# LITERATE PRACTICES AND TECHNOLOGICAL INTERACTIONS: THE PROFESSIONAL, MULTIMODAL WRITING OF SENIORS COMPOSING A COUNTY FAIR

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction and Literature Review

This dissertation describes the literate practices and layered strategies writers use in creating administrative writing. This work focuses on the literate activities and interaction with technologies in the production of multimodal texts of senior writers in a workplace where many types of texts are produced and distributed. The participants plan, manage, and publicize a large, rural county fair. The participants in the study have not been formally trained as professional writers (and do not consider themselves "writers" at all), the setting is not a traditional workplace with hired employees but instead an office setting with volunteers and Carriage County Fair Board members, and the composing of the written text is only one among numerous other types of work in this setting. Yet literacy is an integral medium through which the work of the Carriage County Fair is accomplished.

My project expands on current research in adult literacies by contributing new understandings of how literacy functions and is used in professional but nonworkplace settings by older adults. By observing a group of senior writers as they take on a myriad of literate activities in the pursuit of completing a range of tasks, I focus on their layered literate practices. This idea of layering comes from Brandt (1995) and her notion of "accumulated literacies," which she describes by saying that "Literacy 'piles up' in the twentieth century, among other

ways, in the rising levels of formal schooling that begin to accumulate (albeit inequitably) in families.…. Literacy also "piles up" in the twentieth century in a residual sense, as materials and practices from earlier times often linger at the scenes of contemporary literacy learning" (p.652). I am interested in the ways these residual piles rub up against each other in conflict, harmony, and sometimes indifference all together. Brandt goes on to write, "these models stress continuity in the process of change surrounding literacy emergent practices that take place alongside fading ones and often co-op elements of the older forms" (p.654) This accumulation, piling up or layering is the idea that literacy is not a matter of one conception of literacy replacing another, but rather different conceptions bleeding into one another over time.

My work looks to how literacy practices interact with, bolster, and even hinder technological practices in order to get work done in an authentic non-professional administrative setting. A desire to better account for how contemporary writing practices are enacted by individuals and how individuals perform daily operations of writing production have driven this dissertation. Studying literacy as practiced among seniors through their production of administrative writing is a valuable avenue of research that does not discuss these participants from the deficit model of autonomous literacy (Street, 1994) but instead focuses on a nuanced ideological approach. Street's (1984) Ideological model of literacy accepts that literacy varies from situation to situation, and it depends on belief making reading and writing cultural practices that are learned in specific cultural contexts. In the ideological model, using literacy and numeracy cannot be generalized across cultures and cannot be isolated or treated as neutral. The definition of literacy depends on the context in which that literacy is being practiced. Sullivan and Porter (1997) critique the ways in which different subfields tend to limit themselves to

particular locations for research, arguing that computers and composition research tends to focus on the physical computer classroom, while professional writing studies adhere to the workplace. Sullivan and Porter (1997) follow up their critique by suggesting, "thoughtful approaches to writing technologies should extend to all the sites where technology is used in the production of writing" (95). Rice (2009) expressed a similar concern arguing that we conceive of meaningful space primarily through the lens of our experience as academics. In this research, I am not interested in solely isolating literacy as the object of study, but also understanding literacy by learning about the work it accomplishes. This is akin to Steve Witte's (1992) argument that we learn about writing best when we don't look at it straight-on; we learn best about writing when we think about what it is doing. This look to context provides much needed meaning. Or as McCarthy, Hart-Davidson, McLeod and Grabill (2011) have said, "Writing, too, is a medium. Writing is where the action is but isn't what the action is about. For most people writing is as invisible and as tedious in its day-to-day incarnations as the math that our computing machines do. Writing is a means to an end. A way to get things done. Where the action is but not what the action is about" (p. 334).

I am interested, as Barton and other New Literacy Scholars have been, in the roles that literacy plays in people's lives. "Rather than looking at whether people do or do not possess literacy skills, in order to develop a full understanding of what literacy means in people's lives it is necessary to look at how they use literacy as part of the process of making sense of their lives, representing the world for themselves, and working towards achieving what they want, using the resources available to them" (Barton p.53). As a field, to develop a robust, complex understanding of writing in practice, we must look beyond literate based activities to seek people

out who while engaging in literate activity don't necessarily foreground it as the center of activity. The study of everyday literacy practices points attention to "the texts of everyday life, the texts of personal life; these are distinct from other texts which are more usually studied such as educational texts, mass media texts and other published texts" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Literacy studies add the perspective of practices to studies of texts, encompassing what people do with these texts and what these activities mean to them. As Barton (2007) wrote, "Everyday literacy gives a richer view of literacy which demands a new definition of literacy, a new way of thinking about what is involved in reading and writing" (p. 4). It is through this exploration of the everyday that we develop this knowledge of literacy. Examining the everyday in the context of writer practices, especially seniors, will build on this richer view of literacy.

The objective of this study is to develop an empirically based understanding of literacy used in the practice of senior writers. The following research questions guide my study:

**Overarching conceptual question:**

What literate practices do writers rely on in creating administrative documents?

**Specifying question:**

What does the intersection of literacy and technology look like when senior writers produce multimodal text in order to perform the work of event administration?

Through my work tracing the literate practices of a small sample of writers through ethnographic observation, surveying, and interviews, this project contributes to a richer understanding of senior writers composing in professional situations. This project contributes valuable qualitative insight into how such activities may occur. As Prior (2003) argues, "we can

only understand where texts come from–in terms of their authorship and social contexts as well as their content and textual organization–by careful tracing of their histories" (pp. 196-197). This study builds at an understanding of the everyday literacy of the participants through their administrative documents by analyzing the processes these participants go through in order to produce text. This process analysis gives a better understanding of the social contexts surrounding the texts. The goal is adding to the field's knowledge of senior literacy and its intersections with technology.

Understanding layered literacy practices can add to Brandt's understanding of accumulating literacy and by looking at senior writers there is an opportunity to see the ways in which some long unused literacy practices may resurface when combined with modern technologies. Senior participants may have broad variation and exposure in literacy practices and can bring a wealth of life experience to navigating literacy tasks. As Bowen (2011) argues, "literacy researchers should pay greater attention to elder writers, readers, and learners. Particularly as notions of literacy shift in digital times, the perspective of a lifespan can reveal otherwise hidden complexities of literacy, including the motivational impact of affective histories and embodied practices over time" (p. 586). This intersection of literacy and technology adds dimension to both fields by focusing on the ways they overlap, and blend together and in other words, pile up.

My study of the Carriage County Fair brings together four variables of literacy research: 1) everyday literacy: the fairground offices 2) senior literacy: participants over the retirement age of 65 years old 3) administrative documents: the texts produced to administer the fair, and 4) layering of technological and literate practices: the instances studied that see tool, practice and

person intersecting. The fairground location of my site was essential to finding authentic "everyday" literacy. My participant pool allowed me to work with a group of writers that are quickly diminishing; those with little or no formal computer and/or writing training. They are diminishing so quickly in fact that some my participants have died since the start of this work. There is a limited time left for literacy scholars in America to learn about first generation computer writers, and there may not be many participants in the future that will be able to remember the first time they saw or used a computer or who will be able to discuss reading and writing experiences without including text mediated or presented on screens. Bowen (2011) also points out that by "Resisting the compulsion to position elders as digitally deficient by default, we may find their stories useful in understanding how embodied, affective sources of motivation endure and support literacy practices across the life course" (p.590). Leaving behind the deficit model allows for a more thorough inspection and understanding of digital skills and rigor.

My study on the participants creating documents and varied types of text is valuable to the professional writing field and to those who study multimodal composition because of their unique backgrounds. Often professional writing is created by experts with significant overt or academic training. This dissertation looks at a group of successful autodidacts. They are successful because of the layered approaches to technology and literacy that they employ. The writers of my study work to negotiate and layer reading, writing, invention, typing, printing, audience, faxing, purpose, and design among other literate and technological concepts and needs in useful, successful ways. "Layered literacies" can be best captured by Deborah Brandt's (1995) description of literacy as accumulating and piling up as technology and its uses come together and come apart in ways that writers need them to. Gough argues (1968) "Writing … is

problematic because it forms part of both the technological and the ideological heritage of complex societies" (p.55). My study works to reveal the complexity of layered literacies with a particular focus on the uses of technology among aging autodidacts. My study looks to the ways in which technology and literacy interact and why this interaction is necessary. My work is as Olson (2002) describes, an "attempt to understand how we live our lives at the unfolding edge of history, using literacy in the ways that make most sense for us in our lives, to continually make a future from our own skills and choices as writers" (p. 172)

This chapter provides a literature review of relevant scholarship and describes how this study is situated within these conversations. The first section focuses on everyday literacy. The next section describes the literature in literacy and technology followed by a section on senior writing and their connection with professional writing. Finally, the chapter closes with a preview of the next four chapters.

**Everyday Literacy**

The social turn within the field of literacy studies (Huot, Stroble & Bazerman. p. 3) encouraged literacy scholars to investigate the effects of cultural and social situations on literacy in use. Under the New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1990; Street, 1993), social-practice perspectives on literacy came together in the late 1970s and early 1980s as an explicit challenge to the work of such figures as anthropologist Jack Goody (1986, 1987, 2000; Goody & Watt, 1968), classicist Walter Ong (1982, 1986), and psychologist David R. Olson (1977, 1994), whose efforts to explain cultural changes in societies focused on alphabetic literacy as a unique agent of cognitive and social reorganization. In the reversal of the autonomous model, revisionist scholars put

context at the center of understandings about literacy. As a result of the shift away from understanding literacy as an autonomous entity (Street, 1984) whose affordances are evenly distributed among all genders, races, classes, and cultures, scholars turned their attention to literacy in practice (Street, 1984). In doing so, scholars have determined that no single "literacy" exists, rather people practice multiple literacies (Huot, Stroble &Bazerman, p.3) all of which are socially and culturally situated. The study of literacies outside of compulsory settings is an area of research that emerged from this social turn that looks to consider the forms, functions, and meanings of literate activity (Daniell 2003; Powell, 2007; Hutchins, 1995; Lave, 1988; Lave & Wegner, 1991; Wertsch, 1991). The turn prompted researchers to consider local, contextualized literacy practices within specific communities.

This social turn in literacy studies emancipated the field from a strict understanding of literacy as an autonomous agent as scholars embraced socially situated understandings of literacy practices within communities. Literacy events serve as concrete evidence of literacy practices. Heath (1982) developed the notion of literacy events as a tool for examining the forms and functions of oral and written language. She describes a literacy event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes” (p. 93). Any activity in which literacy has a role is a literacy event. As Barton and Hamilton (2000) describe, “Events are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them. The notion of events stresses the situated nature of literacy, that it always exists in a social context” (p. 8). Barton and Hamilton (2000) describe literacy practices as “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy” (p. 8). Literacy practices involve

values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships. They are how people in a particular cultures define literacy, how they talk about literacy and make sense of it. These processes are at the same time individual and social. They are abstract values and rules about literacy that are shaped by and help shape the ways that people within cultures use literacy. Street (1993) described literacy practices, which are inclusive of literacy events, as "'folk models' of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them" (pp. 12-13).

The New Literacy Studies (NLS), exemplified in the work of Street, Heath, Gee, Barton and others, takes a sociocultural view of literacy, emphasizing descriptions of literacy practices in everyday life, and challenging approaches which in the past had looked to literacy as a basic skill separate from its contexts. As Barton (2007) writes, "Across a range of disciplines literacy has become a code word for more complex views of what is involved in reading and writing" (p. 5). NLS look at societies in detail starting from everyday life and what people read and write while raising general questions about what is meant by literacy.

Barton breaks down aspects of literacy into three areas: the social, historical, and psychological. Social aspects of literacy help researchers to focus on the human aspects of literacy by foregrounding them. "Literacy is a social activity and can best be described in terms of peoples' literacy practices which they draw upon in a literacy event,". He goes on to write that, "People have different literacies which they make use of, associated with different domains of life. Examining different cultures or historical periods reveals more literacies", this puts forth the idea of multiple, varied literacies that are context dependent and that people have many types of these literacies. This dissertation explores the senior or aged life domain. "People's literacy practices are situated in broader social relations. This makes it necessary to describe the social

setting of literacy events, including the ways in which social institutions support particular literacies", broadens the research sites of NLS by looking beyond the local to social institutions, like country fairs.

Scholars have called for observational inquiry into the literacy practices of people from various cultures and subcultures (Robinson;1983) thanks to work in the New Literacy Studies. My work is guided by these three ideas, that 1) literacies are multiple and are socially situated and contextually determined, 2) the study of literacy outside compulsory settings is important to have a full understanding of literacy in its multiplicity and 3) observational studies of people as they engage in literacy is an important way to capture what literacy actually is rather than speculating on what it might be.

The value of multiple roles of literacy in our lives cannot be overestimated. "Seeing writing within the complex of our unfolding lives also suggests that research in writing across the curriculum, writing in the professions, writing in the workplace, writing in the public sphere are far more than instrumental exercises in the conventions of getting things done. They are studies in how people come to take on the thought, practice, perspective, and orientation of various ways of life, how they integrate or keep distinct those perspectives in which they are practiced, and how we organize our modern way of life economically, intellectually, socially, interpersonally, managerially, and politically, through the medium of texts." (Bazerman, 1988). Literacy and our relationships with it are varied, complex, and seemingly unending. There is nothing that literacy does not touch and influence.

*Literacy as Ecological*

David Barton (2007), an early NLS scholar, focused on an ecological approach to literacy research also arguing that literacy is best understood as a set of practices, which people use in literacy events. He claims that it is necessary to talk in terms of there being different literacies and that these different literacies and practices are situated in broader social relations. He puts forth the idea that, "How people use literacy is tied up with the particular details of the situation and that literacy events are particular to a specific community at a specific point in history" (Barton, p. 3). This focus on writing in social contexts is key to NLS and to this study. I work to identify and describe this small community in a particular point in history and to build an understanding of the literacy practices in these events. In learning more about the community and their literate practices, I work to develop a fuller understanding of the social relationships and motivations of the participants. Specifically, by understanding the people and what they do with literacy I can see what literacy does *for* them and *to* them.

Barton argues "literacy is embedded in institutional contexts which shape the practices and social meanings attached to reading and writing" (p.46). This idea is like Brandt's idea of literacy sponsors: people and institutions "who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy and gain advantage by it in some way" (Brandt p.55-56). I agree with both Barton and Brandt that institutions shape our ideas about reading, writing, and in turn, our behaviors and identities within social communities. Barton has observed that "in general, people do not read in order to read, nor write in order to write" (p.47) they are instead using literacy to do other things. People need to know when the train arrives or how to fix the hay baler, they are not employing literacy in a void without context or in some way removed from their own lived experiences. Because as Barton argues "literacy is embedded in

institutional contexts which shape the practices and social meanings attached to reading and writing" (p.46).

Barton's approach to social and everyday literacies starts with people's uses of literacy, not from their formal learning. It also starts from everyday life and from the everyday activities which people are involved in (p. 34). "Everyday literacy gives a richer view of literacy which demands a new definition of literacy, a new way of thinking about what is involved in reading and writing (Barton p.4)" Literacies do not exist on some scale starting with basic or simple forms and then going on to complex or higher forms. The starting point for a detailed examination of literacy practices is to "realize that literacy may be different in different domains and that school for example is, but one domain of literacy activity other domains may be just as significant" (p.39). This approach situates literacy and social and individual history. Current literacy events and practices are created out of the past, and ongoing process maintenance development and change (p.53).

*Literacy as Ideological*

Brian Street begins his studies in NLS from descriptive social and anthropological methodologies because as mentioned above, literacies are socially situation and contextually determined. He describes his approach as an "ideological" approach to literacy, one that accepts that what is meant by literacy varies from situation to situation and is dependent on ideology. He contrasts his approach with "autonomous" approaches, which claim that literacy can be defined separately from the social context. In autonomous models of literacy, literate and oral modes are seen as cognitively distinct, and views literacy independently of its social context. Street describes how: "the meaning of literacy depends on the social institutions in which it is

embedded…[and]… the particular practices of reading and writing that are taught in any context depend upon such aspects of social structure as stratification… and the role of educational institutions" (1984, p.8).

*Literacy as Sociocultural*

In *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* (1990), James Paul Gee forwarded a sociocultural approach to language and literacy developed by New Literacy Studies (NLS). Gee focused on studying language in use in society focusing on the idea that literate practice cannot be separated from other wider cultural practices including technology use, that literacy practices are almost always integrated with and interwoven into, constituted part of the very texture of wider practices that involve talk, interaction, values and beliefs, and that literacy is a way of being, valuing, believing, and interacting with the world (p.3). Gee would agree that literacy is more than a compilation of skills, that literacy is becoming a member of a community and understanding the culture in which one is situated. As he states, "Literacy … come[s] wrapped up in the attitudes, values, norms, beliefs (at once social, cultural, and political)" (p. 64).

Gee's idea of Discourse with a capital D provides a framework which captures writing, reading, thinking, behaving, technologies, dressing, designing, and valuing that is essential for work in New Literacy Studies. "To appreciate language in its social context, we need to focus not on language alone, but rather on what [Gee] calls Discourses with a capital D. Discourses (Big 'D' Discourses) include much more than language…It's not just what you say or even just how you say it, it's also who you are and what you're doing while you say it." (p.3). Expanding his description of discourses, Gee writes, "Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing,

thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities or types of people by specific groups", and are "ways of being 'people like us'," "'ways of being in the world'," "socially situated identities," and "always and everywhere social and product of social histories" (p.3). This focus on Discourses allows researchers to contextualize what Gee refers to as a secondary literacy (p.168) where participants are apprenticed into social groups through acquisition and work rather than through overt instruction (p.170).

Gee (1999) also discusses NLS as one movement among many that took part in the larger "social turn" away from a focus on individuals and their "private" minds and towards interaction and social practice. The NLS are based on the view that "reading and writing only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural (and we can add historical, political, and economic) practices of which they are but a part" (Gee, 1999, p. 3). It is one of the tenets of NLS that "any piece of language, any tool, any technology, or social practice can take on quite different meanings (and values) in different contexts and that no piece of language, no tool, technology or social practice has a meaning (or value) outside of contexts" (Gee, 1999 p. 6). The NLS is based around these ideas that reading, writing, and meaning are always situated within specific social practices within specific d/Discourses and that these situations and contexts do not just exist as they are rarely "static or uniform, they are actively created, sustained, negotiated, resisted, and transformed" (Gee, p. 4).

*Literacy as Sociological Organized Practices*

An important aspect of NLS is recognition of the complexity of the idea of literacy. Therefore, to understand literacy, researchers need to observe literacy events as they happen in people's lives, in particular times and places. The fact that literacies vary widely means that detailed observation needs to be going on in a variety of different settings, and also that the findings from one setting cannot simply be generalized. Research needs first to be specific to a given domain before making any general claims about literacy. NLS researchers approach literacy as a set of socially organized practices, which make use of a symbol system (Barton, 2007). Literacy is not "simply knowing how to read and a write but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts" (Scribner & Cole, 1981 p. 236). A move to focusing on social aspects of literacy involves a shift in the ways of studying the topic as it also shifts from a "psychological paradigm to social paradigm" (Barton, p.25) Literacy can be seen as a set of social practices which people drawn on literacy events. From this NLS perspective, literacy is located in interactions between people, rather than being a decontextualized cognitive skill, it is an activity.

In his work in social linguistics, Gee explored the concept of *Discourse* ("big D" Discourse). In Gee's work, *discourse* ("little d") refers to language-in-use. When discussing the combination of language with other social practices (behavior, values, ways of thinking, clothes, food, customs, perspectives) within a specific group, Gee refers to that as Discourse (p. 6-7). Individuals may be part of many different Discourse communities, for example "when you 'pull-off' being a culturally specific sort of 'everyday' person, a 'regular' at the local bar…a teacher or a student of a certain sort, or any of a great many other 'ways of being in the world'. In Gee's

view, language is always used from a perspective and always occurs within a context. There is no neutral use of language. Meaning is socially constructed within these Discourse communities.

According to Gee, (p.10) there are at least two reasons why we should consider literacy in broader terms than a traditional conception of literacy as the ability to read and write. First, language is by no means the only communication system available. Many types of visual images and symbols have specific significances, and so "visual literacies" and literacies of other modes, or the concept of multimodal literacy, are also included in Gee's conception of new literacies (p.10). Second, Gee proposes that reading and writing are not such obvious ideas as they first appear. "After all," he states, "we never just read or write; we always read or write something in some way (p.11)". Furthermore, Gee also argues that reading and writing should be viewed as more than just "mental achievements" happening inside people's minds; they should also be seen as "social and cultural practices with economic, historical, and political implications (p.12)".

So, in Gee's view, literacies are not only multiple, but inherently connected to social practices. In short, he emphasizes studying language-in-use and literacies within their contexts of social practice. As do the works by his colleagues such as Brian Street, Gunther Kress, David Barton, Mary Hamilton, Courtney Cazden, Ron Scollon, and Suzie Scollon, among others. Because new literacies are multiple and attached to social and cultural practices, Gee explains that people need to (1) be literate in many different semiotic domains, and (2) be able to become literate in other *new* semiotic domains throughout their lives (p.10).

Bazerman (1982) and Graff (1995) call for site-specific historical literacy studies like mine, a further tenet of New Literacy Studies. Daniell, (2003) stresses the importance of directing critical attention to the ways in which people use literacy in noncompulsory settings.

Daniell suggests that "little narratives" demonstrate how literacy is enacted within affordances and constraints of gender, race, class, ethnicity, location, and situation to reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies (2003, p.6). These narratives reveal how people use literacy in ways that hold meaning for their own lives appropriate, employ, and develop literacy practices. Participant populations "cloaked in the invisibility of the ordinary" (Gere, 1997, p.3) are important to NLS. Despite an ordinary nature they are saturated with literate activity and text; official documents like minutes, programs, advertisements, histories, newspaper clippings and many more artifacts help lead researchers to deeper understandings of literacy. These documents are not only evidence of the ways the writers have historically deployed literacy within their work, they also document important information about local communities and the relationship to literacy through the production, collection, dissemination of these texts.

Situated accounts of literacy do not only provide perspectives or readings of texts they describe what people do with literacy and writing in particular contexts. Thus, they reflect contemporary understandings of culture and practice. They document what resources people draw on, how materials are moved from one place to place, where people go, and the things that they do. Situated accounts work from the understanding that different individuals, groups, and stakeholders use and construct literacy differently. Creating accounts of contemporary practice is meaningful as these accounts not only add to the ongoing historical record, but also can be adapted for practitioner use in ways that lead to the creation of better spaces and infrastructures to support the work of literacy.

In *Accumulating Literacy: Writing and Learning to Write in the Twentieth Century* (1995) Brandt argues that it is productive to think of literacy not in terms of a greater percentage

of the population becoming literate over the course of history, but as an increasingly diverse and pluralistic concept that "may be best measured as a person's capacity to amalgamate new reading and writing practices in response to rapid social change" (p.651). Her argument grows out of reflections upon a set of interviews she conducted during 1992 -1993 with sixty-five "ordinary Americans" in which she collected the accounts of their literacy development. Participants explored "the institutions, materials, and people they believed were most influential in teaching them to write" (p.651). Her aim was to trace the effects of accumulating literacy through "the contours of individual lives" (p.652).

Brandt noticed the ways that literacy seemed to pile up both in the amount of schooling in families and in the material and practices of literacy learning. Brandt contends that "this accumulation of literacy provides an increasingly intricate set of incentives, sources, and barriers for learning to read and write, the negotiation of which becomes a large part of the effort of becoming (and staying) literate" (p.665). But she follows that this negotiation does not rupture literacy from the past but instead brings "an accumulation of different and proliferating pasts, a piling-up of literate artifacts and signifying practices that haunt the sites of literacy learning" (p.665). She also reminds the reader that it is both a "push from the past" that is meeting the "pull from the future" (664) that accumulates or contributes to a *layering* effect of literacy.

Brandt (2001), Brandt & Clinton (2002) and Barton (2001) argue that the field needs studies of local literacy practices but beyond that, these localized studies must be connected to larger conceptual frameworks. Brandt and Clinton point out the field has responded to the literacy myth with study of individual literate practices in fine-grained ways, but now, as a field, we need to begin building explanatory theories from those local studies. It's not enough

anymore, they argue, for us to just accumulate detailed studies of specific sites. Brandt and Clinton (2002) suggest that the field of literacy studies combine aspects from the autonomous model of literacy with the social practice model of literacy in order to better understand literacy "not solely as an outcome or accomplishment of local practices, but also as a participant in them (p.337)" They suggest more attention to the material dimensions of literacy which restores a "thing status" to literacy, making it easier to attend to the role of literacy in human interaction. This perspective suggests that "understanding what literacy is doing with people in a setting is as important as understanding what people are doing with literacy in a setting" (p.337). This perspective also allows for the acknowledgement of the influence literacy has in building networks across time and space, although local literacy is the object of study. Importantly, Brandt and Clinton discuss repairing the break between the local and global studies of literacy practices because the physical manifestation of literacy has served to build and sustain these long connections across time (p.347).

Szwed (1981) writes about the value of the literate case study arguing that, "There is a need to keep literacy within the logic of everyday lives of people; to avoid cutting these skills off from the conditions which affect them in direct and indirect ways; to shun needless abstractions and reductionist models; in short, to stay as close as possible to real cases, individual examples, in order to gain the strength of evidence that comes with being able to examine specific cases in great depth and complexity" (p.309). Swzed also argues for the study of the *ordinary* population, "The social meaning of literacy: That is the roles these abilities play in social life; the varieties of reading and writing available for choice; the contexts for their performances; and the manner in which they are interpreted and tested, not by experts but by ordinary people in ordinary

activities. Because it is not enough to know what a language looks like and to be able to describe and measure it, but one must also know what it means to its users and how it is used by them" (Szwed, 1981). This finding is echoed in the work of Barton and Hamilton (1998), as they also note the frequent interdependence of differing communication media as they are realized and used in everyday life in their study of the literacies of a working-class community in the UK.

The study presented in this dissertation relies on everyday literacy literature because it looks to the everyday life of the participants and to understand that and them an understanding of the social turn and the contextually focused New Literacy Studies is needed. Everyday literacy builds the base of this study, it narrows the incredibly wide and expanding field of literacy study in general to a more manageable and applicable collection of thought.

**Literacy and Technology**

Christina Haas (1996) in her work, *Writing Technologies: Studies on the Materiality of Literacy*, represented a landmark move to systematically understand the relationship between technologies and writing through an emphasis on physical embodiment, as well as spatial, temporal, and technological context. Haas's research moved toward resituating where writing researchers conceptualize the position of focus from the already completed "written page" or "inside the mind" to the moments of interaction between individuals, texts, and technologies. Often, literacy in digital contexts is presented as a choice between two alternatives: either as a literacy that contextualizes the social factors favored by the humanities, or as a functional set of decontextualized technical skills. According to the New London Group (1994), language users constantly remake "modes of meaning...to achieve their various cultural purposes," and "when

technologies of meaning are changing so rapidly, there cannot be one set of standards or skills that constitute the ends of literacy learning, however taught" (64). Furthermore, Selber (2004) presents multiliteracy as a continuum of skills and practices that people might acquire in three overlapping stages: functional digital literacy, critical digital literacy, and rhetorical digital literacy. He refers to the sum of these literacies as multiliteracy. Therefore, what it means to be literate, especially in digital contexts, is neither standard nor static, and requires careful and continuous examination and discussion to engage in and understand multiliteracy learning.

I look to Hawisher, Selfe, Moraski, and Pearson's (2004) discussion of literacy narratives to frame my own discussions of the waxing and waning aspects of literacy accumulation. I look to this waxing and waning to learn about the ebb and flow of literacy and its specific uses over time in my participants' work as they describe the ways and times that literacy accumulated or faded from use. I am interested, as Hawisher et al. (2004) have written, in the ways "Specific literacies emerge; they overlap and compete with pre-existing forms; they accumulate, especially, perhaps, in periods of transition; they also eventually fade away" (p. 665). And this is because, "Despite the growing importance of these new literacies, however, and despite statistical reports that document patterns of computer diffusion and use in U.S. homes, schools, and the culture at large, we have only begun to understand how people, both in and outside our classrooms, acquire and develop-or fail to acquire and develop-the literacies of technology (p. 643).

Workplace settings have provided a gateway for technological literacy as workplaces have provided many employees with both access to technology and the motivations for taking advantage of this access. The nature of professional composition in many ways helps one to

better understand the motivation of participants and their successes and failures. It is often through professional work that writers are composing multimodal texts. Hawisher et al. (2004) comment on the role of multimodality in technology, “Hence, it is no surprise that literacy scholars have noted multiple literacies emerging, accumulating, combining, and competing: among them, print and digital literacies (Deibert, 1997), conventional alphabetic literacies (Brandt, 1998) visual literacies (Kress, 2003; George, 2002), and intertextual forms of media literacies (George & Shoos, 1999)”. In order to develop a full sense of motivations and processes of composition, researchers rely on workplace writing studies and multimodal scholars to guide them. Scribner and Cole (1981) went so far as to describe literacy as a “set of socially developed and patterned ways of using technology and knowledge to accomplish tasks”. The workplace is a particularly important site for the study of literacy practices. It is where many people “spend the majority of their waking hours, and for many people work constitutes important part of their identities.” (Barton, 2007, p. 66) NLS also demonstrate that literacy skills in the workplace are not competencies that individuals have put into action, but “Rather, literacy in the workplace depends on who people are, their backgrounds, cultures, and opportunities in the context in which literacy practices are taking place” (Barton, 2007, p.67).

The term professional communication is used as a catchall term for various types of workplace and occupational writing. As such, professional communication, as it is currently framed, seems to have little to do with professionals or the process of professionalization. There is often a narrow view of what professional writing that focusses on the theoretical value of what a profession is. Faigley & Miller (1982) as an example focused their work on college educated workers and attempted to discern how much writing was performed in a day on the job. They

found that an average 23.1% of total work time was spent writing, or over one day in a five-day week while nearly three-fourths of the participants sampled claimed to give 10% of work time or more to writing. Professional writing acts as a bit of a catch all term but because of that it includes more than it excludes which is why I have been using the term administrative writing to describe the work of my participants.

Professional communication has also become a vibrant academic research field supporting numerous workplace-based writing initiatives, including service learning, workplace writing, online communication, and other forms of occupational communication. In addition, a Modern Language Association survey revealed that on average English departments teach more sections of professional writing each year than they do creative writing, American or British literature, or all literary periods combined (Rentz p.186). There is a distinct need to create frameworks to address the many complicating uses of the term professional, although that is beyond the scope of this project. In some cases, scholars have characterized professional communication as deliberately functional or instrumental communication (Moore). For example, Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2003) characterized professional discourse as "discourse created to bring about, by means of informing some person, some end beyond the experience of the discourse" (127). According to them, this discourse is most readily apparent "within such professions as business, the law, medicine, and academics" (p.127). In developing a similar position, Freed (1987) argued that professional discourse is directed to or from a group "with the intent of affecting the group's function" (p.197). However, as Sullivan attested, by 1991, the term professional writing denoted widely varying meanings and purposes. Sullivan and Porter (1997) found, in their survey of journal literature prior to 1992, that professional writing

encapsulated “three spheres of application” as a research field, a workplace activity, and an academic curricular course or major (p. 392). There is need now to separate professionalism as Faber (2002) describes “a social movement predicated on knowledge control, social elitism, and economic power” (p. 332)” from the workplace activity of writing.

Literacy and technology are intertwined and affected by workplace or professional settings. It is clear that writers often come to motivations, support, and experience with both literacy and technology and the two of them layered together through their workplaces. This was especially prevalent for senior writers as many of them came to literacy and technology though their work.

**Senior Autodidact Writers**

Writing studies and age studies have much to learn from one another. In addition to longitudinal, cross-generation studies that focus on mentorship there is a focus on researching how the older members of a population can be crucial to the formation and maintenance of group identity. Studies of communal efforts by elders to preserve culture expand theories of literacy. For example, the concept of literacy sponsorship has been expanded through studies of older people as they reproduce literate legacies with and for future generations. Also expanding the concept of literacy sponsorship, Hogg’s (2006) “From the Garden Club: Rural Women Writing Community” documents the literacies of senior women in Nebraska, who use literate activity to create a sense of community. As they “grounded themselves in space and time through their writing” (p. 32), they illustrate a particular form of sponsorship that focuses on “producing and sharing culture and history for future generations” (p.132).

Rumsey's (2009) study of her own family's multimodal, home-based literacy practices put forth the concept of heritage literacy, which looks to "how people transfer literacy knowledge from generation to generation and how certain practices, tools, and concepts are adapted, adopted, or alienated from use" (p. 575). The women in Rumsey's study made decisions about how multimodal literacies and technologies "are accumulated across generations" (p. 576). These accumulated "heritage literacies" become treasured practices, or what White-Farnham described as rhetorical heirlooms: "literacy practices acquired not through formal education, but through family knowledge" (p. 210). This attention to the relationships among people of all ages, we can study more intersections of literacy and learning that aren't as apparent in work that focuses exclusively on a single or younger generation.

Weinstein and LaCoss (1999) observed that information about literacy and its functions, circumstances, and values among older people was "virtually nonexistent" (p. 318) and more than twenty years later, most studies of composition and literacy continue to emphasize younger people with many of the studies of literacy and older people isolated to specialized subfields. By 2030, 12% of the world's population will sixty-five and over and by 2050, 16.7(He, Goodkind, and Kowal, p. 3). In the United States, the population of people aged sixty-five and over will account for almost 21% of the population by 2030 (Federal Interagency, p. 2). According to the UN global, aging "is poised to become one of the most significant social transformations of the twenty-first century" (United Nations, p. 1). Old age is, itself, composed by cultures, by social norms, by interpersonal relationships, by institutions, and by representations of the self just as literate activity is. Because literacy is complex, dispersed, and wrapped up with many

interconnecting systems, literacy learning, and practice remains relevant to human experience well past college-age.

The inclusion of older adults in literacy studies happens more often than in other related subfields like composition studies. Literacy research has documented the cross generational views of literacy during periods of change (Brandt, 2001, 2014, 2018; Selfe & Hawisher, 2004; Heath, 2012). In these studies, older people figure most often as literacy sponsors and mentors. As Brandt points out, "While often congruent with certain stages of life (i.e., youth, middle age, old age) the multiple and simultaneous roles most people play in families, communities, and workplaces condition developmental trajectories and possibilities even as they interact with one another" (Brandt, p.251). Brandt furthers this by writing that, "studies of later stages of life afford researchers 'a means of tracing the trajectories of development and motives for literacy learning and practice as individuals use literacies to shed, embrace, resist, or maintain both new and familiar social roles'" (p.5).

As people live longer and more active lives, literacy is particularly important for shaping what Bateson (2010) calls "Adulthood II (p.52)." She describes it as "Commonly occurring after child- rearing and career-building efforts have subsided but before the biological effects of aging place greater constraints on productivity or quality of life", Adulthood II begins "[w]hen you realize that you have done a lot of what you hoped to do in life but that it is not too late to do something more or different" ("In Search" p. 52). Literate activity is a significant resource for establishing and maintaining social roles through Adulthood II and into old age and a way to have meaningful roles in our society

Writing is developed and supported throughout the lifespan in every new occasion for writing. We need to continue extending our range of studies from the earliest years onward, in school and out. We need to continue into the retirement years of reflection and social engagement as people transition out of traditional workplaces. And since our life spans of writing are supported through technology, we need to understand more fully the ways in which technologies are reshaping these writing experiences, how the technologies may provide new kinds of support and how people move through various supportive literate technologies throughout their lives.

There have been moves away from this narrow school centered focus as researchers have been expanding the fields of lifespan writing and age studies and looking to age as important context in literacy studies. As Bowen (2018) writes in the introduction to the special edition of *Literacy in Composition Studies*, writing studies and age studies "share an interest in recovering the previously, ignored work of marginalized social groups in order to make sense of the rhetorical worlds in which they write or otherwise make meaning; both turn a critical eye on the ideologies that create and sustain systems of oppression through discourse; and both identify opportunities for the resistance to, appropriation of, or confirmation of dominant ideologies through literate acts" ("Literacy Narrative", p.1).

As attention to digital technologies in literacy has continued to expand, adults with experience in print literacies found themselves in new, unexpected places of discourse. Angela Crow's *Aging Literacies* (2006) focuses on the challenges that literacy technologies bring to many adults as they age. Crow suggests that researchers stay in tune with gerontological research on the physical and cognitive changes associated with aging as the affect abilities to develop and

engage in digital literacy practices. Crow illustrates the "conundrum of digital and new media composition for aging audiences and users. On the one hand, compositionists regularly call for digital design that is dynamic and rhetorically sophisticated; on the other hand, such designs do not automatically lend themselves to the kinds of accessibility needs shared by many older users" (p.90-91).

Crow suggests that we need to know more about how users, actually navigate digital texts so we are better able to strike a balance between overaccommodating (and thus insulting) older audiences, and underaccommodating (and thus excluding) them (p.91). Extending Crow's attention to older users and producers of digital texts beyond academic contexts, McKee and Blair (2006) note that the age-based digital divide can be deeply problematic for many older people, potentially just as detrimental to individuals and society as the divide based on cultural and economic resources. As news, information, governmental business, and personal communication are conducted online, older adults who do not use the internet are at an increasing disadvantage in terms of developing social relationships, participating in civic discussions, and gaining valuable knowledge on issues such as health care (p.14). McKee and Blair's article calls for literacy and composition scholars to identify and address the barriers many older digital literacy learners face.

Studies of older adults' technological literacy have prompted thinking about the ideological aspects of literacy practice and learning. The work of Ruth E. Ray reveals that life-story writing does more than pass the time in reminiscence. In *Beyond Nostalgia* (2000), Ray documents older people writing life stories within several writing groups, focusing on how the literate activity of writing, and sharing life stories help in the construction of identity. Ray notes

how “social scripts” for gender, race, class, and especially age placed “rhetorical demands” on the life stories (p.76). Ray’s work with Chandler (2001) further illustrates that “interpersonal dynamics” within groups of senior writers can be transformative, as participants’ questions and shared reminiscence alter “fixed and . . . formulaic reminiscences,” and instead “pose new

“How people use literacy is tied up with the particular details of the situation and […] literacy events are particular to a specific community at a specific point in history” (Barton, 2007 p.3). In other words, social context organizes literacy, not the other way around. Proponents of NLS do not consider literacy directly but always through the lens of organizations, institutions, and groups. Agency became an important rallying cry for those focused on their social-practice perspectives, as local readers and writers were observed making meaning of literacy on their own turf and on their own terms (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Hamilton, Barton & Ivanic, 1994; Mace, 1988). Therefore, in my study, I am looking to the literate activities of my participants through their community involvement. While I would not go so far as to say there is a fair literacy, I do think the social factors of their literate activity must be accounted for and considered.

NLS is part of the wider social turn which shifted the focus away from individual minds towards social interactions. Proponents of NLS argue that literacy is always for a purpose and therefore must be understood as operating within social and cultural contexts. A plurality of literacies is necessary because texts can be read in different ways and because literacy always involves apprenticeship to a group. Being literate is always being literate for entry into a particular community or group. Many different social and cultural practices incorporate literacy so there are many different "literacies" (legal literacy, gamer literacy, country music literacy, academic literacy of many different types).

Instead of focusing exclusively on the technology of writing and its repeated consequences, Scribner and Cole (1981) approached literacy as a set of socially organized practices which make use of the symbol system and a technology for producing and disseminating it. Literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use. People do not just read and write in general; they read and write specific sorts of texts in specific ways; these ways are determined by the values and practices of different social and cultural groups (Gee, 2010, p.11). According to the New London Group (1994), language users constantly remake "modes of meaning...to achieve their various cultural purposes," and "when technologies of meaning are changing rapidly, there cannot be one set of standards or skills that constitute the ends of literacy learning" (Cazden, C., Cope, B., Fairclough, N., Gee, J., et al, 1996, p. 64; [The New London Group]). Therefore, our conception of what it means to be literate, especially in often expanding contexts ought to be an on-going discussion.

What NLS allows is studies that look at particular societies in detail and diverse groups within those societies focusing on how communities of people use literacy. NLS studies have often started from everyday life teasing out our differences while avoiding making grand generalizations. They more often raise more general questions about what is meant by literacy. And through that work comes recognition of the complexity of the idea of literacy and how much of our understanding of it is not obvious.

The workplace is a particularly important site for the study of literacy practices. It is where many people spend the majority of their waking hours, and for many people work constitutes an important part of their identities. It is important to remember though that literacy

skills in the workplace are not the contractual competencies that individuals have put into action. Rather literacy in the workplace depends on who people are and their backgrounds, cultures and opportunities in the context in which literacy practices are taking place (p.67)"Workplace literacy", a term Paul Meyer and Stephen Bernhardt use to describe the multiple literacies of twenty-first century technical communicators, "includes not only the traditionally defined literacies of reading, writing, and math, but also computer skills, oral communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and effective interpersonal communication" (p.86).

While Barton looks to the social literate practices of people within specific contexts it is still also useful to observe and discuss discrete skills used in those contexts of meaning making. Writers faced with new writing tasks draw upon and build from the store of behaviors in their past, often reverting to habits that have worked for them, or that are simply familiar. As they continually are faced with such situations, rhetoric and writing experiences are layered. As Roozen has described, an "enormously complex aggregation of practices" informs writers' current action (p.345).

Cook proposes a theoretical frame for technical communication pedagogy based on six abstracted layered literacies: basic, rhetorical, social, technological, ethical, and critical. She argues that what is needed is a more integrative frame that incorporates all of these literacies into a single articulation of technical communication pedagogical goals. The layered literacy frame, described in her article "Layered Literacies: A Theoretical Frame for Technical Communication Pedagogy", synthesizes these components into six key literacies, including instruction in diverse topics ranging from "the ancient art of rhetoric to the most contemporary technologies, from basic reading and writing skills to ethical and critical situational analyses" (p.5) While the article

also suggests how the frame can be applied to a program of study or individual course in order to establish teaching objectives, develop course and lesson activities, and assess pedagogical materials, students, and programs that is not really useful to my application here. I am instead interested in the layering framework and the description and classification of literacy.

**Situating the Dissertation**

Disciplinarity is how we know ourselves. It is our definitions, our history, our status, the methods we employ and how we envision our future. All disciplines construct their identity as it exists and as it changes, but emerging or frequently overlooked disciplines foreground such questions because of their need to carve out a space for their work. Scholars must do the same. They must envision and define their discipline and then articulate their work's location in it. The identity of any academic field is based in part on the research it conducts and so it is also true of the individuals within that field. As each emerging scholar develops their research questions and begins to make meaning through scholarly inquiry, they are also shaping the field. Creating unique research questions in literacy is challenging because we overlap with so many other fields. We share and borrow methods, theories, and content areas with speech communication, rhetoric, composition, design as well as with psychology, education, and computer science. The academic shift back to interdisciplinary inquiry has shown that all fields are connected and overlapping. It is difficult to try and determine a truly independent discipline. Writing studies' dyed in the wool interdisciplinary nature is what makes the field so vibrant and malleable and welcoming. Literacy touches all things and therefore allows us tremendous opportunity in how we shape our field and ourselves.

Subfields, too, are completely intertwined. There is no separating literacy from the technologies that make it possible or the social relationships that necessitate it. A text comes from a person and that person has a changing life and comes from a society of people, who are also always changing. And that text is made and used for ever evolving purposes. Identifying the areas of inquiry that may be impacted by this work is important and difficult. All that is to say, that the interconnected nature of research is much like a spiderweb, with threads reaching in all directions and tying themselves together. In this brief section, I will identify some of the threads that tie this work into the broader net of the discipline.

We cannot all be great theorists. We cannot all tell the grand narratives. It is through sustained small-scale studies of the contexts of the field that we can examine these grand narratives. We can look to identify in our own lived experiences and communities these large-scale sweeping theoretical proclamations. My research here responds to some questions that post-process writing studies are concerned with: Why and how do people in a culture read and write when they are not compelled to? What are the functions and forms of the various literacies in the site? What do the literacy practices mean to the participants and to their wider culture? This study assumes that literary is multiple, contextual, and ideological and therefore must be bound in its size and scope. This work offers a glimpse into what it means to be literate in this specific culture. Daniell (1999) called for "little narratives" of literacy because they "…show people reading and writing for specific purposes: for entertainment, for personal growth, for identity formation, for community, for privacy, as well as for problem solving, for receiving and transmitting information, for economic advancement, or for political empowerment of oneself or of one's group." (p. 405).

This study contributes to everyday literacies. Smaller scale studies of literacy practices are valuable. Interviews of people engaging in everyday literacy practices help exemplify cultural knowledge. Studies of this type localize the global. They create the connection between theory and lived experiences. My work here looks beyond the writing classroom and the writing workplace to learn about people that use writing without necessarily making it paramount to themselves and to their organization. The participants here use writing. It is a tool among others. It is employed to get work done. They are not a group of people that have come together with writing as their focus. They instead use it as a matter of course. They are just one of many, many, groups that are out there doing interesting things with literacy that not yet been captured by our field. Everyday or local literacies are vast because the human experience is vast. And when we too often look to literacy acquisition in children or enculturation of young adults, we miss all these communities that are on the margin. It is not that the field does not value studies like this it is that there are only so many hours in the day, and only so much one scholar can do. There are more literate practices and activities then there are stars in the sky and that is amazing and disheartening. The multiple, ideological, and contextual nature of literacy means that each person and group unexamined is a missed opportunity to explore not only culture but these instances of literacy. My work here shines a small light on a small place and that is worth doing even in the face of the scope of the field.

This study contributes to the field of computers and writing especially the areas that look to learn about and explore people's relationships with writing technologies. The participant pool here is truly unique. I had participants that used slates to write in their primary education who now compose with word processors. These participants' experiences with writing technologies

are completely different than that of their parents or their grandparents. The experiences of their children and grandchildren also cannot compare. It is because of the speed of technology evolution in the last seventy-five years that makes these people so special. Their parent's lives were not much different than the grandparents. But this group has seen and taken on incredible amounts of change in their lives. The tools that we use to compose affect our meaning. And we must have thoughtful examination of tools in action, this study strives to provide that.

This study contributes to New Literacy Studies and multiliteracies. It is through small scale studies like this one that we may learn about the unique aspects of literacy events and practices in situ. New Literacy Studies looks to create knowledge about what writers of new literacies do when they write. What they think about and how they negotiate the demands of new forms and processes of writing. The subfield aims to reflect, describe, categorize, document, and differentiate writing in digital times. In my work here, I look to take on these tasks while incorporating the overlapping goals of everyday literacy scholars and scholars of writing technologies.

**Dissertation Overview**

This chapter has explored some of the ways in which NLS values the social context of literacy and how that social context must include things like identity and age of the writer, the everyday or professional setting in which the activity takes place, and how the technologies available to the writer shape the literate events. I have attempted to clarify some of the key terms and concepts that contextualize this dissertation. These previous pages provide a foundation for the study discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 offers a discussion of the methodological issues and decisions made for data collection and analysis. Primarily, data collection consisted of ethnographic participant observations, surveys, and interviews. The data was analyzed with the goal of description, not the production of theory.

Chapters 3 and 4 are focused on data analysis specifically of the observations combined with interview data. Specific findings are discussed in more detail in these chapters as they are best explained in the context of examples and case studies from the study

Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation with a discussion of implications and questions for further research and practice.

# CHAPTER 2

## Research Methodology and Methods

This study was designed to investigate the literate and technological practices of a hundred-and-sixty-year-old, rural agriculture society to better understand both the technology and literacy at work and the ways they intersect in an administrative setting populated mostly by seniors. The overarching purpose of this project was to observe and describe how non-professional writers used technology in their literate practices. This study aimed to understand different roles people take on in a literacy event, as Barton writes, "the relationships between literacies and other social structures, for instance gender patterning of literacy events; [and] different technologies that are being used and the possibilities and effects of these" (Barton, 2007, p. 55). The intended outcome of this project was a description of how senior writers in a semi-professional environment navigated the intersections of technology and literacy.

In my experiences with the site, I was drawn to the sophisticated and complicated writing that this particular group of senior writers was taking on. They were creating many varied texts and documents and relying on many different tools and experiences to complete that work. And they were very successful. I was struck by how smoothly they incorporated different and unexpected strategies to make successful documents. As I reflected on their composing work, I was struck by the amount and quality of their experiences and education. They were making

documents smoothly and successfully with none of the education and modeling that I had been taught was so important. Watching them compose forced me to question the value of the things that seemed important in my own education. I wanted to learn more about how these writers could come together to create such successful documents in a setting that seemed strange, with backgrounds I was unfamiliar with, utilizing unexpected tools and ideas. I was looking to immerse myself in their everyday literate practices to see where education, experiences and literacies had piled up. To address my purpose, I asked the following research questions:

**Overarching conceptual question:**

What literate practices do writers rely on in creating administrative documents?

**Specifying question:**

What does the intersection of literacy and technology look like when senior writers produce multimodal text to perform the work of event administration?

## Study Overview

This study took place over the summer of 2015 consisting of fifty days of observation. The average day was about seven hours, for a total around 350 hours of observation. The study had a participant pool estimated at over two hundred people who were observed in some capacity. This included volunteers, workers, administrators, and even customers and visitors to the site. The Fair Board voted and approved of this large and broad observation pool after I discussed the project at a monthly Fair Board meeting. Of those people observed, seventeen people participated in a short survey of seventeen questions that included background demographics as well as questions about literate activity, education, and participation in the

research site focused on writing. Five participants of the survey were also interviewed. This produced three and a half hours of interview audio which became fifty-nine pages of written transcripts. Throughout the study, I also relied on ethnographic style observation and field notes that were followed by reflective memoing. I also obtained a small collection of textual artifacts.

**Description of the Site: The Biggest Little Fair in Ohio**

In order to answer my overarching conceptual question, I chose a site that encompassed many types of writing by a group of unique people, a county fair. Professional writing produced by non-experts through the use of a variety of writing technologies and strategies was needed for this study in order to learn about everyday literacy.

The Carriage County Fair is proud to be the "biggest little fair in Ohio". This slogan comes from being one of the few remaining agricultural fairs in the state. A fair that is not agricultural seems a bit of an oxymoron, but it is common for a fair to really be more of a festival, fundraising event, or in some cases, a collection of food trucks surrounding a small concert. Agricultural fairs offer a spotlight on seemingly dwindling interests. The fair allows people to showcase their talent, skills, and hobbies for their friends and neighbors to see. There are exhibits of flowers, quilts and for a number of years, gift wrapping. People enter sunflowers taller than their houses and some very fine paintings. They bring their jellies and jams and barley by the basket.

For six days in August, for five dollars, you can watch a cow get milked, eat some deep-fried Oreos, ride the Zipper and see a pumpkin bigger than a New York City apartment. I recommend waiting on the Oreos until after the Zipper. To many, the Carriage County Fair is the

best part of the summer and probably even the whole year. People have been thinking that since 1858 when the fair began as a one-day event.

On Tuesday and Wednesday nights, a few thousand people cram into the grandstands to get sprayed by mud and if they are lucky maybe a bit of shrapnel at the demolition derby. They eat elephant ears and ribbon fries while they talk a lot about what the fair was like twenty years ago or when they were a kid, whichever was longer ago. They talk about the weather, the price of corn and how the weather might affect the price of corn. They also talk about the year they had, because for so many the fair is the real marker of time, and the year truly ends when the fair does.

The Carriage County Fair offers entertainment for all ages. There are shows and dancing and some very fun, very bad karaoke singers. There is a very renowned puppet show and some pretty rough cover bands. There are skills competitions and shows of all kinds. Each night offers a grandstand show, two nights of demolition derbies, two or three nights of tractor pulls, and Sunday has a rough truck competition where locals bring their farm trucks to compete in an obstacle course for a small cash prize, a trophy for the barn, and pride.

There have been a number of other primetime entertainments over the years. There have been some country music concerts. One band had a hit song the summer they were booked to perform at the fair and overwhelmed the grounds with their fans. Once a singer drank Jack Daniels on stage during the show and that was that on concerts. In the 80s, there was pig wrestling. My dad ruined his wedding tuxedo competing with two of my uncles and they didn't even win. To win a team of three had to get a small, greased pig inside a barrel in the fastest

time. There was a time when rodeos were common and while beef was common in the area cowboys were not, so they didn't last.

There are thirty-five acres of things to see and do at the fair and another fifty acres for people to forget where they parked. To many, the fair isn't so much about what can be seen but who can be seen. It is about spending time together. It is common for entire extended families to spend the week on the fairgrounds tending to animals and children and having a hard time figuring out which are dirtier. The fair is some families' only vacation and for many, one of their only extravagances. I didn't know a kid growing up who didn't have a jelly jar of quarters and wrinkled up ones saved up to buy air brushed t-shirts and poorly engraved identity bracelets from fair vendors.

The fair brings together families and neighbors and other people on the periphery of our lives that we seem to lose track of. People see their 5$^{th}$ grade science teacher making burgers for the booster booth and their old girl scout leader riding Western Pleasure. And if you ask my cousin, people are always bumping into their exes. This coming together has always seemed to be the point of it all to me. The blue ribbons and high sale prices on pork or beef have always been leading to being together with the interactions and memories being the real purpose of putting on the fair and volunteering to make it possible.

Putting on the six-day event takes all year with continued, and often intense, preparation work leading up to the fair. Much like a document, it is always being revised, re-organized, and edited with collective input. It is usually only a few days after the fair ends that plans for the next year start, while reflecting on the successes and opportunities for further refinement from the year's work. The fair volunteers work year-round in many different ways. Members of the

entertainment committee have to find and evaluate dancers, singers, puppet shows, bands, magicians, and clowns, which may involve attending local and regional festivals to observe and listen to entertainers, such as a cover band, but also involves making several phone calls, contract writing, and negotiation in consultation with the fair's lawyers. This work leads to the promotion committee who must work with the entertainers to create effective marketing campaigns and advertisements that get codified into the yearly publication. Other volunteers spend the year in meetings and training to understand the latest and best practices coming out of the state and national organizations that govern the various interests. They must keep up to date on the laws, rules, and regulations that govern such things as food production and safety. They also take a very active role in educating others about this information, processes, and policies that are required for safe, well-organized, and well-received event planning.

Other work is more hands on. Tractors need repairs, barns need painting, and grass needs mowed; thus, maintenance or upkeep of fairgrounds, service infrastructure, and essential resources (e.g., tools) are essential behind-the-scenes work that requires continuous commitment among the committee members. For example, it is not uncommon to hear the promotion committee discussing copy and design while staining benches or repairing fencing. The fair board and agricultural society meet monthly for discussion, vote on important matters, and collaborate and strengthen relationships through potluck. While the days of the fair itself are limited to just six, the work to make them happen smoothly goes on year-round.

I chose to study the people that work and volunteer for the Carriage County Fair because they are interesting, dedicated, kind, and accepted my proposal to observe and engage in this study, spending time and becoming emersed in their lives for a summer. The ways they created

documents were interesting to me because of how different they were from my own experiences with group writing and all that I had learned about composition. My understanding of literacy was skewed toward the academy. While I had read about the value of everyday literacy research, I had seen little of it in my own experiences. I wanted to apply what I had learned about the contextual nature of literacy by experiencing the contexts along with my participants. I wanted to complete this small-scale observation to focus on authenticity and understanding in order to move beyond my assumptions about others and their literacies. In this section, I will be describing the institutional organization and specifics of the site.

The Carriage County Fair is run by the Carriage County Fairboard. This Fairboard is a group of twenty-one elected officials that reside in Carriage County. The board officially meets monthly, throughout the year, to plan and administer the fair. They are also responsible for the fair in all aspects. The Fairboard has elected officials and some appointed positions. For example, the board elects their own President and Vice President and appoints a Treasurer and Secretary and their assistants. The Fairboard itself is elected by members of the Carriage County Agricultural Society. To be a member of this society, one must reside in the county and pay annual dues of five dollars. Fairboard members serve three-year terms with no term limits, and many on the board have been so for more than fifty years. The longest serving board member at the time of my observation was 97 years old and had been serving on the board since the early 1960s. Each board member has a primary responsibility; these include tasks such as marketing, parking, and supervision of livestock divisions among many others. Not all the responsibilities were created equal though. My own grandfather was in charge of manure. And while that makes for a pithy one liner, I cannot stress the importance and love for the person who removes the

manure from a fairground. During my observation period, nineteen of the twenty-one Fairboard members were over forty- five years old with most ranging between 65-85 years old.

When discussing the Carriage County Agricultural Society, Fairboard, activities and members most people in the community and the research participants, just use the term “the fair” to refer to the entangled offices, committees, and activities I have worked to be clear on the delineations in the research site throughout this document. To reiterate: the agricultural society elects the Fairboard, that Fairboard administers and manages the fair and its events, entries, and all other connected duties and responsibilities. This work is facilitated by that board under the leadership of their own elected executive board and appointees.

The Fair Office (Image 2.1) has between one and twenty-five people working at any given time, during the summer leading up to the fair. There are three nearly full-time workers in the Fair Office and the others are Fairboard members and volunteers. The office opens every day at 9am with a few people coming in earlier if their chores are sorted and most people leave at 4pm on the dot to go home and start supper or to get going on the outdoor work of the grounds like mowing, cleaning or planting. The Fair Office also has a noon lunch time where everyone on the grounds is expected to eat together.


Figure 2.1: The Fair Office

The Fair Office is the physical home of the Carriage County Fairboard. It is a small building with nine rooms that holds the fair offices and meeting spaces. The entire second floor is used for storage and is transformed into the monthly meeting space with folding tables and chairs. The other rooms consist of a large, shared lunchroom with kitchenette, front reception area, and various small offices. The building has five desktop computers with a sixth being used only for the week of the fair as a sales terminal. These desktops ranged from years to decades old. Images 2.2 and 2.3 below show two different angles of the shared "Computer Room." The front reception area has a well-used fax machine, and everyone seems to love the laminator. As I was interested in technology's role in the literacy events taking place, I paid special attention to the tools used throughout the office.

Figure 2.2: Computer Room

Figure 2.3: Computer Room in Use

As mentioned in Chapter 1, authors Sullivan and Porter (1997) critique the ways in which different Rhetoric and Composition and Professional Writing subfields have tended to limit themselves to particular locations for research. They argue that computers and composition research tend to focus on the physical computer classroom, while professional writing studies adhere to the workplace. They follow up their critique by suggesting, "thoughtful approaches to writing technologies should extend to all the sites where technology is used in the production of writing" (p.95).

I wanted to apply the academic lens acquired in my work to my home literacies in an effort learn about a discourse community whose participant population was wholly different from the academy. A group of people that self-select through volunteering and family tradition, all of the participants in this study voluntarily take on the tasks of the fair for their own personal reasons. I wanted to learn more about the members of my own community because it is through authentic small-scale studies that the field can build toward more universal ideas and understandings as was discussed in Chapter 1.

Because of the nature of the research site and the research design of the project, there were levels of participation by the people involved. The fair allowed me to observe all of the workers, volunteers, and community members. In order to get this approval, I discussed my project with the fair executive committee and presented my study and goals to the board and society for a vote which was approved. I was also granted access to documents at the fair office. Despite being given this sweeping approval, I requested all documents from the participants personally and reminded them of their right to refuse. I administered one 17-question open-ended short answer survey to eighteen participants. I gave the survey to thirty-six people and eighteen were returned to me. Questions included demographics, schooling, age, and other basic background questions to learn, more about the population. I also created questions that focused on the participants' roles in producing and using documents. These questions were based on the work of Hawisher et al. (2004) in their technology narratives. Surveys provided a rich layer of data about my participants. The information gathered helped to determine who I observed more thoroughly and who would be interviewed. They also provided a limited comparison between the participants of the study in order to understand the different types of work and workers at the site.

The final level of participation came from the structured interviews. While doing my ethnographic observation, I often interviewed people informally throughout the day and throughout their writing. My final source data came from five structured interviews I performed near the end of the observation period of my study. Not all participants that agreed to the structured interviews came from the pool of people that responded to the survey but that was not a feature of the research design. I asked many members of the community if I could interview

them even though they had not completed a survey as I thought the survey might be keeping participants from wanting to participate. At each level of participation, the participants were given new and detailed informed consent forms. While all community members did not sign a form for the initial observation, the fair executive committee wrote a letter of support to the Institutional Review Board of my institution after I had informed the community of my intentions and methods.

While the population targeted for the survey was determined by their own self-selection to the research site, I sought to develop a more detailed picture of this group in terms of gender, age, education, occupation, and role at the fair. I also created questions that focused on the participants' roles in producing and using documents. These questions were based on the work of Hawisher et al. (2004) in their technology narratives. I was also interested in how participants viewed literate activity and technology in their own lives. A close look at the sample population may help establish limits and qualifications for the survey as well as strengthen certain claims in regard to certain populations.

**Participants**

The participants of my study are rural senior writers. This participant pool was inspired by other studies that look at the literacy activity of seniors (Ray, 2008; Teems, 2015; Schäffer, 2007; Millar, P., & Falk, I., 2000; Martin, 2009; Blair, K., & Hoy, C. 2006; McKee, H., & Blair, K., 2006 and Bowen; 2011, 2012). Many of these studies focus on identity, technology, and lifespan literacy. I found my senior population especially interesting because of their history with both education and writing technology. There is a closing window of time to work with people

that had the unique opportunity to have written on slates, used typewriters, and now are working with computers. This population offers a distinct look at and perception of writing. While it is imperative that as a field we strive to always examine and broaden our focus it is especially important to consider time sensitivity in our work. The time to interview and more importantly to know these people is ending much too quickly to continue to focus on academic studies of writing. The participants had little or no formal training with writing technologies, and many had little or no training in writing beyond some amounts of high school education in the 1940s and 1950s.

While the population is important, it is their interactions with literate activity and technology that I am primarily interested in for purposes of this dissertation. I explore what the intersections of literacy and technology look like when rural senior writers produce multimodal texts in order to get work done. The writers in this research site created varieties of text that combined and utilized different media; they rarely produced traditional print linguistic text. Their work of administrating and hosting the fair was facilitated by the creation and use of site-specific multimodal compositions.

Professional writing produced by non-experts through the use of a variety of writing technologies and strategies was needed for this study. My research goals were expanded by this site selection because of the make-up of my participant population. Early on in my data collection, I realized the Fair Board participants were nearly all advanced in age and so my research questions changed to reflect this characteristic. I suspected early on that the generational cohort might be a determining factor in the shape of their literate and technological practices just as Brandt had found in her work in *Literacy in American Lives*. The participants' rural

community and background coupled with their age provided an interesting turn to the planned direction of the study while also complicating my notion of their texts as they turned out to be mostly multimodal.

As a primarily exploratory and descriptive study, this project involved a small sample size of writers. An adequate sample size in qualitative research is "one that permits by virtue of not being too large—the deep, case-oriented analysis that is a hallmark of...qualitative inquiry, and that results in—by virtue of not being too small—a new and richly textured understanding of experience" (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 183). My purpose here is not to provide generalizable conclusions from the data, but to lend generative insight. I believe that it is through an appropriately small sample size that researchers may create a more detailed descriptive analysis rather than relying on self-observations and reporting in similarly focused but larger pools of participants.

This table offers a basic introduction to the participants of the research survey. The participants in bold were also interviewed, and interviews were transcribed and analyzed using grounded theory.

Table 2.1: Participant Overview

| Pseudonym | Age | Occupation | Years at the fair |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Abby** | 25 | 4-H Youth Development | 11 years |
| **Anthony** | 33 | Extension Office | 20 years |
| **Connie** | 52 | School Counselor | 10 years |
| **Dennis** | 71 | Retired Floor Layer | 30 years |
| **Dottie** | 58 | Assistant Secretary | 40 years |
| Evelyn | 80 | Retired | 41 years |
| Samantha | 43 | Photographer | 23 years |
| Sherie | 68 | Retired Bookkeeper | 37 years |
| Harriet | 65 | Retired Teacher | 29 years |
| Margie | 60 | Retired Teacher | 19 years |
| Edie | 55 | Buyer/Designer | 20+ years |
| Shelby | 45 | USPS Rural Carrier | 25 years |
| Beth | 68 | Retired | 10 years |
| Laura | 24 | Preschool Teacher | 10 years |
| Deana | 68 | Secretary, Farm wife | 20 years |
| Tom | 68 | Warehouse Owner | 20 years |
| John | 97 | Retired | ~ 50 years |

## Data Collection

Qualitative research rooted in grounded theory principles requires an adaptable research design and some flexibility. Unlike other methods that allow researchers to formulate a hypothesis and then set up a study to prove or disprove that statement, grounded theory research requires that the researcher's questions and the data be permitted to influence each other. This type of flexibility is necessary when conducting qualitative research. Collected data shape and

influence the research questions while these new questions also affect the data set. In the following sections, I will explain my initial study design and the changes that were made as the study progressed while providing a discussion of the methodological perspectives and research methods used throughout this project.

I collected multiple forms of data in order to fully develop my study and describe my site and participants. Table # identifies the types of data collection with a more detailed description following.

Table 2.2: Collected Data

| Data Source | Description | Use | Amount | Time |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Surveys | 17- question survey of the Fair Board and support staff. | Questions focused on background to learn, more about the population including demographics, schooling, age and role in producing/using texts | 18 surveys | N/A |
| Interviews | Semi-structured interviews focused on learning about 5 participants' use, creation, valuation, of documents and literacy activities.<br>Questions focused on participants and their use, experience, history, and evaluations of technology. | Interviews provided truncated and guided literacy narratives.<br>Participants had the chance to discuss literacy and writing from their own perspective and viewpoint. | 5 interviews | 3.5 hours |
| Observations | Observed participants in one-on-one and group settings.<br>Followed one person throughout a number of days. Followed one document from person to person. Observing one office as the people changed. | Observation of rural seniors without formal writing training in order to uncover findings about composition, writing instruction, professional writing, multimodal composition, technology use, and enculturation. | 50 seven-hour days. | Approximately 350 hours. |

***Surveys***: I administered one 17-question open-ended short answer survey to eighteen participants I gave the survey to thirty-six people and eighteen were returned to me. Questions included demographics, schooling, age, basic background questions to learn, more about the studied population. I also created questions that focused on the participants' roles in producing and using documents. These questions were based on the work of Hawisher et al. (2004) in their technology narratives. Surveys provided the first layer of data about my participants. The information gathered determined who I observed more thoroughly and who would be interviewed. They also provided a limited comparison between the participants of the study in order to understand the different types of work and workers at the site.

***Interviews***

Along with my multiple observations of the research site, I also performed a number of interviews with my participants, some informally others more structured. I interviewed each participant after I began observations. This approach helped to develop a research relationship and allowed me to gain insight into each participant's background and job description and let them get to know me over the course of days. This also allowed the participants to become acclimated to the types of questions I would be asking them and get them used to responding to me directly. The initial interviews also served as an information session for the participants to learn more about the consent process and what the data collection process would require. The primary structure of my interviews was ethnographic in nature and was approached with both scripted questions and open-ended conversation (Prior, 2004; Spradley, 1979).

In order to bolster my observations, I conducted semi-structured interviews focused on learning about the participants and their use, creation, valuation, of documents and literacy

activities throughout my observations. Questions focused on the participants and their use, experience, history, and evaluations of technology. The interviews were structured like literacy narratives to encourage direct and open participation and interaction with the participants. The participants had the chance to discuss literacy and writing from their own perspective and viewpoint, which I compare and contrast with the information gathered from the observations in later chapters. I take a constructivist approach to these interviews, with the understanding that the interviewer and interviewee determined the direction of the conversation and co-constructed reality together (Silverman, 2005; de Fina, Shiffrin, and Bamburg, 2006; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Davies & Harre, 1990). Data was not gathered from a completely objective lens (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) because all researchers bring histories, backgrounds, and biases to the data they select and collect as well as when they analyze it

My interviews began with very basic demographic questions as a way to categorize my participants and describe them in my work. Following the demographic questions, I asked questions about their personal histories in order to learn about literacy values, education and their reading and writing activities. with literacy to learn more about their backgrounds. The answers to these questions were often self-deprecating. The respondents often talked about teaching their own children and grandchildren to read and write. They were also split between positive and negative responses to learning literacy skills in school settings. I followed by asking the interviewees conceptual questions about terms important to my work in order to understand how my participants thought about literacy and writing. I discuss the results of these questions more thoroughly in Chapters 3 and 4. Questions about the participants' personal literacy use added context to their use of literacy and technology at the fair. This was followed by interview

questions that focused on professional writing and how the participants understood and conceptualized it.

I asked many questions about the fair to understand each person's personal history with the organization and the work they perform. While the questions in this section are organized under the topic of the fair, they continued to focus on writing work performed in service of the fair. My final section of questions looked into the participants' use of technology at home. I wanted to understand where technology fit into the lives of the fair workers. I limited these questions to computers and smart phones because I thought they were most closely related to my study.

I transcribed the digital recordings shortly after conducting my interviews and then deleted those recordings, according to my IRB stipulations. These transcriptions are not meant to be "the event," rather, they are constructs and (re)representations of the event (Green, Franquiz, & Dixon, 1997). My transcriptions are not objective, static pieces of data. They are interpretations of the event (Green, Franquiz, & Dixon, 1997; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). I transcribed for ideas and not linguistic or discursive features (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) because those are not relevant to my study. I am looking to get to the ideas behind the answers my participants gave not particularly the langue they used to give them. I recognize the incomplete and partial quality of transcripts and attempt not to provide a purely objective written translation of the verbal data. The transcript brings out the categories that are legitimate in my academic context. The 'original' observed activity is viewed through a professional lens which is different from the lens through which the participants in the 'original' activity constructed it. (Bezemer and Mavers, 2011, p. 194) It is for

these reasons that I consider transcription to be an actively constructed method of data analysis. With that in mind, I tried to be as accurate in my transcripts as possible. I listened to the audio recordings several times with new goals in mind during each pass. During the first pass through, I slowed down the files and tried to capture as many words as possible. The second time I reviewed the audio file, I set the pace to normal speed and cleaned up the transcript by correcting misspelled words, adding missing words, etc.

The transcribed verbal data was segmented into "verbalization units", a unit of segmentation developed by Elling, Lentz, and de Jong (2012). Verbalizations were divided into units which could include single words, but also clauses, sentences, and phrases. Unit borders were determined by pauses between verbalizations and by the content of these verbalizations, following the procedure used by Cooke (2010). "We chose to use the term "verbalization units" instead of "thought units," because, in our opinion, verbalizations are manifestations of thoughts and not necessarily thoughts themselves" (p.212). I view my transcription and segmentation approach appropriate for my purpose and project because "the 'accuracy' of a transcript is dependent not on the degree to which it is a 'replica' of reality, but how it facilitates a particular professional vision" (Bezemer and Mavers, 2011, p. 196). The choices made here reflect the scope and purpose of this project.

***Observations***

The bulk of my data comes from the observation of the office staff throughout the days prior to, during, and following the fair to learn more about the creation, circulation, and uptake of their professional documents. I worked at the fair during this time and divided my days between shifts of working for the fair and observing and research work. I usually split the day in halves

divided by lunch. This sounds more clearly cut than it was. While I observed, I was still needed to answer the phone sometimes or fix the copier and while I was auditing demolition derby tickets, I was often observing a volunteer across the table and to noting our conversations. I also asked interview type questions throughout the observation process. I followed one person throughout a number of days, and I also followed one document from person to person in my observations. The office has less than twelve staff members who are primarily responsible for the documents created.

Observations coupled with interview questions allowed me to get nearer to the composition of the texts. The composition and creation of writing and how these rural seniors are doing this without formal training was observed and analyzed in order to uncover findings about composition, writing instruction, professional writing, multimodal composition, technology use, and enculturation. My field notes moved through a series of related and detailed writing tasks. Following my draft of these notes, I checked my information against the actual research site and events often asking follow-up and clarifying questions of the participants. My observations and field notes were guided primarily by Emerson, et al (2011), who offer a detailed and critical look at ethnographic and qualitative work focusing on the creation of text, including notes. In their work, awareness of writing choices generates an appreciation of the reflexivity of ethnographic observation and research. This reflexivity involves the recognition that an account of reality does not simply mirror reality but rather creates or constitutes as real in the first place.

***Textual Data Sources***

While I do not perform textual analysis for this iteration of the project, I collected textual artifacts to add context to the process of composition.

Table 2.3: Textual Data Sources

| **Textual Data Sources** | **Description** | **Use** |
|---|---|---|
| Fair Books | Official entry system and classification document for entries | Contextualizes work of the writers. Reference and guide. |
| Web presence | Website, Facebook page | Frequent text that integrates technology and composing overtly. |
| Advertisements | Radio ads, placemats, newspapers ads | Commonly created documents that offer detailed information on composition. |
| Other miscellaneous texts | Manuals, blueprints, 4-H documents, contracts, real estate agreements, signs, letters, entries, handbooks, maps, guides. | Writing read by participants and used at the site that parallel writing and documents produced. |

The Fair Book is the official entry system and classification document for entries. These books are given away to members of the community for free and they contain information about all entry classes, rules, fees and prizes. These books also contain a small number of forms used for entry. The books also offer some narratives of the fair, advertising and some sponsored advertisements. These books are an integral part of the administration of the fair and in order to contextualize the work of the writers that lay beyond the text I use the Fair Book as reference and guide. As Barton (2007) writes, "Some texts become fixed points and have a degree permanence in people's lives. People construct identity around the text, whether it is religious book, prayer or saying on the wall, or constantly reread academic article or love letter. It is the fixedness of text which allows them to be analyzed and dissected. They can become reference points for individuals and for societies [….] the overall effect is a consistent one of positioning people and structuring their identity" (p.81). I use the fair book in order to better understand the fixed,

permanent reference points of my research site and to better understand how these texts are structuring the identity of the participants.

The website and Facebook pages were cataloged with screenshots throughout my observations but were little referred to by the participants. There was some discussion as the Facebook page was contracted out to a local newspaper. Because of this I include these data points in my collected set.

The local fair advertising includes radio spots, brochures, programs, stickers, yard signs, placemats, and newspaper inserts among other objects. The web presence and advertisements are the commonly created documents that are produced during my observations, and I use these texts to offer more detailed information on composition.

The fair office runs like many other offices except I would guess with more paper artifacts. There are emails, notes, memos, forms, rules, reminders, and bulletins in use throughout the site. These documents were created in house and are the backbone of the administration. I was interested in not only the creation, but of the power and use of these documents in the research site.

I also collected wide swath of other hard to categorize textual artifacts. This includes tractor manuals, repair guides, spray-painted stall markers, maps, blueprints. These remaining documents were a few of the existing documents that I found in the study. I collected and used these documents to understand the types of writing that these writers are used to reading and using at the site.

**Analytic Process**

I align myself with Corbin & Strauss (2008) in my approach to data analysis. This allows me to identify what additional, fine-grained approaches to analyzing the data may be suitable later on in the project. My aim was not to produce a grounded theory, but I find much of Corbin and Strauss's suggestions helpful in managing a large amount of qualitative data. It was necessary to organize the data, familiarize myself with the data, memo about the data, and pare down the data before beginning a fine grain analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In using grounded theory as outlined by Corbin & Strauss, I immersed myself in the data and allowed analytical categories to emerge from that dataset. I reviewed the data multiple times in order to familiarize myself extensively with the texts. During this process, the brainstorming phase of analysis began. I worked to develop concepts that organized the data into like categories. I then moved to a conceptual ordering that described how my concepts related to one another.

In order to analyze the interview data of my case study, I also look to Barton et al. (2007) and their work where a large group of literacy specialists studied literacy and learning in order to learn about the relationship between people's lives and their learning of literacy. The members of the research team observed and interviewed the people of the study while also collecting physical artifacts. From this, a four-part framework for analysis was developed. In this framework, people's individual histories, imagined futures, current practices and current circumstances were taken into account. These four categories guide my own work in my analysis or and serve as a guide for interpreting the literacy data gathered from interviews and observations. While I concede to being guided by Barton et al "qualitative work is produced not from any 'pure' use of a method, but from the use of methods that are variously textured, toned, and hued"

(Sandelowski, 2000, p. 337). While I approached the analysis from a New Literacy Studies perspective, I did not apply a fixed coding scheme upon the data. Instead, I analyzed the data multiple times, adjusting my goals and findings according to my readings of the data. This approach resulted in findings that are colored by my own perspective, "Researchers seeking to describe an experience or event select what they will describe and, in the process of featuring certain aspects of it, begin to transform that experience or event" (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 335).

**Small Scale Study and Researcher Subjectivity**

Literacy can be seen as a set of social practices which people draw on in literacy events. From this perspective, literacy is located in interactions between people, rather than being a decontextualized cognitive skill. Therefore, to understand literacy, researchers need to observe literacy events as they happen in people's lives, in particular times and places. The fact that different literacies are associated with different domains of life means that this detailed observation needs to be going on in a variety of different settings, and also that the findings from one setting cannot simply be generalized across context. Research needs first to be specific to a given domain before making any general claims about literacy which is how I set out in my own work. I aimed to take on detailed ethnographic observations of my participants in their volunteer workplace in order to understand more about the context of their literacy and their lives and how those two things interacted and overlapped. Rather than looking at whether people do or do not possess literacy skills it is necessary to look at how they use literacy as "part of the process of making sense of their lives, representing the world for themselves, and working towards achieving what they want, using the resources available to them" (p.53).

Smaller scale studies of literacy practices are valuable as they can be one of the best ways for people to increase their understanding of literacy, by reflecting on their own practices and the practices around them. Small-scale social literacy studies as described by Barton start with the identification of a particular topic, place, activity or group. The next step is to observe the visual environment trying to get some distance from it and to see it in a way a stranger with no knowledge of the domain might. After observation, researchers identify, and document particular literacy events and texts used within the research site. Interviews of people engaging with literacy are used to help make cultural knowledge clear and to make sense of some of the observations. Data collected in this way can be analyzed in relation to many of the concepts explored by Barton, "different roles people take on in a literacy event; the relationships between literacies and all other social structures, for instance gender patterning of literacy events; different technologies that are being used and the possibilities and effects of these" (p.55).

Small-scale studies of literacy practices are valuable in increasing understandings of literacy, by reflecting on local practices and the broader practices surrounding them. One-way researchers are doing this is by exploring the literacy practices in a particular area of everyday or professional life. These studies start with the identification of a particular topic, place, activity, or group. The next step is to observe the environment. After observation, researchers identify, and document particular literacy events and texts used within them. This is often followed by interviews of people engaged in literacy that can be used to help make sense of the cultural knowledge sensed in the observations. Data collected in this way can be analyzed in relation to many concepts. This research site capitalized on the small amount of social capital I had. Researchers wanting to spend a great deal of time observing and interacting with participants can

worry that by entering a completely unknown space that it would take more time than available for the people to warm up to them. And this very real worry may lead to research that is surface level and cursory. To mitigate this risk, I looked to my own community to find a research site and decided to work with a group of people who had always interested me.

I work to identify and describe this small community in a particular point in history and to build an understanding of the literacy practices in these events. In learning more about the community and their literate practices, I was able to develop a fuller understanding of the social relationships and motivations of the participants. That is to say by working to understand the people and what they did with literacy I was able to see what literacy does with them and their lives.

My position as a researcher is shaped by the roles I take on in my life, who I am, who I was, and how I have changed. I have always been a part of the fair, but I was also always apart from it too. I did not grow up doing 4-H, my parents don't farm. I had entered the scarecrow contest once and took second place with a very lumpy ballerina. I did however grow up in and out of the fair office and helping with small office tasks.

I know and am related to a number of members of the Fairboard and spent a great deal of time there growing up. I worked at the fair in the ticket office as a summer job for thirteen years. I had an active role in the Treasurer's Office, but I did not hold any real sway or power. I do not believe my work as a ticket salesperson affected my lens as a researcher negatively but instead enhanced it. I came to this research site with more knowledge on policy and procedure than a complete novice. I also was able to use my familiar and familial relationships to develop closer relationships with my other participants, which I believe led to more forthright and honest data

collection on both sides. I believe I have saved hours of work collecting information by having been immersed in the community throughout my life.

Spradley (1979) writes that the ideal situation is to be a student or apprentice because the "informants" actively organize information for the researcher, so while I was not a novice in the site I was more of an apprentice. I feel that our personal relationships led people to be willing to participate in the study. My personal relationship with the fair also made the ethnographic aspects of this research possible. Most graduate students do not have a chance to take on ethnographic research because of the immense time strain and lack of community participation. It was through my personal connections that I was able to find a place in my researched community and the major reason I was able to take on ethnographic work in this time frame. I could not have learned all that I needed to know for this study if I had not had long lasting relationships with the people and experience in the research site.

Ethnography as a research method involves, as Ortoleva noted, techniques such as participant observation, interviews, and textual analysis, and is an approach to understanding social behavior as situated in time and place rather than as objectively rendered from a situation or text (p.60). Scholars such as Rosaldo and Clifford complicated ethnography's "classic modes of analysis, which in their pure type rely exclusively on a detached observer using a neutral language to study a unified world of brute facts, no longer hold a monopoly on truth" (Rosaldo, xviii). Clifford argued for shifting the understanding of where knowledge is made in ethnographic studies from the moment of action and to the moment of writing, a move that calls attention to the role of the researcher in structuring the written depiction and bringing her lenses and understandings to the site of research. This builds on Rosaldo's understanding that "[a]ll

interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others" (8). This argument extends the field attention to the transfer of practices across writing moments with different domains and motivations (Witte, 1992; Roozen, 2009; Roozen, 2010). Participant observation methods are poised to uncover practices that might exist below the threshold of individuals' consciousness and also provide a way to look across a broad scope of activity happening in space and time.

As a participant observer (Spradley, 1979; Spradley& Spradley, 1978; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Tedlock, 1991; Mustane & DeWalt, 2010; Delamont, 2010), I participated in the fair administration for the duration of the project. This amounted to fifty days or around 350 hours of observation across three months and participation as covered by my IRB approvals, but this work is influenced by my lifetime of interaction at the site. In a sense, all social research is a form participant observation because we cannot study the social world without being part of it (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). From this point of view, "participant observation is not a particular research technique but a mode of being in the world…" (p. 249).

My research interest in how literacy is a situated practice necessitated that I immerse myself in the intersections of literacy and technology to better understand the multimodal texts that get work done in this professional setting. I engaged in participant observation, with field notes taken during and throughout the day or meeting and reflective notes once the events were over. Participant observation allowed me to contextualize the data I obtained through other methods and provided the needed context for developing my survey and interview questions. Tedlock (1991) describes participant observation as "ethnographers attempting to be both emotionally engaged participants and coolly dispassionate observers of the lives of others. In the

observation of participation, ethnographers both experience and observe their own and others' co-participation within the ethnographic encounter" (p.69). This initial collection of broad details was followed by a narrower focus in later observations and that allowed me to both understand the literate activity and literacy events of the research site allowing me to focus on the intersections of writing and technology in the workplace.

Participant observation and post-observation field notes within this study were limited in some ways. My participation in the administration of the fair could seem moderately obtrusive. In participant observation, the ethnographer should try to blend in with members of the site and must account for the ways people react to the researcher's presence (Spradley, 1979). I did my best to blend into the population, by working my share for the organization and not allowing my study to get in the way of other's daily work. Post-observation field notes came with some limitations as well. If there was an expected lag between observing and taking field notes, I tried to handle this problem by writing down key words before engaging in other activities, and then writing up my field notes after.

I was guided by a feminist methodological approach in my study. Feminist methodology not as a set of methods designed for ethical research, but a mindset with which I as a researcher could approach the entire research process. A major tenet of feminist methodology that was foregrounded in my study was its reflective and transparent approach (Etherington, 2004; Fonow & Cook, 2005; Roof, 2007; Beetham & Demetriades, 2007; Morrow, Hawkins, & Kern, 2015; Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). Many methods can be used in a feminist methodological approach, what is consistent among feminist methodology is researchers reflecting on their methods and making them explicit to their audiences throughout.

I also strove for reciprocity (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001; Powell & Takayoshi, 2003; Frisby, Reid, Millar & Hoeber, 2005; McKee & Porter 2008; Trainor & Bouchard, 2013; Diver & Higgins, 2014; Fraser & MacDougall, 2017) in my research by working to provide for my research site. I offered my physical labor and helped to archive and categorize the historical documents of the site. While they took me up on all my offers of administrative work I was often put to use in the labor of the fair after the office closed for the day. Some of my tasks included watering plants and weeding flower beds, cleaning in the barns and a lot of fetching and carrying. I was also the head water changer of the water cooler. I was open to the ways in which the participants saw my role in their workplace and let them define things that they needed from me. Most of the tasks centered on having a strong back and cheery attitude.

My observations throughout the project evolved. Early in my observations, I noted as many details as I could, this included descriptions of the people in the office, descriptions of the activities they performed, and descriptions of what seemed to be relevant conversations. As my study moved on, I focused more tightly on asking probing questions while the participants worked. These questions focused on the participants' goals for writing or motivations within a document. For example, I often asked the very broad questions of "what are you doing?" followed by "why are you doing that?" and "why are you doing it that way?" I asked this so often that my participants would tell me directly before I could ask them. I had inadvertently trained them. I also focused my observations on the participants' workspaces and methods for writing, including the selected tools. This included pictures and notes focusing on the physical

workspaces of the participants, a collected list of software and tools used in their day-to-day work with writing.

**Methodological Reflection**

My research methods were not static throughout the project. I intended to employ time-use diaries to gather observation-like data while I was not available to be at the research site. My decision to try to include time-use diaries was influenced heavily by Hart-Davidson (2007), who described time-use diaries as "Qualitative research technique[s] ...[where] research participants keep detailed records of their time usage relative to a specific activity" (p.153-54). Hart-Davidson relied on the use of time-use diaries to "learn more about the distributed, collaborative, and mediated nature of composing processes" (155) because they are "minimally intrusive means of facilitating dialogue between participants and researcher" (163). These diaries were going focus on what the literate practice with technology looked like throughout the participants' workdays and their everyday lives. This data was going be used to contextualize the work of the participants and the use of technological strategies in performing this work. I was going to compare their reported at home literate activity to the work done at the fair. The time-use diary ideally provides information that may not be obtained from the interview or serve to triangulate the other existing data (Cohen et al., 2011). I had difficulties, though, with the implementation of the diary. My participants did not see them as valuable to the study and often did not fill them out or filled them out in such a cursory way that they added little value to the project. I also tried prompting my participants to fill out their diaries by calling them near the end of the day and asking them to fill them out. They ended up looking like tiny daily surveys as I developed more

tightly bound questions. The participants did not care for them, and this affected their good will toward the study. I quickly cut back on them and instead focused on observation and conversation, which I believe the participants appreciated.

The Carriage County Agricultural Society has monthly, meetings to discuss the administration of the society and the fair. These meetings are open to the public while only society members are able to vote. I planned to use recordings of the agricultural society meetings to compare the discussions by the members to the official minutes, so that I could use the meeting minutes as an accurate representation of the meetings to learn about past meetings, actions, and Fair Boards. I was going to transcribe them as needed. The meetings provided the overarching structure and goals of the participants which was necessary to understanding the writing, but I found that taking my own notes and referring to the written and released meeting notes served me better than transcribing the meetings myself. My research design was flexible enough to allow for cutting some data sources. A more experienced researcher would probably be able to implement the diaries more successfully than I was able. They would have also predicted the futility in transcribing the large, long public meetings.

The fair as a research site shaped my scope which was beneficial to my work here as studying much more activity or interacting with many more people would have been beyond the scope and possibility of a dissertation sized study. I could only access the limited numbers of workers and volunteers and even then, not all were willing to participate fully. While John, the fair Treasurer, agreed to be observed he did not want to be interviewed because he leads “a very private life”. John was actually a very grumpy man and not at all private in his dealings or life, but he did not see the value in talking to me about his writing or his uses of technology as he

expressly told me on multiple occasions. He was always interested though in talking to me about the acidity of water and which vitamins I ought to be taking and he always let me think I was helping him with the crossword. The limited number of possible participants bound the study to a more manageable size.

My personal relationships with the research participants complicated their interactions with me as a researcher but did not seem to negatively impact them. I have known Dottie since I was a child and spent many nice summer days playing on her farm and helping with chores in the barns. Beth was married to my grandfather and Connie was the popular cool girl of my mom's high school class. This web of interaction forms community. A community that I was a member of and through that membership I was able to study. The participants have their own interconnected relationships that further complicate the work here. Most of my participants are related to one another. Some are even related on more than both sides of the family tree.

I expected issues of identity and respect regarding the project and my role as a researcher. I was afraid in starting the study that my participants would treat me like the ways they did when I was 7 or 17. While many of them did try to feed me most days, they respected the work I was doing. Sometimes, it felt like they were playing along but they always answered my questions honestly and did not try to perform while I observed them. Something I would not have been able to see if I had not known them all so well.

The participants were quick to gossip though, usually asking why my sister was still not married, for example. Knowing these people personally also led to some areas of data collection moving away from focused discussions on literacy and technology and moving towards personal questions about me and my work in general and its value. For example, almost all the

participants asked me, at one time or another, if I was ever going to finish school. It was something that was also used to introduce me at various committee meetings, “This is Jess. She is doing a school project. She has been at Kent a long time and wants to just listen to our meeting tonight….”.

I asked my participants about the study itself. It is hard to judge the level of true informed consent and how the participants see their own role in the research they participate in. In order to learn more about how my participants perceived me and my work, I asked them about the survey questions and what they thought about them.

I asked, “Why do you think I asked you these questions?” Please see Table 3.2 below for their responses

Table 2.4 Participant Responses to “Why do you think I ask you these Questions”

| |
|---|
| To see how much writing I read to complete things |
| To see the variety of events and likes and dislikes in people’s lives. To gain knowledge that everyone is different. |
| Because you are really a psych major and wanted to see how we react weird questions. Or maybe to see if we really like you? |
| To help you in your project |
| To help you support your ideas of your students |
| To gather information for research study about writing and technology |
| You are doing research for a project using forms of communication and the variety of jobs done at the fair ground before and during fair. |
| ??? |
| To try and determine how much writing and reading it takes to do everyday tasks |
| To understand how people communicate and what resources or tools they use. |
| Not sure. I think because writing is not being used it is a dying art. Or you want my job ☺ |
| You want to know what kind of people volunteer you should know I had cancer and I cannot talk and I’m over 70% deaf |
| I don’t know. Maybe to find out how busy we really are, and how we deal with every aspect. |
| Because no one writes anymore |

The responses to this question are very interesting. While all the participants had read and signed informed consent forms outlining the goals of the study and most talked with me about what I was doing and what my goals were, only two participants seemed to parrot back the explicit goals. One respondent focused on my role as a teacher and made connections with the study and the work I do with and for my students. I find this to very endearing. I was happy to see that they had considered this for my students and chose to participate so that something they may do might help those students. I think the two people who made jokes are indicative of people's behavior in my work.

Participants often referred to me and my observations directly and worked to include my study into their conversations. Connie, in one of my first days actively taking notes while observing asked me "What are you writing down", "Did you get that?", and finally, "did you write down stapler?". Connie was concerned with the notes that I was taking but took an active and engaged role and pushed to discuss them with me. I showed her my notebook and let her read the things I was noting. She saw that I had made a list of each type of technology she used and that is why she asked I had included the stapler. She also asked about keeping track of the texts she interacted with. She clarified the names of some forms and thus began her very active and interactive role as an observation participant.

While participants negotiated the value of the study, they were participating in there was difficulty in sharing my conceptions about literacy. Often during slow periods of fair work, the people would ask me questions about what I was doing and why I was doing it. It took a while for my participants to feel comfortable in my observations of them and for me to feel

comfortable in my role as observer. I didn't note until my eighteenth day of observation that I had felt comfortable. This was when I stopped trying to fill space. I would often prepare questions to ask the participants, either clarifying about the work or technology or about their lives. It was around this time that I would let the room remain quiet and allow the participants to fill that space if they wanted. When given the opportunity, the people focused on getting to know me better as a person often askinFscg about my family and my life and they would share their own interest in my work. I would describe my project and my interests in literacy and technology broadly and we often ended up having discussions on what literacy meant and what technology meant. These discussions were useful for me to articulate my research for people outside of the field and I think it gave my participants a better understanding of my goals and my work.

This small site also limited the kinds and scope of findings I can possibly support in my work. This type of tightly focused analysis does not lend easily to sweeping theoretical discussions but in accordance with other small-scale studies can build towards it. This microethnographic work is ideal for graduate level work that explores data analysis as I do here.

Literacy researchers need to guard against what Smagorinsky (1994) described as generalizing from data that may only reflect a process occurring at a particular time and under particular conditions. "Due to the small samples that researchers often work with, we might modestly claim that most such investigations are exploratory rather than conclusive". (p. 16) The amount of data gathered for this project would have been unmanageable with a larger sample and ultimately, would have produced a less rich and useful set of findings and implications. In addition, the amount of data I did gather required that I choose a manageable focus for the scope

of the project. For the project, purpose, and manageability guided the choices about sample size and participants. A flexible, mixed-methods, qualitative approach utilizing grounded theory analysis allows me, as a researcher, to get at my research questions while allowing for reflective change. This reflective change accommodates a social constructivist understanding of literacy that fits my needs here well.

# Chapter 3

## Layers of Literacy

It may be easy for some to assume that something like an agricultural fair is not home to many literate events and activities. That thinking woefully underestimates the workplace writing that takes place to put on a large event and the technologies that make it possible. In this chapter, in order to better understand the writing that enables work to get done and the technologies used to create and disseminate that writing, I focused on how one exhibit entry can come to appear at the fair looking to the literate events and activities surrounding it especially to the primary textual artifact, the Fair Book. And in this, I relied on Cook's (2009) theoretical frame for technical communication pedagogy to analyze and examine the different layers of literacy as they were reflected in the journey.

Cook proposed a theoretical frame for technical communication pedagogy based on six layered literacies: basic, rhetorical, social, technological, ethical, and critical. Cook advocated for diverse instruction in technical communication programs and wanted to include "the ancient art of rhetoric to the most contemporary of technologies, from basic reading and writing skills to ethical and critical situational analyses" (p.5). Cook's work focused on this frame's application to programs of study and individual courses. My participants possessed a variety of literacies that encompass the multiple ways people use language in producing information, solving problems, and critiquing practice and I found Cook's distinct and limited categorization useful to highlight aspects of multiliteracy as enacted in my research site. This chapter utilizes Cook's

categorization of layered literacies to examine the intersection of composition and writer and encompasses social literacies. I have chosen to omit Cook's critical literacy as it is more expressly pedagogical than the other categories and did not sufficiently align with my own data.

Imagine a single entry in one of the exhibits, a pencil collection. There are four separate departments to divide children into age groups in terms of exhibits. The rules make clear that exhibitors must mount and present their collections in containers or mount them on boards in displays that are smaller than roughly a paper box. The rules also set out the premium or prize for first and second places. First place or blue-ribbon entries win two dollars, and second place red ribbons, win a dollar fifty. There are always pencil, keychain, and stuffed animal collections on display. Families help their children choose the proper entry area including department, section, and class. They read and take note of the rules specific to those parameters. They also account for the deadlines and entry forms. The collection of pencils, keychains, or teddy bears then must be prepared for entry, and keeping in mind the predetermined rules available in the Fair Book. This example is manageable in terms of rules and procedures because they are determined by the fair and its governing body. Livestock entries into fairs are governed by the state's livestock health exhibition rules that aim to protect the safety of participating animals and people who attend the fair. To enter a pencil collection, a child must only collect the items and then build or design the display, keeping in mind the display dimensions. Often a pencil display is a favorite mug, or a poster board labeled in a child's own handwriting.

In order to enter an exhibit, a person needs "The Fair Book." This is the official set of rules and expectations for the current year's fair. The Fair Book also contains information about the organizations that participate, the administration, photos and memories from past years, and

advertisements. Fair Books are between eighty and one hundred pages each year and are free to the public. They are available county wide at post offices, libraries, and greasy spoon diners. The Fair Book organizes every kind of activity, event, or exhibit at the fair. While it is unnecessary to break down the entire system of departments, sections, and classes in fair entry systems for my use here, I look to this text as an artifact and its utility for examining the work getting done, how it is getting done, and why it is getting done.

Some texts become fixed points and have a degree permanence in people's lives. As Barton (2017) says, “People construct identity around the text, whether it is religious book, prayer or saying on the wall, or constantly reread academic article or love letter. It is the fixedness of text which allows them to be analyzed and dissected” (p.81) He goes on to write that texts can become reference points for individuals in our societies. He also separates these identity constructing texts from other more transient types of text like junk mail, online chat, and daily newspapers which are thrown away. It is not always the particular texts that are of significance, but the overall effect is consistent one “positioning people and structuring their identity” (p.81).

The Fair Book is one of these identity constructing texts. It classifies and categorizes people’s goals and experiences. The book becomes a member of the community that reaches beyond the confines of a single summer. They become something that members of the community discuss and bond over and often they become souvenirs. I would not be surprised if each house on the road I grew up on could find least four old editions. It codifies the future of the fair, makes possible the present, and historicizes the past. The Fair Books play an important part in the lives of community members. It is common to have half a dozen on a shelf in the kitchen,

or a decade's worth in a box in the barn. Often the book is the only place that some community members are memorialized beyond a small obituary in the local paper. They memorialize our family members and represent some of our greatest achievements. To compare the Fair Book to a religious text is not far off in the value they hold.

The Fair Book is written by the Fair Book committee over the winter months. The committee is made up of volunteers from the Fairboard. While attendance may vary, it is usually between three and five members and, as far as anyone knows, it has always been all women. The current women on the committee, Connie, Stacy, and Sherie, work throughout the year to make notes and changes to the existing document. Rarely do they ever create sections without a model or making modifications to an existing document. The committee also receives feedback from fair members like the Secretary, Deana.

Throughout the year and during the days leading up to the fair especially, Deana keeps notes in a special copy of the book to indicate where changes need to be made in the future. The tools she uses are pens, post-its and highlighters. Deana focuses on accuracy in the Fair Book because it is the official rule book of the fair as such carries a considerable amount of power and authority over the events and exhibits. She is focused on the correctness not just of the knowledge in the book but in the writing itself. Deana is performing what Cook would categorize as basic literacy tasks. She is focused on correctness and completeness.

***Basic Literacy***

Making informed decisions about usage, grammar, mechanics, styles, and graphic representations based on knowledge of readers and writing situations is the goal of a Cook's basic literacy (p.9). When it is layered with other literacies, basic literacy is not a formal set of

rules and principles that a writer must adhere to but rather a method for gathering information efficiently. Writers make "appropriate reader-based decisions about data presentation, document form, and document construction; engaging readers through effective and appropriate reader-based writing techniques; and responding to and within complex writing situations." (p.9). To assess basic literacy in Cook's usage, one must do more than evaluate writing for correct usage, grammar, and spelling. We need to ask people to explain why choices are correct or incorrect, given a specific audience, writing situation, or purpose. For example, Cook recommends asking writers to identify specific stylistic or document design choices they made for documents and then to justify those choices with reasons for their application. She sees such assessment including evaluation of writers' knowledge of conventional rules of correctness and accuracy, but it moves beyond the knowledge of rules to knowledge of the effects of discourse communities, conventions, and specific contexts on writers' choices.

The Fair Book is often an unquestioned arbiter, it is the rule of the community and Deana takes this aspect very seriously. Consider what Dottie had to say about her section of the Fair Book and how important accuaracy is,

> I'll do the Junior fair part of the book. The Junior Fair part of the book is lots of communication with committees and departments. It takes me probably, when I start on that section of the book, it probably takes me from December until March every year to get it all taken care of. Checked. Created. Proofed. Sent out to the department. This is the rules and regulations. Getting it back. Due by the deadline. You know all of that.

Dottie provides the committee the information needed to complete the book. She is responsible for the content and its accuracy. The committee trusts the information they receive from Dottie and do little to check it or edit it.

I believe that it is a concept of basic literacy held by male community volunteers that diminishes the value of the writing done by women at the site. Throughout my observation period and my own history with the fair it was clear that to many people some positions were "women's jobs" while others were "men's jobs." I do wish to point out that this gendered divide was not as I expected though. Women were expected and encouraged to take on a number of manual chores and jobs. Women hauled hay, mowed, mucked barns, drove tractors, repaired equipment, and performed any other number of manual tasks. They were also expected to do the "office work" on top of all that. It was not expected of the male volunteers to perform much office work. Many of the positions do require a fair bit of paperwork but it is not expected that men in the community complete it or complete it well and they are not expected as volunteers in the organization to take that information and make use of it. They primarily serve as data collectors that hand off this "office work" to their female colleagues and I believe that is because they base the value of written work in its correctness and not in its rhetorical or social values. The basic view of literacy separates writing from labor.

When talking about our weekends, Samantha, a front desk volunteer told me once that "dirty boots come in all sizes." This idea that all people do labor, all boots get dirty seemed to be a prevailing idea in the site. Work is also considered something seen on the body; it is not done by the mind. Work means dirt. Work means a hot shower at the end of the day, not at the beginning. Samantha and Dotti once were talking about helping their dads work and the

conversation led to how work used to be "different back then." It wasn't really clear when "then" was though. Samantha was always impressed because her dad worked so hard that he could eat a whole dinner and still have room for eat four pieces of her mom's homemade pie. Even though her dad ate all this food, he worked so hard in the summers that he lost weight. Work was done by the body, and since writing and communication came from the mind, it was not categorized or valued in the same way. To some participants, any work that could take place in air conditioning was not "work," but, instead, a waste of time. These same participants however relied on the written documents to make their own work possible. Without women completing the essential writing in the office, there would be no rules to enforce or regulations to follow. There would be no fair without the documents that make it possible.

***Social Literacy***

Research in workplace practices has demonstrated the crucial role social skills play in writer's success or lack of success as members of organizational teams. For success, among the most important of these social skills is the ability to collaborate and work well with others. Karen LeFevre (1987) in *Invention as a Social Act*, expands the significance of collaboration to include not only the audience for whom the document is written but also other writers and other texts with which the writer has had contact, like Dottie's collaborators above. Technical communication scholars see documents as both a means of self-analysis and self-projection (Paradis, Dobrin, and Miller p.293). Similarly, in a review of early workplace writing research, Debs (1989) found that "consistently we find in industry that the production of any text is a social process. The activities of this social process are based on the day-to-day ongoing talk

embedded in the context; thus, the writing process is often 'submerged"' (p.36). Collaboration can be direct, such as coauthoring, or indirect, such as brainstorming or strategizing; it can also be formal or informal. Cook's research focuses on collaboration as a form or means of production.

Dottie, in her interview, goes on to discuss other social aspects of her writing of the Fair Book.

> Who helps me with it? As my sole job, it's my job to do it but I also worked with Abbey or the Carriage educators, presidents of committees. If people are doing what they need to do subcommittees…Or researching at fair managers convention. I'll go to meetings that other fairs do and compare what they have. If they have something cool that we think or there is something that we should put in there that we don't. And I'll go to the seminar specifically when I'm down there to try to help to get that information. I go on the computer, and I research I pull-up 10 fairs that I know that are good at what they do. They have a good reputation and I'll print everything that's in the rules and regulations annotate all. "Oh, this is cool" and then I would suggest that to our people.

The Fair Book committee often meet to discuss what needs to change in the Book, but they do not do much collaborative writing. I had the chance to sit in on one committee meeting but there was not much writing. There was however much discussion. This discussion really focused on the way they wanted people to see the fair and the discussion settled on "fun and family friendly." In this meeting, the textual artifacts were a small stack of recent Fair Books and legal pads of paper. Each member of the committee worked through a copy of the book noting changes and discussing them. The members were equal participants and respected each other's

input. They often stopped talking or making notes to make sure that they were listening to the other people and that the others felt heard.

The Fair Book also spurs social literacy in the use of the text by the audience. A family gets ahold of the book and then often looks through it together to see what new classes or exhibits are going to be offered and to prepare their own entriesThe Fair Book is a catalyst for a literacy in action as described by Brandt and Clinton (2002). The terms "literacy events" and "literacy practices" are terms that are "central to much literacy research today" (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). A literacy event, they write, "is considered a social action going on around a piece of writing in which the writing matters to the way people interact" (p. 342). A literacy practice, then, is "the socially regulated, recurrent, and patterned things that people do with literacy as well as the cultural significance they ascribe to those things" (p. 342). The terms literacy events and practices highlight the importance of social context surrounding literacy activities. Events are specific, concrete activities that happen in a given moment, while practices, on the other hand, are generalized and common activities that tend to happen within communities or situations. Literacy practices are such activities as a person reading a recipe to make a meal or a student reading an assignment to complete her homework: they include both the literacy activity as well as the socio-cultural context that informs that activity. Brandt and Clinton (2002) argue that the term "literacy event" places too much emphasis on the human agency in literacy activities. As discussed above, they call for a need to understand the text as agentive to better understand how literacy work gets done. They argue to replace the term "literacy event" with the concept "literacy-in-action," which implies the agentive nature of both human agents and textual agents within literacy activities.

Because this work explores new literacies, I use Knobel and Lankshear's (2007) definition of " new literacy" here, which they say, is particularly functional for helping to maintain the integrity of the term "literacy" and for embracing the new literacies that have evolved in recent years: "In a similar vein we have recently defined literacies as 'socially recognized ways of generating, communicating, and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in Discourses (or, as members of Discourses)' (Lankshear and Knobel 2006, 64)". Knobel and Lankshear then go on to define the terms of their definition. First, they pull from Scribner & Cole and Street to describe literacy as a social practice, which means that literacy practices are always done within a social context and for specific purposes or aims. Next, they note that literacy must have content, which can be any "meaningful content," a term that they admit is "wider and looser than many literacy scholars might accept" (p. 4). Meaningful content, they say, cannot only be the topic of a given literacy practice, but it also can be what users get out of that practice, such as engagement in relationship with others. Third, they describe "encoded texts" as those that use a linguistic system and that can exist independently of an author, be moved across space and time, and be reworked by someone new. Finally, they describe the term Discourses as Gee has defined it. Discourses are ways of speaking, writing, doing, and being that allows one to occupy a specific identity position within a specific social context (Gee, 2012). Knobel and Lankshear's definition of literacy aligns with Gee's definition of literacy as the acquisition of a secondary discourse (Gee, 2012).

In respect to these ideas on the definitions of literacy, I describe using the Fair Book as a social literate event. Families in the community make meaning spurred on by the book as agent, and their children are mentored into the community through interactions with a text that lead to

other actions. They experience a direct and visible role of literacy in their lives that leads to real results and real consequences. Abby, a volunteer at the fair works for the 4-H office of the county as her day job. She sees the writing these kids do as important to their development as people. Many 4-H clubs require written assignments to be completed before a project can be submitted to the fair. There are often readings assigned and many written assignments.

The social realm of the fair scaffolds people's lives and relationships. It is through this interconnectedness that the social aspects of literacy become apparent. Much like literacy is seen as a way of being in the world, the fair is a way of *being* for members of the community. There are fair people and there is everyone else. The fair and its commitments intertwine with all other aspects of people's lives. Anthony chose his college major and career because of it. Samantha would never send her kids to a school that had classes during the fair. Abby made sure her wedding was after August so people could attend without out worrying about all the work they still needed to get done in preparation for the fair. People's lives become the fair and the fair becomes a meaningful part of their lives. It measures member's lives in eras. "I was still in 4-H." "I had just joined the board." And "That was the year I started volunteering." Things and events in people's lives get matched to the corresponding events of the fair.

Our relationships with literacies often begin at home as many people's oldest and most valued literacies come from their homelives and families. When asked about their hometowns in the survey, all of the responses were small townships within 20 miles of the fair. Many participants were from within five miles. This seems to be because the fair is a family phenomenon, much like literacy itself. Family tradition is something that was often brought up throughout my observations at the site. Most volunteers were related through blood or marriage

or both to other members of the community. I cannot think of a single person in my observation or my own lived experience who came to the fair as an outsider. The fair and the work that comes with it are passed down from one generation to the next and is through an examination of these generational literate practices that we can trace the trajectories of development and motives for literacy learning and practice.

Take my own family for example. My grandfather participated in the FFA and then as an adult joined the Fair Board, his wife worked selling tickets in the grandstand. All of his children began working for and at the fair as children and all still volunteer to help now. Now, my own generation of cousins are on the Fairboard while their children are going through 4-H, FFA and Junior Fairboard. We have four generations of volunteers in just our family. We are the rule and not the exception. In just these seventeen respondents, there is one husband and wife pair, a matriarch, her daughter and daughter-in-law and a granddaughter, and there is a pair of sisters. The members of the community are completely interrelated, and I mean that both figuratively and literally. In fact, when asked why they work or volunteer at the fair the respondents answered overwhelmingly that it was a family tradition.

**Table 3.1 Responses to "Why Participants Work/Volunteer at the Fair"**

| |
|---|
| Love the fair, it's a family thing that can be done together from little kids to grandparents I love to see all the faces for young and old |
| I love the fair. Have gone as long as I can remember. Just being a part of it all gives such satisfaction. Meeting new people, especially those that have never come to the fair before is a pleasure |
| Love being a part of the fair and helping to make sure everything comes together for the best week of the summer |
| Enjoy the personnel and to help wherever needed; enjoy all the volunteers |
| Because I love these people and I want to help as much as I can. |
| I always enjoy the fair. My sons participated in 4-H showing pigs. I knew I would enjoy being involved in the fair because I have always attended every year |
| Because I love our local Carriage. Co. Fair |
| (checkmark) Family tradition… I hope you might has been involved for many years. (checkmark) children and grandchildren are involved |
| I started volunteering because it was a way to get to know people when I first moved to Ohio. My husband was a fairboard director then it was because I grew to love the fair staff. |
| To help my dad because once the fair senior blood stains. Best girl in the world. Been involved since I was 8.<br>My family has been involved with the fair for many many years & love the fair |
| I grew up at the fair. My great grandfather was Fair Board President for over 20 years (I believe), my grandma has been on the Fair board over 30 years, and my mom has volunteered in the office her entire life. I have the best friends and memories from fair and think it is the best time of the year. |
| I love the fair |
| That's the only way I get to see my wife during the summer |
| My family has been involved with the fair for many many years & love the fair |

Many studies of literacy that take place in the home focus on language acquisition in children. Intergenerational literate tradition is an area of study that I would like to explore more in future work. Literacy is, of course, not inherited but the data in this study shows it is not that far off. It is through the family relationships that the seeds of literacy are planted as literacy is a tool that is employed in service to the fair. The fair ties families together and the inverse is also true, families tie the fair together. But this seemingly required volunteering at the fair also necessitates a very real type of knowledge and literacy work.

As seen above, the participants of the survey described their work at the fair as a labor of love. Most of the volunteers are not paid. The few paid positions were at minimum wage. The Fairboard pay themselves so little that I could not get a straight answer as to the amount only that it didn't pay for half of what people gave. The people I observed and worked with do not volunteer for the fair as a way to make money or gain influence they do it because they love it, and they love their families. For many, the fair is their family and the work they take on is their family tradition. It is not uncommon for a person to serve a role for decades and then have that role passed to a child or grandchild. The superintendent of dairy cows was a position that I saw pass from father to son in my time observing. The passing down of a position is often bittersweet as most of the senior members of the community are seen as retiring or stepping back from the position while many hold positions all the way to their death. Members of the fair were often stepping into their parents' shoes or more aptly their work boots.

Fair membership and a person's role in the community was constantly negotiated. It is common in conversations to name members of your family for as many generations as can be

remembered. Many of the participants in this study referred to me as Jim's granddaughter or as a May (our family name) and would be hard pressed to name me outright, focusing instead on my connections and community ties. People are often heard disclosing the number of years volunteering or in attendance, such as "This is my fifth year," "I have attended the fair for 15 years now," or "This is my fiftieth year here at the fair." Participants often use narratives of events in fair history as benchmarks of community membership and to encourage community institutional memory which can be tricky in an organization like this.

These issues of gender, age, education, and technology are important to this discussion of literacy's social dimensions. "How people use literacy is tied up with the particular details of the situation and […]" (Barton, 2007 p.3). In other words, social context organizes literacy, not the other way around. Literacy is always for a purpose and therefore must be understood as operating within social and cultural contexts. A plurality of literacies is necessary, and literacy always involves apprenticeship to a group. It is through the context of community and social relationships that the different literacies that people they make use of are associated with different domains of life. Just as a person's life is multiple so too are the literacies they have learned and relied on. But these layers also come with friction as often literacies are not just layered but are in opposition to each other. The domains of a person's life are not clear especially in a place that brings age, education, family status, and gender all together. Participants often had to determine if they were working with their supervisor or with their aunt and how to negotiate them both at the same time.

These negotiated life domains posed a problem for one of the participants through office work, Anthony, who was in his early thirties and elected to the fair board shortly before my

study began. He was like many others though in that he was “practically raised at the fair”. His mother, Dottie, another participant had been volunteering or working for the fair all of Anthony’s life and most of her own besides. Anthony has a degree from the state’s agricultural college and worked as a 4-H extension educator at the time of the study.

Anthony had some struggles in defending his role as a productive Fairboard member. He had a number of odds stacked against him; he was young, he worked inside with technology and his mother was on the board. Many people thought that he had somehow not earned his position because his mom also held a position, which is a bit silly as most people involved in the fair are related in one way or another. He was also elected to his position not appointed. All Fairboard members are elected to three-year terms after proving they are a resident of the county, a member of the agricultural society and providing a petition in which twenty other agricultural society members sign off on their nomination. Anthony was considered very young not really because he was in his early thirties although that is empirically young for the board, but he was often thought of as young because the other Fairboard members had known him his entire life and had not yet begun to see him as adult. I am not sure if the older members of the community do not conceptualize adulthood as I do or as Anthony does, but many members often pointed out Anthony’s lack of children. Anthony and his romantic relationships were often the topic of conversation both in his presence and away from it.

The largest blow to Anthony’s ethos as a board member and valued community member was the work he was often tasked with. Anthony was tech savvy, even when he was just a volunteer before he was elected to the board, he was the person called to fix a paper jam or when the Wi-Fi was not working. He had to update the computers on-site and often ended up helping

other members with issues they were having at home. This put him squarely in the realm of "office work," and separated him further from the other male participants. He was young, educated, and worked inside the office often on the computer. It did not matter how many fields he mowed or barns he mucked he was separated from other members of his community. He was also a vocal proponent of modernizing some of the procedures of the fair.

The 4-H livestock auction is an incredibly important event during the fair. It is where the 4-H members sell their animal projects. For many families this is where they make or break financially for the year. The animals are judged earlier in the week as to how well they match breed standards, and the 4-H members are judged on how well they show their animals. The ribbons awarded are often the major difference in who makes money and whose family lost money. Anthony had pushed for the purchase of a specialty livestock auction software suite to help administer the sale and while successful it cost him respect in the eyes of the older members. Anthony was doing "office work" and when someone is doing office work, they are not doing "real work". Anthony was often seen in the fair office dealing with any number of technological problems. He had to load cash into the ATM, restart the phone system, and deal with the fair's website. These things though were not often considered work though by his colleagues. While Anthony's type of work helped to administer the event and take care of the 4-Hers it did not sway his colleagues. What should be mentioned is that Anthony still performed his share of these idealized labor forms. He was often out on the grounds on a tractor or in a barn.

Barton argues that "literacy is embedded in institutional contexts which shape the practices and social meanings attached to reading and writing" (p.46). This is very apparent in

the example of Anthony. His role as a Fairboard member is directly affected by how others judge his work, and they judge his work as inferior as it is literacy based. This is a disconnect from literacy with purpose. While Fairboard members see Anthony performing a literate activity they are not considering or valuing his purpose in that work. Anthony does not do information work for the sake of it. He is not solving problems with documents to get out of other chores but that is how his peers have judged him. Barton described an "ambivalence towards literacy [that] seems to be a strong element in contemporary culture". I am not convinced this is ambivalence but rather the invisible nature of literacy. Those that did not see Anthony's diligent information work through writing could not value it as they are missing the context.

A way to combat issues of ambivalence and invisibility in the social domains of literacy is through the construction and use of narrative. Narratives provide the bedrock of the community. The narratives of the fair are shared and negotiated and often codified through literate activity into history or sometimes even lore. It is through the negotiation of these narratives that the social domain of literacy is shaped. Narratives create the history of the fair and the present of the community as they also both look to the future. Narratives act as gatekeepers to the members of the group, like Anthony among others.

Often these connections are between a person and an event hosted on the grounds and are used to classify people into ages and into levels of community membership. If a person used to enter into or watch the pig wrestling contest, they are Baby Boomers. Pig wrestling was exactly as it sounds. Teams of three who were encouraged to dress in costume were tasked with grabbing a greased adolescent pig and placing it inside a barrel. Teams with the fastest time and best costumes won. If a person used to ride their horse to the fair, they are beyond retirement age. It

was common for 4-H members to ride their horse from their homes to the fairgrounds, to show the horse all day in various events and then ride the horse home each evening. Now, all horses are brought in on trailers and are boarded the week at the fair in stables. Making fun of the fancy horse trailers is a favorite pastime of fair old timers. It was often mentioned how easy both horse and rider have it now and what a shame the costs have risen so much to show a horse. Older still are the people who remember the grandstand being built and when admission was charged by the card load.

An example of lore that serves in the policing of the social domain of literacy is the big storm. In 2004, there was a storm on Thursday night of the fair. Participants say it was a bad one. The clouds seemed to stretch for miles. It's common to see pictures of this event still, even now, decades later. People often enter paintings of the storm in the art exhibition. Photos of the clouds hang in the office. The storm got so bad that people had to hide in the barns, well most people. There was a reported lightning strike. As the years have drawn on that lightning strike has gotten worse. It has turned into more than one person being hurt, the person struck was a kid, the person was a baby. In some stories, a barn a burnt down. Somehow, most people who say that they were there all happened to be trapped on the Ferris wheel. In reality, the storm did roll in with some vicious looking clouds and people did hide in barns. A fence was struck by lighting and quite a distance away a teenager leaning on it got a bit of a shock and to be cautious he was taken to the local hospital where he was released that night. While the 2004 storm was not much meteorologically, it is a cultural touchstone that allows members of the community to prove membership and to bond over a shared experience. I wonder how long this storm will act as a benchmark before it is shunted off for other shared memories.

In my examination of the historical artifacts of the fair, I looked to find older cultural touchstones. One story in the historical minutes was of a terrible traffic jam which occurred when horses and buggies were tied to the fence on the drive coming into the fair, and no one could get past them to come in. Another was about the risk it took to make the fair happen. Until 1965, it was necessary for the fair to get a loan for start-up money each year as the society held no funds. One of the directors would take a loan out against their farm and let the fair use it to fund the event that year.

These narratives that built the community are disappearing. They are in the historical minutes and some scrapbooks and show up as fun facts on the social media pages sometimes but their value as a cultural touchstone is gone. They have moved from experience to memory to trivia. This points to the transitive and evolving nature of the social domains of literacy. What is once so important that it can make a person a member of a community ultimately shifts and evolves and can even disappear. Many of these events then fade from the community group into history and lore. That is why small-scale literacy studies, such as this, are so important. Studies of this type examine how people "come to take on the thought, practice, perspective and orientation of various ways of life…(Bazerman, 1988). Without investigation into the social domain of literacy we risk looking at it again as autonomous and unbound from human interaction.

More than being benchmarks of membership narratives of big events in fair history also create an institutional memory that is often reflected clearly in the documents that support the fair. The Kingston family are a 4-H legacy. They are a generation spanning, pig-showing, powerhouse. They win and win big, year after year. They also happen to be very kind people and

thoughtful farmers. In the late 1990s, they had a streak of prize-winning pigs and members of the family often did well in the show ring. As I mentioned before, this is a big deal in terms of cash value at the time of auction. Someone was tired of losing to the Kingston family and decided to try get even. A few days before the fair started, at least one person broke into one of the Kingston barns and beat up the pigs. Now, when I heard about this as a kid, I don't think I could have imagined anything funnier but that is because I didn't understand. An adult in the community broke in and abused animals. Animals that were being raised carefully and thoughtfully by dedicated children and teens with the support of their family. While ultimately many of the animals exhibited at the fair are raised to be processed into meat, they are often loved and cherished by the families that spend much time with them. The loss of an animal can also be a tremendous economic loss to the family as they are investments made each year.

This crime was a blow to the community. It made people question their neighbors. The Kingston's had to question their safety. And the livelihood of a family was placed at risk. The pigs were still shown that year and the judges were able to assess them despite their injuries. The children still entered the showmanship classes and did well, as usual. The pigs were auctioned at a very high price, and no one ever found out who did it.

This is more than a benchmark of community membership like the big 2004 storm. This is institutional memory in action as created by narrative. While people may not forget about the storm, they will eventually stop referring to it as often. And while people may move on from discussing the Kingston pig beating, they will still be affected by it as the event led to rule changes in the pig showing classes that have been codified through the production and dissemination of text in the community. I could not track down a Fair Book from that time

period, but it was clear in discussion with participants that the community pushed for rule changes to prepare for things like this happening again. They made it clear in the documents of the community that accommodations must be made in extreme situations and made it clear who the people would be that made those decisions. This event sent ripples through the texts and lives of the community but the archive of those textual changes is difficult to find and to seek without a vibrant institutional memory and involved, active community members. It would also be incredibly hard to get at the catalyst for these rule changes without a situated social literacy study that includes focus on the institutions that surround literacy events and practices.

The text that mediates the fair leads to real and measurable consequences. If rules are not read or not respected people are kept from entering objects or projects into the fair. Projects in this sense includes animal entries. If rules are interpreted incorrectly the results are the same. The Fair Book as a social literacy event with agentive power is clear to the members of the community and any event that incorporates people must too have an ethical facet.

**Ethical Literacy**

Ethical literacy can be defined as both, technical communicators' knowledge of professional ethical standards as well as their abilities to consider all stakeholders involved in a writing situation (Cook, 2002 p.15). Sanders (1997) describes ethics as a centripetal force, one that moves things toward a center. In other words, ethical considerations touch many areas and influence how we act and make decisions about our documents' purposes, audience, contents development, and delivery methods. Wahlstrom (1997) suggests that ethical literacy grounded in the technical writing profession's ethical principles; legality, honesty, confidentiality, quality,

fairness, and professionalism enhance decision making by making writers more cognizant of ethical implications of their decisions, including their responsibilities as citizens and workers in their society. Dragga (1996) however, showed that technical communicators typically rely more strongly on personal morals and values when making ethical decisions just like the members of the Fair Book writing committee.

The members of the committee all had different ethical considerations that they valued and focused on. Connie focused on choosing the pictures that represent the fair and its people. She spent much of her time working with Samantha who is a professional photographer in day-to-day life. The fair is lucky that Samantha provides so much free photography work for the group. Samantha and the photos she creates play a large role in the fair. They are the primary marketing and promotional images and have also gone on to become their own historical record. Connie and Samantha spent many meetings discussing the ethical ways to use the photography. They had many discussions trying to interpret the wishes of the people who were photographed. Connie was very concerned about using people's images without having their express permission. This often led to discussions of privacy and anonymity between Connie and Samantha. They often compromised by choosing images of people that they knew and that they thought would "be okay" having their picture used

Stacy was more concerned about the advertisements in the Fair Book and how advertisements created relationships between outside entities and the fair. Many of the events at the fair are only possible with business donations, considerations, and sponsorships. The Fair Book is one of the most popular places for people to advertise. Although many people also sponsor signs or events the book is one of the only places that advertisements go out into print

and into reader's homes. Stacy was the head of advertisement at the time of the study and was very busy with her responsibilities. All year she had to seek out connections with local community and business members. And her work was mediated by a number of documents. She was often writing both letters and emails. She was also responsible for dealing with legal contracts. She most often used her computer at home and a personal email address. While she consented to be observed in the study and often talked with me about her work, I could not access much of it because she performed it nights and weekends in her own home and not on site at the fairgrounds. From our discussions though it was clear she was always considering how the actions of the fair reflected on advertisers and how advertisers might reflect on the fair. She was always making critical choices in shaping the fair's persona through this ethical lens.

Dottie was always more focused on the rules sections of the Fair Book and how important those are especially ethically. The rules that govern animal husbandry are thorough, complicated, and fraught with tension. The consumption of animals and the ethical ways that can and should be done are one of the central debates throughout the history of the fair and agriculture broadly. Dottie in her interview said, "Sometimes, it's even calling the state "is this the rule /regulation for the entire state? We're not doing something we shouldn't be doing. Are we overstepping our authority?" The ethical decisions of the state and federal regulators are enacted through the fair and that is an important and technical task. It is through the use of the Fair Book document that these decisions and actions can take place in the premium judgement

Judges are often local and regional experts in a particular class. Although expert might be stretching the term a bit as some are locals who have been drafted into volunteering at the fair for some of the less rigorous categories like pencil collections. The judges are responsible for

making sure entries follow the rules of the fair and the exhibit and for determining who wins the premiums. The judge's book gathers the relevant information and serves as a binding historical document for the fair after the event is over. The fair keeps their judging books in case the information is ever again needed. It was common to refer back to recent books to see who had won and to see how rules had changed over time. The judge's books are kept for insurance and auditing reasons. The fair is often audited and must prove how many premiums were awarded and that they were paid and to whom. They also provide historical documentation for the fair. While not all judge's books are available throughout time there is a large selection that has become part of the literate archive of the fair and stand as an artifact of the ethical literacy of the participants.

***Rhetorical Literacy***

Sherie is focused on the history of the fair and seeing that it is made available in the Fair Book. Often the only information people get of the fair comes from the book or comes from word of mouth and small-town rumor mills. Sherie strives to include relevant and interesting information in the Fair Book as she hopes it "connects with the old readers, like herself" Sherie works to memorialize any members of the community that have died within that year. This is something that she takes very seriously, and she works with the members of the families to negotiate this important work.

Rhetorical literacy is most often viewed as "a multifaceted knowledge that allows writers to conceptualize and shape documents whatever their specific purpose or audience" (Cook 2002, p.10). Sherie envisions her audience as similar to her and she assumes that they also share her values and interests. Rhetorical literacy relies on an understanding of the audience's role in

shaping effective discourse. Analytical skills for identifying and responding to the audience in terms of the communication's purpose and the writing situation are also needed. Cook believes that knowledge of and the abilities to "choose and apply invention strategies, depending upon specific audience, purpose, and writing situation and finally, an awareness of one's own ideological stance and the given audience's stance(s) are important to a rhetorical understanding of literacy (p.10).

The above description of rhetorical literacy requires people to understand and be able to analyze, evaluate, and employ various invention and writing strategies based upon their knowledge of audience, purpose, writing situation, research methods, genre, style, and delivery techniques and media. It offers no exact formulas for devising solutions to writing challenges, it strives to develop a set of fluid skills and reflective practices that might be employed successfully given any audience, purpose, or writing situation. Writers who demonstrate that they possess rhetorical literacy should be able to create a wide variety of documents for specific clients and specific situations and to explain why their documents are appropriate within these contexts. They should also be able to use organizational knowledge and research strategies to determine how organizational constraints may affect an audience's receptiveness to their document and may shape their document's purpose.

*Technological Literacy*

A thorough discussion of the differences in digital and technological literacy and technology and tool and their relation to how people conceptualize and describe writing would be its own separate dissertation (or more likely, ten dissertations). For ease of discussion, I rely

here on some very basic and a bit dated definitions so as not to get bogged down in the minutiae of the discussion but instead can focus on the instances literacies presented themselves in the study. Digital technologies do not necessarily count as new literacies. Instead, new literacies are ones that take a new approach to how we think about text and communication. While new literacies can include texts that embody new technologies, they do not have to. New literacies that both incorporate new technology and are grounded in a new way of thinking about literacy practices are what Lankshear and Knobel (2003, 2007, 2008) call "paradigm cases" of new literacies.

Cook (2002) describes technological literacy as "A working knowledge of technologies that helps to produce communications, documents, or products; an awareness of how these technologies promote social interactions and collaboration; an ability to research how users work with technologies; and an ability to critique this research and act upon it to make decisions and produce documents designed with and for users. "(p.13). Proficiency is only one component of technological literacy, people must also be able to serve as facilitators for the users of technology (p.14) As facilitators, communicators "accommodate technology to users" (Dobrin 1983, p.108). Technical communicators are "intimately connected to users of technologies" (Johnson 1998, p.76). Because of this connection, they must develop analytical skills that allow them to observe and gather information about users' preferences and requirements for technology, and they must develop writing skills that allow them to incorporate this knowledge into documents to support these preferences. As Cook (2002) writes, "Supported by social and rhetorical skills necessary for their interactions with users, this form of technological literacy casts technical communicators in three roles: as rhetoricians who study audience knowledge, preferences, and

requirements for technology; as architects who take this research and use it to construct technology documentation to meet audience needs; and as usability researchers who take their written product back to the audience to critique how well the documentation and the technology work for the audience"(p.14).

The Fair Book does not go far as an in-house document. I was originally interested in observing how the document was composed on computers. I wanted to observe a participant manipulating software to develop and make changes to the document. That was not the case, however. The cutting and pasting I observed happened with scissors and tape. The committee had written marks and notes in the books and then shared them with the publisher by dropping off a few different hand-marked and taped versions. They told me that the company had been "working with them for years and years and they know what we need." If I were to expand this study, I would look to trace the document with the publishers. The publishers create a version of the book for the Fairboard's approval in the late winter. The books then become available to the public in the late spring. The creation of the book is a collaborative and welcoming experience relying on manual tools and an old school sense of publishing.

Entry forms are submitted through the mail, a very old and very loud fax machine, or dropped off in-person at the office. The forms provide information about each exhibit so they can be classified, and so judging documents can be created. The information is entered into a specialty fair software system. Almost all of the information is added by one volunteer, Shelby. Shelby is rural route postal-delivery person who volunteers for the fair nearly every day in the summer. She is the office expert in this software system. She enters the data from the entry forms and the software generates entry tags. These tags have the department, section and class for the

entry and information about the exhibitor including their hometown. The entry tag has two parts with a partition between the two halves. The top of the tag is attached to the entry item while the detachable tag is given to the participant as a claim ticket to retrieve the item after the end of the fair. The tag is a small piece literally but figuratively prompts much work and literate activity for the people involved. From the time Shelby enters the information into the system and the item is picked up at the end of the fair the tag leads to dozens of individual literacy events spanning members of the community

In order to learn more about the participants experience with literacy and technologies, I asked them in the survey how much education they had, and the results surprised me. I expected the participants to have limited educations because of their age and the socioeconomic demographics of Carriage County. And I had a very naïve view that comfort and skill with digital technology came from education. While all the survey participants had a high school diploma seven had some college education and two had Master's level classes if not the degree. I was also surprised that one participant included their military experience as part of their education as this was something I had not considered. From my observation of the site and my informal interviews, I know that these respondents' answers do not really represent the other members of the board or volunteers of the fair. I would say most had high school diplomas but many of the people that volunteer for the more blue-collar positions did not have advanced degrees. They do however have a width and breadth of workplace experiences. This divide regarding education and training may account for the division in office work and outside work and the ambivalent value of basic literacy. The members may have self-selected themselves into these groups based on where their talents lie and the work that they enjoy.

The technological literacy of the fair volunteers is particularly interesting in the Treasurer's Office because of the multiple and varied ways that technology is implemented to make meaning in such an important area. The Treasurer and Secretary work together to write and enter all of the premium checks into the accounting books. "The books" in this case is a literal ledger book that is maintained with red and black ink. The treasurer of the fair was a WWII airborne division veteran in his early 90s who had been keeping the books for the fair since the early 1960s. There is not much about his office or work that had changed in that time although now the ledger sheets have to be purchased through eBay. The Treasurer's office is a very interesting and vibrant place. There is a file cabinet but only two drawers have files. The other drawers house flashlights, extension cords, extra ponchos, and work gloves. The Treasurer and his office are the most reliant on institutional memory. So much so that he often spurned written information like reminders or records. This led to a bit of trouble recently when the state auditor's office could not confirm some sales numbers and required more daily breakdowns of the finances in the office. The other members of the Fairboard including Anthony, pushed for the office to begin using Excel to keep track of this information leading to many arguments and hurt feelings.

As the premiums are being prepared in the Treasurer's office, the front office volunteers are doing the final steps of preparing the exhibit paperwork. The front office volunteers are responsible for taking the information created in the fair software and using it to perform the labor of using the documents. They tie strings to the tags, call people who forgot to fill in information, and sort the documents alphabetically for the superintendents on check in day. This

little tag is the lynch pin of the entry system that makes the fair possible and it is through its value as a text that is able to fill that role.

Check-in day is an all-day controlled fiasco the day before the fair opens. Exhibitors return to pick up their exhibit tags and attach them to their exhibits. In our case, the pencil collection. They then are tasked with getting their item to the barn and doing a final set up before leaving with the claim ticket. It is very much like checking in a coat but instead of a coat it is a twenty-foot-tall sunflower or a homemade jam. That night and early on opening day that judges with the help of their superintendents determine the winners finalizing that information in their judging books that are returned to the office to be used in writing the final premium checks and creating the formal log of the fair.

This work is all behind the scenes and almost all before the fair even begins. In fact, for many of the volunteers it is the start of the fair that signals the end of work rather than its beginning. The literate labor is never ending and constantly renegotiated in the site and beyond it. Cook's layers of literacy, especially the social layer, allow us to better understand the participants' goals, training, social status, education, and other factors that keep the literate work in constant flux just as the fair is in constant flux. It is through a reliance on family tradition, community, negotiated narrative and identities enacted through literacy practices that work gets done and has gotten done for more than one hundred and sixty years and will continue to get done.

# Chapter 4

*These narratives are "little glimpses of our times for they are reflections of culture, of moments, of realities."-Cynthia Selfe*

*"I like to communicate it well and include people. I don't know why but I want to make sure that you feel that I have written something. That I have something for you."-Dottie*

This chapter focuses on the case study participant of Dottie as she works to communicate well and include people while she tries to have something for her reader. By bringing together observations, survey, and guided interview response data I provide a narrative glimpse that is a "reflection of culture, of moments, of realities" as described by Selfe. This section begins with a description of Dottie's biography, a look at her workspace, her available materials and her writing tasks. Literacy and technology narratives are discussed and Dottie's relationship to literacy and some of her literacy sponsors.

Dottie's office is crowded the way a person's mind is crowded. There are papers and folders and pictures everywhere at least on her half. She shares the office with another two desks that are used by a few different fair members. She also shares her space with the copier and the supply closet. All the flat surfaces are covered, even the chairs most of the time. The pictures are of babies and grandkids, hers and others. There are weddings, memories of old fairs, past 4-Hers and her family. The place is bright and cheerful because Dottie is bright and cheerful. She is the kind of person who gives a great hug. They are not too long, and they are not too short, and you always feel like she wants to hug you. Dottie feels like family but the kind you never fight with. The kind of family member who are you always happy to see and sad to leave. She always brings

a side dish when you tell her not to. She will watch the kids if you have to run out for a minute. Dottie remembers birthdays, anniversaries, and middle names. In my case, she remembers the embarrassing outfits I wore in middle school, but she does not hold them against me. Dottie dances at weddings and sends cards when you need them. She is good and kind. Dottie is great, really great.

I prepared to observe Dottie and her technological literacy by spending some time in her office. I had been observing the fair office for about a week and Dottie had already completed my initial survey. She was getting used to seeing me in the role of a researcher. Dottie let me set up in her office while she finished her lunch. I sat down at Dottie's desk to get a better sense of her and the materials of her literacy. I expected post-its and file folders. I was very flattered to see a folder with my name on it and all of the documents I had given her for my study. I was filed in between the "Farm and Dairy" folder and "New Ideas-Suggestions". There were enough stationary items for a crew of office workers. She had a well-used receipt printing calculator. She used a baby monitor to keep an eye on the front desk down the hall because there were many times she is working after hours or alone in the building. I assumed I would see lists of things to do and collections of phone numbers. And those things were there. But something was missing from her desk. There was no computer on it.

Her computer was behind her desk on a shallow table. It was flanked by a file cabinet and a printer. To me as a writing researcher and teacher who is rarely apart from her computer for more than a few hours, Dottie's work area seemed strange, fettered almost counterproductive. It was a space that I believed marked the limitations of her digital literacy. In my own scholarship, I value the theoretical work of literacy researchers who place value on contextual studies of

literate practice. But with my first thoughts on Dottie's desk, I found myself holding a decontextualized ideology of literacy that privileged the literacies and literate activity of younger people and that assumes that elders are digitally deficient. Dottie's embodied habits at her workspace seemed like signs of age rather than signs of a thriving digital literacy.

What can technological literacy narratives tell us about literacy and technology and how the two intersect? Previous discussions have centered around expanding the field's scope of research to include genres such as instant messaging (Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 2009; Haas & Takayoshi, 2011), have attempted to situate "the roles of teachers and students" (Hea, p. 6, 2009; Kitalong, 2009; Turnley, 2009), and have discussed "logistics, security, privacy, and cultural assumptions" (Hea, p. 7, 2009; Hochman & Palmquist, 2009; Dean, Hochman, Hood, & McEachern 2004; Efaw, Hampton, Martinez, & Smith 2004). I seek to build on these conversations by focusing on one elder writer's relationship to technology and literacy throughout her lifespan as she remembers it and lives it. As various writing technologies continue to proliferate, writing researchers and scholars can expect many types of differences in how writing happens. How it happens physically, socioeconomically, and culturally.

My goal was to learn more about what literate practices writers rely on in creating administrative documents, it was my overarching research question. I also wanted a detailed view of this intersection of literacy and technology when senior writers produce multimodal text. So, I collected three types of data that inform this case study discussion. I performed ethnographic observation, a formal interview and gathered survey data. This chapter will be a discussion of these three forms of data in this single participant case study. I believe that before we can identify and acknowledge elders who are digitally literate as Pew and AARP attempt to

do, we must first understand what digital literacy actually looks like in situ, within embodied experience, now and throughout the lifespan.

Not all scholarship on technological and digital literacies is done using literacy narrative methods but much research uses literacy narratives exclusively or at least uses interviews as a part of the process to compose a narrative. I have chosen the interview method to create a technological literacy narrative because while "Most researchers recognize that large-scale statistics provide one picture of salient trends," narrative can present to us "the human and very personal face of social, cultural, economic phenomena that so fundamentally shapes the project of education" (Selfe & Hawisher, 2012, p. 36).

The technological literacy narrative constructed here draws heavily on Selfe and Hawisher's (2012) analysis of how the interview has changed over the years, culminating with a feminist structure and process in interview methods. Specifically, this feminist structure and process has several characteristics. It is "semi-structured (e.g., Gubrium and Holstein, 2001; Ritchie and Lewis, 2013), as conversations (Palmer,1982; Burgess; Lofland and Lofland,1984; Shepherd, 2003) in which all participants, researchers and informants, understand that they are engaged in mutually shaping meaning, and that such meaning necessarily is local, fragmentary, and contingent" (p.36).

In the past, research interviews I conducted were often about "extracting information," (Selfe & Hawisher, 2012, p. 36) but I tried to see myself as a learner as well. This is not to say that I was not in a powerless position, or that my participants like Dottie saw us as equals exchanging knowledge. But I did try to structure the interviews and the interview questions in a way that helped us deepen our existing relationship over the course of the summer. We

interviewed face-to-face. I crafted my questions to be open-ended and was willing to share my own life and stories with Dottie. I also went off script to follow up some of her responses, as these stories might be "suppressed or go underinterrogated in more conventional forms of interview research" (Selfe & Hawisher, 2012, p. 39; Mishler, 1986). This narrative, then, highlights not the "God stories that yield coherent narratives of complex phenomena" but the "knowledge of individuals, which provides small, but potent glimpses of the meaning people attach to the everyday practices of their literate lives" (Selfe & Hawisher, 2012, p. 42).

My initial read of Dottie's computer station was not anything special. Despite evidence over the last several decades that literacy is a situated, social practice, an age-based ideology persists in our discourse on literacy even in some subtle ways like my own first impression. The ageist ideology of literacy appears, for example, when the Pew Internet and American Life Project knowledges that internet users born in the 1930s and 1940s are "competitive" when it comes to email use, but then adds that "teens might point out this is proof that email is for old people" (Jones & Fox, 2009, p.1 ) Despite reporting evidence of elders' increased engagements with digital literacy, Pew dismisses the most common internet based literacy practices among elders as outdated and thus not really competitive after all. Even among organizations actively promoting positive images of older adults, such as AARP, an age-based ideology remains. In part drawing from Pew research, AARP also acknowledged the increases presence of aging adults online in its magazine, proudly insisting that older internet users were "doing a lot more than just e-mailing their grandchildren and looking at family photos" (p.94).

By uncritically dismissing elders' most common digital activities as antiquated or primitive, both reports advance age-based understandings of literacy which privilege practices

and activities most common among young people. These reports suggest that email and looking at family photos are too basic, too Web 1.0 and mark elder internet users as less active members, or even as nonmembers in online culture. People saw Web 2.0 as one of the latest evolutions of the internet as it blurred the line between producers and consumers of content while shifting attention from access to information toward access to other people (Brown & Adler, 2008). Web 2.0 includes social media, like Facebook and Twitter, blogs, wikis, and other web platforms and services in which users create the content. Although adults over age sixty-five are a fast-growing population in social media use, particularly in the recent boom among adults over age fifty (Madden, 2010), teens and adults well under the age of sixty-five are still more likely to use social media and are also more likely to be the focus of public discussions of social networking in the media and in policymaking (Lenhart, 2009). It is not insignificant that Facebook was originally designed for college students, and only later was the service made available to other adults. It is a mistake to identify elders who do not use Web 2.0 technologies or at least not in expected or conventional ways, as somehow failing or digitally illiterate. Even online activity that by now seems mundane, like writing email or sharing photos, not only counts as digital literacy practice but they can also teach us about literate practices that extend beyond youth focused ideologies.

Pew and AARP have both done good work to uncover generational patterns in social and literate activity, but they are not alone in forwarding youth centered views of literacy. The work of these reports pushes pervasive ageist ideals within our culture. Robert Butler, who claims to have coined the term *ageism* in 1968 (p.11), describes ageist views of elder's failure to learn and change. "Tied to his personal traditions and growing conservatism, he dislikes innovations and is

not disposed to new ideas. Not only can he not move forward, he often moves backward" (p.7). It's most familiar phrasing "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" remains a long-lasting stereotype in our digital age.

Other scholarship has focused on how younger students acquire technological literacies. Agee and Altarriba's (2009) article "Changing Conceptions and Uses of Computer Technologies in the Everyday Literacy Practices of Sixth and Seventh Graders" surveyed and interviewed middle schoolers about how they used technology. Overall, the sixth graders interviewed were surprisingly uninterested in computers at all, even for gaming and social purposes. They also were not engaged with using computers for schoolwork (p. 384-388). But by seventh grade, students who were interviewed showed more engagement with computers in terms of entertainment, social, and school use. The researchers found that the social lives of students greatly affected their computer use, as did "contextual factors" such as family members affecting when and how the sixth- and seventh-graders used the computer. This study showed just how nuanced technological literacy acquisition really is. While sixth- and seventh-graders are usually grouped together as young adolescents or middle schoolers, there were stark differences in how they used and conceptualized technology. The researchers also claimed that "computer technologies may be problematic for younger adolescents in terms of cognitive, social, and physical needs" (p. 392). Theirs is a more common type of study and a more expected population of participants.

Buck (2012) also explored the intersection of academic and outside literacies among younger users, emphasizing that "examining the social, technological, and structural factors that influence digital literacy practices in online environments is crucial to understanding the impact

of these sites on writing practices" (p. 9). Buck's case study of her subject, Ronnie, showed that, similar to other research like Agee and Altarriba (2009), his "everyday literacy practices are embedded within an ecology of practices that is shaped by social and technological influences on his writing and his self-presentation on social network sites" (p. 35). As literacy practices evolve on and through social network sites, users "encounter important questions about data management and ownership, privacy, and identity representation" and "spending time on social network sites means developing digital literacies to negotiate the new rhetorical situations they encounter, where one status update is broadcast to many different friend groups and where social media companies frequently change privacy configurations" (p. 35). Essentially, the effect on writing practices she found was a greater attention to and concern with privacy and identity.

Technological literacy narratives and other studies too, focus on these groups of younger people. While part of the reason for this is that the demographic that makes up the overwhelming amount of composition classrooms is adolescents and young adults, strictly focusing on this demographic doesn't give the field a full picture of technological literacy practices. Scholars often find themselves surround by a nearly inexhaustible number of undergraduate students. These students often also have more flexibility in their scheduling as their responsibilities often fluctuate more often than others. There has been too much focus on studying the groups of people closest too us on college campuses but is understandable with the many benefits that kind of work rewards the researcher with. I hope the largest reward is time, but I worry that it might be power. It is a difficult thing to be vulnerable as a researcher especially when there are age dynamics at play. Because of the make up of the student populations at large midwestern colleges we have been leaving many people out. Many scholars, including Scenters- Zapico

(2010), Ruecker (2012), Berry, Hawisher, and Selfe (2013), have worked to widen our views by helping to compose the stories of people of color, which have contributed greatly to better understanding digital divide issues.

Focused on youth-centered understandings of digital activity, messages from the media often position elders as an abstract group of deficient writers and readers. Meanwhile, literacy researchers have argued that literacy must be understood as embodied within everyday contexts as distributed across social domains, and as developed and evolved over time (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic; Heath; Street). Researchers (Brandt; Duffy; Selfe & Hawisher) have focused on long term spans of literacy, studies of life stories both in and outside the digital realm have explored generations of literacy practices across recent decades. Particularly in studies of older adults and literacy. Crow (2000, 2006) focuses on older students in classrooms that were aided by computers and their training and development challenges. Mckee and Blair (2006) looked to community-based technology literacy programs. Ray (2000, 2001) utilized narrative and life writing to look at aging beyond nostalgia. Teems (2015) looked to the relationship between a person and their aging body and how literacy intersects with bodily control. These situated approaches examined not only the physiological and cognitive barriers to literacy but also the impact of affective experiences like feelings of desire or anxiety which can lead literacy practices to thrive or stall.

In their study of older adults and digital literacy in community learning centers, McKee and Blair (2007) address cultural anxieties related to technology use, observing that "[o]ur society ... certainly fetishizes young people - you don't see grandma dancing with an iPod, for example- and the message that technology is for the young is something that many older adults

seem to have internalized" (p.24). The result of that internalization is often a fear of learning to use technologies (p.25). Of course, stereotypes of old age do not always result in fear, anxiety, insecurity, or other feelings that can discourage literacy, but affective experience is always deeply enmeshed within literacy and learning. If some elders feel inadequate as learners because they have been moved by pervasive public messages that digital literacy is something only young people do, such feelings can impact their motivation to pursue literate practices with digital technologies. Although some older adults do experience anxiety and reluctance when learning to use new technologies (McKee & Blair, 24-26), this idea is regularly circulated as a universal truth (Morrell, Mayhorn, and Echt, 2004, p.74), often masking the rich literate practices already underway by many older adults.

Building on this focus on the ideological, affective, and motivational dimensions of literacy, I believe that before we can identify and acknowledge elders who are digitally literate as Pew and AARP attempt to do, we must first understand what digital literacy actually looks like in situ, within embodied experience, now and throughout the lifespan. In exploring the actual experiences of what Prior (1998) calls "literate activity" (p.138), an attention to motivational scaffolding can offer a robust sense of what technological literacy means in the lives of elders. The term motivational scaffolding generally describes in-the-moment feedback from the expert-teacher; examples include "acknowledging that the task is difficult; using humor; providing negative or positive feedback" (Thompson, p.428). Bowen's 2011 study expands this notion of motivational scaffolding to contexts outside of the classroom or writing center and beyond the immediate teaching moment to consider the sustained affective connections that foster literacy development over time and across a variety of literate contexts.

In studies of aging adults and digital literacy, attention to personal motivation is crucial, as elders do not always share with younger people many of the same motivations or social needs to learn and use literacy technologies. For researchers of literacy, particularly in subfields that focus on computers and writing, affect based motivation could be powerful in technological literacy development in people of all ages. Crow (2006) addresses personal motivation when she suggested that the development of technological literacy among aging faculty may be best learned when motivated by a personal curiosity (p.10). This echoes digital literacy scholars, who value informal, curiosity-driven, and experimental methods of "tinkering" as important pedagogical tools, as discussed by Rice (2009).

Following Fleckenstein's contention that literacy depends upon "feeling sufficiently at home in a place that we will speak and write" (p.62), my interest here in digital literacy is a move toward understanding the forces that support literacy over time, as well as the sociocultural, historical, and material arrangements that grant new literacies familiarity. By focusing on my participant's present activities and accumulated histories, I aim to reinforce the idea that digital literacy needs to be understood in relation to broader social and historical contexts or what Selfe and Hawisher (2004) identify as cultural ecologies (p.31-32).

Brandt (1998, 2001) contends that individuals' pursuits of literacy are connected to cultural and economic practices, so that individuals' literacy learning, and development can be understood as a response to changing economic and social positions. For Brandt learning to read and write served as a means for social viability, mobility, and economic security during the twentieth century. De-centralization of agrarian economies, the integration of corporate markets, and ever-increasing demand for information networks provided a context for investigating the

role of literacy learning and development in individuals' lives. One fundamental way in which this pursuit of literacy is realized is through the literacy sponsor. Brandt defines the literacy sponsor as, "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy-and gain advantage by it in some way" (p.166). Across a five-year study, Brandt uses interview data from over 100 participants of many ages to identify how the literacy sponsors construct opportunities for individuals to enter into literacy practices and situates these literacy practices within the larger material context of economic opportunity.

We must consider and include the stories that individuals tell about literacy and how those stories are intertwined within social technological and historical contexts that are always evolving. Researchers also ought to attend to the long-term embedded experiences that people have with literacy. We need to resist the need to position elders as digitally deficient by default so that we may find their narratives useful in understanding embodied relationships with both technology and literacy and their intersections.

Todd Ruecker (2012) defined the literacy narrative as "stories of people learning to read and write" (p. 240). Furthermore, the purpose of literacy narratives, according to Selfe and Hawisher's (2004) was to place "technological literacy in specific cultural, material, educational and familial contexts" and uncover "clues about the constellation of factors that can affect and be affected by electronic literacy acquisition and development" (p. 646). Literacy narratives, then, are stories of reading and writing highlighting the various contexts and factors of literacy acquisition. One study can include many narratives (Brandt, 1994; Ching & Ching, 2012) or just a few (Hawisher & Selfe, 2004; Ruecker, 2010). By carefully analyzing these narratives,

scholars can develop rich, detailed portraits of people's lived experiences with writing and reading.

Dottie is one of the year-round employees of the fair. She has had many jobs at the fair over the years and she will likely take on many more in the future. She is Assistant Secretary, Junior Fairboard Coordinator and Junior Fairboard Advisor and the Treasurer for the Sale Committee. She is also the person that can answer everyone's questions. Dottie was born in 1957 in the county seat not fifteen miles from the fair and her home. She has never lived outside of Carriage County and doesn't plan to leave. Her grandchildren are attending the school system she graduated from. She describes herself as a farmwife and she considers agriculture important in our lives. Dottie sees her identity as being a mother and a grandmother. And she volunteers at the fair besides working at it. She likes a little bit of everything that has to do with agriculture and people. She calls herself a people person.

To learn more about the intersections of literacy and technology in Dottie's life I needed to talk to her and observe her. I needed to see her literate activity through fresh eyes in order to bring my own understandings of literate activity to bear on her own descriptions of her experiences. Dottie was chosen as my case study participant for a few reasons. She was the person most willing to let me observe frequently. She was in the fair office more often and for longer periods of times than others. She also provided thoughtful and detailed answers to my questions, even if they did not seem relevant or valuable to her. Most of all though was Dottie's collection of responsibilities and how many of them were literate in nature and mediated by digital technologies. She wrote more documents and used more technology than any of the other participants in the study. Dottie was surrounded by documents, literally. Every surface in her

shared office was covered in documents for the administration of the fair. Each wall had a pin board, and each board was full. There were advertisements, copies of forms and documents that needed approval before printing. In my observations she stressed the importance of "seeing everything". Dottie also embraced and used technology in a very purposeful way. She loved her smart phone and was often observed using it for work and personal reasons. She was also charged with maintaining the fair's social media presence through administering their Facebook page and dealing with the fair's website. The website was produced and modified by an outside consultant. She checked the Facebook page between five and ten times each day to remove spam and help people by replying to questions. Those things together made her my choice for the case study seen here.

Dottie remembers "being a kid and being involved in and showing animals and being in 4-H." Her father especially encouraged her work with the 4-H. She doesn't think that her mom understood it. Although her dad did, "She's not a big volunteer type person and my dad was, to a fault". Dottie grew up with a strong example of what it means to be an active community member in her father. She was encouraged to join 4-H and volunteer in other ways. It is important to note that Dottie also can see how too much volunteering can be detrimental to a person as Dottie has a history of taking too much on.

Dottie became involved with the fair when she joined Junior Fairboard. Junior Fairboard is for teens and young adults who are aging out of 4-H but want to continue to volunteer at the fair. They put on children's day activities, sell merchandise, man the information booths, and help in any way they can. This help includes working on the grounds throughout the summer to prepare for the fair. Junior Fairboard was brand-new, and they didn't know what they wanted the

members of the new organization to do when Dottie joined. But the Fairboard knew that they wanted young people to help. Dottie came into the office because they needed help doing a couple of things and she worked as an all-around gopher and office helper. She liked it and she came back on her own without being asked. Once a former board member asked Dottie to put posters out because they didn't have enough people, and she did and that was the beginning of starting to really work at the fair.

Learning about Dottie through my interviews and observations, I began to see an affective disposition towards literacy in general and technology by association that in many ways motivated literacy development throughout her life. In their study of literacy and one community, Barton and Hamilton (2000) found that participants often wanted to talk about the "ruling passions" of their lives rather than specifically about literacy and that hearing about these ruling passions often brought better understandings of participants' literacy (p.83). Dottie's ruling passions can be seen as American agriculture and it's midwestern lifestyle and values. Dottie could be said to have a "literacy affinity" according to Bowen (2011) which she describes as "an enduring attraction toward literacy expressed and reinforced by effective and bodily experience" (p.592). Bowen's concept of literacy affinity draws on Bourdieu's *habitus,* described as an embodied disposition toward a particular cultural field, in this case literacy, that is observable. Hayles (1993) summarizes, "in orientation and movement of the body through cultural spaces and temporal rhythms" (Hayles,1993, p.160). For Dottie, the movements toward developing a literacy affinity were in part observable through our observations, discussions, and interviews, which revealed a consistent development of literacy affinity. She had a lasting pull of

literacy in her life as a way of helping her community and enabling her to be a better member of that community because they closely related to and affected her ruling passions.

As most people do, Dottie located the foundations of her attitudes towards literacy in her childhood. Specifically, in valuing literacy education through her schoolwork. Dottie' literacy affinity grew from an early age. Dottie grew up with a hearing problem that led to a speech impediment that she still worries about. Her memory of learning to read centers on her second-grade teacher. Mrs. Yellowstone made Dottie interested in reading because according to Dottie she was a phenomenal educator who all the students loved dearly. She gave them confidence. Dottie recalls being rewarded by with hugs and with complements. Dottie describes all of the students in her class having problems with school but feeling supported by Mrs. Yellowstone. That was the beginning of Dottie loving to read. Dottie is still an avid reader. At the time of our interview, she had a small stack of books on her bedside table. She had a book about genealogy, a romance novel, and a few books about the Amish. She prefers historical romances but like most people couldn't remember author names off the top of her head. She did bring in a list of the names a few days later. It was through this personal relationship that encouraged reading and learning that shaped Dottie and her hobbies today. Teachers as literacy sponsors are important to reaching children in critical timeframes. It is through these timely interventions that relationships with literacy are formed for the good and ill.

While reading has been a constant in Dottie's life, writing has come and gone as her life has evolved. When I asked Dottie, what writing looks like she said it could be anything "It could be a postcard. A note, to journaling, which I did a lot" Dottie grew up keeping a journal and has continued to do so throughout her life. She doesn't journal as frequently as she has in the past

though. She used to write every day and is now down to three or four times a year. She seems to have stopped writing as often as she didn't end up valuing some of her earlier entries. "Some of them, now that I read back on them, some of them were really stupid. Some of them are just the weather and how the day went. What I did that day. But then a lot of it has history to go with it to be here at the fair and different things like that so it brings back those great memories." She joked that she wanted all her journals destroyed when she dies.

Writing clearly has an emotional value to Dottie. "To me writing gives me a way to evaluate what I think is happening. What I think is going on with me to make me feel better or to make me a better person." Even when asked what writing looks like she brought it back to the emotions that she has tied to writing "Oh, anything. It can be a symbol of just a few things. A heart with 'I love you' to long papers."

It didn't start out that way for Dottie though. After second grade with Mrs. Yellowstone, she moved on to third grade with Mrs. Standing who was one of the worst teachers, according to Dottie. If a student did not do well in writing, they got wrapped on the desk with a ruler. Students would have to write something over and over again until they got it right. Dottie joked that now she enjoys writing correctly. She was terrible at writing poems, and she remembered having to write poems a lot.

Dottie also made it clear that she enjoyed writing more when she could type instead of hand write. She enjoyed typing class and always wanted to be a secretary or a teacher. Even now, she keeps her keyboard to the edge of the table as she was instructed in her high school typing class.

Dottie has always liked research papers even though she thinks that makes her weird. “I like to communicate [an idea] well and include people. I don’t know why but I want to make sure that you feel that I have written something. That I have something for you”. She sees writing something as being natural. “I enjoy it. I take it as a challenge and [working for the fair] is. Because I love it and I love what I do, it’s all easier.” According to Dottie, composition is “Absolutely trying to get everything together that I want to put in there and doing it correctly. And getting all the rules and regulations but including, just like I said, making it so everyone is included that there’s something there and it is sounding really good”.

Brandt’s (1994) “Remembering Writing. Remembering Reading” sought to “explore literacy learning as it has occurred across the twentieth century” by having people remember “the occasions, people, materials, and motivations involved in the processes” of writing and reading (p. 461). The findings demonstrated that most people associated being able to read with “prestige” (p. 462) and “with learning, relaxing, and worshipping” (p. 470), while writing had “a less coherent status in collective family life, and much early writing is remembered as occurring in lonely, secret, or rebellious circumstances” (p. 464). The narratives Brandt conducted also demonstrated “that reading and writing were actually often linked in school assignments but usually in a way that subordinated writing” (p. 473). Her interviews helped to expand “the scope by which we study literacy practices and the need to understand school-based writing in terms of larger cultural, historical, and economic currents” (p. 477). Dottie and her journaling connect to this subordinated view of writing. While reading is paramount and on her nightstand, her active reflective writing has tapered off and is more seasonal than daily.

Hawisher and Selfe (2004) drew attention to the study of literacy through the literacy narrative and arrived at five conclusions. The first that "literacies have lifespans" (p. 644). An example from Dottie's life might be learning how to use a card catalog in the library when she was growing up. The Dewey Decimal System is still with us, but it is almost exclusively electronic. Literacies arise, change, evolve, amalgamate, and sometimes disappear. The second concept Hawisher and Selfe arrived at was that "People can exert their own powerful agency in, around, and through digital literacies" (p. 644). This finding affirmed previous research from Giddens (1979) and Feenberg (1999) and demonstrated that technology is not deterministic and does not always control our behaviors, but instead can be manipulated and molded by its users. Dottie asserted her own agency through digital literacy by becoming the voice of the fair through her administration of the social media accounts. She spent the time learning the tools and the conventions around them and that allowed her to step into the role as the primary communicator for the organization. The third concept developed was "Schools are not the sole—and, often, not even the primary—gateways through which people gain access to and practice digital literacies" (p. 644). Besides schools, other important gateways for literacy acquisition include workplaces, communities, and personal relationships. Dottie's volunteer work became her gateway, and it was supported by the relationships she has with her children. The fourth finding was that "The specific conditions of access have a substantial effect on people's acquisition and development of digital literacy" (p. 644). Access is not merely having a computing device physically available, but is better understood to include "large-scale historical, political, and economic factors" (p. 673) that affect one's access to a device. Dottie's access to literacy tools has been an important factor in her volunteer work and her personal relationships. She often discussed what it

took to save the money for her personal computer and the things she needed to save and scrimp on to make it possible for her family to invest in other literacy tools like her printer and her smart phone. Their final finding was that "Families transmit literacy values and practices in multiple directions" (p. 644). In other words, there was not just a parent-to-child transmission of literacy, or an older sibling passing on literacy to the younger, or of a child teaching a parent how to use a computer or smartphone; instead, literacy can be transmitted in all of these ways. Dottie's children and husband are all very plugged in. They are a family that values tools, some of them are huge combines and others are as small is the weather radio. Collectively they are a family who seeks out, learns and shares their knowledge about tools in all directions. Dottie taught her children to use the sewing machine and they taught her to get her hotspot working on her phone.

Dottie is a very thoughtful writer and strives to always keep her audience and their own goals in mind. She focuses on how she can format a document to give the most information in as concise a way as she can without confusing people while also making sure that the information is correct. She sees herself as often creating the "bones" for a document. She creates a start or guide for the volunteers in the various subcommittees so that together they can create a useful document. Then she has to manage the project of the document by communicating with the other volunteers and double checking their work, both the content and the writing of it. The documents at the fair have visible stakes. They play an important role in the administration of the event and there are very real consequences for these documents. But Dottie also concedes that she is more often dealing with human nature something her documents cannot solve. "We can do all these forms and documents, but we can't read it for them, and we can't remember it for them".

Dottie is impressive in her integration of hard copy paper documents and documents that are based in her computer. She seamlessly worked between hard copies on her desk and in-progress documents on her computer. It seemed that this was the difference in text for her. When a document was final it would become a hard copy that she could then pin to her wall or sort on her desk and refer to in the future. While documents in progress were housed in the computer or on her physical desktop to be "redpenned". "I e-mail a lot. I do research. I write everything, after I create it by hand, I put it on the computer to proof it and spell check and proof myself. Everything. The dentist appointment. Just everything. I can't imagine not having a computer. I just can't."

Dottie recalls the previous year when her computer had a virus. And she had to quickly find help to recover her lost data. She was relieved that she only lost about three weeks' worth of work. It was after this data loss and her old pc laptop taking hours to load that her husband surprised her with a new Apple. Dottie's husband is a farmer that relies on his computer. He uses it to administer the business end of the farm and after a friend's son had used an Apple for years and had no trouble, he bought one for himself. His friend told him about it on a fishing trip which Dottie whispered to me was really a drinking trip with some fishing. Her husband surprised her by taking her out in a snowstorm to buy Dottie her own Apple computer. She doesn't think it has enough programs though.

She works on her computer "at home or wherever. [She] takes her computer everywhere". She usually writes in Word but had started using Google Docs. When she first gets to the fair every day, she turns on the machinery; printer, computer, "all of that stuff". She checks the answering machine and checks her to do list. Dottie always makes a to do list the

night before or often during the summer she is contacted at home about fair business. There are no real off hours for her. She also frequently uses her smart phone to text collaborators to check information or remind people of upcoming deadlines.

Dottie is constantly composing letters. She handwrites them and she uses Word to type and edit them. “Look at the stuff I have a lying around here. I start with doing everything handwritten and then I transpose it to the computer normally.” She usually edits her writing as she types.

Dottie is on her phone or her computer most of the day. Lately, she has been on her tablet every night looking at Craigslist. She is always talking to someone or looking up something online. She is rarely away from them at all. She is always taking pictures and posting them. She comments of Facebook regularly. She is really good at finding the information she is looking for on Google. All of that could be said of almost any young woman. If I had to guess just by reading that description, I would say Dottie is under thirty-five. But Dottie is sixty and makes great paprikash. Dottie learned a lot about and began using computers through her courses at the local college to become a teacher. She did not end up finishing her teaching degree but did end up working in administration at the local high school where she continued to integrate computers and technology into first her job and then her life.

Technological literacy can have both narrow and broad definitions. Narrowly it can mean being able to functionally use technology, such as creating a PDF file or composing a document in Word. A richer and more productive definition for this project is to define technological literacy as something that goes beyond functional literacy, something that sees technological literacy as “a complex set of socially and culturally situated values, practices, and skills involved in operating linguistically within the context of electronic environments, including reading,

writing, and communicating" (Selfe, 1999, p.11). Selfe's broader and deeper definition of technological literacy has been very valuable to my own understanding. Similarly, Selber in *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*, argued that not only is functional literacy important, but that critical literacy, the ability to question and critique technology and digital spaces, and rhetorical literacy, the ability to take into account the users and audience of what has been created, must be incorporated into the field's understanding of technological literacy and best pedagogical practices.

There is overlap between digital literacy and technological literacy as terms and in practice, and sometimes they are nearly indistinguishable. The difference between these two terms, if there is any, could pivot on digital literacies emphasis on online environments. Cooper, in her chapter "Learning Digital Literacies" in Cynthia Selfe's edited collection *Multimodal Literacies* (2007), defined digital literacies as "reading, writing, and exchanging multimodal information in online environments" (p. 181). Lankshear and Knobel (2008) defined digital literacy as "a shorthand for the myriad social practices and conceptions of engaging in meaning making mediated by texts that are produced, received, distributed, exchanged, etc., via digital codification" (p. 5). Maybe the distinction between technological and digital literacy is that digital literacy emphasizes the online and the digital codification of writing while technological emphasizes the binary between print and computer. For many years, it was possible to make a distinction between technological and digital literacy because not all writing and reading technologies were online. Now though, nearly all software has an online component. Video game consoles require an internet connection, student writing is saved to the cloud, and a huge array of writing is done on online blogs and social networking sites. This is not to say there is absolutely

no distinction between writing online and writing offline, but that the trend is toward nearly all writing and reading practices being influenced by online, digital literacy.

The technological platform used to do writing; a desktop, laptop, tablet, or smartphone embodies certain material and physical attributes which can affect writing. The term "technological" might not even be necessary anymore. Perhaps "technological" needlessly reinforces that binary between print and digital. Are there enough cases of people writing and reading without technology to make a distinction? It is true that pencils, paper, post-its, are all technologies. I am referring to late 20th and early 21st century computer and online based technologies.

When I asked Dottie how much writing she does on a usual day she clarifies it to be "actual writing". I am still not sure what Dottie means by that. Dottie thought that 45% of her average day is dedicated to writing. The rest of the day she is taking care of people. But as we discuss writing and her job at the fair, she ups that number dramatically. "Filling out forms. A lot of writing, a lot…. It's always something. It's constantly writing. Writing a letter to [the tree service company]. Doing the minutes. To go into that, there's a lot more. When you put a number on it, I would say 85%." We go on to talk about that last fifteen percent but as we do Dottie cannot really make a hard line between literate activity and other types of work. "I answer the phone but then I read. I get the information". She talks about some of the questions and tasks she has dealt with so far that day and then says "the fair it is handing out and disseminating information and it is all written. Check the book. It's in the book."

Dottie has a broad understanding of writing and of professional writing, specifically. I wish I had been more open-minded in my own assumptions of writing and of my participants. I

had thought coming into this study that I would ask these writers about writing and that they would not really consider the work they do to be writing or literate activity and then I could say "Oh, but it is. Don't you see?". That I would somehow shine the light of literate activity down upon them. I was wrong and I was naive. I asked Dottie what a professional writer looked like and at first, she pointed to me which was flattering and a bit terrifying. But then she went on to say "if I really had to sit and think about a professional writer…I guess, because of doing so much and changing my career so often. I just see them looking like a little bit of everybody. Even my grandson's note to me (pointed to child's note on the bulletin board). He could be professional at his age. That's his job- make everybody feel good." Dottie's grandson was three at the time. Her understanding of what it means to be a writer is bold and broad and strikingly inclusive. Writers look like all of us and all of us could be writers. She did not see professional writers constrained by publications or degrees. She did not define them by the tools that they use. Instead, in her understanding of a professional writer, she focused on the idea that it is a writer's job to make others feel. And for Dottie, that meant we ought to make other people feel good.

I asked Dottie to describe her work so I could understand how she saw her role at the fair and what she defined as work. I asked, 'If you came home and somebody said, 'What did you do today?' What would you say? What did you do at the fair today? Dottie's response surprised me but should not have. "Helped people. Took care of people. Met with people. I answered the phone. Talked to people. Deposits. Typed up minutes. Composing a letter to [the tree service company]. It's just a weird variety. That's what's interesting about it." Later on, Dottie went on to say, "But what else do I do? Greet the public. Take care of them." Dottie sees herself as talking care of others and considers her literate activity a way to do that. Literate activity is

getting the work of caring done. Dottie goes on to describe what else she does in a day, "Whatever is needed at the time. Mailings. I run labels. Learning new computer programs. I hate learning new programs. It's just a bookkeeping one and I hate it. I hate it. I absolutely hate it. [I]t's a bookkeeping program that I thought I had to have. Then, I found out that the old sale program I have on there, what I needed is there. They updated it and the update included everything that I needed. So, do I go in and learn this because it's good for me? I might use it in the future (JH: And did you decide to try learning?) I've been too busy for it. It is a winter thing. Usually, I think that with something like that you learn it when you need it. So, now I don't need it, so it can wait a while."

Dottie's use of computer technology evolved throughout her life and each time it seemed it was because she identified a need that technology could help her fill or take on. She learned the software the school used. She became very good at Google. And some of these things are tied to her literacy affinity and the value she places on it. Dottie sees learning and literate activity as good for her, as a way to improve herself. She does not tie literacy to socioeconomic improvement like many other people do. It is a common idea to think that improved literacy skills can lead to improved situation or power in our day to day lives. Harvey Graff (1979) described this type of thinking as the "literacy myth". Dottie doesn't seem to think of literacy as a privilege or at least she never indicated that in our discussions. But it could be because that literacy had always been a valued and important part of her life that she does not see it as privilege but as a tacit part of her embodied experience. She might also attribute some of the things that literacy has provided in her life to other social and personal factors.

While Dottie worked hard in acquiring and improving her literacies, she could not have done it all on her own. In many ways her literacy has been enabled or allowed by what Brandt (1998) calls literacy sponsors, or agents who provided beneficiaries the resources to develop in exchange for some types of economic gain (p.19). To help draw attention to "literacy as an economic development," Brandt developed the concept "sponsors of literacy," defined as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 166). Using sponsorship to analyze literacy can have many benefits including: how it "can force a more explicit and substantive link between literacy learning and systems of opportunity and access" (p. 169); how "sponsors are engaged in [the] processes of positioning and repositioning, seizing and relinquishing control over meanings and materials of literacy" (p. 173); and how "sponsors enable and hinder literacy activity, often forcing the formation of new literacy requirements while decertifying older ones" (p. 178-179). Overall, Brandt's project helps writing teachers and scholars better understand the multiplicity of forces that encourage, discourage, and transform literacy.

These sponsors provided Dottie with access to both traditional alphabetical literacy and technological literacies. Dottie's secretarial education in high school was made possible with state education funds that were intended to help teach high schooler's trades so they could quickly enter the Ohio workforce upon graduation from high school. Her courses at the local college introduced her to computers and word processing while the school's goal was to develop their reputation as a leading teacher education program in the region and the computing work was an important part of that reputation. Literacy does not only act within economic systems and

terms though. Literacy can also be tied up with people's emotions. The "lure of feeling literate" (Strickland, 2007 p.47) also entices learners. As it still does with Dottie. She knows that learning is good for her. And that feeling of doing things that are good for her is a strong motivator in her relationship with literate activity. Radway (1997) describes this emotional motivation as "a desire to know, to connect, to communicate, and to share" (p.7).

Dottie is both teacher and learner, she is the sponsor and the sponsored throughout her various literacies. She is not operating with technology or literacy at a deficit. She is often tasked with helping others use the computers and is sought after for troubleshooting. She still needs to ask for help sometimes from her son, Anthony, the resident computer fixer. She is also leading by example to the other members of the Fairboard who can see the work she is able to accomplish because of her technological skills. While she has not yet convinced all her peers to work more with computers, but she has encouraged some to be more active with their smart phones and with social media. Literacy and technology are a back-and-forth relationship, much like a friendship for Dottie. There are times when she is doing the lifting and times when she is the one being supported and this maps on to her understanding that writing and communication and the tools that make it possible are all really for helping people.

Literacy is old and it is new and by paying attention to that middle ground between the two we can begin to see what literacy might mean for the present. Dottie is not just an older woman with her back to her computer she's also a trained secretary, a farmwife and a person with four different jobs and titles at the fair. Her story reminds us of the histories of individuals as they move from one context of literacy to another, histories that "emerge, accumulate, and compete with other literacies and also fade" (Selfe & Hawisher p.5) Dottie, like so many others,

draws on a rich literate past full of emotional and embodied experiences that carry her into new literate contexts and activities.

By paying close attention to the work of older adults whose literacies are undervalued by default, we can begin to make transparent the ageist ideologies that a deeply seated in our professional and public discourses on literacy, on learning and on technology. And then maybe we can move beyond youth centered understandings. With more attention paid to elders' literacies we might see literacy less in terms of measuring up to the most recent technological innovations and more in terms of how individuals regularly innovate in order to make meaning in their everyday lives. We need to consider literacy across the lifespan including school literacy, workplace literacies and the literacies developing beyond career age and into retirement. Literacy is on a lifelong continuum from birth to death and it extends across generations and through this understanding and recognition of the continuum, we can appreciate the active and changing nature of literacy.

# CHAPTER 5

## Conclusion and Implications

The first chapter of this work explored some of the ways in which New Literacy Studies values the social context of literacy and how that social context must include things like identity and age of the writer, the everyday or professional setting in which the activity takes place, and how the technologies available to the writer shape the literate events through a review of the field's literature. Chapter 2 offered a discussion of the methodological decisions made for data collection and analysis. Primarily, data collection consisted of ethnographic participant observations, surveys, and interviews, leading to a case study. Chapter 3 focused on the layered social domains of literacy by looking at labor, gender, and family tradition. The chapter also explored how narratives become cultural touchstones that work to police community acceptance. And finally, the chapter traced the interactions of one document through the community. Chapter 4 relied on the case study of Dottie and focused on data analysis specifically of my observations combined with interview data to explore and discuss layering of literacy. This final chapter concludes the dissertation with a discussion of the limitations of this project, implications for future research, and some teaching applications. I do not argue for generalizable conclusions here, but instead offer some generative questions and ideas to prompt future inquiry and practice.

As the field evolves, concerns about the limitations of local studies have become common (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Collins & Blot, 2003; Horner, 2013; Pahl, 2008; Prinsloo &

Baynham, 2008; Street, 2003; Vieira, 2013): “There have been several concerns expressed in recent times that the ethnographic focus of research in the NLS tradition has contributed to a bias toward localism in such that research cannot see beyond the immediate context of its research focus” (Prinsloo & Baynham, 2008, p. 5). Situated accounts of practice are or can be critical to meaning and the way it travels in our world. Detailed portraits of the work of rhetoric and writing can become the foundation to many kinds of contemporary writing studies, including asking questions about the nature of success in rhetoric and writing. Situated accounts describe what people do with writing in particular contexts. They reflect contemporary understandings of culture, practice, and our lived experiences. They document what resources people draw on, how materials are moved, the places people go, and the things they do. Situated accounts work from the understanding that different individuals, groups, and stakeholders use and construct literacy differently. The reality of our practice is multiple. Creating accounts of contemporary practice is meaningful as these accounts not only add to the ongoing historical record, but also can be adapted to the creation of better spaces and infrastructures to support writing.

Repairing the rift between the local and global is important for studying literacy practices. Literacy built and sustained connections across time and space: notes, forms, documents, books, computers, and the machines that make them possible, all have played a role in mediating larger and longer views and understandings of the social world, by holding them all together across contexts. Readers and writers engaging in the context of these things across time and space connect our past to our present and our local to the global. Through the collection of local studies, like this one, the field can acknowledge literacy’s hand in building networks across time and space as it has had in delocalizing and reframing social life and in providing the

centralizing powers by which larger and larger chunks of the social world are organized and connected. Researchers can follow many threads at similar sites of reading and writing, exposing the ways that a localizing literacy event in one context might be a globalizing accomplishment in another. It is a perspective that can focus on the ways that local literates are recruited into the distant through reading and writing

When anyone is reading or writing, it is well worth asking who else is getting something out of it; often that somebody will not be at the scene. Literacy objects can function as the medium through which the energies invested in literate practices in one context are organized into benefits for those in other contexts. Scholars generally agree that focusing on local literacies can pose problems, and they have different approaches on how to reframe discussions to move toward more global contexts. They argue that studies of local literacies must examine the ways local practices connect with global, institutional structures, and how those relationships affect issues of power and identity.

Brandt and Clinton (2002) expressed concern that a focus on the local contexts of literacy events prevents analysis of how those events are connected to global forces. They suggest that it is possible to think about the "technologies of literacy" as having certain "capacities" including "a capacity to travel, a capacity to stay intact, and a capacity to be visible and animate outside the interactions of immediate literacy events," (p. 344). To understand the ways local contexts might not fully determine how literacy gets incorporated or used at the local level we need to identify the inherent agency in literacy, so that we may be able to characterize the ways literacy at the local level is connected to global needs. Brandt and Clinton call on Latour's explanation of how "science is a social practice," in that the questions asked are human questions and the meanings

made are socially constructed. Brandt and Clinton draw a parallel between this and literacy: the social context of literacy events impacts how literacy gets done, as do the more tangible technologies of literacy. They argue that likewise, literacy needs to be seen as an object that has some agency in determining the ways literacy events unfold.

Studies of local, situated literacies explore local literacy practices without a direct connection to broader institutional influences, such as the authors, publishers, and other interests that are served when texts are used. There may be some sweeping gestures to those forces, but the connections are not made systematically. Viewing texts as objects allows researchers to make clearer connections between local literacies and global structures.

Again, Brandt and Clinton rely on Latour: we must first understand that the "global" level of a social practice is actually made up of local activities. Those activities, though, are far away from the local activities that we are studying, and our perspective does not allow us to see the local detail of them. So, global influences are simply the things, people, or institutions to which texts are connected that are not "at the scene" (p. 347). In order to connect the local practices that we study with global forces, we must be able to follow objects that are common in each. By viewing literacy as an object, we can make direct connections between local literacy activities and broader global forces and implications.

## Limitations of the project

### Participant Pool

There are several limitations to this study. First, I limited the pool of possible participants from the beginning of the study by choosing to examine a specific and limited organization of people for a limited time. This selection of a research site narrowed potential

participants to those who live in the area that could afford to volunteer. This meant that my participants had the time and financial security to work voluntarily and the physical capability to do so. This may explain why the participant pool included so many seniors as they had the time and the financial stability to take an active role in a community organization.

My selection of an organization also implies shared ideologies of the participants. If the participants were not supportive of agricultural focused activities, they were unlikely to have joined in the first place. There are affordances and constraints to limiting the participant pool. The congruent nature of the participants may have been helpful because I was working with a limited number of people. If I had interviewed a broader range of people from more varying backgrounds, there might be difficulty in finding some common ground among the participants. However, this also is limiting because my participant pool does not include representation from other populations and excludes potentially helpful and relevant data that they might have provided.

**Surveys**

Even though I and others reviewed the surveys, I would try to be more stringent in the future by giving the survey to a larger pilot group. I think I would also have pushed harder to get the initial surveys back from my participants. I gave them early in my field work and was worried that I might come off as annoying or pushy to the people who worked at the site. I was nervous that I would be affecting the good will that the project ended up relying on. I also would have made the survey a bit longer. When it was originally designed, I had hoped for a large number of participants, and I did not want them to be feel overburdened with the time they spent

on it. If I were to do it again, I would have had more people pilot the initial survey and I would have timed them to see the average amount of time people were spending on completing them. If I were to expand the study in the future, I would like to expand the educational area of the survey and trace it along with historic education standards in the region and current education demographics to have a more fleshed out understanding of the participant pool in relation to the larger county wide community.

**Interviews**

More participants would have allowed me to compare the emerging themes across multiple participants. Also, these other participants could have provided totally different or contrary emerging themes. I would have liked to have more interviews with the people who work at the fair in outdoor labor positions, but I was not able to convince them to let me interview them formally. They were fine with talking and informal questions, but some people seemed uncomfortable when asked to sit down and talk for an extended time. They especially avoided my audio recorder. Others told me they simply did not have the time to be interviewed. I would have liked to revisit these people during the winter when their seasonal obligations were fewer. In my future interviewing, I want to feel freer to allow the conversation to meander. I had a difficult time balancing on-topic conversation with useful tangents. As the interviews went on, I felt more comfortable and assume that trend will continue in my future work.

The study's use of interviews allowed me to gather only retrospective accounts of the literacy practices participants claim. Accounts change as narratives are told in new settings and do not represent actual, past events (Mishler, 2006). The interview data used throughout this

dissertation is retrospective accounts, and so claims cannot be made for what participants actually did, but only for what participants reported to have done. However, this study provides me with a starting point for future research projects that would allow me to examine how seniors or community volunteers engage in literacy practices. For example, a future study might include recordings of writers coming together to revise a document that would allow me to examine the specific ways conversations occur and how literacy or other variables play a role in these interactions.

**Artifacts**

While I collected literacy artifacts from my participants, I was not rigorous enough in this collection. I often asked participants to provide me with the documents they relied on. These were often state regulations and their own in-house documents from previous years. I also asked participants to give me copies of the texts they were actively collecting. These artifacts were useful and interesting and helped me to shape my understanding of the work of literacy in the site. I do think they I could have collected and analyzed more artifacts and had a developed a system for soliciting them. In the future, I would approach the participants to solicit artifacts after my reflective memoing. This would ensure that each artifact that is pivotal to observation was collected. Artifact analysis would have changed the direction of my study though. This method of analysis would have further separated the participant from me as the researcher. I could have drawn a number of conclusions based on the text and not the influence of the participants.

**Focus groups**

Many people might be intimidated to participate in interviews on their own. A focus group could be an alternative to future interviews. A focus group could be more conversational and make participants more willing to share stories and to "piggyback" off of each other's stories. Of course, a focus group is more difficult to schedule. Participants could also choose to leave the study affecting the data transcription and analysis. Also, it is important to consider to what extent the other participants in the focus group affect the responses of others. This could affect both the reliability and validity of the focus group. Could a focus group be able to effectively address the idea that it is meant to address and could various focus groups be able to provide consistent results across different contexts? Would a participant answering after a conversation is moving along alter their response to fit in with the others? Would a participant feel more comfortable one-on-one with a researcher instead of discussing something in front of a group of peers? I worry that a focus group could have led to a piling on. One participant could admonish writing, or a writing practice and the others could have felt pressured to agree. It happened fairly often in the informal discussions we had about the project.

**Activity Logs**

At the outset of this project, I planned on using activity logs to help develop a more thorough picture of my participants' writing habits. Activity logs come from the need to engage in artifact analysis in qualitative research. Some researchers (Prior, 2003; Prior & Shipka, 2003) have asked participants to draw pictures of their writing process. Roozen (2010) "asked a participant to describe the process involved in the invention and production of various projects

by showing [them] how various texts and materials were employed" (p. 323). Regardless of the precise means researchers use to encourage research participants to recall prior writing experiences, the purpose is to "make visible the participant's tacit knowledge of text invention and production" (p. 323).

While activity logs were designed and prepared for the participants to help them note their uses of technology and any type of writing activity, they were not implemented. The main goal was to help them recall more precisely their technology use and writing activity for our interviews and informal discussions. Many participants were hesitant to employ the logs and decided not to use them or abandoned them quickly. They did not see how the information would be useful to anyone and some thought that log would interrupt and delay their work. And I don't blame them. I was not clear enough in articulating my goals for the participants if they did not understand one of my methods of gathering data, especially one that had a large time requirement. In future work, I plan to investigate successful ways to motivate and train participants when it comes to keeping activity logs. The logs were designed to be easy to use, but perhaps better design characteristics could have been employed to increase the likelihood of a participant completing an activity log.

This brings up a larger point about future research design: what are the best ways to complement testimony via interviews to get a more complete picture of the research site? Observations with recordings would be able to collect more data than what I could produce in my participant observation and reflective memoing. Having research participants turn in artifacts more systematically could also provide a more detailed picture. But these would all come at the cost of time.

All studies are limited in their success. There are always new things to learn, places to dig deeper and methods to employ. Despite the limitations of this project, it has produced a number of thought-provoking avenues for future research. Below you will read some generative questions and ideas.

**Generative Questions**

• How do these writers carry out revision of their work in the long lifespan of the documents? The artifacts used by the participants, like many of the other things at the fair, were often years, decades, or even generations old. What does revision look like in that expanded and open time frame and how do writers deal with a document's long past? A close textual analysis could provide some ideas supplemented by guided direct interviews. I also want to learn more about which rhetorical strategies are important to these revision processes?

•What purposes for writing are there at different stages of life and how do technological, social, and cultural changes place new demands older adults in terms of literacy? The examination of intersectional identities of writers has been expanding to provide focus on older writers and learners but what does that mean to the writers themselves and to us in the field? What changes will come about in literacy learning and teaching because of what we are learning about senior literacy? I would like to spend more time learning more about older writers across a number of contexts deploying a wide array of tools and strategies.

• How do the end users implement and use, in situ, these documents that have been created to do work? I was able to observe but not interview some of these users of the documents. This has limited my understating of the document's success. I was not able to judge how well the users thought these documents do their jobs. My observations allowed for just a small look into the path these documents take once they leave the fair office and how they are used once they were returned. I would like to know more about the step in the middle. I would have liked to have traced a single document through all of its actors and actions. The trail to follow is long and winding and intersects in some very intriguing ways. Tracing a document in this way would allow a researcher to learn about the intersecting populations and communities and to also focus on the applications of the document.

•What about this work is inherent to the community observed? Are the results of this work because of the nature of people who are interested in agriculture? Future research might focus on collaborative composing activities within other similar sites. This would expand the participant pool allowing for a great collection of information to draw on. This would allow for comparison across the data as a way to focus on the variables of the work rather than the participants. I would like to contact another fair or other agriculture group and observe their composing processes to drawer tighter conclusions about the literacy and technology intersections of the participants.

•What is literacy like for other seniors in other community organizations? Are their composing practices comparable, varying? Another avenue is to select a differing group of senior community volunteers that are not necessarily in agriculture. I have been working on a follow up study that employs many of the same methods to focus on a chapter of The League of Women Voters. I am trying to isolate variables like tool implementation, levels of education, and gender. These participants are similar in age, education level, and purposes of their work. But the writing is often deployed in ways that contrast the study here. I would like to spend more time learning about how diverse communities of seniors put writing to work for various and wide spreading goals.

•What do the intersections of gender and literacy look like when examined more fully? While beyond of the scope this study and my own background, there were instances when a thorough examination of gender could be performed. It would be beneficial especially if brought into discussion with education, access, expertise and the participants' own ideas and feelings about these intersections.

•What is the role of expertise in literate activity? While this work did not focus on expertise it did play an important role that I would like to explore in the future. My participants were all fair experts and longtime members of the community, but they were not self-styled as writing experts. I would like to approach the enculturation and development of a new group member. This seems to be limited by the way people join the group though. A longitudinal study that traces development of a new community

member could rely on the methods used by Haas (1994) in order to trace the development of a participant's beliefs about literate activity and their experiences.

• Finally, how could the field benefit from a thorough meta-analysis of similar small-scale studies or grouped collections of literacies? Is there a need for an expansion or at least centralization of our research? A clearinghouse of studies would help researchers as the field proliferates. The speed that field is expanding is heartening but it feels in some ways untenable as there is just so much research to find, read, connect, and apply spread across subfields, journals, websites, publishers. I would have appreciated a more thorough systematic collection and review of our literature, something large scale, daunting and most importantly, made by someone else.

**The Writing Classroom**

Small scale studies of literacy practices are valuable in the writing classroom. They can be one of the best ways for people to learn to examine and value their own literate lives and practices. They can increase a student's understanding of literacy by leading them to reflect on their own practices and the practices of others around them. Gere (1994) explores literacy practices in community spaces and seeks to apply that knowledge to the classroom. Gere proposes that, "We listen to the signals that come through the walls of our classrooms from the world outside" (p. 76), such as rural, community-based writing groups, among others. Gere writes, "These writers bear testimony to the fact that writing development occurs outside formal education" (p. 76). This expansion of literacy's lens opens our classrooms to the worlds that our

students come from.

This classroom work could take a step-by-step approach. Starting with the identification of a topic within a place, activity, or group. Students could then be mentored in observational research techniques to explore the visual environment. After observation, students could identify and document particular literacy events and texts. Interviews of people engaging in literacy can be used to help make sense of the observations. Through thoughtfully designed writing prompts students could spend time reflecting on a number of ideas that arise from a close inspection of literacy and then apply those ideas to their own literate lives.

Susan Kirtley's (2012) "Rendering technology visible: The technological literacy narrative" argued for the importance of literacy narratives as assignments in classrooms. Literacy narratives can help instructors and writing programs understand how technology affects composing practices (p. 191). These narratives can also help students, teachers, and writing programs better understand writing ecologies that are affected not just by technology, but "race, class, or gender" (p. 200). Kirtley mentioned one problem with literacy narratives that she encountered in her classes, however. Many students either lack the vocabulary to fully articulate their experiences with technology, race, class, and gender, but even if they do understand them, "they might feel compelled to censor their words and lives in a public forum" (p. 200). James Zebroski (1994) implements ethnographic research into the writing curriculum by aligning himself with Lyotard's position of empowerment through discourse and Faigley & Hansen (1985) have designed student "microethnographies" of local cultures and contends that "asking students to write narratives about the culture in which they participate is one way of allowing them to explore agency and to locate themselves within their culture" (p. 218). Kirtley also

favored technological literacy narratives to be written over the course of the semester, which "allows students to shape their own stories and increases awareness of technology" as they move through the semester instead of just right at the beginning or even right at the end of the semester (p. 200).

Writing is developed and supported throughout the lifespan in every new occasion for writing, for every new purpose. We need to continue extending our research as a field to include all parts of life's continuum. There are studies in all areas of life, but they could benefit from life-span perspective (Early, 2018; Bazerman et al, 2018; Bazerman et al, 2017; Applebee, 2000). Because our life spans of writing are supported through technology, we need as Bazerman (2002) says to understand more fully "…the ways in which technologies are reshaping these writing experiences, how the technologies may provide new kinds of support, and how people move through various supportive literate technologies throughout their lives" (p.35). This perspective leads us to take even more seriously the great variety of writing activities because as Early (2018) describes, it is through the socially distributed and social organized forms of writing that people develop as writers and form their literate consciousness. Writing is deeply integrated with our development as individuals and social collectives. Bazerman (2002) argues that "It is time to recognize that writing provides some of the fundamental mechanisms that make our world work…." (p.34). He goes on,

> Research in writing across the curriculum, writing in the professions, writing in the workplace, writing in the public sphere are far more than instrumental exercises in the conventions of getting things done. They are studies in how people come to take on the thought, practice, perspective and orientation of various ways of life, how they integrate

> or keep distinct those perspectives in which they are practiced, and how we organize our modern way of life economically, intellectually, socially, interpersonally, managerially, and politically, through the medium of texts (Bazerman, 2002, p.33).

Theory, history, and practice all come together to tell the same story. They are an attempt to "understand how we live our lives at the unfolding edge of history, using literacy in the ways that make the most sense for us in our lives, to continually make a future from our own skills and choices as writers. (p.36)" It is through studies of small, local, everyday, literacies, like this one, that we may observe, explore, and share this unfolding edge.

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