“WE ALL WE GOT”: DESCRIBING AND CONNECTING FOOTBALL AND CLASSROOM FIGURED WORLDS AND LITERACIES

A dissertation submitted to the Kent State University College of Education, Health, and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Adolescents use literacies in order to build identities in a variety of figured worlds. Some identities become more powerful than others as adolescents attempt to understand and successfully utilize the valuations and literacies of the diverse figured worlds in which they participate. The goals of this study were to describe the figured worlds of football and the classroom of a highly recognized high school football program and school. My study involved four participants from the varsity football squad and the coaches and teachers who guided and shaped both figured worlds.

I used a qualitative case study design to explore each figured world and the literacies demanded from my participants. Data were gathered from observations in both the football and classroom figured worlds, interviews with my participants, their coaches, and teachers. I also studied various artifacts from both figured worlds in order to describe the valuations and literacies endemic to both.

Findings show that both figured worlds demanded key beliefs and valuations from my participants in order to gain power and positionality in each one. My study also shows that the football figured world expects players to comprehend key literacies in order to gain recognition and esteem. For some of my participants, connecting the valuations and literacies between the worlds allowed them to build strong identities in both. However, one participant was unable to take on the expected valuations and
literacies in recognizable ways in the classroom figured world, and as a result, was unable to build a strong identity there.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Years ago, when my friend Marcia graduated and received her Ph.D., she hosted a “Village Party.” She framed the festivities not as a graduation party but as a celebration of her village of family and friends and their contributions to her success. Throughout my own Ph.D. journey, I tried to remain mindful of those people who were sacrificing on my behalf. I owe so much to so many!

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Thanks for keeping a future vision in front of me when I couldn’t see it myself. Thanks to Dave and Linda; you are my life-long friends who continue to carry me on your shoulders when I need it most. My life is rich due to your friendship. Thanks to the numerous graduate school friends who walked and struggled with me. Your presence and empathy has been invaluable! Thanks to Mary; you are my friend who was willing to read my entire dissertation and give feedback for no other reason than your investment in my life. My village friends include many colleagues too. Marilyn, you have been a faithful friend and compatriot in this journey. Thank you for your ear and mind! Kim and Mallory, you carried me across the finish line when I could barely walk on my own. Thank you for your belief in me! For the innumerable teachers who have asked questions and followed my work, I thank you for your investment. You are all amazing!

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for being one of the first professors to encourage my interests in figured worlds and identity. Thanks for the invitation, long ago, to the identity study group. I had no idea where it would lead me. Many thanks to you, Dr. William Bintz, who continued to express sheer joy and enthusiasm for my research topic and questions. Thank you for keeping the excitement for me.

My hope is that the village of people who are touched by this project will continue to grow. While the people mentioned have been vital in creating and sustaining the project from its inception, I now hope that thoughtful teachers and researchers will deepen their value of adolescents’ literacies and identities, especially those related to their passions out-of-school. I also desire that teachers and researchers would find ways to extend these ideas and invite more and more adolescents into constructing meaningful identities within the classroom and school walls.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION TO “THE CENTER OF THE FOOTBALL UNIVERSE”

For avid football lovers, August brings two-a-day practices and the sounds of whistles piercing the air alongside of clashing helmets. Amidst this backdrop, the attention of these fans rivets to Tresselton, Ohio, where professional football began and where the sport is revered. Each year, the end of the summer ushers in the enshrinement of beloved professional football players into the National Football, located in proximity to Tresselton. The Hall of Fame Festival activities and Enshrinement end each summer with a spotlight on football that influences everyone in the Northeastern Ohio region. As a result, local high school football players tend to cast their own expectations toward participating in these events one day.

A catalyst for that dream stems from the local Tresselton community. Taft High School has a proud tradition of football achievement, with many of its players participating in Division I collegiate teams and even some players fulfilling the ultimate dream and being recruited by professional teams. The Tresselton and Taft High School community believe they are a key part of in the constellation of American football.

Ten years after moving to Tresselton, I found myself as the literacy coach at Taft High School. I, along with other faculty members, wondered about the intense focus on football success. It seemed clear that being a Taft football player outranked other identities Taft adolescents might be building. For example, I heard many stories of promising players being trained from a young age to excel in high school football. Many of the players were targeted by the community and as a result participated in some type of
football program since elementary school. Community groups held special breakfasts and lunches for the players, and the boys were often given gifts of shoes or equipment if they were unable to purchase the needed items themselves. Teachers would reserve special smiles for key players, and everyone would rehash Friday night’s game on Monday morning, as if the entire school and community had thought of nothing else for the entire weekend.

Due to this perceived, hyper-focus on football and my own study of literacies and identity, I began to ask questions in my mind about these players. I began to wonder if they pursued and found success with classroom-based literacies as much as they pursued and found success with football-related literacies. I wondered if, as a result of these literacies, they identified more strongly as an athlete or a student, and why. I wondered if the community encouraged classroom success and identification with a zeal equal to football success.

These questions became more concrete when a specific instance drew conflict between the athletes, their teachers, and administrators. According to their coach, CJ, the team captains had chosen a theme for the year and designed t-shirts for the team to wear at school. The theme was, “Family. We all we got.” The team captains believed that this slogan spoke to the deep connections they felt to each other as a team. This theme was printed on the back of the t-shirts with the Panther mascot on the front. As soon as the players wore these t-shirts within the school day, they drew immediate reaction from teachers.

One teacher angrily fired off this email on the staff and faculty listserv:
“‘Family, We all we got.’ Really? This is our signature phrase? Let's give the public more ammunition to hate public schools” (October 14, 2010)

Another teacher quickly responded: “The English Department volunteers for proofreading duty. In this political climate, even the seemingly innocuous can have serious consequences” (October 14, 2010).

Clearly neither teacher was supportive of the grammar involved in the team’s chosen slogan. Many other teachers responded with similar comments, and the halls were filled with chatter about the players’ motto. Later that month, the superintendent got involved and asked the coach to collect all the t-shirts from the students and then send them to her office. She did not believe the team should be wearing them because the slogan was not grammatically correct. The team was censored, and the t-shirts were taken.

Observing these events as a faculty member continued to raise questions of literacy to my mind. In what ways could their football context, the expectations, rules, and prescribed behaviors, be described? In what ways could their classroom context be described? What literacy skills were required or assumed in both realms? Were their identities influenced by having their football literacy, their motto that reflected their values, censored by the classroom teachers and administration? Did the players perceive a gap between the literacies they used and thrived with on the football field and the literacies they used in the classroom? If so, what were the implications and ramifications of that gap? How could athletes be invited to excel in both areas? Answering these types of questions became the driving force in developing this study.
The Questions Form the Study

These questions of socially embedded literacies and identity drove me to further observe and discuss this situated context and actively engage with its participants. The purpose of this dissertation is to first describe the context of Taft High School football and the context of the Taft High School classroom and then to investigate the literacies these athletes use in each area. Using a case study design, four varsity football players became key informers for me while I observed them in both realms of activity and involvement. In describing the two worlds, this study explores what literacies are used in each specific social area of Taft football and Taft classrooms, and what literacy connections and/or disconnections are experienced by the study’s participants as they move through both contexts building and shifting their identities. I first discuss the study within its broader, theoretical foundations then move into discussing significance of this research.

Framing the Study

Adolescents are deeply and emotionally involved in creating their identities as they move through their daily lives and participate in a variety of social contexts including in and out-of-school activities, family interactions, and community organizations (Jimenez, Smith, & Martinez-Leon, 2003; McCarthy & Moje, 2002). In this search for identity they develop specific literacies that involve not only skills such as reading and writing but also speaking, listening, and viewing language and artifacts. These skills must be learned and negotiated as the adolescents move through multiple social contexts.
Effectively utilizing these literacies can determine adolescents’ admittance or dismissal in certain social groups, contexts, or imagined worlds as well as the status they hold within the group. This identity-related tension increases as adolescents move through a variety of contexts that demand the mastery of very different literacy skills and understanding. To describe this tension, I first explain the social construction of multiple literacies. Then I explain the concept of identity and the theory of figured world where identity can be built and actualized as literacies are practiced and incorporated.

**Social Construction of Multiple Literacies**

Literacy cannot be effectively studied outside of its social context (Gee, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). To be literate in any society means an individual can communicate and receive meaningful messages. Many contemporary literacy researchers view literacy as not only the ability to read and write printed text; they believe it also involves design knowledge, integration, and construction (Gee, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1984). These researchers posit that adolescents, as they interact and engage in multiple cultures and contexts, are actively learning many types of literacy skills as they begin to construct their lives and identities.

Adolescence is a time of discovery and building identities and independence. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that culture influences identity development during this time. He claimed adolescents tend to accept, discard, incorporate, or translate a variety of literacies based on their changing and emerging social contexts. Due to this vacillation and flexibility, the complexity of the modern world, and the various ways our worlds shift due to economic and social changes, identity, much like literacy, becomes multiple,
flexible, and hybrid. Therefore, adolescents are actively sorting and utilizing a variety of literacies in order to build multiple identities within their social environments (Gee, 1992, 1996; Lewis & del Valle, 2009; McCarthy & Moje, 2002).

**Identity**

Describing the adolescent, identity-building process requires the consideration of multiple individual and societal influences. When an adolescent forms an identity, he or she constructs a complex equation that considers both the personal and psychological along with the social, cultural situation. This construction is complex due to the diverse individual and societal aspects that are considered, taken up, or discarded by an adolescent. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) framed the study of identities not as a psychological and social dichotomy, but as multiple and shifting, combining both psychological and social influences. They stated, “Identity is a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 5). Individuals can construct identities by adapting to personal and societal influences, in both mundane and strategic ways, in order to create a generative space for self-definition and association. In this way, an individual’s active agency is utilized in the identity-forming process. While a person can improvise through individual agency to construct his or her identity, those actions or behaviors need to be recognized or valued by those already embedded within the desired culture. Literacy and identity researchers Ma and Singer-Gabella (2011) emphasized “context and recognition” (p. 9). Individuals who attempt to construct an identity within a specific context need to employ and utilize actions, behavior, and or speech that are
recognized by others. Without the ability to adapt to specific norms and values of a social realm, an individual will have a difficult time developing an identity with any type of power or positionality, a recognized place of importance (Holland et al., 1998), in specific contexts. Due to the vastly different social situations an individual may encounter, this view would hold that one could shape multiple identities that had the potential to be enacted in multiple contexts. Identities are developed from various social contexts and often demand different, situated ways of reading, speaking, learning, and meaning-making (Gee, 1992, 1996; McCarthy & Moje, 2002) in order to be recognized and validated by other members in a situated context.

Holland et al. (1998) labeled these multiple cultural contexts that an individual experiences as figured worlds. They defined figured worlds as “a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (p. 52). Drawing from contextualized literacy studies such as Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Heath (1983), Holland et al. (1998) stated that these figured worlds can demand different ways of being literate and they often afford an individual certain positionality and power based on the strength and accurate enactment of the identity within the figured world. Because they are socially constructed entities, figured worlds are political in nature with some participants obtaining more power based on their positionality than others. As adolescents are building their identities, they must be able to interpret and negotiate the positionality and power systems that structure each figured world in which they participate.
Statement and Significance of the Problem

Multiple Literacies

Past literacy and identity studies have mainly focused on print literacies; however, contemporary literacy and identity studies have pointed to literacies that include visual and symbolic design and production. These studies support Street’s (1984) thesis that there is not an autonomous model of literacy; that is, there is not one, standardized way to be literate across embedded, situated cultures. To include athletics in a literacy and identity study, a wider understanding of ‘literacies’ must be taken into account. The New London Group (1996) documented the various ways that technology and the economy have changed the literacies adolescents need in order to be successful. This group of scholars pointed to the multiple literacy skills that are demanded of adolescents including elements of design along with visual and even kinesthetic literacy.

Citing the New London Group (1996), Richardson (2009) furthered the idea that literacy is socially constructed and not only bound to print text. As a result, the study of spoken and other symbolic language can be framed as literacy study. Adolescents ought to be introduced and inducted to a variety of multiliteracies that they may need in contemporary society. These include ‘reading’ visual symbols in addition to viewing and creating integrated designs. Students need to learn how to comprehend and utilize these multiple literacies in order to successfully participate in their changing world (Fishekerkeller, 2000; Kist, 2000).

This expanded definition of being literate allows athletic or football literacies to be studied alongside of the more traditional academic literacies because it values forms of
communication in addition to the transmission and expression of knowledge that is not necessarily print-based.

**Embedded Multiple Literacies and Figured World Identities**

Due to the complexity of literacies used and the tensions this age group often experiences in contemporary society many social realms, or figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) of adolescents have been studied by literacy and identity researchers. Literacy researchers have found that there are multiple ways adolescents are literate outside of school regardless of their experiences throughout the school day. Many students, whether they are defined as academically successful or not, often build literate identities outside of school walls (Alvermann, 2001; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Knobel, 2001). These literate identities are constructed in a variety of social settings. For example, Lewis and Fabos (2000) articulated the unique way that adolescents read and write with Instant Messaging (IM) outside of school demands. Moje (2002) showed how gangsta adolescents are literate within their chosen, situated culture of gang life. Mirroring the variety of identities that can be built by this age, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, and Queer) youth and their literate identities have been studied (Blackburn, 2002/2003). In addition to these situated studies, the literacy and resulting identity that comes from video gaming participation have also been investigated (Gee, 2003). Many of these literacies are utilized within imagined worlds without physical boundaries. For example, the video gaming world is ‘figured’ by people enacting specific roles and behaviors that are embedded with meaning known and understood only by other players. Often gamers do not share the same physical social context; however, the expectations
and artifacts used within that world are specific and understood by the gamers. They are participating in the same figured world together without physical boundaries or contexts.

**Adolescent Male Literacy and Identity**

Past literacy and identity studies have focused on adolescent males (Hinchman, Payne-Bourcy, Thomas, & Chandler-Olcott, 2002; Rice, 2011). Many adolescents form identities based on their extracurricular involvement throughout high school, participating and spending much of their free time within the athletic, musical, or even dramatic figured world. This time spent, the learning that is done, and the identities that are built, may have a dynamic influence on adolescents in this developmental stage. These studies have shown the various ways the athletes use literacies in and out of school and how those literacies indicate their values and belief systems as they are developing. Working within this framework, Mahiri (1991, 1994) has studied literacies utilized within a community youth basketball program while highlighting the benefits of understanding the speech and interaction that is valued by the youth. His studies provide a pattern that both esteems the youths’ identities involved in a specific program (the community youth basketball program) in addition to analyzing the specific literacies used there.

Researchers have also analyzed the identity of college athletes in a variety of settings with an array of purposes. Adler and Adler (1991) focused on the question of language and identity embedded in a premiere college basketball program. Other studies focused on collegiate African Americans and the tensions they feel as they build athletic identity (Beamon, 2010; Harrison, Sailes, Rotich, & Bimper, 2011; Singer, 2005, 2009). Mahiri (2009) focused on college students who were athletic scholars as he investigated
the tensions of being both a collegiate athlete and scholar. Together with his participants, he analyzed and discussed the inherent tensions between being recognized for your body and its athletic capabilities and your mind with its intellectual capabilities. While these studies have spanned a range of focus, they have, in some way, investigated the connection of athletic literacy and identity. There has been, however, a lack of literacy and identity studies on high school football athletes in particular, especially those embedded in a culture and community that highly exalts football participation and celebrity.

**Literacies in Two Figured Worlds**

In describing the figured world of football and the classroom at Taft High School alongside the literacies found there, I need to differentiate between a social context and a figured world. Holland et al. (1998) described a figured world as an imagined, as-if world. Whereas Taft High School is an actual physical space with multiple contexts, in order to analyze the figured worlds, I examine the literacies, meanings, and expected valuations and beliefs that are acted out within the social context and physical space.

**Football figured world.** Football athletes, especially those who have grown up in a culture saturated with football lore and celebration, often obtain football knowledge and literacies as part of their first socialization. Often football players nurtured within a football community are taught how to ‘read’ and view a variety of football plays, skills, and behavior by significant family and community members from a young age. The conversation and analysis of football is found around dinner tables, front porch discussions, and youth league games. Money, time, and effort are built into sustaining
football participation and dreams of young men who are raised in this type of culture; therefore, their first ‘ways of being’ (Heath, 1983) in the world at least partially encompass these literacies to varying degrees. Early on in their lives these young men are taught the esteemed role of coaches, the sacredness of the football history and participation. Stated and unstated, they are taught elements of the football figured world.

**Classroom figured world.** In a high school classroom, students have specific roles to fulfill and expectations to meet. At Taft, content area teachers expect a type of standardization of skills for all students. These expected skills would include using and comprehending Standardized English through assignments and conversations. Taken as a composite, the classroom figured world would also rely on classic definitions of reading and writing print text as the primary literacy focus.

For some high school athletes, traditional literacies used within the classroom may be perceived as different from the literacies they use within their athletic activities. These literacies that they must develop through the support of various resources such as parents, coaches, teachers, and even their own individual initiative may at times feel in conflict with the literacies involved in the football figured world. For some high school athletes, classroom literacies have not been a part of their athletic socialization; therefore, if they wish to construct identity within the classroom, these athletes must discover and learn how to read, write, speak, or listen in different ways that build success in school. Their ability to do this in recognizable ways greatly alters their power and positionality within classrooms and in turn affects their identity within that world. This study focuses
on football literacies and how certain players use literacies within the football and classroom figured worlds.

**The Need to Focus on Athletic Adolescents and Their Literacies**

To accentuate the need to study high school football players and their literacy practices, Moje (2002, 2008) stated that more youth voices need to be central to literacy study, and she argues that the lack of these studies could mislead policy makers and educators regarding the literacies youths build and employ.

Moje (2002) stated:

This lack of attention to youth literacy, across educational theory, research, practice, and policy venues, points to unstated assumptions among literacy theorists and policymakers alike that little occurs in the literacy development of youth, that little learning about literacy occurs as youth make use of literacy tools to navigate, resist, construct, and reconstruct popular, academic, and work cultures. (p. 98)

She indicated that studying the nature of adolescents’ in and out of school reading and writing will help us analyze how youths undertake these demands and make sense of them.

Jimenez et al. (2003) called for future literacy research to expand outside of the classic definition of reading and writing due to contemporary focus on design and alternative literacies. Research that describes how adolescents use various literacies ought to turn attention to the ways literacies interact with identities both in and out-of-school (Jimenez et al., 2003, p. 506). Research dedicated to these adolescent voices and
to the goal of hearing how they describe their literacies is important to gain insight into the variety of students found within high school classrooms today.

Even the International Reading Association has begun to address the question of football athletes and the stereotypes they hold in our larger culture in the United States. In the June/July 2011 issue of Reading Today, a review of a speech from Tony Dungy highlighted the ways football players are literate and expert in specific types of literacy. Dungy, a successful NFL coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Indianapolis Colts, stated that football players are not most often cut from the team based on their athletic ability. He said, “They get cut because they cannot process information fast enough” (“A connection between literacy and football,” 2011, p. 15). He also pointed out that much of a football athlete’s time is not spent practicing on the field. According to Dungy, a majority of the athlete’s time is spent “reading, analyzing, and critiquing scouting reports, game films, and other materials” (p. 15). Although Dungy is focusing on the professional athlete, this analysis and critique shows that football literacies require a high level of thinking ability and listening skills; however, these thinking demands are not often studied or recognized within the stereotype of the high school athlete, a fact recognized by the Reading Today reviewer.

Based on the lack of literacy studies concentrated on high school football athletes and a persistent literate stereotype of football players in general, a study such as this one is needed. This study is focused on identifying and describing the literacies that these athletes use within their football activities and their classroom activities. This type of study answers Moje’s (2002, 2008) call to place adolescents at the center of literacy study
and offers a constructive response to the stereotypes that may follow any football player. It also has the potential to offer meaningful literacy skills connections to identity concerns for literacy researchers, teachers, and high school football players.

**Purpose of the Study**

As contemporary teachers and educators, my professional colleagues and I need to be concerned about how our students form literate identities and to pay attention to the various ways adolescents are literate in a variety of settings. We need to understand how and why they use different literacies because as Gee (1996) stated, “Literacy—of whatever type—only has consequences as it acts together with a large number of other social factors, including political and economic conditions, social structure, and local ideologies” (p. 58). A study such as this, which attempts to describe the figured world surrounding the literacy use and identity development, gives a more holistic depiction of the factors involved with specific literacy practices.

By understanding the skills and behaviors that are built in one cultural realm, or figured world, we may positively affect how these high school football athletes acquire and learn the skills and behaviors of another cultural or embedded situations. By listening and studying how these high school football athletes articulate and utilize the literacies of a situated football figured world and the literacies of classrooms, we can build an understanding of how they transfer or negotiate their literacy skills from one ‘world’ to the next and how that does or does not influence their identities.

Understanding how our adolescent students negotiate and utilize a variety literacies in their daily lives will enable our schools and teachers to build more effective relationships
and create more inviting learning environments. Finally, this study of literacies use will also enable literacy researchers another opportunity to explore the various ways adolescents develop their literate identities.

We can learn where and how students experience connections and/or disconnections between the football and classroom figured worlds, and how they describe their resulting positionality, power, and identity in each area. By hearing and studying their voices, we can develop a better understanding of how they are actively involved in building (or deconstructing) these literacies and identities because learning in school intimately involves the continuing negotiation between teacher and student identity construction and maintenance (Vadeboncoeur, Vellos, & Goessling, 2011). Studies that analyze both literacy and identity have the potential to enlarge educational invitation for all students (Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street, 2009); therefore, this study provides an important lens to potentially enhance the education of more diverse students and their interests.

How do these athletes develop, use, and navigate the literacies of the football figured world and the literacies of their classroom figured world? This study closely examines the connections and/or disconnections the players experience between these two realms. To achieve this purpose and due to the specificity of the football and classroom figured worlds within my study, I first articulate and describe basic elements and characteristics of each world as I studied them with my participants. This description allows the literacy findings to be clearly embedded within the situated figured world characteristics and expectations.
Research Questions

Through observation, interviews, and the study of artifacts, I investigated how the participants described the Taft High School football figured world and the literacies they use there through six research questions. I also examined the Taft High School classroom figured world and the literacies they used there. Then together with the participants, I attempted to articulate and describe the connections and/or disconnections they felt as they moved between these worlds.

First I describe the Taft High School football figured world in order to answer the following research questions:

1. What literacies do participants use in the football figured world?
2. What characteristics of the football figured world influence the literacies there?

Second, I describe the Taft High School classroom figured world in order to answer these research questions:

1. What literacies do participants use in the classroom figured world?
2. What characteristics of the classroom figured world influence the literacies there?

Finally, I address the remaining research questions:

1. What connections, disconnections, or tensions do the participants experience as they move between the two worlds?
2. In what ways do these experiences shape their identity-building process?
The Study’s Organization

In this dissertation, I first discuss the social embeddedness of multiple literacies. Then I describe Holland et al.’s (1998) theory of figured world and its connection to my study. Chapter 3 articulates the qualitative case study design as well as my data collection and data analysis procedures. In chapter 4, I briefly introduce the participants, and then I describe the figured worlds and contextual setting of Taft football and of Taft’s classrooms. In chapter 5, I analyze the literacies my participants most utilize in each figured world and the connections and disconnections they find between the two. Chapter 6 summarizes the findings and discusses the implications this research has for researchers, high school teachers, coaches, and athletes.

Definition of Terms

_Figured World:_ “A socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52).

_Identity:_ “The way a certain person acts in a certain situation” (Gee, 1996, 2000/2001). Identity is metadiscursive and negotiated within social situations (Lewis & del Valle, 2009; Moje et al., 2009). “Identities are a key means through which people care about and care for what is going on around them” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 5).

_Literacy:_ More than reading and writing, literacy includes how one views, visually represents, speaks, or hears. It also includes the reading and writing of design and symbols, not necessarily only letters and words (Jimenez et al., 2003; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1984).
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In my review of literature, I discuss two main research areas that inform my study. First, I frame literacy as socially constructed and embedded through discussing studies that define literacies as multiple, dynamic, and not only print-based. Within this discussion I highlight ways adolescents use literacies both in and out of school. Secondly, I explore Holland et al.’s (1998) theory of identity, its connection to figured worlds, and how the study of figured worlds and literacies can connect.

Social Construction of Literacy

This study is grounded in the theory that literacy is learned and acted out in specific social contexts. That is, culture and context shape what is learned (Vygotsky, 1978). If culture changes, learning changes. Within these social contexts and specific cultural demands, language is a primary tool for learning and literacy. Without a social setting, language could not be recognized to gain or communicate knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, learning and literacy are dynamically tied to social contexts. Studying the football literacies and learning within the athletic social space, and the academic literacies and learning within the social space of school, depends on this social construction of learning (Finders, 1997; Wertsch, 1991).

Because contemporary individuals participate in a variety of social contexts and spaces, researchers such as Heath (1983) and Street (1984) began to study the various ways individuals are literate in different contexts. As a result, their findings moved the conceptualization of literacies away from the ‘autonomous model’ of literacy. In this
model, literacy was conceived as a set of skills that could be learned in isolation, away from context. Different people use literacy in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons in order to effectively communicate and learn in their surroundings (Heath, 1983; Street 1984). Their studies also moved literacy understanding away from only print-based texts and suggest that literacy and learning encompasses more than reading and writing. Other skills such as speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing are all used in unique ways, dependent on the social situation and cultural models. With his study on videogaming culture, Gee (2003) also agreed that modern society, with its dependence on signs, symbols, graphs, and other types of visual artifacts, in addition to the design qualities utilized for these visual symbols, stretches the idea of literacy wider than only considering ‘print literacy’ in the form of linguistic representation. It allows for the idea that symbols can be “read” and visual design can also embed meaning within certain contexts and to communicate knowledge.

The New London Group (1996), who designed *Pedagogy for Multiliteracies*, also utilized the social construction of learning and literacy to frame their conversation on multiple literacies demanded from contemporary society. They stated, “Our view of mind, society and learning is based on the assumption that the human mind is embodied, situated, and social. That is, human knowledge is embedded in social, cultural and material contexts” (p. 30). In other words, “ways of knowing” are dynamically tied to the time and space surrounding an individual. The reality that is lived out by individuals is situated and culturally bound. Gee (1992) also stated that learning and meaning cannot
be studied outside of a social context. The embeddedness of meaning is not found within an individual’s brain; it is found within the cultural models that surround the individual.

Social contexts greatly shape the literacies that are utilized by individuals. As individuals learn and communicate within multiple social situations, they develop a variety of literacies that include not only reading and writing but also speaking, listening, viewing and visually representing. This study is constructed with this connection regarding the social construction of learning and multiple literacies alongside of how these connections build identity in adolescents.

**Adolescents and Socially Constructed Literacy and Identity Studies**

Adolescence is difficult to define because it is a socially constructed term. What might be constructed as the time between childhood and adulthood would be very different from the United States or Bangkok or rural India. In the United States, the concept of adolescence, ranging from the ages of 13-19, evolves from an ‘in-between’ space, believing one is neither a child or an adult (Christenbury, Bomer, & Smagorinsky, 2009). Since my study is embedded within the United States, I use this definition and conceptualization of the social constructed time period of adolescence.

Adolescents engage a plethora of social contexts on a daily basis. These contexts involve recognizable institutions such as school; however, they can also include more virtual contexts such as video game groups ranging across geographical locations. As a result, literacy, which has historically been viewed as the ability to read and write mostly linguistic print, has a broader definition based on a larger variety of skills. With the advancement of technology and the transient nature of our society, being literate involves
more than a simple ability to read and write. It includes the ability to design and ‘read’ symbols in unique communication situations (New London Group, 1996). This wider literate opportunity greatly enhances contemporary adolescents and their ability to create and communicate language and literacy of various types as they transverse their everyday, technology-infused lives, which allows for multiple identity-building opportunities (Gee, 2003).

Literacy and identity studies reflect this movement and change in the conception of literacy. While literacy and identity studies were first focused on how literacies symbolized difference of cultural contexts, much contemporary literacy and identity studies frame literacies and resulting identities as negotiated, metadiscursive, and spatial (Lewis & del Valle, 2009). These studies framed literacy and identity processes as complex and multifaceted involving a variety of discursive elements while also highlighting the ways in which technology can be involved as adolescents engage in literacies in virtual ‘spaces’. This shift was dramatic and opened opportunities for studies like mine to further our knowledge of how adolescents’ use of multiple literacies are connected to the identities they are forming.

Moving the concept of literacy away from the autonomous set of skills model to a more multiliteracy and social view (Gee, 1996; New London Group, 1996) and framing identity as multiple and negotiable revolutionized literacy and identity studies both in and out-of-school (Hull & Schultz, 2002). As a result, many adolescent researchers have studied the ways adolescents enact and develop their literacies within specific social settings (Alvermann, 2001; Black, 2005; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Faulkner,
These researchers have taken time to show the adolescents’ expertise both in and out-of-school and with what has been considered standard and non-standard literacies. These include literacies involving groups such as gangs (Moje, 2000b) and even Instant Messaging (Lewis & Fabos, 2005).

Moje (2000b) looked at ‘gangsta’ literacy that was used by her adolescent participants. She was able to discover and articulate the various literacies gang members use to show membership and participation in the ‘rules’ and mores of gang life. The explicit way the gang members acted, signed, and spoke were connected to their membership in the specific social group. In a similar way, MacGillivray and Curwen (2007) researched the literacy that was used by ‘tagging’ practices, and Kirkland and Jackson (2009) studied the framing of ‘coolness’ as they studied their participants acting out their literacies and identities as Black males. In their study of Instant Messaging, Lewis and Fabos (2005) found that their participants follow specific rules and produce a variety of literacies by using symbols and abbreviations that are accepted and recognized within the IMing world. These studies show that the literate identities being constructed are performative and discursive in nature while also being flexible for an adolescent.

Furthering the study of the situated nature of literacy and identity, Ogbu (2003) studied the African American community in Shaker Heights, Ohio. He attempted to articulate why the African American adolescents did not seem to succeed academically equally to the Caucasian community adolescents. He theorized that African American adolescents were not succeeding in school because success might be considered “acting
white” or identifying with a historically recognized ‘white’ institution. His explanation of community and historical influences on school-based literacy reflect socially constructed literacy and practices. The adolescents in his study seemed to be disregarding academic literacy, which they believed clashed with other literacies and identity values their community espoused. His research provides a descriptive lens to understand how language and literacy is socially embedded within this community. All the above studies also show that many adolescents develop or shun literacy expertise in and out-of-school, and they have multiple reasons for doing so based on the identities they are interested in creating and sustaining.

Understanding the interplay of literacy practices and the identity they can shape can also be found within studies focused on boys and reading. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) and Brozo (2010) have studied the literacy lives of boys and what engages them, or not, about school, literacy, and especially reading. They have found that often boys are not engaged with reading in school because they do not feel connected to the material being studied. They do not perceive a connection to their interests, activity, and identities outside of school. Their studies show that when this connection is made, most boys will engage with reading. These researchers advocate that schools and teachers need to consider how boys identify with texts when inviting them into literature and literacy activities.

Rice (2011) focused on the literate identities of adolescent boys, and she pointed out that since identities are often observed and framed as ‘difference’ or resistance to another identity, boys’ literacy practices are not always viewed in a positive light,
especially within the context of school-based literacies. Her narrative study, which focused on adolescent boys’ literate identity, attempted to build a broader understanding of how boys are literate and how they build identities out of those literate practices. While this study provides a storied way of framing and describing young men’s literacies and identity, it does not specifically target athletes and the negotiation or connections they may encounter when moving between the athletic and academic realms of their high school experience.

Mahiri (1991, 1994) has written extensively about sports’ general discourse and how participation may influence adolescent and adult identity. For example, through a discourse analysis study, Mahiri (1994) articulated the ways the “coaching circle” discourse, which was used in a neighborhood basketball program, could be implemented by classroom teachers for more African American academic success. While Mahiri’s studies focused on how elements of sports discourse influenced adolescents’ lives, he did not address high school football players’ identities with a particular figured world and multiple literacies lens.

The recognition of these socially constructed literacy practices and their interplay with adolescent identity is important to my study because it builds a historical path to use when considering the various literacy demands athletics and academics can make on high school football players as they build their literate identity through participation.

**Identity Theory and Figured World**

My second research area focuses on studies that combine both identity and literacy in an individual’s or group’s life. Literacy researchers began integrating identity
theory within their studies as they continued to recognize how intimately the social situation influences one’s literacy and learning. Identity theorists Holland et al. (1998) defined identity as a construct that is negotiated within social settings and groups, which again emphasizes the social embeddedness of a person’s identity. Using social and social psychological concepts, Holland (2003) stated, “Social identities are locally innovated and improvised both from discourses and practices authorized by powerful translocal institutions and from popular imaginaries widely circulating in everyday talk and in commonly available media” (p. 31). Their definition shows the complexity of influences in the identity-building process.

Identities are dynamic, socially constructed performances that are enacted within specific social situations. They are both derived from and driven by cultural models found within institutions, media, and imagined realms of division and inclusion. In other words, identities can be built and connected by individuals in a variety of situations and settings (Gee, 1996, 2000/2001, 2003). An individual both acts upon and is restricted within his or her cultural environment, interpretations, and ultimately, figured world.

Furthering his definition of identity, Gee (1996) stated, “By ‘identity’ we mean the way a person understands and views himself and is often viewed by others, at least in certain situations—a perception of self that can be fairly constantly achieved” (p. 68). These identities that are built affect how one acts in individual figured worlds and how he is recognized or is given access or power within each figured world.

Holland et al.’s (1998) research highlighted the ways that an individual’s identity is often shaped by the values and mores of a social, situated context, and his or her
identity construction is influenced by both psychological and social aspects; however, those individuals can also show agency within those somewhat socially “prescribed” identities. Key literacy researchers such as Moje et al. (2009) and Lewis and Del Valle (2009) recognized that identities are “social, fluid, and recognized” (Moje et al., 2009, p. 419). With this concentration on the social aspect of identity, this definition builds on the conceptual frame with a socially constructed understanding. Identity must be recognized, which would indicate a social context.

Gee’s (2003) research that connected video gaming and literacy has been very influential due to the construct of “affinity group” which is helpful vocabulary to describe how and why groups gather around specific social contexts and domains, why they enact specific roles, and how their identities are built as a result of their participation. Within these specific social contexts and within affinity groups, Gee (1996) pointed out that, “Words have no meaning in and of themselves and by themselves apart from other words. They have meanings only relative to choices (by speakers and writer) and guesses (by hearers and readers) about other words and assumptions about contexts” (p. 76). With this in mind, it is important to study words and entire language use and literacies within situated contexts to gain a fuller understanding of those ‘worlds’.

Due to this recognition of the elasticity of identities, these literacy and sociolinguistic researchers emphasize a ‘tension’ or even the ‘work’ that is involved in building and acting out an identity. Often this work is done within an as-if realm that Holland et al. (1998) have termed figured world. As-if realms encompass those roles and rules that are both historically and currently supported within specific cultural settings.
For example, a ‘professor’ has specific roles to enact and perform within collegiate settings that are quite different than the roles expected from a department secretary. While invisible, the expectations and enactments are connected to perceived positionality and socio-history of each job’s responsibilities. These socially constructed ‘places’ that both constrain and provide opportunities are figured worlds, peopled by individuals, expectations, and tasks (Holland et al., 1998).

**Figured World**

Holland et al.’s (1998) concept of figured world is important as I study the ‘world’ of football at Taft and the world of the classroom that the players experience. Holland et al. defined a figured world in this way: “By ‘figured world,’ then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (p. 52). That is, a figured world is a social context with culturally shaped ways of acting and thinking that are esteemed over others.

As stated above, this ‘as-if realm’ noted as figured world can be both stated or unstated or have clearly demarcated or imaginary boundaries. For example, a figured world could be made up of video gamers who reside in different parts of the world but connect via technology to play their games. While engaged in the video gaming figured world, these players take on specific roles and behaviors that are expected and recognized, even from a literal distance. They understand what would influence the recruitment, retention, and enactments of their members and what actions would qualify
as being part of the “in” group and what actions would be situated participants on the outside of that world.

While the space of a figured world is not always physical, this imaginary realm is not ahistorical. Each figured world holds certain expectations based on past behaviors and established beliefs that may or may not be apparent to members trying to access this ‘as-if’ realm. For example, actors within the video gaming figured world learn that many elements and behaviors are prefigured, that is certain roles have an historic expectation that outlines the boundaries of what is acceptable within that specific world. An individual trying to gain access and position within that video gaming world must not transgress those boundaries in order to be granted admission.

Robinson (2007) also gave a helpful definition of figured world in his study. He stated, “Another way to describe this fashioning of self is that figured worlds, as a context of meaning, enables individuals to ‘figure out’ who they are within this context” (p. 193). This idea makes the connection between figured worlds and identity construction even more concrete by defining figured world as the context in which identities are built.

Certain figured world studies have built on Holland et al.’s (1998) theory in a variety of ways (Blackburn, 2002/2003; Hatt, 2007; Ma & Singer-Gabella, 2011; Robinson, 2007; B.C. Rubin, 2007; Street, 2008; Urrieta, Martin, & Robinson, 2011). In-school studies have investigated the figured world of reform-minded classrooms (Blackburn, 2002/2003; Ma & Singer-Gabella, 2011; Robinson, 2007). Blackburn (2002/2003) used an out-of-school setting in order to find how her subjects built a figured
world in their teen center that allowed for acceptance and disruptions of what it meant to be an LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, & Queer) adolescent. Blackburn argued that the ways these teens chose to identify and use their literacy is important to understanding who they are and who they want to become. In a similar way, Urrieta et al. (2011) focused on how their participants articulated the hybrid figured world of prison and college as they were pursuing their college degrees while incarcerated.

Figured world studies often look at how an individual’s behavior actively constructs meaningful identity within specific contexts (Hatt, 2007; Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007a, 2007b). These contexts can involve family interactions and culture, community groups, or groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Elements of these figured worlds consist of artifacts, discourse, and identity (Hatt, 2007). When describing these elements, Hatt defined artifacts as “semiotic mediators.” These are symbols or means by which the figured world is represented or evoked by the participants or learners. Discourse is the means and/or method by which the artifacts are ‘displayed,’ shared, or understood within the group. Identity is the element that is altered by the participation, acceptance and/or rejection, and subjectivities culturally and situationally bound within a specific social context (Urrieta, 2007a, 2007b).

When observing and analyzing a figured world, power and positionality must be taken into consideration according to Holland et al.’s (1998) figured world model. Clearly, a figured world will have those who have mastered the skills, language, and literacies demanded and others who occupy the fringes due to ability, time, or engagement with the figured world. The positionality of individuals within the figured
world determines the power of each member. The “place” where an individual finds herself influences how she sees herself and how others perceive her role and distinction. This perception or recognition of position and power ultimately influences the ability of an individual to author an identity within that specific figured world. This conceptual framing allows me a way to pragmatically situate the positionality of individual players within the football team and/or within the academic classroom. It also allows me to see the team and the classroom as a learning community and the positionality of my participants within that community. The power and positionality of an individual within a figured world will often influence identity formation there. For my study, analyzing my participants within their specific high school context allows me to describe and delineate the ways that these young men are “constrained and enabled” (Dimitriadis, 2005) by the various worlds they participate in both through their choice (football) and through state law (school).

This study focuses on the high school football athletes and the ways they describe the figured world of football and the classroom at Taft High School. The study also investigates what literacies they use within both worlds. Finally, I investigate any connections or disconnections the participants find between the two worlds’ literacy demands.

**Summary**

Due to a continued research focus on the social construction of learning and literacy, the historical model of literacy has morphed into a constellation of socially embedded skills that can be flexible, highly adaptable and can affect how contemporary
adolescents identify with peers, teachers, coaches, and parents. When studying adolescents within their meaningful contexts, their acceptance or disruption of literacies must also be observed and analyzed as they attempt to enact their various identities within different figured worlds. It is important to hear their voices as they discuss and describe the connections and/or disconnections they feel between the different identities they are constructing and the literacies these identities contain or demand.

In this chapter I first described the social construction of literacy and then highlighted the various ways that literacies have been studied as multiple and dynamic. As a result of this theory of multiple literacies, I analyzed various studies that highlighted the ways adolescent develop literacies in and out-of-school, and how those literacy studies have become connected to identity studies. Second, I discussed Holland et al.’s (1998) theory of figured world and its connection to identity building. Although there have been a plethora of studies connecting adolescent reading and writing practices outside of school, and studies committed to reading and writing activities altered by technological practices (Kist, 2005), there has not been a specific focus on high school football athletes and their experiences as they construct identities as players and students in each world. This study describes how high school athletes, specifically those enmeshed in football literacies from a young age, perceive the figured world of football and the classroom, the literacies demanded in both of these areas, and the connection or disconnection between their football practices and their classroom activities.
CHAPTER III
STUDY DESIGN

In my study, I first describe the Taft High School football figured world to answer the following research questions:

1. What literacies do participants use in the football figured world?
2. What characteristics of the football figured world influence the literacies there?

I then describe the Taft High School classroom figured world to answer these research questions:

1. What literacies do participants use in the classroom figured world?
2. What characteristics of the classroom figured world influence the literacies there?

My final research questions are:

1. What connections, disconnections, or tensions do the participants experience as they move between the two worlds?
2. In what ways do these experiences shape their identity-building process?

As a result of these research questions, my study is designed to first articulate elements of the figured world of Taft High School football and the figured world of the Taft High School classroom. Then I describe the literacies used in both worlds. Finally, connections and disconnections between the two findings are discussed.

In chapter 3, I discuss the framework for this study. I articulate my research design and describe the context of the study and the importance the setting plays in this
specific study. I also discuss the data collection and analysis methods that were used. Finally, I address the methods I used to establish the trustworthiness and ethics of the study.

**Theoretical Foundation**

This study draws from the areas of social construction of literacy and learning (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978) which view literacy learning as embedded and situated. Throughout this study, I also discuss the unique insight this socially constructed view of literacy offers when used as a lens into understanding the multiple ways and places adolescents can build literacy abilities and identities (Lewis & del Valle, 2009). Finally, to contextualize the literacy findings, I discuss building identities within figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998).

**Research Design: Qualitative Case Study**

Erickson (1986) claimed there are two, broad types of educational research. They are positivist/behaviorist and naturalistic/descriptive. My questions led me to a descriptive and holistic study of the adolescents’ literacy skills in two different figured worlds, because I believe that meaning, learning, and literacy is socially bound (Gee, 1992). In order to conduct this study, I attempted to hear the voices of the adolescents I studied and make their voices central by understanding and describing the literacies they utilize within specific figured worlds. Descriptive research allows for the depth of study to be completed on individual, contextualized voices as they relate to their literacy understanding. Naturalistic research offers a flexibility for the nature of reality to be complex and multiple, in addition to being constructed by individuals (Lincoln & Guba,
The contextualization and personalization of this type of research was important and vital to me. I wanted to use thick description of the context in order to develop the story of these adolescents’ literacies within two specific figured worlds. In order to centralize their voices, I made the “strange familiar and the familiar strange” (Spindler & Spindler, 1982) so that their interpretations and understandings could be learned and explored. Finally, I wanted to analyze across their cases in order to build the description of their figured world experiences.

As a qualitative researcher I entered this study with the goal of describing the individual cases of my participants. I did not enter the research with specific conclusions to draw. I hoped to hear the stories and voices of the participants as they articulated the literacies they use. While qualitative research is not usually seen to be generalizable beyond the research context, it can fine-tune the theories and understandings that are already prevalent in literacy research, and the findings can positively influence the participants, the situated context in which the study is conducted, and other contexts that are similar to it.

I chose to develop a case study because I wanted to study the “particular” cases of my participants as they interacted and negotiated between their football and classroom literacies in their natural setting (Stake, 1995) and to study across those cases in order to build a more holistic understanding in this situated context. My questions are specific to this situated context, and therefore, fit the parameters needed for case study research. According to Merriam (2001), case study can be described as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (p. 193). My study is particularistic because it focused on the phenomenon
of how these participants negotiated between their classroom and athletic literacies and identities. I used description to articulate my findings for each individual case and to analyze across the cases.

According to Stake (2005), these studies are intrinsic case studies because I am studying these particular, situated cases according to their own merit. I looked to understand how these athletes defined and built their literacies in this football program, in this school, and at this time. This is not a set of representative case studies for all high school athletes.

First, I described each individual player as a case and analyzed that data accordingly. Second, I analyzed across the cases to find any connections and themes between the cases (Merriam, 1998). Doing this cross-case analysis gave more merit and a “more compelling interpretation” to the particular finding of each case (Merriam, 1998).

**Context of the Study**

**Setting**

**Tresselton, Ohio.** Tresselton, Ohio, is a mid-size city with a population of approximately 80,000 people. The city and the surrounding area boast of three universities, a state university branch, and a technical college; however, the city rests much of its identity on being in the region near where professional football began. Having the Professional Football Hall of Fame nearby makes an indelible impression on its citizens and fuels their football passions.
**Taft High School.** The context of my study is Taft High School in Tresselton, Ohio. It is a comprehensive high school that has 1,600–1,800 students enrolled with approximately 60% of its students receiving free or reduced lunch. Approximately 45% of the students self-identify as White, 38% identify as African American, and 14% identify as Multi-racial (Office of Data & Testing, May 17, 2013). The sprawling high school building is a large, two story building built with red brick. Most of the classes are housed in the main building; however, some classes such as physical education, swimming, and weight training are held in the field house, which is attached to the building on the east side, and the vast natatorium which is connected on the northeast corner.

Taft High School has a history of being a community-oriented building. When the massive structure was built, it was meant to facilitate a variety of activities for different interest groups. The main building includes a large auditorium with comfortable seating used by the Tresselton Symphony and other community events. A Natatorium is also connected to the school building. This large facility is home to the Taft swimming team and the home pool for some nearby smaller colleges. The facility is also open so that any community members can exercise there on a daily basis. Tresselton elementary students are often bused to the Natatorium for special swim events. Swimming lessons are offered regularly for students and community members.

The high school has enjoyed a rich athletic tradition for many reasons; however, its football tradition is closely tied to the history of professional football itself, which began in this area of Ohio. The facilities of Rawley Stadium, which sits next to the high
school and is the home field for the Taft football team, and the weight room, which is inside the high school building, are vast structures filled with history and lore. These settings provide a stage for dreams to be designed and constructed by the coaches, players, and community members.

Participants

Participant selection. For my individual case studies, I was purposeful in my selection. I relied on the insight of my committee and the team’s coaches, along with my own observations and conclusions. I planned to study the athletes for a time period of 8–9 months. I chose participants who represented a variety of the team’s varsity players. My participants varied in economic class, race, and age, and in athletic and classroom success. With a diversity of input, I also attempted to choose the “best” participants for this case. Stake (1995) defined these case study participants as: “‘Best’ usually means those that best help us understand the case, whether typical or not” (p. 56). I tried to utilize this definition as I narrowed down my choices. I wanted to find an appropriate number of participants that helped me answer my research questions well and provided a variety of voices that were important to my study and its findings.

First, in order to gain field entry, I had to obtain permission from district administration and the coaching staff to begin my study. District and building administration gave me permission to continue, and then I accessed the coaching staff. I gained permission and entrance to the program and players primarily through the head coach, CJ. He was excited about the potential of the study and opened up his entire program for my research. He explained my purpose to his assistant coaches, and all of
them welcomed me into the program. This open access allowed me to ask any question to any coach or player which provided me the ability to comprehend the Taft football context more quickly.

Second, after I gained entry, I spent time with the entire varsity squad observing their meetings, practices, and scrimmages. In my first observation, CJ introduced me to the team, so my identity and purpose was explained at the beginning of the project. Taft’s football program and its players have frequently been subjected to scrutiny and observation. In fact, during part of my data collection period, a nationally recognized videographer was filming the team for a documentary he was creating. The players and coaches appeared to continue unhindered with their work; my presence was never pointed out and activities moved through an established routine despite my presence and the presence of another researcher/videographer.

Third, I created a grid of possible participants and their basic demographic, football, and academic information. I used this grid in conversation with coaches and my committee as we narrowed the list to six participants for the case studies. I approached these potential participants and gained their permission and cooperation. I then began building a more individual relationship with them as we started our first of four face-to-face interviews. Throughout the study period, I was able to develop relationships with many team members because I became a constant face both in school and at games, practice, and films. Because of this, the participants were not ever identified to the team unless the participants themselves did so. I became known as the person who would ask
questions of everyone both during football practices and games, in addition to showing up in a variety of classes during the school day.

I secured permission for this study through the district administration, the Taft campus principal, the Taft coaching staff, and the players themselves. Although I completed all the interviews and much of the data analysis for all six original participants, for the sake of clarity, this study focuses on four players who best helped me understand the case (Stake, 1995). Again, these players represent a variety of socio-economic status, in addition to different academic and athletic involvement, which were part of my participant selection goals. As a group, these participants represented both varying degrees of football success as measured through playing time and coaches’ recommendation, and they achieved a variety of classroom achievements according to their teachers. In order to study the specifics of the figured world of football and the figured world of the classroom at Taft, I wanted my participants to represent these types of variety for each case.

To make sure their voices were clearly heard and understood, I invited four varsity football players to collaborate with me throughout the research project. My participants were Allen, James, Neron, and Asher. Because Allen was a senior, and already 18 and considered an adult, he signed his own consent form. Since the rest were 17 and considered minors at the beginning of the study, James, Neron, and Asher signed their own permission forms and also gained their parents’ permission. Throughout this process, not one player or parent resisted or questioned the goals of my study. The
players, especially, were happy to help me due to the support and sponsorship I had received from the coaching staff. My participants are as follows.

**Allen.** Allen played in the defensive backfield as an 18-year-old senior, Caucasian male. He had experienced a lot of success in football and pinned many of his high school dreams on achieving accolades throughout his senior year. Many of the coaches recommended him for this study; however, Allen suffered an injury during the season and was unable to keep his starting position on offense. Although he still held a starting position on special teams, Allen often struggled with his attitude toward his team, coaches, and school in general as the season progressed. In school, Allen only enjoyed his math and weight-lifting classes which were both taught by football coaches. In those classes he claimed that he enjoyed the conversations and the special privileges he gained from being a football player in the coaches’ classes. He claimed he wasn’t particularly drawn to any other teachers or content areas. In November, after the football season ended, Allen began missing more and more days of school. Eventually, by Christmas break, Allen dropped out of Taft and enrolled in a Digital Academy to finish his high school credits. Although he had left Taft, I was able to interview him at length one last time in the early spring.

**James.** James was also a senior when this study began, although he was 17 years old. He has attended Taft High School since he was a freshman and has enjoyed athletic success both as a football player and as a wrestler. James is an African American male who played a defensive back position. James had participated in a myriad of athletics his entire life, even at a young age through the midget league. The coaches gave James a lot
of responsibility due to his position and his understanding of the defensive concepts so he was often a leader in the defensive backfield. James’s eager attitude and smile often lifted the spirits of Taft players and coaches throughout the season. James enjoys varying degrees of success in the classroom. According to his teachers, he is a student who is not rude or contradictory; however, he often struggles with paying attention enough in class to complete his work and to keep from distracting others. Fortunately for James, his mother actively monitors his academic performance and provides intervention when needed.

**Neron.** Neron was 16 years old when the study began. He is a Latino male who played both defensive back and on the special teams. Although he enjoyed success in the Taft program, unlike many of his peers, he did not grow up dreaming of being a Panther. Neron began playing football in middle school when he moved from Chicago to Tresselton in order to live with his father. Neron showed conceptual understanding of the defense, and coaches often relied on his perceptions and insight, especially on game night. Neron is very driven academically as well as athletically. He is currently enrolled in Tresselton City’s engineering program and hopes to attend college through an athletic or academic scholarship.

**Asher.** Asher was a 16-year-old junior when this study began. He is an African American male who played on the offensive line for Taft. Although he had attended another district throughout his late elementary school years, Asher had been attending Taft since his freshman year. Asher dedicates a large amount of his time to many other academic and musical pursuits; he is involved in Taft’s competitive speech team, the
academic challenge team, and the band program. He also regularly performed musically with peers both in school and in community events. Asher is also enrolled in Advanced Placement courses, which pushed him academically. Although he has played football for many years, and enjoyed his time with the program, his first love is the track team where he throws discus and shot put and competes on the state level.

**My Role as the Researcher**

Due to my understanding of football and my gender, I was usually considered an outsider during most of my data collection. I was not able to be a participant observer in that I could never actually play the game with the players or make play recommendations with the coaches. My gender greatly defined my ‘outside’ observer status in the football-oriented research. Indeed, when walking into the coaching offices and/or the media room, I was expected to announce myself by calling “Woman on the floor!” or some type of warning because there were often coaches and players in various states of dress, even in obscure times of the day.

My gender caused some curiosity with community members at the games, too. During games, I spent time on the sidelines with the team and time in the stands with the fans. Although the players and coaches rarely acknowledged my presence during games, many friends and acquaintances questioned my presence as the only female on the sidelines with the team.

When initially talking with me, coaches would often disclaim their language by offering excuses for profanity or take time to define what their language meant. Gradually as I built trust with the staff, they stopped disclaiming their speech, and they
assumed I could understand what they were discussing at various times. As would be expected, I was never allowed to be in the locker room before a game, both due to the players getting dressed and to the privacy of the game strategy. I was initially invited by the coaches to enter the locker room to hear their half-time strategy discussions and alterations; however, after two observations of this practice, a district level administrator forced me to quit due to my gender and perceived appropriateness of my inclusion. As the data collection time progressed, the coaches included me in more private conversations, and I began to get random text messages reflecting somewhat off-color humor. Even with this level of acceptance by the coaching staff and players, my gender would often define my role as outside researcher when in the football world. For example, when I was cold at one specific practice, a coach ran to the locker room and brought out an extra coat and scarf for me to wear as I observed. I believe I received this attention because of my gender. I had heard many other male coaches discussing the temperatures throughout my research, and their colleagues had not run to provide warmer clothing. In incidents such as this, my gender was still apparent in the research site.

In Taft’s classrooms, I had more of a participant observer’s role. Due to my occupation as literacy coach for the school, I was able to co-teach in most of my participants’ classes at least once, and I was able to observe their classes both formally and informally a number of times. Since my job did not tie me to a certain area of the building throughout the day, I was able to observe the players in the hallways, lunchroom, and study halls, which also provided additional insights into the one-on-one information I was gaining through my interviews with players, coaches, and teachers.
In all my observations and interactions, I did not use my role as teacher in the attempt to control my participants’ behavior while in school. I only tried to describe and understand from their viewpoint. At times this was difficult because I would find one of my participants skipping class or cheating on his work, which created an ethical dilemma as a researcher and a teacher. If a player needed assistance with his classroom work or attendance, and the coaches asked me to intervene, I would when possible. For example, I did encourage Allen to finish his senior year at Taft High School in order to graduate with his classmates. For another participant, I helped the coaches encourage and guide him through the ACT application process. For the most part, however, I tried to keep my role as the researcher and describer separate from my role as teacher and literacy coach.

Data Collection

I began my data collection on August 1, 2011, which was considered the first day of the 2011 Fall Camp. I continued my data collection throughout the school year following and observing the participants in games, practices, film, weightlifting, and classes. I stopped collecting data on June 1, which ended the 10-month study. Data collection methods included field observations/notes/analytic memos, participant/teacher/coaches interviews, and the collecting and analyzing of general documents and artifacts such as newspaper articles, trophies, football programs, and written historical documents about the program. Even when I could not attend a game, I would listen to the game’s radio broadcast on a community station to add another angle to my data collection.
Observation

Because I was observing the participants in both the football program and at school in their classrooms, I split my observations accordingly. Because I am an employee at Taft High School, I had numerous opportunities to interact with my participants both formally and informally as we developed relationships with one another. As Taft’s literacy coach, I often found myself co-teaching a class with one or more participants enrolled as a student. Within the classroom, literacy coaching role, I found myself more as a participant observer (Merriam, 1998) because I was actively involved with the students as I collected data. This position was different than my position within the football world. Within the football figured world, I was only an observer. I was not ever involved with practices as a coach or as someone who could intervene with players who needed extra time to learn plays.

Throughout the football season, I observed my participants in practice, while watching and analyzing film, throughout pregame conversations, and throughout games for approximately 80 total hours. (See Table 1 for specific times and activities.) I was careful to attend an equal variety of these activities in order to observe the literacy demands of each, to observe the integration and performance the participants enacted as a result of those demands, and in order to knowledgably craft my interview questions. In this area, I acted only as an observer. While the purpose of my presence was explained to the players and coaches (Merriam, 1998), I was not involved with the activity that was going on around me. I attempted to have as little interference as possible on what the players and coaches were doing and saying.
Table 1

*Football Games/Meetings/Practices/Film*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Games</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Meetings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/6 Midnight Madness</td>
<td>8/1 Max testing 6:00-7:30 = 1.5 hrs</td>
<td>Film vs. *Valley 9:30-11:00 = 1.5 hrs</td>
<td>8/1 Team meeting 7:30-9:00 = 2.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 p.m.-1:30 a.m. = 2.5 hrs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/19 Scrimmage vs. North Central Catholic</td>
<td>8/3 Practice 6:30-7:30 = 1 hr</td>
<td>Film vs. Crescent 9:00-11:00 = 2 hrs</td>
<td>Team meeting before North Central Catholic 3:00-5:30 = 2.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30-9:30 p.m. = 2 hrs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/27 Game vs. St. Thomas 7:30-10:00 = 2.5 hrs</td>
<td>8/4 Practice 11:30-12:00 = .5 hr</td>
<td>Film vs. Canaltown 6:30-7:30 = 1hr</td>
<td>Team meeting vs. St. Thomas 3:30-6:30 = 3 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/3 Game vs. Franklin 7:00-10:00 = 3 hrs</td>
<td>9/1 Practice 3:30-5:00 = 1.5 hrs</td>
<td>Film vs. Canaltown 9:00-10:00 = 1 hr</td>
<td>9/16 Team Meeting vs. Valley 3:30-5:30 = 2 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/9 Game vs. Pike 7:30-9:30 = 2 hrs</td>
<td>9/7 Practice 5:00-6:00 = 1 hr</td>
<td><strong>5.5 hours of film</strong></td>
<td>9/29 Team meetings vs. Canaltown 3:30-5:30 = 2 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/16 Game vs. Valley 7:00-10:00 = 3 hrs</td>
<td>9/12 Practice 5:00-6:00 = 1 hr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/23 Game vs. Crescent 8:00-9:30 = 1.5 hr (on radio)</td>
<td>9/13 Practice 4:00-5:00 = 1 hr</td>
<td></td>
<td>10/29 Team Meeting vs. Chelsea 9:00-12:00 = 3 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/29 Game vs. Canaltown 6:30-10:00 = 3.5 hrs</td>
<td>9/19 Practice 3:30-4:30 = 1 hr</td>
<td></td>
<td>11/5 Team Meeting vs. Gunnersville 10:30-1:00 = 2.5 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/7 Game vs. Brenner 8:00-9:00 = 1 hr (on radio)</td>
<td>9/26 Practice 3:30-4:30 = 1 hr</td>
<td></td>
<td>11/12 Team meeting vs. Kenton 1:00-2:30 = 1.5 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/21 Game vs. Brimsdale 6:00-10:00 = 4 hrs.</td>
<td>10/5 Practice 3:30-4:30 = 1 hr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*20 hours of meetings.*

*(table continues)*
Table 1 (continued)

*Football Games/Meetings/Practices/Film*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Games</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Meetings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/29 Game vs. Chelsea</td>
<td>10/12 Practice 3:30-4:30</td>
<td>= 1 hr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00-5:00 = 4 hrs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/5 Game vs. Gunnersville</td>
<td>10/13 Practice 4:00-5:00</td>
<td>= 1 hr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00-10:00 = 3 hrs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/12 Game vs. Kenton</td>
<td>10/24 Practice 3:00-4:30</td>
<td>= 1.5 hr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00-10:00 = 3 hrs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>35 hours of games</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18 hours of practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

78.5 total hours
*All team names are pseudonyms.

Throughout the school year, I was able to observe each participant multiple times in at least two different classroom content areas, with the exception of Allen who stopped regularly coming to school in late November/December. I attempted to observe each participant in classroom settings that demanded different types of literacies. I tried to observe an English or social studies classroom which demanded more conventional reading and writing, in addition to a science and/or math class that might demand different types of skills to be used. (See Table 2.) Some classes were much more
Table 2  

*Teachers, Classrooms, and Dates of Observations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Content Area Taught</th>
<th>Number of Classes Observed</th>
<th>Date of Observation</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richter</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/14, 11/10, 12/5, 12/6</td>
<td>Allen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lockard</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10/3</td>
<td>Allen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/29</td>
<td>Allen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brill</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/20, 12/16, 5/11</td>
<td>James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10/21, 2/28</td>
<td>James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogan</td>
<td>Yearbook</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/15</td>
<td>James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompsen</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/4, 2/16, 5/4</td>
<td>Neron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gullik</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/13, 12/16, 5/3</td>
<td>Neron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franks</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10/26, 4/2</td>
<td>Neron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall</td>
<td>Advanced Biology</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11/10, 12/16</td>
<td>Asher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franks</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/9</td>
<td>Asher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greten</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12/13, 1/12, 4/10</td>
<td>Asher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All teacher and student names are pseudonyms.*

interactive and collaborative, while other classes were more formal and individualistic. For example, Neron and Asher both enjoyed collaborative, project-oriented work in their engineering and Drama classes, although even in these classes the boys were rewarded with individual grades. However, all the participants’ English classes were more formal and focused on individual reading and writing with standardized expectations. All the math classes I observed were very traditional with the teacher guiding the students
through problems, then letting students work on further examples. James enjoyed physics class where the format was somewhat varied. Sometimes the teacher lectured while other times he engaged the students with labs or projects. During my observation time in the classroom, I watched each participant’s behavior and outward engagement with the teacher and topic being discussed. I also observed how each participant interacted with other students and the literacy demands being placed on him through a variety of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing activities. (See Table 2.)

I wrote a variety of field notes from my observations, where I recorded what I saw and experienced throughout my data collection phase. During my observations, I would attempt to literally widen and narrow my vision of the physical setting and what I was seeing and hearing. In many football games, I would spend a part of the game time on the sidelines, right behind the coaches and players as they executed their game strategy. At other times, I would move up and sit in the stands, surrounded by community members and fans. This provided a wider vision of the game and a somewhat different perspective; it also immersed me in the conversations and dialogue taking place outside the team. I also did this in participants’ classrooms. I would observe just the participant and his actions for a time, then I would strategically move my focus outward to watch the entire class and make observations of the stated and unstated norms and beliefs being enacted.

All my observations were audio taped or written down as field notes and then typed for the purpose of analysis. I used digital audio taping for many of the football
observations such as during the actual football game while I was on the sidelines or observing the half-time conversation in the locker room. This allowed me to capture the emotions of the game without the burden of pen and paper throughout somewhat inclement weather and curious gazes of community members. Within the classroom, I would usually take extensive notes from my observations and participation. Due to my role within the school, bringing a digital recorder into the classroom made both the teachers and the students nervous regarding my intent. To keep the study’s participants’ anonymity safe within their classrooms, to provide security for the teachers, and to facilitate my complicated role of both participant (as literacy coach) and observer (as researcher), I used field notes most often while in the classrooms.

I also took many “on-the-fly” notes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) usually throughout the school day as I had informal conversations with teachers, players, and coaches. As my committee members stated, when I entered my school each morning, I entered ‘data world’ so I always carried a clipboard with me throughout my work day so it was available to jot down notes and impressions that were later transferred into either observations, analytic memos, or both.

**Interviews**

Formal interviews were completed with the participants, coaches, and teachers for this study. The interviews were conversational in style (H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 2005), but each formal interview centered on a specific focus through a semi-structured design (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Interviews allowed me to build relationships with the participants, to check and validate their own insights, and to provide a type of
triangulation between my data. Interviews also provided insight into the literacies demanded in football and the specific ways each participant identified as a football player and as a student.

**Participants’ interviews.** While I was able to have many informal conversations with the participants throughout the study period, each participant was formally interviewed four times throughout the school year. (The exception was Allen. Because he no longer attended Taft after November, it was difficult to make contact with him. Another study participant, Ernie, was very close to Allen, and through his connection I was able to convince Allen to return for a third and final interview. He did come back to Taft during a late afternoon, and we were able to conduct an interview with Ernie for about 90 minutes. This time served as his third and fourth interviews.) Together we were able to creatively find times that did not conflict with classroom obligations and/or athletic commitments. Each individual interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes each. I executed the four formal interviews throughout the school year so I could track any changing or growing literacy use or identity changes. I used the time in-between the interviews to observe the participants in class, to interview their teachers and/or coaches, and to clarify my thoughts regarding their interview data.

Each interview had a specific topic to cover, although each interview was allowed to conversationally move through the topic based on the participant’s personality. The first interview focused on developing a relationship and common understanding about who the participants perceived themselves to be. For this interview we concentrated on general interests, family life, social life, and their history in athletics and academics. For
the second interview, we focused on the specific figured world elements and the literacies they believed they used in football. Together we tried to build a grid of the types of abilities, skills, valuations, and beliefs that were demanded in football. I would write out initial thoughts from my field notes and analytic memos, then throughout one of our following interviews each participant would further guide my analysis and emerging ideas. (See Table 3 for Allen’s grid.) For the third interview, we focused on the figured world elements and the literacies demanded from the classroom. We answered the questions regarding the abilities, skills, valuations, and beliefs that were demanded in their classrooms. Finally, during the fourth formal interview, we tried to bring all this previous information together and do some analysis together. The participants and I studied our grids and charts and made corrections and/or additions according to their impressions. Where there were connections between the two worlds, I placed a (+). Where there seemed to be disconnection, I placed a (-). (See Table 3.) It was my intent to include their voices and insight into this part of the data analysis so that I could fully articulate their views and beliefs and to serve as a type of triangulation and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1984).
**Table 3**

*Comparing Figured World Elements and Literacies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allen</th>
<th>Football</th>
<th>Classroom</th>
<th>Same (+) or Different (-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>Body position of offense</td>
<td>Doesn't want to read Romeo &amp; Juliet. Read about sports stars or black history</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Somewhat of a mystery</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking</strong></td>
<td>Shortened plays or disguised plays/trashtalking</td>
<td>Clowns around to get out of reading and/or work</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening</strong></td>
<td>Have to listen to the right voices</td>
<td>Hate to listen to bad readers</td>
<td>(-) Although he has trouble listening to any authority who tells him what he doesn't want to hear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Viewing</strong></td>
<td>Learn new plays by seeing it on the board</td>
<td>No equivalent in class</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visually Representing</strong></td>
<td>Can see new plays on board</td>
<td>No equivalent in class</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Thinking</strong></td>
<td>Players see more than coaches. Coaches plan so much, they don't want to give up their ideas/DBs have to be smart</td>
<td>Hates math that's not functional</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>History with Program</strong></td>
<td>Allen dreamed of being part of the team from a young age. Went to games and dreamed of playing</td>
<td>Did not dream of academic success</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coaches/Teachers</strong></td>
<td>CJ sets the bar high/CJ almost like a father, until adversity. Players see more than coaches</td>
<td>Thinks teachers don't meet him halfway with his opinions on assignments, so he only works halfway</td>
<td>(table continues)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (continued)

*Comparing Figured World Elements and Literacies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allen</th>
<th>Football</th>
<th>Classroom</th>
<th>Same (+) or Different (-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual/Team</td>
<td>Look out for TC. We all we got sounds good, but few are buying it./ Disillusioned by the end of season</td>
<td>Only thinks about his own grades or slacking</td>
<td>(-) At the beginning of season, but (+) by the end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Comments</td>
<td>Yearns to be close to dad. Football is the way/ Wanted his name remembered for football</td>
<td>Slacks without football</td>
<td>Prefers learning with hands on in both (-) no slacking in football (+) hands on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Object</td>
<td>Black eye stuff &amp; nice uniform/ couldn't wear red cleats</td>
<td>Not enough of identity for this</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Identity</td>
<td>Largest dreams connected to playing on Taft’s team</td>
<td>Never constructed an identity here</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positionality</td>
<td>Began near to the power structure, but positionality changed with injury</td>
<td>Never felt near the power structure here</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coaches’ interviews.** For my formal interviews, I was able to interview the head coach and two assistant coaches at three different times for approximately 30–40 minutes each. (See Table 4.) Each of these interviews was one-on-one either in the coaches’ offices or in a classroom. Often, due to their busy schedule and demands, additional more informal, conversations with the coaches would happen informally as we discussed the participants, reviewed the game and/or practice plan, or clarified literacies involved in football.
The coaches would often give me handouts that the players received before each game, and they would provide practice schedules if I asked. These artifacts were often explained in 5–10 minutes, before the players came to practice or reported to a pregame warm-up. Whereas these ‘mini interviews’ were not formal, I treated the data carefully by writing extensive field notes about the information that was given and including those details in my analytic memos. Although the coaches were completely open and supportive to my study, I was also careful to be respectful of their limited time with the players and the depth of planning they needed for each week’s game. After the football season was over, I had more time to speak to CJ, Coach Smyth and Coach Poland; however, most of these conversations were informal and used as a type of member-checking that guided my analytic memos and data analysis. Conversations with all three coaches become more complicated in late January because CJ was not granted a

Table 4

Coaches’ Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CJ (head coach)</th>
<th>Coach Poland</th>
<th>Coach Smyth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
new coaching contract by the school board in their January meeting. This began a protracted battle within the Taft community regarding the head coaching position that stirred heated debate throughout Tresselton. In my conversations with the coaches, it was often difficult to keep my discussion and member-checking focused on my study due to the emotions each coach was feeling; however, I tried to keep our objectives clear each time we met.

**Teachers’ interviews.** I was able to conduct interviews with at least two different teachers for each participant. For the three participants who consistently stayed in school throughout the data collection process, I was able to speak with three different teachers. (See Table 5.) These formal interviews were conducted during the teacher’s planning period or during other times such as lunch or after teachers’ meetings. Most of these interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and purposely spanned the school year so that I was able to understand the participant in a holistic manner both during and after the football season. These interviews usually took place throughout the school day. During these interviews I took extensive notes and within 24 hours, I would carefully type the notes, adding additional notes and data, and utilizing the information for my analytic memos and ongoing analysis.
Table 5

*Teachers’ Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Content Area Taught</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richter</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Allen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lockard</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Allen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brill</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogan</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompsen</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Neron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gullik</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>Neron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franks</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Neron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall</td>
<td>Advanced Biology</td>
<td>Asher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalder</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Asher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greten</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Asher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All names are pseudonyms.*

**Artifact Study**

In their description of figured worlds, Holland and Skinner (2008) claimed that, “Cultural artefacts are objects inscribed by collective meaning” (p. 853). To help me analyze the figured world of Taft football, I studied artifacts such as trophies, newspaper articles, programs, and even parts of the football equipment such as the helmets and jerseys. Studying these articles added historical and community-value data to my analysis. Some of these artifacts, such as the helmet and jersey, were situated as ‘ pivots’
by the players (Holland & Skinner, 2008). They had become artifacts that transitioned them into this other ‘world’. I also read the plethora of newspaper articles that appeared in the Tresselton paper which averaged at least one article per week. While reading the articles, I carefully looked for references to historical traditions, valuation, and reflections of community feelings. I tried to read these articles in print and online because reading the comments posted after the online articles provided great insight into the strongly held belief that the community held regarding the “Panther Nation.” Analyzing these artifacts supported me as I considered how they ‘opened up’ the figured world of football for these players (Holland & Skinner, 2008, p. 853) because I continually examined not only their personal interpretations and understandings but also incorporated the community’s expectations and traditions of the program. I also analyzed artifacts such as the football program with its glossy pictures of the players and the materials from Football Awards Banquet, which officially ended the season.

To help me analyze the Taft classroom figured world, I studied personal artifacts such as my participants’ writing and/or classroom assignments. I also studied more general artifacts such as school newsletters, classroom posters, school board minutes, administrative and teacher emails, and even curriculum materials. Analyzing these artifacts collaborated my data gleaned from participant and teacher interviews as I attempted to articulate not the physical setting of the Taft classroom but the figured world with its stated and unstated expectations, roles, and positionality of those who populate it.


Data Analysis

Preparing and Organizing the Data

Case study analysis is a multifaceted process that includes movement “between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, and between description and interpretation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). It is a process that demands that the researcher moves back and forth between the data collection and analysis while reflecting through various emerging ideas or incidences that seem to stand out among others.

In case study research, data analysis is a continual process throughout the data collection period; however, qualitative researchers must be open to allowing the data to lead the analysis. Stake (1995) stated, “The search for meaning often is a search for patterns, for consistency, for consistency within certain conditions, which we call ‘correspondence’” (p. 78). In conducting an intrinsic case study, first and foremost I attempted to understand each case. I used both categorical aggregation (using triangulation and analysis) and direct interpretation (asking “What does this mean?”) as I searched for patterns within the data (p. 78).

According to Merriam (1998), “Category construction is data analysis” (p. 180). Therefore, as I collected my data, I first read and reread the transcribed data and documents, making notations, comments, and thoughts. I would often ask further questions of the players and/or coaches as I tried to develop the ideas from my data. Based on their feedback and additional data that were collected, I returned to those notes and comments, and compared them to “another incident in the same set of data or in
another set” (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). I then looked for aggregates or categories of like comparisons to build a coding system for categories. This iterative process continued throughout the data collection process and extended into the analysis phase.

Merriam (1998) compared this process to organizing grocery items. As the items are sorted, counted, and noted, gradually a strategy of organization can be used to organize various grocery items into meaningful categories such as size, color, or food types. These categories are “conceptual elements that ‘cover’ or span many individual examples of the category” (p. 182). As these categories emerge, data collection and analysis will continue through the sorting and coding of new data. As the categories continued to develop and encompass the data being collected (Merriam, 1998), connected themes began to emerge for each individual player. These themes allowed the final step of analysis, which involves final interpretation and articulation of these findings.

**Analytic Memos**

I utilized analytic memos and data analysis notes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) after I transcribed each interview and after some informal observations and interactions with players, coaches, and teachers. These memos provided a reflective, thinking space for me to investigate emerging themes and future questions I needed to pursue. These memos also helped me organize and categorize the many ‘on-the-fly’ observations and informal conversations I had on a daily basis that related to my study, and they also used as a method of reflexivity throughout the study (Schram, 2006) as they brought to light my personal bias and preconceived notions. These memos also became part of the theme building.
Coding the Data

My participant interviews spanned the school year so that our conversations would reflect both the football season and the off-season thoughts and emotions. I was able to conduct four different interviews with three of the participants throughout the school year and three interviews with Allen. After each interview, I would transcribe our conversation and write any analytic memo that seemed important to the study. Before I interviewed the participants, I would comb through the previous interview data to find pertinent information to clarify or to drive the next set of questions while also keeping my larger organization to the four interviews in mind. As I built questions to drive the individual case studies, I also designed questions to elicit their input in developing their descriptions of the figured world of football and the figured world of the classroom at Taft High School. I began designing categories and descriptions of these worlds to member check in each consecutive interview. For example, I highlighted their comments and/or thoughts regarding the figured world of football in orange. Information connected to the classroom was highlighted in green, and I developed and highlighted questions and/or details I wanted to probe in our next interview with a yellow highlighter.

As I read through the interview transcripts, I would make notes of questions to pursue with the coaches and/or teachers. Often questions emerging from the interview data would also correspond with thoughts or areas of inquiry from my field notes or informal conversations I had with coaches, teachers, and/or players. All my analytic memos and field notes were categorized according to emerging themes connected to the football world or the classroom world so that I could analyze those documents with like
data. I would then take questions emerging from my interviews, analytic memos, and field notes back to the participants for further clarification and/or member-checking.

**Representing the Data**

After all the interview data were collected, I made a spreadsheet that held a quick summary of the figured world characteristics and the literacies each participant reported using in the football world and in the classroom. After summarizing their thoughts about each ‘world,’ I would either use a (+) or (-) and a brief narration/explanation to indicate the connection and/or disconnection the participant felt between his football practices and his classroom activities. This visualization helped me see the emerging data and where the connections and disconnections might be for each participant. This also helped me develop larger categories to describe the literacies in both areas and to serve as the basis of my analysis.

**Case and Cross-Case Analysis**

My cross-case analysis was similar to my single case analysis (Merriam, 1998). First, I studied my four cases as individual case studies and allowed each case to tell the individual’s story and perceptions of his literacies in football and in school. Second, in order to draw a larger representation of my research findings within this situated context (Stake, 1995), I then analyzed across the cases to draw larger generalizations between them. To guide my generalizations, I utilized the “Comparing Figured World Elements and Literacies” chart (See Table 3), information gained from my teachers’ and coaches’ interviews, and memos built from artifact study. Using these together, I was able to construct connecting points between the cases. Merriam (1998) stated, “The more cases
that are included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases included in the study, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be” (p. 40). By analyzing across the cases, I was able to draw a stronger, clearer picture of my findings within this situated context because the categories that emerged reflected connections from all the cases.

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

While Merriam (1998) reframed the conventional research terms such as reliability and validity with new meaning to better match the goals of naturalistic and qualitative research, other researchers have completely disregarded conventional terms and developed new. These researchers believe that naturalistic research requires a different set of criteria by which to be judged because its intent is different than quantitative, or more conventional research. Lincoln and Guba (1984) stated, “Within the conventional paradigm, the criteria that have evolved in response to these questions are termed ‘internal validity,’ ‘external validity,’ ‘reliability,’ and ‘objectivity’” (p. 290). However, as Lincoln and Guba pointed out, naturalistic research operates under a different structure and therefore needs to adhere to different criteria. These researchers posited that the following aspects should be considered when evaluating naturalistic work. These aspects include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

**Credibility**

Merriam (1998) claimed that qualitative research interprets reality as much more complex than conventional research does. Likewise, Lincoln and Guba (1984) utilized
the term “credibility” as the element of trustworthiness by which to judge naturalistic research. Below I articulate the techniques I used to increase the credibility of my study.

**Prolonged observation.** My research project began in August of 2011 and continued throughout the entire school year. I finished gathering data when my participants and I stopped attending school at the beginning of June 2012. The intensity and length of this project aids in the validity and quality of its findings.

**Persistent observation.** Although I was involved in this project for an extended amount of time, my focus stayed with describing the figured worlds and the literacies demanded by those worlds. As the length of my observation and project continued, I developed many other questions that could be answered from my observations; however, I kept my focus on the specific research questions that framed my study.

**Triangulation.** I utilized triangulation through collecting data via interviews, observations, and the study of artifacts. I interviewed coaches, players, and teachers so that a full description was developed for each player while he was embedded within these two key worlds and involved with the literacies there. Where there were multiple connections between my data, my findings took form. Using multiple methods allows qualitative researchers the ability to confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 1998). Through triangulation, I was able to deeply describe each participant, his participation within both worlds, and the literacies utilized there.

**Peer debriefing.** Merriam (1998) pointed out that the qualitative researcher benefits from having a peer examine and give feedback as findings are being articulated from the data. For my first outside peer, I invited an academic colleague who was a
college professor and well-versed in qualitative research to read and think along with my study as it evolved. He was involved with my entire journey through the data collection and analysis stage. His research writing experience and his long-term investment in understanding my data provided another set of eyes and a sounding board for my emerging thoughts. Together, we would discuss and methodically analyze my argument and how to best ‘hear’ the voices of my participants. This colleague also provided dialogue regarding the study’s theoretical foundations due to our similar research interests. For my second consultant, I utilized the expertise of Taft’s engineering teacher. Talking with him helped me refine my thinking and understanding connected to the symbolic communication used in science and math, which became an important aspect to my data as I was collecting and analyzing. Due to my language arts background, I depended on this teacher to help me frame this area of intelligence and skill that I heard my participants expressing. For my third peer reviewer, I had another college professor, also experienced in qualitative research, read a draft of my study and offer her insights. These critical colleagues, in addition to many conversations with other doctoral candidates, provided input and clarification for each stage of my process.

**Member checks.** To articulate the need for member checking, Stake (1995) described it this way: “Actors play a major role directing as well as acting in case study. Although it is they (the actors) who are studied, they regularly provide critical observations and interpretations, sometimes making suggestions as to the sources of data” (p. 115). I conducted many types of member checking throughout my data collection and data analysis stages. These member checks ranged from participants commenting on
drafts of my findings to coaches and teachers directing or reconstructing my thinking regarding the skills and attitudes they expected from the participants. I formally used member checking with the participants during their last three interviews. I analyzed the data from each prior interview and ask for their clarification, interpretation, and/or suggestions about my preliminary thoughts.

Because I carefully combed previous data before each new interview, the participants were often able to clarify my thinking and interpretation of their words and ideas. I found the long-term consistency of our interviews very helpful as I tried to learn about them, and they became more and more confident throughout the school year as they redirected or validated my thoughts. My participants and I gradually developed an on-going dialogue with my study. For example, oftentimes I would catch Neron in the hallway and pose an emerging thought I was finding in the data. The next day, he would stop by my office and either agree with me or redirect my thinking to better reflect his understanding and interpretation. Because I was embedded in Taft, I was able to do this type of informal member-checking and ‘on-the-fly’ notetaking on a frequent basis. These conversations would always be included in my analytic memos that would direct more of my analysis.

As I tried to describe the figured world of football, I often found myself connecting with three key coaches. These coaches, CJ, Coach Poland, and Coach Smyth, were always willing to read drafts of my ideas and/or listen to my analytical thoughts. Due to our busy schedules, I often had informal member-checking conversations with them. We would address one question or detail and then return to it another time when
our schedules allowed. When talking with CJ, who was usually the busiest coach, I would usually have to take ‘on-the-fly’ notes as I walked from one place to another as we talked. The most focused member-checking conversations happened on three different occasions with Coach Poland and Coach Smyth. Throughout those conversations I took extensive notes on their thoughts and interpretations regarding some of my data analysis. The notes from these member-checking conversations were also put into analytic memos or drafts so that I could best capture the voices involved in Taft football.

In similar ways I connected with teachers as I tried to describe the Taft classroom figured world. Asher’s English teacher became a sounding board to some of my emerging ideas as I collected my data. James’s English teacher also helped me hone my analysis by talking openly about his classroom expectations. Finally, Neron’s engineering teacher, who had also held a football coaching position, served as an on-going member check for me regarding the classroom figured world. All my conversations were captured in on-the-fly notes and then included in analytic memos as I attempted to describe the Taft classroom figured world.

Transferability

Stake (1995) stated that, “The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization” (p. 8). The primary goal of a qualitative (or case study) researcher is not to make the project generalizable. This type of researcher is bound to describing a specific, embedded context. However, Merriam (1998) and Lincoln and Guba (1984) framed thick description as the mark of quality naturalistic research where transferability can be enabled. Lincoln and Guba (1984) stated:
Thus the naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility. (p. 316)

I attempted to meet this need for naturalist research by incorporating rich description of the research contexts. I attempt to describe the figured world through multiple senses and through the prism of my participants. I describe the physical surroundings and the people involved in the social contexts so that the findings can be trustworthy.

Through my rich description I offered readers or future scholars the sense of how ‘typical’ my context was as compared to other contexts. For example, my study is situated within a specific type of high school. Due to the depth of football history and celebration, it might be more unique than other high school football programs; however, through this description, my readers can determine if the context of my study is similar or not to their own context of interest.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

In describing a case, as a researcher I must make sure that what I am seeing and hearing is as accurate as possible. In this project I point to my use of triangulation of data and an audit trail that were used to raise the quality of my research findings.

**Triangulation.** As explained above, in this project I analyzed data from multiple observations, interviews, and artifact studies. As I analyzed my information, I layered my data through testing categorical descriptors to verify emerging themes and categories
that were held in common. This allowed rigorous findings to be verified in multiple ways from multiple sources.

**Reflexive journal.** Throughout my research project and data analysis time period, I kept analytic memos tracked my emerging thoughts and findings. Lincoln and Guba (1984) termed this type of writing-as-thinking as a reflexive journal. Throughout my data collection and analysis, I used analytic memos with my journal to help me separate my own stereotypes and systemic ways of thinking that blocked me from understanding or seeing my data from my participants’ point of view. Through my memos I also made myself accountable for where and when I did observations and interviews by seeking the advice of the coaches and teachers. My memos provide a path to my thinking, analysis, and thematic connections.

**Audit trail.** I have developed an audit trail with my data that shows the variety of methods used for data collection (interviews, observations, and artifact study) in addition to my analytic memos that describe how and why decisions were made and the charts and graphs that were used to develop the categories that frame my findings.

All of these techniques attempt to create a situation where the researcher rigorously analyzes her data and attempts to describe her findings in order to build meaning in ways that are consistent (Lincoln & Guba, 1984) with participants and their conceptions of reality. I attempted to utilize them to create quality research.

**Ethics**

Throughout my study, I was very careful with the privacy of my participants. I understood that although their coaches had approved and even stipulated that they do
whatever I asked, they would be telling me insights and interpretations that needed to be kept private from other players, coaches, and teachers. Before I began the study, I thoroughly adhered to the regulations of Kent State University’s Human Review Board. Throughout the study, as much as possible, I kept the participants’ identities a secret from other players and from each other. While I was not able to keep their identity a secret from the players and coaches due to the depth of questions I needed to ask, I never betrayed any participant insight or information that was given to me. I was also careful not to disclose information that was given by the coaches to the teachers and vice versa. I attempted to keep those interviews and information separate in order to protect the participants.

I did face ethical dilemmas throughout the study that stemmed from my role as literacy coach and as researcher. As Taft’s literacy coach I had access to all the participants’ grades; however, to protect them and to lend credibility to their voices and insights, I chose not to investigate their grades on my own. If the participants and/or the teachers volunteered this information I included it in my study. I did not try to prove or disprove claims through grade point averages. I also found other ethical dilemmas that stemmed from my dual role at the school. For example, twice I found one of my participants skipping his classes. As a teacher, I should have reported this so that the school’s discipline could have taken place. However, in both cases of his absences, I chose to take on my role as researcher instead of teacher. I did not report these absences to the coaches, the administrators, or teachers because the access I had to his schedule was based on my study. When my role as researcher and literacy coach collided, I tried
to take this pattern consistently and chose my role as researcher in order to respect and safeguard the privacy of my participants.

Because I realized that my participants and the coaches were volunteering a lot of their personal time to my study, I tried to offer reciprocal services to them. I offered to help any team member with specific writing or reading assignments, in addition to any test preparation practice they might need. As the year progressed, I was able to do this for many different players, both for my participants and others on the team. Not only did this practice allow me to give back to the program; it further protected my participants from their peers because I was invested in many different players.

Summary

My dissertation uses a case study format to describe the figured world of football and figured world of the classroom, the literacies used in each, and to articulate the connections and/or disconnections my participants experience between the two. I analyzed data from interviews, field observations, and artifact study in order to study each participant as his own case, and then I analyzed across cases for connecting themes.

My data collection was an iterative process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) in which I collected, organized, and analyzed my data throughout the entire research process. As the data collection ended, I was able to create codes and develop categories for my data that would drive my findings. My findings are then described in order to articulate important details to the study (Erickson, 1986).

My study’s data focused on answering questions connected to the Taft football and classroom figured worlds and the literacies my participants use in each area. In
chapter 4, I describe the figured world of Taft football and the figured world of the classrooms. In chapter 5, I articulate my findings regarding the literacies in both worlds and the connections and disconnections each individual experiences and how that might influence their identities. Finally, in chapter 6, I discuss the implications of my research.
CHAPTER IV

TAFT FOOTBALL AND CLASSROOM FIGURED WORLDS

The purpose of this study is multi-faceted. First, I describe the figured worlds of Taft High School football and the Taft High School classroom and the literacies required in both worlds. Second I articulate how the characteristics of the figured worlds influenced the literacies that were used and demanded in each area. Finally, I describe the connections and disconnections my participants experienced as they move between the two worlds and how that tension influenced their identity building development.

My data were collected from my observations, interviews, and artifact study. From my data, I described the figured worlds and the literacies used in both; then I tried to analyze the connections and/or disconnections that took place between the two worlds of football and the classroom. Throughout this process, my participants were involved in leading and clarifying my information. All participants were members of the Taft varsity football team. The four participants were chosen to represent a diversity of ethnicity, age, and athletic and academic success within the varsity squad. I spent the 10 months observing the participants within the football program and throughout their academic school day. I interviewed three coaches and at least two teachers for each participant.

I interviewed each participant four times with the exception of Allen. Due to his disengagement from Taft’s classrooms, I was only able to interview him three times. In the third and final interview, we were able to talk for an extended amount of time and address the key questions related to the study.
This chapter focuses on the nature of the figured worlds in both Taft football and classroom. Because both of these figured worlds are particular in their history, present practices, and in personalities of their participants, the descriptions became important to the discussion of embedded literacies they both entail. In order to describe these figured worlds and further provide a theoretical foundation, I articulate the definition of figured world as theorized by Holland et al. (1998). I follow this with a brief introduction to my participants, their coaches, and teachers in order to clarify certain roles and expectations and the people who fulfilled them in each world. Finally, I describe the Taft football and classroom figured worlds using categories that emerged from my data.

**The Figured World of Football at Taft**

Holland et al.’s (1998) definition of a figured world is rooted in the idea that the identity building process is socially embedded, socially constructed, and dependent on shared meanings of cultural models. A figured world is a “space” where individuals take on roles that are both historically and socially situated but also informed by an individual’s agency. Individuals bring their history with them, a “history-in-person,” while also using the agency to carve a space for identity (Holland et al., 1998). These roles that individuals enact are both constrained by past practice but empowered by individual decision and current direction.

In their book, Holland et al. (1998) stated, “Figured worlds take shape within and grant shape to the coproduction of activities, discourses, performances, and artifacts” (p. 51). Within their conceptualization, Holland et al. described how a figured world can be differentiated from a social context. They do this by describing the world of Alcoholics
Anonymous. Although this is a social group, meeting in different cultural settings throughout the United States, each AA group has a similar figured world due to the specific valuations and orientations they have toward the group and their objectives and how its members are figured. As Holland et al. explained, the members of the AA group use specific labels for themselves (alcoholics, not drinkers) and they give value to objects such as tokens to recognize the number of days they have been without drinking.

Holland et al. described this figured world:

In AA meetings participants tell stories about their lives before they joined the organization. They collect tokens for the periods of time they have remained sober. They come to name themselves, and often to see themselves, as “alcoholics” and not just drinkers. All these elements of AA are meaningful in, relevant to, and valued (or not) in relation to a frame of meaning, a virtual world, a world that has been figured. (Holland et al., 1998, p. 51)

While a token to an AA participant serves as a point of sobriety, to those outside this specific world, the token is simply comparable to a poker chip. However, that poker chip takes on very specific meaning within the AA figured world, which spans multiple physical settings.

When attempting to navigate any figured world, an individual is required to recognize the prefiguredness that is built from history and tradition. For example, in AA, the token has specific historical meaning. To acquire a more acceptable positionality within the AA membership, an incoming member must recognize and honor that meaning. Without this public acceptance, building an AA identity might become
jeopardized for an individual. His or her individual agency or viewpoint of the token cannot disregard the historical and political meanings the tokens have served for the membership without consequences on identity construction. I entered the Taft football and classroom figured worlds with this delicate balance in mind.

I studied the Taft football program and the Taft classrooms in the same way. While they both do inhabit a physical, social space, those who participate in the football program and in the academic classes give value and frame specific meaning to worlds that are figured both through a dynamic history and an expectant present. Being a member of the Taft football team brings a certain prestige and recognition. The actors of the football team are recognized and certain expectations are maintained within the figured world that might not be expected in other situations. For example, physical assault is not accepted outside Rawley Stadium’s oval; however, within it, physical violence is encouraged and bred through weeks of preparation, films, and community expectation. In the classroom, teachers are expected to fill specific roles that are different than the football coaches. While coaches’ roles include the expectation of yelling, threatening, and even insulting at times, teachers are expected to be nurturing and positive with their speech. Yelling and/or cursing would not be a teacher behavior with positive value in the classroom figured world. These are just a few examples that begin to describe the Taft football and classroom figured world.

In the reminder of this chapter, I introduce the players and coaches who served as my participants throughout the study. In the next section, I also briefly explain the role of teachers within the study. A deeper description follows in Chapter 5.
Introduction to Players, Coaches, and Teachers

Table 6 is a brief description of my player participants and the coaches that fulfilled dynamic roles in the football figured world. While I interviewed two teachers for each individual player, their insights and comments were used to build a composite of the Taft figured classroom world. Building a composite classroom figured world held tension for me as a researcher because I realize how much individual teachers and content area disciplines can shape individual classrooms. However, in Taft’s classrooms, especially in the junior and senior levels, many classes could be described in similar

Table 6

Player Participants and Coaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Brief Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Player</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>Senior, Caucasian, Starting Defensive back, Athletically driven but struggled a lot academically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Senior, African American, Starting Defensive back, Athletically driven, struggled some academically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neron</td>
<td>Junior, Hispanic, Starting Defensive back, Athletically and academically driven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJ</td>
<td>Head coach. Tightly organized his program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach Poland</td>
<td>Defensive Coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach Smyth</td>
<td>Special teams coach. Defensive line coach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ways. For example, most classrooms were led by an individual teacher who controlled most of the curriculum and the assessments. As a result, I believed my research questions were best served by building a composite of the classroom figured world found within Taft. The individual teachers, their titles, and content areas are described within the Taft classroom world description.

**Figured World Elements**

To develop and articulate key elements of the Taft football and classroom figured world, I analyzed my data collected through interviews, observations, and artifact study. I attempted to construct and define often unsaid, but yet expected, roles that players, coaches, and teachers take on within these ‘as-if’ realms and the styles of expected interactions (Holland et al., 1998). I also tried to describe with words the stated and unstated values built and assumed within each world. As I collected and coded data in both figured worlds, similar descriptive categories emerged to frame my findings (see Table 7). These categories serve as organizers for considering elements of both figured worlds. First I discuss the elements of the Taft football figured world, then I describe the elements of the Taft classroom figured world.

The Taft football figured world is maintained by collaborative imagining. The coaches, players, and community members together take on specific roles and grant value to specific ways of thinking and being that allow the football figured world to thrive, grow, and make an indelible mark on the high school and town.
Table 7 lists the categories of figured world elements that emerged from my data. I then describe the elements embedded within football figured world by articulating the context and analyzing how this ‘as-if’ world appears so real.

Table 7

*Football Figured World Elements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles &amp; Esteem of Coaches</th>
<th>Role of Tradition &amp; History</th>
<th>Balance of I Versus Team</th>
<th>Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tightly Controlled/Liturgical Organization</td>
<td>Sacred Physical Space</td>
<td>Individual Drive</td>
<td>Physical &amp; Kinesthetic Ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unquestioned Hierarchy</td>
<td>Equipment &amp; Artifacts</td>
<td>Collaborative Support</td>
<td>Visceral Language &amp; Multiple Literacies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking and Planning</td>
<td>Community Expectations</td>
<td>Unquestioned Dedication to the Program</td>
<td>Decisive Actions Connected to Behaviors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Roles and Esteem of the Coaches**

I begin the description of the Taft football figured world by focusing on CJ, the exacting program he developed, and the way he ‘figured’ the position of the other coaches and players. Mirroring the priority this local community has for football, CJ was hired to mentor young men through middle school and into high school as his teaching responsibilities; however, most of his time was expected to be devoted to coaching the Taft football squad. As the head coach, his personality and decisions created and drove much about the Taft football figured world. This was vividly heard and seen in CJ’s many team speeches.
As he began one particular, pregame schedule, CJ had this motivational speech for his players which points to the assumed roles and behaviors. He stated:

This is the last bastion to be a man. You can commit physical assault every time you play. The more violent it is, the more you are a hero. You are carried off the field on the community’s shoulders. Where else is there a grander stage than Rawley Stadium on October 29th? You have the opportunity to write your story today, to make it perfect. Go out; play it, and be a hero. It’s the perfect day that deserves the perfect ending. You can write it. (CJ, head coach, pregame speech, October 29, 2011)

By contextualizing this game within the school’s and community’s expectations, CJ shaped and sustained the definition of roles and behaviors for the Taft football figured world. He pointed to both the history-in-person potential as well as the individual’s agency in creating an identity within the world (Holland et al., 1998).

Because he controlled and sustained much of the football figured world at Taft, I begin the figured world findings by describing the head coach, his staff, and his program’s organizational structure. The way CJ positioned himself, his other coaches, the players, and Taft history very strategically figures this football world and defines specific expectations and assumptions.

The head coach, CJ, was impeccably organized and disciplined, but able to work collaboratively with his trusted staff. He viewed the assistant coaches as ‘head coaches’ of their squads and allows them the latitude to make decisions and develop schemes that each week’s success demanded. I did recognize a high level of collaboration between the
22 members of the coaching staff. They meet regularly, multiple times a day, to discuss, debate, and develop ideas for their players and opponents, although these meetings were always in private, without players being involved. CJ proudly admitted to me that no one on the coaching staff uses the words “I” or “mine” when referring to his coaching or to the program because of this emphasis on collaborative leadership. In this way, CJ articulated his expectation of collective work, even through his coaches’ speech. CJ, Coach Poland, and Coach Smyth explained to me that although there may be disagreement between the coaches in their meeting, differences are negotiated behind those doors so that the staff can form a united message and direction for the players through their weeks of preparation. This unity is believed to craft and solidify the hierarchy of the team’s organization.

**Tightly controlled/Liturgical organization.** CJ is deeply committed to the overall success of his players. This drove his controlled organization. During his 27 years of coaching (not all at Taft), he has always focused on the whole athlete, not only his athletic performance on the field. He regularly called the players “men” and often referred to football as being a means to additional life opportunities such as attending college through an athletic scholarship. Since CJ’s background includes being an English teacher, he frequently edited his players’ scholarship essays, and he helped his players prepare for testing such as the ACT.

CJ’s tight and caring organization extended beyond the actual football field or locker room. CJ expected his Taft coaches to go beyond only focusing on the football success of their players. They were expected to be invested in the lives of the young men
they coached every day. When Allen’s family didn’t have sufficient money for a quality Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner, CJ himself brought a full dinner to the player’s house on both of these days. The offensive line coach had his players to his house and took them all trap shooting with his own sons and other family members while he also fed them a full breakfast. Coach Smyth, the special teams’ coach, spent hours meeting the social and emotional needs of his players after school and practice times. For example, he would often have players in his office, relying on him to help them negotiate family trauma, school behavior issues, or even potential neighborhood conflict. One day Coach Smyth even drove home in the middle of his workday to grab his own black dress shoes so that a player could have proper attire for a community event.

As a general rule, the players seem to accept and utilize this ‘wrap-around’ support that CJ has built for the program. Many players told me stories of going to their coaches for advice and direction regarding life circumstances that were far beyond the football realm, and these coaches met each concern and conversation with care and insight. As Neron stated, “If football is our family, the coaches are our football dads” (Neron, January 11, 2011). These coaches acted out the role of father figure for many of these young men who had not had a relationship with their own biological fathers or faced struggles that seemed bigger than themselves. While fulfilling this father-like role, this also positioned the coaches to influence the players’ lives outside of practice and school. This influence was important when the coaches are figured as the authority to be followed.
CJ believed his role included developing a highly structured, repetitive, almost liturgical program for his athletes. Order, structure, and predictability became expected and unquestioned as the Taft players moved through the program. Although their personal lives could be highly chaotic, they anticipated the program’s structure and believed the football world will be organized and orderly. The players seemed to trust this structure and believed that because their coaches designed it, it would bring more team success. To further illustrate this organization, I describe the liturgy of the week.

**Practice week.** Because the coaching staff constructed and controlled so much of the football figured world, describing the coaching staff and the structured program they create seems primary. Understanding the organization and how it is built to privilege the hierarchy and coaching philosophy is important to conceptualizing this figured world.

The coaches of the Taft High School team engaged with their jobs with zeal. Each component of the program and each experience that the players have was meticulously planned and organized. The week’s practice prior to a game was rigidly scheduled and repeated week after week so that the players have the structure ingrained in their minds and bodies. The coaches collaborated to develop a type of routine that moved the program through each challenge, victory, controversy, and the mundanity of daily practice drills.

Each weekday held certain significance in the practice routine. For example, “Mental Mondays” are used for film review and play planning, weight training, and conditioning. Helmets and pads are put away on Mondays, while the players and coaches concentrate on developing a strategy for attacking the week’s opponents and building
more endurance in the players. On Tuesday through Thursday, the players don their full pads and have a full contact practice for two to three hours. After these hours of practice, some position coaches have their players stay and study more film. The position coach always led this film study with players only sporadically contributing answers to close-ended questions. They were generally only expected to watch, listen, and study the visual execution the coaches develop.

If their weekly contest was on Saturday, Coach Smyth’s trademark comment could be heard at the Thursday practice. He loudly asked the players as they stretch and warm up, “What day is it?” Then all the players within hearing responded with him, “It’s the day before, the day before!” This phrase became another ritualistic marker within the design of the week. With a Saturday game, Friday was a day when the players left their pads in the locker room, and they simply ran through plays and received last minute instructions. Everyone emotionally and physically prepared for the game the next day (See Table 8).

Most practices typically started around 3:15 and ended about 6:00; however, CJ kept the players at practice until his objectives for the day were met. This might mean the players would stay longer if needed. This on-the-spot decision-making by CJ was not to be questioned. Some practices were held in Rawley Stadium and others were held on the team’s practice field on the opposite side of the high school from the stadium.

On different nights of the week, a coach might keep his squad after practice to view film. For example, oftentimes Coach Poland kept his defensive squad after practice to study film for the upcoming opponent. This could last from 30 minutes to an hour.
Table 8

_Taft’s Football Figured World Schedule_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of the Week</th>
<th>Structure of the Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Mental Mondays were focused on viewing film for the upcoming game. Notes were taken and most of the time was committed to listening and learning. Team t-shirts and shorts were worn for this practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Tuesday practices were in full football equipment (all pads and helmets) and with full contact (tackles allowed). Practices were broken into 15-20 segments so that each player had time to practice specific skills with specific coaches. In Tuesday practices, the starting line-up began scrimmaging against the scouting team who were taught to run the upcoming opponent’s plays through cue cards developed by the scouting coach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Wednesday practices were in full football equipment. Practices were broken into 15-20 segments so that each player had time to practice specific skills with specific coaches. In Wednesday practices, the starting line-up scrimmaged against the scouting team who were taught to run the upcoming opponent’s plays through cue cards developed by the scouting coach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>If there was a Friday game, Thursday’s practice became a helmet’s only practice. Players wore team t-shirts and shorts but no pads. Defensive and Offensive plays were practiced without any tackling. If the team played on Saturday, instead of Friday, Thursday was only “the day before the day before” as coined by Coach Smyth, and the practice was organized like Tuesday’s and Wednesday’s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>If there was a Friday game, the players stayed after school and immediately began their pre-game ritual. If they played on Saturday, Friday’s practice was with helmets only, and plays were practiced without full contact and full pads.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Gameday liturgy_. Each gameday had a specific liturgy that guided the players and coaches through stages of getting “locked in” for the game. The term “liturgy” is my own because the fixed routine reminded me of the very structured way in which a church worship is designed and implemented. Like a church’s service, where the hierarchy and organizational structure of the church’s worship service is ritualistically performed to gain certain emotional and spiritual preparedness, the gameday liturgy also attempted to
meet a certain objective of emotional and psychological readiness through ritual. I was able to attend many of these activities throughout the regular and tournament season of data collection. I never saw any variance in the structure. Because the structure so strongly points to CJ’s meticulous planning and figuring, I describe the liturgy leading up to each game.

First the players met together in a large seminar room inside Taft, with all chairs facing the front of the room. Even here there was unquestioned priority seating. The seniors sat in the front, with the underclassmen sitting behind. I usually sat in the back corner of the room giving me a bird’s eye view of the room and the film. With the entire program seated together, over 100 members filled the red seminar room.

There were murmurings as the beginning time came closer, and senior captains usually began by telling others to quiet down, take out their earbuds, and turn off their music. When CJ entered the room, he quietly asked everyone to sit up and pay attention. Everyone did just that, and the gameday routine began.

CJ always began the liturgy with a short reference to something motivational that would thematically build throughout the afternoon’s preparation. Often he would share a quote to begin this time. He told the men that it was time to start “locking in” for the game. Each meeting they had moved them closer in preparation for their contest.

After CJ’s first, short motivational speech, the offense left to practice plays in the hallway. The defense stayed for film study first. Because the Defensive Coordinator, Coach Poland, was the expert with the film program, the defense usually stayed longer for this session. When offense came back, the defense went out to run through plays
while offense watched a little film. CJ usually had difficulty working the computer and projector himself; he depended on the position coaches to do the actual technical work while he narrated and pointed out details he wanted the offense to see. After 15 to 20 minutes, the defense would return and any freshman who had been sitting in the center section with the offense would quickly get up and move over to a side section of chairs. Both squads would then listen to CJ’s second motivational message and schedule discussion that led them to the team meal.

The team meal became an important part of the pre-game ritual because it was a guarantee that the players ate the food they needed for the game. This organizational element was possible due to the Booster Club members who provided funding for the meals and even helped serve the team for each game. The seniors were released first to eat. The rest of the underclassmen waited quietly in the seminar room until it was their turn. There was very little talking, no aggravating, and no music playing; they just waited. The underclassmen were then released according to their squad assignment.

Team meals, held on the first floor school cafeteria, were always quiet, with little off-task behavior. There was talk, but if it got too loud, a senior captain told everyone to quiet down which always stopped the talking. Many players listened to their music; others talked quietly. The focus was preparedness, not being social. No player was told this, even though they were participating in a social event in the school’s cafeteria, a place that is usually filled with general laughter and conversation between the adolescents. The cafeteria was a different space for this pregame ritual, however, so there was little conversation and/or off-task behavior.
Special teams left first to go back upstairs. As others finished, they went upstairs also, but waited quietly outside the seminar room, sitting against the wall or laying on the floor until the entire team came together again.

When the special team meeting was completed, the entire team was gathered back into the seminar room and CJ addressed them again. This time he was more serious and targeted with his words. For the big game against rival Chelsea, each player and coach in the room was given a red marble. CJ then spoke about the power of throwing all the marbles together at one time as opposed to throwing them one at a time. He tried to emphasize the value of working as a team and giving it “110%,” because in his words, “This game is worth all the marbles, men” (CJ, head coach, pregame speech, October 29, 2011). Success in this game was vitally important to this season and the community’s bragging rights.

After this discussion, the team left the room for the walk out of the building and down toward the locker room facilities connected to the football stadium. During this walk, where coaches accompanied the players and sometimes fans lined the sidewalks, the players were expected to lock in and continue the mental preparation for the game. It was mostly quiet; there was no laughing or pushing or discussing. Some players would put in their earbuds; others just walked silently, staring at the ground or at a point far out in the distance. For important games, such as the game with Chelsea, it wasn’t unusual for this walk to be lined with fans and community members. Even so, the players knew to keep the faces forward and their emotions in check as they ‘lock-in’. They were not expected to interact with the community members’ passion at this point in the ritual.
When the walk to the locker room was complete, the team either prepared to leave on the bus for an away game or slowly prepared for a home competition. The rest of the preparation took place in the locker room. When they were dressed, the players were allowed to come outside of the locker room to stretch and do whatever they needed to lock in for the game. At this time, the coaching staff usually convened to the coaching offices for information meetings and to change into their matching outfits for the game.

At approximately 40 minutes before game time, the seniors led the players through a series of stretching and drills. Coaches stood within the players’ formations or walked silently as they observed the preparation. Fans began to fill the stands at this early time creating an air of hopeful expectation. When there were approximately 10 minutes before the start of the game, the players were told to reconvene in the locker room for one last, pregame speech. I was never invited to observe this stage; however, from my conversations and observations when the players re-emerged, it was always a very emotionally-charged motivational talk. This was when emotions were invited into the process. CJ waited and built to this throughout the afternoon. The players then lined up at the door, jumping, slapping, cheering, and watching the fans and cheerleaders as they readied the entry tunnel to the field.

This ritual was repeated each week with no variance that I observed. CJ was meticulous about getting the timing correct for this procedure. I often noticed that he would pad the time he actually needed in order to account for events such as a late bus for away games, or for a late player who was unable to get a ride. He was absolutely convinced that this routine allowed his players to properly prepare for each game.
**Unquestioned hierarchy.** There was a clear hierarchy to CJ’s program and therefore, the Taft football figured world. The community expected winners, so CJ used his power as head coach in the attempt to achieve that. Every coach and player knew and understood the hierarchy of the team. The hierarchy was as follows:

- Head Coach
- Position Coaches
- Other Coaches
- Captains
- Seniors
- Juniors

This unquestioned hierarchy was evidenced through the tightly controlled program explained in the previous section. Players who I knew challenged their teachers and struggled with other types of authority willingly submitted to CJ’s authoritarian structure.

**Play calling organization.** In my first long conversation with CJ, which took place during the late spring of 2011, he explained to me that Taft’s football program was based on words, not on numbers. For example, the defensive plays were not recognized by certain numbers; they are known by words and visual symbols. To signal the play “Pirate,” the defensive coordinator put one of his hands over one eye. The defense sees this signal and immediately knows what coverage to run. CJ believed that words and signals were better and more meaningful for players when they were memorizing multiple plays and formations. He wanted complete understanding in his play calls. Words and meaningful signals worked well for his system. Sometimes when the coaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head Coach</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position Coaches</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Coaches</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captains</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juniors</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
put in a new play for a game, they even asked the players for a meaningful signal. For some play designs, this often led to some unique and interesting visual symbols, but the players always understood. In this way, the Taft coaching staff and players created value and specific meanings to previously random words or signals. This points to how they figured this world for the players’ success and focus.

**Critical thinking.** Throughout the study, I tried to differentiate who did the critical mass of thinking for the team. I knew from my observations and conversations that the coaching staff spent many hours studying film and developing strategy that was then ingrained in the players throughout the week before the game. On the other hand, players such as Neron and James believed that their thinking contributed to the game strategy each week. Coach Smyth finally helped me understand this balance. He equated the game to the ‘test’ for each week. The difference was that even the coaches did not always know the right answers. For example, even the coaches couldn’t anticipate all the plans the opposition had developed. So, within the confines of the game, coaches often found themselves listening to each other and to certain players as their game plan might be altered or changed. While this level of contribution would not have been acceptable throughout the week’s preparation, during the game, the coaches re-figured the roles of thinking for some players and allowed for more of a collaborative experience.

**Role of Tradition and History**

CJ also valued and integrated a respect for the Taft history and tradition into the program’s daily work and through that modeling creates a sense of community connection and obligation within the players. Often key alumni are invited to various
meetings and practices. I also saw alumni visit during some weight room workouts. These returning players are always introduced followed by their list of accomplishments while playing at Taft. Sometimes they are even given a few minutes to give some type of motivational speech to the current players. CJ used the past players to create a feeling of connection and continuity. Current players are encouraged to learn from their words and value their insights.

**Sacred spaces.** While the coaches and their program structure constituted an important aspect of the Taft football program at this time, the space involved with Taft football is an enduring part of the legacy and history of the program. A description of the physical spaces of Taft football is vital to describing this situated context and giving specific details to the figured world.

**Rawley Stadium.** I spent many long hours observing practices and games, and having many conversations with players, coaches, and fans in Rawley Stadium. I sat and stood through heat, rain, and snow as one season moved to the next. Throughout all this time, Rawley always stood as a proud backdrop. As a researcher embedded within the program for an extended length of time, I began to acclimate to the mythical quality this stadium has for the football program.

I found that history is tangible in this stadium; it echoes through the locker room, the stadium, the field, and the bleachers. Often, when the bleachers were cleared of the fans and the players and coaches were in the locker room after a big game, I would find myself standing near the field, under the bright lights, feeling like I could almost touch
and hear the hopes, dreams, and stories this stadium has held within its oval for many generations of Taft players.

The figured world of Taft football is intimately connected to the stadium. Built in 1938 with the potential of seating up to 22,000 guests, Rawley has been the home field for Taft football for many years. Rawley stands tall, tucked beside Taft High School. Although the field is leased and used by two other universities and one other Tresselton high school, Taft’s history blankets the home locker room, and all their equipment is housed here. In the eyes of the community, Rawley Stadium is home to Taft.

Walking into the vast stadium, I understood why the players often have such high expectations from their college environments. Rawley’s concrete stadium rises high above the turf field. Its newly-built, brick press box stands even farther, a full three stories of prime seating for administrators, coaches, and other athletic officials such as college recruiters and reporters. At each end of the stadium, more bleachers round out the fan seating.

A large Jumbotron that features video for each play fills the eastern corner of the stadium and a large scoreboard rises above the stands in the western end. Deep sidelines envelope the playing field on all sides, allowing plenty of space for the large high school squads, coaches, trainers, and equipment. Perhaps due to their on-going football interests, the taxpayers of Tresselton Schools provide financial support for this massive stadium’s upkeep and maintenance while their players enjoy some of the space and expectations that professional players, coaches, and teams would have.
The players and coaches loved their facilities and are somewhat pampered by the luxuries not usually found in high school stadiums. The physical space afforded the coaches both conversational spaces and space for squad meetings throughout the game. Plays are revisited and redesigned, and players are encouraged and directed, and have questions answered in the wide sidelines while headsets carry instructions from the coaches inside the well-equipped press box to the coaches on the field.

Rawley’s storied tradition is expansive, and its facilities are well beyond the expectations of a high school stadium. Coach Smyth once told me that some of the Taft football players aren’t initially interested in playing football at smaller colleges because they are disappointed by the lack of grand facilities. As they are recruited by a variety of colleges, Taft players quickly find that even many college facilities cannot compare to their home field, and oftentimes this serves as an area of frustration for a new recruit. They are not prepared for this change. Their football figured world has been structured around high-quality facilities and adapting to smaller, less mythical physical surroundings is quite difficult for them to accept.

After two state tournament games, I had a conversation with Coach Poland about the physical space of Rawley and how that influenced their coaching and team. He pointed out that in both stadiums (away from Rawley) where the tournament games were played, the sideline areas were too small for position squad meetings and even the locker rooms were not equipped for a large group, half-time coaching session. At the Cooperstown stadium and tournament game, the coaching headsets did not work, and the coaches on the sidelines were not able to communicate with the press box coaches. At
the Clinton stadium, there was not room to have good conversations on the sidelines or even in the locker room at half time. He stated, “Physical space impacts our coaching. We’re used to wide sidelines and a great locker room here at Rawley. It’s hard to adjust” (Coach Poland, November 10, 2011). Coach Poland believed that the lack of physical space had a negative influence on their coaching and teaching abilities.

The stadium seems to embrace the history and hope for the future by creating a physical space shared by collegiate and professional athletes. The community members who gather for the games also enjoy the seating options and the wide range of spectacular field views. Many fans have been season ticket holders for generations; young and old can be found coming through the Rawley gates when the game whistle is blown. Each observer comes with the expectation of victory and the continuation of Taft football superiority.

**Weight room.** One important physical space of the Taft figured world that surprised me was the weight room. I learned that the weight room serves as somewhat of a back stage preparation area for the players and coaches. It is the focus of off-season training and where work ethic is honed. The coaches have high expectations that the players will be in the weight room for many hours after school during the months of January through May. Weightlifting also continued three days a week in the summer, until the actual season can begin in August. CJ expected hard work and focused behavior during this off-season time because he believed it was this preparation that would bring more victories in the fall. When the winter weightlifting season began in January, CJ expected each player who was not in a winter sport to report to each session. He even
told them that appointments with doctors or dentists needed to be done during the school day or a day that didn’t include weightlifting commitments. Even these types of appointments needed to take a second seat to this off-season activity.

CJ reiterated, “If you can’t commit, then leave” (CJ, head coach, weight room speech, January 4, 2012). This blunt quote displayed the level of weightlifting commitment he expected from the players during the months of January through August and cemented this room as an important place to be found.

CJ related the charge of player favoritism that all coaches encounter to the players’ responsibility to weightlifting. He told the players, “I play my favorite guys. You have the 100% ability to be my favorite. This is where you make yourself” (CJ, head coach, weight room speech, January 4, 2012). CJ clearly articulated the work ethic he expects and rewards.

The weight room was a vital part of CJ’s program and the space itself was as important as Rawley Stadium. The weight room became the place where dreams are drafted and family was built. The weight room was developed to be a type of family dining room table where the team gathers on a regular basis to laugh, talk, and work together as goals are built for the upcoming opponents and challenges. In January, I heard these symbols evoked and described by the seniors and alumni who CJ invited back to initiate the beginning of the weight-training season. Although I had observed and analyzed the Taft program throughout the entire football season, a new realization developed as I listened to the crafting of the weight room story through the alumni and coaches’ speeches.
In January, as I watched the players run through their weightlifting assignments, I looked around and saw the entirety of the room in a newly constructed light. The room itself reinforces the precision and craft of history and the communication of expectations and roles. The walls of the large weight room are industrial beige. Each wall is adorned with motivational phrases or pieces of Taft memorabilia. On the front wall, these words are painted high above the players’ heads: “With tradition comes responsibility. Some of us can’t win it for all of us. Attitude means everything.” These are three different sentences that encapsulate much of the Taft story I had experienced up until this time. They pedantically proclaim the behaviors and beliefs within this ‘as-if’ realm of the football program.

On a side wall, a long, professionally designed, color chart covers the entire wall, scripting out Taft’s All Ohioans. This list begins in 1976 and continues to the present. Under the chart of All Ohioans are the motivational phrases: “Speed kills. Strength punishes,” a nod to the vicious nature of the football tradition.

Across the back wall are five huge charts depicting the top players in each squad for a variety of weight lifting. Each chart is divided into six squares, and there is a professional picture of the top lifter, in full uniform, from each squad. There are charts for the top lifters in Bench, Squats, Hang Clean, Deadlift, and Top Lifts. The squad divisions are Offensive Line, Quarterback/Running back, Wide Receiver, Defensive Line, Linebacker, and Defensive Back. Finally, at the end of the wall is another chart of equal size that recognizes Academic Champions from each squad. The coaches explain
that this chart serves as a visual reminder that they expect the players will excel academically also.

On the last side wall are the words “Panther Country” painted in a script, and a huge football that has the fall’s schedule moved into the 10-week slots. In the middle of the weight room are 16 full weight stations. All the weights are racked evenly and meticulously organized reflecting CJ’s perfectionism. CJ reminded the players that the weight room, as well as any other space this team occupies, must be clean and organized, so team leaders made sure underclassmen knew how to rack the weights correctly. It was in this room that impressions were made on the coaches and players throughout the off-season. Actions that were done here were not easily forgotten. CJ kept careful watch as the players lifted and pushed each other within their squads. CJ once said to me, “I know everything these players do from January to August. They don’t think I do, but I know” (January 4, 2012). CJ was always aware of where his players are and what they were doing, even during the off-season.

Besides the program’s structure and the physical spaces of Rawley and the Taft weight room, there are other key elements to the Taft football figured world, which are more connected to the players themselves.

**Equipment.** The physical equipment was very important to the Taft figured world. The players felt like they were putting on a piece of history when they donned items such as the helmets, jerseys, and pads. In fact for some players, these items served as the pivot piece that moved them from one ‘world’ to another (Holland et al., 1998) because they are imbued with tradition and expectation. The equipment served as an
artifact of the sacredness of having a position on the team. These pieces of costume became vital in the enacting of their football identity and its literacies.

**Artifacts.** The artifacts filled the Taft football figured world with depth and scope. They created and maintained a sense of history that was tangible and relatable for past and future players. Taft’s trophy cases and walls are filled with football championship trophies, in addition to various historical documents and recognitions. One example includes an actual bell. Proudly displayed in the high school commons area, in front of the large wall of trophies, is the victory bell. This bell, which is stabilized on a large, wheeled base, is kept by the winning team after Taft plays its cross-town rivals, the Chelsea Arrows. Each year the game’s score is painted on the base and then given to the winners until the next fall, when it is rolled back onto the sidelines for the big game. Owning this bell for the year takes on an epic honor that fans and players highly esteem between each yearly match-up. When Taft won during my data collection phase, four players jumped onto the bell’s wide base and began ringing the bell while numerous other players pushed the entire entourage across the wide field while the fans cheered loudly.

Another artifact that serves as the hope and dreams, but not necessarily a reality for each Taft player, is the State Championship ring. In Ohio, when a high school football team wins its Division, the entire team is given a ring to signify the championship. At Taft, players and fans can easily find alumni who proudly wear their ring and tell stories about their season. ‘Getting the ring’ becomes the goal for a team and players each season.
I also observed that the community’s support feeds on these powerful symbols also. The jerseys, helmets, and trophies of past victories and remembered heroics provide expectation and motivation for fans who attend the games and listen over the radio. Many fans wore old jerseys of past players, girlfriends wore an extra jersey of their football playing boyfriends, and almost every individual in the crowd came to the Taft football games wearing blue or black Taft Panthers sweatshirts or t-shirts. In order to appear more cohesive to my surroundings, I found myself purchasing more and more Taft t-shirts, sweatshirts, and other blue clothes for the games and even for the practices. I once accidentally wore an orange colored raincoat to a rainy, overcast practice and was chastised (in a somewhat teasing way) by two different coaches because orange is the color of Taft’s arch rivals, the Chelsea Arrows. After this incident, I tried to stick to the acceptable dress code, which appeared to be anything related to Taft, as much as possible. In this particular world, only blue and black were acceptable colors and not wearing them identified one as an outsider.

Since the artifacts such as helmets and trophies were housed in community spaces such as the stadium itself, many community members and players had the ability to point out and tell their own stories connected to these items of memory and celebration when they come to Rawley. These artifacts added to the sense of storied and shared history that is so tangible with Taft football.

**Community expectations.** The community holds the Taft football team in great esteem and begins each season with expectations for winning. Entire families structure their week around the Friday or Saturday game. As I found through my participants’
stories, many fathers, grandfathers, and/or uncles further the community tradition by taking the younger boys of their families to these games and encouraging their dreams of one day playing on Rawley field.

Being a part of the football team was very important to the young men who attended Taft. Many players had dreamed of becoming a Panther since a young age. James and Allen both explained this passion through their stories. James continually strove to keep his place on the team by hard work and commitment to his coaches and teammates. This commitment seemed to stem from his desire to be a meaningful part of a team, but it also came from a lifetime of watching and yearning to “be a Panther.” James remembers fighting over who got to be the Panthers even during childhood, backyard play. He reflected on attending games with his father and becoming caught up into the crowd’s energy and excitement that was dramatically tied to the “Panther Nation.” Although James is an all-around talented athlete, he held his position within the football team with great respect and worked hard to keep it through his aggressive play and his commitment to the coaches.

Growing up in the Tresselton community, Allen had always dreamed of playing for Taft football. Playing football at Taft fulfilled Allen’s childhood dreams and aspirations. Like other football players at Taft, Allen was heavily influenced by the history and celebrity of playing Taft football from an early age. In his interview, Allen related some of his childhood conversations with his father regarding playing football for Taft:
My dad told me this story like a million times, he tells me like every year. “You remember when you was little and we took you to that Taft game? And after the game, you was like, ‘I wanna be a Panther!’” That’s all I wanted to be. (Sept. 14, 2012)

The mystique of the championship history and tradition of excellence that surrounded the Taft football world intrigued and wooed many young men of Tresselton who rightly deciphered the primacy the program held within the city.

**Balance of I Versus Team**

Throughout the data collection time period, I struggled with trying to understand the delicate balance that was expected between the individual and the team. I heard the coaches refer to this many times in many contexts. Clearly, the coaches expected each individual to work hard and push himself as an individual player; however, CJ and his staff constantly made the team wear perfectly matched uniforms and work hard to support each other, too. On the one hand, coaches praised players for individual drive and accomplishment through awards and special recognition. On the other hand, they expected all players to fulfill their roles on the team, which might mean executing a fake run so that another teammate could actually score and gain the praise. To achieve success in CJ’s program, players had to excel as individuals but also be willing to sacrifice for the collaborative effort.

CJ repeatedly told me that the football team was the most functional family in the Tresselton city limits, so the idea of a connected group was very important. He believed and spoke to this balance in many ways through his coaching meetings, squad meetings,
and even talking one-on-one with players. Players, too, seemed to carve out an intricate balance between how they perform as individuals and how they work as a team.

**Individual drive.** The balance between individual work ethic and collaborative support was a tension that CJ knew existed in his program. He tried to be explicit with his language by expressing value for both. At the football awards banquet that took place after the season ended, CJ and the other coaches continually praised the players for their work in the weight room and their consistent effort on the field; however, they also praised these same players for their teamwork. CJ tried to be very specific about the team values through the slogan the seniors chose “We all we got;” however, Allen was at least one player who began to doubt this slogan while he struggled to achieve this balance of I versus Team. Allen said this to me about his attitude; “Yeah, it changed. Like I even told CJ, I told CJ, I’m like I should’ve just looked out for me. I should’ve looked out for Allen” (Allen, December, 7, 2012). He went on later:

Like, it sounds good, “We all we got.” It just sounds good, but in reality, it’s “I’m all I got,” really. Like, Allen, Allen has to take care of Allen and do what he has to do to get out of Taft High School. (Allen, December 7, 2012)

This delicate figuring and balancing between the individual and the team seemed to be a complex equation for players to achieve; however, those who were able to conceptualize it and act out the acceptable behaviors were afforded strong positions within the team. Allen was unable to support the hierarchy’s established I versus Team balance where the individual came second to the team. As a result, his identity suffered.
Collaborative support. While Allen does represent a player who became disillusioned by the expressed value CJ and his coaches put on the team as a unit, it was clear that in the Taft football figured world players had to be willing to see themselves as part of a whole. The image of family was often used by the coaches and players to perpetuate this deeply esteemed bond. When he spoke about his commitment to football, Neron always tied it into who he was as a person. He stated:

You have a whole other family. You be at football enough more than you be at home so it’s like, that’s your other family, and it’s so much like memory that you have, with your football players, and it makes a big impact on your life. (October 24, 2011)

The accountability players had to their team was a value and belief that was both stated and unstated, and the understanding of this I versus Team concept often determined the playing time and success individual players experienced with CJ’s program.

Although Asher was involved in a wide variety of school activities, they were all based on some type of team. In our conversations, Asher consistently told stories and referred to episodes that involved his teammates, whether the team was the Model UN, the speech/debate team, a certain band, or the football team. He seemed to thrive on being part of a group that had specific and targeted work to do. This focus on the team was vital in football because as one coach told me, “Football is the only sport, where if you don’t do your job, your teammates will get physically hurt” (Coach Smyth,
September 1, 2011). Many of the players could understand this; however, others struggled with how to highlight their own accomplishments within the team.

**Unquestioned dedication to the program.** Although he did not grow up dreaming of playing Taft football due to living in Chicago, Neron wholeheartedly engaged with the coaches, the program, and philosophy the coaches were creating. He followed his coaches with his entire head and heart.

When he spoke about his commitment to football, Neron always tied it into who he was as a person. He stated, “It pretty much shows who I am personally, and it points out who a person can be later in life” (Neron, October 24, 2011). Through his speech and action Neron displayed the unquestioned dedication his coaches expected from their players in this figured world.

When Taft’s coaches scheduled most of the players’ after school and weekend time in preparation for their games, their coaches were assuming that players would give up this time for the benefit of the program. It was the players’ role to submit themselves to this program and its timetable. CJ, other coaches, and other players referred to the program’s team members as ‘family’ thus making the unquestioned tie to each other very articulate and clear.

**Skills**

To be successful in this football figured world, each player had to develop very specific physical and kinesthetic abilities, but they also had to have language and literacy skills. The combination of these two areas was highly valued in this particular football
world due to the expectations and roles developed within it. The approved and expected roles and skills were also acted out in the players’ actions and behaviors.

**Physical and kinesthetic ability.** Clearly, an important aspect of participation in the Taft football world was an element of physical ability. To gain a spot on the team, each player had to exhibit at least a small amount of kinesthetic intelligence. The players had to be able to move quickly and efficiently, and they had to have specific abilities for certain positions within the team. For example, as a linebacker, Neron consistently exhibited both the speed and strength needed to pursue opponents in the open field. Asher, playing on the offensive line, was not as quick in the open field, but he was quick out of his stance and could block incoming defensive linemen quickly and efficiently. Because CJ believed that participation in the football team benefitted any student, he was more inclined to include most anyone. Often he and the coaching staff would help develop specific abilities for a specific position, just so each student could be a part of the team. However, it was obvious that the starting positions were held by players with all-around physical ability and kinesthetic understanding.

**Language.** At one practice, early in the fall, I overheard Coach Poland yelling to the defensive backfield, “Choke your motors! Choke your motors!” Later that afternoon, I repeatedly heard him use the phrases, “Chop his legs off!” and “Use controlled violence!” While I puzzled over what these phrases could actually mean, the players weren’t fazed by them and seemed to alter what they were doing based on these commands. On all my audio recordings, whether during practices or games, I heard loud, passionate, and direct language being shouted out to players. I began to realize that while
sometimes the visceral language was meant to underscore anger and/or frustration from players and/or coaches, some of the volume and intentional use was simply due to the vast space of the football field. When a sideline coach needed to quickly relay a message to a player already on the field, the coach must be loud, clear, and quick. The same rules applied to the player on the field who wanted to communicate back with the coaches. There just was not time or space to speak quietly or descriptively. Most of the time, by necessity, the language was abbreviated and direct, and held a sense of emotional energy.

**Literacies.** Contrary to my own preconceptions, there is reading and writing involved in the football world at Taft. It was just very different from the linguistically based reading and writing involved with most classroom activities. Two different participants and even some coaches compared the highly symbolic reading and writing of football to reading and writing math and/or science. The reading and writing involved in football is short and abbreviated, reflecting the football language use. A letter indicates most positions. Some positions are represented by symbols, and the movement of each player is usually displayed through arrows. Unlike traditional print literacies, football reading and writing is not always linear; however, it is often conceptually built from one stage to the next. For example, one position within an offensive play might be changed for a certain game. To understand the changes, the players must understand the original play conceptually.

There are opportunities for more of a narrative reading and writing in preparation for some games. Each week, the game’s script contained mostly symbolic language; however, I did observe coaches distributing notepads and pencils for some games in
which they expected players to write not only symbolic language, but even narrative explanations, if needed.

As described in the language section, most of the speaking was very emotional and visceral. In many ways, the speaking and listening procedures reflected the hierarchical chain of command within the team’s structure. For example, I recognized that when CJ spoke, no one else did. In fact, when CJ walked into a room, whether before a game or even at half-time, all talking automatically stopped. Often CJ would speak and then give the floor to a position coach. No player was expected to speak when the coaches were. In most situations, after the position coaches spoke, they left the floor to the seniors and/or team captains. They then completed the messages begun by CJ. Juniors and other players who weren’t playing on a consistent level were not invited nor expected to talk. They were expected to listen and do.

When speaking to each other, the players were allowed to use whatever emotionally-laden speech they felt their message needed. As James pointed out, as a football player you could use whatever colorful language you wanted; however, much of this language was not acceptable in the classrooms or even in some homes. When needed, the coaches would also choose very visceral language that would gain the attention of the players. No one seemed to shy away from the level of cursing and type of language that was used in the football world; however, the coaches made it clear that the colorful language was only acceptable within this world. Players were often disciplined if the coaches became aware of inappropriate language use during the school
day or with teachers. CJ often talked about curtailing a player’s time on the field if he discovered insubordination within the classroom.

An important part of each week’s preparation was watching film and learning the new play script, all of which demanded specific viewing and design knowledge and skill. Often the coaches would lead the players through films of their upcoming opponents, but they also sent DVDs of film home with players to watch and learn on their own. It was an expectation that this work was done outside of practice time hours. When players were taught new plays or a new script, it was assumed that they could follow and understand the symbols and concepts of the play design. Some of these play scripts were also sent home for the players to study each week.

On another level, players were expected to view and ‘read’ the body posture of an opponent in order to execute a play successfully. For example, coaches and players often told me that the defense needed to watch the helmets of the offense. If the offense had their helmets down, they were preparing for a running play. If they had their helmets up, they were preparing for a pass play. The ability to view and make decisions with this sort of skill often gained players a starting position within the squad.

**Decisive action connected to behaviors.** The action and behavior for the coaches and players within the Taft football world are very specific, direct, and often closely tied to the language use. For example, when I heard Coach Poland yell, “Choke your motor!” I immediately observed that the defensive lineman ran hard up to a certain spot on the field, then quickly slowed down and covered an offensive player. Coaches expect that when a command is issued, the players will do what is asked quickly, directly,
and without question. This abbreviated language, which is expected to be followed immediately and fully, can be understood because the actions and behaviors of the players are often repeated throughout the high school careers. They are guided through expectations for the season and each week, and they repeatedly practice these skills so that when a command is given, it can be acted upon and completed.

The coaches and players believed that actions need to be violent on the field. Coach Poland can often be heard, yelling his command, “Controlled violence!” Many players told me, both formally and informally, that one thing they loved best about football is that they could take out their aggressions and frustrations through the hitting. Hitting hard, both in full pad practice and in games, was the expectation for each player. In fact, if this was not done, coaches would often change a player’s position within the team until the situation was changed. In the football figured world, action often needed to be immediate as a result of an unquestioned belief in the structure of the program and coaching staff. Players had to have both the skill and belief in order to display their approved actions and behavior as evaluated by the coaching staff and peers.

**The Figured World of the Classroom at Taft**

Taft has many of the stereotypical markings of many other American, comprehensive high schools. The high school is divided into four different small schools for its 1,600–1,800 students. According to the Taft Report Card from the Ohio Department of Education, Taft’s graduation rate hovers at 89.3%.

Each small school has an administrator and there is also a campus principal. These leaders can always be found in the hallways, encouraging students to enter the
classrooms, in the lunchroom to curtail any negative behavior, in the classroom observing teachers, or in their offices. Taft has about 80 teachers in the building during each school day. The teachers range in age and educational experience. Approximately 60% of Taft’s teachers have obtained their masters degree (Ohio Department of Education 2011-2012 Report Card). Many teachers serve as coaches, club advisors, and mentors for a variety of students and groups. These range from the traditional athletic teams such as football and basketball to groups such as the National Honor Society, Speech and Debate, and many other activities.

For this study, I attempt to describe Taft’s classroom “world” in ways similar to the football figured world. I discuss how the classroom world is figured and what beliefs and skills are valued. Many classrooms at Taft could be studied as individual figured worlds; however, for this study, the classroom figured world was configured as a composite of the classes in which my participants attended. As I collected and analyzed my data from the Taft classroom figured world, similar categories to the Taft football figured world became apparent; therefore, for my classroom description, I have utilized the same categories that organized the Taft football figured world description. I used the same basic categories for two reasons. First, the classroom figured world categories began emerging in similar ways to the football figured world categories. As a result, using the same language ought to facilitate a clearer discussion of the as-if realms, the characteristics, and the literacies involved in each. Second, this decision to utilize the same categories follows other out-of-school literacy research that serve as theoretical foundation for my project. This research highlights the abilities built and reinforced in
chosen, out-of-school arenas in order to mine them for their insight into adolescents and their identity (Hull & Schultz, 2002; Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Moje, 2000). I hope to build connections between adolescents’ out-of-school and in-school literacies by validating what literacies are used in both, even if certain literacies are not recognized within school. My research follows that historical research model. Table 9 organizes the classroom figured world categories analyzed from my data.

Table 9

*Classroom Figure World Elements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles &amp; Esteem of Teachers &amp; Administration</th>
<th>Role of Tradition &amp; History</th>
<th>Balance of I Versus Team</th>
<th>Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Liturgical Organization</td>
<td>Physical Space</td>
<td>Individual Drive</td>
<td>Intellectual Ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unquestioned Hierarchy</td>
<td>Equipment &amp; Artifacts</td>
<td>Collaborative Support</td>
<td>Standardized Language &amp; Multiple Literacies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Community Expectations</td>
<td>Unquestioned Dedication to School</td>
<td>Self-Initiated Action &amp; Approved Behavior</td>
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**Roles and Esteem of Teachers**

Much like the roles of the coaches, the classroom figured world of Taft High School is designed in a hierarchical way. Administrators are expected to take the leadership and disciplinarian roles for the whole school, whereas classroom teachers take on the role of leading and designing their own classes. Administrators often assume the teachers and students will show respect through listening to their leadership and advice. Teachers believe students ought to be motivated to learn and exude good behavior out of
respect for their scholarship and wisdom. Students are expected to obey the rules, both overt and hidden, and abide by the assumptions for the structure to move smoothly.

**Tightly controlled/Liturgical organization.** The organization of the day has its own liturgy, almost like the one created for the football team; however, this pattern was created by past history and school board policy. The day’s pattern mirrors most high schools in that bells move students from class to class. Each day begins with a homeroom at 7:55 a.m. with the Taft announcements, and then the day moves through each class period until 2:55 p.m. Taft’s schedule is built on block scheduling so each student is in class for 90 minutes, rotating classes for A days and B days. Because the other Tresselton City high school houses most of the career-tech offerings, some Taft students are bused to and from that high school throughout the day. For example, Neron spent his mornings studying Engineering and reported to Taft around 11:30 to eat lunch and then finish his academic classes. While enlarging their options, with students coming and going each day, there is a constant state of fluidity in Taft which sometimes feels disconcerting to teachers; however, students seem more flexible. This fluidity adds an element of unpredictability and disunity to the Taft classroom figured world that teachers and administrators have a difficult time controlling and directing. This can be observed in the classes surrounding the lunch periods. Most students transitioned between the two schools somewhere between 11:00 and 12:30; however, the two schools’ schedules were not perfectly matched. As a result, students were often late to their Taft classes because they had to eat lunch first. Because the teachers had no way of discerning the truthfulness of these types of tardiness claims, they had to admit the students after class
had already begun. Despite this type of ambiguity, it was the expectation that teachers and administrators would control and manage this daily student population movement.

**Unquestioned hierarchy.** There was a defined hierarchy at Taft High School, even though it was not always seen. School board members were expected to take on the role of making big policy decisions and communicating them to the Superintendent. The Superintendent then would implement the decisions by directing the building administration of the district. Building administration would then communicate and enforce policies and procedures with their teachers who would then clarify these issues with students. Unlike the Taft football figured world, the levels of hierarchies of Taft’s classroom world were rarely in the same social context or setting; however, each party was expected to comply and fulfill the roles and expectations they were given. School board members impacted the daily life of students by designing bus schedules and class options while teachers were ultimately expected to comply with the structure they were given by fitting their teaching and instruction within it. For example, throughout my study, I often heard teachers express their frustration at the block scheduling structure of their classrooms. Teachers such as Ms. Greten often worried over the instructional time she lost due to seeing her students every other day. However, each teacher, including Ms. Greten, ultimately altered his or her instruction to fit the design created by the school board.

**Critical thinking.** Discussing and observing the level of critical thinking involved in the classroom world of Taft was difficult. In some classrooms, such as Neron’s engineering class taught by Mr. Thompsen, I could easily observe and track the
problem-solving and critical thinking that was being done as the students built various electronic models for specific project assignments. However, Ms. Gullik, Neron’s government teacher, seemed to place less of a thinking demand on the students. Most of the activity in her class consisted of taking notes or working in small groups to complete some type of assignment. While it appeared that some students within the class were actively engaged and thinking, others seemed off-task and simply copied answers off a neighbor. When I asked Neron about this complexity, he simply shrugged and said it just depended on the work ethic of each individual. He believed that academics were important to his life goals so he applied himself in his classes. In his mind, other students did not value academics this much, and as a result, they didn’t work like they should in school. Ms. Gullik’s classroom organization appeared to invite those with desires similar to Neron’s to engage with some critical thinking while allowing others to disconnect.

In most testing situations, the teacher always knew the right answer. The teachers believed that the students had to ‘give’ the right answer in order to receive credit. For example, Mr. Brill, James’s English teacher, would often ask close-ended questions in testing, especially when assessing the students’ knowledge of classic literature. In his questioning, Mr. Brill often looked for the one right answer from his students. Asher’s Dramatic Arts teacher did not completely fit this mold mostly due to this content area and due to Asher’s work ethic. Although she did administer some classic, right or wrong answer tests and quizzes, much of the activities were built around the students interpreting and acting out certain cuts of plays and dramatic readings. Asher seemed to enjoy and thrive in this kind of atmosphere. One day his teacher directed me outside to
the parking lot where Asher and his peers were filming a scene with her car. Asher was directing, acting, and engaging his peers in this activity.

**Role of Tradition and History**

**Physical space.** The physical space of Taft High School is mostly designed as large, open spaces of hallways lined with either red carpet or tan linoleum. Many of its hallways and classrooms are painted with an industrial beige or white color, with red being added in some areas through the exposed red brick. Much of the carpet in the main building has a blue tint also, tying the building into the Taft’s colors of blue and black. There are paintings, signs, and other artifacts with the Panther mascot prominent throughout the halls. Flyers announcing a myriad of athletic, academic, and social events also blanket the hallway walls; however, throughout the football season, large signs announce each week’s opponent in key social areas throughout the facilities in a way that no other team or organization ever would.

This physical space seems to both accentuate community and historical continuity through the use of school colors and through the prominence of the mascot; however, the space tends to build the expectation of standardization and institutional life. Although the halls are now filled with adolescents connected to their iPods and iPhones, the institutional schedule and setting keeps them marking a path that generations of Panthers have followed in their high school experience. Much like they have for years, teachers line the hallways between classes, urging students to “get to class,” attempting to maintain the customary and timely movement into classrooms.
**Equipment and artifacts.** The equipment of school is fairly typical. Each student is expected to have some sort of writing utensil and paper. Students are also expected to have their work organized in some type of binder or folder for most classes. Teachers utilized equipment like their computers, SmartBoards, projectors, and books for their teaching. Often, there are not enough books for each student to have his or her own copy, or there are only class sets of books, so the students aren’t always accountable for bringing their books to class.

Due to a variety of reasons, computers are not plentiful at Taft; therefore, computers and other technology for student use are not common. If a student wants to do research and/or typing, he or she would have to utilize a computer lab. Often, if teachers want students to see a specific website, they would just display it using their own computer, projector, and SmartBoard. Although they aren’t supposed to be part of the school technical equipment, many students would use their iPods, iPhones, and/or other computing devices during their day.

Even though there are strict rules about having earphones and iPods, even conscientious students such as Neron could be seen walking through the hallways listening to his music. Cell phone use is a constant frustration for some teachers and administrators; however, they are prevalent. Some teachers ignore the cell phone ban and attempt to solve the technology shortage by helping students learn to use their cell phones as a learning tool. In one psychology class I visited, the teacher had planned an entire research-oriented lesson on dreams. Unfortunately, the Internet server was not functioning that day, so she wasn’t able to do much of her lesson. Instead of abandoning
her plans, she asked students who had Internet available phones to continue the research with small groups. In this way, students were still able to learn the material and find that cell phones can also serve as educational devices.

In many ways the artifacts of Taft’s classrooms are similar to the equipment. The textbooks create history, as students find names of other family members as previous users of the book. Different content areas often had artifacts that marked their room. Although classrooms had various types of artifacts, most teachers used the artifacts to invite students into further content area knowledge. For example, science classrooms had charts and graphs that described content such as the Periodic Table, a variety of animals, biomes, and/or pictures of career options in the science field. James’s physics teacher, Mr. Cooper, decorated his room with physics information, and he used students’ vocabulary projects to create word walls throughout the year. Asher’s French teacher, Mr. Stalder, had posters of France and Paris gracing his walls representing the French culture.

The common areas such as the library houses past yearbooks that allow students to read and learn about Taft’s past. The hallways were filled with trophy cases describing past victories, both academic and athletic, although the athletic trophy cases were prominent on the first floor lobby where every student passed each day. The players I interviewed had more difficulty articulating or enumerating artifacts that were specific to just the school. In many ways, the trophies and sport memorabilia, while more intimately connected to the football world, still represented artifacts of the school in general due to the depth of sporting lore that invades Taft’s hallways.
Community expectations. Allen’s family illustrated the depth of community expectations surrounding the Taft football team and how the classroom was overlooked. He believed he carried his own football dreams on his shoulders, along with even his father’s. Allen described this feeling:

Yeah, and mostly I just think about my dad. My dad, even though my dad is older than me, he looks up to me for what I’ve done now. He’s like, “you’re playing at Taft High School.” He’s like, “That’s something I never did” . . . He never made it. So it was kinda like, he always tells me, “I’m proud of you.” He tells me that every day. I kinda like get like goosebumps. I’m like, I got this old dude looking up to me. (September 14, 2011)

Allen’s father had very few expectations outside of football participation for him. That was his focus and hope for his son’s high school experience. Allen did not necessarily feel that his father had the same level of pride for classroom achievement.

Allen’s story was repeated for many Taft students. Athletic achievement was esteemed to a much higher degree than academic gain. While some families valued Taft’s education apart from the athletic offerings these families often seemed in the minority to teachers and students. As James once told me, no one ever stopped his father at the grocery store and congratulated him when James got a good grade, but many men of the community would stop and talk with his father when James had an especially good athletic performance. This community celebrity was recognized only for athletic prowess, not classroom achievement and/or progress.
Balance of I Versus Team

While students in Taft’s classrooms did not expect to fulfill the role of ‘teammate’ within their classes, they did expect some group work and collaboration. Indeed, their social nature made these methods of learning advantageous for teachers to employ. However, as every student at Taft understood, when grades were calculated, they only reflected the individual’s achievement and learning. Grades were very individualistic and even competitive between some students.

**Individual drive.** For the most part, individual students are expected to be self-motivated and independent in completing their work and listening to classroom instruction. In many classes, teachers often assign group work; however, grades were still assigned to individuals using the traditional A, B, C grading scale. In general, after some general guidance and instruction, teachers expect students to persevere and persist when confronted with difficulties. In classes, teachers would often assign homework and expect it to reflect individual effort. For example, Ms. Marshall talked with me regarding her homework expectations and how different students were able to meet her goals and others were not. She enjoyed teaching Asher’s Advanced Biology class because most students completed their individual work in a timely manner and answered their own questions when they became confused. Ms. Marshall had other classes that did not complete their homework efficiently, and in her mind, depended on her to tell them all the answers to any questions they might have. She found this very frustrating.

**Collaborative support.** In many classes, students were expected to work within collaborative groups. For example, in Asher’s drama class, he regularly coordinated with
a group of classmates to fulfill the course expectations. When the teacher assigned group work, it was expected that students would participate in that goal whether or not he or she chose the group members. Although there was the expectation that students would sometimes be asked to work collaboratively, grades were still assigned to individuals. Students still applied themselves to the assigned tasks in order to gain their own grade and were upset when other group members received grades they did not deserve. The competitiveness of individual success was not overshadowed by the desire for a group effort in most of Taft’s classrooms.

**Unquestioned dedication to school.** In many ways this figured world element was established by school truancy laws. Students were expected to be dedicated to attending school on a daily basis. Teachers would often assume students would want to be in school and strive for good grades. They would often try to motivate students with external motivators such as grades when students’ behavior and/or attitude did not fulfill their expected roles. Even though some students would not be attending college, rationale for studying and applying oneself was often explained through this lens. This caused some dissonance in students such as Allen who did not see himself as a student who succeeded in the classroom and only valued school to the point that it allowed him to play football.

**Skills**

The Taft’s classroom figured world assumes that students will have certain intellectual and cognitive skills and abilities. Often teachers do not actually even overtly teach these skills; however, they are assumed for high school students.
**Intellectual and cognitive ability.** Whereas a certain level of athletic ability determines a player’s position on the football team, classrooms are filled with a variety of learners and ability levels. Inclusion classes, where students with IEPs (Individual Education Plans) are included with the general population, widen ability gaps in many classes. Due to the transient and somewhat turbulent home lives of some students, reading levels are usually quite disparate, which is challenging for all teachers. Many of Taft’s teachers believe that students’ reading and writing skills are deficient; however, they don’t feel able to address all the deficiencies they perceive along with the content area expectations. While Taft’s students often show remarkable problem-solving abilities in their personal and social lives, they often struggle with using critical thinking to solve cognitive problems. For example, science teachers such as Mr. Cooper often find themselves discouraged at students’ inability to engage in the scientific process of forming a hypothesis, testing it, and then using that information to form a new, informed hypothesis. This series of steps is difficult for many Taft students; they struggle with the perseverance needed for this type of cognitive exercise.

**Language.** For the most part, only Standardized English is desired and acceptable within the school day; however, the school is filled with African American Vernacular English and a variety of adolescent slang that bends and shifts meanings in ways that keep teachers disoriented much of the time. Profanity is fairly commonplace in the hallways; however, most teachers try to curtail its use inside their classrooms. While profanity occurs frequently among the students, it is not acceptable for teachers at any time. In addition, although some teachers will raise their voices in certain instances and
in moments of frustration, usually it is toward the behavior of a small group or class in general, as opposed to an individual’s performance.

Teachers would often be very descriptive with their classroom language. I often observed that when new vocabulary was introduced, not only were definitions shared, but also the teacher usually had additional explanations and descriptions to help the students learn the meanings of new words. Due to the complexity of the content areas for high schools, many of the vocabulary and concepts were fairly new to the students, so the teachers had to take time to explain steps and procedures very well. This was also done in small groups or for individuals. If a student was confused, while the rest of the class worked, I frequently watched teachers stop and help clarify these misconceptions and/or mistakes very quietly and unobtrusively.

The players felt profound differences in the language styles of the Taft football world and the classroom world. James was very articulate about these differences. Perhaps due to his social nature, our conversations often turned to comparing interpersonal interactions between his identities as student and as football player.

James compared the two communication styles and how emotional language worked to motivate him:

Like, my interaction with teachers, it’s more like, like sometimes I need for you to yell at me, like, “Come let’s go! You gotta pick it up!” and like teachers they be more like firm with you and be like, “James, you gotta get your grades up.”

(James, February 3, 2012).
James, as well as other players, had distinctly different expectations of how their teachers would talk to them and how their coaches would communicate with them. On the flip side, they also had different expectations of how they themselves communicated with teachers and coaches. James, Asher, and Neron seemed knowledgeable and adaptable with these rules. Allen, while seeming to understand the different rules of the worlds, still had difficulty adjusting his speech to teachers and would sometimes find himself in conflict with them as a result.

**Literacies.** Reading and writing in Taft’s classroom was again based on Standardized English and specific content area vocabulary expectations. Most expository text utilized in English class was lengthy and narrative in nature. For example, I was able to co-teach *The Christmas Carol* with Allen’s English teacher at one point. I was also able to observe James as he struggled through the complex text of Macbeth in his English class.

Writing continued to be a point of frustration for most teachers. African American Vernacular English and ‘text-speech’ invades much of the writing and causes tension when teachers cannot understand the writing and/or when Standardized English language was the expectation. In my role as literacy coach, I often heard teachers discuss what they perceive as the decline of student writing skills based on the influence that technology seems to have had on written communication. As reported by their teachers, all my participants struggled on some level to meet the demands of writing in formal, Standardized English; however, James, Neron, and Asher were committed to becoming
more proficient at this because they viewed the skill as imperative to their future educational success.

Math and science oriented classes were somewhat different. The reading and writing in these classes were based on numerical and symbolic understanding. Neron and James both felt more proficient in these areas of reading and writing whereas the advanced narrative texts and extended writing assignments of their English classes proved more frustrating.

Speaking and listening in the classrooms also tended to be based on the expectation of Standardized English or content area vocabulary knowledge. The teacher did most of the on-task speaking, and the students were expected to listen. Sometimes, depending on the activity, students were asked to listen to their peers answer questions and/or read their class contributions. In the classes I observed, Asher was always very attentive to listening to others. He also showed great speaking proficiency in his classes and with his speech and debate team.

For the most part, the viewing and visually representing activities in Taft classrooms was restricted due to the lack and inadequacy of technology; however, teachers did incorporate maps and graphs through their SmartBoards and textbooks. When they were able, students were sometimes asked to complete graphs or other visual representations through a computer program. Due to all-staff professional development, many teachers incorporated different types of Gallery Walks for their content area lessons also. During this activity, pictures would be displayed around the room and students would have to identify specific details about the pictures within small groups. These
pictures would tie into content area lessons or extend the understanding of specific concepts.

**Actions and behavior.** Taft depended on a hierarchical structure of command to build the expectations for student action and behavior in the classroom. The administrators and school board set many of the rules by defining what were appropriate behaviors. Teachers then build on those for their classrooms. Students, for the most part, are expected to be obedient and submit to the rules in order for the school to run successfully. In classrooms, there is an emphasis on turn-taking with questions and answers, with some teachers utilizing small group work that varies the expectations somewhat. The small group environment is somewhat more collaborative, but for the most part students work for their own individual grades and with their own initiative and self-motivation. This classroom figured world relies on the condition that students will care about their grades enough to engage in school-approved actions and behaviors.

**Summary**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the figured worlds of football and the classroom at Taft High School. Because the study is deeply embedded in a particular figured world, this football description is more vast and expansive in order to provide a clear context for the figured world and literacy findings and commentary. The depth of access I was granted to the football world provided descriptive opportunities that have been missing in prior adolescent literacy studies. Because each classroom could be conceptualized as its own figured world, the discussion of the Taft classroom figured worlds is a collective, general description of the classroom and teachers who were
involved in my participants’ classroom lives. In the following chapter I introduce my participants more fully and discuss the literacy findings contextualized within these figured worlds.
CHAPTER V

DESCRIPTION OF LITERACIES

In this chapter I describe the types of literacies the participants use in the football figured world and classroom figured world and how these literacies are shaped by those worlds. In order to frame my discussion, I refer to the figured world elements explained in chapter 4. I more thoroughly introduce each of my participants and then I discuss their literacy uses. Finally, I present a cross-case analysis that examines the connections among the individual cases.

Detailed Introduction and Description of Literacies

To help frame the literacy findings and the commentary following them, I first describe each participant in a deeper way than I have in prior chapters, and then I discuss the literacies they utilize in both the Taft football figured world and the Taft classroom figured world.

Allen

In his senior year, Allen stated, “I’m living my dream right now” (September 14, 2011). Three different coaches recommended including Allen in my study because of his unique and strong personality. Allen is a Caucasian, and an 18-year-old senior at the time of the study. Allen had historically excelled at football but struggled academically.

When I approached Allen on September 7, 2011, to be a participant in my study, I had already been observing the team for the entire month of August, and the coaches had already introduced me to the team and asked that everyone support my work. Allen was willing to help my investigation.
As I watched Allen walk down the Taft hallway with a certain type of swagger, I began to feel that his steps hid some of the conflicts he faced in his life. Although he shared a deep athletic history with many players on the football team, I often observed him sitting alone in team meetings. His one true, best friend, as labeled by Allen, was on the team; however, since his friend was a junior and an offensive player, I did not see them together very often while at school or practice.

Allen is an uncle who enjoys being part of his nephews’ lives. He believes his family is close; however, he admitted that the family struggles financially and that factor creates stress in their lives. The coaches knew this and helped the family. For example, CJ brought a full Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner to Allen’s house during his junior year because the coaching staff realized how tight the finances were in Allen’s family. This interest and investment meant a lot to Allen, and as a result, he felt very committed to the coach who provided these meals. Unfortunately, however, Allen’s relationship with other coaches deteriorated throughout the season due to his change in playing position and his choices to accept (or not accept) criticism and make changes in his performance.

Although he did speak of college in our initial interview, he clearly was enthralled with the potential of his senior year on the varsity squad. However, his experience turned out to be very different than he had dreamed. His identity that was built around having his name as a legacy in Taft football history became jeopardized by a leg injury and the resulting negative attitude that continued to spiral downward according to his coaches. Allen finished the year playing on special teams and performing for personal recognition
because he had become disillusioned by the team rhetoric. Allen stopped coming to school regularly soon after football season, and completely dropped out of Taft after the first semester. He attempted to finish high school by completing his English credit online.

**Allen’s football literacies.** Allen and his coaches communicated that his expertise and life’s passion were deeply connected to the football figured world. He found Taft’s celebrity and prestige a remarkable invitation. Writing his name in the storied history of Taft football was an all-consuming drive for Allen as heard through his childhood memories and current stories; however, possibly due to his misjudgments of the Taft football figured world, he ended up with a lot of disillusionment and disappointment. He expressed many of these disappointments throughout our final interview. Throughout his high school football career, and through the beginning of his senior year, Allen played a variety of positions. He was an offensive starter throughout his junior year as he played a receiver position. Because the defensive backfield was weaker moving into his senior year, the coaching staff asked him to moved to a defensive position, which he willingly did. He also played on the special teams squad throughout his senior year. Allen conceptually understood the game of football and was pretty versatile in the roles he could perform for either the offensive or defensive squads. Allen displayed his Taft football passion by often leading a cheering crowd of seniors onto the field for every game. He appeared to love being part of the Taft football tradition. Two different coaches recommended him to be a part of my study due to his football knowledge and expertise and the passion he had while playing the game.
Reading and writing. Allen did believe he performed a type of reading when he was on the field. While he was fast and powerful, he used this ability in combination with his ability to read the body language of other players in order to make big plays. He stated, “It’s kinda like sign language. You read a lot of things” (December 7, 2011). His understanding and ability to read other players in order to make important adjustments provided him an important starting position on the team as the season began. His ability to ‘read’ other players also helped him when he changed from the offensive to the defensive squad during his senior year. Throughout his football career, Allen had played a variety of positions due to his athleticism and his disciplined, repetitive practice. During his junior year, he played receiver for the Taft squad; however, the coaches asked him to consider moving to a defensive back position due to the lack of players there. After careful consideration, Allen did make this move from offense to defense.

Allen described this move, “It was kinda hard at first being used to all the defensive techniques because I’m so used to ridin’ up, lookin’ for the ball, and like receiver mode still, but like, now it’s kinda, I’m catching on better” (September 14, 2012). Allen seemed happy with the move overall.

Unlike some players, even when he was given a notebook and pencil, Allen was not likely to jot down a lot of notes during Mental Monday sessions. He would normally wait until practice began in order to learn the new plays; however, the constant demand to read other players and adjust to their movements still allowed Allen to excel in the football figured world because he was able to adjust in a game situation when writing would not have been helpful or timely.
Speaking and listening. In our conversations, Allen displayed an understanding of the communication styles within football. He knew that his coaches communicated a lot of information in abbreviated form, especially during a game, and he used trash-talking to intimidate his opponents while they faced off against each other. He explained, “Yeah, when you start trash-talking, that’s a whole different Allen then when you’re . . . nobody’s ever seen before” (December 7, 2011). He would often transfer his emotions into his speech while he played, understanding that this process was encouraged and even beneficial in this world.

Although Allen did comprehend the messages being given to him on a concrete level, I often wondered if he could hear some of what was unsaid, what was prefigured about the communication in the Taft football figured world. For example, late in the season after Allen had suffered his leg injury and struggled with meeting his position’s demands for multiple weeks, Coach Poland took me aside and in a frustrated manner showed me a text he had received from Allen. In the text, Allen had asked, “When am I gonna get my starting position back?” (Oct. 21, 2011). Coach Poland reacted to this text by stating to me, “Allen is a coward!” Coach Poland also reported to me that he had forwarded Allen’s text to another coach, and that coach had also responded with an angry retort of, “Why didn’t he ask this in practice?” Both coaches were angry that Allen did not follow the expectation of asking the question face-to-face and dealing with the problem in a straight-forward manner. Coach Poland refused to answer Allen’s texts about his playing time and starting position because as the coach, he believed texting these questions was a sign of cowardice. Coach Poland was reacting to the fact that this
type of language use (texting questions) was not the expectation in this world, yet Allen did not acknowledge that fact, and as a result, his playing opportunities were possibly curtailed even longer.

Allen seemed to violate the speaking expectations in other ways. As opposed to other participants and their conversation, Allen was usually the center of his own stories and insights. This did not seem to reflect a balance between the “I versus Team,” and as a result, his actual speaking did him some harm. In our conversations, Allen referred to his regret of moving from the offensive to defensive squad. He admitted that he missed the celebrity and recognition that often came from playing a receiver position. As a defensive player, he felt that he didn’t receive as much individual recognition. This type of comparison was never part of the conversation with players such as James, Neron, and/or Asher. They were willing to fulfill whatever team role was needed.

**Viewing and visually representing.** Allen’s coaches admitted that Allen did not learn primarily through watching films and discussing plays in the locker room, and he readily agreed with them in our conversations. While the coaching staff highly valued the viewing literacy involved in film study, and would teach their expectations through the films, this was not a literacy in which Allen believed he excelled. He believed he learned best when he was kinesthetically engaged with the game, not through the lens of a film.

Allen’s viewing ability, while not centered on watching film, did help him while he stood on the sidelines of a game or when he was ‘reading’ an opponent’s intentions. With these types of literacies, Allen excelled both according to his coaches and himself.
Allen’s classroom literacies. Allen did not find classroom literacies to be invitational nor relevant. In speaking of math-related literacy, Allen said, “Ok, like, all I think I need to know how to do is multiply and divide, add and subtract, and cash my check and count my money. That’s all I need to know how to do” (February 23, 2012). When he moved through his day in Taft’s classrooms, Allen did not find the literacies valuable to his life goals; he did not experience a unity and precision that he understood, recognized, or connected to his football literacies.

Allen made this statement regarding his classroom behaviors and engagement:

I think, yeah, I don’t like that. I don’t. Like if they tell us to write about something or just, like, do it a certain way, I feel, like myself, I feel I can do it better this way and you might get something better. You might get a better work ethic and a better quality. Instead of doing it this way, you’re gonna get half of what I wanted to do. Cause I’m gonna do, ok well, so you’re not going to meet my half way, I’m only gonna do it half way. (February 23, 2012)

Allen seemed to struggle seeing the connections of classroom literacies to his everyday life and future needs. Referring to his science class, Allen questioned, “But I mean, like, why do I need to know, like, pi [3.15] for?” (February 23, 2012). He seemed unwilling to open himself to valuing or integrating these particular classroom literacies into his life; however, these statements regarding his classroom literacies and identity were made alongside his willingness to submit to the Taft football expectations and seemed to show a great difference in his thinking. He said:
I don’t think I slacked in football because when it came to football that’s what I like to do. That’s what I love to do. So, and plus my dream was, like, go to college and like, make it to the NFL and just, really, I wanted to make a name for myself so I just always worked hard doing sprints and in the weight room and stuff. There were times when I did want to just be like, man, I’m not doing it. But, I pushed myself. (February 23, 2012)

Ultimately, perhaps due to this disconnect between what he perceived to be his football dreams and the absence of interest for the classroom literacies and success, Allen actually withdrew from the Taft classroom figured world to finish his senior year in another way, which was uncommon for CJ’s players. Although some players were committed to excelling in the classroom, Allen seemed content to just do the minimum expectations in order to be football eligible. His grades followed the profile of athletes who were ambivalent about their academic pursuits. He would make sure his grades were fairly average during the first nine weeks of the school year, which was always football season when his eligibility depended on maintaining certain grades in his classwork. He would also concentrate on obtaining better grades during the fourth quarter of each school year because that was also used for eligibility for the next fall. The second and third grading quarters rarely reflected strategic focus on his part.

He described his apathy toward school:

Yeah, it’s just, I got, I mean, I got pretty lazy. I didn’t want to do it. . . . I always knew in the fourth nine weeks, like, here comes football season, I gotta buckle
down, so . . . It’s just like, after football season, I was just like, alright, I’m just about to chill for a minute. (February 23, 2012)

His work ethic, which seemed to push him to excel in football, did not pervade his academic pursuits. Through our conversations and conversations with his teachers, it became apparent that Allen only performed the bare minimum in the classroom, performing at the level that would sustain his football eligibility. At times it became difficult for his teachers to even assess the strength of his cognitive skills and abilities due to his uneven and often disinterested performances. His Senior English teacher, who also taught him as a sophomore, claimed that his difficulties seemed to stem from his motivation, not his skill level. She stated, “He was here to play football.” After teaching him for a second school year, she believed he had some needed skills; however, his classwork rarely showed that (Richter, April 9, 2012). Perhaps due to these disconnections in Allen’s life, it became difficult to ascertain the classroom literacies he had self-initiated and developed in a strategic manner.

Through the conversations we were able to have, however, we did attempt to dialogue and articulate the literacies Allen related to Taft’s classrooms and to the demands he found on his skills there. He often displayed a lack of understanding or even confusion when he spoke of classroom literacies skills such as standardized writing expectations and reading skills development.

**Reading and writing.** Our conversations quickly revealed that Allen viewed some of the literacy skills demanded in his classes as a mystery. In math for example, he mentioned confusion when letters and numbers were involved; “A triangle, and just, like,
and it’s just all the numbers and letters combined together. I mean the alphabet should stay with the alphabet” (February 23, 2012). In addition to math, Allen also mentioned his history of trying to gain a certain GPA, along with his lack of self-confidence and confusion as it related to English. He said:

I tried to do it before. Like I tried to shoot for a 3.0. I got a 2.5 or something like that, and I was like, man . . . And I thought I was working pretty hard, putting in quality work. I was like, this is gonna be an A. C? Ah, man. Be like, dang. I stayed up to 2:00 writing this stupid story. (February 23, 2012)

Although he could point to spurts of effort, Allen could admit that he rarely applied himself whole-heartedly to his classroom work or understanding what his teachers’ expectations were of him. He did not enjoy most of the books he was asked to read in his English classes, and unless he was invited to read sports-related books independently, he did not see the value of studying classic literature written by such authors as Shakespeare or Dickens. In the attempt to describe Allen’s feelings toward reading, I observed his actions in his English class when I had the opportunity to co-teach with Mrs. Richter. We had created a lesson connected to the reading of A Christmas Carol. While he did not become a distraction to other students in the class, Allen took few notes and did not engage in group conversations about the text. In our conversations, Allen often expressed disinterest in any books other than those connected to sports. In addition, he did not see the connection of most academic writing to his life either. Throughout our interactions, he did not express the belief that he had the skills to be a
good writer, and as a result, he often procrastinated in his writing tasks, claiming to write late into the night and still receiving a grade he did not understand.

Allen had this to say about much of the classroom work he encountered: “Just read this book so we can get it over with and just chill” (February 23, 2012). The passion and grit that he used in the football figured world was not at all present in the classroom, and as a result, Allen did not experience a high level of success there.

**Speaking and listening.** The only class Allen reported that he enjoyed was one of his math classes. This particular class was taught by one of the football coaches who was known for telling football stories and interacting with athletes when instruction had ended. He was also known to do a lot of his instruction verbally to the class. This combination of coach as teacher and the integration of football storytelling into the class seemed to be invitational to Allen. He could use his listening literacy to understand the mathematic concepts, and he could participate in the off-topic conversation because it centered on football. He seemed willing to do the work needed for that class and to build the literacies needed to master the content; however, he still struggled to pass standardized math tests he needed for graduation.

Allen repeatedly spoke about the importance of his football activities to the dismissal of his classroom activities. He rarely expressed interest in connecting the level of commitment he gave to football into the classroom. When speaking about his teachers, except his math teacher, he would often express almost a feeling of mutual acceptance regarding his level of classroom literacies and/or identity. He said, “It’s just,
certain days I come in here (classroom), I don’t want to do it. And they (teachers) was like, we know that” (February 23, 2012).

Although he expressed this feeling of almost apathy toward his classroom figured world, I never heard him express those same feelings toward the football figured world. While playing football, he willingly gave up more of his desires and integrated his passions and dreams into what the coaches asked him to do.

**Viewing and visually representing.** Allen’s motivation to do well in math did allow him to develop his skills in representing and comprehending the symbols used in mathematics. Although he still struggled in this area, it seemed as though the skills were more accessible to him than were reading and writing skills. In our conversations he rarely expressed confusion regarding the math symbolic literacy expectations he encountered in these classrooms. He claimed he liked to finish his work and then discuss football with the teacher who was a coach. Perhaps this connection made him feel more competent with his math work within this particular class.

**Connections between the two figured worlds’ literacies.** Ultimately, Allen did not connect this viewing of mathematic symbols with the skills he had of viewing the football field and plays. In our conversations and in my observations, it seemed as if Allen only saw school as a vehicle that allowed him to play high school football, much of which was supported by his dad at home.

Allen explained this drive to be known through football:

I’m the first person to play football, like, in high school in my family at all. So, I did something that my dad didn’t do, even though my dad got a bunch of trophies
from back in the day, I did something that he didn’t do. It’s just, I don’t know . . .

it’s just being a football player here, it was something that my dad would, my dad
would tell me all the time, “Oh I’m proud of you.” (February 23, 2012)

Later he added:

Playing high school football, he never did that because he got involved in music
and other stuff and then that’s when he just quit playing sports, so just playing
high school football, that was good for me. I just wanted to get my last name
known. (February 23, 2012)

As seen from this and other data, Allen’s passion was to be recognized for his
contributions to the Taft football figured world. He was not driven to build an identity
within the classroom figured world.

While he performed well with most football literacies, especially prior to his
injury, Allen did not integrate the literacies of the classroom into his life in authentic
ways (New London Group, 1996). He was not able to make meaningful connections
between the two figured worlds and their literacy skills, possibly because he did not
necessarily see classroom engagement as a worthy goal unto itself or perhaps he did not
perceive himself to be invited (Brozo, 2010; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). It was only
beneficial in that it provided him the ability to play the sport he loved. When we
reconnected in the late spring, however, Allen was beginning to realize that he had not
given his classes and school the attention they deserved because he began struggling to
find any type of job and to finish his degree online.
Looking at his good friend and fellow teammate Ernie, Allen was able to acknowledge that Ernie had achieved more classroom success because he “hit the books” and stayed faithful. He stated, “Yeah, I started slackin’ (after football season). But like, Ernie, he do it first nine weeks, second nine weeks, third nine weeks (laugh) . . . I just couldn’t do it” (April 23, 2012). Allen was proud of Ernie’s successes and continued to encourage Ernie to stay in school and do well with his work so that more colleges would be interested in recruiting him. With hindsight since dropping out of traditional high school, Allen discovered that he had narrowed his choices by not sufficiently valuing and building classroom literacies. He didn’t want that for his friend.

James

As a senior, deeply embedded in the Taft figured world of football and classes, James stated, “My main focus as a student is my grades and my sports, like, I don’t really have to worry about anything else because that’s what my parents help me with” (February 3, 2012).

James was a 17-year-old, African American senior at the time of this study. He was a popular student who was fortunate to have great parental support from his mom and dad at home. While his activities tended to be more social then academic, or perhaps more distracted than focused, his parents were quick to help guide his focus if he veered too far off-course.

James’s smile could charm almost anyone. His smile had the potential to quickly disarm most people with whom he interacted. In fact, when he was a junior, James found himself an underdog, but crowd favorite, as he scrapped his way into the state final
wrestling match for the Taft wrestling team. According to the local paper, the crowd couldn’t help but cheer for this athlete who seemed able to overcome any obstacle and pull the audience behind him as he did so.

As a researcher, I experienced the disarming nature of James’s smile and effervescent personality. On four different occasions, James and I scheduled interview times, and he completely forgot to attend. When I approached him about his forgetfulness, he would quickly flash that smile, apologize, and promise to meet me another time. I always found myself laughing with him and rescheduling, even after numerous times.

James also had the ability to captivate his peers and even teachers with stories rich with drama and excitement. Even the most mundane, everyday retelling became something special when laced with James’s natural enthusiasm and zest for the social. His love for fun and laughter extended out from him, and others nearby were often invited into conversation through his innate sense of humor. In our interviews and during our informal conversations, I often found that James’s stories come fast, and they weren’t always linear, but they were always filled with his winning smile and sense of adventure. While transcribing our interactions, I often found myself chuckling at his storied approach at conveying his thoughts. Our interviews were filled with laughter and keen insights that were embedded within elaborate stories and impressions.

James has filled his life with athletics to keep himself active and involved. In elementary school, he participated in football and swimming. While he actively and
officially participated in football and wrestling, he was also fond of golfing with his cousins.

But, as I witnessed, when James put on his pads, cleats, and helmet, he perceived life differently. When he added these artifacts of the football world, his focus changed from entertaining to winning. He did not engage in winding explanations of his thoughts. His goals and participation became crystal clear. James explained,

Yeah, like, I know once I put on my helmet and my shirt pads and everything, I’m different then like in school cause in school, like, I’m more like, like, I like to have fun a lot. Like, in pads, I like to have fun a lot too, but I get real serious because it’s time to like, like really pay attention and learn, like what I gotta do, cause, like, if I mess up, like if I don’t go hard, I know I can get hurt. (November 3, 2011)

James’s family was filled with others who loved storytelling and laughing. His family appeared to be very connected and close. I saw his father at every football game, proudly wearing one of James’s old jerseys so that everyone knew his support. According to James, family dinners could be hysterical affairs, with his dad and James himself jockeying to keep everyone laughing.

This same charm and sense of humor kept him as a favorite with the football team and coaches. Throughout the 10 months I observed James, he was rarely found alone at school or at practice. In football, while he always worked hard at the drills and met the expectations put in front of him, if there was down time, there was usually a circle with James in the middle laughing and telling stories. When I asked the coaches about James
and his social nature, his coaches laughed quietly and admitted sometimes they had to push him to focus on the tasks in front of him. Although he perceived himself as extremely focused on football, the coaches seemed aware that he still needed their help to concentrate at times.

**James’s football literacies.** James’s boundless energy and athletic ability were assets that set him apart from many of his peers. He had the ability to channel those two elements into great performances on the football field. His kinesthetic and social intelligences were also key in his easy adaptation to the Taft football figured world literacies.

**Reading and writing.** Like Allen, James had the ability to ‘read’ other players’ body language and adjust his skills to meet the competition. James was also able to see the value of reading and writing the visual symbols of the football plays because he knew the conceptual knowledge was built from comprehending those symbols and how they related to an entire game plan. He valued the instruction of Mental Mondays where the focus was more on learning new play designs through reading and writing. He applied himself to understanding the concepts behind the symbols and plays by learning how to read and write them efficiently.

**Speaking and listening.** Throughout his time playing football, he had experienced quite a lot of success due to his natural athletic abilities, although he was quick to underscore that natural ability is not enough. He also believed that training is important to excel. He knew he needed to listen to his coaches, and I observed James listening and integrating his coaches’ directions consistently. His coaches knew he
worked hard and could absorb their criticism and become a better player. The defensive coordinator, Coach Poland, said this about James:

James, um, well, skills wise, (he’s) unbelievable. When I say unbelievable, you take a look at his body of basically 150 pounds . . . I mean, I think he weighs 150-155, and to ask him to do what he does is almost not fair. I mean, his position, we ask him to cover down and play like a linebacker, and really, knock guys, try to knock guys, I mean he does. He’ll knock himself out too, you know, I mean he had injuries because he throws his body around. (January 24, 2012)

Because of his athletic intelligence, James is the type of player that coaches listen to when he comes off the field. The coaches valued his conceptual insights to what was happening in the game in many ways because James knew how to speak and when to listen. James was always respectful in giving his insight, allowing for the coaching leadership to maintain its control. He did not often volunteer his insights unless asked, and he gave input that positively influenced the team and not just himself. All these factors made James a trusted player for the coaches.

Because the coaches attempted to understand their players’ learning styles, the coaches told me that based on their experiences with him, James seemed to learn best by kinesthetic approaches. They understood that his conceptual knowledge didn’t come fully from film or even discussion. They believed James’s expertise came from actually practicing his skills over and over. As a result of that repetition, James then became very conceptually alert and insightful for the coaches. Due to his position as defensive back and his in-depth understanding of the defensive strategy, the position coach would always
listen to James when he came off the field with something to say. James described this game interaction like this:

I’d be like, “Coach Jennings, they’re doing this,” and then like, like, he’ll talk to Coach Poland and they’ll be like, they’ll come and ask me, “What are they doing?” And I’ll tell Coach Poland, and I’ll like, it’s like basically, the position coaches, you talk to the most. They’ll all talk, and then they’ll think of something, they’ll ask us “What do you want to do?” (April 12, 2012)

Based on my observations and the data collected from other players and coaches, the coaching staff would not listen so closely to just any player. They gave preference and time to those leaders who strategically understand the game and could see the other team’s schemes. James offered insight often to the coaches, and many times they made decisions based on his insight and experiences on the field.

James and I had many conversations regarding the language of football and how things are said. He was able to discuss the differences in the way players communicated, and what coaches were more prone to yelling or talking more emotionally restrained. He was able to hear and understand messages of many types while also changing his own style to match what the situation demanded.

**Viewing and visually representing.** Another reason the coaches listened to James’s advice was due to this ability to visually understand what the other team was doing. Because he played in the defensive backfield, James was able to see the offensive scheme more holistically than other players. While he usually narrated what he saw to the coaches, and the coaches drew the visual representations, James’s viewing expertise
was helpful in game situations when the coaches needed to make changes or develop new insights.

**James’s classroom literacies.** James’s natural social energy allowed him to engage with some of the classroom literacies at Taft. He was deeply motivated in some classes; however, in other classes his mother had to serve as the extrinsic motivation to maintain a more academic focus. James understood most of what the classroom literacies demanded of him, and for the most part, he was willing to valiantly attempt to be successful there.

In classes, James was somewhat inconsistent in his performance. Through my teacher interviews and observations, I found that it was not unusual for him to fall behind with his assignments; however, his mom played the role of encourager and focuser in school work, and James responded by completing the worked that was needed. If she found out James had fallen behind with work, she investigated what could be done to rectify the situation. She, like the coaches, was committed to his success, and James responded positively to her direction and support.

James seemed motivated in school both through his mother’s encouragement than through his own drive and initiative. He did understand how his grades and athleticism must support each other, but that was mainly due to his mother’s stories and consistent support throughout his schooling. James talked about the support of both his parents:

They support me 100%, like, they want me to be a good student cause if I ever get hurt doing that sport, if I just rely straight on sports, then, if I were like on sports and had like terrible grades, then I’d be like, I be like all off if I can hurt cause
then I lose scholarship, like, going to college. But if you have good grades, and
are ok at sports, then you’ll still go to college because you have good grades.
Like the one thing my mom always says is, she’ll be like, she’ll be like, you could
be Billy Sue. If Billy Sue has all As and Bs, and is a decent wrestler, he’s gonna
get the scholarship over you cause you’re a wrestler, but your grades aren’t as
good as Billy Sue and they’re not about to entrust you with all this money just so
you can go to this school and flunk out. They are gonna go with a kid they know
is good. (February 3, 2012)

Although he had to work hard at sustaining the concentration he needed in some
of these pursuits, I found that James remained committed to building his classroom
literacies. He continued to grow in his understanding and appreciation for classroom
literacies and the role they would play in his future. We even discussed how his senior
year needed to prepare him for the rigors of college classroom demands. He realized that
in the very near future, he would have to utilize classroom literacies on his own without
his mother’s intervention. He expressed commitment to valuing this pursuit.

**Reading and writing.** Although James slightly preferred the direct and visceral
communication style of the football realm, he did articulate ways that ‘reading’ and
‘writing’ in football helped him with certain classroom skills. He explained how his
football literacies transfer to math and science in this way:

They’re the same, like, they’re kind of similar, cause, like, a play they call, wheel,
dog, cat, stunt. The W means, like the weak linebacker. Every letter has a
different position. Like, in physics, it’d be like, a weird shaped symbol which
means something else. It’d be like, what symbols, like \((\pi/3.14)\) for example, \(\pi = 3.14\). You gotta know what that means. (February 3, 2012)

While his literacies of reading and writing in football seemed to bring advantage to his classroom skills, James still struggled with the reading demanded from his English classes. I once observed James in the hallway, attempting to take a Shakespeare exam, and it was clear by his distracted behavior and manner that he was struggling to succeed with this reading and writing demand. James was taking the exam because he had missed school while undergoing a wrist surgery. Throughout his time in the hallway, while he was supposed to be taking the exam, I found him laughing and talking with others as they passed by, occasionally trying to read the text and write the answers, and fiddling with the cast on his wrist. Toward the end of the class period, I found James completely consumed by digging into his cast. When I asked what he was doing, James informed me that he had “dropped” his pencil inside his cast, and he could not get it out. As a result, he was unable to finish his exam. While this episode appeared rather humorous to both of us, we both understood that the pencil was in the cast due to being distracted from his main assignment, which was completing his exam. Although he often struggled with distractibility and his focus on academic tasks, James continued to apply himself to developing these skills because he believed that this type of reading was important for his future goals like going to college and obtaining a ‘good’ job.

**Speaking and listening.** The attention and focus that James was able to give to his athletic endeavors came with more difficulty in the classroom. The lack of kinesthetic application and the different methods of motivation teachers had available
tended to have less motivation than the communication style of the coaches. Although he understood the difference and purpose of the language, sometimes the visceral communication of the football field seemed more direct and focused to him.

James explained the two different communication patterns in this way:

Yeah, like on the field, like they’d be like, what’s going on, and I’ll be like, well, he messin’ up, what do you want me to do? I can’t cover the whole field by myself! And like, in school, it’s different when you talking to a teacher, you can’t get in their face, well, I keep doing the problem the way you teachin’ me and I’m getting it wrong, you’d get sent to the principal and get in trouble. But on the field, the coaches, they gonna expect you to talk that way because your adrenaline’s pumping and you’re angry, and you’re trying to win. (February 3, 2012)

James knew that he couldn’t aggressively confront his teachers when he was frustrated. He also realized that his coaches and teachers communicated differently with him too. He attributes much of this to the coaches’ passion to win games in a short amount of time while teachers could explain more quietly with extended time.

Viewing and visually representing. James seemed to comprehend his teachers more when he was actively involved or when there was visual representation. For example, in a physics class I observed, the students were asked to go on a treasure hunt to evaluate energy use within the building. James went from quietly listening and being on- and off-task during the class to jumping into a type of leadership discussion role and bounding from one area to another with his small group. The different types of
measuring and calculations the group was doing seemed perfectly suited to social gifts, his hands-on aptitude, and his knowledge and integration of symbols.

**Connections between the two figured worlds’ literacies.** James seemed to make strong connections between the symbolic knowledge he needed to master within his science classes and the symbolic nature of his football literacies.

James said this about reading and understanding football symbols: “You gotta know what it means, cause, like, usually, you always use the same symbols, but like, it’s be like for different plays. So, like, he could call, he’ll like, a W, he’ll write W Zap” (February 3, 2012).

Connecting this knowledge to classroom, James said, “Yeah, and then it could be like, for like, for like physics, the pi could be pi (π) times 3 or something, you know what I mean?” (February 3, 2012). James was clearly connecting details between the two literacies the figured worlds demanded (Hull & Schultz, 2002; New London Group, 1996).

He also, due to the social intelligence he exhibited in both worlds, valued working collaboratively with his peers, showing a knowledge of team work and an understanding of the communication styles utilized in both world. I observed this teamwork both on the football field and in the ways he engaged with small group work within his English and Physics classes. James had this to say about the communication styles in both figured worlds:

Like, my interaction with teachers, it’s more like, um, cause like, me personally, like sometimes I need for you to yell at me, like, “Come on! Let’s go! You gotta
pick it up!” And teachers, they be more like firm with you, and be like, “James, you gotta get your grades up.” (February 3, 2012)

Later, in the same conversation, James recognized that both coaches and teachers have individual goals for their players and students; however, the way those expectations are communicated are very different and would be misplaced if switched. For example, James realized that his teachers will not yell at him in the ways his coaches will, and he also expects a different type of language to be used on the football field and in the classroom. Through his comments and in my observations, James was very effective in utilizing both these communication styles and expectations.

Finally, James seemed to connect the reading and writing preparation he did for football to the reading and writing he did to prepare for the classroom. When given the tools and opportunity, he would regularly take notes or read in football and in classes for different purposes. He described this habit:

I still take notes, for like, for the play, cause for every week, it changes, it changes, like for school classes, sometimes you’ll have a syllabus that will tell you what’s going to be the different changes. But in football, you don’t know until, like, that day. (February 3, 2012)

Although he did struggle at times with accountability in the classroom, the connections James developed between his football and classroom literacies helped him achieve more success in both areas.

Neron

When describing how his peers thought of him, Neron stated:
They’d pretty much (say) I’m energetic. I like to do a lot of things. I’m the type of guy, person that’s real hyper and energetic. Football team, they call me the energizer bunny. I like to try to take every practice hard. Every single practice.

(September 16, 2011)

Neron identified as a 17-year-old Latino whose father immigrated to America from Puerto Rico. If you passed Neron in the school hallway, you would see a focused, well-dressed young man who seemed intent and focused on whatever task is at hand. At just a glance, you wouldn’t realize the commitment, dedication, and loyalty this young man had to his coursework, his friendships, and his football team. At school, Neron was a bit quiet, often found smiling and/or laughing at what his more animated friends might be doing at any moment in time, but he was always seemingly focused and driven to reach the goals he mapped out for himself. While in class, he was mostly focused on the work; however, he also tended to engage his teachers and other students in lively debates. He engaged in this banter very strategically as his way to stay focused and to concentrate. He enjoyed success in the classroom due to his dedication to learn and study as much as possible. In fact, Neron was enrolled in the engineering courses at Taft, which demanded a high level of commitment and academic skill.

At football, Neron became animated and lively, even being deemed the Energizer Bunny by his teammates. While he was visually much more active while at football, the same level of concentration and even compartmentalization was still apparent. While other players laughed and played around with friends, whether before practice or after a game, Neron remained focused on the task at hand. He didn’t seek the limelight, was
content near the back of most team entries onto the field. He didn’t seem to need the accolades in the ways Allen discussed. Neron never spoke about wanting to be remembered only as a Taft football player. He talked more consistently about giving his best self in every opportunity for the team’s success. He stated, “You gotta do whatever it takes to win” (October 24, 2011).

Neron grew up in the south side of Chicago, where his mother homeschooled him for many years in order to keep him out of what she saw as a troubled Chicago school system. In middle school, Neron moved with his siblings to Tresselton to live with his father and began attending one of the Taft feeder middle schools. Although he was first enrolled as a seventh grader, the teachers determined that Neron’s skills put him on par with the other eighth graders, and so he was moved into that grade level. This transitional time was difficult for Neron. He found it difficult to make new friends, and he did not connect with any specific athletic team. His older brother, who also moved with Neron from Chicago, found his place in the Taft high school football squad. His brother’s participation invited Neron to try out for the middle school team. Neron also found his connections within his football squad as his extracurricular interest. He stated, “Cause it’s like the only thing I really do have now, like, when I came down here I didn’t have nothing, but my brother, he showed me football so that’s the only thing I do now, is play football” (October 24, 2011). Throughout middle school and high school, Neron valued football participation as an important part of his personal development after moving to Tresselton.
Neron’s football literacies. Neron’s high level of commitment to all his activities included the acquisition and implementation of the Taft football figured world literacies. Despite a smaller, physical stature, Neron outplayed and out-thought many other players on the field every day. His coaches and peers recognized this and highly respected him for it. In one of our interviews, Neron deftly displayed how he used a variety of literacies to achieve football success.

He gave me the following illustration of his literacies and conceptual understanding of the game. He stated,

Yes, like certain positions. Like if they come out with two tight ends, and two receivers, we would call a double-tight and so that’s Check 22. And if they came out with a bunch set, all on one side, we’d call Spartan, and that’s bump us into a tight formation cause they’re most likely going to run. They never pass out of Spartan. (October 24, 2011)

Neron’s ability to comprehend the messages his coaches verbally sent to him, along with his conceptual understanding of the game, heightened his importance and the position he had among his peers and coaches. He was able to use a variety of literacies to give feedback to his coaches, unlike some of the players who had not developed these skills. He believed, rightly so according to his coaches, that he was sometimes actively involved in the critical thinking done throughout a game.

Reading and writing. Throughout our interviews and informal conversations, Neron and I probed into the reading and writing abilities as they related to football. We found that he believed his interest and study in the engineering field gave him an edge as
a football player. These skills allowed him to conceptually understand plays better.

Neron explained this advantage in this way:

Then again, it also helps because uh, engineering, it gives you a lot of ah, explanations about life and, like, right now we’re studying like numbers exponents and like the 0s and 1s and stuff so that pretty much again, lets you get an inference on how things are created and things, and you also make inference of that on football because the probability and things. (October 24, 2011)

Neron excelled in his position on the Taft’s football team because he conceptually understood the coaches’ philosophy and plans; he had the ability to focus clearly on the instruction that was before him. He seemed to be able to transfer some of his engineering and scientific insight into his football performance by reading and writing the symbols and plays needed for the team’s success.

**Speaking and listening.** Like I observed with James, the coaches listened when Neron came off the field with feedback. Although he was a small player for his position, as linebacker he was able to see different strategies and schemes the offense was trying to implement. The coaches trusted his instincts and insights because they knew he had studied film and practiced hard for each game day.

Coach Poland, his position coach, believed Neron was open to coaching and guidance. He told me, “Neron is the most coachable and most intelligent player on the team. If I tell him to do something, Neron will do it, even if it’s against his instincts” (Coach Poland, January 24, 2012). To illustrate this point, his coach described a game in which Neron was asked to trust the coaches’ insight and instinct instead of his own.
Because he did follow his coaches’ advice, he was able to make a big play and stop an important offensive drive. Ironically, this yielding to authority, despite his own instincts, granted Neron a certain authority and positionality with Coach Poland and on the defensive squad.

Perhaps as a result of this attentiveness and his experience, Neron was often asked clarifying questions within team meetings. When a coach wanted the players to answer a question regarding their own or an opponent’s game plan, I often observed other players looking at their feet and otherwise avoiding eye contact with their coaches; however, Neron was always quick with his correct answer, even while watching film or viewing the whiteboard with an altered play. During our interviews, the coaching staff again reiterated that Neron was one of the few players who could conceptually understand the game without running the drills. Running through the drills often helped him develop more physical skills; however, he seemed to be able to comprehend his role and the offensive scheme on a more abstract level than other players who often struggled due to lack of focus or due to their inability to conceptualize the coaches’ advice without being kinesthetically involved.

In our interviews, Neron and I talked a lot about the language of football. At one practice, I heard Coach Poland yelling to Neron and the other linebackers saying, “Choke your motor! Choke your motor!” I asked Neron what that meant, and we discussed how much is communicated within those few words. In my interviews with Coach Poland, I found that this phrase implied a variety of messages and actions for the linebackers when
they were certain positions. The linebackers were to slow down, pull forward, and check for their coverage assignments. A lot was communicated with very few words.

I asked Neron if it was ever difficult to understand what the coaches were telling him when they seemed to use such coded language. He stated,

Um, like, over the years, you get to know your coach, so whatever he says, you gets to, you pretty much know what he’s saying even though if it’s something completely off topic. So you pretty much get an understanding of your coach and get that bond with him. So you pretty much know what he’s saying even if he’s pretty much not saying it. (October 24, 2011)

Neron seemed to be expressing that understanding who his coaches were was important in comprehending their communication methods and means. Neron believed that if he understood the philosophy and expectations of his coaches, he would be able to perceive what their messages were without needing too much audible language.

*Viewing and visually representing.* Neron took his responsibilities as a player very seriously. Because his role demanded a deep knowledge of his own defensive scheme and also an understanding of the opponent’s offense, Neron watched films attentively and always listened to his coaches when advice was given. He explained, “Like, me, you always gotta know, never know when you are gonna be picked or called so you always gotta be ready and you always gotta know everything that somebody might call you upon” (October 24, 2011). He paid careful attention to the cognitive work involved in football in addition to the kinesthetic work because of this he was able to
recognize and comprehend opponents’ plays and offensive strategies even during an emotional game.

Neron held a lot of power within the team. This seemed to be due to his natural athletic ability but also to his willingness to learn the game on a higher level than only his position. In the defensive backfield, he was able to act on the short, abbreviated messages being given by his coaches, and in addition, he was able to articulate conceptual decisions the offense made that changed how the defense reacted.

**Neron’s classroom literacies.** While he was passionate about succeeding in the football figured world, Neron was also highly motivated to excel in the classroom. As opposed to many of his peers, Neron had already identified a field of interest that he had begun to study. Within his engineering classes, Neron was able to engage fully and plan for his future through mastering the literacies skills he utilized.

Neron experienced success in the classroom as well as on the field. In many ways, this outcome was due to similar skills in his mind. Due to his dedication to learning, he maintained a high level of focus and was able to connect his classroom pursuits to other areas of his life. While Neron valued what he called real life experience, he believed that the ‘book smarts’ gained from excelling in school would bring him advantages in life. Neron believed it was his responsibility to work hard and diligently through his schoolwork, and he valued his work ethic there as much as his work ethic on the football field.

He stated this about mental toughness in both football and the classroom:
Yeah, cause, mental, that’s the number one thing everybody needs, I’ll say that does kinda distinguish me from everybody else because um, like, hard work pays off, if you’re working hard the whole year, you’re gonna pay off. Like for instance, school, if you’re studying and going to school and studying and not skipping classes and getting good grades, you’re gonna get paid from a full-ride scholarship. That’s your pay day. Also with football, if you go hard every game, and you come to practice every day, you’re gonna get paid with either a football scholarship to a college or a state championship ring. (March 14, 2012)

Neron spoke to the value of staying mentally tough, engaged, and consistent through both the football and classroom demands. Throughout my study, I did recognize this dual valuation in both areas. His work ethic did not change while moving between the football and classroom figured worlds.

**Reading and writing.** While his first love was not reading and writing in his English classroom, Neron still diligently applied himself to those demands. He willingly read books through SSR (Sustained Silent Reading), and he completed all his written assignments. He always completed his reading and writing assignments in all his classes, which continued to build a variety of reading and writing literacies. Perhaps due to his reading and writing skills he had developed in football, Neron was able to excel and lead his peers in areas involving reading and producing symbolic writing. He was able to write and comprehend code in order to build a variety of projects in his engineering classes.
Speaking and listening. Although he felt emotionally closer to his coaches, Neron did respect most of his teachers, and he exerted a lot of effort into comprehending the classroom information. While in class, Neron paid close attention to the information being given and carefully managed the instruction. He understood the role of what a teacher was saying and how to listen within the classroom setting. He explained how he attended to what a teacher writes on the board:

Like, in ah, school, while a teacher is giving a lesson, and she writes something on the board, it’s important so you have to pay attention, also to her words too, so like, later on, in the day or later on in the week, if she calls upon you, you’re like, oh, yeah, she said that before. It was on the board so that’s the answer. (January 11, 2012)

Neron seemed to trust and value what his teachers were saying, and he was often able to lead small groups within his classes due to his understanding of key vocabulary and meaning. He was able to develop these literacies in order to succeed within the classroom figured world.

Viewing and representing. His true love, however, was his engineering and math courses. Through our conversations, I came to realize that he believed he could use his visual reading and symbolic understanding skills to comprehend the engineering work he did. His engineering teacher trusted Neron’s insights and often asked him to answer content and procedural questions for this class. Neron often used his mathematical knowledge to excel with his pragmatic applications in engineering. Neron also had to balance the “I versus Team” mentality in similar ways between football and his
engineering classes. For example, often the engineering teacher would put his students into small groups to answer certain questions or build a certain model that addressed a specific problem. Because his grades were very important, Neron worked diligently to complete this work on an individual level; however, he understood that he must also support and encourage the efforts of his small group peers for the projects to be fully successful.

**Connections between the two figured worlds’ literacies.** Neron gave concerted effort in both figured worlds. He believed this was his own responsibility. While not necessarily a literacy, this commitment and work ethic drove his valuation of success in the building of a variety of literacy skills. About his high commitment level, he said,

> Ah, me, it’s either, it’s how I see it in my eyes; it’s everything or nothing. Like, me out there, every time I do something, I don’t ever say, “Ah, I wish I did this.” You just go out there and give it your all, every time you go out, no matter what. Even if you’re losing, even if you’re winning, even if you can’t win, just go. That’s it. (March 14, 2012)

Neron seemed to believe he had a lot of agency and power both within the classroom and within the football team. Through our conversations, he always stressed that his agency came from hard work, determination, and his commitment to doing well whether it was in the weight room, on the practice field, on the game field, doing homework, or completing a test. His coaches’ and teachers’ impressions and observations agreed with this perception he had of himself and his ethics. He both
understood and successfully applied the specific literacies in each figured world, and he
did it with consistency and diligence.

Due to his personal ambition and drive, Neron appeared to make key connections
between the demands of football and classroom literacies. He stated, “You just gotta give
it your all and then you’ll feel how that feels and you’ll want to keep going and going and
going” (March 14, 2012). He believed all his activities deserved his best effort.

Neron often developed his literacy skills through his leadership potential on the
football field and in the classroom. His teammates and classmates acknowledged and
respected his leadership abilities within the football figured world and the classroom
world due to his ability to read and comprehend symbols, communication abilities with
teachers and coaches, and his conceptual understanding that came from viewing. In both
worlds, I observed him leading small and large group discussions. On the football field,
he often talked to his defensive squad and/or a coach about specific strategies. This was
due to his ability to listen and learn from the film studies and from their instruction.

In his engineering class, he led his group in their project due to his literacy skills,
and in his government class, I observed him ask probing questions that led everyone to a
deeper understanding about a specific area such as program coding. If he did not
understand something, Neron was willing to ask questions that benefitted himself and his
peers. On the football field and in the classroom, Neron’s pursuit of success made him
stand out as a leader among his peers. He continually developed his literacies in both
areas that influenced his identity (Gee, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2002; New London Group,
1996).
Asher

Asher was an African American junior who pursued a variety of interests and participated in many diverse activities Taft High School offered its students. Asher seemed to gain energy from experimenting with athletic and academic team opportunities in addition to applying himself in Advanced Placement classes.

Asher eagerly described his holistic approach to his life in high school:

I’m like, and I just devoted myself to, you know, trying to do better, trying to learn. Try to get everything. Try to take advantage of my opportunities, and that’s why I’m in all these clubs. That’s why I try to do. I get good grades.

(January 12, 2012)

He added this comment regarding his love of working with his peers in class and on a team, “I do like working in the groups. I love working in groups. Yeah, I love working in groups. That’s fun” (January 12, 2012).

Whether it was a saxophone, football helmet, forensic script, or a guitar, as a 17-year-old African American, Asher gave his whole self into all his activities. Throughout his high school career, Asher made significant contributions on the football team and indoor and outdoor track squads. He also lent his talents to the speech/debate team, the academic challenge team, and to various bands. Throughout my data collection period, I was able to observe Asher with his speech/debate team and with a group of people who performed at a community concert in Tresselton. I also saw him organize, practice, and execute a group drama project in his Drama class.
Due to Asher’s broad passions and interests, he had many different friends from the various groups. I have seen him with the athletic students, the musicians, and the advanced students within his classes and on teams such as Model UN. He was a serious student and person who wanted to do well in many areas, but was also willing to laugh readily in most situations.

Asher’s family seemed to encourage his wide-ranging interests. According to Asher, his family often developed new, innovative ideas and plans, using creative conversations and debating. Asher explained,

Ah, well, my mom, she has like, she has her master’s degree, she’s thinking about going to med school. And uh, we’re always, she’s always coming up with stuff. She’s like, we’re like, creating all these get-rich schemes all the time and my step-dad is like . . . they, like, you know, you invent something you get a patent for it . . . they have a couple of ideas . . . Yeah, and ah, I help them with that. We’re always thinking, and ah like, looking at . . . and . . . out there. And ah, also we have some interest in conversation. Just about anything. (September 14, 2011)

While his family likes him to be active, Asher admitted that he drives himself towards his goals and ambitions. They did not necessarily encourage him in specifically athletics or academics. “It’s all me,” he stated.

Trying to connect and understand how my participants identified themselves helped me embed my literacy findings within a broader picture of them as individuals. Hearing their stories allowed me to contextualize the data that emerged from their
engagement within the two figured worlds. In the next section, I describe the literacies utilized in the Taft football figured world and the Taft classroom figured world.

**Asher’s football literacies.** Perhaps due to his wide-ranging interests, Asher can be very articulate about the Taft football literacies and how his skill development and participation in football differs from his other interests. While he worked hard every day in practice and can effectively compete with his peers, he maintains a balance between his identity as a football player and his identity as a track athlete, as a musician, and as an intellectual.

**Reading and writing.** Asher played on the offensive line, and because the offensive line was filled with large and talented seniors, he didn’t see a lot of playing time during his junior year while I collected data. This lack of playing time never seemed to destabilize his connection to the team. In practice, Asher often played on the scouting squad, which had to learn an opponent’s offense or defense in order to challenge Taft’s first team. This demanded that the scouting team learned new schemes quickly so that the starting squad could adequately prepare for each week’s challenge. Asher’s backpack would often hold pages full of plays so that he could study them during any free time he might have. Asher explained why he studied football much like he studied in the classroom:

> It’s like math class. Get your assignment, you get your assignment. You go home and look at your scouting report, what you will be doing this week around this time. If you don’t look at that sheet or you don’t do the right thing, he pulls you out. You’re fired. (November 9, 2011)
Asher understood that his cognitive skills would hone his physical abilities on the field if he took the time to study and apply himself. He was willing to put in that time to become a better teammate and player.

Because Asher believed the coaches had done their work and preparation well, he devoted himself to listening, practicing, and studying the plays, or script, that had been developed for the team. In all my interactions with the participants, Asher was the only player who could pull out various game scripts from his backpack to illustrate the offensive game plan. Each week the coaches developed a sheet of plays that would be utilized for the upcoming game. Often, these new plays would be extensions of plays already learned; however, often certain positions would have key changes. For the team to be successful, all players had to read and study the scripts each week. Asher compared these scripts to notes for a class. The coach (or teacher) had prepared them, and it was his job to learn and memorize them so he could successfully incorporate them into the game. This was in opposition to other players, such as Allen, who were somewhat inactive in this realm. They didn’t ‘read’ or study the scripts; they just trusted in the repeated drills the coaches designed at practice to teach them the skills they needed for each game.

*Listening and speaking.* Asher talked about studying football in much the same way as he talked about studying for his classes. He knew and appreciated that his coaches spent a number of hours painstakingly planning for each game day and practice. Using a specialized computer program, Coach Poland downloaded every film for each opponent. The computer program then analyzed the opponent’s tendencies such as how
many pass plays they run or how many defensive schemes they use. Based on that knowledge, the coaches build a plan for each week, a preparation for the opponent they will face on either Friday or Saturday. Asher always listened and attended fully to film study, even if he realized he wouldn’t get to play consistently in an upcoming game. While he didn’t often speak while in the large group, he was very proficient with the play calling and symbolic language when we discussed them in our interviews.

I believe Asher utilized his Taft football speaking and listening literacies in a very pragmatic way throughout my data collection process, which spanned the entire school year. I observed Asher’s ability to motivate and persuade through his verbal skills when CJ’s contract was unexpectedly not renewed by the school board. Asher became the voice for those players who supported CJ and pushed for him to be reinstated. Asher began a petition that players signed, and he spoke very articulately at a city commission meeting regarding this issue. He was even featured on a local news station that was covering the coaching controversy at Taft. He was very articulate and clear about wanting the school board to explain their decisions to the players, those who were most influenced by the choice to remove the coach. Although this explanation was not ever given, Asher was consistently able to fulfill this need for the football team. He clearly articulated the importance of CJ’s role as coach and mentor in his life and in the life of the team.

*Viewing and visually representing.* Asher believed that viewing and comprehending symbols was part of his responsibility as a football team member. In CJ’s program, the second string players served as the scouting squad, so they needed to
be proficient at understanding and running their opponents’ plays. Indeed, during the practice week, the scouting squad coach would lift up cards with opponents’ plays visualized on them, and the Taft scouting players would have to execute those unfamiliar plays based on their film study and by the visual representation. In this way, Asher excelled with his viewing literacies and was able to participate and contribute in meaningful ways to his team.

**Asher’s classroom literacies.** Asher enjoyed classroom success. He utilized his love of teamwork within his academic pursuits by joining the Model UN team, the speech team, and multiple different bands throughout his high school career. He was able to identify in somewhat disparate figured worlds through his intelligence and wide-ranging interests.

**Reading and writing.** Throughout his high school classes, Asher showed the ability to succeed with the extended reading that an Advanced Placement track demands. He has also excelled in speaking, due to his expert use of Standardized English both in the Model UN and speech and debate team. According to his English teacher, his utilization of grammatical rules was sometimes a struggle for him. She believed this was often because he had too many novel ideas he wanted to communicate. However, Asher continually attempted to excel so that he could effectively communicate his thoughts and ideas to others. Asher regularly completed reading assignments given through his Advanced Placement and Honors courses. He was able to read and complete the work required on a consistent basis.
**Speaking and listening.** Asher often used his gift of communication for the sake of students and players. As an example of this support, Asher was highly involved in fighting CJ’s dismissal as coach following the 2011 football season. Asher appeared on a variety of public settings calling for an explanation from the Taft school board. He was able to speak clearly and articulately on all occasions while listening to others. The players seemed to appreciate his abilities to express their questions and anger; they were willing to let Asher be their voice.

**Viewing and visually representing.** During my data collection period, Asher also showed a high aptitude for visualization skills as he directed his small group’s scenes in their Introduction to Dramatic Arts class. His teachers all agreed that he had the ability to think critically through difficult concepts, although he did at times struggle with writing his thinking and processing connections. They weren’t sure if this was related to his schedule or his ability.

Asher willingly applied himself and learned what he was taught within his classes. He said the following about how he developed his viewing and visualization literacies in the classroom by comparing film and play study in football:

I kinda find that, I kinda feel like it’s the same. I feel like we’re in school, learning these plays, you know? And how most of my teachers do it, they have notes. Basically they give you visual representation of what you need to do, and show you how to do it. (January 12, 2012)

Asher believed that mastering classroom literacies would help him achieve his academic and life goals. He faithfully applied himself to developing them.
Connecting the two figured worlds literacies. Asher believed there was a connection between the discipline he used in football and the discipline he used in the classroom. He described the similarities in our interview in this way:

That’s somewhat of a, I mean, as in studying, with um, studying for like a test, maybe math, I repeat, repeat, repeat what he gave us and keep doing it, keep doing it, keep doing it to remember it and with football, it kinda gives you an ethic for what you need to do to firmly know something or remember something. To teach you form, and like, with bags, you say, he’s going to keep coaching you to the best of his ability. Coach is going to say, get your butt lower, Ah, put your hands, you don’t want your hands on their shoulders, you want your hands in his chest, right? And yeah, just that repetition, I guess that has, yeah, that repetition that you need to be successful, basically.

When I asked if he was willing to give this same effort as a student too, Asher replied, “Yeah, of course” (January 12, 2012).

Asher applied himself to classroom literacy skill building with the same faith in his teachers that he had in his coaches when he committed himself to football literacy skill building. He believed both his teachers and his coaches had studied their craft and had wisdom to offer him. Asher compared his teachers’ preparation as similar to the ways his coaches prepared for each game. He trusted that the teachers had done their preparation also, and as a result, he used his more print-based reading and writing skills to succeed in his classes. He compared them in this way:
They (the coaches) plan it all out, what we’re doing for that whole week. And what plays we’re running because even, um, (my offensive coach) did work, when we um, were about to play Ridgeville (a cross-town rival). He drove all the way to Steubenville to get the film for the Ridgeville game . . . They stayed up and scripted what we were going to do and ah, the whole week we were practicing, practicing, and repeating, repeating, repeating. School-wise, um, I take most AP and dual credit classes. I mean, she’s gonna put it on the board, you better copy it down and you better study it or you’re gonna fail the test. That’s basically how it works. (January 11, 2012)

This connection and similarity seemed obvious to Asher as we talked. He matter-of-factly related the processes he used to succeed in school. He did not ever express hesitation in reading or writing of longer, narrative text, nor did he feel like science and math have posed great difficulty for him. He enjoyed the competition and challenges involved in an Advanced Placement track, and he did not shy away from the demands it posed such as a high use of Standardized English and/or a high level of critical thinking. Asher also believed that his teachers were experts in their field. He did not often challenge them or the information they gave; he just seemed to enjoy the material they presented. This often made him a favorite of teachers because he willingly granted their views as ones from the position of wisdom.

Asher displayed a unique connection between the literacies of these two worlds when he became the team spokesman after the school board did not renew CJ’s coaching contract. Asher, like many other players, thought this decision was unjust and
unwarranted. Due to his dual training in speech and football, however, Asher was able to fulfill a unique role amongst his peers. As was previously mentioned, he was able to speak passionately and knowledgeably to a local news station, a local paper, and to the Tresselton City Council. He explained his passionate response to me, “Yeah, it’s, . . . such a good man (CJ). He’s such a good man. Such a good person. It’s just inappropriate what happened to him, and I truly believe it’s not right.” Later he described how CJ told the team:

He was there and um, he was in there. He talked, and you could tell he was crying, and um, you could tell he, he, he went to tears a couple of times. He’s like, “All you guys can do is use your voice because you have, you guys have been spoken for, and it’s not right.” I’m like, he’s completely right, and I want a state championship . . . He’s just such a good guy, and this shouldn’t happen to a man of this caliber. But it did. (Asher, January 12, 2012)

Although Asher’s voice was not enough to reverse the school board’s decision, and CJ was not allowed to continue as Taft’s head coach, Asher’s ability to communicate the feelings and consternation of the football players was important to the community who watched the circumstances.

Cross-Case Analysis

To describe the literacies that Allen, James, Neron, and Asher utilized within the Taft football figured world and the Taft classroom figured world and the connections and disconnections they experienced, I studied each participant as an individual case to provide a more holistic description of these literacies within the situated context of Taft.
I then analyzed the findings across cases in order to find similarities and differences. I first briefly introduce these themes across the case studies, then I describe them more in-depth. After my analysis, I found these themes across all the individual players:

1. The players’ belief and valuation of skills, behaviors, and hierarchy was important for their individual success in both the football and classroom figured worlds.

2. The players’ positionality and power within both the football world and the classroom world depended on their cognitive abilities and the choice to successfully utilize and understand the communication styles and literacies demanded in each world. This, in turn, influenced the identity built in these worlds.

3. The players seemed to benefit and reach more of their personal goals when they were able to connect the literacies and values between the football and classroom worlds.

First, throughout my cross-case analysis, I found that the players’ individual success was at least somewhat dependent on how they “took on” the beliefs and valuations found within the figured worlds. For example, to find success in both football and classroom figured worlds, the players had to submit themselves to the hierarchy norms in both areas. They also had to learn to value and respect elements such as the discourse, equipment, and artifacts in the specific ways the figured worlds defined (Hatt, 2007). While the role expectations were different in the figured worlds, both demanded the same type of acceptance and ‘buy-in’ for an individual.
Second, the players’ real and perceived power and positionality within both figured worlds was dependent on not only their willingness to take on certain expectations, but it was also connected to their choice to build and correctly implement the literacies skills in each area. In general, when the players were able to build the variety of literacy skills each figured world demanded, they experienced more success and more esteem from teachers and coaches. This success, esteem, and recognition seemed to positively influence their identity as a football player and as a student (Holland et al., 1998).

Third, the players were positively influenced in both the football and the classroom figured world when they were able to identify, connect, and implement the literacy skills needed in both areas. When the players were motivated to merge their literacies, they often experience more success than they would have without these connections.

As we talked through emerging data and these types of cross-case analysis, Coach Poland attempted to describe how some players seem to excel over others in his mind. He stated,

You know, since we’ve been here, there’s been a select few who, and I think that’s on every level, you know? You know, there’s guys that understand conceptually what’s going on, and there’s guys that are doing what they are coached to do. Maybe it’s the ‘it’ factor. They understand it, you know? (Coach Poland, January 24, 2012)
With my findings, I propose that the “it” Coach Poland is referring to is the ability to conceptually understand the roles and expectations of the football and classroom figured worlds and as a result developing and merging the literacy skills demanded by both. This idea was verified through other conversations I had with Coach Poland throughout the research period.

The Players’ Belief and Valuation of Skills, Behaviors, and Hierarchy Influenced the Players in Both Worlds

CJ was often very explicit about how to value participation in the Taft football program. He often made statements like the following: “This is Taft frickin’ High School. The greatest job on earth. The greatest high school in the country” (CJ, head coach, team meeting, August 1, 2012). He often added, “Remember who you are” (CJ, head coach, team meeting, August 27, 2012).

All four of the participants valued being a part of the Taft football team. Certainly, Allen held this role in his life as his highest achievement. James had enacted a part in the Taft figured world even in his neighborhood backyard activities, and Neron valued his football participation not only on the Taft level, but as a way to connect to his brother’s tradition there. Asher did have a deep respect for the Taft football tradition, and he also shared many stories regarding his past teammates and games. However, at the core of this valuation, there was a deep, meaningful divide between Allen and the other participants.

All four of my participants displayed a deep respect for the Taft football tradition. They valued playing for this team and being part of its storied history. They were all
willing to put hours into practicing, weightlifting, and conditioning just to have the opportunity to wear the Taft jersey. For Allen, James, and even Asher, their dreams began as children. They had been acclimated into the Taft football tradition and celebrity at a young age. They understood and had participated in the community’s expectations for this athletic squad almost all of their lives, and they enjoyed the link it gave them to fathers, brothers, and other male community members. Neron, although not dreaming of this from a young age, still valued the tradition and especially the link it forged with his own brother. If this was the extent of the belief and valuation they had for the football figured world, they all four should have fully identified as a Taft Panther. However, there were subtle differences that Allen did not seem to understand; prefigured expectations that he either disregarded or was unable to meet. For example, Allen questioned his coaches’ decisions regarding his individual playing time via his text message instead of asking the question face-to-face. In addition, the coaches also overheard him swearing his anger toward another teammate who had taken his defensive position. This individualized focus started as a seed that developed many other questions within the football figured world for Allen. Allen moved from thinking about the team to only considering what he needed for himself. He said,

It sounds good. “We all we got.” It sounds good. But, in reality, it’s “I’m all I got,” really. Like Allen, Allen has to take care of Allen and do what he has to do to get out of Taft High School. (December 7, 2011)
It appears that Allen’s emotional break from the team as a consideration deeply influenced his connection to Taft in general. Without the football connection, ‘getting out’ of Taft was his priority.

Managing the delicate balance between “I and team” also seems to be an important valuation and role to act out. James and Neron seemed successful at maintaining this balance by both building individual goals and developing hard work ethics and also being team players, willing to sacrifice for another teammate’s glory. Asher, too, appeared willing to diligently focus on his role on the scouting team, without needing a starting position to feel valued. Allen, however, struggled finding this balance. I found this in many different areas. First, as I discussed earlier, his drive to individuate through his costuming set him apart. While other teammates were satisfied wearing CJ’s prescribed uniform each game, Allen tried to find ways to spotlight himself. Whether it was wearing the wrong color of shoes or by applying extra ‘make-up’ for the sun glare, Allen wanted to look different. Second, even in his conversations with me, Allen consistently focused on his own accomplishments and insights. He rarely displayed the ability to step outside of his own actions and behavior to understand a coach’s decision that appeared negative to him. He rarely wanted to talk about the accomplishments of his teammates. His stories focused on what he did or wanted to do within the team. As Gee (1996) pointed out, Allen did not show this key understanding in his stories:

Paradoxically put: a person can speak a language grammatically, can use the language appropriately, and still get it ‘wrong.’ This is so because what is
important is not just how you say it, not just language in any sense, but who you are and what you’re doing when you say it. (p. 124)

Both with his coaches and with his peers, Allen used acceptable grammar, but he did not show his figured world knowledge by appropriately addressing his coaches’ decisions and his role as a sacrificial teammate.

Surprisingly, through my individual and cross-case analysis, I found that the valuation and belief my participants enacted in the football figured world was equally important to his physical and kinesthetic skills. Allen had the physical skills to perform well within the team; however, he lacked the successful integration of other key valuations regarding the hierarchy of coaching decisions, the communication style, and team uniformity. While he certainly valued the Taft football tradition and his ability to participate on the team, his inability to integrate other key beliefs left him frustrated and literally on the sidelines.

In similar ways as they took on the expected roles in the Taft football program, James, Neron, and Asher were able to enact their roles as students with success because they were willing to accept the hierarchy and organizational structure that Taft’s classroom success demanded. They valued the insights and trainings of their teachers and were able to accept their figured roles as authority. James, Neron, and Asher also believed that academic engagement was connected to their life’s goals. They were able to support the notion that education could afford them better jobs and a means to achieve a happier life. Taft’s school structure encouraged this view by building and moving
students through a system of grades and accomplishments in order to ‘prepare them’ for college and worklife.

The Players’ Positionality and Power Within Both Worlds Was Influenced by Their Literacies

The players’ identity as a Taft football player not only included their speed and strength, but also their understanding how to use a variety of literacy skills to possibly influence the outcome of the games. Although Allen did show kinesthetic expertise on the field, even his coaches would say that he was not able to integrate all the literacy skills of the game in the same ways as James and Neron. Allen also seemed unwilling or unable to value the time needed to study film or review play scripts, which revealed his dismissal of this particular figured world element and the devaluation of the literacy skills development that film study demanded. His focus was on the hands-on application and even the glory of the game for himself. While Asher understood the game holistically and valued developing the literacy skills it demanded, he often was not very critical about his roles or the conceptual design of the plays. He simply did what he was told through the play scripts. He even admitted in our conversations that, opposed to the classroom, he usually kept to himself on the sidelines in football. He did not offer insights or suggest changes to his coaches, and he didn’t argue or push for more playing time. He did not use his speaking literacies or display the knowledge he might have gained through his viewing and/or visually representing literacies. He seemed content to author more of a minor role for himself within this figured world (Holland et al., 1998).
The power and positionality that James and Neron enjoyed was also tied to their ability to integrate the language and literacy expectations within the football figured world. They were expressive and insightful about how the coaches were expected to talk, and how the players were expected to talk and how they were motivated by different types of speech and level of emotion. As a result, they were able to maintain their starting positions and interact with the coaches during games, and this dramatically influenced their ability to author identity as football players.

Perhaps due to his larger-than-life dreams of being a Taft football player, I often observed Allen unable to control his emotionality while he communicated, whether it was on the field or off the field. The confrontation and questioning to his coach via his text message illustrated this difficulty he had. While he did identify as a football player, Allen’s inability to fully engage with the literacies demanded by the Taft football figured world decreased his ability to fully develop an identity there.

As was stated earlier, by his own admission, Asher did not perceive himself as an emotional leader on the football team. I noted this throughout my data collection also. Asher was usually much more moderated and situated himself more to the fringes of the whole team, especially during the game contests. I did not get to observe him integrate his knowledge and skill level with the communication style that seemed so valued by the coaching staff and the team leaders. Of all the participants, Asher seemed to be building a variety of identities in a variety of areas. Perhaps his desire to remain more moderate in this area reflected his passion and commitment to other figured worlds as well.
In the classroom, my participants showed a great deal of diversity; however, the general findings still show that power and positionality were affected by successful literacy skill development in this figured world. Whereas Neron and Asher seemed to enjoy relative success in their classwork, Asher definitely displayed a better integration of the reading, writing, and speaking needed for the classroom. Asher’s literacy expertise was seen mainly in his speaking; he spoke eloquently and persuasively about a variety of topics within his classes. He also consistently engaged with his assigned reading and chose to read a variety of texts outside the classroom that related to his various interests. I witnessed this throughout the events surrounding the non-renewal of CJ’s contract and as he contributed to discussions in his Advanced Biology and French class.

Neron’s literacy expertise was more in the area of listening and in using his symbolic and visual aptitude to excel in math and engineering. His work ethic still gained him solid grades and recognition in other areas, but he admitted that the reading and writing involved in English class was difficult for him. For example, Neron’s English teacher included independent reading expectations in her classroom. While he reported struggling with getting through some of these texts, he did enjoy the feeling of finishing and preparing a project to reflect his learning. Neron also volunteered to work on his writing skills through extra work provided by his engineering teacher. He added this demand to his existing workload because he realized this was a weak area that he wanted to improve.

Due to his difficulty to focus at times, James struggled with staying up-to-date and consistent in his classes. Although he claimed to value academics, his mother had to
constantly monitor his grades, and he often struggled with the longer narrative and/or dramatic texts within his English classes. Throughout the research period, Mr. Brill would often tell me that James’s mom had called him and checked about James’s progress. She would record the work missing, and within a few days James would complete the missing work. James believed his symbolic understanding and viewing skills gave him advantage in his science and math classes; however, even his science teacher claimed he was inconsistent in his performance. Despite his vacillating classroom performance, however, James still claimed that his identity and work as a student was an important part to his life goals so he continued to apply himself in this area.

Despite the varying level of success between James, Nero, and Asher, however, all three mentioned their attempts to improve their classroom literacy skills through practice, which seemed to reinforce their identity as students. I often saw James in the library, surrounded by a social group of friends, but still trying to complete one assignment or another through collaborating with his peers. Neron maintained a focus on academics all the time. He often showed his communication and vocabulary proficiencies to me when he would stop by and chat about his latest engineering design project. My room frequently became a place for Asher to practice for his speech competitions and/or speech performances. I observed him putting in many hours of practice, fine-tuning his communication skills with his teammates and his musical abilities. I never observed Allen putting in these extra hours of time nor even express interest in the assignments he was creating for class. Even when I observed him within
his classes, he rarely appeared to be connecting with the material. He would usually comply with the teachers’ requests, but he would not put extra effort that might extend or build on his existing skills.

**The Players Seemed to Benefit When They Connected Literacies**

Three of my participants described how they connected their literacies between the Taft football and Taft classroom figured worlds. James, Neron, and Asher all spoke about their athletic and academic personal goals. Due to these goals, they actively built literacies in both of these worlds. Throughout our conversations, the participants mentioned the connections they made between their football literacies and their classroom literacies. Utilizing the power of this connection seemed to benefit them in both areas.

For example, James explained the purpose of active listening and note-taking in both figured worlds:

Yeah, because like, for some games, our coaches, we’ll go to the seminar room, and we’ll like, he’ll give us a notebook, that will be straight blank, and he’ll start writing stuff down on the board, and we’ll have to copy it down and remember cause the thing that he wrote on the board, is the thing that we’ll use in the game, so like, in school, when the teacher writes something on the chalkboard, you have to write it down because it’s going to be on the test. Football is basically like the test. (February 3, 2012)

Throughout part of my research period, Neron was engaged with improving his writing. He described a significant transfer he was able to make in order to improve his
writing. He stated, “It’s (hearing your writing read aloud) similar to watching film because the coach uses film to show us what we did wrong” (February 16, 2012).

Asher connected the roles of his teachers and coaches in his learning. He believed they both had valuable educational roles in his life. He observed, “I mean, it’s similar (when a coach is teaching in football) because he is a teacher, you know. He’s legally a teacher, and um, I mean it’s not really, I don’t really see a difference” (January 12, 2012).

James had his love of wrestling and his never-ending circle of friends, which gave him different identities he valued. Neron had also constructed a meaningful literacies and identity in the figured world of the classroom, especially within the engineering and math fields. Asher had built literacies and identities in vastly different worlds such as music and speech and debate teams. Conversely, Allen had organized most of his high school career around a select few football literacies, letting other practices and knowledge slip by or just ignoring them. At the beginning of this study, I wondered if this depth of passion and focus would at least be rewarded in the football figured world, but in Allen’s case, I found that it was not rewarded, and it possibly even built hurdles to his accomplishments there. For example, according to his own admission, Allen was unable to successfully navigate and utilize the literacies of the classroom. He was certain, however, that he fully understood the literacies he needed for football success. However, as the season went on, it became clear to everyone that Allen was not fully able to adjust to key literacy demands such as the way to communicate and value a coach’s opinion to the way one was expected to dress within this specific figured world. These areas of
deficiency eventually became part of the change in his positionality and power within the team.

For the most part, James, Neron, and Asher believed that their education would open doors for them in the future. They seemed to believe that their athletic interests might make a way to pay for a college education; however, sports activities, in themselves, could not obtain all the goals they hoped to reach. Whereas James sometimes needed his mother (who acted like his classroom coach) to remind and resource him, all three believed that doing well in high school could advantage them in college, and a college degree would allow them to enter the job market and gain the financial security they felt they needed. Both Neron and Asher applied themselves stringently to their academic endeavors in much the same way they applied themselves to their athletic endeavors. They saw both as an extension of a personal work ethic. James did struggle with giving school and classroom literacies the attention he wanted to give; however, with encouragement and direction from his mom and teachers, he was usually able to build these skills. He did, however, miss the hands-on applications that athletics gave him. When a teacher invited James to do hands-on projects or capitalized on his social expertise, James shone and found the work much more appealing.

James, Neron, and Asher’s stories are in contrast to Allen who did not necessarily seem to believe in the value of education. I often wondered if he would have even bothered obtaining his high school diploma at all without the direct interventions of his mother, coaches, and best friends. When football ended for Allen, it became apparent that he was absolutely unmoored in school. He found little value in the work he was able
to do, and he often found his teachers to be unreachable and irrelevant. Allen also had a difficult time connecting his football literacy skills and literacy skills that would benefit him in the Taft classrooms. Perhaps part of this was due to the diversity he found between the classrooms and what each demanded of him. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, I wonder if Allen’s seeming inability to connect and build new literacies was influenced by the complexity of Taft’s individual classrooms as opposed to the unity and structure provided by the football coaches and program.

James, Neron, and Asher all valued the wisdom and insight their teachers brought into the classroom. For the most part, they showed teachers the same respect they showed their coaches. As many high school students do, each of the three had favorite teachers; however, they were all respectful of the hierarchy of the classroom and the authoritarian structure of the school. In fact, it was through the success in this structure and within these teachers’ expectations that they gained their confidence and identity as students. When their teachers spoke about James, Neron, or Asher, they always had a smile on their faces and usually had happy stories to tell about enjoying them in class. All three were given opportunities to lead their peers and give insight into class work due to their faithful commitments.

Allen was unable to grant teachers the same type of respect he gave his coaches. He rarely completed his assignments on time, and they did not always reflect a high level of respect for the teacher or the content area. Either he was unable or resistant to building an identity within confines of the particular literacies of the Taft classrooms. His classroom identity seems to reflect either an ignorance or a resistance to the conformity
of the content areas and the teachers’ assignments. This placed continual hurdles to his success there.

**Summary**

This chapter describes the individual and cross-case findings related to the study’s specific research questions. For each individual case, I focused on the literacies my players used within each figured world. For my cross-case analysis, I found three themes in common. First, the players’ belief and valuation of skills, behaviors, and hierarchy were important for their individual success in both the football and classroom figured worlds. Second, the players’ positionality and power within both worlds depended on their cognitive abilities and the literacy skills they were chose to utilize in each world. Third, when the players were able to flexibly connect their literacies between the two figured worlds, their identities were more strongly developed in both areas.
CHAPTER VI
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

My study focuses on describing the specific figured world of Taft High School football and the Taft High School classroom. By using the insights of my participants, my study also expounds on the literacies used within each figured world. Connections and disconnections between the literacies were then explored.

Participation within any figured world demands that an individual take up certain values, beliefs, and activities. Holland et al. (1998) stated, “Figured worlds rest upon people’s abilities to form and be formed in collectively realized ‘as-if’ realms” (p. 49). By incorporating a broad definition of literacies (New London Group, 1996), I analyze not only how my participants read and write within both worlds, but also how they hear, speak, view, and visually represent. To what extent my participants accepted and actively engaged with the literacy practices and values in each figured world often influenced the power and positionality they found there. This influenced their construction of identities within the world.

While many literacy researchers have focused on how adolescents use literacies to build their identities (Alvermann, 2001; Gee, 1992, 1996; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Knobel, 2001; Lewis & del Valle, 2009; McCarthy & Moje, 2002) and even on the literacies athletic adolescents may use (Mahiri, 1991, 1994), this study provides the unique framework of two specific, embedded social contexts (the Taft football figured world and the Taft classroom figured world) and the insights of participants who are actively involved in each world. This study provides insight for adolescents, their teachers, and
their coaches who are interested in the interplay of figured worlds, the variety of literacies that can be demanded in figured worlds, and the possible influence this recognition can have on the development of an adolescent’s identities. The implications of my study have potential to bridge the gaps between the figured worlds, literacies, and identities that adolescents chose out-of-school to those required in school by listening and analyzing the voices of the participants and by closely examining what classroom teachers can learn from coaches. By drawing upon the figured world description and the literacies of football, my findings can influence how teachers invite adolescents into classroom literacies and how adolescents themselves can build meaningful connections between their diverse literacies and figured world identities in order to experience more powerful positionality.

**Overview of the Study**

I used qualitative case study design in order to describe the Taft football and Taft classroom figured worlds. My study then explored the literacies my participants reported using within each world. I then analyzed the connections and/or disconnections between the literacies. Using the data gathered from both figured worlds, the following research questions guided my study:

1. What literacies do participants use in the Taft football figured world?
2. What characteristics of the football figured world influence the literacies there?
3. What literacies do participants use in the Taft classroom figured world?
4. What characteristics of the classroom figured world influence the literacies there?

5. What connections, disconnections, or tensions do the participants experience as they move between the two worlds? In what ways do these experiences shape their identity-building process?

Taft High School, located in Tresselton, Ohio, was the setting of my study. At Taft, approximately 60% of the students received free and reduced lunch. At the time of my study, approximately half of the student body self-identified as African American or Multiracial and the other half identified as White. Taft High School’s athletic history is well-known throughout the community and state due to many successful college and professional players in addition to the region’s focus on the National Football Hall of Fame. Taft’s location has often cast a spotlight on its high school football program. Young men grow up in Tresselton dreaming of playing under the lights of Rawley Stadium, beneath the adoration of current fans and with history surrounding them. However, as high school students, these football players also attend classes and daily navigate various academic demands. Both the Taft football program and the Taft classroom were places for potential literacy and identity development.

I began my study in August of 2011. I met my four participants and spent time watching films, observing practices and games, and meeting with coaches. As school began, I also spent time observing my participants in their classes and interviewed three of my participants four different times and one participant three times throughout the
school year. My 10-month study ended in June of 2012 when the academic year was completed.

My findings revealed that the Taft football figured world and the Taft classroom figured world did contain certain expectations for specific beliefs, values, and literacies. My data analysis also showed that players did use various literacies in both worlds, and they did experience key connections and disconnections between the literacies demanded in both worlds. At times it even appeared that their ability to navigate these literacies had the potential to influence their developing identities.

First, the players’ belief and valuation of the skills, behaviors, and hierarchy influenced them in both their football and classroom worlds. The extent to which Allen, James, Neron, and Asher were able to take on or participate fully in the expected values and behaviors of these imagined, as-if realms (Holland et al., 1998) often influenced the success they experienced in each one. The players needed to recognize, accommodate, and act within the values and hierarchy involved within their coaching staff and within their high school classrooms. Second, the players’ positionality and power within each world depended at least in part on their use of the literacy skills required. For example, each player had to understand and act on the short, abbreviated, emotional language of their coaches in the football world, but they also needed to attend to and comprehend the longer, expansive academic speech of their classroom teachers. Finally, the players did seem to benefit in both realms when they were able to connect their valuation and literacies between the two worlds. James, Neron, and Asher accepted and pursued the literacies and beliefs of both worlds, seeing the success in these places as connected to
their individual goals. Allen was not able to do this, and eventually he struggled in both worlds with the demands he was given.

In this chapter I discuss my study’s findings. I frame my findings and discussions in a way that informs teachers, coaches, and adolescents themselves. I hope to articulate the ways participation within diverse figured worlds such as the football and classroom, and the literacies demanded in both, can influence the identities adolescents develop. Next, I discuss the implications of these findings to teachers and coaches who wish to foster classroom identities within adolescents. In addition, I discuss implications for adolescents themselves who desire to build classroom identities. Finally, I address specific implications for teachers who hope to facilitate and encourage literacy and identity development within their classrooms and for adolescents who are interested in developing literacies and identities within specific figured worlds. These implications are built from observing CJ and his coaching staff as they sustained an educational football figured world for their players. Lastly, I offer suggestions for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Allen, James, Neron, and Asher all desired to build successful identities within the football figured world. As a result, they at least tacitly agreed to take on the roles the figured world afforded them and the valuations inherent to the world. James, Neron, and Asher desired to construct identities within the classroom figured world. Because of this motivation, they were able to learn and utilize the literacies and enact the valuations necessary for the classroom. The extent to which these adolescents successfully utilized
the literacies demanded in both worlds seemed to affect their position in both worlds. This section discusses each finding and how it builds on or refutes existing research.

**Players’ Belief and Valuation of Skills, Behaviors, and Hierarchy Was Important for Individual Success in Both Worlds**

Just as Moje (2002) and MacGillivray and Curwen (2007) found with their gang-related and tagging participants, adolescents are engaged with specific literacies within specific embedded social contexts as they construct their identities. Although they are different from the more standardized literacies recognized by the classroom, adolescents are engaged in many types of reading and writing outside of school while being influenced by their figured worlds and the valuations there (Alvermann, Hagood, Heron-Hurby, Hughes, Williams, & Yoon, 2007). My findings show that the football and the classroom figured world demanded specific literacies and valuations, and to meet their individual goals, my participants needed to recognize and utilize those.

As Holland et al. (1998) described, figured worlds are historical phenomena. They stated, “Figured worlds, like activities, are not so much things or objects to be apprehended, as processes or traditions of apprehension which gather us up and give us form as our lives intersect them” (p. 41). When my participants’ lives intersected the two figured worlds of Taft football and Taft classrooms, they had the opportunity to either take on the roles and literacies offered to them or dismiss the roles, options, and literacies as somewhat irrelevant to their lives. In addition, they had individual agency to make choices within a certain range of options. Their identity construction (i.e., the values, beliefs, and literacies) had to be recognized and accepted by those already within the
figured worlds. Both worlds did require key literacy skills in order to build identity. Both worlds also required similar respect for the established hierarchy and the required expertise determined by that hierarchy. All of these elements needed to be reenacted but also could be acted upon to a certain extent in order to build identities in each figured world. James, Neron, and Asher all had individual goals that included a certain measure of success in both the Taft football and classroom world. As a result, they worked diligently to construct an identity within both of those worlds by recognizing and carrying out the culturally produced activities. Allen, however, did not perceive how his life intersected with the Taft figured world in a meaningful way; therefore, he struggled to construct a meaningful identity within the classroom figured world.

My study’s findings seem to indicate three beliefs that were in common between the football figured world and the classroom figured world. These beliefs encompassed the literacies and figured world valuations, and while they were somewhat different when compared side-by-side, these general beliefs where established by both worlds and influenced the identity work there.

**Belief #1: For all literacies, communication relied on the established standardization and accepted patterns.** My study shows that despite commonly held knowledge, the football figured world and the classroom figured world both demanded reading and writing literacies from the participants who actively engaged within the worlds. The reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing in the football figured world was much more symbolic, relying on representational letters or symbols to communicate information. When coaches wanted to teach certain plays for
each week, they would write them on large and/or small whiteboards and offer quick explanations. These plays would then be copied so the players could study them on their own throughout the week. The coaches depended on the players’ reading comprehension as they explained the week’s plays and the philosophy behind them. The abbreviations or symbols were not spelled or explained; understanding was assumed. James explained this, “It’s SS or FS. Corner is C; Mike is M, Will W, and ah, Sam, S. He just writes it on the board, and you have to know what it is” (November 3, 2011). The coaches assumed the players could comprehend the reading and writing demands of this figured world; they only explained the variations or changes within the written plays each week. The playbook, with its symbols and abbreviated language, become the standardized way of communicating the plays and responsibilities within the team.

The reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing in most classrooms was usually more of an extended text, based on sentences and paragraphs and relying on standardized punctuation and grammar. In the classroom figured world, the teacher would most often be directing the literacies on the whiteboard through standardized language and would assume the students could comprehend and recreate similar language. However, my participants were not always able to utilize the expected standardized literacies of the classroom in teacher-expected ways. For example, Asher’s Dramatic Arts teacher explained how Asher struggled to communicate his thoughts through his standardized English writing. She believed Asher had great ideas; however, he was not able to put them into a form that seemed understandable or standardized to her. He would struggle with grammar and organization to his writing,
often having run-on sentences and/or misplaced punctuation. On the other hand, during two of our interviews, Asher used a pen and paper to quickly write out complex play structures while he described certain scenarios. In order to describe these plays well, Asher had to adhere to a specific organization and structure, which he did with great ease and success. The standardization of the football written work seemed to come much more intuitively and fluidly than the standardized English expected from his classroom teacher.

My study’s findings indicate that the participants were more adept at taking on and recreating language within the football figured world than in the classroom figured world. The football figured world relied on a standardized language system in the same way that the classroom figured world did for clear communication; however, my participants appeared more confident and successful, according to their coaches and teachers, with the standardized football literacies than the classroom figured world literacies. James, Neron, and Asher all desired to achieve their personal goals within the football and classroom figured world; however, even with the success they did individually find, they still struggled in a variety of ways with the standardized, expected literacies within the classroom. How can teachers invite student understanding regarding their standardized expectations, and then allow students multiple and diverse opportunities to utilize those literacies in practical ways in order to positively influence identity construction within their classrooms? Clear communication was the goal for both figured worlds and their standardized literacies; however, that clarity was not always
found by my participants in both figured worlds. As a result, their identity construction was influenced.

**Belief #2: The established hierarchy formed and sustained the focus and standardized expectations of communication.** A key valuation in both figured worlds was the acceptance and respect for the established hierarchy. My study shows that in both the football figured world and the classroom figured world, in order to reach their individual goals, my participants had to take on and appropriately integrate the literacies preferred by the hierarchy. For example, in the football world, most often due to the vast spaces such as a football field and/or stadium, the participants expected most literacies and communication to be abbreviated, visceral, and immediate. Language was used to immediately motivate and instruct; it is not meant for future consideration. In actuality, the inability to read, speak, listen, or view football’s often emotionally-laden speech could result in physical injury to an individual player or teammate; therefore, speech was meant to be heard and put into action. Players and coaches identified with this type of abbreviated and/or visceral speech needed in open fields and to meet physical demands. They realized that coaches on the sidelines could usually see details more clearly and following their spoken language was imperative for physical safety and for proper play execution. It became clear through our interviews that the participants believed they needed to speak and listen with extreme focus in the football figured world. This became difficult with the noise and chaos created by the wide open field, the marching bands, and the fans. Abbreviated and often emotional speech was demanded in both speech and in listening.
On the other hand, although he fully accepted that his coaches would yell at him, James was not able to conceive of teachers yelling at him in the classroom. “It wouldn’t seem, it wouldn’t seem right for a teacher to be like, ‘You better get an A!’ You’d be like, alright?” (February 3, 2012). Due to the differences between the immediate, physical demands on the football field and the longer, sustained range of the classroom demands, James did not expect teachers would have the immediate or emotional need to communicate with him in ways similar to his coaches. In his classroom figured worlds, he had not experienced many teachers yelling at him or his classmates. As a result, he believed that teachers would take more time to explain their thoughts, their expectations of him, and what he was supposed to learn. In turn, they expected their students to communicate clearly through more descriptive, extended talk without dramatic emotions.

In both these figured worlds, where my participants participated and had to opportunity to build identities, the hierarchy established the literacies and focus of communication. James, Neron, and Asher were able to accept these demands of each hierarchical system; however, Allen struggled against it. In fact, the literacies of the classroom figured world appeared to puzzle and confuse him. Perhaps as a result, he was not able to respect or incorporate the classroom figured world’s literacy expectations nor the desired respect for the hierarchy there. How can teachers successfully initiate more students into the process of understanding and valuing the role of the teachers as content area experts in addition to the integration of key content area literacies? From my study’s findings, it would seem that building those areas of respect and valuations would be an important component in building student classroom figured world identities.
Belief #3: Disciplined work today in understanding and integrating key literacies and valuations will bring success tomorrow. In both the football figured world and the classroom figured world, my participants had to accept and believe that their repetitive, disciplined work would help them meet their long-term, individual goals. CJ constantly reminded his players that football could be the key to their college education. James and Neron both anticipated that they could possibly earn a football scholarship for their football skills and therefore earn a college degree. Each day they put on their practice helmet and faced the hours of practice CJ demanded, they worked toward this possible target. In another example, Neron valued film study because he recognized that analyzing his opponent through this type of viewing could make him better prepared in a game situation. Taking the time to critically study film took extra hours in addition to the expected practice times; however, Neron regularly and actively engaged in this viewing process in order to be more successful in his games. James, Neron, and Asher all believed that their coaches and teachers could help them meet their individual goals both in the football and classroom figured world, and for the most part, these three participants were willing to put time and disciplined effort in the tasks they were given. Allen, however, struggled with this long-term vision. In a sense, he had obtained his life-long, individual goal, which was playing on the Taft football squad. As his senior season moved on, it was clear that he became confused and disillusioned with his future football and classroom goals. He did not have any clarity to focus on-going discipline and energy. How can teachers guide a student like Allen? How can more students be invited to create multiple identities that can anchor them for more immediate
but also future goals? In some way, Allen was able to envision and discipline himself toward a current and future identity within the football figured world; however, he was not able to orient himself toward this within the classroom world.

My study’s findings first suggest that the football figured world and the classroom figured world both demanded certain recognition, respect, and the integration of literacies and valuations that were endemic to each figured world, needed for clear communication, and guided and sustained by the hierarchy. When my participants were able to respect and take on these beliefs and valuations, they met their individual goals. Surprisingly, there were many similar skills and valuations expected in both the football figured world and the classroom figured world. If more teachers could recognize these similar belief structures and even literacy skills adolescents bring to their classrooms, could more students find more fulfillment there? For example, there might be many connections between how a band member is expected to respect the hierarchy of his section leader and the band conductor. There are also specific ways band members learn a variety of literacies. Clearly, there are differences between reading band music and reading a classroom text; however, it appears that inviting the perseverance and respect band members build for this literacy into the classroom might help them achieve their classroom goals.

**Players’ Positionality and Power Within Both Worlds Depended on Their Successful Integration of Beliefs, Valuations, and Skills**

To gain a position of power within each world, the players had to utilize the demanded literacies of each world and adhere to the expected beliefs and valuation. In
order to construct meaningful identities in diverse figured worlds, individuals need to recognize and act within the expectations; however, there is also room for some (re)creation. In order for each of my participants to gain power and positionality within the football and classroom figured world, they had to adopt and integrate key characteristics of each figured world into the identity they were constructing there.

Holland et al. (1998) provided a description of how the acceptance and integration of a figured world’s values and beliefs can influence one’s identity being constructed. They stated:

The dialect we speak, the degree of formality we adopt in our speech, the deeds we do, the places we go, the emotions we express, and the clothes we wear are treated as indicators of claims to and identification with social categories and positions of privilege relative to those with whom we are interacting. (p. 127)

While my participants did gain power and positionality through reenacting certain beliefs and roles offered to them, they also used individual agency to (re)create positions for themselves within both figured worlds. Within my findings, there seems to be three general areas the participants must have integrated into their identity within each world. The participants’ power and positionality was positively influenced by both their reenactment and (re)creation of key beliefs and valuations within the figured worlds in which they participated. I first discuss these areas, and then analyze how these markings of power and privilege were similar and/or different between the two figured worlds.

**Reenactment.** Throughout my study, it became apparent that in order to gain certain power and privilege within both worlds, there had to be a reenactment of values
and beliefs that were recognized in both worlds. In both the football and classroom figured worlds, there was a hierarchy of leadership that the participants were expected to respect. The coaching staff made the decisions and built the team’s philosophy and playing structure while the administration and teachers developed the structure of the school day and the expectation of the content area classrooms. In each world, the participants needed to integrate that respect into their interactions.

James and Neron enjoyed having powerful positions on the football team. They respected the hierarchy of the coaching staff and did all they could to fulfill the roles they were given. James and Neron were able to understand the game conceptually, and as a result, they were often asked to give input about their experiences during games; however, they did not give input until they were invited. They were willing to wait and submit to the coaching staff and their decisions.

Although he didn’t have as much playing time as others, Asher maintained his desired position through studying his plays and by successfully performing his role with the scouting team throughout practice. In our conversations, Asher repeatedly acknowledged the expertise his coaches brought into the game. He willingly submitted himself to their decisions and his role on the team.

In the classroom, James, Neron, and Asher valued their teachers and their academic, personal goals. They attempted to keep their classwork complete and maintain a focus throughout their classes. For the most part, they earned their teachers’ respect and trust. All three of these participants willingly submitted to their teachers as content
area experts, and even if they struggled in certain content areas, they were open to teacher guidance and direction.

Allen struggled with respecting his coaches in the football figured world and his teachers within the classroom figured world. His enactment, such as the unacceptable football text communication and putting his head down during classroom instruction, was not recognized nor accepted by the hierarchy of either world, and as a result, he was not able to build strong identities in either area.

For the participants to achieve more power and positionality within both worlds, they also had to take on the appropriate balance between themselves as individuals and their role within the team. James, Neron, and Asher all seemed to intuitively understand this delicate balance in the football figured world. All three expressed the willingness to fulfill whatever role the coaches desired for them and dependably acted out the roles they were given. James, Neron and Asher also appeared to understand the different balance of the individual and the team within the classroom and how to act out these differences. These participants were driven as individuals to learn and achieve academically. Neron provided an insightful observation as he compared the concept of the I versus Team between the football and classroom figured world. He stated:

I’d say in school, it’s pretty much individual. Because like, you’re all, it’s your grades, like, the only time you will help someone else out is if you’re in groups because it, you’re pretty much, when you help someone else, you’re not supposed to. You’re pretty much giving them your grade and giving them your knowledge. So I’d say it’s more of an individual thing. (January 11, 2011)
Here Neron pointed out that not only was working as a team highly discouraged in the classroom world, some forms of this were viewed as cheating and would warrant disciplinary action. Neron did not express any type of tension trying to sustain these differing demands between the football and classroom worlds. He seemed to accept the differences and apply himself accordingly to meet the goals he had set for himself. Both James and Asher indicated similar feelings of strong individuality within the classroom as opposed to the balance of team within the football figured world. Grades and classroom success were not to be shared; however, football wins were.

Allen did not seem to struggle with the emphasis on individual achievement in the football and classroom figured worlds. In football he deeply desired to gain fame and recognition through his individual play, which sometimes conflicted with his desire to work collaboratively with his teammates. In the classroom, Allen understood he was accountable for his own work; however, he did not pursue building a stronger academic identity. While he was not a disruption in class or in small group assignments, Allen did not use the insights of his peers to comprehend more deeply.

In both the football and the classroom world, my participants’ stronger positionality also depended on both their reenactment and integration of cognitive and kinesthetic skills. James and Neron seemed to maintain a similar position within the team due to their cognitive and kinesthetic skills. Both players were quick, strong, and willing to play hard every minute while they were on the practice or game field. The coaches respected them, and their teammates looked to them for direction and approval. Especially during more cognitive activities such as film study, his teammates often relied
on Neron’s cognitive abilities to answer the coaches’ questions and to clarify what they were seeing. I regularly observed Neron having the same type of laser focus when he stepped on the field and used his kinesthetic skills to read players’ positions and the opponents’ plans.

While the classroom world generally demanded very little of their kinesthetic intelligence, James, Neron, and Asher applied themselves to developing their cognitive skills within their classrooms. Intellectual abilities were definitely the primary focus in the classroom figured world, and because all three of these participants were committed to building identities within the classroom world, they strove to stretch their intellectual pursuits. James understood that his future demanded that he value and sustain his education. Neron and Asher willingly submitted themselves to more rigorous classes and expectations in order to grow in their cognitive abilities. They all believed their high school classes were preparing them to meet their future educational goals.

As would be expected, Allen preferred to build his physical skills as opposed to his intellectual skills. As opposed to his teammates James, Neron, and Asher, Allen had chosen a fairly easy class schedule for his senior year. His schedule did not reflect the same level of college preparedness that the other participants’ schedules did. The fact that he quit attending Taft after football season ended, and then he attempted to complete his high school career through an online school, again seemed to underscore the fact that he struggled to find value in developing his cognitive abilities and skills through the classroom world. He failed to enact the belief and value system of the classroom figured world.
While James, Neron, and Asher were able to speak, enact, and costume themselves in recognizable ways within both figured worlds, Allen was not able to do this. Learners, or actors, have individual agency and choice when they play with literacies and identities offered to them (Gee, 2003). Allen identified with a few of the reenactments demanded in the football figured world, but he seemed to disregard all those opportunities offered to him within the classroom figured world.

**Re)creation.** As Holland et al. (1998) found in their studies, while building identity within figured worlds, individuals were able to use their individual agency to a certain extent. While gaining power and positionality within both figured worlds relied heavily on the enactment of certain values, beliefs, and skills, looking across my participants’ cases, a strong figured world identity also depended on some active (re)creation of these figured world characteristics. However, this (re)creation had to still be recognized. Allowing the figured world to be flexible enough for certain (re)creations may initiate more connections for the individuals attempting to construction identities.

Using their individual agency, James, Neron, and Asher were able to (re)create features already found within each figured world. James was known for his sense of humor and his ability to make any practice fun. Somehow he was able to do this even without dismissing the recognition of the expected hierarchy. For example, at one practice, James wore a pair of socks with holes in them. This was not acceptable for CJ’s practices, so as a punishment, James had to “run the hill.” This drill demanded that James run up and down a steep incline located near Rawley Stadium. Even while doing this, James managed to keep his cool and sense of humor without seeming to defy the
coach’s discipline. James was also able to do some (re)creation within his role as student in the classroom figured world. James’s social spirit sometimes had to be directed within the classroom; however, with his desire to achieve academically, he found ways to connect with his classmates in meaningful ways that was usually accepted by his teachers. For example, when James had to complete small group work, he could often be found in the library with his classmates. This was a place where he could get assignments complete but also experience a bit more freedom in conversations. In both worlds he was still able to craft a space that met his social needs without challenging the hierarchy.

Neron also did some (re)creation within the I versus Team expectations both on the football field and in the classroom. On the Taft football team, most of the leaders were very emotional and vocal in their leadership. They were often the first out of the locker room and the first to celebrate with each other and with fans when the team won. However, I often observed that Neron was much more reserved in this area. When the team ran out of the locker room and onto the field, Neron was not usually in the lead pack. He was actively involved in the celebration and anticipation; however, he was not in the forefront for recognition of himself. He acted in the same manner after a win. While other team leaders ran ahead of the squad and celebrated with fans, Neron often hung back, more quiet and reserved. He did not seem to draw the attention to himself; he just appeared to be part of the whole. Interestingly, while I observed him, Neron was not always quiet and reserved in the classroom. He was never outspoken in a negative or distracting way; however, he often led whole class discussions and would speak up with jokes or interesting anecdotes. Neron appeared to be very confident with his personality
in both worlds, even though some characteristics of his behavior did not mirror some figured world expectations. This (re)creation of his role on the football team and within the classroom appeared to be accepted and even enjoyed by his coaches, teachers, and classmates. He seemed to gain power and privilege through the ways he acted within and upon the identity opportunities he was offered within each context.

Asher did a lot of (re)creation of his role both within the football figured world and within the classroom figured world. Asher continually had to balance his broad-ranging activities and the demands they placed upon his time; however, somehow he was still able to make football a priority. Even when he had to balance a speech competition and a game on the same Saturday, he would still race from one to another, arriving to the football meeting with dress pants but the required t-shirt. In general, Taft coaches believed football ought to be the leading, and perhaps only, out-of-school commitments their players should have. However, Asher was able to effectively maintain other commitments and develop other skills, both cognitive and kinesthetic, throughout the football season. Within the classroom, Asher’s love of language and creation was apparent in his pursuit of speech and debate and in his love of the arts. His active and successful participation in a variety of academic and arts-related activities (re)created the identity many teachers believed Taft football players built, and it allowed Asher to create and connect multiple meaningful identities. Asher’s teachers recognized that he was equally committed to the football and classroom figured world and balancing strong positions, power, and identities within each.
Allen’s (re)creation was not recognizable nor valued within either the football or classroom figured world. Allen was not able to (re)create a different role with his coaches and teammates when he was injured, and his obsession about his starting position seemed to defy the I versus Team philosophy. Allen did not even seem able to (re)create a role for himself with his cognitive or kinesthetic skills within either world also. This remained a puzzle to him. His coaches and his teachers seemed unable to lead him toward developing a meaningful and recognizable identity within either figured world, and as a result, Allen began disappearing from both.

Although some (re)creation was accepted by both the football and classroom figured world, my findings seem to indicate that the margin for creation was slim in both worlds. In addition, how to (re)create roles and actions within the figured worlds was not fully understood by my participants. While James, Neron, and Asher seemed able to perform this creation in acceptable ways, Allen was not, and he was not able to truly articulate why. If teachers and coaches are concerned about inviting more adolescents into a variety of figured world, it would seem that both the articulation and acceptance of a breadth of (re)creation would be beneficial. In addition to this understanding and articulation, my study’s findings suggest that perhaps the ‘markings’ of power and privilege in these specific figured worlds could be broadened so that more adolescents could access stronger identities. Both the recognizable reenactments and the accepted (re)creations were recognized in certain ways within the Taft football and classroom figure world. These markings communicated stronger identity and power and positionality to my participants and their peers.
The markings of power and privilege. The ways in which the power and privilege were marked, recognized, or rewarded within the figured worlds seemed to have a dramatic influence on my participants. In the football figured world, power and privilege usually included more playing time, more leadership responsibilities, more trust from the coaches and other players, and more community recognition. Most importantly, all of these powerful experiences built more confidence and strong identity that spurred further success. When coaches and players repetitively praised James and Neron and asked for their insights, that in turn elevated their confidence level and identity in the football figured world.

In the classroom power and privilege were marked in some similar ways. For example, James, Neron, and Asher, students who were able to respect the classroom hierarchy, understood the balance of individual drive and collaborative support, and the need to build cognitive skills, and as a result, they gained power and privilege in specific ways. They gained more trust from their teachers and more dependence from their classmates. They also gained success through completing assignments and assessments to earn satisfactory grades. However, in comparing the differences in the two figured worlds, my study shows very specific markers that could influence an adolescent’s classroom identity construction.

First, earning dependence from classmates is not the same as gaining respect from teammates. James and Neron were able to build respect from their teammates; however, in some cases they were more likely to earn dependence in the classroom. For example, classmates would often want Neron in their collaborative group work; however, this
desire was not because they respected his knowledge as much as depended on his work ethic. My study leads me to ask questions regarding peer recognition and respect of classroom achievement. How can the climate of the classroom figured world build respect for academically successful adolescents instead of possibly ostracizing them?

Second, the classroom figured world at Taft had no way of celebrating academic success with the community on the same level that the football team was recognized. As James once noted, no one ever stopped his father in the convenience store to congratulate him on his son’s academic successes. However, community members often stopped his father and praised James’s success with the Taft football squad. This level of recognition and praise spurred a great amount of confidence in James, which in turn positively influenced his athletic performance. It seems that the Taft classroom figured world could benefit from discovering ways to celebrate academic success within the community itself. In what ways could students gain recognition and praise for the time and commitment they devote to academic achievement? Trying to answer this question, and attempting to build a model for this in the classroom figured world seems as though it could foster powerful confidence and identity construction for more adolescents.

**Players’ Seemed to Benefit When They Were Able to Connect Values and Literacies Between Both Worlds**

In their research, Hull and Schultz (2002) articulated the need for teachers to build bridges between the literacies adolescents use outside of school to the literacies they need to utilize within school. Doing this offers more students the opportunity to build successful classroom identities and possibly meet their personal educational goals. As
adolescents learn and acquire new literacies, the identities they can potentially form are most powerful when they are meaningfully connected (Gee, 2003). Within school, it becomes important that adolescents can find ways to bridge literacies and identities through understanding characteristics of the classroom figured world. These ideas seem to be supported by the experiences of three of my participants. James, Neron, and Asher built many articulate connections between the football and classroom figured world literacies. These connections enabled them to reach more of their personal, educational goals.

James, Neron, and Asher all seemed to benefit and meet their personal goals better when they were able to connect their valuation, literacies, and identities between the two figured worlds. They had developed the literacies demanded in the football and classroom figured worlds to the extent that they were actively building identities in both worlds. When they connected these two, they all three seemed to benefit. Due to their passion and deeply developed football identity within the football figured world, all four participants tended to begin with their football literacies and connect them to classroom literacies. Because this study attempted to articulate the participants’ connections, the way they developed their connections frames my discussion.

**Football literacies to classroom literacies.** The hierarchy of the football program and classrooms was similar in that the coaches as well as the teachers expected that their training and knowledge gave them the ability to instruct the adolescents in their endeavors. The role of the players/students was to listen and follow the decisions made, most often without questioning. In addition, James, Neron, and Asher developed
connections between the symbols of science and math and in the studying of information given in the football and classroom world.

When James, Neron, and Asher discussed the connections they experienced between the football and classroom figured worlds, they often began conversations by discussing the football figured world characteristics and then connecting literacies, values, and beliefs with the classroom figured world. James illustrated this connection well when he compared football games to classroom tests. He believed both asked for application and performance of learning that was provided by the coaches/teachers.

Asher agreed with James when he talked about taking notes in both football and in his classes in order to study, and Neron made his connections through his work ethic and the value he placed on learning the literacies his coaches and teachers presented him. They all believed they applied themselves with equal commitment and were motivated by similar values in both worlds. Allen, however, struggled to find connections between these two worlds and the literacies he used in both. According to our conversations and my observations, his football identity seemed to overshadow the efforts he gave to his classroom literacies and identity.

Allen stated this about his classroom identity and literacy engagement:

Cause it seems, it just seems like, the week just takes forever and then like, on
Friday, like, you just, you just sitting there thinking about Friday night, just
thinking about playing. You just thinking about what you gonna do. It’s kind of
a distraction in a way, but in a way it’s not. But, when I’m in school, I’m just
like, funny, clowning, just having a good time. (December 7, 2011)
Unlike James, Neron, and Asher, who began with their football identities and then compared and connected their classroom identities, Allen simply seemed completely focused on his football identity and literacies. According to his comments, Allen had not developed a way to connect, or even create a hybrid of literacies that could facilitate his identity development in both the football figured world and the classroom figured world (McCarthy & Moje, 2002). His focus, even while participating in the classroom figured world, was still centered on football.

My study’s findings suggest that adolescents themselves need to recognize and build bridges between multiple figured worlds. When these connections are made, multiple identities are influenced because adolescents perceive and experience successful transference and the strength of interaction. For example, connecting the two figured worlds was not difficult for James, Neron, and Asher as they believed each area of participation was a key component to their lives. The identities they were building were multiple (their identity as a football player and identity as a student) and had different goals; however, they pursued the goals with similar discipline because of the connections they had made. Teachers of various content areas need to strive to help students develop these bridges so the strengths of one identity may positively influence the identity in another figured world.

The discussion surrounding my findings point to important implications as adolescents construct identities outside of the classroom and use a variety of literacies and belief systems there. Ultimately, my findings illustrate that adolescents build identities in a variety of figured worlds. These are meaningful and often cause a high
demand for a variety of skills and valuations. Adolescents take part in out-of-school literacy demands willingly and repetitively in order to gain identity with power and positionality within these out-of-school contexts. My study extends existing literature by illustrating how bridging meaningful literacies and identities have the potential to gain more power and positionality within multiple figured worlds. If teachers could initiate or invite more of this connection between adolescents’ out-of-school literacies (such as football) and their classrooms, perhaps more students could both reenact and (re)create in ways to build stronger identities there.

My study’s findings have important implications to teachers, coaches, and even adolescents themselves. There are implications to teachers and coaches as they attempt to invite adolescents to use literacies and build identities within diverse figured worlds. There are also implications for adolescents as they can become cognizant of the literacy demands in diverse figured worlds and actively initiate their identity development through their individual agency.

**Implications**

The findings of my study indicate that there are a variety of explicit, and prefigured, literacy expectations in the Taft football figured world and the Taft classroom figured world. Some of these expectations overlap, such as in the symbolic reading of a playbook and its connection to math and science; however, some of the literacies are not as closely aligned. The reading of extended text that is the expectation of many Taft classrooms is a very different type of reading or literacy demand than the reading involved the football figured world. According to my findings, if an individual desires to
develop a specific identity within a figured world, he must commit to at least attempting to achieve the literacy skills that are valued and expected there.

My findings seem to indicate that the commitments made by Allen, James, Neron, and Asher directed how they pursued understanding the literacy demands in the Taft football and classroom figured world. Allen made a life-long commitment to the Taft football figured world and achieving the literacy skills demanded there. He attempted to use his agency and figured world knowledge in order to position himself powerfully in the Taft football figured world. James, Neron, and Asher made commitments to achieve literacy skills in both the Taft football and classroom figured worlds. These commitments allowed them a closer positionality in both worlds, which positively influenced their identity development. This study can inform teachers and coaches as they attempt to invite more students into the literacy skills involved in a variety of figured worlds. Specifically, teachers can attempt to understand the values and beliefs that draw adolescents to their out-of-school activities in order to build meaningful connections to the classroom, and they could invite more (re)creation within their classrooms that reflect a broader range of beliefs and valuations. In these ways, more adolescents could build flexible and stronger identities.

As an educator myself, I am specifically concerned with the implications these findings have on adolescents as they enter various high school, classroom figured worlds and attempt to find success there. As a teacher, I want more adolescents to discern and build meaningful connections between the passions they integrate into building their out-of-school literacies into classroom literacies. I believe this recognition could allow
more adolescents to experience more power and privilege in the classroom. It seems important that teachers reflect on the beliefs and valuations that drive out-of-school literacy and learning and identity building and invite adolescents into that process. As a result, more adolescents could become more vigilant about finding connecting points for themselves.

My data implies certain considerations that can help teachers understand and utilize their students’ out-of-school literacies and identities within the classroom figured world. First, to invite students’ identity building process within their classrooms, teachers ought to be explicit regarding the literacy demands their content area places upon students. For example, what are the beliefs and valuations that undergird a science classroom? Science teachers could be explicit about the hierarchy expectations, the value of teamwork throughout the labs, and the dependence science has on asking questions, posing hypotheses, and then testing hypotheses to build knowledge. Second, as a way of demonstrating care and interest for students, it’s important that teachers recognize and validate all literacies in some way. Third, students themselves should be encouraged to recognize the literacies they already use, and how and why they use them, in order to perceive the advantages they are afforded in various figured worlds. I first discuss these implications, then I address what teachers can incorporate from the Taft football figured world in order to invite more students into building classroom identities within that figured world.
Teachers Need to Actively Invite Students Into Content Area Literacies

Teachers need to describe and model content area literacies for students in their classrooms and actively invite them into new figured worlds. All new learning requires identity work (Gee, 2003). Teachers can support students in this work by articulating content area expectations and literacies. Each content area that is taught within a secondary school setting has expected literacies that are more recognized and/or accepted than others. For example, symbolic reading and writing might be more valued and expected within a science or math course as opposed to a language arts course where whole words and sentences are more the expectation. Moje (2008) asked that secondary teachers and literacy educators recognize these differences. She stated:

A reconceptualized view of secondary school literacy suggests that a person who has learned deeply in a discipline can use a variety of representational forms—most notably reading and writing of written texts, but also oral language, visual images, music, or artistic representations—to communicate their learning, to synthesize ideas across texts and across groups of people, to express new ideas, and to question and challenge ideas held dear in the discipline in broader spheres. (p. 98)

This call for teachers to recognize the need to teach disciplinary literacy aligns with the findings of my study. James, Neron, and Asher all seemed at least fairly articulate regarding the literacies skills their classroom figured world required of them. Although they experienced differing degrees of academic success, none of them indicated confusion regarding their classroom literacy demands. On the other hand, Allen truly
believed that classroom literacy skills were mostly beyond his ability to understand. The rationale and structure of these literacies seemed like a secret or puzzle to him. Perhaps, if teachers could have invited him into a different position within their classrooms by explaining their content area literacy demands, he might have experienced less frustration.

For students to have the greatest opportunity to access classroom literacies, Gee (1996) asserted that students need to be presented with more than overt knowledge simplified into small instructional steps. He stated:

Immersion in such practices-learning inside the procedures, rather than overtly about them-ensures that the learner takes on perspectives, adopts a worldview, accepts a set of core values, and masters an identity often without a great deal of critical and reflective awareness about these matters. (p. 136)

In other words, Gee proposed that effectively using acceptable literacies within content areas depends on students actually learning literacy skills while actively participating in classroom figured worlds. Students need to be actively engaged in the participation of the figured world. Perhaps classroom teachers who only invite students to passive roles are not allowing meaningful access into the classroom figured world. By offering instruction and activities that reflect a variety of learning modalities and immersion within practices, teachers may invite more identity construction.

Expected literacy practices can be assumed and inadvertently hidden from potential learners. If teachers become more articulate about the literacies of their content area and the demands they place upon students, and then immerse the students in that
figured world through a variety of learning opportunities, perhaps more students such as Allen would find more success in contexts that seem baffling and too complex. While the literacies of football seem to develop more naturally to some of my participants, they have still acquired new skills, understandings, and insights as they have moved through the Taft football program. They have learned through overt and clear skill focus, such as viewing films and copying plays, but they have also built upon that overt learning by repeated and prolonged immersion in total participation—mind and body—in the figured world. Perhaps if teachers could duplicate this clear focus and active immersion in their content areas, more students could willingly acquire more classroom literacies.

Teachers want students to be successful in their classrooms. My findings imply that being articulate about the content demands and the characteristics of the figured worlds may allow adolescents to build stronger identities within their classes. If more students could construct new learning within their own identities, they might be more willing to take on the roles and responsibilities provided within the classroom figured worlds.

**Teachers Need to Recognize and Value Other Literacies Students Bring to Their Classrooms**

To invite more students into the classroom figured world, teachers ought to recognize and value literacies that are part of their students’ figured worlds and identities. Studying adolescent literacy practices through a figured world and an identity lens allows teachers to value literacies students bring to their classrooms as opposed to framing their language and literacy practices as a deficit (Hull & Schultz, 2002). Teachers can no
longer assume that every student will use Standardized English for his or her essay or that every student sees the value of reading *A Christmas Carol* in December. While they must balance the curricular demands they are given, teachers must also invite adolescents into the classroom figured world by recognizing existing literacies and values (Hull & Schultz, 2002; Lewis & Fabos, 2005; MacGillivray & Curwen, 2007; Moje, 2000). By issuing this type of invitation, teachers initiate more diversity and multiplicity into their classrooms where more students can imagine a role.

As Gee (1996) pointed out, “Diversity, then, is not an ‘add on,’ but a cognitive necessity if we wish to develop meta-awareness and overt reflective insight on the part of learners” (p. 141). Acknowledging the literacy skills and identities that are already included within a classroom will strengthen instruction and invite more students into the figured world of school. A student’s social context and the models within the context have a dramatic influence on his literacy and identity construction. Students need to work alongside their teachers as they are invited to acquire and connect new skills (Blackburn, 2001). James, Neron, and Asher felt enough empowerment to utilize the literacies and values from their football figured world within the classroom figured world. However, Allen did not seem invited to do that same bridge-building. Could teachers have found inroads from Allen’s life-long dreams of football success to content area learning? Would issuing this type of invitation encouraged Allen to build a stronger identity within the classroom figured world?

Rather than assuming that there is one unified way to identify with classroom literacies, it is important that teachers perceive the various ways that individual’s history,
values, and perceptions build over time and how that influences their learning.

“Knowledge construction shapes—facilitates, fosters, hinders, challenges—the identities and values of students. As students’ identities shift over time and across contexts, how they contribute, what they see as important, and how they themselves are valued changes” (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2011, p. 247). Recognizing and accommodating for these shifts and multiple identities can be a way to invite more students into learning new literacies.

Teachers who can recognize and value the diversity of their students seem to be better equipped to open the social context of the classroom up to more diverse literacies and perhaps more student success. As Robinson (2007) pointed out, individuals ‘fashion selves’ within figured worlds. They ‘figure out’ who they are while embedded within specific social contexts. Welcoming this diversity also allows teachers more latitude for accepting adolescent (re)creation within the classroom figured world. When feeling empowered through their individual agency, adolescents may form stronger identities within classroom figured worlds.

Teachers need to be consistently aware of what strengths, literacies, and identities their students bring with them in order for all students to have the opportunity to gain confidence and clarity in a classroom figured world.

**Students Need to Recognize Existing Literacies**

Students need to recognize the literacies they already use in order to author identity for themselves. If adolescents can recognize and value the literacy work they do in out-of-school figured worlds, perhaps they can build bridges to more in-school
literacies. James, Neron, and Asher felt compelled to build identities in both the football and classroom figured worlds and that drove them to learn in both area. In her study of adolescent boys and their literacies, Rice (2011) stated, “Students who are successful in school submit to learning experiences. However, they also exert control over the tasks they engage in” (p. 60). My findings seem to indicate that this control is connected to the power and positionality my participants desired within the football and/or classroom figured worlds, and it is also connected to how well they understood and willingly took on, or submitted, to the characteristics each world demanded. In order to exert this control, my participants perceived a variety of connections between these two worlds.

Students such as James, Neron, and Asher are able to build connections between their out-of-school literacies and identities and the literacies and identities that are required for the classroom figured world. This connection allowed them to enjoy success in both areas because they transferred the skills between the two figured worlds. Identifying the skills they used, and then applying them consistently allowed these students to experience powerful positions within their football team, and in various areas of their classes. It allowed them to author themselves, or (re)create themselves, successfully into both figured worlds (Blackburn, 2001). My studies suggest that adolescents can benefit when they connect and build bridges between their figured worlds so that certain expertise that is built is not hidden or nontransferable (Rowsell & Kendrick, 2013) and stronger identities can be built in multiple areas.
Implications for Teachers: What Teachers Can Learn From the Coaches

Throughout my extensive time spent observing the Taft football figured world, I found a number of learning techniques that could benefit the learners in the Taft classroom figured world. Because CJ developed his program by framing his players as students, he and his coaching staff infused the Taft football figured world with opportunities for every type of learner. The coaching staff utilized every learning modality, used meaningful repetition, and application of knowledge both in games and in practice. My data indicated that there are specific methods and ways of framing their practice that teachers could integrate into the classroom figured world what appeared to be successful for the football figured world. By success, I mean that many players seemed to learn the required information that was taught to them. The areas that would most benefit Taft classroom figured world would be adopting a clear I versus Team philosophy, engaging in critical and creative thinking as they planned and reflected on lessons, incorporating all learning modalities as they taught, and building a tight, consistent curriculum.

I versus Team philosophy. First, each of CJ’s coaches believed they were collaborators with each other. Although each coach had specific duties to fulfill, each coach believed that winning and success came from working together as a team. As CJ once told me, he and his coaches avoided the use of “my” in any conversation. The pronoun was always “us” or “our.” This was a verbal way to acknowledge this collaborative priority. The coaches pragmatically facilitated their collaboration through regular meetings, both short and long. For example, before each week’s game, the
coaches would meet for multiple hours on a Sunday in order to prepare for Mental Monday and the week ahead. Every voice was heard at these meetings in order to provide the best plan for the week. Second, there was also heavy collaboration throughout the games. For example, two coaches were always present in the press box in order to provide the sideline coaches with a broader view of the game. The press box and sideline coaches would exchange insights through headsets and attached microphones. Each coach depended on the other for insight. Through the collaboration, plays and instructions might be changed, but this rarely happened from one individual coach’s insight. Third, another example of collaboration came from quick conversations and discussions right before the coaches entered the locker room at half time. At the beginning of each half time, the coaches would meet in a huddle, many talking excitedly at once. The press box coaches would come down and confer with the sideline coaches as everyone attempted to adjust or implement changes in the game plan. No single coach even considered making adjustments without the advice and input of the other coaches. As a result of this multi-dimensional conversation, the coaches were often able to overcome specific unplanned obstacles and achieve a victory for the team. The coaches did not argue or protect their particular squad within the team. They collaborated to develop a group goal and consensus.

**What teachers can consider.** In many schools, including Taft High School, the administration had encouraged teachers to spend time planning collaboratively. This collaboration, set aside in the schedule and built for teams of teachers, was labeled Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). For some teachers, this became a dynamic
time of collaboration and planning. Teachers built a dependence on each other’s insights regarding lesson planning and assessment in addition to building understanding regarding specific students. However, as the year progressed, and other demands such as grading, conferences, and meetings grew, many teachers abandoned the PLC time and used the time to complete personal planning or grading. As a result of this disregard, many Taft teachers lost the strength that can come from collaborative work. CJ’s coaching staff did not ever see their collaborative time as negotiable or as time that they could use for personal use. As I observed the coaching staff, I realized that this time of dialogue and professional collaborative was a vital part of the Taft football world. Meeting regularly and being in constant communication with each other was a strategic element to the strength of CJ’s coaching staff and the team’s performance.

This collaboration also allowed coaches to develop methods for individual players to complete their plays, which positively influenced their identity in this figured world. From observing the benefits of this tight collaboration, I believe teachers and students could glean advantages from incorporating more collaboration time within the Taft figured world. To model the consistency and coherency of the Taft football figured world, this collaborative dependence would need to grow from both administrative and teachers support and participation. Administration and teachers need to communicate a shared vision and goal that all are willing to support. Only then will the Taft classroom figured world benefit in the shared leadership that the Taft football figured world utilized.

**Critical and creative thinking through planning and reflecting.** My data revealed that the Taft football world was designed through many hours of planning and
reflecting. The plays for the entire season were bound in a manual, and each week the coaches pulled out key plays and formed a script that each player was expected to learn and implement. The plays that were chosen were chosen as a result of film study, past experiences, and current players’ strengths and weaknesses. During my first meeting with CJ, he took the play manual and a few weekly scripts, set them on the table between us, and said, “This is my curriculum. These are my lesson plans” (CJ, February, 28, 2011). He valued the organization of the program’s learning plan and remained meticulous and organized.

CJ’s coaching staff spent hours reflecting on each day’s and week’s practices and games. They spent many hours every Sunday reflecting on Friday or Saturday’s game, and then built on that reflection in order to prepare for the new week’s opponent. After each day’s practice, the coaching staff would meet for at least a short meeting to discuss the effectiveness of the day’s work. During this time, advice and insights were shared across offensive and defensive coordinators, with every coach having equal input. Each coach was involved in both creative and critical thinking as they examined player performance and anticipated the opponent’s strengths and strategies. In this way, the players benefitted from the strength of collaborative insights, planning, and reflecting, in addition to observing the critical and creative thinking their coaches used to prepare for the games.

**What teachers can consider.** During my time observing Taft teachers, I recognized that many teachers planned how to teach complex concepts to their students. Many also spent time reflecting on how the students learned and/or accepted the lesson
design. As the Literacy Coach, I was able to co-teach and assist many teachers in these types of conversations and planning. However, this consistent, cognitive work was not something every teacher integrated. Some Taft teachers used the same lesson plans each year without modifying or changing based on student needs. Unlike the Taft figured world, where the coaches were continually modifying their plays and strategies both to meet the opponents’ plans but to also extend their player’s learning, parts of the Taft classroom world relied on fixed curriculum and lesson plan designs that did not match the learners’ needs. For example, perhaps if Allen’s math teacher would have been more open to another way of solving the equations, Allen might have experienced personal satisfaction as opposed to disillusionment at his teacher’s instruction. If teachers could find unique ways to design lessons in order to scaffold students in meaningful ways toward their learning goals, perhaps the Taft classroom figured world could contain more students who build strong identities there.

**Multiple modalities of learning.** CJ incorporated a diversity of learning modalities into each week’s learning. For example, he would utilize film study for those players who learned by viewing plays and strategies. This film viewing was also supported by the week’s script or plays that were written on a large whiteboard during Mental Mondays. When these plays were written by the coaches in this manner, the players were given notebooks to copy the new plays and write down any key information they needed to understand their roles for that week. During these times, the coaches would also ask questions of the players for comprehension checks in addition to allowing the players time to ask their own questions. In these ways, CJ and his staff allowed and
encouraged verbalization of the learning each week. Much of the rest of the week was a balance of reinforcing what was written (information given visually), viewed (information given visually), and heard (information given verbally) and incorporating that into individual and team execution of the plays throughout practice (information given through tactile and kinesthetic modalities). As the team prepared each week, the concepts that were taught were repetitively underscored for the players so that when the game whistle blew, they were fully prepared.

**What teachers can consider.** My data indicate that the Taft figured world teachers did not generally plan student learning through using a variety of learning modalities. While teachers attempted to reach as many students as possible, quite often they would rely heavily on their content area strengths. For example, Allen’s English teacher most often relied on verbal and written descriptions and explanations for her assignments when she introduced new learning. There was very little viewing and/or visual representation of learning and basically no kinesthetic or tactile connections. While Asher’s biology teacher did incorporate labs into her classes, which often did reach a wider range of learning modalities, on a more daily basis, she relied on notes and explanations given verbally. Perhaps by the nature of his classroom content area, Neron’s Engineering teacher did incorporate a variety of learning styles into his lessons due to the visualization of his projects and the kinesthetic connections the students had to have in order to complete their assignments. If more Taft teachers could have strategically incorporated a variety of learning styles and modalities into their classrooms in the manner that CJ incorporated them into his coaching, perhaps more students could
have build identities within the Taft classroom figured world because they would have experienced greater access to the content.

**Curriculum and literacy development.** CJ incorporated a variety of learning opportunities for all types of literacies. He believed he was building a program for players age 8–18. Due to the history and expectations embedded into Taft’s football figured world, CJ worked closely with players and coaches of all ages within the Tresselton community. CJ trained all the coaches, even those working with the 8-year-old players, and provided them with the plays, philosophy, and expectations that would become a foundation for the Taft varsity squad. “I want every player to have a consistent understanding of the expectations of this program,” said CJ (February 28, 2011). As a result of this macro view of the program, CJ developed a cohesive and developmentally appropriate curriculum for the players growing up in the Tresselton community who wished to play Taft football. By creating this curriculum, and by training all the coaches, CJ provided consistent vocabulary, literacy expectations, philosophy for each player. This consistency provided concrete and stable scaffolding for any player who entered at a young age, dreaming of one day being a Taft Panther.

**What teachers can consider.** This consistency could also benefit students within the Taft classroom figured world. In this figured world, the Taft teachers would often speak of scope and sequence of the curriculum. When they had these discussions, they were addressing the needs for the content area expectations to be consistent, clear, and developmentally appropriate for each student as he moved through the grade levels and classes. However, much of this conversation highlighted the differences between
individual teachers’ philosophies and expectations. For example, Asher’s English teacher demanded correct, standardized grammar. She taught it and drilled it into her students. She was often frustrated at doing this because she felt as if high school juniors should already come with grammar knowledge; however, as she felt this frustration each year, it became clear that other English teachers before her did not put the same emphasis on correct, standardized grammar that she did. As a result, the students and she experienced difficulty getting to the goals she had set. Perhaps, if the English teachers in Taft, and even in the middle school had aligned their expectations more, the teachers and students could have experienced less frustration and been better prepared for the goals she had set.

CJ infused the Taft football figured world with the idea that his players were first students of football. He and his staff held and executed core educational beliefs that influenced the type of literacy learning and identity development the players experienced in this program. CJ and his staff were able to invite a diverse group of players into the Taft figured world and scaffold them through learning by maintaining a commitment to collaboration and individual accountability, critical and creative thinking, a tightly planned and strategically developed curriculum, and to utilizing all types of learning experiences. These philosophies and practices structured the Taft football figured world for players of many ages. If teachers could emulate similar practices and utilize them in their classrooms, perhaps more students could access more strategic literacies and build identities within that figured world.
Implications for Myself, the Researcher, Teacher, and Administrator

Throughout this research project I have learned many important things that influence how I work with other teachers, students, and the school gatekeeping community. Because I do not have my own classroom, and currently interact with teachers in a somewhat administrative type of role, the implications I developed are centered on an entire school community as opposed to only one type of classroom.

First, this study influences how I interact with teachers regarding their classrooms. By listening closely to these participants, and gaining access to one of their out-of-school passions of football, I have developed a great interest in the strengths adolescents bring to their classrooms. I want to help teachers understand this and then help them adjust their curriculum and instruction in ways that invite more diverse literacies into their classroom. I desire to help teachers recognize the literacy strengths students bring to their classrooms and help those teachers build bridges and connections between a variety of figured worlds as they introduce the figured world of their classroom and content area. I wish to model how to invite student engagement in identity building within a variety of content areas and classrooms (Hull & Schultz, 2002). My participants provided an opportunity for me to see a larger scope of their literate lives. This focus sustains me in trying to construct curriculum that is more conducive to being literate and doing literacy in ways they value (Rice, 2011, p. 59). As I lead teachers through the implementation of key documents such as the new Common Core Standards, which become tested during the 2014–2015 school year, I hope to integrate this view of developing curriculum that reflects students’ out-of-school interests, while inviting them
into new learning. Resourcing teachers with a literacy and identity framework will help them integrate these theories into their everyday instruction so that more students can be invited into the learning process.

Second, this study profoundly influences the value I give to students and the literacies they bring to school everyday. Listening and deeply integrating myself into my participants’ school and football world has reminded me that every adolescent’s life is complex and beautiful. Each adolescent is negotiating his or her way through daily demands in a myriad of socially constructed realms. As a member of the school community, as a face they see in many of their classes, I want them to realize I value the learning processes they use and the ways of knowing they bring. I want to establish collaborative partnerships with more adolescents and resource them as they construct multiple identities within many figured worlds. I want to facilitate their hard identity work and new learning by listening to their passions, existing literacies, and how they function in diverse figured worlds. Specifically, as a result of conducting this study, I hope I can help them learn enough overt knowledge regarding the literacies they need to construct the positionality they desire within and out of school.

Third, this study will change how I interact with school and community gatekeepers. I realize that to implement any change within an educational community I must be cognizant and respectful of the community’s figured world. For example, during the 2011–2012 year Tresselton City Schools needed to pass a levy to maintain many of their innovative programs for their students. To do this, the promotional material needed to appeal to the community members’ figured world, not to just what the administration
wanted. To achieve these ends, Taft’s administration began running special ads through the Jumbotron at home games. These advertisements, which asked for community support for the school levy, always had a celebrated Taft football alumni pleading for the community’s support. I believe using these specific voices, within the walls of Rawley Stadium, made a dramatic influence on the voting decisions of the fans. Putting the promotion into a meaningful and situated context for them more quickly gained their support than many other options. Teachers and administrators need to understand the ways community identity is constructed within a situated figured world if the schools are going to remain relevant and integral to a community’s educational success.

**Limitations**

There are a few limitations connected to this study. First, since I was a literacy coach embedded within Taft High School, my presence might have influenced the participants’ impressions and responses. Although I tried to triangulate any data that I gathered and promised them confidentiality, I understand that the participants perceived my role as connected to both their coaches and their teachers. When introducing this study to the team, CJ told his players to answer any of my questions and help me in any way I asked. Although I continually re-enforced that their participation was completely voluntary, each of CJ’s players would have felt the necessity to comply with my questions and inquiry because their coach had issued that mandate.

Second, my research is somewhat limited in scope because it was contextualized in such a specific, situated culture. The data that was gathered cannot be fully representative of every high school football program and player, although parallels could
be drawn from similar, situated contexts and the findings can provide valuable insights into how adolescents actively build meaningful identities within certain, out-of-school figured worlds.

Third, it is difficult to determine how much my gender limited the data I was able to collect and observe within the football figured world. As an observer, I was granted wide access to film study, weightlifting, practices, and games; however, there were obvious data occasions I was unable to observe. For example, due to my gender, I was unable to gain access to some locker room conversations. In addition, while I was granted access to the coaches’ offices located above the players’ locker room, I always had to carefully announce my presence when I arrived to avoid mistakenly walking in on a player or coach who was not dressed. I cannot know how my presence limited or curtailed the conversation that might have been taking place.

**Future Research**

My study attempted to describe and compare the literacies that Allen, James, Neron, and Asher utilized in the figured world of football and the classroom. In doing so, I attempt to shine a light onto the complex reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and acting that football athletes perform and/or complete on a regular basis in order to participate full in this world. As a result of this study’s findings, further research could be done in several areas.

As I conducted my research, analyzed my research, and articulated my findings, I continually struggled with describing a composite figured world of Taft’s classrooms. In reality, the figured world of each classroom is dramatically influenced by the discipline
or content area expectations, the individual teacher, the specific curriculum being used, and even the time of day a student enters that classroom. Future research could drill into these areas to describe the unique features between classroom figured worlds, even within one high school. Future research could also be completed within other football figured worlds in order to investigate the wide range of literacies and valuations that are built and how a variety of football players connect or not to classroom figured worlds and literacies. Studying a diversity of football programs, and the coaches that influence them, could provide additional insight into the findings from this situated context.

Although football studies have been lacking in the literacy and identity area, adolescents engage in many other figured worlds during this time in their lives. Future research studies could be done to compare and contrast the literacy demands of other extra-curricular, school-based activities. Activities such as competitive swimming to band performance could be mined for the unique literacy demands these figured worlds place on their participants. These types of studies would allow teachers to better understand the identity-formation that is being done outside the classroom.

This study should also influence the curriculum teachers build for their students. With the burden of high stakes testing and the new Common Core standards, more and more students are not finding a match between their interests outside of school and what they are asked to do inside of school. Future research into aligning curriculum standards alongside of high interest, student-centered content area assignments could invite more students into what happens inside the classroom. For students who identify with teamwork, using more collaborative grouping and assigning specific roles to each group
member. Aligning more out-of-school literacies alongside of content area literacies and providing more opportunities for collaboration are specific ways curriculum and instruction decisions could be influenced by this study.

Beyond the participants and their insights, a few content area teachers suggested that the main difference between extracurricular and classroom participation is the element of choice. Students can choose what extracurricular club or team in which they can build their identity; however, most content area classes are mandated by the state and leave students with no individual choice. Future studies could focus on how to offer more choices to students within content area assignments or studies could investigate what attracts students to various extracurricular activities so that teachers could integrate that knowledge into their classroom.

**Conclusions**

Based on my findings from this study, I would argue that Allen, James, Neron, and Asher did build specific literacies within the specific, embedded figured world of Taft football. The literacies they constructed demanded skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and visually representing. Successful participation in this figured world also demanded that they enact specific roles and take own specific identities as individuals and players.

I would also argue that my findings suggest that James, Neron, and Asher were also expected, and for the most part did, build specific literacies within the embedded figured world of the Taft classroom. They enacted and (re)created roles and beliefs in recognizable ways that earned them powerful positions and identities.
Adolescents take on a variety of valuations and beliefs embedded within their figured world participation. As adolescents learn the literacies involved in multiple figured worlds, their acceptance, reenactment, or (re)creation of the literacies influence the power and positionality they achieve and the identity they build. When adolescents are able to bridge the literacies, values, and beliefs from out-of-school figured worlds to their classroom figured world, their ability to achieve power and positionality because stronger.

There are many implications for teachers from my study’s findings. To facilitate more connections between figured worlds, teachers should be explicit regarding the beliefs, valuations, and skills inherently expected within the classroom figured world. By integrating this into their instruction, they may invite more adolescents to build identities there. This could then invite more adolescents to build stronger classroom identities and powerful positionalities within this figured world.
REFERENCES


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


