educators associated with alternative schools did not want alternative schools to be recognized as schools for minorities only; educators wanted to expand the definition of alternative schools so White, middle class parents would be interested in the possibility of alternative education for their children. Forced bussing policies increased the popularity of the new “magnet” schools, as parents looked for more choice associated with public education (Bauman, 1998, p. 258).

In the 1980s, however, the definition of alternative education began to change from the progressive form in the 1970s to a more conservative and remedial form (Lange & Sletten, 2002). In the 1980s alternative schools no longer challenged the infrastructure and political agenda of schools, but were considered the “salvation for floundering public school systems” (Bauman, 1998, p. 260). Alternative education became geared towards students who were disruptive or failing, and this function greatly influenced the direction of alternative education (Lange & Sletten, 2002). This function of alternative education also influenced enrollment; by 1981, 10,000 public alternative schools existed serving approximately 3 million students in the United States (Raywid, 1994).
Societal issues have greatly affected the role of alternative education. Being familiar with the history of alternative education in the United States is essential for understanding the issues and concerns surrounding alternative schools.

**Origins of Zero Tolerance and the Growth of Alternative Education**

During the 1980s, alternative education and public education in general became affected by the court’s use of the term “zero tolerance.” Zero tolerance denotes “a disciplinary policy that is intended primarily as a method of sending a message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, by punishing all offenses severely, no matter how minor” (Skiba & Knesting, 2001, p. 20). The term “zero tolerance” was first used in 1986 by Peter Nunex (Free, 2004; Skiba & Knesting, 2001), the U.S. attorney in San Diego, for impounding vehicles and property of anyone crossing the border with any trace of drugs and charging those individuals in federal court (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). The term “zero tolerance” applied to education policy beginning in 1989 by school districts in California, New York, and Kentucky. These school districts enforced the “zero tolerance” policy mandating expulsion for drugs, fighting, and gang related activity; in 1993 the term broadened to include smoking and disruption in school. By 1996-1997 the National Center on Education Statistics found many schools had implemented some variation of the zero tolerance policy; in fact, 94% of schools had zero tolerance polices for weapons, 87% had zero tolerance for alcohol, and 79% had zero tolerance for violence or tobacco (Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Taras et al., 2003).

funding to expel any students who brought a firearm to school for a minimum of one year (Dunn, 2002). The law can be modified and expanded to expel a student convicted of using a firearm, even off campus. If a student is not expelled after using or having a firearm on a school campus and then does commit a crime, the school is liable for the student’s actions.

Zero-tolerance policies and the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 have not been implemented without dispute (Pelliccioni, 2003; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Various groups, such as the American Federation of Teachers, have voiced the necessity of these policies in order to curb violence in schools; however, other groups, such as the Rutherford Institute, are concerned about policies automatically punishing students without considering circumstances (Pelliccioni, 2003). In fact, courts, such as the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, have “struggled with the constitutionality of a school policy that does not consider whether a student intended to violate a rule prohibiting possession of knives, drugs, or alcohol on school groups or at school activities” (p. 978).

The zero tolerance policy and the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 influenced the administration of public education and determined the population of students suspended and expelled from schools, therefore influencing the mission of alternative education. By the 1990s many students attended alternative schools due to lack of academic and behavioral success in traditional schools and not because the students desired an innovative or creative approach to education (Bauman, 1998).
Despite the ambiguity surrounding alternative education and the popularity of the zero tolerance policy in education, Raywid (1994) proposed two characteristics of alternative schools have endured since the 1960s. These characteristics include serving a population not being served by traditional education and a variation from standard school organization. Because of these two traits, many alternative education programs are linked to students who are labeled “disadvantaged,” “marginal,” or “at risk” (p. 26).

Raywid (1994) developed a typology or classification system for alternative education (Aron, 2006; Gregg, 1998; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Raywid, 1994, 1999; Reimer & Cash, 2003). According to Raywid (1994), alternative schools fall into three categories based on their program goals: Type I, those schools trying to change the educational system; and Type II and Type III, those schools trying to change the student.

Type I programs depart from the traditional organizational and administrative structure of schools (Raywid, 1994). Type I programs are considered “true educational alternatives” offering flexibility, student empowerment, self-paced work, counseling, multi-aged classrooms and choice (Aron, 2006, p. 4). These are schools students choose to attend and are likely to reflect innovation curricular instruction.

Examples of Type I schools include magnet schools, charter schools, schools-without-walls, after-hours schools, and schools in atypical settings (Aron, 2006). Type I programs are effective because students who might not have been successful in traditional settings are more engaged and successful in school; these schools are true alternatives to mainstream education (Raywid, 1994). Researchers note successful Type I alternative programs share the following characteristics: small, designed by those
invested in them, themes or emphasis, flexible schedules, democratic practices of staff and students, student choice, high expectations for student achievement, small size, autonomy within school, maximum teacher/student ration of 1:10, adult mentors, schools free from district interference, and continuity in leadership (Franklin, 1992; Kinney, Fuentes, & Herman-Kinney, 2006; Lange, 1998; Meyers, 1988; Reimer & Cash, 2003; Tobin & Sprague, 2000).

Type II alternative schools, as defined by Raywid (1994), are known as last-chance schools and remedial schools. The mission of these schools is to change the student, and the student management policies are usually punitive in nature (Raywid, 1994, 1999). These particular schools are viewed as “temporary assignments,” permitting students who “succeed or ‘shape up’ . . . to return to the mainstream” educational system (Raywid, 1999, p. 48). Type II schools are defined by their discipline codes; disruptive students are segregated, contained, and reformed (Aron, 2006). Instead of attending the school, students are sent to the school for a temporary amount of time or until their behavior requirement is compatible with the school’s expectations. Type II schools are programs students are forced or sentenced to attend. These programs are considered “soft jails” and usually “focus on behavior modification” while little focus is paid to modifying instruction (Raywid, 1994, p. 27). Because the placement is supposed to be short term, the curriculum is considered basic, emphasizing skills and drill. Raywid (1999) asserted punitive orientated schools are ineffective in altering student behavior. Gregg (1998) insisted true alternatives in education, not punishment, are the most effective in improving student behavior and achievement.
The third type of alternative school is for students who are “presumed to need remediation or rehabilitation” (Raywid, 1994, p. 27). These focus on students’ social and emotional growth. Type III schools are usually “short-term but therapeutic settings for students with social and emotional problems that create academic and behavioral barriers to learning” (Aron, 2006, p. 4). These schools may be focused on helping students struggling with alcohol or drug addiction, mental illness, or other personal issues not usually attended to in traditional school settings.

Despite these categories, Raywid (1994) acknowledged an overlap in programs, particularly between Type II and Type III programs. Both types work under the assumption that the school can “fix” the student and that the “problems lie within the individual” (p. 27). The Type II and Type III schools are usually more correctional or disciplinary (Aron, 2006; Raywid, 1994). These programs, however, are considered ineffective because students are successful while at the alternative school, but when they return to the traditional schooling model, they revert to their prior difficulties (Raywid, 1999). Raywid (1994) contended Type II and Type III programs are more expensive and less effective than Type I programs. While students are transitioning back to mainstream education, they do not always receive the support they need to continue their success. McCall (2003) insisted that in order for students to be successful after an alternative school, educators must provide support and pay careful attention to students’ transitions back to mainstream education.

Zero-tolerance procedures and The 1994 Guns Free Act have greatly changed the nature of alternative schools in the United States. These policies shifted alternative
education away from schools with curricular innovations to schools providing remedial education for students considered challenging for the public school system. Raywid’s (1994, 1999) classification of alternative education is useful because it informs the educational community of the types of alternative schools for students.

**Research on Students Attending Type II Alternative Schools**

“Zero-tolerance policies, the Individual Disabilities Education Act, increases in youth violence, school failure, and knowledge of the developmental trajectories leading to antisocial behavior” have expanded the role of last-chance alternative schools in public education (Tobin & Sprague, 2000, p. 1). These second-chance schools are designed for students who have been placed in alternative education by the school as a last chance or by the courts before being incarcerated (Reimer & Cash, 2003). King et al. (1998) stated

> The hope is that by getting trouble-makers out of the regular schools, the remaining students and faculty will be able to focus without distraction upon academic performance while the students relocated to the alternative school are expected to receive the structure and discipline required for eventual re-entry to the mainstream. (p. 1)

Sekayi (2001) found students invited into a one-year alternative school because of prior problems in school demonstrated resistance to learning through verbal expression, passive-aggressive behavior, and aggressive behavior. Arnove and Strout (1978) warned the educational community that alternative schools, even by 1974, were becoming geared towards disadvantaged students who were sent to these schools without a choice. Educators and researchers insist this view of alternative education creates “dumping
grounds for undesirable or unwanted students” (Gregg, 1998, p. 3). He warned “punitive attitudes carry the risk of creating a two-tiered system of education: good schools and good teachers for good kids and bad schools and bad teachers for bad kids” (p. 6); and according to Gregg, not only does this system not work, it violates constitutional rights.

Students referred to alternative schools are usually deficient in credits to graduate, have been retained, have chronic absenteeism, have family conflicts, have a history of abuse or neglect, are minority in status, come from low socio-economic status, have emotional or behavior disorders, have mental disabilities, and are male (Aron, 2006; McCall, 2003; Reimer & Cash, 2003; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Many of the students in alternative schools have had a “serious crisis” that “literally overwhelm[s] their ability to cope” (McCall, 2003, p. 114). Reimer and Cash (2003) found students in alternative school settings are twice as likely to live in single-parent families and are likely to have parents without a high school diploma. Other factors surrounding the discussion of alternative education include truancy, poor academic performance, and pregnancy (Munoz, 2004). Many students, however, are not referred to alternative schools for just one of these reasons, but for multiple factors (McCall, 2003). Students attending alternative schools have also reported a higher prevalence of most risk behaviors compared to students attending regular high schools (Watson et al., 2004). Risk-associated behaviors include cigarette smoking, alcohol use, drug use, and sexual activity.
Research Trends in Type II Alternative Schools

Bauman (1998) stressed that historically evaluations of alternative schools have been compiled in statistical data with no “anecdotal evidence to supplement numeric conclusions” (p. 260). For those educators and researchers who have conducted descriptive studies, the most concerning statistic surrounding alternative education is that Type II alternative schools are disproportionately represented by minority males from low socioeconomic families (Bauman, 1998; Brown, 2007; Christle et al., 2004; Gregg, 1998; McCall, 2003; Skiba & Knesting, 2001).

Concerns have been raised surrounding students’ perceptions of education, especially when forced to attend an alternative school (Brown, 2007). Brown surveyed 37 students attending an alternative school because they had been suspended or expelled from their school. Students felt they missed important instructional time and therefore fell behind in their classes. They also critiqued the disciplinary actions as being “too liberally imposed” without “sufficient evidence” (p. 449). These perceptions also “fostered ill feelings toward school adults” (p. 449). Her conclusion was the “interventions aimed at students’ troubles actually compounded them” (p. 449).

King et al. (1998) presented a case study of a school that shifted from a last-chance alternative school focused on behavior remediation to an alternative school, different in its academic content, instructional delivery, and school policies. Instead of being sent to the school, students went through an admissions process. The schedule of classes was based on a 4-day, blocked schedule to allow students to gain employment or
relief from child care needs. They found an increase in academic performance and attendance. Students and staff reported an atmosphere of caring and a focus on learning.

Bauman (1998) studied Jackson school, a last-chance alternative school for students who were deemed disruptive by their mainstream home schools. The school’s mission was to provide an education to students who needed to improve their behavior. Most of the students who attend Jackson had been suspended; 75% of the students were male and about 80% were African American. The school’s focus was behavior modification and placements were temporary on the condition that school personnel deemed the student capable of returning to the mainstream setting. The students liked their teachers and felt the staff cared about them; however, she also noted Jackson embodied qualities of alternative education from the 1960s and 1970s by providing small class size and an innovative curriculum relating to students’ needs. She cautioned, “the danger of any case study of alternatives like Jackson school is that it fosters a belief that it is the children who must be fixed while the educational system remains essentially intact” (p. 268).

**Transitioning From Alternative Education to Students’ Home Schools**

Type II alternative schools are considered temporary; therefore, educators must understand and assess how students transition back to mainstream education. McCall’s (2003) study compared 16 students who attended an alternative school and returned to school versus 16 students who attended alternative schools, but eventually dropped out of school. The alternative school was run by a non-profit organization and focused on providing small class sizes, family involvement, and community involvement. All the
students involved in the study were considered successful while they were involved in the alternative school. His research found that the students who dropped out were students of color with low achievement in schools who came from an economically disadvantaged single parent home. In contrast, the stay-in students were White, had higher achievement, and came from two-parent homes. Students who dropped out noted neither teachers nor schools encouraged them to stay in school. They also reported that the “school had an attitude about them” (p. 116) contributing to their reasons for dropping out. The students insisted nothing could have helped them succeed, other than keeping them in alternative school. He argued for educators to rethink “policies that blindly shift students back to regular education” (p. 116).

**Literacy and Alternative Education**

Although there have been research studies focused on curricular approaches, including literacy instruction, conducted at various models of alternative schools (Taylor & Nesheim, 2000/01; Young & Mathews, 1997), after an exhaustive literature review I could not locate a research study examining the literacy practices of youth who attended an alternative school.

**Research on Suspensions and Expulsions**

In discussing a Type II model of alternative education, the research focusing on suspensions and expulsions needs to be explored. Although this seems to depart from the discussion on alternative education, because many students are sent to alternative schools because of suspensions and expulsions, there is overlapping information in the studies and findings. Studies for suspension and expulsion (Christle et al., 2004; Imich, 1994;
Mendez, Knoff & Ferron, 2002; Taras et al., 2003) and research focused on alternative schools (Bauman, 1998; Brown, 2007; Dugger & Dugger, 1998; King et al., 1998; Lange, 1998; McCall, 2003; Tobin & Sprague, 2000) report similar descriptions of students; common characteristics include: minority status, male in gender, low-socioeconomic status, high-risk behavior, behavioral, emotional or mental disability, victims of abuse, and low-academic competence.

Skiba and Knesting (2001) explained that expulsions are usually reserved for incidents of moderate to high severity whereas suspensions, a widely-used technique, are commonly used for a minor offenses, such as disobedience, disrespect, attendance issues, and classroom disruption. These methods are used by school administrators “to decrease violence, discourage drug abuse, and curtail criminal activities on campus” (Taras et al, 2003, p. 1206). Suspensions and expulsions are also used to control challenging behavior, including truancy. Although safety to students and to others are listed as reasons for out-of-school suspensions or expulsion, Taras et al. found that in general assault is not a major reason for student expulsion. Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions are usually triggered by “disrespect and defiance, non-compliance and disruptions, and verbal and physical aggression to those involving drugs, vandalism, and weapons” (Mendez et al., 2002, p. 260). Although student behaviors are related to suspensions and expulsions, these methods can also be used to “push out students with problems by creating a paper trail to justifying sending students to an alternative school, or, justifying students dropping out” (p. 260).
Research has found although suspensions and expulsion rates are related to student behavior, suspension and expulsion rates are also affected by school factors as well (Christle et al., 2004, p. 511; Mendez et al., 2002). Mendez et al. found that schools serving high percentages of poor minority children are more likely to use suspensions than schools serving a higher socio-economic White population. They also found schools serving a more racially diverse group of students had higher suspension rates. They attributed this in part due to racial tensions in schools and also the possibilities that teachers and administrators may not understand and value children from a variety of cultures and backgrounds.

Teacher turnover, teacher beliefs, and principals’ attitudes and practices are also linked to student suspensions and expulsions (Christle et al., 2004; Mendez et al., 2002). Wu (1980) found suspensions and expulsions were most affected by institutional biases, the administrative response and involvement in student discipline, and by teachers’ beliefs. Ironically, although suspensions and expulsions are found to be frequently used, they have not been found to effectively limit inappropriate behavior or increase students’ achievement (Christle et al. 2004); but rather “school suspension has been found to significantly correlate with poor academic achievement and grade retention, delinquency and school drop-out, student disaffection and alienation, and drug use” (Mendez et al., 2002, p. 261). In fact in a study comparing a sample of 20 schools with high suspension rates to 20 schools with low suspension rates, Christle et al. (2004) found students were more likely to be involved with law violations during their suspensions from school. According to Raywid (1994) Florida schools during the 1979-1980 school year made
roughly 58,000 in-school suspension placements; however, she noted in-school suspensions were ineffective as there was no significant difference in dropout rates, referral rates, punishment rates, suspensions rates, or expulsion rates. Educators also argue excluding students from education opportunities contradicts the mission of education (Christle et al., 2004).

**Alternative Schools and Detention Centers**

Research has found youth in alternative schools and detention centers share many of the same academic characteristics, including poor literacy skills (Christle & Yell, 2008; Drakeford, 2002; Foley, 2001; Guerin & Denti, 1999; Rogers-Adkinson, Melloy, Stuart, Fletcher, & Rinaldi, 2008). Similar to the research focused on Type II alternative schools, research focused on juvenile detention centers has found there is an overrepresentation of minority males throughout the juvenile justice system (Foley, 2001; Leiber & Fox, 2005; Noguera, 2003a; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999; Wordes, Bynum, & Corley, 1994; Wordes & Jones, 1998). The research focused on adolescent literacy in juvenile detention centers shows adolescents in these settings have lower reading grade levels than their peers (Drakeford, 2002; Foley, 2001; Rogers-Adkinson, et al., 2008; J. Vacca, 2008). The research in juvenile detention settings uses standardized reading assessments to measure literacy competence in terms of the rate of reading, accuracy of pronunciation, fluency, spelling, and comprehension while evaluating reading programs for youth in detention center settings (Drakeford, 2002; Mulcahy, Krezmien, Leone, Houchins, & Baltodano, 2008).
Table 2 provides a summary of research examining the impact of gender and race on suspensions and expulsions from school leading to alternative school placement. It also provides a summary of research examining the impact of gender and race on arrests, convictions, and incarceration in juvenile detention settings. These studies are significant because they recognize the disproportionate number of minority males in alternative schools and juvenile detention centers. Although it is extremely important and necessary for educators to question why this phenomenon exists, it also highlights the limited information on Caucasians girls in alternative school settings and juvenile detention center settings.

Table 2

**Summary of the Studies Focused on the Impact of Gender and Race in Alternative Schools and Juvenile Detention Centers Settings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Setting of Data Collection</th>
<th>Finding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bauman (1998)</td>
<td>Alternative Education</td>
<td>Research on Jackson Alternative School found 75% of the students were male and 85% were African American.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown (2007)</td>
<td>Alternative Education</td>
<td>Minority males were overrepresented in students expelled from school. Expulsion from school led to lost instructional time and negative feelings about school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Defense Fund (2008)</td>
<td>Juvenile Detention</td>
<td>Black males have a 1 in 3 lifetime risk of being incarcerated. Latino males have a 1 in 6 lifetime risk of being incarcerated. Caucasian males have a 1 in 17 lifetime risk of being incarcerated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christie, Nelson, &amp; Jolivette (2004)</td>
<td>Traditional Middle Schools</td>
<td>Study of traditional middle schools in Kentucky (n=161) found schools with a great number of Caucasian students had lower rates of suspensions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 2 (continued)

*Summary of the Studies Focused on the Impact of Gender and Race in Alternative Schools and Juvenile Detention Centers Settings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Setting of Data Collection</th>
<th>Finding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foley (2001)</td>
<td>Juvenile Detention</td>
<td>More than three-quarters of youth in juvenile detention centers are young men from minority backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregg (1998)</td>
<td>Alternative Education</td>
<td>A review of the literature of Type II Alternative Schools finds minority males are overrepresented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leiber &amp; Fox (2005)</td>
<td>Juvenile Detention</td>
<td>African American youth are more likely than Caucasian youth to receive a more severe outcome throughout the juvenile court process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCall (2003)</td>
<td>Alternative Education</td>
<td>Dropouts from a Michigan Alternative school were twice as likely to be African American or Latino.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noguera (2003a)</td>
<td>Alternative Education and Juvenile Detention</td>
<td>Black males are more likely than any other group to be suspended and expelled from school. Black males are also more likely to be arrested, convicted and incarcerated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noguera (2003b)</td>
<td>Traditional Urban High School</td>
<td>Minority males are removed from classroom for punishment more than any other group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snyder &amp; Sickmund (1999)</td>
<td>Juvenile Detention</td>
<td>White males were less likely to have ever been arrested than Black males or Hispanic males.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wordses, Bynum, &amp; Corley (1994)</td>
<td>Juvenile Detention</td>
<td>Youth who were African American or Latino were consistently placed in detention centers more than Caucasian youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wordses &amp; Jones (1998)</td>
<td>Juvenile Detention</td>
<td>The ratio of African American to Caucasian arrests for violence was 5 to 1 and African Americans were arrested three times the rate of Caucasians for drugs and weapons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Sociocultural theorists understand literacy as socially situated in specific contexts with specific purposes. Viewing literacy through this lens points to the importance of gender, socioeconomic status, family influence, and peer influence.

Alternative education was created to ensure all students were receiving a quality education. Over the years, alternative education has been affected by societal changes, shifting the public perception of their function. The literature surrounding alternative education provides the educational community with insight into types of alternative schools currently existing for youth. In general, most youth who attend alternative schools have had prior difficulty in school, either academically or behaviorally. In the research surrounding alternative education and suspensions and expulsions it has been noted that an over prevalence of minority males are suspended, expelled, or attend school in alternative education settings. Although this research is important, there is a lack of research on other populations affected by school policies, particularly Caucasian females. The educational community needs more research focused on alternative school students, particularly student characteristics or activities allowing them to be successful in and out of school. Literacy can be a resiliency factor for youth with anti-social tendencies and those at-risk for dropping out of school. After an extensive literature review I could not locate research studies focused on the literacy practices of youth who have been educated in alternative schools.

My study extended this research in order to understand the literacy practices of youth who have been educated in an alternative school. Researchers have learned about
the varied literacy practices of youth in personal and traditional school settings; missing from this discussion is an examination of the literacy practices of youth who have spent a portion of their educational experience in an alternative school setting. During my study I used a sociocultural lens to understand the youths’ literacy practices. From this perspective I acknowledged the importance of factors, such as school, gender, socioeconomic status, family, peers, and life events influencing the youths’ literacy practices.
CHAPTER III
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of my study was to learn about the literacy practices of three female adolescents who, prior to my study in the spring of 2008, attended an alternative school because of suspensions, expulsions, or court-orders, including truancy, possession of drugs, possession of weapons, vandalism, or any other activity deemed unlawful. This study has the potential to inform educators and researchers about the literacy practices of youth who attend schools in non-traditional settings.

In this section, I describe my theoretical frame and the underlying assumptions guiding my study. I describe the research design and discuss how the research methodology suits the nature of the study. I provide the context of the study and discuss how I selected the site and the participants involved. Finally, I outline my data collection procedures, review the data analysis process, and discuss trustworthiness and validity.

Theoretical Frame

The study is situated with a theoretical frame viewing literacy as a social practice. From a sociocultural perspective, this study explores not only the literacy practices themselves, but the purpose of the literacy practices and the meaning of the literacy practices for the participants. This framework also requires an exploration of the context in which the literacy practice is being used.

The participants in this study are three Caucasian female young adults who attended an alternative school, prior to my study during the spring of 2008. From a
sociocultural perspective people’s beliefs about gender and how gender should be enacted is socially constructed, thereby shaped by societal values (Williams, 2007). Also from a sociocultural view, descriptors of the participants (e.g., good or bad) are “a socially accomplished construct . . . infused with certain ideologies or assumptions about how the world works” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 11). For a researcher this means one cannot make assumptions about participants’ literacy practices or behavior based on gender stereotypes or societal expectations.

**Case Study Design**

This study employs a case study design. A case study is the study of an intensive, bounded unit (Maxwell, 1996). Three female participants have been purposefully selected; each participant was considered an individual case in order to better understand their literacy practices. This study follows Merriam’s (1998) characterization of case studies as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. This study is particularistic as three participants have been selected to learn about the literacy practices of youth who have attended an alternative school. The case studies are descriptive as the study is presented in a detailed manner, providing rich and “thick” descriptions of the girls’ literacy practices. The study is heuristic as it provides an explanation of these three girls’ literacy practices. This is important in understanding the role of literacy in the girls’ lives.

Merriam explored how case studies can be arranged into categories based on their orientation or function. According to these categories, this study is considered a descriptive case study, as it provides a detailed account of the literacy practices of three female youth who previously attended an alternative school.
Case studies are used to understand the meanings that people make in particular contexts (Dyson & Genishi, 2005); therefore, this study not only created a detailed account of the girls’ literacy practices, but the study also explored the meaning the literacy practices had for each of the participants. The context in which the literacy practices are being used is also a focus of the study.

**Context of the Study**

The community of Lincoln was built on a river to provide transportation for material goods. During the early 1900s the community became an industrial site that housed railroads, coal mines, and steel mills. During the 1970s and 1980s the community’s economy began to decline; in the last 10 years, employment has decreased in the steel mills and the most profitable industry has been closed. The population of the city has a strong ethnic culture; Polish, Italian, and African American. The surrounding area outside of the industrialized river valley is rural. In this area live people with an Appalachian origin who live below the poverty-line. The local school districts include Walnut Valley School District, Hill Local School District, Harris County Schools, Iroquois School District, City School District and River City Schools.\(^1\)

The Alternative Education Initiative was created by Ohio House Bill 282 in 1999 (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2006). The Lincoln County Alternative School, the site where I met each of the girls, is funded primarily by the Initiative Grant Program (ODE, 2006). The Lincoln County Alternative School is located in the Lincoln County Justice Center, which includes the juvenile detention center, the male and female

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\(^1\) Pseudonyms are used throughout the entire document.
corrections centers, the county Prosecutors’ offices, numerous courtrooms, and probation officers’ offices. Ironically, posted on the entrance of the building is a sign reading, “No Children Allowed Unless by Order of the Court by the Order of Sheriff Reynolds.”

Students enrolled at the Lincoln County Alternative School range from ages 9-18 (grades 3-12) and are students registered in one of the following school districts: Walnut Valley School District, Hill Local School District, Harris County Schools, Iroquois School District, City School District, and River City Schools. Students are sent to the Lincoln County Alternative School either because of a suspension or expulsion from their home school district or because of a court order including, truancy, possession of drugs, possession of weapons, vandalism, or any other activity deemed unlawful. If a student has been suspended or expelled from school, the school district contacts John Reynolds Jr., the chief probation officer for the Lincoln Juvenile Court. Mr. Reynolds makes arrangements with the home school to have the student placed at the alternative school. If the student has violated a law, he or she is assigned a probation officer and sent to the alternative school for a period of time designated by the Lincoln Juvenile Court. Mr. Reynolds or the student’s probation officer contacts the school district to inform the school of the student’s placement at the alternative school.

The Lincoln County Alternative School can be considered a Type II school; the school is viewed as a temporary educational site relying on a basic skill instructional model. The school has two classrooms, and students are instructed by either Mr. James or Mr. Torre. Until this past year the students were randomly assigned a classroom in order to keep the student numbers equal in each classroom. During the 2008-2009 school year,
however, Mr. Torre taught high school students, whereas Mr. James taught elementary and middle school students. The teachers rely on workbook series, such as *Ohio’s Buckle Down* series or school donated materials, such as older editions of textbooks. During my pilot study I wrote two grants to fund the creation of libraries in each classroom.

Although Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly attended the Lincoln County Alternative School during the spring of 2008, during the fall of 2009 each violated their probations and were placed in the Lincoln Juvenile Detention Center. The detention center is a short-term pre-adjudication and post-adjudication facility. Judge Williams can sentence youth to the detention center for up to a 90-day, short-term placement. After this short-term placement, youth may be assigned to attend a youth home, drug rehabilitation center, or youth prison depending on their charge. If an adolescent violates his or her probation, the adolescent’s probation officer can place the adolescent in the detention center. In 2008 the detention center had 600 admissions; of the youth admitted, 29% were female and 71% were male. In terms of race and ethnicity, 60.3% were reported as Caucasian, 28.5% were reported as African American, and 11.2% were reported as “other.” All youth are required to attend school while in the detention center. The detention center has one teacher, Mr. Pearson. During the school day, students rotate from Mr. Pearson’s classroom into the computer lab where they use the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT), an online schooling program. The detention center has three book carts; students have constant access to the books. During the spring of 2008, I wrote a grant to fund the purchasing of books for the detention center. See Tables 3 and 4 for youths’ schedule while at the Lincoln Juvenile Detention Center.
Table 3

*Detention Center Weekday Schedule*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00</td>
<td>Shower and uniforms are issued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30</td>
<td>Breakfast and clean up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00–8:50</td>
<td>Class with Mr. K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00–9:50</td>
<td>Computer Lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00–10:50</td>
<td>Class with Mr. K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00–12:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00–1:00</td>
<td>Computer Lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00–1:50</td>
<td>Class with Mr. K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00–3:15</td>
<td>Work detail (cleaning rooms and showers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15–4:00</td>
<td>Visits and religious services *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15–4:45</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:45–5:30</td>
<td>Letter writing **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30–9:15</td>
<td>Recreational time, leisure time, special programming, social time, TV time, evenin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15–9:30</td>
<td>Snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30–10:00</td>
<td>In rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>Lights out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Visiting only occurs Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Visiting time is a legal right for all youth in the detention center. Religious services are provided only on Fridays.

**Note.* Youth may only write one letter to whomever they choose; however, they are not allowed to write nor receive letters from another detention center, jail, or prison. If youth do receive letters from another detention center, jail or prison they are kept and given to the youth upon their release.
Table 4

*Detention Center Weekend Schedule*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00–8:30</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00–11:30</td>
<td>Showers, leisure time, work details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30–12:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00–2:00</td>
<td>Phone privileges, leisure time *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00–4:00</td>
<td>Recreational time, leisure time, special programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15–4:45</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:45–5:30</td>
<td>Leisure time, letter writing **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30–9:00</td>
<td>Recreational time, leisure time, special programming, social time, TV time, evening visits (if necessary due to parents’ work schedule)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00–10:30</td>
<td>Snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>In rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Lights out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Phone use is considered a privileged. Youth must make collect calls.

**Note:** Youth may only write one letter to whomever they choose; however, they are not allowed to write nor receive letters from another detention center, jail or prison. If youth do receive letters from another detention center, jail or prison they are kept and given to the youth upon their release.
**Pilot Study**

I conducted a pilot study in order to better understand the research questions guiding my study. I began my pilot study on January 4, 2008, and continued my work at the Lincoln County Alternative School until May 9, 2008. I attended the school every Thursday and Friday for a total of 33 days. I assisted Mr. Torre, a classroom teacher, in developing and utilizing a classroom library, and then implementing content reading strategies with his students. In this setting I worked with Suzanne and Molly as members of the classroom community and individually. Although Danielle did attend the Lincoln County Alternative School at this time, I did not know her. Through my pilot study, I found students at the Lincoln County Alternative School were engaged in numerous personal literacy practices, including reading novels, poetry, and magazines and writing poetry and short stories. These results guided my research questions. See Table 5 for a complete listing of data collected during the spring of 2008.

**Participant Selection**

Barone (2004) defined a collective case study, or multiple case studies, as an investigation of more than one case. The redundancy of cases is purposeful to help the researcher make a more informed argument. The selection of each of the participants, Suzanne, Molly, and Danielle, was purposeful.

First, I selected three Caucasian girls who had an educational experience at the Lincoln County Alternative School. The research focused on alternative schools finds a disproportionate number of minority males compared to other racial, ethnic, and gender groups (Bauman, 1998; Brown, 2007; Christle et al., 2004; Gregg, 1998; McCall, 2003;
Table 5

*Data Collected During Pilot Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Video Interview</th>
<th>Written Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>April 24, 2008</td>
<td>April 24, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 minutes about writing.</td>
<td>5 poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 14, 2008</td>
<td>April 17, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15:00 minutes of Suzanne working with Mr. Torre and a group about a reading assignment.</td>
<td>3 written pages about her parents, school, and her behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading strategy chart from Suzanne’s one-on-one tutoring session with a preservice teacher conducting her early experience at the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>January 17, 2008</td>
<td>January 17, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Formal interview in which Molly discusses books she enjoys reading.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Noguera, 2003a). Although this discrepancy is important, it also points to the lack of research focused on other populations served by alternative education; therefore, I decided to focus my study on three Caucasian girls, a population overlooked in the research.

Second, I developed relationships with two of the girls, Suzanne and Molly, while I was conducting a pilot study at the Lincoln County Alternative School during spring 2008. Because I was studying the girls’ literacy practices and their schooling experiences, I felt it was important to select students with whom I had built rapport.

Third, I selected participants whom I thought would best help me understand the role of literacy in the lives of female students who at one point had been enrolled in an
alternative school setting. Through my pilot study I began to recognize how Suzanne and Molly used or rejected certain literacy practices and how their literacy practices influenced their lives. Ms. Alisa Snyder, a probation officer from the Lincoln Juvenile Division who has worked with the girls and their families, suggested Danielle be a member of the study because of her known interest in reading.

I secured the permission of the participants’ parents and school districts in order to complete this study. Ms. Snyder initially contacted the participants and their parents/guardians. Although I arranged times to meet with the participants and their parents/guardians before the study began in order to obtain consent forms and answer questions, I was unable to have a face-to-face meeting with the girls’ parents/guardians. Instead I spoke to Suzanne’s and Molly’s mothers by phone and had Ms. Snyder contact Danielle’s sister to obtain and sign her consent form. I called each school district associated with the participants to gain permission to observe the students while they were at their home school.

**Danielle**

Danielle attended the Lincoln County Alternative School on November 19, 2007, until December 10, 2007. She then returned April 15, 2008, and stayed for the remainder of the school year. Although Danielle’s attendance at the Lincoln County Alternative School corresponded with my pilot study, I did not know her. Danielle was not initially selected as a participant; however, when another girl withdrew from my study, Ms. Snyder suggested Danielle.
Danielle attended the alternative school beginning August 26, 2008; however, after violating her probation, Danielle was placed in the Lincoln Juvenile Detention and began to attend school at the center on September 22, 2008. Danielle stayed at the detention center until her 18th birthday, November 10, 2008, at which time she was released and decided to drop out of school. Danielle’s leaving school ended her participation in the study.

**Suzanne**

During my pilot study, Suzanne attended Lincoln County Alternative School February 4, 2008, and stayed until the end of the school year. I interacted with Suzanne during this time. I was constantly observing and interacting with students in Mr. Torre’s classroom where Suzanne was placed. When I observed Suzanne writing poetry during class, I would approach Suzanne and initiate a conversation about her writing. Suzanne allowed me to read her poetry and asked my opinion about her poetry. I asked Suzanne to be a participant in my study because we had established a friendly relationship, and I knew her to be a writer.

During the 2008-2009 school year, Suzanne attended ninth grade at River High School; however, due to a domestic violence incident Suzanne was placed in the Lincoln Juvenile Detention from September 10, 2008, until October 6, 2008. Suzanne returned to River High School on October 7, 2008. Suzanne was suspended from school and sent to the Lincoln County Alternative School on April 22, 2009, where she finished the school year.
Molly

Molly began attending the school January 4, 2008. January 10, 2008, Molly participated in a book pass, a strategy that familiarized students with 25 books I brought for students to preview. Students, including Molly, sampled each book for 3 minutes, then wrote the book title and their comments about the book on a piece of paper. The book pass was a strategy used to include students in the decision making and selection of books to be purchased for their classroom library at the alternative school.

Before the books for the classroom library arrived in February, Mr. Torre kept a stack of young adult novels on his desk for students to read after they completed their school work. During my pilot study, Mr. Torre and I observed Molly reading books from his personal collection, including *The Creeps in Room 112* (Bennett, 2002). When I observed Molly reading, I would approach her and initiate a conversation about the novel she was reading. Molly also participated in one formal interview.

After violations of her probation Molly was placed in Caring Center, a drug rehabilitation center from April 16, 2008, until August 22, 2008. During the 2008-2009 school year, Molly attended 10th grade at River High School; however, due to another violation of her probation Molly was placed in the Lincoln Juvenile Detention Center from August 24, 2008, until September 2, 2008. Molly returned to River High School on September 3, 2008.
Data Collection

Data collection began September 16, 2008, and lasted until December 11, 2008, for a total of 13 weeks. Data collection methods included observations, interviews, literacy vignettes, and a collection of school and personal writing documents.

Participant Observation

Observations allow researchers to document participants’ engagement in activities, conversations participants have with others, participants’ behavior, and the setting. Through observations researchers can draw inferences about meanings and perspectives about others (Maxwell, 1996). The observer-as-participant stance requires researchers to reveal their identity, but their extent of participation in the setting is limited (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Although I was highly involved in my pilot study, because I was observing the girls at multiple sites, the alternative school, the detention center, and the girls’ home schools, I selected a less involved role. I observed and interacted with the participants; however, I did not have significant interactions with any other students in the school setting. Throughout my study I observed Suzanne 12 times, Molly 11 times and Danielle 8 times. Each week I observed each participant while she was at school for a half-day, approximately 4 hours; however, there were days when the participant did not attend school and I was forced to make other accommodations. I observed the literacy practices of each of the participants on Tuesday morning, Tuesday afternoon, and Wednesday morning; however, because of the girls’ absences I also observed Thursdays if they had not been in school earlier in the week. The participants’ schedules rotated to ensure I observed them at different periods during the school day. The rotations also
provided me the opportunity to observe the participants while they attended their English Language Arts course, a course focusing on literacy practices. I paid particular attention to literacy practices of students while they were in school. I focused on the participants’ literacy practices during classroom instruction, including both school and personal uses of literacy. School uses of literacy included reading from assigned texts, taking notes, worksheets, and writing activities. Personal uses of literacy included writing personal notes to friends, other non-school sanctioned writing, and reading personal materials. I also noted if the participants used free time in school or class to engage in literacy practices, including, but not limited to, writing notes, writing poetry, and reading a book. I also focused on the writing participants used for personal expression in and out of the classroom, such as writing notes and poetry. Participant observation allowed me to identify specific literacy practices; this stance also allowed me to observe factors triggering the participants to engage in literate acts. By observing why and when a literacy practice was employed, I also observed what I thought the literate act accomplished.

Field notes are a written account of what has been “seen, heard, and experienced in the field” (Horowitz, 1989, p. 17). I took various types of field notes, depending on the situation I encountered. For example, I took “on-the-fly” notes, as described by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) as notes, phrases, or key words to help a researcher remember events during observations. Times I took “on-the-fly” notes included informal conversations with the girls, teachers, or other staff members. I kept a journal with me when I observed the participants, so I could remember conversations I had with students
and teachers even if I could not at that time write an entire field note. Observations in the girls’ classes, ordinary conversations, and informal interviews were documented in this journal. I took notes, like on-the-fly notes, during my time in the field; however, I also took field notes after I left the site (Horowitz, 1989). The field notes I took after I left the site were thick descriptions of situations or conversations (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). My field notes were both descriptive and reflective. I typed these up either immediately after leaving the school or within 24 hours.

**Documents**

When possible, I photocopied school documents, such as writing assignments, reading assignments, or other pieces of literacy work to help inform my study. I also copied any personal writing, such as poetry or personal notes. I asked the participants permission before I copied any of their school documents or personal writings. The girls’ personal writing provided an understanding of their literacy practice. When the girls would share their personal writing, such as poetry, I would use their work to engage them in conversation about the literacy practice. This provided information about why the piece was written, what was accomplished from writing the piece, and factors that seemed to influence their writing.

**Vignettes**

Literacy vignettes are short writing pieces focused on a significant moment from one’s literacy history (See Appendix A for directions on how to write a literacy vignette). Literacy histories have been found to be an effective means for helping preservice teachers develop their literacy philosophies (Ball, 2000). Having participants write a
literacy vignette provided a glance at important moments in their lives as literate people. This also provided an understanding of the participants’ literacy practices over time. Literacy vignettes helped to explain why the youth participated in or rejected certain literacy practices. The factors influencing the participants’ use or rejection of literacy practices were also uncovered through literacy vignettes. Because literacy vignettes provide a personal view of the participants’ literacy practices, the vignette also addressed the purpose of the literacy practice. I interviewed each girl about her literacy vignette within a week after she wrote it.

**Interviews**

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) described in-depth interviews as a “meaning-making partnership between interviewers and their respondents” (p. 128). Interviews were conducted with students, parents, and teachers. The interviews conducted with students, parents, and teachers were conversational in style, meaning they required “active asking and listening” (p. 119). In-depth, conversational interviews are “issue oriented” and therefore allowed me to gain information particularly about students’ literacy practices (p. 120). Conversational interviews also allowed students to provide in-depth and vivid answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Interviews allowed me to gain insight into the literate practices of the participants, the factors influencing the participants’ use of literacy, and the literate practices’ purpose or accomplishment.

**Participant interviews.** Although I had regular conversations with each of the participants, I formally interviewed each participant at least once a week; however, when that was not possible I made sure to never let more than two weeks proceed without a
formal interview. I interviewed Suzanne 10 times, Molly 11 times, and Danielle 7 times. Each formal interview lasted approximately 50 minutes.

Because I interviewed students about their literacy practices, I used the tree-and-branch interview model, which allows the researcher to divide the research focus into equal parts, with each part covered by a main question (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I asked the main questions and follow up on each to obtain answers with depth, detail, vividness, richness, and nuance. The first question I asked was “Have you read anything interesting lately?” This question was developed by Pitcher et al. (2007) during their study of the reading motivation of 384 adolescents. I selected this question to begin interviews because I thought it would be open-ended enough to allow students to discuss topics they may have read in a book, for school, or on the computer. This engaged students in conversations about print literacy, but also multiple literacies (such as MySpace, something young adults do not always consider “reading”). Follow up questions included questions concerning participants’ responses and also additional questions probing into other reading activities or interests. After that initial question, I asked follow up questions and probing questions to their response (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The second question I asked was “Have you written anything interesting lately?” This question was open-ended to allow students to discuss writing they did for school, at home, or on the computer. Again, I asked follow-up questions and probing questions to their response. Follow-up questions included questions concerning participants’ writing activities and also questions about other writing interests or activities. My purpose during interviewing was to keep track of the participants’ literacy practices and to better understand the
participants’ perspectives about the meaning of each of the literacy practices. I audio taped all interviews. All audio taped interviews were transcribed.

**Parent interviews.** I interviewed parents/legal guardians once during the study. My purpose in interviewing the parents was to gain their perspective on their child’s literacy practices. I used the tree-and-branch model, allowing for multiple main questions, to gain the parents’ perspective on their child’s literacy practices and schooling experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I asked the following main questions:

1. What types of reading do you see your child doing?
2. When do you notice your child doing this reading?
3. Does your child ever discuss this reading with you?
4. What type of writing do you see your child doing?
5. When do you notice your child doing this writing?
6. Does your child ever discuss this writing with you?

I asked follow-up questions and probing questions after each main question. I planned on audio-taping all interviews; however, I was only able to have a face-to-face meeting with Molly’s mother and brother. Because of her work schedule and issues within the home I spoke to Suzanne’s mother on the phone. Danielle’s sister was unable to meet with me and did not have access to a telephone; therefore, I had Ms. Snyder give her a questionnaire, with the above questions, during a scheduled court hearing.

**Teacher interviews.** I interviewed at least one of each of the participants’ teachers during the semester. I interviewed each of the girls’ language arts teachers, plus I interviewed Molly’s history teacher and Suzanne’s math teacher. Mr. Pearson was
Danielle’s only teacher while she was in the Lincoln Juvenile Detention Center. I also interviewed Mr. Torre and Mr. James, teachers from the alternative school who in the year prior had the girls in their classrooms. My purpose in interviewing teachers was to learn about their perceptions of the participants’ literacy activities and schooling experiences. I used the tree-and-branch model, allowing for multiple main questions, to gain the teachers’ perspective on the students’ literacy practices and schooling experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I asked the following main questions.

1. What can you tell me about the reading and/or writing assignments you have (student’s name) complete in class?

2. What would you say are (student’s name) strengths and weaknesses as a student?

3. What types of outside (non-school related) reading have you observed (student’s name) doing?

4. Does (student’s name) discuss in class any ideas that you think are related to outside reading?

5. Does (student’s name) ever discuss with you any reading he/she does outside of class?

6. Does (student’s name) ever discuss with you any writing he/she does outside of class?

I asked follow-up questions and probing questions after each main question. I audio-taped all interviews. All interviews were transcribed.
Probation officer interview. Although I had informal conversations with Ms. Snyder throughout the study, I conducted a formal interview with her at the end of my study. My purpose in interviewing Ms. Snyder was to learn about the girls’ probation histories. Also Ms. Snyder has spent time with the girls and their families and could provide information about the girls’ home lives. I used a conversational approach with follow-up and probing questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). During the interview I asked Ms. Snyder for narratives and stories focused on her interactions with the girls and their families (Rubin & Rubin). I audio-taped the interview. The interview was transcribed.

Table 6 presents a summary of data collection procedures for Danielle throughout the study. Table 7 presents a summary of data collection procedures for Suzanne throughout the study. Table 8 presents a summary of data collection procedures for Molly throughout the study. Table 9 provides a rationale for each research question and data collection method.
Table 6

*Summary of Weekly Data Collection Procedures for Danielle*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly Data Collected</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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<th>10</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation At School</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal Interview</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Vignette</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent/Guardian Interview</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
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<td>Ms. Snyder Interview</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

*Summary of Weekly Data Collection Procedures for Suzanne*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly Data Collected</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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Table 8

*Summary of Weekly Data Collection Procedures for Molly*

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<tr>
<td>Literacy Vignette</td>
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<td>Parent/Guardian Interview</td>
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<td>Teacher Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Snyder Interview</td>
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Table 9

*How Data Informs Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
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</table>
| What are the literacy practices of three female young adults who have spent a portion of their schooling experience in an alternative school setting? | * Weekly ½ day observations of the participants in their home school for a total of 13 observations.  
* Use of previous research collected on participants during my pilot study at the alternative school.  
* Formal interview about the literacy practices.  
* Interview with parent/guardian  
* Interview with teacher  
* Interview with Ms. Snyder |
| What are the girls’ purposes for engaging in these literacy practices?             | * Weekly ½ day observations of the participants in their home school for a total of 13 observations.  
* Formal interviews about the literacy practices  
* Literacy vignette written by each of the participants.  
* Interview with parent/guardian  
* Interview with teacher  
* Interview with Ms. Snyder |
| What do these literacy practices accomplish for three girls who have spent a portion of their schooling experience in an alternative school setting? | * Weekly ½ day observations of the participants in their home school for a total of 16 observations.  
* Use of previous research collected on participants during my pilot study at the alternative school.  
* Formal interviews about the literacy practices  
* Interview with parent/guardian  
* Interview with teacher  
* Interview with Ms. Snyder |
| What factors influence the literacy practices of three female young adults?        | * Weekly ½ day observations of the participants in their home school for a total of 13 observations.  
* Formal interviews about the literacy practices  
* Literacy vignette written by each of the participants.  
* Interview with parent/guardian  
* Interview with teacher  
* Interview with Ms. Snyder |
**Data Analysis**

Data analysis began with the preparation of transcripts (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). All audiotapes were transcribed within 24 hours of the interview. While collecting data I simultaneously analyzed data (Merriam, 1998). As I transcribed audiotapes, reread my field notes, and read the girls’ written work, I began noticing data and developing ideas about categories and relationships (Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1998).

Rubin and Rubin (2005) described the analysis proceedings as 3 stages:

1. recognition of concepts and themes,
2. systematic examination for clarification,
3. coding, sorting and final synthesis.

I read and reread interview transcripts, field notes, documents, and memos allowing for themes to emerge. I created units of data, “any meaningful (or potentially meaningful) segment of data,” and created categories (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). Merriam explained that the constant comparative analysis process begins with “a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or another set” (p. 159). Coded data were arranged and rearranged to create categories to compare the data within and between categories (Maxwell, 1996). I spent a significant amount of time reflecting and thinking about emerging themes. When creating categories I was open to continuous revision of my thoughts and reflections. Because categories should reflect the “purpose of the research,” I labeled the categories according to the research question they answered (Merriam, 1998, p. 183). The final stage of
analysis involved finding relationships and making interpretations (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

**Analytical Memos**

Memos provide an opportunity to “reflect on issues raised in the setting and how they relate to larger theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 161). I used memos to stimulate analytical thinking and to help notice patterns in the data I collected (Bogdan & Biklen; Maxwell, 1996). I also used memos to address and explore my positions as a researcher; my feelings about the school, students, teachers, and topics of concern or interest (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Memos allowed me to link my knowledge of theory, previous research, and my findings.

**Participant Involvement**

Although the girls were the “objects” of my study, I involved each girl in the analysis of the data I collected (D. Kelly, 1993, p. 9). I decided to have each girl analyze her own data for three reasons. First, Kelly argued that researchers working with youth should “create moments where their authority is shared with students by temporarily placing young people in teaching and research roles and then reflecting with them on what has been learned” (p. 11). Data analysis is a sophisticated process usually reserved for those in academia. The research on students in alternative schools tends to focus on these students as unsuccessful academically; however, I thought it was important to show how these girls, when given the opportunity, could participate in the research process. Second, the reading and rereading of data is in itself a literate act and understanding their girls’ literacy practices was the focus on my study. Third, this provided the girls the
opportunity to reflect on their literacy practices and to ensure they were being accurately portrayed.

The procedure for handling the girls’ involvement in the data analysis process occurred as follows. I met with each girl a week before her participation in my study ended. The entire process was audio taped. I explained my research questions and gave them a copy of each question. The girls were given copies of interview transcripts, field notes, school documents, and any personal writings. I did not provide the girls with any memos that I had written. I also deleted any personal or reflective comments that I had made on my field notes. I did not want to influence the girls’ views on the data. I also did not want to girls to see any positive or negative remarks that I made about their school or personal literacy practices. I gave the girls different color highlighters; each highlighter represented a research question. As the girls read interview transcripts, field notes, school documents, and personal writings they highlighted the information they felt answered each question (See Appendix B). After the girls finished reading I asked what they learned. After they answered my question I asked them if there was anything missing or any other information they wanted to add (See Appendix C).

Throughout data collection I was constantly engaged in data analysis; therefore, I began creating categories before the girls engaged in their data analysis. After the girls’ participation I compared their analysis to mine. I used the last week of observations and formal interviews to clarify any discrepancies between my data analysis and the girls’ data analysis.
Cross-Case Analysis

Multiple or comparative case studies collect and analyze data from several cases. Merriam (1998) explained that multiple case studies require two stages of analysis. First, the within-case analysis must occur, followed by an across-case analysis. These three cases were first analyzed as individual cases and then as a collective unit. I first analyzed each of the girls’ data individually. I then created new categories using the data from all three cases. Merriam (1998) stated the goal with cross-case analysis is to build an explanation general enough to fit each of the individual cases.

Trustworthiness and Validity

According to Lincoln and Guba (1984) extended engagement in the field, persistent observation, and triangulation increase credibility. I developed relationships with Suzanne and Molly while I was conducting my pilot study at the Lincoln County Alternative School during the 2008 spring semester. In order to recognize important literacy events and/or practices in the lives of the participants I also used persistent observation. Persistent observation is the constant attention to and recognition of the participants’ literacy practices while in the field. This allowed for the literacy practices of the participants and those events relevant to literacy to be pursued and highlighted in a detailed manner. Extensive descriptions of the participants, their schools, and their literacy practices were written. Triangulation can occur through the use of multiple sources (Merriam, 1998). My methods of data collection were triangulated through the use of a variety of data collection methods, including interviews with the participants,
interviews with parents, interviews with teachers, school documents, personal writings, and observations.

I also conducted member checks. Member checks allow a researcher to take data and interpretations back to the participants to ask if the results are possible (Merriam, 1998). Member checks are described by Maxwell (1996) as the “single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpretation of the meaning” of what participants say and their perspective of what is happening (p. 94). Member checks were used continuously throughout the study. As I read and reread the data and began creating categories, I shared these findings with the participants. Each participant stated she had no further suggestions nor changes. Member checks were used as “evidence regarding the validity” of my findings (Maxwell, 1996, p. 94). The girls’ participation in data analysis was another form of member checking. Through this process the girls read interviews and field notes and made their interpretations of the data provided. This allowed for conversations regarding their perspectives on their literacy practices, the purposes, the outcomes, and the factors that seemed to influence their reading and writing.

Another means for strengthening validity is through inter-rater reliability (Marques & McCall, 2005). Inter-rater reliability is defined as the “extent to which two or more individuals (coders or raters) agree” (p. 442). Marques and McCall explained inter-rater reliability as a “solidification tool” in which the inter-raters become “validators of the findings of the qualitative study” (p. 440). Inter-rater reliability was used as a tool to verify and strengthen the findings (Marques & McCall). Two raters were selected and the research questions were explained. The inter-raters were provided with 20% of the
data per question and a handout explaining the emergent categories (see Appendix D). Having two inter-raters examine the data and confirm my findings created a greater sense of validity.

Table 10 presents a summary of the inter-rater results for research question one: What are the literacy practices of three female young adults who have spent a portion of their schooling experience in an alternative school setting because of suspensions, expulsions or court orders? Table 11 presents a summary of the inter-rater results for research question two: What are the girls’ purposes for engaging in these literacy practices? Table 12 presents a summary of the inter-rater results for research question three: What do the girls think their literacy practices accomplish? Table 13 presents a summary of the inter-rater results for research question four: What factors, including but not limited to family, peers, school literacy practices, and life events, influence the literacy practices of three female young adults?

Table 10

*Outlines the Summary of the Inter-Rater Results for Research Question One*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage of Agreement</th>
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<td>Reading books</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading information text</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing letters and notes for communication</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing poetry</td>
<td>80%</td>
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<td>School literacy</td>
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*Outlines the Summary of the Inter-Rater Results for Research Question Two*

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading information text</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing letters and notes for communication</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing poetry</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School literacy</td>
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Table 12

*Outlines the Summary of the Inter-Rater Results for Research Question Three*

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<tr>
<td>Reading information text</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Writing letters and notes for communication</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing poetry</td>
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<td>School literacy</td>
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Table 13

*Outlines the Summary of the Inter-Rater Results for Research Question Four*

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<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>88.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor adults</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The inter-rater reliability approach is a “percentage-based agreement in the findings” (Marques & McCall, 2005, p. 439). A high correlation indicates satisfactory reliability. The high percentages of agreement in this study help solidify the validity of the findings.

**Summary**

The major purpose of my study was to explore the literacy practices of three girls who previously attended an alternative school. An examination of the girls’ literacy practices might provide educators with an understanding of the role of literacy in the girls’ lives.

As I described in this chapter, I collected data on three Caucasian girls who previously attended an alternative school. The data included observations, school documents, personal writing, literacy vignettes, interviews, parent interviews, teacher interviews, and an interview with the girls’ probation officer.
I analyzed the data by first recognizing concepts and themes. I then coded data and created categories and finally made interpretations. I used analytical memos to assist me during the process. I also involved the participants in the data analysis process. Their participation allowed the girls to make their own interpretations of the data. The experience also served as a sophisticated form of member checking. Inter-rater reliability was used to strengthen the findings. Data from each participant were analyzed as an individual case; I then analyzed the data from the girls as a collective unit.

In the next chapter, I report my findings as they relate to my four research questions.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the personal and school literacy practices of three girls who attended an alternative school. I met each of my participants at the Lincoln County Alternative School. I met Suzanne and Molly in the spring of 2008, during my pilot study. I met Danielle at the Lincoln County Alternative School during Fall 2008. I collected data for 13 weeks, from September 16, 2008, until December 11, 2008.

Originally, I planned to investigate the literacy practices of Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly while they were attending the Lincoln County Alternative School; however, due to probation requirements and violations, I collected data at three sites. Danielle attended school at the Lincoln County Alternative for one week and at the Lincoln County Detention Center for seven weeks. Suzanne attended school in the Lincoln County Detention Center for three weeks and River High school for 10 weeks. Molly attended school at River High school for the entire 13 weeks of my study.

My study explored the girls’ personal and school literacy practices. I defined personal literacy practices as self-initiated reading and writing activities. School literacy practices were defined as reading and writing directed by a teacher. This chapter presents findings for the following research questions:
1. What are the literacy practices of three female young adults who have spent a portion of their schooling experience in an alternative school setting because of suspensions, expulsions or court orders?

2. What are the girls’ purposes for engaging in these literacy practices?

3. What do the girls think their literacy practices accomplish?

4. What factors, including but not limited to family, peers, school literacy practices, and life events, influence the literacy practices of three female young adults?

The discussion of my findings is structured as follows. The three participants were considered individual cases. Each case begins with an overview of the girls’ school and probation history, followed by an in-depth examination of their personal and school literacy practices. Following the individual cases is the cross-case analysis, in which the cases were examined together as a collective study. The cross-case analysis presents an in-depth examination of the similarities and differences in the individual cases.

**Danielle**

In August, Ms. Snyder, Danielle’s probation officer, suggested I include Danielle in my study because she knew Danielle enjoyed reading and also said, “she’s had kind of a mix mash upbringing. So she’s got some real world experience that I thought she could bring to you” (Ms. Snyder, Interview, December 8, 2008). Ms. Snyder described Danielle’s home-life as “mix mash” because at different times in her life Danielle lived with her grandmother, her mother, and her sister, Heather. The “real world experience” was Danielle’s arrest and her pregnancy at 17.
I met Danielle at the Lincoln County Alternative School on September 16, 2008. I worked with Danielle from September 16th until November 7, 2008. During these eight weeks she attended the Lincoln County Alternative School for one week and school at the Juvenile Detention Center for seven weeks. In the following sections I describe Danielle’s school and probation history. I then provide an in-depth examination of Danielle’s personal and school literacy practices.

**School History**

Over the course of 12 years, Danielle attended four public schools. According to Danielle and Ms. Snyder, the change in living circumstances and school placement was due to her parents not wanting to provide care for her, her parents’ multiple marriages and divorces, her parents’ and family members’ home evictions, and her sister Heather’s imprisonment (Danielle, Interview, October 15, 2008; Ms. Snyder, Interview, December 8, 2008).

Between 9th and 10th grade, Danielle was not enrolled in school. Ms. Snyder explained:

She just kind of dropped off the face of the earth, so to speak. She didn’t have any formal schooling because when I got her on probation (fall 2007) she hadn’t been enrolled for about a half a year. So actually when she first got on probation, we just placed her in the alternative school until we got her enrolled at City High School. (Ms. Snyder, Interview, December 8, 2008)

In addition to the four public schools, Danielle also attended school at the alternative school and the detention center.
In the fall of 2008 Danielle was the typical age of seniors in high school, although she had only accumulated school credits to qualify as a junior in high school. Danielle was uncertain of her grade level. In September she said, “I am only a sophomore, no I am a junior, I don’t know” (Danielle, Interview, September 30, 2008). Less than three months later, she dropped out of school on her 18th birthday, November 10, 2008.

**Probation History**

Although Danielle’s first involvement in the Lincoln County Juvenile Court system occurred prior to my study, the information is important to understand subsequent placements in the Lincoln County Alternative School and the Lincoln County Detention Center. On October 25, 2007, Danielle was charged with theft, and Judge Williams granted Danielle probation, a court authorized release from jail. Her probation was set for 90 days but was extended another 90 days due to a truancy and drug violation. These events led to Danielle’s placement in the detention center, where she resided for seven weeks during my study.

In August of 2008, Danielle asked to be placed in the alternative school because she was pregnant and she did not have appropriate clothes to wear to school (Ms. Snyder, Interview, December 8, 2008). Because the alternative school provides students uniforms to wear, Ms. Snyder allowed Danielle to have a temporary placement in the alternative school until she was able to find maternity clothing. During the week of September 16th, Danielle missed 2 days of school (Field Notes, September 16, 2008), which violated her probation. As a consequence, Danielle was placed in the detention center for one week, which was then extended to seven weeks because Danielle had nowhere else to live.
(Field Notes, September 23, 2008). Judge Williams, the juvenile court judge, and Mr. Reynolds, the chief probation officer, did not want her to live with her sister, Heather, who had a criminal record and was evicted from her rented house because of gun possession. This left Heather, Heather’s two children, and Danielle homeless. According to Ms. Snyder, Children’s Services preferred not to provide care for Danielle because she was turning 18 in seven weeks (Field Notes, September 23, 2008). Her sentence encompassed this seven week time period; therefore, she remained at the detention center until her 18th birthday, November 10, 2008.

Introduction to Findings

Although my study lasted 13 weeks, Danielle was a participant in my study for only 8 weeks; her decision to withdraw from school ended her participation in my study. Throughout this time I observed Danielle once a week for one week at the Lincoln County Alternative School, and then twice a week for seven weeks at the Lincoln County Detention Center. I also conducted eight, once-a-week, formal interviews with Danielle, one formal interview with Danielle’s teacher, Mr. Pearson, and one formal interview with Ms. Snyder, Danielle’s probation officer. I had hoped to meet with Danielle’s sister but she was unable to meet with me and did not have access to a telephone; therefore, I created a questionnaire that Danielle’s sister completed during a scheduled court hearing. I also asked Danielle to write a literacy vignette, a short descriptive story about a literacy experience. Danielle’s vignette focused on writing letters to her sister, Heather, while she was at the detention center; however, the vignette was only three sentences in length. Danielle wrote:
Whenever I get to write my sister (Heather). It is important to me because I don’t
get to see her or talk to her when I am in jail. Also it is important because it lets
her know how I am doing, and when she writes back it lets me know how
everything and everyone at home is. (Vignette, November 6, 2008)

While it was not an in-depth piece of writing, I was able to use the piece to further
engage Danielle in conversation about letter writing.

During the eight weeks of my study, Danielle engaged in the following personal
literacy practices: reading fiction, writing letters, and writing notes. In addition,
Danielle’s teacher assigned the following school literacy practices: reading Junior
Scholastic Magazine, completing fill-in-the-blank worksheets, and reading newspapers.
As part of her probation, Danielle read informational material on pregnancy, child-birth,
and child rearing. In the following sections I describe in detail each of these literacy
practices, the purpose and outcomes of these literacy practices, and the factors that might
have influenced Danielle’s literacy practices.

**Personal Literacy Practices**

The following section presents Danielle’s personal literacy practices. During my
study Danielle read 10 fiction books. She also wrote letters to her sister, Heather, and
notes to other youth in the detention center. From my observations and interview it seems
living in the Lincoln County Detention Center influenced Danielle’s reading and writing
practices.

**Reading books.** Within the tightly structured day of the detention center Danielle
was allowed to read during leisure time, from 5:30 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. during the
weekdays and from 5:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m. during the weekends. Danielle’s cell, a 7x10 square foot room with a cot, branched off from a main room where three metal book rolling carts with three shelves of paperback books were kept (Field Notes, September 23, 2008). Danielle was allowed to take books from the cart during leisure time; there was no form of checking-out books, and she was allowed to keep the book in her cell (Field Notes, September 23, 2008). Because books were donated by the local public library over the years, most of the books were worn. Books on the cart included those considered “classics,” such as *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925/2004) and *Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1945/2004), and recent popular books such as the *Harry Potter Series* (Rowling, 1997-2007). In the summer of 2008 I was awarded a $1,500 grant to purchase books for the detention center. In 2008, I worked with the detention center staff to update their book selections. We purchased 208 award winning young adult books such as *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), *Looking for Alaska* (Green, 2005), *Al Capone Does My Shirts* (Choldenko 2006), *Copper Sun* (Draper, 2006), and the *Bone Series* (Smith, 1995-2009).

There was an ongoing myth about reading books among the youth placed at the detention center. Many of the youth believe if someone starts a book, but is released from the detention center before finishing it, then that person is cursed and will return to jail (Field Notes, September 16, 2008). This myth influenced Danielle’s reading habits. For example, at the beginning of November, days before Danielle was scheduled for release she mentioned wanting to finish *The Bully* (Schraff, 2002; Danielle, Interview, November 4, 2008). She was in the middle of reading chapter six and was figuring out how many
days it would take her to finish the 15 chapter book. When I started to ask her about the myth, she interrupted me and said:

D: It is bad luck 'cause you will come back.

K: So you have heard that?

D: Yeah

K: Where does that come from? Who says that?

D: I don’t know, everyone says it. My brother was here and he always made sure he finished books. Like he would write, ‘I am almost done with the book sis, I only have 2 chapters left and hopefully I get it done ’cause if not, you know what that means.’ So I don’t know; it has always been a myth. And just like upstairs [in the adult prison], they believe it. Even when my sister’s ex-boyfriend was in prison. He won’t read books in jail because of it. He will read the Bible, but that is it. He won’t read books. Just ’cause he knows if he don’t finish it, then he will end up back in jail.

K: So that is a well-known rumor?

D: Yeah.

K: That is interesting, what do you think about that?

D: I don’t know if it is true, but I am not interested in finding out. So, this book, I will be done Sunday night. If not, I will finish it early Monday morning.

(Danielle, Interview, November 4, 2008)
Although numerous other youth in the detention center acknowledged and believed this myth, the staff and Mr. Pearson, the teacher, were not aware of it (Field Notes, November 4, 2008). When I asked Mr. Pearson why he thought this rumor existed, he said:

I am not sure. But it reminds me of how some of the staff, if they happen to see kids outside of the detention center, the kids will say, ‘Oh now I am going back to jail.’ Like we jinx them if we see them on the outside. Some people are just superstitious. (Mr. Pearson, Interview, November, 11, 2008)

The structured schedule of the detention center, access to books, and lack of other forms of entertainment in the detention center influenced Danielle’s literacy practices. In the course of her eight week placement in the detention center during the fall of 2008, Danielle read 10 fiction books, including four books from the Bluford High Series (Schraff, 2002-2009; Field Notes, September 30, 2008; October 7, 2008; October 15, 2008; October 23, 2008; October 28, 2008; November 4, 2008; Refer to Appendix E for a complete listing of the books Danielle read). Danielle claimed she was “not a reader” during one of our early interviews (Danielle, Interview, September 16, 2008); however, while living at the detention center I observed Danielle twice reading in her cell (Field Notes, September 30, 2008; October 15, 2008). During six of our interviews, Danielle told me about the latest book she was reading, providing a detailed description of the characters and plot (October 7, 2008; October 15, 2008; October 23, 2008; October 28, 2008; November 4, 2008; November 6, 2008). For example, when she finished Somebody to Love Me (Schraff, 2002), she explained the book was about a young girl in an abusive relationship.
And it is about this young black girl. She was missing school a lot and then finally her friend talked her into going back to school. And she met this boy named Bobby Wallace, which was her friend’s boyfriend last year, but he was abusive. And he beat her up real bad. Well, she met him. And he ended up taking her out and they started talking. She ended up drawing for the newspaper, like cartoons for the school newspaper, and then her and Bobby ended up getting real serious. And then he bought her a gold bracelet with his initial on it. And he gave her his varsity coat to wear. Well, Halloween came around and he ended up taking her to a Halloween party and he kept saying he wasn’t using drugs anymore. Well, before they went to the Halloween party he snatched her up by her wrist and she just kept saying he didn’t mean to snatch her up by her wrist, like she was lying to herself. Well, then they went to the party and they get into an argument. And he is like real, like not himself. And she is like what is wrong with him, is he on drugs and then he snatched her up by her arms and her friend Jane, the one he beat up last year, and her sister and her friend try to come and get her. And she wouldn’t do it at first, and she stayed and then he ended up coming after her and his eyes were real big and glassy. And he started choking her and yanking her up by her arms and choking her. And then came Jane and them, and he ended up going and overdosing. And it was her mom’s boyfriend, the one going with Bobby, was the drug dealer and he is the one that sold the drugs to Bobby. So now he is in jail. (Danielle, Interview, October 28, 2008)
Danielle consistently discussed how reading kept her “from getting bored” (Danielle, Interview, October 15, 2008; October 30, 2008). She explained:

> Like honestly, if you just sit in your room and don’t do nothing, it makes your time drag. For the first 2 weeks I was here, I didn’t really read except for the (baby) magazines. And I just started reading and it makes the time go faster. (Interview, October 15, 2008)

Mr. Pearson, the teacher at the detention center, verified that many youth who are not usually readers will read extensively while in the detention center. He stated:

> There is nothing else to do here. During the downtime when the kids are in the pod or locked up in their room it’s either like count the bricks or find something to read. So a lot of them choose to read when they are here. (Mr. Pearson, Interview, November 11, 2008)

Although the purpose of Danielle’s reading was entertainment, she reported feeling relaxed after reading (Danielle, Interview, October 15, 2008). She stated, “This is when I usually read the most, at night, before I go to sleep. It helps me go to sleep and calms me down” (Danielle, Interview, October 15, 2008).

Danielle selected books she thought would relate to her life experiences. She said, “I will read a book if I think the title compares to my life” (Danielle, Interview, October 30, 2008). Danielle thought the *Bluford High Series* (Schruff, 2002-2009) were books that related to her life experiences (Field Notes, October 28, 2008). The *Bluford High Series* are 15 young adult novels focused on the lives of high school students attending Bluford High. The characters are all African American young adults dealing with issues
such as violence, drug use, bullying, family relationships, friendships, and peer pressure. The content is geared to engage high school readers, but according to the publisher, Townsend Press, the books are written at a fifth or sixth grade reading level. After reading *Somebody to Love Me* (Schraff, 2002), about a girl in an abusive relationship with a boy addicted to drugs, Danielle commented:

> It compares a lot to my life. And it made me think of my life. This boy I was going out with, he overdosed and he was abusive (like Bobby Wallace, one of the main characters). And it is like the truth. Like in the book. You really lie to yourself about those types of things. Like you know it is going to happen but you lie to yourself, like no he’s different, he changed. But it is true. (Danielle, Interview, October 28, 2008)

Living in the juvenile detention center influenced Danielle’s reading in two ways: (a) reading was one of the only options for entertainment, and (b) Danielle had access to quality reading materials. The detention center provided Danielle with a structured environment where reading was one of the few sanctioned activities. Danielle did not view herself as a reader because outside of the detention center she did not read (Danielle, Interview October 15, 2008). Danielle attributed her lack of reading to her home-life.

> Well, I read more when I am incarcerated. I don’t read as much whenever I am out because I help take care of my sister’s kids. Honestly, and truthfully, I stay busy when I am at home, like, with my niece and nephew. My niece is like my daughter. . . . ’cause I mean, she [Danielle’s sister] is bipolar and when she
doesn’t take her medicine, she gets aggravated really easily. And I will just tell her, “Sis, just go. I will take the kids.” There is a lot of commotion that goes on in my house. (Danielle, Interview, October 15, 2008)

In the detention center Danielle’s life was predictable and routine; this structure provided Danielle with the time and opportunity to read books. Danielle discussed reading books every day after recreational time, between 4:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. and then again in the evenings between 9:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. (Field Notes, October 15, 2008).

Also, Danielle had access to books she wanted to read. I noticed Danielle had at least one book in her cell each time I visited (Field Notes, October 7, 2008; October 8, 2008; October 14, 2008; October 15, 2008; October 29, 2008; November 6, 2008). When the books purchased with the grant money arrived, Danielle helped me sort through the old books, and we looked for books with ripped or torn out pages that needed to be replaced or thrown away (Field Notes, October 23, 2008). She also helped me unpack the new books and place the books on the carts (Field Notes, October 23, 2008). While working, Danielle and I talked about the newly purchased books. I pointed out some of my favorite books, and I told her that I thought she would enjoy the book Speak (Anderson, 1999). Danielle immediately took the book to her cell. As we continued our discussion, she made a stack of books she wanted to read in the future (Field Notes, October 23, 2008). When Danielle commented on the wide selection of young adult literature, I asked if she went to the city’s public library. She explained that lack of
transportation and taking care of her sister Heather’s children kept her from visiting the library (Danielle, Interview, October 23, 2008).

Danielle found reading to be enjoyable (Field Notes, October 28, 2008). When I asked if she thought she would continue reading for entertainment once she left the detention center, she said:

If it is books I like, yeah. ’Cause I am going to go get a library card. I don’t know if I will go to the Schappia [library] one out by the mall or the one down here on 4th Street. But I am going to get a library card. (Danielle, Interview, October 28, 2008)

Living in the detention center influenced Danielle’s reading habits. Although the first day I met Danielle, she stated she was not a reader; while she was living in the detention center she read 10 books. She read to relieve her boredom. Danielle selected books she thought related to her life. According to Danielle, reading books in which she related to the characters and events allowed her to reflect on her life situations. At the detention center Danielle had access to books she wanted to read. She did not have to think about how she would get books and nor did she have any family distractions to keep her from reading. The predictable routine of the detention center provided Danielle with time to read. An ongoing myth about reading in the detention center did not stop Danielle from reading, but rather made her hurry to finish a book before she was released in November.

**Writing letters.** Contact with family and friends when placed in the detention center were limited. Danielle was allowed to make one phone call per day and to have
one visitor per week (Field Notes, October 7, 2008). Because Danielle’s sister, Heather, did not have a phone or reliable transportation, Danielle relied on writing and receiving letters as her main form of communication with Heather (Field Notes, October 30, 2008).

Letter writing was the only sanctioned writing activity in the detention center. Danielle was only allowed to write one letter on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 2:00-4:00 p.m. (Field Notes, October 7, 2008). Occasionally Mr. Pearson allowed students to write letters during class. Danielle used these opportunities in class to write to her sister (Field Note, October 23, 2008). Mr. Pearson explained, “I know they have letter writing time in the pod, but every once in a while I will let them write a letter to their family or friends. But not often” (Mr. Pearson, Interview, November 11, 2008).

Because Danielle’s letters were her only opportunity for personal communication, I never asked to read the contents of her letters. Danielle told me the purpose of her letter writing was “to find what is going on and what her and the babies are doing. And tell her how I am doing” (Danielle, Interview, October 30, 2008). Danielle commented, “When I am writing [letters to her sister], it makes feel better” (Danielle, Interview, October 30, 2008).

Danielle wrote letters to her sister “every time I get a chance” (Danielle, Interview, October 15, 2008). Danielle’s release dates, however, influenced the amount of her writing (Field Notes, September 23, 2008; November 4, 2008). For example, in September, before she knew she would be staying at the detention center, she did not write any letters. She told me, “I haven’t written letters because I thought I was getting out of here” (Danielle, Interview, September 23, 2008). When she was unsure of her
release date in November, she increased her letter writing to make sure her sister, Heather, knew she might be released early. Danielle said:

Uh, I wrote my sister on Tuesday, it wasn’t a very long letter. And then I wrote her again Thursday, and that was a pretty long letter on Thursday. ’Cause I don’t know what is going on. ’Cause Ms. Snyder said that if I could get released on the 9th she would put it up on the board. But nobody said anything about it being on the board and I don’t know if my sister has been called or not. (Interview, November 4, 2008)

Although Danielle’s letters were intended to be for communicating with her sister, writing and receiving letters became a source of entertainment. Throughout my study, I visited with Danielle seven times during leisure-time when she wrote letters and had opportunities to talk to her friends. On October 23, 2008, I sat with Danielle and her friend, Mya, during letter writing time. I noticed Mya received a letter and then passed her letter to Danielle. Danielle read the letter, and the girls began laughing and talking about the contents. Minutes later they began writing letters. Before they sealed the envelopes they exchanged letters and again began talking about what they wrote. I asked Danielle and Mya if they always read the other’s letters and they responded “yes” (Field Notes, October 23, 2008). When I asked why they did this Danielle said, “to see what all is going on” (Field Notes, October 23, 2008). Danielle and Mya explained because they went to the same school, they knew many of the same people, and when one received a letter, they always shared the contents. (Field Notes, October 23, 2008). Reading each
other’s letters provided the girls with additional information; they used the letters to gossip about friends and events happening in their community.

**Writing notes.** Letter writing to family members was sanctioned at the detention center, but youth managed to engage in unsanctioned note writing to communicate. The detention center divided the youth into 2 groups: Pod A (males ages 13-18) and Pod B (females ages 10-18 and males 10-13). Communication between the pods was not permitted. The youth, however, shared a classroom, and the adolescents used this setting to exchange notes. Twice while observing Danielle, I saw students fold up pieces of paper and wedge them under desks (Field Notes, September 30, 2008; November 6, 2008). On another day in class, when Mr. Pearson had both groups using the same reading materials, I noticed students tucking pieces of paper in the reading materials (Field Notes, November 4, 2008). During one class I saw a student retrieve a piece of paper from under the desk and covertly hand it to Danielle (Field Notes, November 4, 2008). Danielle and I had a conversation about this note, and she explained the process of passing notes between Pod A and Pod B.

D: Oh my gosh, Sara passed a note; it was a note from the boys in Pod A.

K: Does Pod A leave notes in the classroom?

D: Yeah, they will leave little notes, just to get attention. The only people I write notes to are the ones I know. They want serious notes ’cause of course they are locked up. But I will just write notes asking them when they get out or whatever. ’Cause I know two people over there, well three.

K: So what was that note about?
D: That was a note telling us to write a sexy note to them ’cause, uh, they are real horny, so they could masturbate to it. But how can you masturbate to a note? I just started laughing, like, I guess.

K: So have you written anyone notes in Pod A?

D: I just write my name places. Like I’ll write my name on a paper. They will write me once they see my name. Like I know Trey, so I’ve talked to him. I know Drake.

K: So they will write you notes once they see your name written somewhere.

D: Yeah, they’ll be like, what did you to get here? How long are you here? And I’ll be like, nothing. And I’ll tell them I will get out on the tenth. And they’ll be like, ain’t that your birthday? You’ll be 18. And I’ll be like, yeah. Then they will ask how the baby is doing.

K: So then you do write notes back and forth.

D: Yeah, but not like some of the girls do.

K: What do you mean?

D: Well, none who’s in here now, but sometimes there are girls that will write bad notes like that. But we aren’t supposed to have no contact with them.

K: Right.

D: If we get caught we have to go to isolation.

K: So basically you put it under the desk or in with other materials.

D: Um, yeah. Usually people just put them underneath the desk.
K: Has Mr. K ever caught anybody. Like, do you think Mr. K knows you are passing notes?

D: Oh, I think he does, ’cause he’s caught a couple people. Like today there was a note underneath my desk and I picked it up and he was like, “give it here Danielle now.” So I gave it to him. I crumpled it up first and gave it to him. I crumpled it up so he couldn’t read it ’cause I didn’t know what it was about. I don’t even know if it was to me or nothing. ’Cause sometimes they don’t know what desk you sit in, just they know you are in there. So they’ll just leave it under somebody’s desk and you’ll read it and it will have somebody’s name written on it and you just give it to them. (Danielle, Interview, November 4, 2008)

When I discussed the writing of notes with Mr. Pearson he said he knew students tried to pass notes. He explained he would check for notes underneath desks or in the materials (Mr. Pearson, Interview, November 11, 2008).

Although the purpose of writing was communicative, the outcome was entertainment. Danielle wrote and read letters as a way to learn about her sister Heather and her sister’s children. She also exchanged letters with her friend Mya to learn about people and events in the community. In the detention center, the classroom setting provided youth the opportunity to converse through writing avoiding adult supervision.

**School Literacy Practices**

The Lincoln County Detention Center is funded for education programs from The Lincoln County Board of Education and Title I, Part D, The Prevention and Intervention
Programs for Children and Youth Who are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk (The National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk, 2009). The youth were divided into 2 groups: Pod A (males, 13-18) and Pod B (younger males, ages 10-13, and females, 10-18). According to the detention center’s records the average age of the students in 2008 was 15 (Mr. Campbell, Interview, May 29, 09). Mr. Pearson taught all youth at the detention center. When Pod A was in Mr. Pearson’s classroom, Pod B was in the computer lab. While in the computer lab, youth were supervised by a guard. In the computer lab, youth work on Skills Tutor, an online tutoring program published by Houghton Mifflin Learning Technology. Table 14 provides Danielle’s class schedule at the detention center.

Table 14

*Summary of Danielle’s Class Schedule at the Detention Center*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Class/Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00-8:50</td>
<td>Class with Mr. Pearson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:50</td>
<td>Computer Lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00-10:50</td>
<td>Class with Mr. Pearson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00-12:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-1:00</td>
<td>Computer Lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00-1:50</td>
<td>Class with Mr. Pearson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I only observed Danielle when she was receiving instruction in Mr. Pearson’s class. The classroom in the detention center was a small room with thick steel doors. The teacher’s desk was in the back of the room and student desks were in rows. The walls were block cement painted white with no posters or decorations except for a sheet of paper, hung from the top of the blackboard, on which a student drew Mr. Pearson’s name. The three windows in the room were crossed with bars. Attached to the blackboard was a mirror enabling Mr. Pearson to watch the students as he wrote on the board. The room had two filing cabinets and a small table with a globe. Students did not bring any materials to the classroom. Mr. Pearson provided students with all instructional materials. At the end of every class, students returned their materials, and Mr. Pearson counted the number of pencils returned. This was part of a safety check to make sure that pencils and papers could not be converted into weapons.

During the time I observed Danielle, in class, fellow students ranged in age from 10 to 18 years of age. Class-size varied from day to day; the fewest number of students I observed in class was 5 and the most was 15 students. According to Mr. Pearson students ranged widely in ability and skills. Mr. Pearson acknowledged this ability range and stated, “students’ reading abilities range anywhere from borderline illiterate to students with very good reading skills” (Mr. Pearson, Interview, November 11, 2008).

When asked how he would describe his daily lessons, Mr. Pearson used the word “remedial” (Mr. Pearson, Interview, 11-11, 2008). Mr. Pearson explained:

My population here in the juvenile detention center changes almost every day; therefore, it is hard for me to engage students in lessons that extend over a period
of time. Because of this, most of the assignments I give are one day lessons that are usually remedial in nature. Sometimes I try to extend lessons over a few days. (Mr. Pearson, Interview, November 11, 2008)

Mr. Pearson either lectured or wrote information on the board that the students copied on lined loose-leaf paper. I did not observe textbooks being used in the classroom; the staff did not want students to have access to potentially dangerous materials. Students did use *Junior Scholastic Magazine*, during two geography lessons I observed. He also provided students with worksheets such as those accompanying *Junior Scholastic Magazine*. Mr. Pearson informally assessed students and decided what lessons he wanted to teach each day. During observations, I saw Danielle participate in lessons focused on parts of speech, the digestive system, the circulatory system, and geography.

For the period of my observations, whole-class instruction was used; students were never placed in small groups. I observed individual instruction in two instances when younger students were having difficulty with the work. When I asked Mr. Pearson about his instructional decision-making, his answer focused mainly on behavior rather than academic instruction. He said:

I demand that students exhibit proper classroom behavior which allows for an atmosphere conducive to learning. Students adhere to assignments accordingly. As always students conform to the rules of the classroom and suffer the consequences when warranted. (Mr. Pearson, Interview, November 11, 2008)

Danielle discussed Mr. Pearson’s classes as a break from her mundane schedule. She said, “classes keeps me busy” (Danielle, Interview, October 30, 2008). In fact,
Marcy, a member of the staff, explained students often look forward to Mr. Pearson’s class because it offers them the chance to leave their rooms and to socialize to an extent (Field Notes, November 11, 2008). Danielle was externally motivated to complete her work in Mr. Pearson’s classroom because of the threats of being “in trouble from Mr. Pearson and Ms. Snyder” (Danielle, Interview, November 4, 2008).

When I asked Danielle if she thought the reading she did in school was important, she said, “I read, I guess I just read (in school) ’cause I have to” (Danielle, Interview, October 30, 2008). She explained:

Reading educates me. Well, usually. I mean, it educates me about things on the globe. Well, like when I first came here I couldn’t like put all 50 states where they were supposed to be and now I can. I mean, I might get confused every once in a while, but . . . [shrugs]. (Danielle, Interview, October 30, 2008)

Danielle struggled to relate her school literacy practices to her life experiences. When I asked if she thought her school reading and writing applied to her life, she said:

Maybe not some of the school work we do, ’cause to me it is too easy. Maybe ’cause there are so many varieties of ages, they really can’t give us hard work ’cause then some wouldn’t understand it. But it is just too easy. (Danielle, Interview, October 23, 2008)

During my observations, the only time the instruction differed was when students read local newspapers as an assignment. Twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, Mr. Pearson provided students with *The City Star* and *The Intelligencer*, both local newspapers. He explained:
The newspapers are used as current event assignments where I encourage students to open up structured discussion, write a summary of an article they have read, and write an opinion of what they have read. I strongly urge the students to focus on the use of proper sentence structure, including capitalization and proper punctuation. And, as always, I stress being as neat as possible with their work.

(Mr. Pearson, Interview, November 11, 2008)

When I asked Danielle about the assignment, she explained:

You read an article and then you have to fill a paper out, like who, what, when, where, why and how. Um, and then you flip it over and give a summary of at least 6 sentences, and then you give your opinion. (Danielle, Interview October 7, 2008)

Some of the articles Danielle chose to read were about a rape in a local nursing home, three juveniles torturing an animal, and a house fire. When I asked why she selected a particular article she wanted to read, she said:

Usually, I reads the ones that look interesting. Usually it is just the ones that catch my attention. I read one about the house catching on fire with the dogs inside and the two girls in Sistersville who were making prank calls. Those things grab my attention and maybe even compares to my life in some ways. (Danielle, Interview, October 30, 2008)

The newspaper assignment allowed Danielle to select articles she found interesting and articles she thought related to her life experiences. While observing Danielle in class, I noticed after completing her newspaper assignment, instead of
returning the paper, she continued to read another article (Field Notes, October 7, 2008). When I asked her why she read the second article, she said, “It was just, I don’t know, I was just flipping through the newspaper ’cause we had 20 minutes to read. And I read the first article and then I saw that article” (Danielle, Interview, October 7, 2008). When I asked if she always read extra articles from the newspaper she replied “yes” (Danielle, Interview, October 7, 2008). Later I asked Danielle what she liked about reading the newspaper as a school assignment. She said:

I just like reading different happenings around the world. Like it’s not even about what is just here. ’Cause we read the Intelligencer, so it is different happenings over there and around the country, or around there. I don’t know, it is fun to read some of the dumb stuff people do. (Danielle, Interview, October 23, 2008)

Although it seemed Danielle liked reading the newspaper she met most of her other school literacy practices with much less enthusiasm than her personal literacy practices. The teacher’s rationale for daily instruction was the variety in students’ ages and abilities in the classroom plus the emphasis on behavior. These daily lessons did not seem to challenge or engage Danielle. She completed school-sanctioned literacy practices because she knew she had to follow the rules of the institution.

**Reading as a Probation Requirement**

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) cited a recent 3% increase in teen birth rates (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). The CDC found teenage mothers, aged 19 and younger were more likely to drop out of school and remain single parents. Ms. Snyder primarily worked with adolescent girls, many pregnant or with
children. Knowing the CDC’s statistics and noticing the girls lacked information about their pregnancies and parenting, Ms. Snyder created a pregnancy program for adolescent girls on probation (Ms. Snyder, Interview, December 8, 2008). The program included speakers and having the girls work with Manikins, dolls programmed to simulate a baby’s needs. Ms. Snyder also required the girls to read informational text concerning their pregnancies and parenting. Ms. Snyder created a 55-page pregnancy packet containing articles, fact sheets, pictures, and interviews with teen mothers. Ms. Snyder personally subscribed to *American Baby Magazine* and *Parenting Magazine*, and brought these magazines to the detention center to supplement the educational materials she assembled for the pregnant adolescents in detention or attending the alternative school (Ms. Snyder, Interview, December 8, 2008).

As part of her probation sentence, Danielle was required to participate in Ms. Snyder’s pregnancy program (Field Notes, September 23, 2008). Each week, for 7 weeks, Danielle read from her pregnancy packet and read an article from either *American Baby Magazine* or *Parenting Magazine*. Tracey, the nurse at the detention center, also encouraged Danielle to read her pregnancy packet (Field Notes, September 30, 2008). Danielle stated, “It took me three days to read it (the pregnancy packet)—it should have taken me longer, it’s just that there is nothing else to do” (Danielle, Interview, October 7, 2008). Because this was her first pregnancy, Danielle thought the information interesting (Field Notes, October 30, 2008). She said, “I learned a lot from it, ’cause it is my first baby” (Danielle, Interview, October 30, 2008).
The pregnancy packet focused mainly on information about fetal development and ways to ensure a healthy pregnancy (Field Notes, October 7, 2008). Danielle explained:

It [the pregnancy packet] tells you different ways the baby is developing, like the first trimester, your baby still weighs less than an aspirin, but he’s 10,000 times bigger than a fertilized egg. That is crazy. And it shows you different pictures, like different pictures for different weeks. (Danielle, Interview, October 7, 2008)

Danielle discussed learning about nutrition requirements such as how much water she should be drinking and necessary prenatal nutrients, such as folic acid (Field Notes, October 7, 2008). After Danielle read a section from the pregnancy packet, Ms. Snyder had Danielle fill out a KWL (What I know/What I want to know/What I learned) chart about her reading (Field Notes, October 7, 2008). A KWL chart is a reading strategy used before, during, and after students read to activate their prior knowledge, help them set goals for their reading, and discuss what they have learned. Danielle explained:

Every week, usually when I go to my probation meetings, she [Ms. Snyder] brings a paper in here, like I fill out, stuff I know about the baby, stuff I don’t know or want to know. I just fill that out and then she goes and finds different stuff I don’t know. And then she will go print it out and bring it up to me. (Danielle, Interview, October 7, 2008)

The articles Danielle read from *American Baby Magazine* and *Parenting Magazine* ranged in topics focused on keeping children from getting sick to dealing with temper-tantrums. Danielle reported reading five articles she thought related to events
from her life. In a conversation with her in September, Danielle commented on how an article from *American Baby Magazine* provided her with solutions for temper-tantrums. She chose to read the article because she said, “My niece throws tantrums” (Interview, September 30, 2008).

During the seven weeks Danielle was in the detention center, her nonfiction reading was devoted to learning more about her pregnancy. While she was required to read the pregnancy packet created by Ms. Snyder, she did so quickly, in part because she had the time to read and because she was interested in learning about her baby’s development. In addition to the required reading from the pregnancy packet, she chose to read additional articles from *American Baby Magazine* and *Parenting Magazine*. Danielle selected articles providing advice about topics relevant to her experiences with children, like sickness and temper tantrums.

**The Decision to Leave School**

During our initial meeting, Danielle explained she was interested in participating in my study, but she wanted me to know she planned on dropping out of school on her 18th birthday, November 10, 2008 (Field Notes, September 16, 2008). Danielle’s movement in schools affected her education; by the time she reached the age when she should have graduated high school, she did not have enough credits for graduation.

Although she had the opportunity to read for pleasure while in the detention center, at the end of her participation in my study, Danielle discussed reading as more of a functional, outcome oriented activity. Danielle viewed reading as a necessity for college
and a job. She also thought she would have to read more because she was becoming a mother. When I asked if she thought reading would be important in her life, she said:

I think it is going to be more important from now on for me. Going to college and taking the GED, I am going to have to read more. And in high school you really don’t have to read much, evidently, in college you have to read a lot and study. And then I will be reading baby books. I went through this stage where I thought I read enough in school so I didn’t need read at home. But I think whenever I get out, with taking the GED test and stuff, I am going to have to read a lot more than what I had been reading. So it is important to me but I just . . . I don’t know. My priorities were totally messed up for a while and I think it took me having to come to jail and just sit and think about my life. (Danielle, Interview, October 23, 2008)

**Conclusion**

Danielle’s personal literacy practices were influenced by the Lincoln County Detention Center. She read fiction books because it was a sanctioned yet entertaining activity. She selected books that she felt related to her life situations. Reading provided opportunities for self-awareness; for example, she was able to reflect on her experiences with an abusive boyfriend after reading *Somebody to Love Me* (Schraff, 2002). Danielle interacted with her sister, Heather, and friends when she wrote letters and read letters. Letters and notes became a source of entertainment for Danielle and other youth at the detention center with whom she exchanged notes. Her writing allowed her to maintain her membership in a communicative network in which she could share her private
feelings with others. Writing notes to the youth in Pod A also allowed Danielle to assert control over her literacy practices even when they were prohibited.

Danielle’s school literacy instruction was primarily verbal, in the form of lecture. This was paired with worksheets, which typically required simple fill-in-the-blank, one word responses. I did not observe Danielle reading stories, poems, or other works of literature, and no writing instruction in the form of personal essays or creative writing occurred. For Danielle the only meaningful instruction that took place was the newspaper assignment because she could choose the articles she thought were relevant to her life experiences. As part of her probation requirements Danielle read informational texts focused on her pregnancy and parenting. This allowed her to learn about her present situation and her future situation as a mother.

Danielle’s participation in my study ended on her 18th birthday. Before Danielle left the detention center I purchased a baby outfit and the book *Goodnight Moon* (Brown, 1947/1991). I also gave Danielle stationery, stamps, and my address in hopes she would keep in contact, but she has not written. In June of 2009, Ms. Snyder saw Danielle’s sister Heather working at the local Taco Bell. Heather told Ms. Snyder Danielle had a baby boy named Jason. She took and passed the GED and was living and working in Colorado.

Prior to her release from the detention center I asked Danielle about her dreams for the future. She said,

I want to have the baby. And take classes for my GED and take the GED and go to college. And then to be a corrections officer or a probation officer. And then I don’t want to live here. I want to move and get a nice house. And maybe get
married. I don’t know, ’cause I have seen a lot of things happen in marriages. But maybe, at least have a boyfriend who is there for me. And just have a good life for my kids. (Danielle, Interview, October 23, 2008)

Suzanne

I met Suzanne at the Lincoln County Alternative School during my pilot study in the spring of 2008. I developed a relationship with Suzanne over the course of the semester. When I observed Suzanne writing poetry during class, I would approach her and initiate a conversation about her writing. Suzanne allowed me to read her poetry and asked my opinion about her poetry. I asked Suzanne to be a participant in my study because we had established a friendly relationship, and I knew her to be a writer.

My study began September 16, 2008. During this time, I spent 13 weeks learning about Suzanne’s literacy practices. During these 13 weeks Suzanne attended school at the Lincoln County Juvenile Detention Center for three weeks and River High School for 10 weeks. In the following sections I provide necessary information regarding Suzanne’s school history and her probation history. I then provide an in-depth examination of Suzanne’s personal and school literacy practices.

School History

Suzanne has been educated in the River School District for her entire school career. River School District is a small district with one elementary, middle, and high school. River High School has approximately 300 students, 96% Caucasian, and with 29% of the students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch. Prior to my study, Suzanne spent 90 school days at the Lincoln County Alternative School during the 2007-2008
school year. During my study, Suzanne was educated at the Lincoln County Detention Center for 15 school days. Following my study, in the spring of 2009, Suzanne was placed back in the Lincoln County Alternative School for 30 school days.

**Probation History**

Although Suzanne’s initial involvement in the Lincoln County Juvenile Court system occurred prior to my study, it is important in understanding her subsequent placements in the Lincoln County Alternative School and the Lincoln County Detention Center. Suzanne’s involvement in the juvenile court system began in December 2007 with a domestic violence charge filed against her because she assaulted her mother.

Suzanne’s probation officer, Ms. Snyder, related her probation history:

She [Suzanne] was put on for domestic violence. Her and her mom got into a pretty nasty little fight and that’s when she was put on probation. Her mom called the River police and they brought her in. She went on probation with me December of ‘07. She violated probation by kicking in her bedroom door and then another time she was on house arrest and just wasn’t abiding by her curfew and just strolling around River as she pleased. (Interview, December 8, 2008)

Suzanne’s home life could be described as tumultuous. Her probation history indicated a negative and often violent relationship with her mother (Ms. Snyder, Interview, December 8, 2008). When I told Suzanne I would be contacting her mother to discuss her literacy practices, Suzanne said, “fine but she probably doesn’t even notice” (Field Notes, November 17, 2008).
Ms. Snyder placed Suzanne in the Lincoln County Alternative School during the Spring of 2008 because Suzanne had been diagnosed with depression and began cutting herself. Ms. Snyder was authorized to make placements in the alternative school or detention center when it was in the best interests of a youth’s welfare. Ms. Snyder and Suzanne both explained her cutting was a reaction to a break up with a boyfriend (Suzanne, Interview, November 17, 2008; E. Snyder, Interview, December 8, 2008). Ms. Snyder said:

She was really hurt by the whole situation. And so that was her outlet. So that was she was put in alternative school and then I ended up just keeping her for the rest of the year just because of that. Because I felt like if we kept her away from that situation it might be a little better for her. (E. Snyder, Interview December 8, 2008)

Due to another domestic violence charge, Suzanne attended school in the Lincoln County Detention Center from September 10, 2008, until October 6, 2008. October 7, 2008, she returned to River High School. In April of 2009, after my study was completed, she was suspended from school for smoking in the bathroom; this also violated her probation, and she again began attending classes at the Lincoln County Alternative School.

Introduction to Findings

Throughout my study I observed Suzanne once a week for three weeks at the Lincoln County Detention Center and for 10 weeks at River High School. I also conducted 13, once-a-week, formal interviews with Suzanne. I interviewed Suzanne’s
English language arts teacher, her math teacher, her probation officer, and her mother. I also asked Suzanne to write a literacy vignette, a short writing piece focused on a significant moment from her literacy history. Suzanne’s vignette, however, focused on a physical fight she had with her mother. Although it was not about literacy, the piece did allow me to better understand Suzanne’s relationship with her mother.

Throughout the study, Suzanne engaged in the following personal literacy practices: writing poetry, writing letters, and reading books. She participated in school literacy practices as directed by Mr. Pearson, her teacher at the Lincoln County Detention Center, and Mrs. Phillips, her English language arts teacher at River High School. In the following sections I describe in detail each of these literacy practices, the purpose and outcomes of these literacy practices, and the factors that might have influenced Suzanne’s literacy practices.

**Personal Literacy Practices**

The following section presents Suzanne’s personal literacy practices. During my study Suzanne wrote poetry and a letter about her best friend, which she displayed on a school computer. Suzanne began writing a children’s story. Suzanne read four books while in the Lincoln County Detention Center.

**Reading books.** During her time in the Lincoln Detention Center, Suzanne read the following four books: *Aftershock* (Easton, 2007), *Elizabeth: London Calling* (Pascal, 2001), *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Frank, 1952/1993), and *We are Witness: 5 Diaries of Teens who Died in the Holocaust* (Boas, 1996; See Appendix F for a complete reference list of the books Suzanne read at the detention center). The first day I observed Suzanne
at the detention center, September 16, 2008, she asked me to come into her cell and see
the two books she was reading, *Elizabeth: London Calling* (Pascal, 2001), and *We are
Witness: 5 Diaries of Teens who Died in the Holocaust* (Boas, 1996). After she handed
me the books she said, “Look, I started reading” (Field Notes, September 16, 2008).

Suzanne’s reading habits were heavily influenced by peers and girls in the
detention center. When Suzanne began reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Frank,
1952/1993) she told me “a friend in seventh grade thought it was good. I saw it on the
cart and decided to read it” (Field Notes, September 23, 2008). In October, Suzanne
explained she began reading *Aftershock* (Easton, 2007) because Maria, another girl in the
detention center, was reading it and said it was “good” (Field Notes, October 2, 2008).

While she was in the detention center Suzanne struggled to become friends with
other girls. On more than one occasion when I came to the detention center, Suzanne was
crying in her cell because she thought she was being bullied by the other girls (Field
Notes, September 23, 2008; September 30, 2008; October 2, 2008). Later when I asked
Suzanne the purpose of her reading while she was in jail, she explained, “Because I could
stay away from Danielle, Mya, Kellis, and Lindsey, and all the girls. I could just go in my
room and read” (Suzanne, Interview, December 2, 2008). Suzanne’s room provided her
with a sanctuary away from the other girls and reading was an appropriate activity that
she could use as an excuse to retreat to her room.

Suzanne’s time at the detention center was structured and reading was the one of
the only sanctioned activities. Suzanne discussed reading as a way to relieve boredom.
She said she read more in the detention center because she had “more things to do” when
she was not incarcerated (Interview, September 30, 2008). Reading kept her from being “bored” and made time go “faster” (Interview, September 30, 2008).

Although Suzanne read in the detention center, she acknowledged she did not sustain this level of reading once she was released. When I observed Suzanne on her first day at River High School, she told me *Aftershock* (Easton, 2007) was the last book she read. Suzanne said she started another book, the title she could not remember, but stopped reading the book. Immediately she looked at me and said, “but I’m going to make sure I don’t go back” (Field Notes, October 7, 2008). Suzanne was referencing the myth, believed by many of the youth at the detention center, that if someone starts a book, but is released from the detention center before finishing it, then that person is cursed and will return to jail (Field Notes, September 16, 2008). Suzanne admitted to believing this myth; she said, “Yeah, it is true. The last two times I was in here I didn’t finish the books I had started, and here I am again” (Field Notes, September 16, 2008).

Although Suzanne read in response to the myth and for entertainment in the detention center, she did not report reading at any other time during my study. Suzanne explained outside of the detention center, she had choices of activities and other forms of entertainment.

S: I don’t know, I don’t like reading anymore.

K: You don’t like reading anymore. Why do you think that is?

S: I don’t know, I am not that bored as I was in jail. (Suzanne, Interview, November 17, 2008)
In conclusion, Suzanne only read in the detention center; she admitted not reading once she left the facility. The purpose of Suzanne’s reading was to relieve boredom because reading was one of the only sanctioned activities youth could participate in during their time in the detention center. Peers were influential in Suzanne’s reading habits. Peers suggestions influenced the books Suzanne selected to read. Suzanne identified reading as an appropriate activity to help her escape negative social situations.

**Writing.** On four occasions Suzanne discussed writing poems as a way to express her emotions (Interview, October 7; October 28, 2008; Field Notes, November 17, 2008; Interview, December 2, 2008). Suzanne explained she began writing poetry in 2007 because she had “a lot of emotion inside” (Field Notes, November 17, 2008). Suzanne often wrote about sadness over romantic relationships ending (See Appendix G for examples of Suzanne’s poems).

During my pilot study Suzanne discussed keeping her poetry notebook at home; however, throughout the fall of 2008, Suzanne told me she kept her poetry notebook in her school locker (Interview, October 2, 2008). When asked why she kept her notebook in her locker, she explained “I am bored in school. When I am done with my work or when I can’t do my work, I just put it to the side and write” (Interview, October 2, 2008).

I observed Suzanne the first day she returned to River High School after being in the detention center. After her English Language Arts class Suzanne brought me her poetry notebook. She asked me to read her poems while she was in her social studies class. After, she asked if I read her poems. When I responded “yes” she flipped to a particular page of poems and said, “well that one was . . .” and laughed. When I asked her
what she meant, she said, “well I started writing those poems again” (Field Notes, October 7, 2008). “Those” poems were poems about her emotions, usually emotions that expressed feelings of disappointment, bitterness, and unrequited love (See Appendix H for eight of Suzanne’s poems from October 7, 2008).

Twice during my study, Suzanne discussed how her writing helped her express her feelings rather than engage in self-destructive behaviors such as cutting, fighting, and/or screaming outbursts (Interview, October 28, 2008; November 17, 2008). Suzanne explained,

S: Writing poems helps me not keep it [emotions] bottled in.
K: What happens if you keep your emotions bottled in?
S: It’s not good.
K: What do you mean, it’s not good.
S: I flip out a lot.
K: So writing helps you to deal with all those things and not flip out.
S: Yeah. (Interview, October 28, 2008)

In a later interview, she reiterated this information as she explained how writing poetry provided a social and emotional outlet. Her poetry was used as a coping mechanism.

K: Why do you think that [writing poems] is the best way for you to get all your emotions out?
S: Because it is better than what I used to do.
K: Ok, which was . . .
S: The cutting and hitting. Like hitting walls and that. I still do the hitting walls, but. But I don’t do the cutting no more.

K: Ok, so you feel like you write instead of cut.

S: Yeah.

K: And sometimes you write instead of hit things.

S: Yeah.

K: What happens when you do get angry and hit things . . . are you not writing?

S: I will get angry and will just sit there, and if someone talks I will flip out. Like I was just watching TV and my mom talked to me and I yelled at her. I wasn’t angry or anything, but I was watching TV and I got angry and started yelling at her. After I get angry I will get sad and then I start writing.

K: And what does the writing do?

S: Just gets out all my emotions. (Interview, November 17, 2008)

Suzanne’s mom thought she was able to cope with her life situations through her writing. She said:

Writing is important to her. Usually she writes about her life, like if she breaks up with a guy. And sometimes she will direct that writing to that guy. She is a big writer. She writes poems, but sometimes she will just write down her thoughts. She is a big writer. Most of her writing is about what she feels. (Interview, November 24, 2008)

Although it was not her original intention, writing became a way for Suzanne to communicate her feelings with her mother. She did not share her poems with her mother,
but her mother would go through Suzanne’s personal belongings and read her poems while she was not in the house. Suzanne knew her mother read her writing and discussed purposefully having her writing on her bed for her mother to find. Both Suzanne and her mother discussed one particular incident when her mom found a suicide note in 2007. Suzanne told me about the incident during an interview. She explained:

S: My mom reads all my stuff.
K: She does. Why do you think she does that?
S: Because when she was going through my room once she found a suicide note that I wrote.
K: Does it bother you that your mom reads your writing?
S: Yeah, because I don’t read her stuff. Except for text messages.
K: So do you see her going through your stuff?
S: No, I just know that it is either her or my stepdad and I knew it was her that took the suicide note because when I went through her room to get a Q-tip I seen it in her drawer.
K: Did you ever talk to her about it?
S: No.
K: Do you ever talk to her about the writing you do?
S: No, she don’t care.
K: Why do you say that?
S: She doesn’t. Like I try to talk to her and she says, “Alright Suzanne, I am watching TV, go play.” (Interview, November 24, 2008)
When I interviewed Suzanne’s mother I asked if Suzanne ever discussed her writing. She said, “No, but I look at them [her poems] when she isn’t there. Once, before she was on medication, she wrote about killing herself. And then I had to talk to her about that, and we got her in to see someone” (Interview, November 24, 2008). When Suzanne and I discussed the incident she described her note in detail.

S: It just said I am so tired of all this shit, I was cussing at her, I am so tired of all this shit. And I was like I am sick and tired of you acting like you don’t care and all this stuff. And then I said I am sick and tired of Scott being rude to me. And I was like if you didn’t want children you shouldn’t have had any. And all this. Then I was like if you had the chance to get an abortion you probably would have took it. And then I was like but no you don’t take care of me and Dev [her brother]. You just let your 19-year-old son run around when he needs help from his mother. And um, then I was like, your 15-year-old daughter you just let do whatever she wants. And then I just said I am sick and tired of Scott. I just want him to go or I’m gone. And then I said, well it looks like you are choosing him so I am gone.

K: So it was directed towards your mom?

S: Yeah.

K: So did you want her to find it and read it?

S: Yeah, I left it right on my bed. (Interview, December 2, 2008)

Suzanne’s mother was not the only adult who found her writing “concerning” (Suzanne’s Mom, Interview, November 24, 2008). In November, Suzanne was supposed
to turn in a math notebook for a grade. Although Suzanne claimed it was an accident, her poetry notebook was turned in to her math teacher. Suzanne’s math teacher explained:

So when I took the notebooks up, that is how her notebook actually got on the stack. So I take the notebooks home, I start going through them; I get to Suzanne’s notebook. There isn’t one stitch of math notes in there. The cover was like a manila folder, it had lyrics that were laced with profanity. Which I later found out were song lyrics. Inside was a blue notebook, I open that up thinking well that is where her notes are. And I see poems, the first few pages, that are rather dark then there is a section further that to me seems like it is a letter that is not addressed to anyone in particular but the contents of the letter kinda suggest a relationship that went bad and she is very angry and very bitter. And it is sorta-kinda semi threatening things. (Mr. Johnson, Interview, November 12, 2008)

Suzanne’s math teacher turned the notebook into the assistant principal, Mr. Smith. Suzanne verified the incident. She said:

I was writing on a folder song lyrics and it says die, death, die, death. And I wrote death on it in block letters. And it had flames on it and some sophomore found it and turned it in to the math teacher. (Suzanne, Interview, November 4, 2008; See Appendix I for a copy of the folder)

Because Mr. Smith took possession of the poetry notebook, I met with him to discuss the notebook, and he stated that he would allow me to make a copy of Suzanne’s poems. Prior to copying the poems, I met with Suzanne and asked her permission to copy all poems from her notebook. At a later meeting, Suzanne and I discussed the poems, and I
gave her the copies to go through. She said her poem “Black” was her favorite (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Suzanne’s Poem, “Black.”

When I asked why she wrote this particular poem, she explained that a boyfriend broke up with her. She said:

S: I was really mad.

K: If you didn’t know you wrote these poems and you just found them, what would you think about this person? Besides the fact that they seem mad, what would you think?

S: They are disturbed.

K: Is that your word or Mr. Smith’s word? [Mr. Smith told her and me that her poems were disturbing.]

S: I don’t know.
K: Why would you say they are disturbed?

S: Because, the poem called “Black.”

K: Why do you think the poem “Black” is disturbing?

S: Because it talks about the souls and like, it talks about how like the soul is empty and that. And it’s all black and empty.

K: So you think that is disturbing?

S: Yeah. (Suzanne, Interview, November 4, 2008)

As Suzanne and I continued to discuss the “Black” poem, she said, “I actually told that person off. But writing made me feel a little bit better, because I still had anger in me” (Suzanne, Interview, November 4, 2008). Suzanne refused to talk at length about the incident with her math notebook. Even when I directly asked her questions about the incident and her feelings about her poems being read she often gave short replies.

K: Well, does it bother you that Mr. Smith and your math teacher read your poetry?

S: No.

K: Why do you think that is?

S: Because I knew it was going to get read.

K: What do you mean? Who would read it?

S: I don’t know. (Suzanne, Interview November 24, 2008)

Although Suzanne did not seem to want to talk about the incident, her math teacher did tell me that she asked for her notebook. He said,
I do know, that it [the notebook] means a lot to her because she came to me one day and asked, “When do I get my notebook back from Mr. Smith?” And I said, “That is between you and Mr. Smith.” She said, “because I want to have my poems, I like my poems.” And I said, “well then you need to go and you need to talk to Mr. Smith and find out when he will release your notebook.” (Mr. Johnson, Interview, November 12, 2008)

Suzanne’s math notebook was not the only incident in which Suzanne’s writing was read by others in the school setting. On November 3, 2008, the same time Suzanne’s poetry notebook was turned in to her math teacher, Suzanne was fighting with her best friend, Kristen, who had begun dating Suzanne’s ex-boyfriend. In retaliation Suzanne, using a computer in the library, composed a letter about Kristen having sex with multiple boys, and Suzanne left the letter displayed on the school computer screen (See Appendix J for the letter). The librarian explained another student found the letter posted on the computer. After reading the contents, the librarian contacted Mr. Smith. Suzanne and I discussed the incident while she was serving an in-school suspension.

K: So did you write a letter about Kristen? That is what Mr. Smith told me.

S: Yeah.

K: How did that get found?

S: The library computer.

K: You printed it out from the computer?

S: No, I saved it.

K: Why did you . . . so you saved it?
S: Because I wanted her to see it.

K: So you did it deliberately?

S: Yeah.

K: Ok, well who all saw it? Did Kristen turn it in?

S: I don’t know. I wasn’t there when it was found.

K: Did it make you feel better writing it?

S: Yeah.

K: Why?

S: Because she doesn’t even need to be talking about people.

K: But here is what I am trying to get at. Why specifically writing? You could have said that to her, you could have gotten into a verbal fight.

S: At the time I was in class, I was in study hall.

K: I am just trying to figure out why you wrote it down. Why you felt like you had to write the note.

S: I just like writing stuff. (Interview, November 4, 2008)

Suzanne intended for this literate act to hurt Kristen’s feelings. The incident led to a placement in in-school suspension. Mr. Smith explained he wanted her to have out-of-school suspension, but her mom called and said she couldn’t “handle” having Suzanne home all day, so he placed her in in-school suspension (Field Notes, November 4, 2008). He told me that if she had one more incident he would send Suzanne to the alternative school (Field Notes, November 4, 2008).
I asked Suzanne why she signed her name to the letter because she could have easily posted the letter without signing it. By not signing the letter, she may have decreased her chances of getting into trouble. Suzanne explained, “Because I wanted to let her know that I wrote something about her. So I was hoping she would see it” (Suzanne, Interview, November 24, 2008). I asked Suzanne if she was embarrassed by the situation or if it bothered her that other people read what she wrote. She said, “no” to both questions and added that it was “funny” and she “wanted other people to read it” (Suzanne, Interview, November 24, 2008).

Suzanne’s poetry notebook being turned in and her posting of the letter about Kristen happened the same week in November. During the month of November, Suzanne also received detention twice for arguing with a teacher. According to school records, in the month of November, Suzanne had four tardies and six absences. Suzanne began telling me stories of hanging out with older guys, watching a friend get arrested, and a pregnancy scare (Field Notes, November 17, 2008). Suzanne also reported a decline in her literacy practices. She said, “I have been hanging out with people now. I don’t write anymore” (Suzanne, Interview, November 17, 2008). I pressed Suzanne for more information about this decline in her writing.

K: So why do you think you didn’t do any reading and writing this week?

S: I was busy.

K: What were you doing?

S: Hanging out with friends.

K: Alright, well any other reasons?
S: No.

K: Well, I just noticed that you started off in detention doing a lot of reading and when you got out you were doing a lot of writing. But this past week, you have said you haven’t done any reading or writing. Why do you think that is?

S: I don’t know. I guess I just have a lot more to do now.

K: What do you mean?

S: Like, I don’t go home after school. I go to my friends’ house.

K: So you aren’t home as much, that is why.

S: Uh-huh.

K: Does it have anything to do with your math notebook or getting in trouble in school?

S: I don’t know. No. (Suzanne, Interview, November 17, 2008)

On November 24, 2008, Suzanne told me she decided to write a children’s book, called *A Dog Named Sam and a Rainy Sunday*. When I asked why she decided to write a children’s book, she said, “I don’t know, I just thought of it” (Suzanne, Interview, November 24, 2008). She explained the book was about a dog named Sam and his friends.

Sam and his two friends Gary and Rex. And they go on a bike ride and it starts raining and Sam’s bike chain pops off and they went to the gas station for a chicken salesman to fix it and then they go to the Bark’n’Lot. (Suzanne, Interview, November 24, 2008)
The following week she quit writing the book after her work had been disrupted by an interruption in her living situation. Suzanne explained that her writing was at her home and that each night she stayed in a different place, including her grandfather’s house and her dad’s ex-girlfriend’s daughter’s house (Suzanne, Interview, December 2, 2008). When I asked Suzanne if she was going to continue writing *A Dog Named Sam*, she replied, “I don’t know” (Suzanne, Interview, December 2, 2008).

In summary, the purpose of Suzanne’s poetry writing was to express her emotions instead of engaging in self-destructive behaviors, such as cutting. According to Suzanne, writing fulfilled some of her emotional and social needs. Although she did not explicitly state she wrote to communicate her emotions to her mother and friends, her writing became a way for her to communicate her anger towards others, including her mother and friends. Suzanne intended for others to read some of her personal writings; she placed them in public spaces such as the school library computers or her bedroom.

**School Literacy Practices**

Suzanne seemed to meet her school literacy practices with little interest and enthusiasm. Suzanne attended school at the detention center from September 10, 2008, until October 6, 2008. During this time, I observed Suzanne participate in lessons focused on parts of speech, geography, and multiplication tables. Mr. Pearson, the teacher at the detention center, structured the lessons by beginning with a short lecture on the topic followed by a question/answer period. The remainder of the class was used for students to individually complete worksheets. While some students used the entire class period, Suzanne often completed her individual work in 15 minutes or less (Field Notes,
September 23, 2008; September 30, 2008). When I asked her about her thoughts toward school in the detention center, she replied, “School is easy. I don’t even remember any of it” (Suzanne, Interview, September 23, 2008).

Her engagement in her English Language Arts class at River High School was similar. The academic instruction was routine and varied little. During each of my observations I saw the following routine: (a) the teacher would read a story from the textbook aloud to students; (b) after the teacher finished reading the story, with little or no discussion of the story, students would copy vocabulary words, identified by being bold in the text, into their notebooks; (c) students would use dictionaries to define words; and (d) students would complete a worksheet or questions from the end of the story in the book. These questions focused mainly on retelling the story and comprehension.

Each class I observed, Mrs. Phillips repeated this pattern. When I asked why she read aloud to students, she explained:

I read aloud in class to these two classes (Suzanne’s 9th grade class and Molly’s 10th grade class) actually because they are inclusion classes. Some of them can’t read to save their lives and rather than risk embarrassing the students who can’t read and then the students who can read feel like they’re doing all the work, I read. They’ve been mainstreamed so now we need to recognize their feelings and they’re not comfortable reading in the front of the class. So I read for them. (Interview, October 21, 2008)

Mrs. Phillips continued to explain her instructional decision making.
Most of what we do in class is answering questions. They do define vocabulary words. That is something that is an ongoing thing. I constantly have them do that. There’s not too many essay questions. We don’t do too many of those, but we do, do short answers. You know maybe four or five sentences for each answer. That’s mostly what we do. I don’t focus too much on the hard writing until we get into the sophomore year. (Mrs. Phillips, Interview, December 9, 2008)

From my observations it seemed Suzanne completed most of her assignments with little regard to the quality of her work. For example, on October 21, 2008, Suzanne’s class was reading “All the Years of Her Life” by Edward Callaghan. Before the teacher began reading, Mrs. Phillips told students after the reading was finished, they would have to complete the questions from the textbook found at the end of the story. While the teacher read, Suzanne answered the questions and was finished by the time the teacher completed the story (Field Notes, October 21, 2008). Suzanne immediately turned in her work and the teacher said, “See, I told you not to do them ahead of time, now you did more than you had to.” Suzanne responded with a shrug (Field Notes, October 21, 2008). After observing this pattern for two weeks, I asked Suzanne about her English class.

K: I have noticed that as soon as you have the chance, you started working on the worksheet or questions that go with the story. Do you usually complete the questions while Mrs. D is still reading the story?

S: Yeah, so I won’t forget where I found the places where the answers are.

(Suzanne, Interview, November 4, 2008)
Although Mrs. Phillips knew Suzanne hurried to finish her work without completing the reading, she described Suzanne as “a good student when she wants to be” (Interview, December 9, 2008). When I asked her to explain, she said,

When she writes answers for me, I notice she doesn’t give me one-word answers. She’ll give me two and three sentences. I mean she does use complete thoughts, and she does actually write a lot of her answers instead of just giving me a one-word or two-word answer. (Interview, December 9, 2008)

**Conclusion**

At points throughout the study Suzanne read and wrote enthusiastically, and then at other times she distanced herself from both practices. When she was reading and writing, the purpose of these literacy practices was to cope with social situations. She reported reading in the detention center as a way to relieve boredom and escape bullying. She used the writing of poetry as a tool for coping with her feelings. Adults described her writing as “disturbed,” a description that Suzanne seemed to internalize and to use to describe her own writing. Although she discussed reading in the detention center as a means of escaping bullying, she used writing to bully her friend. She also used her writing as a vehicle to communicate her feelings to others. Suzanne left her notebook or papers in the school library and her bedroom, places she knew others could access and would most likely read her writing.

Suzanne’s school literacy practices at the Lincoln Detention Center and at River High School were limited to defining vocabulary words and recalling basic information. At the detention center, instruction was primarily verbal, in the form of lecture. This was
paired with a worksheet, typically requiring simple fill-in-the-blank one-word responses. During Suzanne’s educational experience at the detention center, I did not observe her read stories, poems, or other works of literature. There was no writing instruction in the form of personal essays or creative writing. In her English class at River High School instruction was routine with little variation. In the 10 times I observed, the teacher read short stories from the textbook aloud to the class; there was little discussion. Students defined vocabulary words identified in the text and then completed either a worksheet with questions about the story or questions from the textbook at the end of the chapter. I did not observe any writing instruction in the form of personal or analytical essays.

In April of 2009, Suzanne was suspended from River High School for smoking in the girl’s bathroom. Because her suspension violated her probation, she finished her school year in the Lincoln County Alternative School.

**Molly**

I met Molly at the Lincoln County Alternative School during my pilot study. Before I had the opportunity to ask Molly to be a participant in my study, that spring she was placed in Caring Center, a drug rehabilitation center. In August, I was discussing my study with Suzanne, who attended River High School with Molly. Suzanne mentioned Molly had been released from Caring Center and thought she would be a good participant for my study because she knew Molly liked to write. Ms. Snyder, Molly’s probation officer, also suggested Molly as a participant in my study:

I wanted her to be involved with your study because of her writing. I knew she liked writing, but at the same I thought it would boost her morale a little bit, too.
Like I was chosen to be part of this thing. (Ms. Snyder, Interview, December 8, 2008)

My study began September 16, 2008. I spent 13 weeks learning about Molly’s literacy practices. In the following sections I provide necessary information regarding Molly’s school history and her probation history. I then provide an in-depth examination of Molly’s personal and school literacy practices.

**School History**

Molly attended the River School District for her entire school career (See Suzanne’s School History for a description of River School District). Molly spent 35 school days at the Lincoln County Alternative School and six school days at the Lincoln County Detention Center prior to my study during the 2007-2008 school year. Molly attended school at Caring Center, a drug rehabilitation program, for 30 school days during the spring and summer of 2008. During my study, Molly attended River High School. Following my study, in January 2009, Molly withdrew from River High School and attended the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (E.C.O.T.) online school.

**Probation History**

Molly’s initial involvement in the Lincoln County Juvenile Court system occurred prior to my study; however, it is important in understanding her subsequent placement in the Lincoln County Alternative School and the Lincoln County Detention Center. Molly was placed on probation in January of 2008 for a trespassing charge; she was sentenced to attend the Lincoln County Alternative School for 35 school days. During the winter
and spring of 2008, Molly violated her probation three times because of failed drug tests. Ms. Snyder explained:

Molly failed a couple drug screens, but it got like progressively worse once her dad was diagnosed with cancer. And then she came and said, “I need help.” And then that’s when we decided to go ahead and place her in Caring (Drug rehabilitation center). (Ms. Snyder, Interview, December 8, 2008)

After Molly’s completion in Caring Center’s drug and alcohol program, she began the school year at River High School. On August 24, 2008 she was charged with Underage Consumption, which extended her probation by another 90 days.

**Introduction to Findings**

I observed Molly for 13 weeks at River High School. I also interviewed Molly once a week for 13 weeks. I interviewed Molly’s English language arts teacher, her social studies teacher, her probation officer, her mother, and her older brother. I also asked Molly to write a literacy vignette, a short writing piece focused on a significant moment from her literacy history. Molly wrote a two-page piece about writing poetry with her brother (See Appendix K for Molly’s literacy vignette).

During the 13 weeks of my study Molly engaged in the following personal literacy practices: writing poetry and reading quotations and books. She participated in school literacy practices as directed by Mrs. Phillips, her English language arts teacher at River High School. In the following sections I describe in detail each of these literacy practices, the purpose and outcomes of these literacy practices, and the factors that might have influenced Molly’s literacy practices.
Personal Literacy Practices

The following section presents Molly’s personal literacy practices. She read Witty Profiles (wittyprofiles.com) website to find quotes so she could display them on her school binder. Molly also read two books, *Message in the Bottle* (Sparks, 1998) and *Heroin Diaries: A Year in the Life of a Shattered Rock Star* (Sixx, 2008). Molly wrote poetry which she shared with family and friends.

**Reading quotations.** Witty Profiles is a website claiming to have the “biggest collection of profile quotes on the Internet” (wittyprofiles.com, 2008). Molly explained the website as, “a site with a whole bunch of quotes and poems and stuff. And stuff for AIM (American Instant Messenger)” (Molly, Interview, October 14, 2008). The site has quotations for the following categories: friendship, break ups, funny, holidays, inspirational, love, school, and sports. Users of the website can also find music lyrics and can download pictures. Quotes can be accessed by selecting a category. Users can also post quotes if they are registered with the website. On four occasions, I observed Molly browsing the Witty Profiles website in her first period study hall (Field Notes, September 23, 2008; October 28, 2008; November 24, 2008; December 8, 2008). Because she did not have Internet access at home, she discussed looking at the Witty Profiles website any time she was able to get online, particularly in study hall. She said, “I do that [read the Witty Profiles site] like every morning in study hall” (Molly, Interview, November 12, 2008). I observed Molly copying quotations and music lyrics from the website onto a piece of loose-leaf paper, which she then used as a cover for the three-ring binder she used for all her classes (Field Notes, September 23, 2008; October 14, 2008;
October 21, 2008). On September 23, 2008, her binder read, “It continues to haunt me, when I’m [feeling low] that’s the same reason why I (hold on) and never (let go);” this was a lyric by Dark Lotus’ song, *Afraid of You*, which she found on Witty Profiles (Field Notes, September 23, 2008). Later in October, she used Witty Profiles to find the quote, “Moving on is simple, it’s what we leave behind that makes it so hard” which she copied on her binder (Field Notes, October 14, 2008). On October 21, 2008, Molly found the following music lyric from Alien Ant Farm’s song, *Attitude*, on Witty Profiles, which she then used for her binder cover: “No one’s ever quite confused me this way!” (Field Notes, October 21, 2008; See Appendix L for Molly’s binder cover). This remained on her binder cover for a month until Molly’s brother’s girlfriend drew a picture for her to keep on her binder. She explained, “I get quotes from Witty Profiles and then I put them in my binder, since I change it a lot. have one in there right now. I just have them. I just like to have quotes to read” (Molly, Interview, October 28, 2008). When I asked her why she liked to read quotations, she replied:

> I don’t know, because like they [quotes] just make me feel good when I read them. I don’t know why; it’s just words. I just like looking on there [Witty Profiles], because seeing what other people write, knowing that there are other people out there that feel the same way I do. So, I don’t feel like I am alone. (Molly, Interview, November 20, 2008)

This quote illustrates how Molly’s reading quotations fulfilled her desire to see similar experiences of others in a text. She read the Witty Profiles website to find quotes that she
liked and found interesting. She used these quotes as covers for her school binder, which she carried to all her classes.

**Reading books.** At the time of my study, Molly’s favorite book was *A Walk to Remember* (Sparks, 1999; Molly, Interview, September 23, 2008; Field Notes, October 14, 2008). She also discussed reading *The Notebook* (Sparks, 1996) and *A Bend in the Road* (Sparks, 2001; Interview, September 23, 2008). Throughout my study, Molly and I went to the library for our weekly formal interview. Twice, our conversation ended 10 minutes before the bell rang and during those two times she browsed the library shelves looking for a book to read (Field Notes, October 14, 2008; Field Notes, November 24, 2008). On November 24, for example, Molly picked up *Message in the Bottle* (Sparks, 1998) and began reading the book. Before she left the library for her next class, she decided to check out the book (Field Notes, November 24, 2008). In December, while in English class, Molly showed the book to her friend Jamie. Jamie asked what the book was about and Molly began to explain the plot (Field Notes, December 2, 2008). When I asked why she decided to read *Message in the Bottle* (Sparks, 1998), she explained, “when I was in Ezra (Drug Rehabilitation Center) Ms. Mary Anne (her counselor) told me it was a good book and that I would like it” (Molly, Interview, November 24, 2008). When I asked her if Ms. Mary Anne usually made reading suggestions, she said, “No, but she learned I liked his [Nicholas Sparks] books, so that is why she told me” (Molly, Interview, November 24, 2008). Ms. Mary Anne knew this information because Molly explained when she was in Caring Center, her mom brought her *The Notebook* (Sparks, 1996) to read (Molly Interview, September 23, 2008; November 24, 2008). She said her purpose
for reading while in Ezra Center was for entertainment, and she found it relieved her boredom (Molly, Interview, November 24, 2008). Molly said, “Yeah, reading would take time away. It made time go faster and you weren’t bored. I read a couple books up there. That is when I started reading Nicholas Sparks” (Molly, Interview, November 24, 2008).

Molly and I discussed why she liked reading Nicholas Sparks’ work. She said, “As soon as you open his book from the first page you want to just keep reading. There is always a great beginning and a great ending” (Molly, Interview, September 23, 2008). Molly also admitted that she cried while reading *The Notebook* (Sparks, 1996) and *A Walk to Remember* (Sparks, 1998). She said, “Usually when I read his [Nicholas Sparks] stuff, I don’t put it down until I finish it” (Molly, Interview, September 23, 2008).

Molly’s English Language Arts teacher, Mrs. Phillips, also noticed Molly’s interest in Nicholas Sparks’ work. In October, Mrs. Phillips pulled her aside after class and handed her *The Wedding* (Sparks, 2003). She said, “I know you like these books, I am taking this back to the library today during fourth period. If you want to read it, it will be here” (Field Notes, October 21, 2008). Molly later said, “Well, Mrs. Phillips just showed me that book (*The Wedding*, Sparks, 2003) and I might go get it. She said it was good. So I am going to get that today” (Molly, Interview, October 21, 2008). Although she discussed checking out *The Wedding* (Sparks, 2003) from the school library, she did not do so. During a conversation, about her poetry writing, however, Molly discussed how Nicholas Sparks’ writing was an inspiration.

M: Like stuff I read and then ideas for my writing pops in my head.

K: What has given you ideas for your writing?
M: The Notebook did. Like, I love his [Nicholas Sparks] writing. Like, I don’t know. I like to write about love, so when I read his books, I am like “wow.” Like he is really good at what he does.

K: So you use his books as like inspiration to write your own things?

M: Yeah. (Molly, Interview, November 12, 2008)

Towards the end of the study, Molly began reading Heroin Diaries: A Year in the Life of a Shattered Rock Star (Sixx, 2008). The book is a non-fictional account of Motley Crue’s bassist, Nikki Sixx, and his battle with drug addiction. The book contains Sixx’s personal journals, plus present day commentary. She explained, “He has a lot of poetry in the book, too, and a lot of song lyrics” (Molly, Interview, November 24, 2008). Molly’s brother was also reading the book; “My brother had it at the house. And I just picked it up. I didn’t just start from the first page and go to the last, because it is written different, with months and stuff” (Molly, Interview, November 24, 2008). She continued to explain that the reader does not necessarily have to read the book beginning with chapter one, but because of the book’s format, the reader can start at various chapters and still understand his life. When I asked why she liked the book, Molly explained how the author’s struggle with drug addiction reminded her of her own struggle with drugs. She stated:

It like shows you, like what he was like when he did drugs and what he was like when he got started on drugs. It is interesting, it’s really cool. He is like a rock star and stuff and he is messing up by doing drugs, so, it’s a really good book. I like the way people use words, like how they talk in stories and tell about their lives. I don’t know, I like the book because, like, it kinda reminds me of my life a
little bit because he pulled through it [the drug use] and it took him time to do it, but he kept trying. (Molly, Interview, November 24, 2008)

When I asked Molly her purpose for reading, she said:

Reading, it keeps like, well, whenever you read, you don’t think about other things because your mind is concentrated on the book. So I think it’s like free time. That is what it feels like; you don’t have to worry about anything. (Molly, Interview, October 28, 2008)

Although Molly explained she did like to read, she admitted she did not read every day (Field Notes, November 12, 2008). She said, “I need to read more, but it’s just like, I like writing. Like I’d rather write my own stuff than read” (Molly, Interview, November 12, 2008). The week before my study ended, Molly summed up her interest in reading by stating, “I am really inspired by what people write. I read to know there is somebody else out there, you know, that feels the same way I do. There is somebody that just knows. And also for pleasure” (Molly, Interview, December 4, 2008).

Writing poetry. Throughout my study, Molly shared four poems she wrote:

“Strangers in the Night” (Field Notes, October 28, 2008), “The New Faith” (Field Notes, November 4, 2008), “October” (Field Notes, November 11, 2008), “Forever in Eternity” (Field Notes, December 4, 2008; See Appendix M for “Strangers in the Night,” “The New Faith,” and “Forever in Eternity”). Although three other times she discussed writing poems (Molly, Interview, September 23, 2008; October 21, 2008; December 2, 2008) she brought me these poems to read (Field Notes, October 28, 2008; November 4, 2008; November 11, 2008; December 4, 2008). Molly explained she kept a “notebook full of
poems” at her house (Molly, Interview, September 23, 2008). When asked the purpose for writing poems, she said, “they [poems] are just how I feel. I like to get it [emotions] out instead of it being all bottled up” (Molly, Interview, October 14, 2008). Molly said she wrote poems “because of people” (Molly, Interview, October 28, 2008). For example, she explained she wrote the poem “October” for a boy she used to date (See Figure 2 for a copy of “October”). She said:

I wrote it because there was this guy I liked. We don’t talk anymore, but I want to keep the poem. Like, I can write something, but then move on from it. And it is like, well that was then. (Molly, Interview, November 12, 2008)

I interviewed Molly’s mom and her older brother together. They discussed her poetry writing and its purpose in her life.

Mom: It’s just that she writes from her heart. When she writes everything comes from her heart.

K: Ok, so do you see her writing at home?

Mom: All the time.

K: Ok, what sorts of things does she write?

Mom: Um, poetry. She writes a lot about her life, about what she has been through, um, guys that she likes. Things like that. I think she writes because she has a lot of feelings; she has been through a lot of stuff.

Brother: And it’s easier to vent.

Mom: Yeah.

Brother: It is easier to put it on paper.
Figure 2. Molly’s poem “October.”

October

The smell of his skin, still lingers in the air,
Isn't it incredible how you can feel
Someones touch, even when they no longer there.
A little sinful, that somebody can
Make you cry
When you can't remember, last time
You came eye to eye.
Isn't it amazing how someone can
Constantly run through your mind.
When the clock continues to tick
And you feel like your running out of time.
It's unexplainable how he can make
Your heart go your times without even trying.

How he could leave you there crying.
But what's really a tragedy, that he
Can break your heart.
But you still love him with every
Broken part,
Mom: Yeah (Molly’s family, Interview, November 11, 2008).

Molly explained poetry writing allowed her to express her feelings, especially when she was feeling frustrated or angry (Molly, Interview, October 21, 2008). Molly stated she wrote mainly on what she considered “bad” days.

M: Like if I am having good days then I don’t have to write. But if I am having bad days then I definitely do have to write something down. Or else I’ll be like mean.

K: Ok, so on good days you don’t have to write.

M: Some days I do.

K: Ok, well, what is a bad day versus a good day?

M: I don’t know. If I am like fighting with my mom or something or if I am having problems with a friend or something.

K: Then that is a bad day.

M: Yeah, because like, whenever I get mad, I will be mad the whole day and I won’t be happy until the next day. I don’t know why.

K: Ok, so a good day would be not fighting with people, just being happy. Just in a good mood.

M: Yeah.

K: Ok, so when you have a bad day why do you think you write?

M: So it gets off my chest. Like if it’s something I don’t want to tell somebody, it is easier to put it on paper because paper doesn’t judge you.
K: What about when you are having a good day and you decide to write. Why do you think that is?

M: I don’t know. I don’t know what kind of word to use. I don’t know. I just write. It’s a lot better though.

K: When you are happy?

M: Yeah. Because when I am mad, it’s not like depressing stuff, but it’s just like, wow. And when I am happy sometimes it’s just funny. (Molly, Interview, October 21, 2008)

In an interview a week later, I asked Molly to explain what she meant when she said “paper doesn’t judge you” (Molly, Interview, October 21, 2008).

K: Well, last time we talked you said, “paper doesn’t judge you.” What did you mean by that?

M: I don’t know, like, it can’t say anything to you. You can put all these feelings on a piece of paper and you’re fine. You get it out without somebody saying something back to you which would probably make the situation worse.

(Molly, Interview, October 28, 2008)

As our conversation continued, Molly explained she did not like confrontation. Writing poetry allowed her to “vent” without a verbal argument (Molly, Interview, October 28, 2008).

M: Because I can like talk about my past or feelings and say what I want and not have to worry about people like saying something to me or judging me for what I write.
K: Do you feel like when you say something, people automatically have an opinion about what you said?

M: Yeah.

K: And you usually almost always write about your life, right?

M: Yeah. (Molly, Interview, October 28, 2008)

Molly’s poetry reflected private moments from her personal life; in an interview she discussed being able to write personal thoughts and feelings because her family members allowed her to keep her work private (Molly, Interview, October 21, 2008). She said, “I can put whatever I want down [on paper]. And my mom doesn’t go through my writing stuff” (Molly, Interview, October 21, 2008). Even though her mother respected her privacy, on seven occasions Molly discussed sharing her poetry with her mother and brother (Molly, Interview, September 23, 2008; October 14, 2008; October 21, 2008; October 28, 2008; November 4, 2008; November 12, 2008; November 20, 2008). The purpose of her poetry writing was to express her private feelings, and the result of Molly’s poetry writing was the creation of an avenue of communication between her and her family members. After writing the poem, “October,” she specifically stated she showed her mom the poem. When I discussed this with her mom, she verified this.

K: Does she ever let you read any of her writing?

Mom: Yeah, she reads it to me. A lot of it, she does.

K: Why do you think she decides to allow you to read her writing?

Mom: Because I think it makes her happy when she writes. Why I think she writes, because it makes her feel better. Like, she don’t talk, she don’t like
to talk, but she writes it, like what she feels she writes down. (Molly’s family, Interview, November 11, 2008)

During two formal interviews and in her literacy vignette, Molly reflected on an incident in which she and her brother shared poems they wrote to each other (Molly, Interview, September 23, 2008; October 14, 2008; Vignette, November 11, 2008; See Appendix K for a copy of Molly’s literacy vignette). She explained three years ago her brother left her a poem about their lives and growing up together. She was touched by the poem and shared the poem with her mom, who then encouraged Molly to write a poem in response. She did write a poem, which led to an intimate conversation between the siblings. Molly explained this incident was so important because, “it made me realize how he felt about me. It was a time that we were actually starting to have conversations with each other. My brother is my hero” (Molly, Interview, September 23, 2008).

Molly also discussed sharing her poems with her friend, Jamie. She said, “I always read my poems to her and she’ll say, ‘I wish I could write like that.’ She is always like, ‘Oh my god, how did you think of that’” (Molly, Interview, December 2, 2008). In December, Molly and her friend Jamie were bored after school and decided to write a poem together. She encouraged Jamie to write with her. She explained, “I said, ‘You can do it. Just put words on paper.’ It is kinda cool to have someone to write with. Because like you can exchange the poems and see what the other person was thinking about” (Molly, Interview, December 2, 2008).

In summary, Molly wrote poetry and shared four of her poems with me. She stated the purpose of her poetry was to express and understand her emotions. According
to Molly, poetry writing allowed her to vent about her “bad” days. Interestingly, during her participation in data analysis, she said:

I actually do write like a lot more than what I said [during interviews]. I like writing. Sometimes I do it for feelings and sometimes I don’t just do it for feelings. Sometimes I do it just to see what I can make. I like to see what I can come up with when I write. (Molly, Interview, December 4, 2008)

Molly wrote about her life, including her personal relationships. Her family encouraged her to write poetry and supported her as a writer; she was particularly influenced by her brother. Molly specifically discussed an incident in which she and her brother shared their writing; this led to an intimate conversation and a closer relationship. She also shared her poetry with her friend, Jamie.

School Literacy Practices

Molly was in 10th grade, and she had the same English language arts teacher as Suzanne who was in 9th grade. On September 23, 2008, I walked into the classroom and introduced myself to Mrs. Phillips. She replied, “you can watch her [Molly] mess around and get in trouble” (Field Notes, September 23, 2008). During my first observation, Mrs. Phillips handed out pieces of paper and told students to begin working on their “simple subjects and predicates” worksheet (Field Notes, September 23, 2008).

Interestingly, when I observed Molly, one week later, she was working on the same simple subjects and predicates worksheet. She completed the worksheet after 10 minutes and then placed it on Mrs. Phillip’s desk. After, the teacher said, “re-acquaint yourself with the dictionary. You can use the dictionary to look up vocabulary words and
parts of speech” (Field Notes, September 30, 2008). Example questions from the worksheet were:

1. Put the following in alphabetical order: fiddlestick, fiddlefooted, fiddlefaddle, fiddlehead, and fiddleback.

2. Place each word into three categories: Jobs, Things to Eat, and Types of Homes. The words were: haddock, lasagna, barrister, kale, kennel, obstetrician, chalet, hovel, and podiatrist.

3. Find three animals and three birds beginning with the letter c with at least 5 letters.

Molly used the dictionary to complete the assignment; during the class period, Mrs. Phillips sat at the front of the room reading the novel, *19 Minutes* (Picoult, 2007).

During the month of October, Molly’s class read short stories from their textbook. The short stories included, “Leiningen versus the Ants” by Carl Stephenson; “The Tell Tale Heart,” “The Masque of the Red Death,” and “Cask of Amontillado” by Edgar Allen Poe. Similar to Suzanne’s English language arts class, the academic instruction was routine and varied little. Mrs. Phillips explained she read aloud in both Suzanne and Molly’s classes because they were inclusion classes. When Molly and I discussed her thoughts about Mrs. Phillips reading aloud in class she said:

M: Whenever she reads it’s easier to understand the story, but then again I would rather read by myself.

K: Why do you think she reads to you aloud?

M: Probably because if she didn’t, we wouldn’t do it.
Mrs. Phillips described the routine; “We do read, we do the vocabulary, and then we do worksheets. They get about a five to ten minute discussion of the story, if we can relate to it, and then we move on” (Interview, October 21, 2008).

When I asked Molly her thoughts about the work assigned in her English class, she said, “the things we do in class [English] we did in the eighth grade” (Molly, Interview, December 9, 2008). Twice, however, she discussed how much she enjoyed reading Edgar Allen Poe’s work (Molly, Interview, October 21, 2008; November 4, 2008). After reading “The Tale Tell Heart,” she explained why she enjoyed the story. She said:

M  I liked it.
K  Did you?
M  Yeah, that story was actually interesting, like it wasn’t boring.
K  Ok, why was it interesting?
M  I don’t know. The guy was like crazy. And the way he wrote the story. It made you wonder what was going to happen.
K  So it was a little suspenseful.
M  Yeah, it was supposed to be a horror story. So I liked it. It was weird.
K: Ok, I think this is one of the first times I have heard you talk about something you have read in school that you have liked.
M  [laughing] Yeah. (Interview, October 21, 2008)

Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Masque of the Red Death” eventually became Molly’s favorite story she read in her English class.
M: My favorite one was this one [“The Masque of the Red Death”].

K: OK, why was that your favorite one?

M: Um, like I don’t know, I just like the detail he put in it and how he explained stuff. Like, she [Mrs. Phillips] made us draw the castle and the colors and stuff. I just liked it because, I don’t know. They are at a party and the house is like, there is one room they won’t go into because the way it makes them feel when they go in there. I just liked it; it caught my eye.

K: So would you say this has been your favorite thing you have read so far in English?

M: Yeah.

K: And you have liked almost all the Edgar Allen Poe stuff you have read.

M: Yeah. He writes good stuff. (Interview, November 4, 2008)

Molly also discussed enjoying a unit in which the class wrote sonnets (Field Notes, December 2, 2008). I observed her class during this two-day lesson. As a way to introduce the students to sonnets, Mrs. Phillips gave students blank pieces of paper and told students to “write down everything you love.” She reminded students to make their list “school appropriate” (Field Notes, December 2, 2008). She said, “We are not writing about cigarettes, beer, drugs, or sex” (Field Notes, December 2, 2008). She said, “You can write I love Mrs. Phillips, English class, River High School” (Field Notes, December 2, 2008). Molly wrote enough words and sentences to fill one and a half pages. Later she told me she mostly wrote about her family, but she also wrote, “I love when Mrs. Phillips gets mad when I smoke cigarettes in the girls’ bathroom” (Field Notes, December 2,
2008). Mrs. Phillips then had students make a list of things they hated. After that, she had students write the following individual words: “day, more, see.” She then asked students to come up with words that rhyme with each word (Field Notes, December 2, 2008). The following day, students were in the computer lab writing sonnets (Field Notes, December 3, 2008). Although she enjoyed this assignment, Molly admitted to struggling with her sonnet. She said, “Sometimes when I try to write I can’t” (Field Notes, 12-3-08). She had to finish her sonnet for homework (Field Notes, 12-3-08).

During a conversation with Mrs. Phillips about Molly’s academic performance, Mrs. Phillips said, “Molly is very bright, she is academically. She’s a lot smarter than what she likes everyone else to believe” (Mrs. Phillips, Interview, October 21, 2008). When I asked if Molly had been recommended for the higher level college preparatory class, Mrs. Phillips said:

I think that if she were put in a college prep class, I believe she would do very well. But you tend to adapt to the situation around you. I’ve had this discussion with our guidance counselor; we’ve put some of these kids in this regular class and they perform as regular students. They’re those borderline kids. If we put them in a college prep class, they will behave like college prep students, they will perform like the college prep students. Molly is one of those kids; she acts the way she does a lot of times because of the company that she runs with. (Interview, October 21, 2008)

Mrs. Phillips explained, “I suggested Molly be placed in college preparatory class, but Molly won’t have anything to do with it because her friends are all down in this regular
class” (Mrs. Phillips, Interview, October 21, 2008). After our formal interview, Mrs. Phillips said she would not feel “comfortable” placing Molly in a college preparatory course because she “misses weeks at a time” when she is placed in the alternative school (Field Notes, October 21, 2008). Mrs. Phillips did not think she would be able to make up the necessary work if she missed class due to being in the alternative school (Field Notes, October 21, 2008).

When I asked Molly if she was interested in taking a college preparatory English course, she said “yes, but it is funny because I love writing, but I hate English class” (Field Notes, December 9, 2008). She continued, “Although I heard they don’t do anything in there [the college prep class] either” (Field Notes, December 9, 2008). When I asked her what would make her English class more enjoyable, she said:

Definitely if we could write poetry more often. And be able to have our own stories to read and write a report on our stories. Like pick out a book we want to read instead of just one she [teacher] picks out for us. (Molly, Interview, December 9, 2008)

**Conclusion**

Molly wrote poetry and shared four poems with me. The purpose of her poetry writing was to “vent” and express her emotions. She found poetry also allowed her to communicate with her family members, particularly her brother. She used the website Witty Profiles to gather quotations that she liked and thought were interesting. She used these quotations as a form of self-expression when she copied them on loose-leaf paper and used the paper as a binder cover. During my study, Molly’s personal literacy
practices included reading the books, *Message in the Bottle* (Sparks, 1998) and *Heroin Diaries* (Sixx, 2008). She received book recommendations from her counselor in Ezra Center, her teacher, Mrs. Phillips, and her brother. Molly admitted she was not necessarily an avid reader. She did, however, use the information she read as inspiration for her poetry writing.

Throughout my study, I observed Molly completing worksheets, such as the “simple subjects and predicates” worksheet (Field Notes, September 23, 2008; September 30, 2008). During a unit on short stories, the instruction was routine and varied little. Mrs. Phillips read short stories from the textbook aloud to the class; the students copied vocabulary words highlighted in the text into their notebooks and used the dictionaries to define them; and finally, they completed an accompanying worksheet or the questions from the textbook at the end of the story. Mrs. Phillips verified this was the routine she followed while teaching short stories. Molly enjoyed an Edgar Allen Poe short story unit and a two-day lesson focused on sonnets and had the opportunity to type a sonnet in the computer lab, although she finished her sonnet for homework.

Although Mrs. Phillips saw potential in Molly and thought academically she could be placed in a higher level English class, the teacher hesitated to recommend her because of her absences in association with the alternative school. Mrs. Phillips also claimed Molly did not want to be moved to a higher level English class, although Molly said she did. Molly recognized the irony in that she enjoyed her personal literacy practices, yet did not appreciate the literacy practices taught in her English language arts classroom.
February 25, 2009, I contacted Molly to discuss her well-being and continued literacy practices. Molly informed me that she was no longer attending River High School. She decided to enroll in the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (E.C.O.T.). She explained, there was “too much drama” for her in school, and she decided this would be a better social and academic situation (Field Notes, February 25, 2009). School records indicated she left River High School on January 13, 2009; however, when I contacted her February 25, 2009, she still had not received her computer from E.C.O.T., which guarantees a computer and online access for enrolled students. According to Ms. Snyder, in the spring Molly received a computer and completed her online coursework. Molly was released from probation on July 29, 2009, and she decided to return to River High School for the 2009-2010 school year.

Cross-Case Analysis

Individual cases were analyzed to provide an understanding of Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly’s literacy practices, their purposes, the outcomes of engaging in these literacy practices, and factors that seemed to influence their reading and writing. The emergent findings from the three cases were examined for their similarities and differences. This cross-case analysis was completed in order to build a better understanding of the girls’ personal and school literacy practices.

Emerging from the cross-case analysis were four findings. First, Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly wrote about life experiences which they shared with family members. Second, the girls’ reading habits were influenced by their surroundings, particularly their time spent in the Lincoln County Detention Center and Caring Center,
the drug rehabilitation center. Third, Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly’s literacy practices helped them develop and maintain social networks with peers. Finally, although the girls’ personal literacy practices played a significant role in their lives, their school literacy practices were viewed as compulsory, but not meaningful.

**Writing About Life Experiences and Communicating With Family Members**

When I looked at each case, I found Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly wrote about life experiences which they shared with family members. Writing provided the girls with a means to express their physical and emotional needs. For instance, while in the detention center, Danielle used letter writing as a means for communicating with her sister, Heather. She wrote one letter to Heather, the maximum amount of letter writing allowed while at the detention center. According to Danielle, the contents of her letters included topics such as her life at the detention center, her pregnancy, and the well-being of her sister and her sister’s children. Even though the contents of Danielle’s letters seemed to focus on her and her family’s physical well-being, letter writing satisfied an emotional need. For example, she stated she “felt better” when she wrote letters to Heather (Danielle, Interview, October 30, 2008).

Suzanne and Molly explicitly discussed how writing poetry was cathartic and fulfilled their emotional needs. Both girls used phrases like “venting” and “getting emotions out” to express how poetry helped them cope with life situations. The girls wrote poetry mostly when they were frustrated, angry, or having a “bad” day (Molly, Interview, October 21, 2008). Suzanne and Molly’s poetry focused on their personal lives, including romantic relationships and friendships.
Suzanne’s and Molly’s mothers recognized the role of poetry writing in their daughters’ lives. Suzanne’s mom explained, “Suzanne writes about what she feels and she writes after she gets angry” (Suzanne’s mom, Interview, November 24, 2008). Similarly, Molly’s mom explained she wrote because “she [Molly] has been through a lot of stuff” (Molly’s mom, Interview, November 11, 2008). Both mothers thought their daughters enjoyed writing, rather than talking. Suzanne’s mom said, “She has a therapist but she won’t talk to me” (Suzanne’s mom, Interview, November 24, 2008). Molly’s mom stated, “She don’t like to talk, but she writes it” (Molly’s mom, Interview, November 11, 2008). The girls saw their mothers almost daily, yet used poetry writing to communicate their emotional needs instead of engaging in face-to-face conversation.

Although both girls shared their poetry with their mothers, Suzanne’s and Molly’s relationships with their mothers were very different; this was reflected in their method for sharing their poetry. Suzanne did not ask her mother to read her poetry; rather she left her writing on her bed, knowing her mother, without permission, would look through her belongings and read her writing. She revealed feelings of isolation, anger, and resentment towards her mother, and her probation history suggested a violent relationship. On the other hand, Molly specifically asked her mother to read her poetry. She wanted to share feelings about relationships and life events with her mother. Her mother expressed pride in her poetry and encouraged her to write (Field Notes, November 11, 2008).

Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly used writing as a tool for communicating with family members, particularly their mothers, or in Danielle’s case, her sister who served as her guardian. Whereas Suzanne and Molly avoided face-to-face conversations with their
mothers and instead shared their poetry, Danielle was physically separated from her sister and therefore relied on letters for communication. Writing provided the girls comfort and contributed to their emotional well-being.

**Influence of Setting**

Danielle’s, Suzanne’s, and Molly’s reading practices were heavily influenced by their living environment. The girls acknowledged being enthusiastic readers, particularly when they were in the detention center or, in Molly’s case, Caring Center, a drug rehabilitation facility. Once released to their homes, the girls noted a decline in their reading habits.

While at the Lincoln County Detention Center, Danielle reported reading 10 books in seven weeks and Suzanne read four books in four weeks. The detention center supported Danielle’s and Suzanne’s reading practices by having available three metal three-shelved book carts with paperback books. Both girls accessed the carts, selected books during leisure time, and were allowed to keep books in their cells. Danielle and Suzanne discussed the ongoing myth that if they did not finish their books they would return to the detention center. Danielle was unsure if the myth was true; however, she explained she did not want to take the risk and planned out the time she needed to finish her last book before she was released. Suzanne, on the other hand, said she believed the myth; she even referred to the previous times she had been in the detention center and failed to finish her book. Yet, she left the detention center with a book half read. She assumed a degree of personal responsibility when she stated, “I’m going to make sure I don’t go back” (Suzanne, Field Notes, October 7, 2008).
I did not observe Molly while she was enrolled in the Caring Center; however, she explained the facility had a rolling metal book cart, similar to the book carts at the detention center (Molly, Interview, November 24, 2008). She also said her mother was allowed to bring books for her to read. Her mom gathered books from her personal collection and from her Aunt and brought Molly’s favorite books to the Caring Center. The collection of books included a book by author Nicholas Sparks. She reported reading *The Notebook* (Sparks, 1996) twice while in the Caring Center (Molly, Field Notes, September 23, 2008).

When I asked Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly why they read books in these facilities, they all cited boredom and that reading helped to pass time. The girls shared the same perception of time passing quickly when they read and used the same phrase to describe this perception. Danielle said reading made time in the detention center “go faster” (Danielle, Interview, October 15, 2008). Suzanne stated reading kept her from being “bored” and made time go “faster” (Suzanne, Interview, September 30, 2008). Similarly, Molly said, “it [reading] made time go faster” (Molly, Interview, November 24, 2008).

While the girls were readers in these settings, they each noted a decline in reading practices when released. Danielle cited the “commotion” in her home life as the reason she did not read as much when not in the detention center. Molly and Suzanne discussed being engaged in other activities. When discussing why she stopped reading once she left the detention center, Suzanne said, “’cause I got more things to do” (Suzanne, Interview, September 30, 2008). Many times this included “hanging out” with friends.
The girls’ reading habits were clearly influenced by their environment. Reading was one of the few sanctioned activities in the detention center and Caring Center; therefore, the girls relied on reading to provide entertainment and relieve boredom. Once they left this environment and returned to their homes, they stopped reading. Only Molly continued to read outside of the detention center and the Caring Center. Although she admitted she did not read nearly as much as she did while in the facilities due her participation in other activities, such as writing poetry, sleeping, or socializing with friends (Molly, Interview, October 21, 2008; Field Notes, November 12, 2008).

Influence of Peers

By sharing their reading and writing experiences with peers, Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly maintained and developed social networks. When the girls included their peers in their literacy practices, reading and writing moved from being private activities to forms of entertainment.

The girls discussed their book selections with peers. For example, in the detention center, Danielle and Suzanne spoke about receiving and giving book recommendations. I suggested Danielle read *Speak* (Anderson, 1999; Field Notes, October 23, 2008). While reading the book, Danielle recommended it to Felicia. She discussed having to finish the book as quickly as possible because she wanted Felicia to also have a chance to read *Speak* (Anderson, 1999) before leaving the detention center. While in the detention center, Suzanne read *Aftershock* (Easton, 2007) after seeing Maria with the book (Field Notes, October 2, 2008). Suzanne also used reading as a means to escape negative social situations. Reading was an acceptable pastime, which she could do in her cell to avoid
bullying from other girls in the detention center. Sharing books with friends did not only occur in the detention center. In November, Molly began reading *Message in the Bottle* (Sparks, 1998). During one English language arts class, I observed Molly explain the plot and characters of *Message in the Bottle* (Sparks, 1998) to her friend, Jamie (Field Notes, December 2, 2008).

Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly’s writing practices were also influenced by peers. Danielle and Molly specifically reported instances in which they included friends in their writing experiences. For example, while in the detention center, I observed Danielle sharing letters with her friend, Mya. The purpose of her letter writing was to communicate with her sister. Letter writing is often considered a private act; however, Danielle and Mya read each other’s letters in order to learn more about mutual friends and events in the community (Field Notes, October 23, 2008). Because entertainment options were limited, letter writing became a form of entertainment and gossiping. Similarly, Molly discussed poetry writing as a private, emotional outlet; nonetheless, she reported reading some of her poems to her friend Jamie (Molly, Interview, December 2, 2008). She also encouraged Jamie to write poetry (Molly, Interview, December 2, 2008).

In these instances, Danielle’s and Molly’s use of literacy helped them maintain positive relationships with peers. Suzanne, in contrast, used writing as a weapon of revenge against her friend Kristen. Suzanne wrote a hurtful letter about Kristen and displayed it on the school computers in order to humiliate her friend (Field Notes, November 4, 2008). When I asked why she wrote the letter and signed her name, Suzanne explained she wanted Kristen to read the letter and to know she wrote it
(Suzanne, Interview, November 24, 2008). In this instance Suzanne used writing to bully a member of her peer group.

Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly invited peers to share in their literacy experiences through book recommendations and the sharing of personal writing. At times these conversations were positive experiences that further engaged the girls in their literacy experiences. Suzanne shared a note she had written with the larger school community in order to bully a friend. In this sense, her literacy practices transformed from a means for self-expression to a weapon used to humiliate a member of her peer group.

**School Literacy Practices**

I observed Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly participate in school literacy practices. Whereas the girls had a well-articulated purpose for their personal reading and writing, their school literacy practices were often disconnected from their lives. Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly participated in their school literacy practices with little seeming enthusiasm or interest. Motivation to complete one’s work was external, most often built around the notion that they would get in trouble if they did not complete their assignments. For example, Danielle said she completed her work because of the threats of being “in trouble from Mr. Pearson and Ms. Snyder” (Danielle, Interview, November 4, 2008). School literacy practices were also viewed as necessary for getting good grades, which the girls considered a requirement for finding a job. Suzanne said she read in school “for participation grades” (Suzanne, Interview, October 28, 2008). When I asked if reading was important in school because it was graded she said, “Yeah, and you need good grades to get a job” (Suzanne, Interview, October 28, 2008).
Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly characterized their school literacy practices as easy. Danielle did not think her school literacy practices applied to her life; she found her school work to be “just too easy” (Danielle, Interview, October 23, 2008). Similarly, Suzanne said her academic instruction at the detention center was so easy that she forgot most of what she learned (Interview, September 23, 2008). Molly was critical of the instruction in her English language arts class; she said, “The things we do in class [10th grade English language arts] we did in the eighth grade” (Field Notes, December 29, 2008).

Although Suzanne described the reading done in class as “freaking stupid,” Danielle and Molly were able to find aspects of reading in class appealing (Suzanne, Interview, December 8, 2008). Danielle expressed interest in Mr. Pearson’s newspaper assignment, in which she read and responded to an article from two local newspapers. She enjoyed choosing the article she wanted to read and even read extra articles when she had time in class. Molly enjoyed reading Edgar Allen Poe during a unit on short stories. She found Poe’s work to be suspenseful and “weird” (Molly, Interview, 2008). Molly claimed she would enjoy assignments in her English Language Arts class if she were allowed to choose the books she wanted to read.

Interestingly, the literacy instruction at the Lincoln Detention Center and River High School shared similar characteristics, such as verbal instructions, question-answer sessions, defining vocabulary, and completing worksheets accompanying information covered in class. Although I was not specifically examining the teachers’ instructional practices or rationales for instructional practices, an additional finding was the effect of
the teachers’ student expectations on instructional decision making. Mr. Pearson, the
detention center teacher, and Mrs. Phillips, Suzanne and Molly’s teacher at River High
School, claimed their instructional decisions were based on student population. For
example, Mr. Pearson discussed how the variation in academic level and constant shifting
population, influenced his instruction (Mr. Pearson, Interview, November 11, 2008). Mrs.
Phillips explained she read aloud in Suzanne’s and Molly’s classrooms because they were
inclusion classrooms and she did not want to embarrass students who struggled to read
(Mrs. Phillips, Interview, October 21, 2008). According to both teachers, their instruction
was influenced by the characteristics of the students.

The primary characteristic influencing the teachers’ perceptions of the three girls
was their roles as students. According to their teachers, good students were compliant and
completed their work, whereas bad students were resistant and did not complete their
work. For example, Mr. Pearson categorized Danielle as a “good” student, because “her
work is always completed and is neat” (Mr. Pearson, Interview, November 11, 2008).
Similarly, Mrs. Phillips viewed Suzanne as “good” because she turned in her worksheets
on time, without complaints, even though she rarely read the entire story before turning in
her work. Molly, however, was viewed as resistant by Mrs. Phillips because she did not
always complete her work. Mrs. Phillips said, “Molly’s just lazy” (Field Notes, October 7,
2008). Mrs. Phillips would relay stories about how she did not do her work and when
asked about late work she would “roll her eyes” (Field Notes, October 7, 2008). Because
Suzanne completed her work without the complaints or physical responses, like eye-
rolling, she was considered a better student than Molly.
Personal Literacy in School

While in school, the girls participated in personal literacy practices. For example, Danielle discussed note writing and passing. Youth at the detention center were divided into two groups: Pod A (males ages 13-18) and Pod B (females ages 10-18 and males 10-13). Even though communication between Pod A and Pod B was forbidden, Danielle discussed wedging notes in the classroom desks or leaving notes in reading materials as a way to exchange notes between Pod A and Pod B. She used these opportunities for unmonitored personal communication.

While Danielle worked to hide her personal literacy practices in school, Suzanne blatantly displayed her personal literacy practices, particularly her writing. Two instances occurred in which her writing became the topic of school discussion. First, Suzanne’s poetry notebook was turned in to her math teacher (Field Notes, November 4, 2008). She admitted to writing poems in school, particularly when she was bored, and also to keeping her notebook in her school locker (Suzanne, Interview, October 2, 2008). Suzanne’s teacher was concerned about the contents of her poems and turned the notebook into Mr. Smith, the assistant principal. Second, Suzanne wrote a note about her friend Kristen and then posted the note on school computer in the library (Field Notes, November 4, 2008). The librarian and another student found the note. Because of the contents, and because she signed her name, the note was turned in to Mr. Smith and as a result Suzanne received in-school suspension. In these instances, Suzanne used school as a forum to make her personal literacy practices public.
Similar to Danielle and Suzanne, Molly also practiced her personal literacies in school. Molly read the web site Witty Profiles, a website claiming to have the “biggest collection of profile quotes on the Internet” (wittyprofiles.com, 2008), during study hall, when she was supposed to be completing school work. Molly found a quote she liked and then wrote it on a piece of paper and displayed it on her binder. Molly used Witty Profiles (wittyprofiles.com) to find quotes she thought related to her life experiences; these quotes provided a sense of comfort because she realized her individual experiences were not necessarily unique, but others shared similar experiences (Molly, Interview, November 20, 2008).

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings for Danielle’s, Suzanne’s, and Molly’s case studies and the cross-case analysis. The findings revealed each participant used a variety of literacy practices including reading novels and informational texts and writing letters, notes, and poetry. Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly wrote about life experiences which they shared with family members. Their writing also helped them cope with life situations and express their emotions. The girls’ reading habits were influenced by their surroundings, particularly their time spent in the Lincoln County Detention Center and Caring Center, drug rehabilitation center. Although they reported reading in these facilities, they noted a decline in reading once they were released. The girls’ reading and writing practices also helped them develop and maintain social networks with peers. They made reading recommendations to others and shared their writing with friends.
While Danielle’s, Suzanne’s, and Molly’s personal literacy practices were meaningful and relevant, their school literacy practices were often disconnected from their lives. Their school reading and writing were viewed as compulsory, but not meaningful. The girls’ academic instruction placed low demands on the girls; they only had to turn in completed worksheets in order to be considered “good” students. An additional finding was the similarities between the instruction at the detention center and Mrs. Phillip’s English language arts class at River High School. Both teachers cited student characteristics as the shaping force of their instructional practices.

At times, Danielle’s, Suzanne’s, and Molly’s personal literacy practices intersected with school. These practices helped them establish and keep social networks; however, by engaging in these literacy practices the girls defied school rules. This furthered the sharp divide between the girls’ personal and school literacy practices.
In the last 10 years educators and researchers in the field of young adult literacy have worked to contest the negative stereotypes of youth’s literacy practices despite reports of youths’ decline in the amount they read and write (ACT College Readiness Report, 2006; National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). The future success of youth has also been questioned with findings such as 1.1 million youth, ages 16-19, do not have a high school diploma or equivalent General Education Development (GED) test certificate (Aron, 2006). These negative reports extend to youth in alternative schools and detention centers. Research has found youth in alternative schools and detention centers share many of the same characteristics, including academic failure, poor literacy skills, and the risk of dropping out of school (Christle & Yell, 2008; Drakeford, 2002; Foley, 2001; Guerin & Denti, 1999; Rogers-Adkinson et al., 2008). Studies have also found youth in detention centers are two grades behind their peers in reading levels (Drakeford, 2002; Foley, 2001; Malmgren & Leone, 2000; Rogers-Adkinson et al., 2008; J. Vacca, 2008). These findings might lead to the assumption that youth are not engaged in personal literacy practices.

Although many studies have reported youths’ struggles with literacy, Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly, the participants in my study, engaged in varied and extensive personal literacy practices including reading novels and informational materials, and writing poetry, letters, and notes. These findings challenge the underlying assumption
that youth in these detention or alternative settings are not engaged in extensive reading and writing practices. Other studies are finding that youth in these settings have poor literacy skills (Drakeford, 2002; Foley, 2001; Malmgren & Leone, 2000; Rogers-Adkinson et al., 2008; J. Vacca, 2008); therefore, it is important to understand why Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly engaged in personal literacy practices.

**Overview of the Study**

I used a qualitative case study design method to explore the personal and school literacy practices of three girls who attended an alternative school. My study explored the girls’ literacy practices, their purposes, the outcomes of engaging in these literacy practices, and factors that seemed to influence their reading and writing. The following questions guided my study:

1. What are the literacy practices of three female young adults who have spent a portion of their schooling experience in an alternative school setting because of suspensions, expulsions or court orders?
2. What are the girls’ purposes for engaging in these literacy practices?
3. What do the girls think their literacy practices accomplish?
4. What factors, including but not limited to family, peers, school literacy practices, and life events, influence the literacy practices of three female young adults?

The Lincoln County Alternative School can be defined as a Type II Alternative School according to Raywid’s (1994, 1999) typology. Type II schools, including the Lincoln County Alternative School, are punitive in nature. Students attend the Lincoln
County Alternative School because of suspensions, expulsions, or court-orders. Type II alternative schools are temporary placements hosting students from traditional schools and detention centers. Depending on the severity of the punishment, students in the Lincoln County Alternative School may transfer between the alternative school, their traditional home school, and school in the Lincoln County Detention Center.

I met each of my participants at the Lincoln County Alternative School. I met Suzanne and Molly during my pilot study in the spring of 2008. I met Danielle during fall 2008. I collected data for 13 weeks, from September 16, 2008, until December 11, 2008. Due to their probation requirements and violations, my data collection took place at three sites. Danielle attended school at the Lincoln County Alternative School for one week and at the Lincoln County Detention Center for seven weeks. Suzanne attended school in the Lincoln County Detention Center for three weeks and River High School for 10 weeks. Molly attended school at River High School for the entire 13 weeks of my study.

Data analysis revealed the girls participated in varied and extensive personal literacy practices including the reading of novels and informational texts and the writing of poetry, letters, and notes. The girls’ personal literacy practices helped them cope with their emotions, reflect on their life events, establish and maintain social networks with peers, and communicate with family members. Although I found the girls had well-articulated purposes for participating in their personal literacy practices, their school literacy practices were often disconnected from their lives.

Four conclusions can be reached based on my findings. First, Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly wrote about life experiences which they shared with family members. Second,
the girls’ literacy practices, particularly their reading, helped them develop and maintain social networks with peers. Third, Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly’s reading habits were influenced by their surroundings, particularly their time spent at the Lincoln County Detention Center and The Caring Center, a drug rehabilitation facility. Finally, although the girls’ personal literacy practices played a significant role in their lives, they viewed their school literacy practices as compulsory, but not meaningful.

In this chapter I discuss the conclusions drawn from this study that I hope will inform educators, probation officers, and juvenile court officials who work with youth placed in alternative schools and detention centers. I also discuss implications of these conclusions that I hope will offer guidance to those concerned with practice and research encompassing youth educated in these settings. I then provide an overview of limitations of my study. Finally, I offer suggestions for future research endeavors.

**Discussion of Findings**

Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly engaged in personal literacy practices including reading novels and informational materials, and writing poetry, letters, and notes. I concluded the girls wrote about life experiences which they shared with family members; their reading practices allowed them to develop and maintain peer relationships. Their literacy practices were influenced by their surroundings and access to reading materials. Although Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly engaged in extensive personal literacy practices, they viewed their school literacy practices as compulsory and irrelevant to their lives. This section discusses each conclusion and how each conclusion extends, complements, and/or contrasts the existing research.
Youths’ Literacy Practices

Writing. Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly engaged in writing letters, notes, and poetry. In a study of the literacy practices of over 700 youth, Moje et al. (2008) found writing poetry, particularly among girls, to be a popular activity. Writing allowed youth to establish a network of peers who discussed and read each other’s poetry. Similar to the young women in Moje’s et al. study, Danielle shared letters with her friend, Mya, and Molly shared her poems with her friend, Jamie. Although the purpose of their writing was personal communication, when the writing experience was shared with peers, the activity became a source of entertainment. This allowed the girls to maintain social networks with peers. Writing was a positive experience allowing the girls to build and sustain friendships. Suzanne used writing to control peers and social situations. By writing and displaying a hurtful letter about another girl, Suzanne was able to establish her position as the dominant member in her peer group.

This study also extends the findings of Moje et al. (2008). Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly wrote and shared their writing not only to maintain peer relationships, but to develop relationships and communicate with family members. Although family members, particularly parents, have been found to be important factors in the reading habits of youth, Danielle’s, Suzanne’s, and Molly’s family members influenced their writing habits (Chandler, 1999; Love & Hamston, 2004; Moje et al., 2008; Partin & Gillespie, 2002). For Danielle, writing was the only source of communication with her sister who was also her guardian. Suzanne and Molly wrote poems to share their feelings and life experiences with their mothers. Molly shared poems with her mother about her personal life including
friendships and romantic relationships. Suzanne’s poetry, however, was shared with her
mother in order to express her bitterness, disappointment, and anger.

Reading. Reading allowed the girls to participate in social networking with peers. Studies have drawn the conclusions that youth read for recreational purposes, to learn, to escape from stress, and to relieve boredom (Finders, 1997; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Moje et al., 2008). Similar to the findings of the Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) study, Moje et al. (2008) found youth read novels less than other types of reading materials. In these studies, students reported lack of time for reading at home as the reason that novels were not read (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Moje et al., 2008). According to Moje et al. these reports are significant because they show youth are reading; however, because novel reading is associated with school achievement, youth may not necessarily choose to read materials that will help them succeed in school.

In contrast to the studies of Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) and Moje et al. (2008), Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly engaged in novel reading. While in the Lincoln County Detention Center, Danielle reported reading 10 books in seven weeks, and Suzanne read four books in four weeks. Molly reported reading The Notebook (Sparks, 1996) twice while in the Caring Center, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center. Novel reading, in fact, was one of the few sanctioned activities in which the girls could participate. Unlike the students in the studies of Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) and Moje et al. (2008), the girls had time to read while in the detention center and the Caring Center.
Currie (2004) found reading to be a resiliency factor for adolescents with anti-social tendencies and those considered at-risk for dropping out of school. Students with often negative experiences in school and in home found solace and inspiration from reading. According to Currie books allowed youth not only to “envision alternative ways to live, alternative ways of relating to others, but also to see that they were not so peculiar after all, that there were other people who thought and acted the way they did” (p. 232). This study extends Currie’s findings. Reading provided Danielle and Molly the opportunity to reflect on their life experiences. Danielle selected books that she thought related to her life events. She talked about her experiences with abusive relationships after reading a fictional book in which the main character experienced an abusive relationship with a boyfriend. Molly specifically stated reading provided her a sense of comfort. For example, she was able to relate to Nikki Sixx’s (the bassist for Motley Crue) experiences with drug abuse, which helped her cope and reflect on her own drug and alcohol addictions.

**Surrounding Youth With Books**

The detention center proved to be a positive influence on Danielle’s and Suzanne’s reading habits. Although I did not observe Molly at Caring Center, the drug rehabilitation facility, she reported an increase in reading while living at the facility. The girls attributed their increase in reading to being bored and having few entertainment options; however, access to interesting books increased the appeal of reading.

It was important for Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly to have immediate access to books. This was apparent because they read significantly more when living in places in
which books were present. O’Brien, Moje, and Stewart (2001) noted the physical and material conditions of the classroom can “shape and reflect the way people use and practice literacy” (p. 43). In fact, O’Brien et al. explained the physical arrangement of the classroom might shape how literacy or particular pedagogical practices are “taken up by the students” (p. 44). This notion could be extended to describe the impact of the detention center environment on the girls’ reading practices. Intentional or not, the rolling, metal book carts were always placed in the middle of the center room in the detention center. Because of this placement, the book carts were visible from every angle in the room and also the students’ cells. In addition, youth had to walk past the book cart when they left the center room to attend class. The girls had continual access to award winning young adult literature relating to their life events and circumstances. Similar to O’Brien et al.’s conclusion, having a constant visual of the book carts and immediate access to them encouraged the girls to read.

Gallagher (2009) explained the need for students to be placed in a “daily book flood zone” (p. 52), meaning students need immediate access to interesting books they want to read. He found when he discussed interesting books in the classroom, students hesitated to check them out from the school library; however, when he physically brought books to the classroom, he had to create waiting lists because students were excited to read the book. Gallagher found it is “much more effective to bring the library to the students” (p. 53). Molly’s reading of novels support Gallagher’s notion of creating a “daily book flood zone” (p. 52). During my study, Mrs. Phillips recommended Molly read The Wedding by Nicholas Sparks (2003). She told Molly she would be returning the
book during fourth period so she could later check the book out of the school library. Although Molly seemed interested in the book, especially because it was written by her favorite author, she did not check out the book. When I took her to the school library for formal interviews, however, she not only browsed books, but also checked out *The Message in the Bottle* (Sparks, 1998). Being in the physical presence of books increased Molly’s desire to read.

**School Literacy Practices**

Whereas Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly had well-articulated purposes for their personal reading and writing, their school literacy practices were often disconnected from their lives. This finding complements the work of other researchers in the field of adolescent literacy who have documented the discrepancy between adolescents’ personal literacy practices and school literacy practices (Alvermann, 2001; Alvermann et al., 1999; Bean et al., 1999; Bintz, 1993; Myers, 1992; Moje, 2000; Moje et al., 2008; Worthy, 1998). Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly did not view their school literacy practices as relevant to their current life situations. Overall, school work was completed, not to acquire new knowledge of the world, but to avoid getting in trouble. Reading and writing in school were viewed as requirements for good grades and eventually jobs.

According to the research, students who have attended alternative schools or schools in detention centers are characterized as academically incompetent, with particularly poor literacy skills (Christle & Yell, 2008; Drakeford, 2002; Foley, 2001; Guerin & Denti, 1999; Rogers-Adkinson et al., 2008). The conclusions derived from these reports are that youth in these settings have poor literacy skills and therefore are not
“readers” or “writers.” In this case, Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly’s personal literacy practices engaged them in critical and reflective thinking, while their school literacy practices placed little academic demands on the girls. From my observations and interviews, the level of expectation was that Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly complete and submit their work. In his study of African American adolescent males, Tatum (2008) described an out of school “overload” and an “in-school literacy underload characterized as low-quality education” (p. 52). Tatum’s terms could be used to describe the girls’ personal and in-school literacy practices. In their personal lives, the girls read and wrote a variety of texts; however, in school, the majority of their literacy practices included remedial and routine tasks such as listening to the teacher read stories, defining vocabulary, and completing worksheets. The teachers read to the girls, who did very little reading during class. The girls completed their work with little effort. Because they were placed in classrooms comprised of students considered lower-functioning, they only participated in instruction that focused on basic skills; for example, syntax, punctuation, or vocabulary. The worksheets typically required only single word responses or at most, short 3 to 5 word sentences. The perceived ability levels of students were used as the rationale for the teachers’ instructional decision making that resulted in the students listening to text read to them rather than the students reading interesting and varied texts. Furthermore, during the course of my study, I did not observe any type of reading instruction or the teaching of reading strategies to assist Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly in becoming better readers. Their classrooms lacked instructional practices that encouraged Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly to be creative, critical, and reflective thinkers. Maxine
Greene (1995) argued for curriculum to allow all students, particularly those marginalized or categorized as underachievers, to be creative and imaginative. She contended:

The stigma of “disabled” or “low I.Q.” or “lower socioeconomic class” too frequently forces young person to become recipients of “treatment” or “training,” sometimes from the most benevolent motives on the part of those helping to “help.” Far too seldom are such young people looked upon as beings capable of imagining, of choosing, and of acting from their own vantage points on perceived possibility . . . The supporting structures that exist are not used to sustain a sense of agency among those they shelter; instead, they legitimate treatment, remediation, control. (p. 41)

Greene’s (1995) quote summarizes how Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly were viewed in their classrooms: not as active thinkers but as passive learners. Their educational experiences disengaged Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly from the learning process.

Danielle’s, Suzanne’s, and Molly’s literacy instruction could be classified as Dewey’s (1938/1998) noneducational experiences: those acts simply completed with little or no significant result. Eisner’s (2002) examples of noneducational experiences are tying shoes or driving a car; he contended these experiences are merely done out of “habit” (p. 37). From my observations, it seemed the girls moved through the routine of school work with little learning taking place; they merely acted out of habit. For them school was a series of experiences requiring compliance to achieve the status of a “good student.” Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly described their school literacy practices as easy.
Danielle blamed the “easy” instruction on the wide age range and level of students. Suzanne said her school literacy was so easy that she forgot most of what she was supposed to learn. And Molly said most of the work she did in her 10th grade English class was the same as what she had completed in 8th grade.

The findings surrounding Danielle’s, Suzanne’s, and Molly’s school literacy practices extend the work of Tatum (2008), Greene (1995), Dewey (1938/1998), and Eisner (2002). Tatum’s (2008) term “overload” describes the girls’ personal literacy practices and his term “underload” describes their in-school literacy practices. This “underload” of literacy instruction was justified by the girls’ classrooms being labeled as “remedial” and “inclusion.” The girls’ school literacy practices were not challenging. “Easy” literacy instruction could also be classified as “non-educational” (Dewey, 1938/1998; Eisner, 2002).

Danielle’s, Suzanne’s, and Molly’s school literacy practices were viewed as insignificant in their lives; however, they used school as a place to engage in personal literacy practices. Finders (1997) defined literacy practices that in some way challenge or disrupt institutional expectations as the “literate underlife” (p. 24). In her study of girls’ literacy practices, Finders explored how “literate underlife” practices for the girls were ritualized events boldly defying authority. Similarly Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly engaged in personal literacy practices despite school policies. Danielle engaged in note writing even though it was forbidden; note passing fulfilled Danielle’s need for personal communication without being monitored by the detention center staff. Although Danielle worked to hide her personal literacy practices, Suzanne blatantly displayed her writing on
a school computer. By posting a note about her best friend Kristen on the school computers, Suzanne used school property to spread gossip and bully. Molly also participated in “literate underlife” activities by using the school computers to look up quotes on the Witty Profiles website (wittyprofiles.com). Attendance at school allowed Molly to fulfill her online literacy practices because she did not have access to the Internet at home.

Similar to Finders (1997) findings, these “literate underlife” practices also validated social identity. Danielle did not view herself as an instigator in note writing; a practice she knew was against the rules. Furthermore, after the boys asked for “sexy” notes, she distanced herself from “those” girls who would write “bad” notes. Danielle maintained an image of herself as a “good” girl because she wrote notes about what she perceived as trivial matters; for example, why she was in detention and how her baby was doing. Suzanne used literacy to establish and maintain her position as the dominant female in her peer group. Molly used Witty Profiles to find quotes that represented her feelings, which she then copied on her school binder. Displaying quotes served as a way for Molly to enact her identity, meaning she selected and displayed quotes relating to her feelings and life experiences.

Purcell-Gates (2007) raised questions about the “nature of the relationship” between in-school literacy instruction and out-of-school, or personal literacy practices; she questioned how in-school literacy instruction influenced personal literacy practices and vice versa. In this case, I did not observe, nor did the girls report, their school literacy learning transferring into their personal literacy practices. For example, Suzanne and
Molly defined vocabulary words for each short story read in their English Language Arts classes; however, I did not observe, nor did they report, using these vocabulary words in their poetry writing. At the same time, although Mrs. Phillips recognized their literacy practices, there was no indication that she tried to incorporate their personal literacy practices into their school literacy instruction. For Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly there was a sharp divide between their school literacy practices and personal literacy practices. In reference to Purcell-Gates questions about the relationship between in school literacy and personal literacy practices, in the case of Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly it seems there was not a relationship.

Researchers in the field of young adult literacy have documented the discrepancy between young adults’ personal literacy practices and their school literacy practices (Alvermann, 2001; Alvermann et al., 1999; Bean, et al., 1999; Bintz, 1993; Myers, 1992; Moje, 2000; Moje et al., 2008; Worthy, 1998). Similar to these findings, Danielle’s, Suzanne’s, and Molly’s personal literacy practices were meaningful and important in their lives; however, they viewed their school literacy practices as requirements to avoid trouble and graduate from school. Despite assumptions about the literacy practices of youth in alternative schools or detention centers, it was the girls’ learning experiences in school which were deficits in their engagement in their literacy instruction. The only reading materials available for the girls in the classroom were class sets of textbooks. Unfortunately because Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly were placed in “remedial” classes, they were only accustomed to small snippets of reading done by a teacher. While this instructional decision making was done with the intention of not embarrassing students,
the girls were not provided access to materials to read. Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly did, however, participate in what Finders (1997) described as the “literate underlife:” personal literacy practices completed while in school. These literacy practices allowed the girls to develop and maintain relationships and enact their identity.

**Implications**

The literacy experiences of Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly generate implications relevant to the field of young adult literacy and the education of youth in detention and alternative school settings. This section offers specific implications pertaining to young adult literacy practices, the importance of youths’ access to books, and school literacy practices. These implications are not only relevant for educators in traditional schools, alternative schools, and schools in detention centers, but for adults who work with youth in the juvenile justice system.

**Implications for Recognizing Youths’ Literacy Practices**

Educators must challenge the assumption that because youth are in an alternative schools or detention centers they automatically have poor literacy skills and lack the desire to read or write. This assumption may be based on results from the administration of standardized reading assessments such as the Wide Range Achievement Test, Corrective Reading Placement, Woodcock-Johnson III Test of Achievement Passage Comprehension Subtest and Gray Oral Reading Test (Drakeford, 2002; Malmgren & Leone, 2000; Mulcahy et al., 2008). These assessments measure literacy competence in terms of the rate of reading, accuracy of pronunciation, fluency, spelling, and comprehension. The tests do not, however, provide an understanding of youths’ personal
literacy practices. Although it is important for educators to learn why youth in detention centers have lower scores than their peers, these test scores should not lead to the assumption that youth in alternative schools or detention centers do not participate in personal literacy practices. As my study illustrates, perhaps, these reports create a distortion of the competency and, certainly, the interests of youth placed in detention centers or alternative schools. These reading assessments provide only a narrow picture of youths’ literacy capabilities; they fail to account for the youths’ authentic literacy practices. Educators need to use caution when interpreting these scores; low test scores do not necessarily mean youth are not engaged in reading and writing practices. This assumption not only undermines the literacy skills and practices youth do have, but creates a narrow definition of what it means to be literate. These results lead to inferences restricting students’ access to more complex forms of literature and literacy activities.

Educators should consider the importance of youths’ personal literacy practices while cautiously interpreting the standardized test scores of youth placed in alternative schools and detention centers. Educators must value youths’ literacy practices as important in their lives. Reading and writing allow youth to maintain and develop peer and family relationships and to cope with life events and situations. Literacy practices can also be viewed as a resiliency factors, in that these practices meet youths’ emotional needs. In turn, literacy becomes a source for gaining competence and confidence. Although educators are responsible for literacy instruction, we should also appreciate the role of literacy in the lives of youth, even if their personal literacy practices do not directly contribute to academic success. Recognizing the value of literacy in youths’ lives
can help educators encourage and emphasize reading and writing as valued lifelong activities.

Once educators value the personal literacy practices in the lives of youth in alternative schools or detention centers, we must discover and acknowledge the various types of literacy practices in which youth are engaged. Carefully observing student behavior in class can lead to knowledge about youths’ literacy practices. Often Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly carried out their personal literacy practices in the classroom; for example, the girls wrote notes and poems, and read novels before, during, and after their classes. Observations about youths’ literacy practices can be a catalyst for engaging students in conversations about their literacy practices. Asking students about their favorite authors or a teacher sharing his or her favorite author with students can lead to a dialogue about reading. Conversations between educators and youth are not limited to reading interests. By sharing their personal writing, teachers can create an environment in which students would also feel secure sharing their writing, such as poetry or short stories. If youth are writing about personal topics, this would provide educators insight not only into their writing practices, but their life experiences as well. Through observations and conversations, educators may become aware of the extensive and varied personal literacy practices of youth.

Literacy educators should extend their knowledge about youths’ literacy practices to all adults who work with young adults, particularly those in the juvenile court system. First, literacy educators can help recommend literacy materials for probation officers to use with youth. Because of the nature of their job, probation officers have insight into
youths’ home life, their school lives, and their involvement in the court system. Probation officers can use literacy to educate youth about issues affecting their lives. For example, I worked with Ms. Snyder, the girls’ probation officer, to gather reading materials for girls to learn about pregnancy, child-birth, and rearing children. When I was awarded a grant to purchase reading materials for the detention center, Ms. Snyder and I worked together to select books focused on teenage pregnancy. Second, literacy educators can help probation officers support youth in school by sharing their knowledge of youths’ literacy practices. Probation officers who have knowledge of youths’ reading and writing activities can then advocate for youth in the juvenile justice system and in the schools. For example, Molly needed an advocate to help convince school personnel she could handle the coursework in a higher-level English course. Knowing Molly’s interest in reading and writing, her probation officer could have reassured school administration and teachers that Molly could succeed in a higher-level English course. Literacy educators can work to confront the negative stereotypes of youth in alternative schools and detention centers by providing information about youths’ literacy practices. This information highlights youths’ assets and strengths.

**Implications for Surrounding Youth With Books**

The International Reading Association urges educators to provide adolescents access to books and opportunities to read books they can and want to read (Moore et al., 1999). Detention centers and rehabilitation centers serving youth should provide libraries containing books written for young adults. Research points to the influence of family and the importance of a literate home environment in which youth are surrounded by reading
and writing materials (Chandler, 1999; Finders, 1997; Love & Hamston, 2004; Moje et al., 2008; Partin & Gillespie, 2002). Detention centers and rehabilitation centers function as youths’ temporary living placements. Educators are responsible for providing youth in custody with a literate environment.

The research on youth in alternative school and detention centers found youths’ lives are filled with risk factors, including family conflicts, a history of abuse or neglect, emotional disorders, alcohol and drug abuse and pregnancy (Aron, 2006; McCall, 2003; Reimer & Cash, 2003; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Watson et al., 2004). Reading can serve as a protective factor in youths’ lives, meaning it can help youth cope with life events, give youth a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, provide opportunities for self-reflection, and create a feeling a competence. Knowing the power of literacy in youths’ lives, it is crucial for alternative schools and detention centers to provide youth opportunities to experience reading and writing. Detention and rehabilitation centers can promote literacy through providing recreational reading materials and encouraging youth to read.

The importance of providing youth with access to literacy materials extends to the academic setting. Knowing youth are more likely to read when they have immediate access to books strengthens the argument that traditional middle and high schools, alternative schools and schools in detention centers should have classroom libraries. Classroom libraries can provide students with accessible texts that vary in topic, length and difficulty. Teachers can use classroom libraries to differentiate literacy instruction, making reading enjoyable, yet challenging, for a diverse group of learners. The classroom
library should contain fiction, nonfiction, poetry, magazines, newspapers, quotes, and short stories. Providing youth with a variety of written texts gives students access to the types of materials they might read outside of the classroom, like magazines and newspapers. This also encourages youth to be lifelong readers as these, rather than textbooks, are most likely the types of materials they will read later in life. In this way, classroom libraries can be used as part of the school curriculum, but can also provide students with entertaining materials, emphasizing reading as both an academic practice and recreational activity. Educators can purchase materials for their classroom libraries from grant money, book drives, Title I money, public library sales, and other state and local funding agencies. If educators want to increase youths’ reading practices, they must make interesting reading materials readily available in school environments.

**Implications for School Literacy Practices**

All youth deserve high quality literacy instruction whether they are attending school in a traditional high school, an alternative school, or school in a detention center. This means students should not only be taught basic skill competencies of reading and writing, but students should have opportunities for reflective thinking, creative and interpretative responses to texts, and opportunities for discussion. Educators must challenge the idea that youth who have attended alternative schools or school in detention centers are academically incompetent and in need of remedial instruction. Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly were capable of higher educational expectations and standards. Instead of teaching literacy in the decontextualized context of grammar worksheets and of defining vocabulary words, adolescents need opportunities to experience reading and
writing in meaningful contexts. The behaviors of Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly that led them to the alternative school and detention center were not contingent on their intelligence or academic ability. In fact, at times it was the lack of quality education in school that created behavioral issues leading to placements in the alternative school and detention center. For example, Molly was bored in her English language arts course, and at times her boredom and disengagement with the material resulted in behaviors that her teacher considered problematic; for example, rolling her eyes and not completing her work. This shows a quality education may not only result in desirable academic behaviors, but also social behaviors. Research has found engagement is related to academic achievement (Campbell, Voelkl, & Donahue, 1997; Guthrie, Schafer, & Huang, 2001; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Increasing academic engagement, therefore, may lead to a more successful educational experience.

Educators need to be extremely cautious about the labels they attach to youth. Labeling students and/or classrooms as “inclusion,” “remedial,” “at risk,” or “juvenile delinquents” often colors academic expectations. Unfortunately these labels can cause students to take the blame for the instructional practices in the classroom rather than simply recognizing the problems that poor quality teaching and instruction creates. Labels become excuses for student failure, and thus teachers fail to assume responsibility for creating an effective learning environment.

Alternative schools and schools in detention centers have a responsibility to provide a high quality education that exceeds or at least matches the educational opportunities for youth in traditional schools. Although some alternative schools and
detention centers offer short-term placements, unfortunately for some youth, including Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly, repeat offenses mean the majority of their education is provided by the alternative school or school in the detention center. Offering only “remedial” education in these facilities means students’ educational experiences are short-changed. The education received in these facilities affects students’ future successes or failures in their traditional home schools. If students are not receiving a quality education in these facilities, they may fall behind in their academics when they then transfer back to their traditional home school. This creates a cycle of failure for students who are already disengaged from school.

Recognition and validation of youth’s personal literacy practices can be important in furthering their academic literacy. Unfortunately even when the teachers recognized the girls’ personal literacy practices, they were not used as a foundation to teach academic literacy practices. Mrs. Phillips observed Molly’s interest in Nicholas Sparks books but did not use her interest in novel reading to further engage in her learning. The teachers also did not use the girls’ interests in their personal literacy practices as a means for motivating Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly to participate in school literacy practices. It is crucial that those who work with youth in these settings recognize their strengths and understand how they can be used as motivation to engage youth in their education.

In summary, the literacy experiences of Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly generate implications for the field of young adult literacy and the education of youth in alternative school and/or detention center school settings. Literacy educators must not assume youth in alternative schools or detention centers have poor literacy skills and therefore lack a
desire to read and write. Instead, it is necessary to recognize and appreciate youths’
personal literacy practices. Literacy educators have a responsibility to share this
knowledge with others who work with youth in these settings. This requires literacy
educators to work with alternative schools and detention centers to ensure youth have
immediate access to books they can and want to read. This also means educators must
provide youth in alternative schools and/or detention centers with high quality literacy
instruction and meaningful learning opportunities. In order to create lifelong learners, we
must be cautious about the labels we attach to youth, particularly marginalized youth.

Limitations

Several factors limit the study. First, I wanted to select participants with whom I
developed a relationship with during my pilot study in the spring of 2008. I thought
having long-term relationships would help me establish positive rapport leading to more
intimate conversations about the girls’ literacy practices and lives. Unfortunately, I did
not know Danielle until she participated in my study. When another participant withdrew
from my study Ms. Snyder suggested I include Danielle. I met Danielle the first day of
my study. In my opinion, however, my relationship with Danielle quickly developed
because we were both pregnant and could share our experiences. Also, I was the only
person who consistently visited her while she was in the detention center.

Second, I originally planned to interview the girls’ family members in their
homes. Unfortunately, I was only able to interview Molly’s family in their home.
Because of timing conflicts I was only able to interview Suzanne’s mother by phone. I
was unable to interview Danielle’s sister, Heather, because of her unstable living
situation. I left a questionnaire for Heather to complete during a time she was required to be in court. Interviewing the girls’ family members in their homes would have allowed me to observe the literate environment of the home. Also, interviewing family members in person may have led to a more in-depth conversation. Despite not conducting face-to-face interviews with Suzanne and Danielle’s family members, I was still able to gather important information about the girls’ literacy practices from their family members’ perspectives.

Third, I had to rely on the honesty of the girls’ responses during interviews. Through these conversations the girls shared the reading and writing practices that they completed at home, after-school, or other times when I was not present. Our interview conversations were an important data source. I did, however, use multiple methods of data collection to strengthen validity.

Fourth, my observations of the girls while they were in school may be considered a limitation because of the potential effects of my presence on teachers’ instructional decision making and the girls’ behavior while I observed them in class. Validity was strengthened by observing the girls over an extended period of time and through multiple means of data collection, such as interviews with the girls, their teachers, probation officers, and family members. Through my observations I learned about the girls’ personal literacy practices, their school literacy practices, and their overall schooling experiences. Observations also lead to questions and interview conversations.
Future Research

Our knowledge of Danielle’s, Suzanne’s, and Molly’s literacy practices, the purpose of their literacy practices, the outcomes in regards to their literacy practices, and the factors influencing their literacy practices generates questions regarding future studies. Several topics for further research can be explored as a result of the findings.

Although immediate access to quality young adult literature influenced Danielle’s, Suzanne’s, and Molly’s reading habits, further research might explore how detention centers and alternative schools could go beyond solely providing access to books to more overtly encouraging reading and writing as recreational activities. While in the detention center, the girls discussed book selections with peers, including receiving and giving book recommendations. Research on book clubs in detention centers could explore how this activity might provide youth opportunities to discuss books while reinforcing reading as an enjoyable and recreational habit.

At the detention center, reading was a sanctioned activity, but unfortunately writing was not. Creative writing, such as poems, scripts, or short stories, provides youth an emotional outlet and opportunities for self-expression. Research could explore how detention centers could create writing groups. The creation of writing groups could lead to events like poetry slams or plays.

Although it is important to promote literacy activities as recreational, the creation of libraries in alternative schools and detention centers can support the school curriculum as well. There is a lack of research focused on classroom libraries in alternative schools and detention centers. Understanding the role of libraries in these settings would provide
educators resources to move students beyond basic competencies in reading and writing and would also create opportunities for creative and reflective thinking. An investigation into libraries in juvenile detention centers and alternative schools might also examine how teachers can incorporate young adult literature into their curriculum. A classroom library would allow educators to create text-sets, collections of books, poems, articles, or other pieces of text, all related to a particular topic. Research can examine how text sets might assist educators in alternative schools or detention centers to teach a diverse group of students with a wide range of abilities.

Educators need to better understand the factors which would help youth have successful school experiences. In this study, Danielle eventually dropped out of school, Suzanne was sent back to the alternative school, and Molly left school in order to pursue schooling online. Further research needs to explore the best type of literacy instruction in alternative schools and schools in detention centers. How can educators positively engage youth in their literacy education when they are in alternative schools or detention centers? How might positive experiences with school literacy further engage youth in their education?

One issue raised in my study was the problem of the transient nature of youth in alternative schools and schools in detention centers. Further research needs to explore how educators can keep youth on the academic track that will help them successfully transition back to their traditional home school. Research needs to examine the experiences of youth as they transition from alternative schools or detention centers to their traditional home school. In this study there was little communication between the
alternative school, the juvenile detention center, and the home school. For example, Molly wanted to participate in choir but because her schedule was put together by her school counselor when she was in the Caring Center, she was not placed in the choir class. This activity may have benefited Molly by providing involvement in the school and opportunities to build relationships with teachers and other adults. If youth are expected to negotiate these spaces, such as their home school, alternative schools, and detention centers, educators, probation officers, and juvenile court officials need to understand the support necessary to help youth navigate these transitions successfully.

**Conclusion**

Moje (2002a) asserted “to study youth literacy is to study the complexity of literacy’s power” (p. 212). This was clearly seen in the case of Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly. The girls’ personal literacy practices provided them opportunities for self-expression, communication, and identity construction. Through reading and writing the girls coped with life events, navigated social situations, and developed social networks. Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly had a natural interest in reading and writing. Despite their extensive personal literacy practices, Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly were considered students “at-risk” for academic failure because of their association with the Lincoln County Alternative School and the Lincoln County Detention Center. Although much of the research on students in alternative schools and detention centers focuses on their school failures and struggles with literacy, this study focused on the extensive use of literacy in Danielle’s, Suzanne’s, and Molly’s lives.
The girls’ personal literacy practices could be considered resiliency factors because reading and writing helped Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly cope with emotions and life events in a positive way; however, their school experiences could be classified as risk factors because their experiences in the classroom inadvertently contributed to their disengagement from school. Over the course of their educational experiences, the girls became frustrated with school and detached from their learning. Although the girls may have possessed the academic skills needed to be successful in school, the lack of quality instruction and their association with the alternative school and detention center created a barrier for their learning.

As youths’ life experiences change and identities shift, so too might literacy practices or the role of literacy in their lives. As educators it is our responsibility to nurture their personal literacy practices and to recognize the importance of literacy in their lives. Educators must provide youth with literacy instruction that will provide them with the skills needed for academic success; however, educators cannot ignore the social and cultural capital gained from youths’ personal literacy practices.

During the study Molly said she wrote poetry because “paper doesn’t judge you” (Molly, Interview, October 21, 2008). Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly were constantly being “judged.” In a very obvious way, the court “judged” them for their violations of the law. In school they were “judged” in a more subtle manner; their association with the court system led to assumptions about their academic capabilities and literacy interests. Our responsibility as literacy educators is to recognize the strengths of youth in alternative schools or detention centers. Instead of “judging” youth in alternative schools
or detention centers, as educators, we must provide literacy opportunities in which students like Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly can feel secure expressing their feelings, reflecting on their lives, and growing as literate members of their community.
APPENDIX A

DIRECTIONS FOR LITERACY VIGNETTE
Directions for writing a literacy vignette

A literacy vignette is a short writing piece focused on one significant moment from your reading and/or writing history. This can help you examine the role reading and/or writing in your life. I would like you to write a literacy vignette so I can better understand why reading and writing might be important to you. I am providing you with my literacy vignette so you can better understand how the vignette might be written.

The Monster at the End of this Book

By: Kristy Pytash

My father is a trial attorney. During my childhood this demanding job always had him working long hours. My mom tells me he was hardly home; therefore, she insisted when he was home he would have quality bonding time with me and my brothers. She wanted his time with us to be special, so when we grew up we wouldn’t remember the long hours he worked, but our special, nightly traditions. My Dad came home every night just in time to give us a bath, read our favorite books, and put us to bed. My Dad has an amazing ability to impersonate voices and to create voices for each of the characters. When he would read he would become so animated it was like he became the characters. Every day my mom would help us choose a book before my Dad came home. And each night we would wait anxiously for the sound of the car door slamming, the jingle of his keys, and the sound of his voice singing our favorite song, “Bubble Bath.”

One particular evening before he came home we were looking over the various books we could read. Every night my Dad would read a chapter from each kid’s book. My book over the past couple weeks had been Little House on the Prairie. Joey was trying to find his favorite book about dinosaurs, and my youngest brother David couldn’t find anything he wanted to read. My mom knelt down beside him, looking over the books
stacked on the shelf. “How about this one, David?” she suggested, holding a worn book with Grover on the front.

Joey and I looked over and screamed with excitement. “Yes, David, you have to read that book,” I shouted.

“This is my favorite book,” chimed in Joey.

“Ok,” David agreed, looking over the books, trying to figure out why it was so popular. My brother David is seven years younger than myself and four years younger than Joey. Most of the books he selected for reading time had already been worn, memorized, and not as exciting for his older siblings. He had never seen Joey and me so excited for one of his books. That evening we waited anxiously for my Dad to come home. Joey and I couldn’t wait for him to read David’s choice, *The Monster at the End of this Book*.

That night he walked in the door, singing his usual rendition of the “Bubble Bath” song. And after we splashed around in our bath and put on our pajamas, we gathered around on the brown couch in our living room. We started with my book, *Little House on the Prairie*. And after a chapter we read from Joey’s dinosaur book. When David handed my Dad his book, he laughed.

“David, did you know this is one of my favorite books?” David shook his head, excited about the book. My Dad created a voice for Grover who tried to convince the reader not to turn a page because there is a monster at the end of the book. At the end of each page, Joey, David, and I would scream in unison, “Don’t turn the page.” I remember
laughing hysterically at my Dad’s Grover impression, especially when Grover realizes he
is the monster at the end of the book. That night is one remembered by my family.
APPENDIX B

DIRECTIONS FOR STUDENTS DURING DATA ANALYSIS
Directions for student during data analysis

I would like you to help me analyze the data I have collected this semester. You are going to read all the notes, interviews, and writings I have collected as I have followed you this semester. This semester I have been trying to learn about your reading and writing practices. I started this semester with four questions. These are the four questions I had at the beginning of this fall (hand each girl a copy of these four questions):

1. What are (Danielle’s/Suzanne’s/Molly’s) literacy practices?
2. What is (Danielle’s/Suzanne’s/Molly’s) reasons for engaging in these literacy practices?
3. What do (Danielle/Suzanne/Molly) think their literacy practices accomplish?
4. What factors, including but not limited to family, peers, school literacy practices, and life events, influence the literacy practices of (Danielle/Suzanne/Molly)?

As you read these interviews, field notes, or other documents in front of you, I want you to see if you can answer any of these questions. Now, I want you to pretend that you do not know (Danielle/Suzanne/Molly). All that you know about this person is from the information in front of you, so you have to use the interviews, field notes, or other documents to answer these four questions. We are going to answer one question at a time starting with “what are (Danielle’s/Suzanne’s/Molly’s) literacy practices?” I want you to choose a highlighter and highlight any places where you see that question being answered.
APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS AFTER DATA ANALYSIS
Question One
1. What did you learn about what (Danielle/Suzanne/Molly) reads and writes?
2. Is there anything missing that you notice, because when I write my dissertation I have to use the information in here. So, is there anything that I need to know about what you read and write that I don’t know or that isn’t in here?

Question Two
1. What did you learn about (Danielle’s/Suzanne’s/Molly’s) reasons for reading and writing?
2. Is there anything missing that you notice, because when I write my dissertation I have to use the information in here. So, is there anything that I need to know about your reasons for reading and writing that I don’t know or that isn’t in here?

Question Three
1. What did you learn about what (Danielle’s/Suzanne’s/Molly’s) reading and writing accomplishes?
2. Is there anything missing that you notice, because when I write my dissertation I have to use the information in here. So, is there anything that I need to know about what your reading and writing accomplishes that I don’t know or that isn’t in here?

Question Four
1. What did you learn about the factors which influence (Danielle/Suzanne/Molly) to read and write?
2. Is there anything missing that you notice, because when I write my dissertation I have to use the information in here. So, is there anything that I need to know about the factors which influence you to read and write that I don’t know or that isn’t in here?
APPENDIX D

EXPLANATORY HANDOUT ABOUT EMERGENT CATEGORIES FOR RATERS
Research Question 1: What are the literacy practices of three female young adults who have spent a portion of their schooling experience in an alternative school setting because of suspensions, expulsions or court orders?

Finding: The girls’ personal literacy practices included reading books, informational texts, writing letters, writing notes to friends, and writing poetry. The girls’ school literacy practices included reading textbooks, newspapers, Scholastic Magazines, and worksheets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Books</td>
<td>Both Danielle and Suzanne discussed reading books while at the juvenile detention center. Molly discussed reading authors such as J.K. Rowling and Nicholas Sparks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Informational Texts</td>
<td>Danielle read baby magazines and a pregnancy packet created by Ms. Snyder. Molly enjoyed reading non-fiction, such as <em>Heroin Diaries</em> (Sixx, 2008) and quotes from Witty Profiles (wittyprofiles.com).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing letters and notes for communication</td>
<td>Danielle and Suzanne wrote and received letters while in the detention center. Danielle and Suzanne also discussed writing notes to other youth in the detention center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Poetry</td>
<td>Molly and Suzanne wrote poetry about their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Literacy</td>
<td>While in the detention center, twice a week, Danielle and Suzanne were assigned to read an article from the local newspaper. Both girls also read materials, such as <em>Junior Scholastic Magazine</em>. Although in different grades, Molly and Suzanne had the same English Language Arts teacher. Their classroom routine varied little and consisted of the teacher reading the textbook aloud, followed by copying vocabulary from the chalkboard into their notebooks and then a worksheet with comprehension questions to be answered.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 2: What are the girls’ purposes for engaging in these literacy practices?

Finding: The girls’ participated in literacy practices which they felt were meaningful. They were engaged in literacy practices they thought would help them cope with their lives and provide them with entertainment. School literacy practices were viewed as requirements for success in school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Books</td>
<td>Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly discussed reading for entertainment while in the detention center (Danielle and Suzanne) and the Caring Center, a drug rehabilitation center (Molly). Danielle selected books which she thought related to her life circumstances. She also selected books that would be entertaining and read in order to relax. While in detention, Suzanne used reading to help her cope; when she left detention, reading was no longer serving its purpose and she quit. Molly discussed reading for enjoyment at the Caring Center and at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Informational Texts</td>
<td>Molly and Danielle discussed reading information texts to help them learn about their lives. Specifically, Danielle read baby magazines and materials about pregnancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing letters and notes for communication</td>
<td>Because Danielle’s sister did not have reliable transportation, Danielle depended on letters to communicate with her family. Suzanne wrote a note about her “best friend” which she then posted on a school computer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Poetry</td>
<td>Suzanne and Molly wrote poetry as a way to express their thoughts and feelings. They felt writing poetry would help them cope with their emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Literacy</td>
<td>Suzanne and Molly participated in school literacy practices in order to receive “good” grades. School was viewed as necessary for a “good” job. Danielle participated in school practices because she felt it was mandatory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 3: What do the girls think these literacy practices accomplish?

Finding: The girls participated in literacy practices which helped them learn new and relevant information about their lives, helped them cope with life situations, and provided entertainment.

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Books</td>
<td>Danielle, Suzanne, and Molly discussed reading for entertainment while in the detention center (Danielle and Suzanne) and the Caring Center, a drug rehabilitation center (Molly). Reading alleviated the girls’ boredom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Informational Texts</td>
<td>Danielle read baby magazines and a pregnancy packet prepared by Ms. Snyder. From these materials she learned about her pregnancy, labor &amp; delivery and parenting tips.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing letters and notes for communication</td>
<td>Danielle found writing to her sister made her feel better about her life situations. Danielle also found writing and reading letters to be a source of entertainment. Suzanne posted a note about her “best friend” Kristen in order to hurt Kristen’s feelings; however, because of the graphic language and violation of school property, Suzanne was placed in in-school suspension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Poetry</td>
<td>Suzanne and Molly discussed the benefits of writing poetry. Writing poetry allowed them to express their feelings rather than engage in self-destructive activities, such as cutting, fighting, and emotional outbursts. Molly found writing poetry helped her to develop a special relationship with her brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Literacy</td>
<td>Danielle thought her school literacy practices provided her with an education. Danielle noted that while at the detention center, her classes helped break up her mundane schedule. Although Danielle claimed she valued education she still decided to drop out of school on her 18th birthday. Molly claimed she was unsure of what her school literacy practices accomplished; she thought maybe they helped her learn, but could not articulate why that might be.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 4: What factors, including but not limited to family, peers, school literacy practices, and life events, influence the literacy practices of three female young adults?

Findings: The girls’ family members, peers, life occurrences and living situations greatly impacted their literacy practices. Staff members from juvenile court also influenced the girls’ literacy practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Detention Center</td>
<td>Each of the girls attended the juvenile detention center; Molly also attended the Caring Center, a drug rehabilitation center. Danielle and Suzanne’s time at the detention center and Molly’s time in rehab provided them with an environment to engage in reading. During this time reading was a source of entertainment. During this time, all participants were avid readers, but did acknowledge that they did not sustain this level or reading once they were released. Danielle and Suzanne both discussed a myth surrounding reading and the detention center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Molly’s family encouraged her to engage in reading and writing. Writing was viewed as a valuable tool for communication and expressing one’s feelings. Her family viewed her as intelligent and capable. Danielle and Suzanne’s home lives hindered their literacy practices. The lack of routine, structure, and violence in the home made it difficult for Danielle and Suzanne to engage in reading and writing in the home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>The girls’ literacy practices were influenced by their peers. Molly wrote poems directed at boyfriends and friends. Youth at the detention center suggested books for Danielle to read. Suzanne’s literacy practices changed depending on her social-life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff at the juvenile detention center</td>
<td>Ms. Snyder serves as the probation officer for Danielle, Suzanne and Molly. Ms. Snyder provided Danielle with materials to read during her pregnancy. Nurse Tracey also encouraged Danielle to read and learn about her pregnancy. Although I am not considered staff, I also influenced the girls’ reading and writing habits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

BOOKS DANIELLE READ IN THE LINCOLN COUNTY DETENTION CENTER


APPENDIX F

BOOKS SUZANNE READ IN THE LINCOLN COUNTY DETENTION CENTER


APPENDIX G

SAMPLE OF SUZANNE’S POEMS
Big Girls don't Cry.
I don't know why I am over you.
I should forget you.
Your always in my mind.
At the wrong time.

I loved you.
I needed you.
I adored you.
I'm over you.

Pain is what I feel.
Pain is what I am.
Pain is what I do.
See what you put me through.
APPENDIX H

SUZANNE’S POEMS FROM OCTOBER 7, 2008
x I miss you
I miss your kiss,
I miss your smile,
I miss your voice,
I miss your looks,
I miss your words you said to me.
I feel like I'm not in love,
I feel like I'm in love.
I miss everything you are.

x so long x

So long goodbye,
So long dear gone.
Now I miss you,
Now I want you,
Now I cry for you.

x invisible x

My love for you is invisible,
My tears for you are invisible,
My heart is invisible,
I'm invisible.

x everyday x
everytime I see you I cry,
everytime I love you I get hurt,
everytime I want you I get you.
APPENDIX I

SUZANNE’S MANILA FOLDER COVER
mother fucker

You see me, I see you

You say fuck me, I say fuck you

X, homework

hit

Bitch

Can't I love me, can't I love you

High mother

Higher

High
APPENDIX J

SUZANNE’S LETTER ABOUT KRISTEN
is a nasty cunt that nobody likes.
she has aids and is infested with crabs.
she sleeps with anybody who wants 2 fuck her just
duebas.
they are desperate she likes to eat
pussy.
and she does stuff with her own real dad and she
likes to mess around wit old people.
and __________ is lesbo with __________ not
__________. she acts like she is sooooooo tough but
really no one likes her. thats why in __________ she
gets the fuck beat outta her. and she has sex in her
front yard with some 13 year old. and she had sex
with 7 dudes in the woods and they rode a train on
her. and everybody wants to beat her nasty ass
because she likes to run her mouth and she cant fight
worth shit. one day her and _______ went into the
__________ bowling alley and made out 3 times. then
she made out with _______ and
_________ she is like my mother, _______ gives
everybody she sees blow jobs and _______ is inlove
with __________. and she acts like everybody likes
her but they fucking dontttt!!! And she smells like fish!!!
APPENDIX K

MOLLY’S LITERACY VIGNETTE
Around three years when I came home from a friend's house I came to find a piece of white paper folded neatly on my table. I stared in curiosity, because this piece of paper said To: [ ] From: [ ] I sat down and unfolded the paper, and I began to read. As I read this beautiful piece of work, tears started to overpower my eyes.

It was a poem to me, from my brother. I read this poem continuously because it made me feel rather special. Just to know that my brother cared, and all the good he knew I had within. The poem made me happy for that reason, but said because he talked about me growing up. I wasn't so sure if I wanted anyone else to read it only because it was for me.

I couldn't keep it to myself. I walked downstairs where my mother was sitting in the rocking chair watching TV. She asked me "Why are you crying, what's wrong." I replied "Nothing's wrong, I just lost a poem." My mother read the poem and she smiled. She said "That's very good, maybe you should write one back to him." So that is exactly what I did.
returned from work, and I heard him come in, he stopped to talk to my mom, so I crept quietly into his room, and sat the paper on his dresser. I went back into my room and waited very patiently. I heard footsteps coming from outside my door, a slight knock then the door opened. My brother walked in, sat down beside me, then gave me a hug. We talked for almost two whole hours, about our life, about what we wanted to be. We planned everything out. I'm not so sure if it was poetry that brought us closer together or if we both were maturing at that time. Whatever it was, that day I learned things about my brother, that he cared a whole lot for me, and that one of his interests were also mine.
APPENDIX L

MOLLY’S BINDER COVER
No ones ever quit

Confused me this way!

Alien Ant Farm
APPENDIX M

MOLLY’S POETRY
Strangers In The Night

When I opened my eyes I came to see
a familiar shadow hanging o'er me,
The one that lingers around your head
while you sleep at night.
Keeps you running from more war, and helps you settle the fight.
The one who guides you when your soul is bound tight.
The one who whispers a word.
"The New Faith."

a new beginning,
shot like bullets straight to the Son.
A new journey has just begun.
A new thought behind every piece of life.
A new way to explain the things you dare.
What lies beyond the reach of reality and asks
The path you choose to walk,
Your Everything that's meant to be.
Will eventually come if you just follow me.
a peculiar hand that reaches to the me.
the fear of dying will be over soon.
The clock will tick like a bomb in
head.
Everything is easier left unsaid,
Beyond the Galaxy something impossible
see,
Seems in distance, from where I stand.
Life is better directed by hand.
It's unbelievable, but you see my God,
will direct you the way,
He'll find something new.
Forever in Eternity

Your eyes shine brighter than any star I've seen,
Your smile makes me want to move on with life,
If you ever need anything on me you lean.
My soul intertwined with yours in the night.

I believe that our hearts were meant to find,
You are the best thing that God could have offered.
I know that you are supposed to be mine,
When I met you I felt so awkward.

Coming with time I knew I'd be just fine,
You gave me the hope to move on with this,
You can tell my love for you in each line,
We can live forever in complete bliss.

So when you read this I hope that you smile,
And know that I love you all of the while.
APPENDIX N

SAMPLE PARTICIPANT LETTER
Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Kristine Pytash and I am a doctoral student at Kent State University. During the spring of 2008, I learned about your child’s literacy experiences at the Lincoln County Alternative School. I would like to continue my work with your child during this (2008-2009) school year.

If your child decides to participate, I will be observing your child at their home school. Your child will be asked to keep track of his/her reading and writing activities in a literacy log. Your child will be asked to participate in interviews regarding their reading and writing experiences, their experiences at the Lincoln County Alternative School and their experiences at their home school. I would like to audio-taped and video-tape all interviews.

I would like the opportunity to write and present my work to other interested colleagues. I plan to use my findings for academic papers, teaching, and professional writing. If your child’s responses are ever used, his/her name will be removed to ensure his/her identity remains anonymous. Taking part in this project is entirely up to you and your child and no one will hold it against you or your child if he/she decides not to do it. If your child does take part, he/she may stop at any time.

If you want to know more about this research project, please contact Kristine Pytash at kpytash@kent.edu. For more information you may contact my advisor, Dr. Denise Morgan at dmorgan2@kent.edu. This project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call Dr. John West Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies (Tel. 330-672-2704).

Thank you very much for considering participation in the research aspect of this project.

Sincerely,

Kristine Pytash
APPENDIX O

PARTICIPANTS’ AUDIO/VIDEO AND PHOTOGRAPH CONSENT FORM
Audio/Video and Photograph Consent Form  
For Parents/Guardians

I agree to allow Kristine Pytash to use my child’s interviews and discussion comments in her study. I understand that my child’s name will not be used. I agree to photographs, video-taping and audio-taping of my child. The information gathered from my child’s interviews, literacy logs, and discussions may be presented in academic papers, teaching, educational conferences, and professional writing.

By signing below, I give my consent.

__________________________________________  ____________________________________________
Signature                                              Date

Address:  
__________________________________________  ____________________________________________
__________________________________________  ____________________________________________

Phone Number:  ____________________________________________

Email (optional):  ____________________________________________
APPENDIX P

SAMPLE PARTICIPATION LETTER FOR TEACHERS
Dear Teacher,

My name is Kristine Pytash and I am a doctoral candidate at Kent State University.

I am interesting in learning about the schooling and literacy experiences of students who have attended school in an alternative school setting. In order to better understand the child with whom I am studying, I would like to interview you about your experiences with the child at school. All interviews will be audio taped.

The study builds upon current research and continued work. I hope this project will add to the field, regarding adolescent literacy. I would like the opportunity to write and present my work. I plan to use my findings for academic papers, teaching, and professional writing. If your responses are used, your name will be removed and anonymity maintained. Taking part in this project is entirely up to you and no one will hold it against you if you decide not to participate. If you do take part, you may stop at any time.

If you would like to know more about this research project, please contact me, Kristine Pytash, at kpytash@kent.edu. For more information you may contact my advisor, Dr. Denise Morgan at dmmorgan2@kent.edu. This project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call Dr. John West, Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies (Tel. 330-672-2704).

Thank you very much for considering participation in the research aspect of this project.

Sincerely,

Kristine Pytash
APPENDIX Q

TEACHERS’ AUDIO CONSENT FORM
Consent Form

I agree to allow Kristine Pytash to use my interviews and discussion comments in her study. I understand that my name will not be used. I agree to audio taping during interviews. The information gathered from my interviews and discussions may be presented in academic papers, teaching, educational conferences, and professional writing.

By signing below, I give my consent.

__________________________________________
Signature                                      Date

__________________________________________
Address:____________________________________

__________________________________________
Phone Number: ________________________________

__________________________________________
Email (optional): ______________________________
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


Moje, E. (2002b). But where are the youth? Oh the value of integrating youth culture into literacy theory. *Educational Theory, 52*(1) 97-120.


LITERATURE CITED


