

# LEFT TO THEIR OWN DEVICES: BOOK CLUBS AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

by

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(Under the Direction of Donna Alvermann)

## ABSTRACT

In 1998, Etienne Wenger wrote that “today’s modern institutions are largely based on the assumption that learning is an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end, that it is best separated from the rest of our activities, and that it is the result of teaching” (p. 3). Wenger wrote this nearly twenty years ago; sadly, while the world around us has continued to evolve, our classrooms have not.

In a society where technological advances could easily allow both learning and individuals to become isolated, privileging participation and social action within a group of peers is a priority worthy of research. The purpose of this study, rooted in a sociocultural perspective, was to examine students’ individual, collaborative, and networked activities around books in an effort to discover whether or not they would come together to form a community of practice. Once a community of practice was confirmed, the data were then used to look at the value created or experienced as a result of the community of practice.

A group of 4<sup>th</sup> grade avid readers were given an iPad, an app, and the free rein to make choices about their own reading. The actual reading for the club took place away from school. In the beginning the participants read on iPads using Subtext, an eReader with capabilities that allowed students to read and annotate synchronously and asynchronously within the same book.

However, after the first of three books read during the study, the participants chose to abandon the eReader in favor of print books. This was one of the earliest examples of the group coming together to make a decision.

The data clearly supports and gives evidence to the development of a community of practice around the book club. In the process of becoming a community of practice, the participants exhibited elements associated with sociocultural perspectives including the co-construction of knowledge through mediation and scaffolding of one another's understanding of the texts being read. Additionally, while not a part of the original research question, there was an abundance of data supporting the idea that value creation was achieved within the group.

**INDEX WORDS:** sociocultural perspectives, communities of practice, value creation stories, literacy, new literacies, eReader, book clubs, e-book, social annotation, face-to-face discussion, scaffolding, co-construction of knowledge, and mediation

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## DEDICATION

This is for John.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xi
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Overview of the Issues.....	3
The Problem.....	4
Purpose.....	6
Research Question .....	6
Organization of the Study .....	6
Definition of Terms.....	8
Summary .....	11
2 REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE .....	12
Sociocultural Perspectives .....	12
Communities of Practice.....	19
New Literacy Studies .....	26
new literacies .....	30
New Literacies .....	32
Book Clubs.....	34

e-books .....	35
Social Annotation.....	36
Face-to-face Discussion and the Power of Dialogue .....	38
Summary .....	39
3 METHODOLOGY .....	41
Answering the Question.....	41
Research Design.....	42
Data Collection and Sources .....	67
Data Analysis .....	73
Summary .....	86
4 RESULTS .....	87
The Story.....	87
My Findings .....	110
Summary .....	144
5 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	145
Summary of Findings.....	146
Considerations and Limitations .....	151
Implications.....	153
Summary .....	160
REFERENCES .....	163
APPENDICES	
A IRB PROTOCOL AND DOCUMENTS .....	180
B INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO PARENTS .....	185

C	PARENTAL CONSENT .....	187
D	ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE.....	192
E	RECRUITMENT OF MINORS SCRIPT .....	195
F	TIMELINE.....	197
G	INTEREST INVENTORY / BOOK CHOICE .....	198
H	BOOK CHOICE QUESTIONNAIRE .....	199
I	GOOGLE QUESTIONNAIRE 1 .....	200
J	GOOGLE QUESTIONNAIRE 2.....	201
K	GOOGLE QUESTIONNAIRE 3 .....	202
L	GOOGLE QUESTIONNAIRE 4.....	203
M	INFORMATION ON BOOKS READ .....	204
N	QUESTIONS FOR FINAL CONFESSIONALS.....	207
O	DATA MATRIX.....	208
P	CODES AND DESCRIPTORS .....	212
Q	FINAL CODE CLOUD .....	213
R	VALUE CREATION MATRICES (A & B) .....	214

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 3.1: Final book club choices .....	66
Table 3.2: Data matrix .....	72
Table 3.3: Codes and descriptors .....	78
Table 4.1: Early data .....	88
Table 4.2: Evidence of participation .....	122

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 2.1: Tension between ground and aspirational narratives .....	24
Figure 3.1: The research site .....	47
Figure 3.2: Google Form book questionnaire .....	65
Figure 3.3: Creating excerpts within Dedoose.....	75
Figure 3.4: Adding codes within Dedoose.....	76
Figure 3.5: Code co-occurrence matrix within Dedoose .....	79
Figure 3.6: Direct access to excerpts attached to codes within Dedoose.....	80
Figure 3.7: Code cloud within Dedoose .....	81
Figure 3.8: Dedoose home screen.....	83
Figure 3.9: Google Forms check-in .....	84
Figure 4.1: Basic story map .....	102
Figure 4.2: Tensions between ground and aspirational narratives.....	123
Figure 4.3: Value creation matrix .....	124
Figure 4.4: Value creation matrix A .....	131
Figure 4.5: Value creation matrix B .....	131

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years as a 4th and 5th grade advanced content reading teacher, I've refined and honed the goals I set for my students down to one simple statement:

*I want my students to experience and embrace all forms and genres of the written word, choose to read on their own, and learn more about their reading through great discussions with others.*

Do my goals align with those of my state or the Common Core? No, they do not, and frankly, this has never been a concern for me. I've come to realize that once my goals are met, everything else seems to fall into place naturally. An added perk for me is the knowledge that the mastery of my goals may very well have a lasting impact that follows my students into adulthood.

Over the past fifteen or more years, my plan had worked flawlessly. Year after year, I was able to create classroom communities where reading was part of who we were and discussing our reading was simply second nature. Our discussions allowed us to come together; and presented opportunities for real learning to take place—often without the students even knowing it. It was seamless. Thus, one can only imagine the surprise when, during a grade level meeting, my administrators suggested that I consider pulling back on the number of books my class read each year and drastically curb the amount of “warm fuzzy” discussions about books that were currently taking place within my reading block. The reasoning behind this request puzzled me. I was told that the reading of whole novels and discussions surrounding such reading were no longer considered best practices in terms of the management of instructional

time. They suggested that the time I would get back as a result of this change be spent on worksheets or websites containing reading passages similar to those found within our state reading tests. I was however, offered a compromise of sorts; I could continue my “fuzzy book talks” if I would be willing to use a timer and stop the conversations after 10 minutes. I couldn’t begin to wrap my head around this—how does one stop a conversation at a specified time without insulting the speaker and possibly leaving important issues unresolved?

I left that meeting in a daze and spent the next few weeks conferring with my “tribe” of like-minded teachers. As a group, we talked, read research, and shared ideas in an attempt to appease our administrative team while maintaining our own personal standards and beliefs surrounding best practices in reading instruction.

The communities I’d built year after year, the communities that had enabled me to turn out “readers”, were being threatened. What my administrators considered to be “warm fuzzy” talks were actually so much more. This was how I built my communities - one conversation at a time. They were safe places for the sharing of honest emotions and asking questions without fear of ridicule. Everyone’s favorite part of the day was now to be relegated to ten minutes and a timer?

Stumbling across Subtext later that month was akin to the heavens opening up and revealing a possible solution to my problem. Subtext, a digital reader platform, enables much more than an eReader environment; the platform includes an arsenal of tools for annotation, communication, and reference. The tipping point for me, however, was Subtext’s social annotation tool. Everyone reading the book could see one another’s annotations and reply to the annotations and questions of others. I’d simply take some of the work towards my community building goals and place it in the digital realm. I didn’t see this as a complete solution, but rather

a life raft that just might help me—and my students—stay afloat. While I was excited that some of our “fuzzy talks” could now take place within a social annotation environment, all I could think was, “Wait till the kids see this!”

An avid reader myself, I found that annotation allowed me to call out all that was great and all that I wanted to share with my friends who were reading the same book. In the past, my class had read books within the Kindle app, which included taking notes or highlighting words and passages. However, what Subtext offered was so much more in line with the spirit of annotation and the social aspect of my now-threatened classroom discussions. I’d found a way to satisfy my administration while staying focused on my personal goals for my students. Best of all, though, I’d stumbled upon an idea for my research.

In life, a determination to succeed without sacrificing one’s own personal beliefs is viewed as a positive attribute. However, as I was soon to discover, in qualitative research, determination can only take one so far. The research will have its way. Possibly a more apt way to state this is that the students who are a part of your research will have *their* way.

### **Overview of the Issues**

I was forced to accept, that in this current era of accountability and aggressive testing, time for simply coming together as a classroom community and talking about books is not what many consider a good use of instructional time. However, it’s during our talks about what we are reading that my students come together over a shared goal. It’s also during this time that they begin to feel comfortable discussing the beautiful language they’ve encountered, calling out perfect dialogue, incredible imagery and sensory language an author has so graciously bestowed upon us. We use this time to compare works, scoop up mentor texts and make lists of great words we’ve stumbled upon. The best days are those in which discussions about our reading



leave us wanting to ignore schedules in order to continue our talk. I believe that it's during these discussions that a classroom community comes together and lifelong readers are born.

Being asked to forgo this precious time was a bit of a personal affront, and in my opinion, a poor decision. Finding a way to continue that sense of community became my most pressing goal.

### **The Problem**

Wenger (1998) wrote that “today’s modern institutions are largely based on the assumption that learning is an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end, that it is best separated from the rest of our activities, and that it is the result of teaching” (p. 3). This reminded me of the 10-minute limit I’d been granted for my book discussions in class. Wenger wrote this in 1998, and sadly, while the world around us has continued to change and evolve, our classrooms have not.

Each generation has certainly seen its share of changes in education. However, due to the impact of computers and other technologies, this generation is witnessing change at a constant and ever-changing pace. This is especially true in the field of literacy. As noted by Ikpeze (2012), “We are in an era of rapidly changing literacies, and learners need to acquire multiple forms of knowledge, skills, and values to meet the demands of the 21st century” (p. 3). As our abilities to communicate with an increasingly digital world grow, our reach and reason for understanding must grow as well. Closely connected to this is the importance of studying social learning and social participation (Anstey & Bull, 2006; New London Group, 2000). A community of practice framework (Wenger, 1998) views learning as a shared, social experience ideal for meeting the needs of a changing literacy environment. Additionally, Kapucu (2015) found that “Communities of practice act as catalysts for students to internalize the knowledge

they are exposed to and allows them to reach different interpretations of the same knowledge” (p. 586). Using social learning theory and a communities of practice framework, Kooy (2006) views the conversational culture of book clubs as an authentic professional learning opportunity for adults. Through her research, she has been able to document the emergence of interdependent relationships, dialogue, and learning in clubs comprised of preservice teachers.

Unfortunately, most of the research surrounding communities of practice has focused on adults in the business (Corso, Giacobbe, & Martini, 2009) and healthcare (Rayner, K., Bradley, S., Johnson, G., Mrozik, J. H., Appiah, A., & Nagra, M. K., 2016) sectors, with very limited amounts research in the education sector. I found that whenever communities of practice theory is used in educational research, it tends to favor higher education or preservice teachers (Liu, 2016), classroom teachers (Gardiner, Cumming-Potvin, & Hesterman, 2013; Terrazas-Arellanes, F. E., Knox, C., Strycker, L. A., & Walden, E., 2016; Charbonneau-Gowdy, 2015), ESL teachers (Rogers, 2000), and online communities of practice for adults (Thorpe, M., McCormick, R., Kubiak, C., & Carmichael, P., 2007). A limited number of communities of practice studies focus on the K-12 student, with the majority of those studies highlighting the middle (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006 ) or secondary student (Amidon & Trevathan, 2016). The few studies that did include elementary level students mentioned communities of practice as a secondary focus or as studied communities of practice that were already in existence within the study’s setting (Gholson & Martin, 2014; Beinke, 2013). Those that I did find were in the areas of music (Beinke, 2013), English language learners (Chou, 2016), or math (Gholson & Martin, 2014). Additionally, many of the studies I located took place outside of our country (Beinke, 2013) in educational systems that do not align with our own.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine students' individual, collaborative, and networked activities around a book in an effort to discover whether or not they came together to form a community of practice. Additionally, if a community of practice was to form, this study would also look at the value created or experienced as a result of the community of practice.

In a world where technological advances could easily allow learning, as well as individuals themselves, to become isolated, privileging participation and social action within a group of peers is a topic worthy of research. This research highlights the value of collaborative social practices in both digital and traditional reading environments.

### **Research Question**

While there are many questions that could be asked and examined in a study such as this, I chose to focus on the sociocultural aspects of the book club and the possibility of the book club developing into a community of practice. In doing so, I have chosen to view new literacies and any actions or tools associated with new literacies as methods or events contributing to the possible creation of a community of practice. The following question shaped this inquiry:

How might collaborative e-book reading experiences, along with subsequent face-to-face conversations, support the development of a community of practice amongst skilled upper-elementary readers?

### **Organization of the Study**

With the possibility of Subtext serving as a way to continue our reading community via annotations and online discussions, I invited a group of self-identified avid readers to join me in a voluntary lunchtime book club. The books were to be read and discussed within Subtext, while

weekly face-to-face meetings would allow for additional conversation. I was curious to see what would happen when a group of students came together around a shared love of reading. I was also interested in seeing whether or not their actions might work to move the group beyond a simple club and into a community of practice.

While not necessarily a focus of this research, I was also interested in discovering what affordances were provided by the technology and whether or not the affordances, along with the face-to-face meetings, contributed to the book club becoming an actual community of practice. Wenger and Trayner (2015) describe a community of practice (CoP) as “a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (para. 3).

The club was designed as a hybrid of sorts, reading and responding through an e-book while also meeting face-to-face once a week in my classroom. I provided the following: instruction in the use of the eReader platform, a place for the group to meet face-to-face, and assistance in deciding what books were to be read. All other decisions and activities were left to the group.

The actual reading for the club took place away from school on iPads using Subtext, a component of Accelerated Reader 360. Subtext is an eReader with capabilities that allow students to read and annotate synchronously and asynchronously within the same book. Students were instructed in the use of the tools provided within Subtext. Instructions included how to enter questions and comments for fellow group members, how to create a poll within the text, and how to respond to the annotations and queries of others. Students were also instructed on how to use tools hosted within the Subtext environment, including a highlighter and links to both

Wikipedia and Google. The focus of this study was on the students and their actions around their reading.

During their weekly face-to-face meetings, students had an additional opportunity to share their insights, understandings, and ideas. As Richard Beach (personal communication, October 8, 2015) explained, “each face-to-face meeting is an opportunity for students share their new learning, and thus increase the shared knowledge of the group.” In addition to monitoring online communication within Subtext, during these face-to-face meetings, I observed and took note of any actions or discussions indicating the natural development of a community of practice.

While not the focus of this study, technology played a critical role in this research. Having immediate access to information and the thoughts and ideas of others is powerful. Through technology, the students had access to counter narratives, information to confirm or dispute claims, photos, videos, and other resources that allowed them to question an author’s authority, question one another, and possibly develop alternative perspectives and understandings.

### **Definition of Terms**

- *Advanced content* – Within the setting of this study, advanced content refers to a homogenous grouping of high achieving students, including those identified as gifted as well as those who are not. Placement in these classes is determined by a rubric comparing test scores (cognitive and standardized), motivation, and daily grades.

Advanced content courses have single subject identification. Advanced content courses are not accelerated or designed to move a student into another grade level. Students in advanced content classes are expected to go beyond baseline standards. The coursework

insures mastery of grade level standards and then provides more in-depth studies of a child's current grade level specific standards through critical thinking and research opportunities.

- *Book club* – A book club is traditionally viewed as a group of people that get together in a physical location to discuss books they are reading. In most cases the members are reading the same book. The internet has opened another venue option to the traditional face-to-face book club, the online book club. An “meets” or converses about the book via the internet. This could be achieved via emails, a blog, or a webpage. Online book clubs may also communicate through shared documents or asynchronous annotation within a shared book.
- *Community of practice* - Wenger & Trayner (2015) describe a community of practice (CoP) as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (para. 3).
- *e-book* - An e-book is a digital or electronic book. It is a file that requires an eReader in order to be read.
- *eReader* - An eReader is software that allows one to read an e-book file. The Kindle and Nook are examples of devices that serve as eReaders. However, an eReader can also exist in the form of an app, such as iBooks, Scribd, or Oyster. Most eReaders have tools that allow the reader to highlight text, take notes, bookmark a page, annotate, look up word meanings, and access the Internet.
- *High-ability or gifted learners* – The meaning of high-ability or gifted learner in this study is based upon the definition of gifted learner provided by the state in which the research took place. According to the Georgia Department of Education, “a gifted

education student is defined as one who demonstrates a high degree of intellectual and/or creative ability(ies), exhibits an exceptionally high degree of motivation, and/or excels in specific academic fields, and who needs special instruction and/or special ancillary services to achieve at levels commensurate with his or her ability(ies).”

- *MAP* – MAP is an acronym for Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®), a testing format created by Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), a respected educational research organization. MAP tests adapt to a student’s learning level as the child works through a test. Once baselines have been established, MAP tests, which are taken 2-3 times each year, can measure student progress and academic growth.
- *Social annotation* – Social annotation (SA) is the practice of annotating within shared e-books, PDFs, or websites. It’s similar to writing within the margins of traditional printed books, yet in a digital form. The “social” in social annotation implies that one can not only enter his or her own thoughts, but also view and comment on the annotations of others reading the same text.
- *Subtext* - Subtext is an e-Reading platform that allows students to annotate as they read, while at the same time viewing and responding to the annotations of others within their group. Teachers can create the groups to be as large as an entire class or as small as two friends reading the same book. In addition to annotating, students can ask questions of the group, create simple polls, jump out of the text to research online, or simply use the highlighter to note specific words or passages. Additionally, teachers can use Subtext to integrate questions, quizzes, and other media or social content into e-books. Subtext was recently purchased by Renaissance Learning and is now part of their Accelerated Reader 360 program.

## **Summary**

This chapter provided information on my background and the genesis of the ideas influencing the design of this study. I explained that the purpose of this study was to examine fourth grade students' individual, collaborative, and networked activities around a book in an effort to discover whether the students on their own came together to form a community of practice. Additionally, this first chapter included an overview of the issues, a purpose statement, the research question, definitions of key terms, and an overview of the organization of the study.

The focus of the next chapter is the review of literature. In this chapter I share the wisdom of researchers that came before me by providing a thorough review of scholarly, peer-reviewed articles and books written by experts in their field. This review of literature enabled me to position my research within related research that has already taken place in the field, thus providing a context for my work.

In chapter 3, I introduce the methodology behind my study. This includes information on the pilot study that informed this research, my choice of case study as a methodology, and the context of my study. The chapter ends with a description of my data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4 contains the results of my study. It's written in a way that allows the reader to experience the study as an observer of the events. Within this chapter, I also share my findings based on the analysis of the data gathered. The final chapter, Chapter 5, builds upon my findings through discussions of the implications of the study, limitations of the study, and possible directions for future research.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

In this chapter, I step away from my research plans to tell you about those who came before me. These researchers have cleared the path I chose and informed my journey. This chapter sets the background and context for my research by providing an overview of the research related to the foundational elements of the study. These topics include sociocultural perspectives, communities of practice, zones of proximal development and scaffolding, New Literacy Studies, New Literacies, new literacies, book clubs, e-books, annotation, and face-to-face discussion.

#### **Sociocultural Perspectives**

As we participate and communicate in an increasingly digital world, the importance of understanding social learning has become more and more relevant (Anstey & Bull, 2006; New London Group, 2000). Sociocultural perspectives focus on the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge, exploring the social system in which learning takes to seek explanations for an individual's thinking and learning.

Soviet psychologist Vygotsky believed that cognitive development should be studied by examining the activities that one participates in when engaged in shared actions and how this engagement affects future actions (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987). What we create during these encounters—new understandings, words, ideas, and stories—is just as important as the interactions we experience along the way.

While Vygotsky preferred terms such as *cultural historical* or *sociohistorical*, Vygotskian scholar James Wertsch prefers the moniker *sociocultural*, as he believes it more aptly describes human action as linked to the “cultural, institutional, and historical setting in which it occurs” (1991, p. 203). In *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind* (1985), Wertsch provides a clearer understanding of Vygotsky, explaining that “Vygotsky managed to tie various strands of inquiry together into a unique approach that does not separate individuals from the sociocultural setting in which they function” (p. 16). Vygotsky’s work focused on the idea that our mental functioning is sociocultural, historically, and institutionally positioned and that a person’s mental actions are the result of social interaction or activity. In short, socioculturalists focus on the ways in which occurrences come about as a result of the student’s culture or group. The student’s thinking and development will be examined through their participation in the group (Cobb, 1994).

It is interesting to note that Wertsch viewed this connection as moving in both directions. He posited that just as the group or institution may have influence over an individual, the action of individuals might also have influence over group dynamics, decisions, and functioning: “In this view, one cannot provide an account of human action without taking its cultural, institutional, and historical setting into account. On the other hand, such settings are produced and reproduced through human action (Wertsch, 1991, p. 203).

### **Zone of Proximal Development**

Vygotsky (1978) found merit in what a child was able to accomplish with assistance. This idea was contrary to what others in the field believed to be true; that only those things children are capable of doing on their own without any type of assistance were the true indicators of mental ability. He believed that the level of accomplishment through assisted performance is a

better predictor of what a child can actually achieve and a predictor for future learning Vygotsky (1978) noted that in earlier studies, “they never entertained the notion that what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone” (p 78). This distinction pointed to educators not only looking at a learner’s actual ability, but also their potential ability.

Vygotsky (1978) identified the “zone of proximal development” (ZDP), as the “distance between the child's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance and in collaboration with more capable peers”(p. 86). In other words, the area between what a child can do or learn on his own and what a child can do or learn with help is the space or the zone in which learning happens. While in this zone, students can, with help from adults or children, master concepts and ideas that they cannot understand on their own. The ZDP is the level at which learning takes place.

According to Vygotsky, when the ZDP is ignored, instruction often lags behind the development of the child. “The only good learning is that which is in advance of development.” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89).

Additionally, Vygotsky placed an emphasis on the importance of oral language in social settings, with a special focus on classroom dialogue. “Language is the main tool that promotes thinking, develops reasoning, and supports cultural activities like reading and writing” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.102). In his writings, Vygotsky suggested that levels of learning increased and were powerful in classrooms that were highly social where children were engaged with each other in meaningful activities which included a great deal of talk (1987) . Sadly most classroom discussions are still teacher led with students having very little input (Sipe, 2008).

## Co-Construction of Knowledge

The goal of a co-construction of knowledge is central to the sociocultural perspective. Co-construction of knowledge is a process of learning that is often associated with ZDP that involves a teacher, adult or a peer working together with a student to come to a mutual understanding or solve a problem. “Co- construction of knowledge happens when children and teachers work together to find meanings, rather than facts” (Jordan, 2004). This working together involves oral language and a negotiation of meaning. Vygotsky believed that learning always occurred and could not be separated from a social context. Thus, instructional strategies that enable the co-construction of knowledge have the power to help create a collaborative community of learners. In a study where students were provided with multiple entry points to access the curriculum and were empowered as active agents of their own learning, Ahan & Class (2011), proposed that by switching from the traditional teacher-centered style instruction to instruction that invites students’ co-construction of knowledge, the students gain control of their learning and in turn report a deeper level of understanding and engagement..

The co-construction of knowledge may include student-student and expert-student collaboration. Scaffolding and mediation are instructional strategies often utilized to promote the co-construction of knowledge.

**Scaffolding.** Important to this study is the significant role that “expert others” often play in a child’s learning. According to Vygotsky (1978) the role of “expert other” can be played by an adult or even a more knowledgeable peer. In addition to the role played by teachers, Sipe, (2008) attributes a great deal of meaning construction to children’s mediation, and scaffolding of one another’s literary understanding.

Scaffolding, is a term often associated with Vygotsky's ZDP, however Vygotsky never used the term in his writing. It was actually introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross in 1976. Wood et al. described scaffolding as an "adult controlling those elements of the task that are essentially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence" (p. 90). In scaffolded learning, the students are supported with just the right amount of assistance.

Gordon Wells (1999) viewed scaffolding as an ideal way to implement Vygotsky's ZPD. Wells identified three components unique to scaffolding:

- The essentially dialogical nature of the discourse in which knowledge is co-constructed
- The significance of the kind of activity in which knowing is embedded
- The role of artifacts that mediate knowing (Wells, 1999, p.127).

In their study of primary students in both Mexico and England, Fernández et al. (2015) found that the way in which children talk together can mutually support each other progress to understand a difficult task. They found this peer to peer scaffolding to be almost automatic. "That is, the children may not be trying to 'scaffold' each other's learning, yet they achieve this simply by using effective communicative strategies for solving a problem together" (p. 69).

Sipe (2008) states, "One of the simplest ways in which children can scaffold one another's literary understanding is to assist in explaining things in the text or illustrations that are unclear to another child" (p. 225).

**Mediation.** Mediation is the idea that all human activity is facilitated by tools or signs (Wertsch 1991). In sociocultural studies, mediation refers to the use of language (spoken and written), maps, regular signs (street signs, warning signs, etc.), mnemonic devices, and even technology as learning resources or assistance. Mediation is seen as a "go between" in a child's

attempt to create meaning when presented with information that's not clear, or instantly relevant to them. Vygotsky did not believe that the use of tools to mediate merely simplified an understanding that might have happened without the mediation, he found the inclusion of tools actually changed the flow and alter the entire course and organization of understanding (Vygotsky 1987).

Thus, it's not what the tools do, it's how their use changes human actions or understandings. In this respect, learners use the tools to participate together and socially construct knowledge, it's not the knowledge provided directly from the tools, but rather what knowledge can be constructed through the use of the tools (Wertsch and Bivens, 1992). In this study, the iPads and Subtext didn't provide the understanding, they provided the text to be read that was then digested and discussed in order to come to a mutual understanding. Likewise, an individual student's comments during face-to-face book club meetings is considered a mediational tool when it adds to the understanding, not simply at the face value of what is being said. It's a culmination of everyone's conversation towards the end goal of an understanding of what's been read.

### **Sociocultural Perspectives and Literacy**

Sociocultural perspectives in literacy focus on a wide variety of ways in which people use literacy. Over the past few decades, literary response research has broadened its focus beyond the reader and the text to embrace the idea that texts, readers, contexts, and stances are all constructed within a sociocultural context (Iser, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1994). Building on this understanding, Galda and Beach (2001) state:

This implies that students learn to respond to literature as they acquire various social practices, identities, and tools not only through participation in interpretive communities

of practice, but also through experience in acquiring social practices and tools and in constructing identities within specific cultural worlds. (p. 66).

Tracey and Morrow (2012) credit Urie Bronfenbrenner as one of the earliest researchers to recognize the sociocultural perspective. Bronfenbrenner's use of Russian nesting dolls as a metaphor for sociocultural perspectives works for me. However, I'm not certain that I agree with his strict labeling of the four spheres (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem) and the level of authority each level of influence has on the child. While I understand that Bronfenbrenner saw the levels interacting with one another, I personally believe that throughout life, the different spheres of influence, as well as their impact on our thinking and learning, change frequently and are not so easily classified.

Gee (1999) views the "sociocultural perspective" as an outgrowth of linguistics, sociology, and anthropology. He described a "'social turn' away from individual behavior and individual minds toward a focus on social and cultural interaction" (p. 61). Additionally, Gee (2007, 2012) recognized Shirley Brice Heath's ethnographic work as having an impact on this movement. In her book *Ways with Words* (1983), Heath reported on the ways in which the children of three different North Carolina communities acquired and used language and literacy skills and the roles these skills played as the students grew to become members of their individual communities. The anthropological work of Brian Street also played a large role in bringing new ways of teaching and learning to the forefront. In his book *Literacy in Theory and in Practice* (1985), Street reports on his studies of the people of Iran and how he experienced them putting literacy to work in their lives. He identified two types of literacy practices: autonomous (individually acquired skills and knowledge) and ideological (practices with connections to culture and power). What Street first identified as ideological literacy, or literacy

as a social practice, later became known as the New Literacy Studies, which Lankshear and Knobel (2011) describe as “a new approach to thinking about literacy as a social phenomenon” (p. 27). Moving closer to an alignment with communities of practice, Davidson (2010) states that “one is obliged to consider how the thinking of a particular group of individuals has directed the children’s thinking, how the children understand who they are in relation to others and how they interpret the world” (p. 249).

### **Communities of Practice**

Communities of practice, inspired by both anthropology and social theory (Foucault, 1980; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978, 1987), fall within the domain of sociocultural perspectives and provide a way for one to study the social nature of human learning. Wenger (2010) notes that “it is a perspective that locates learning, not in the head or outside it, but in the relationship between the person and the world, which for human beings is a social person in a social world”(p. 1). While it is generally understood to be a social network of sorts, the concept of “community” in reference to literacy practice seems to connote a wide range of understandings (Behrman, 2002).

Wenger and Trayner (2015) describe communities of practice (CoP) as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (para. 3). In this study, I was curious to see if a community of practice evolved as the members of the book club interacted around a shared text.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), “Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor” (p. 92). The members of the community of practice share a passion or concern. There is a shared goal the



members would like to achieve, and they are willing to meet together regularly in order to achieve this goal. Additionally, those involved realize the power behind a group.

Lave and Wenger (1991) note that not all groups, clubs, or even communities can be considered a community of practice. In order to be a true community of practice, three specific elements must be in place:

- Domain – A domain is an identity that's created by a shared interest. Those who are members of the community must be truly committed to the domain. In this study, the domain is a love of reading.
- Community – Within their shared domain, members share information, conduct activities together, and are involved in discussions about their domain. Relationships form and the members learn from one another. There is a level of respect and understanding between members of the community of practice. In this study, the community is the students in the book club.
- Practice – A community of practice is not simply a shared interest group, and it is not something that can be forced. It develops over time, through sustained interaction. Over time, the members become practitioners with a shared purpose or goal. In this study, I feel that this aspect was the determining factor as to whether or not the book club would be considered a community of practice.

According to Lave & Wenger (1991), the goals for communities of practice include the following:

- providing a shared context for people to communicate and share information, stories, and personal experiences in a way that builds understanding and insight;

- enabling dialogue between people who come together to explore new possibilities and solve challenging problems;
- stimulating learning by serving as a vehicle for authentic communication, communication and self-reflection;
- introducing collaborative processes to students;
- helping students organize around purposeful actions with a goal of tangible results; and
- bringing about or revealing new knowledge to help students better understand specific social issues.

Communities of practice are, by their nature, unique. However, all communities strive to make decisions that are driven by purpose; thus, identifying the group's purpose is of paramount importance. Successful communities have focused and well-defined goals (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In a study combining social learning theory with communities of practice, Kooy (2006) reported that members of her book club for teachers "repeatedly confirmed that their learning in the book club was changed, stimulated, and provoked" (p. 673). While I allowed students to create their own purpose statement for the group, purposes for communities of practice usually involved building relationships around a shared goal, gaining knowledge, and carrying out tasks or projects centered on goals. Rogoff (1990) writes, "Children's cognitive development is an apprenticeship—it occurs through guided participation in social activity with companions who support and stretch children's understanding of and skill in using the tools of the culture" (p. vii).

Additionally, Wenger (1998) advises that communities of practice should use the group (the community of practice) as a catalyst for change. Members of the CoP should co-create a

group culture and identify as belonging within the group and as a part of the culture that the group creates.

### **Technology and Communities of Practice**

We are all aware of the increasingly important role that digital tools play in our everyday lives. This is true in the field of education as well. Gee (2010) asserts that “digital tools are changing the balance of spectatorship and participation” (p. 15). As a current classroom teacher, I see the truth in this statement almost daily. It’s the child who has nothing to say in class, yet posts the most insightful response to our reading on the class blog. It’s the child who doesn’t care for my explanations, preferring instead to look up information on her iPad and share it with the entire class. As frustrating as these examples can be at times, I’ve found that simply embracing this new normal opens up a wide range of learning possibilities.

Along these same lines, access to technology also invites changes to typical communities of practice. Gee (2010) notes that “digital tools are changing the nature of groups, social formations, and power” (p. 15). Access to technology is equivalent to power. Technology enables the user access to information not previously available which in turn disrupts the balance of power or status of the group. (Gee, 2010).

### **Value Creation in Communities of Practice**

Value creation should not be confused with evaluation. Within a community of practice, the story is in a continual state of revision. Some facets of value can be measured quantitatively, including how many times participant attended the meetings, how often they responded within Subtext, or even how many times they contributed to the conversation within each meeting. However, other aspects, including confidence, willingness to change, and knowledge capital, are more difficult to assess.

Analyzing value creation is one way in which researchers may determine the accomplishments or even success of a community of practice. Wenger, Trayner, & deLatt (2011) explain:

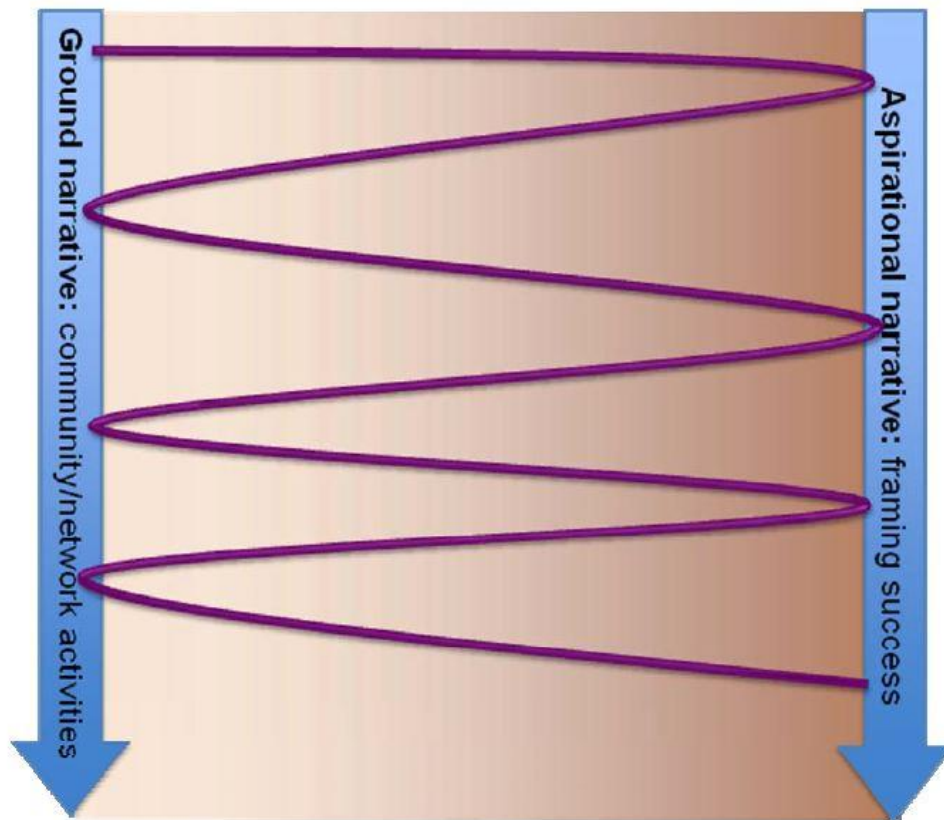
Value creation focuses on the value that communities create when they are used for social learning activities such as sharing information, tips and documents, learning from each other's experience, helping each other with challenges, creating knowledge together, keeping up with the field, stimulating change, and offering new types of professional development opportunities. (p. 7.

Wenger, Trayner, and deLaat (2011) developed a detailed framework to assess value creation within a community of practice. In addition to quantitative data, Wenger et al. suggest that individual and collective narratives should also be used to measure value creation within a community of practice. The group identified two distinct types of narrative. The first, ground narratives, are those stories that represent what happens within the day-to-day life of the community. In most cases, ground narratives represent observable data, such as attendance, participation, enjoyment, and levels of engagement. The second type of narrative is aspirational narratives. Aspirational narratives are less concrete, and as the name implies, they represent the aspirations of the community members. This includes what the group wants to accomplish, how group members define their community, and what they think their group is or should be. In this research, my aspirational narrative information was pulled from individually completed surveys, video confessionals, and conversations.

Wenger et al. (2011) suggest that “the tension between these two narratives creates a space for learning and for deciding what is worth learning” (p.17). They suggest that this

framework includes five cycles that carry a community of practice back and forth between grounded and the aspirational narratives:

- Cycle 1: Immediate Value- Activities and Interactions- Participation and enjoyment
- Cycle 2: Potential Value- Knowledge Capital- What is being produced
- Cycle 3: Applied Value- Changes in Practice- New ways of doing things
- Cycle 4: Realized Value- Performance Improvement- Change in the community's performance
- Cycle 5: Reframing Value- Redefining Success- What participants might change if they were to do this again.



*Figure 2.1.* The tension between ground and aspirational narratives.

## **Spaces of Influence**

Spaces of Influence, an alternative to the Value Creation Matrix, offers a less structured approach to determining an individual's contribution within a community of practice (Green, 2005). Green (2005) writes, "The term spaces of influence can be taken to mean opportunities in which the influence of an 'influential other' enables learning in ways anew" (p. 295). In this framework, one looks specifically at the 'influential other' and builds upon the scaffolding work of Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976). Green's Spaces of Influence model also utilizes narratives as vehicles for understanding, with a focus on five specific areas of influence in which an 'influential other' might contribute within a community of practice:

- spaces of action, in which learners make decisions about their learning;
- spaces of explicit discourse, in which learners engage in conversations about their learning;
- spaces of learning, in which learners engage with content important to their learning;
- spaces of practice development, where learners can practice or refine their skills in a hands-on manner; and
- spaces of trust, where learners feel comfortable enough to take risks in order to continue learning or master a skill (p. 300).

After comparing the two models, Value Creation Matrix and Spaces of Influence, I decided to incorporate the value creation matrix as part of my data analysis. This decision was based upon the more robust levels of value description and the in-depth reporting provided as part of the Value Creation Matrix.

### **New Literacy Studies**

New Literacy Studies (capital letters) refers to “a particular sociocultural approach to understanding and researching literacy” (Lankshear & Knobel 2011, p. 27). This approach places itself in direct opposition to traditional literacy instruction, and as such, requires a paradigm shift that included an abandonment of the direct instruction deemed necessary to overcome the “literacy crisis.” Street states,

What has come to be termed the “New Literacy Studies” (NLS) (Gee 1990/1996/2007; Street, 1995) represents a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on acquisition of skills, as in dominant approaches, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice (Street, 1985). This entails the recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power...and asking “whose literacies” are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant. (Street, 2005 p. 77).

This approach takes literacy from something that was mainly a function occurring inside our heads and brings it out into the world. As Gee (2010) explains, “Literacy was a social and cultural achievement—it was about ways of participating in social and cultural groups—not just a mental achievement” (p. 2).

Thus, New Literacy Studies represents a shift in perspective on the study and acquisition of literacy, from the traditional cognitive model to a broader understanding of literacy practices in their social and cultural contexts (Gee, 1996; Street, 1993). As teachers embrace this shift, new understandings of what constitutes literacy will continue to emerge. Teachers must come to recognize “the constellations of practices that constitute ‘literacy’ in a new social, digital, and participatory culture” (McWilliams et al., 2011, p. 1).

Based upon this understanding of what the New Literacy Studies encompass, I will now focus on a few of the foundational elements of this area of scholarship, with a particular focus on how each element has a connection within this research study.

### **Global and Local**

New Literacy Studies acknowledge the ease with which we can all become globally connected through technologies: “As educators link their students and their classrooms - transnationally—helping students to engage with wider audiences and deepen their knowledge of the world—they reflect a growing educational effort to prepare young people to negotiate globalized responsibilities and relationships” (Sotrnaulolo & LeBlanc, 2014, p. 192). Today’s classrooms often have social networking platforms, video conferencing capabilities through Skype or Google Hangouts, and translation tools that facilitate multilingual writing or publishing. Putting these tools to use is important if we plan to help students become “global citizens.”

The books that participants will be reading as a part of this study were chosen based on their ability to assist the readers in looking beyond their own lives and stepping into “another world.” Through the use of technology, I hope that participants will reach out to learn more about the text.

### **Social Practice**

Within the realm of New Literacy Studies, literacy is considered to be a situated social practice. This designation came on the heels of studies by Heath (1983), Street (1985), and Graff (1979), each of whom has provided sufficient data to dispel the “Great Divide” myth, a split between the oral and written literacy traditions. When viewed through a lens of social practice, reading and writing appear to be a related, integral part of classroom life, supported by lively



discussion, and shared power (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 1999; Heath, 1983). In a 2011 interview, Coiro and Kajder provided a “real world” example of social practice in action, discussing the use of student-created podcasts within her classroom:

“These were sixth graders, but they had some fairly sophisticated ideas and responses to the texts we were reading, and they had feedback that started coming in from other authors, other teachers, and folks who were using their podcasts as learning tools in their own work” (p. 152).

Having students read together, intelligently discuss their reading, and then work as a team to create a podcast that others could not only listen to, but also use for instructional purposes, is a beautiful example of the social practice of literacy at work in a classroom.

Within this study, the students participated in three different social venues, the Subtext asynchronous annotations, and the face-to face weekly book club meetings. I feel that each will prove to be powerful, yet different, examples of lively discussion and shared power.

## **Discourses**

Gee (2007) views literacy as “a way of being together in the world” (p. xx) According to him, mere words are not the only way in which we can communicate who we are to others. Being a part of a Discourse is how we communicate something about ourselves to others. In what Gee (2007, 2012) refers to as big D Discourse. Within Discourse, we are “with our people” a part of a larger group with similar ideas. This aligns with my study and its focus on communities of practice, or “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 1998, p. 45). The participants were all avid readers who were more than willing to meet outside of regular class time to discuss and share information about their reading.

## Identity

In his earlier book, *Sociolinguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* (1996), Gee describes the big D Discourses mentioned in the previous section as our “identity kits” (p. 142). He explains that each kit “comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize” (p. 142). For me, that may be a group of teachers with similar beliefs, my family, or a group of other doctoral students. For students, it could be a book club, individuals with common social concerns, or members of their class. How we situate ourselves, what groups we identify with, and the Discourses of which we are a part work to give us our identity. As Gee (2007) states, “Discourses are not units or tight boxes with neat boundaries. Rather they are ways of recognizing and getting recognized as certain sorts of whos doing certain sorts of whats” (. 153).

These identity kits are powerful and can function both positively and negatively in the lives of students. The participants in this study self-identified as “avid readers,” so I naturally expected certain behaviors of the group well before the study began. However, those who struggle with reading also self-identify and are identified by others in ways that can often define them for years to come. Alvermann (2001) experienced just such an identity issue during a case study involving a struggling 9<sup>th</sup> grade reader named Grady. In her study, Alvermann questioned whether or not her knowledge of Grady’s performance had any influence on her expectations of how he would perform in the study.

## Power

Viewing in-school or out-of-school literacy as social (Street, 1995) implies that when one engages with literacy, it’s social from the very beginning. In schools, teachers and students represent a social system. The idea of power and position of power comes into play as one views

the level of any social interaction among group members. The level of power can vary based on the amount of time or history one has with the group or the amount of background knowledge one has to share with the group (Pahl & Roswell, 2012). During her study of seven preadolescent girls identified as “struggling readers,” Graff (2010) witnessed this acquisition of power. Over the course of eight months of afterschool and summer sessions, the girls were given the opportunity to self-select books of interest, which were then purchased through funds provided by a local library grant. By the end of the eight months, Graff noted that “the books became platforms upon which the girls could discuss their concerns surrounding peer acceptance and race relations” (p.183). The books provided a level playing field, and the group became a means for Discourse through which they could all connect.

### **new literacies**

When Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel write about new literacies, they do so with a lowercase letter at the beginning of each word. In their book, *New Literacies: Everyday Practices and Social Learning* (2011), the researchers explain their understanding of literacies as “socially recognized ways in which people generate, communicate, and negotiate meanings, as members of Discourses through the medium of encoded texts” (p. 46). Based upon this understanding, web pages, vlogs, blogs, a textbook, and even cave drawings are all literacies. A tribal dance, a weekly poetry slam, and possibly even a string of computer code would also be considered literacies. In describing the difference in meaning when the word “new” is placed in front of the word “literacies,” Lankshear and Knobel (2014) explain that research in the area of new literacies “focuses on ways in which meaning-making practices are evolving under contemporary conditions that include, but are in no way limited to, technological changes associated with the rise and proliferation of digital electronics” (p. 97). They make a distinction between

conventional literacies and new literacies, not simply based upon the technological implications, but possibly more importantly, based upon what they call the “ethos” of new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). In short, while many seem to focus on the technical side of new literacies—all things digitally encoded that are used for communicating and negotiating meaning—Lankshear and Knobel also focus on the literacies that differ from mainstream literacy or school-based literacies. What they identify as the “new ethos stuff” or what Gee (2004) describes as “affinity spaces”

Gee (2004) views affinity spaces as places, both physical and virtual, that encourage participation, value collaboration, enable dispersion of knowledge and expertise, and build community surrounding a shared interest. This description aligns beautifully with communities of practice and fits nicely under the big umbrella of sociocultural theory.

What Gee, Lankshear, and Knobel have all realized is that it’s not the “stuff” that we need to be studying, because the “stuff”—those digital amazements—are changing too rapidly to even bother to study. What’s more important is how we, as a people change, embrace and utilize the “stuff” to communicate and learn. Again, I believe that communities of practice may also serve as affinity spaces that move beyond “digital amazements” to simply utilizing those “amazements,” just as we moved beyond fountain pens and mimeograph machines. It was always about the word and never truly about the mode of delivery.

Finally, as a way of further clarifying this confusion of term, Lankshear and Knobel (2011) state that “new literacies (lowercase) in the way we understand and describe them can really only be researched effectively from a sociocultural perspective, of which New Literacy Studies is an example” (p. 28). Once again, this presents a beautiful fit for this study.

### **New Literacies**

I include New Literacies (upper case) in this writing because much of what occurred within Subtext relied heavily on the internet and other Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). Those aligned with the tenets of New Literacies appear to be, at times, in direct conflict with the sociocultural-driven perspective of new literacies (Gee 2007, 2012; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011), which views literacy as a social practice. Operating from a psycholinguistic stance, those adhering to the views of New Literacies (capitalized) are most often concerned with the Internet and emerging ICTs, with a focus on how these technologies are being integrated into classrooms with the goal of preparing students for the future they will inherit (Leu et al., 2011). This area of study has been dominated in large part by University of Connecticut professor Don Leu and his former student Julie Coiro. New Literacies takes the view that internet resources are critical for teachers and their ability to create experiences that guide learning. They propose that understanding and utilizing the resources available through the internet will allow teachers to present full, rich, and more complex learning opportunities (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004).

Leu and his team at the University of Connecticut New Literacies Research lab have developed the following list of central principles they associate with the New Literacies:

- The internet is this generation's defining technology for literacy and learning within our global community.
- The internet and related technologies require additional new literacies to fully access their potential.
- New literacies are deictic.
- New literacies are multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted.

- Critical literacies are central to new literacies.
- New forms of strategic knowledge are required with new literacies.
- New social practices are a central element of New Literacies.
- Teachers become more important, though their role changes, within new literacy classrooms. (Leu et al., 2013, p. 1158)

I must admit to feeling as if the inclusion of social practices seems to be a confusing addition to a list that seems unevenly balanced in favor of the internet, almost to the point of excluding other forms of literacy and modes of communication. If new literacies are “deictic in nature” (Leu et al. 2011), in a constant state of change, it seems important that we include the cultural practices as an equal partner, as advocated by new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011), along with the concept of shared Discourses put forth by Gee (2007, 2012). What better way to grow with and adapt to these rapid changes than with the support of others who share your ideals and goals?

In stark contrast to the claims of New Literacies, in his 2008 book, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes our Future*, Mark Bauerian, a professor at Emory University, argues that rather than preparing today’s youth for the future they will inherit, technology is actually hindering their future possibilities. His stance is not based on opinion, but rather on research. Based upon his studies and those of others, Bauerian states, “Instead of opening young American minds to the stores of civilization, and science and politics, technology has contracted their horizon to themselves, to the social scene around them” (p. 10).

### **Book Clubs**

I first became interested in the idea of doing research surrounding book clubs when I read Alvermann, Young, Green, and Wisenbaker's (1999) "Adolescents' Perceptions and Negotiations of Literacy Practices in After-School Read and Talk Clubs." The article served as a gentle nudge, giving me permission to go in research directions that truly interested me—avid readers, choosing to read more, wanting to discuss what they read, all on their own time. The researchers in that study focused on the communal activity and notion of peer culture. Additionally, the group centered on what Gee (1996) labeled the identity toolkit mentioned earlier in this chapter and the ways in which the avid readers in this group viewed themselves. These toolkits are part of with what Gee refers to as big D Discourse. When we are part of a Discourse, we are "with our people," part of a larger group with similar ideas. Gee further explains that each kit "comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize" (p. 142). The study had many interesting findings, including the fact that the participants enjoyed having time to discuss books, appreciated the library as a space of acceptance, and respected the fact that the discussions did not resemble school-based discussions.

While not taking place away from school, my study allowed avid readers to escape the confines of the lunchroom to discuss their reading. Taking advantage of new technologies, online book clubs represent the next generation. Stover, Yearta, and Harris (2016) note that "continuously evolving technologies require an expanded redefinition of literacy to include ways of generating, communicating, and negotiating meaning through texts in online social contexts" (p. 6). This not only aligns with the tenets of New Literacies Studies, but also aligns with sociocultural perspectives and elements of communities of practice.

After studying online book clubs for two summers, Scharber found these clubs to be “fun, engaging, and convenient” (p. 433). Student approval ratings were high, and parents reported that they loved the flexibility of the clubs. Scharber notes that “these internet-based clubs capitalize on kids’ interest in new literacy practices, while complementing, and hopefully encouraging, traditional reading practices” (p. 436).

### **Online or Virtual Book Clubs**

As the name implies, online book clubs take place online and do not meet face-to-face. It should be noted that online book clubs do not necessarily require the reading of the books online in an e-book format. In an online book club, it’s the discussions surrounding the book that take place online. Online book club “discussions” could occur within a blog, via email, within a wikispace, or even in something as simple as a shared Google Doc. Online or virtual book clubs may meet at specified times online or operate on a “come when you can” asynchronous basis.

In a study pairing university students with middle school students, Carico and Logan (2004) noted student enthusiasm for reading and discussion when using online chats about literature. Their study reports that some of the participants missed the face-to-face feedback, yet the majority reported a sense of “freedom from not being burdened by the fact of having to look at a bunch of other people while you are expressing your thoughts” (p. 296).

### **e-books**

While I do believe that traditional printed books offer the reader an opportunity for a focused, uninterrupted reading experience, a chance to get lost in the story and to allow one’s imagination to work through the process of understanding, there’s something to be said for the ability to click out, grab a definition, view a photo of the book’s setting, or become more up-to-date on a specific event or time period. In discussing the differences between printed book



experiences and e-book reading, Johnson (2009) notes, “When you sit down with an old-fashioned book in your hand, the medium works naturally against distractions; it compels you to follow the thread, to stay engaged with a single narrative or argument” (p. xx). However, Johnson views today’s interactive reading as a positive, a place where “every isolated paragraph serves as the launching pad for a conversation with strangers around the world” (p. 3).

### **Social Annotation**

The art of marginalia, more commonly known as annotation, is a time honored practice. I still own books that I annotated in middle school, high school, and college, and I enjoy going back to take a peek at my young adult thoughts. Types of annotation or marginalia include chapter summaries, questions to self, favorite words or passages, highlights, notes to assist with understanding, or ideas for later discussions.

In contrast to print annotation, or standard individual annotation of a digital source, social annotation (SA) enables readers to communicate in real time around a common digital text, adding comments, posing questions, answering the questions of others, and ultimately building a shared understanding and appreciation of a work. Grisham and Wolsey (2006) describe these asynchronous communications as “interactive, like discussion, but thoughtful, like written discourse” (p. 652).

In a study conducted with 32 college students, Reid (2014) first ensured that students were comfortable with online, standard annotation of an electronic source by teaching them to annotate weekly PDF articles for class. He then created a control group that continued to function in this same manner—a study group that was able to read, but not actively respond to, the annotations of others—and a final group that had the full privileges of a social annotation tool. Reid found that the group that fully utilized the social annotation tool scored significantly

higher than the other two groups on comprehension tests, while experiencing less stress and mental effort as they read.

The intended use of technology in my research was to communicate, specifically through online or social annotation, allowing participants to share their knowledge and ideas in order to learn from each other. Guzdial and Turns (2000) recognize that open-ended discussion forums often become catalysts for change, especially when the software is used by students to start new ideas for their learning or contribute to collaborative ideas.

At first glance, the effectiveness of such actions would of course depend upon the students participating. Staarman (2003) states that “in a sense, the nature of computer-mediated interaction might not be very different than that of face-to-face interaction” (p. 74). Staarman found there to be quite a few differences between the contributions of elementary students working as a group and responding online and those who responded individually. As Beach (2012) states, “Through collaboratively sharing knowledge, students also recognize the value and importance of adopting different perspectives” (p. 448).

Additionally, it should be noted that for many readers, online annotation provides a “safe place” for expression. Barack (2011) reports that online student conversations surrounding texts tend to be less forced and more natural. Multiple empirical research studies report that online literature responses are beneficial for students who are timid, reluctant to participate, or marginalized by others in class or within society as a whole (Johnson, 2000; Sandmann & Gruler, 2007; Thomas, 2014).

### **Face-to Face Discussions and the Power of Dialogue**

Reading and writing float on a sea of talk.

-- Britton, 1983

With the continued focus on test scores, it seems to me, as a classroom teacher that time for discussion of any type is quickly eroding. In her classic book *In the Middle* (1987), Nancy Atwell discusses her desire to somehow have “dinner table conversations” about literature in her classroom. I love that imagery. Even back in 1987, my first year in the classroom, I too craved that type of connection with my students.

In classrooms, we seem to be required to teach more, to more students, in less time. However, as Nystrad (2006) found, “there are strong effects on student learning for the overall dialogic quality of discourse, as measured by time devoted to discussion” (p. 10). Thus carving out space in the day for discussion has been empirically shown to be worth the time.

Discussion is a critical component in the comprehension of any text being read by students (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Nystrad, 2006). In their book *Grand Conversations: Literature Groups in Action* (2007), Peterson and Eeds explain that classroom discussions about literature are much more than they appear to be on the surface: “More than an exchange of information and sharing of ideas, dialogue requires personal investment” (p. 15). In a true dialogue, all involved parties need one another. There’s an unspoken collaboration that brings forth a wide variety of ideas, concerns, and understanding. Luke and Freebody (1999) found that the shift from a child’s simple reception of information while reading to a more involved construction of ideas surrounding a text is brought forth when readers interact with one another and share their ideas about what they have read. Dialogue is scaffolding in its truest sense. It supports and adds structure to understanding. If we want students to do more than simply decode text on the

page, Sipe (2008) reminds us that the experience of talking about and interpreting stories must be viewed as an integral part of reading instruction. When students are given the freedom and time to socially construct meaning, the gaps in understanding aren't left unfilled (Iser, 1980). Thus, through meaningful discussion, a group of learners may collaboratively bring forth understanding to fill the gaps and possibly (hopefully) increase comprehension.

As a participant observer and not an active member in the book club at the core of this research, I was forced to take a back seat and release my role of information provider, which gave space and time for the students to engage in a joint construction of understanding.

In *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (2015), MIT professor Sherry Turkle wrote the following:

Face-to-face conversation is the most human—and humanizing—thing we do. Fully present to one another, we learn to listen. It's where we develop the capacity for empathy. It's where we experience the joy of being heard, of being understood. And conversation advances self-reflection, the conversations with ourselves are the cornerstone of early development and continue throughout life.” (p. 3)

### **Summary**

By providing a concise yet comprehensive review of sociocultural perspectives, Co-construction of knowledge, communities of practice, New Literacy Studies, New Literacies, new literacies, book clubs, e-books, annotation, and face-to-face discussion, this chapter provided the context for my research. Reflecting back on each of the elements, I was able to see a nesting of sorts, with each element fitting in nicely within the previous. A common “sociocultural thread” is woven through this research.

In the next chapter, I introduce the methodology behind my study. This includes information on the pilot study that informed this research, my choice of case study as a methodology, and the context of my study. The chapter ends with a description of my data collection and data analysis techniques.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Through a sociocultural lens, with a specific interest in communities of practice, this research documented the collaborative social practices associated with a lunchtime book club's reading and annotation of an e-book. The research also documented the club's weekly face-to-face meetings. Specifically, I wanted to know whether the club's activities served to support the development of a community of practice.

While not the main focus, new literacies also informed the study with an emphasis not on the technology itself, but on the ways in which the participants used technology to make sense of their reading and enhance their explorations beyond the book. Within new literacies, the act of reading is viewed as more than just a change in how the text is accessed—the printed page versus a digital screen—but more importantly, what affordances accompany this shift (Lankshear & Knobel 2011).

My study was guided by the following research question:

How might collaborative e-book reading experiences, along with subsequent face-to-face conversations, support the development of a community of practice amongst skilled upper-elementary readers?

#### **Answering the Question**

Works such as this are filled with an abundance of facts, explanations, and examples. Yet, without a clear connection to the research question, the information has no purpose, no relevance, no grounding. No matter the length or depth of a dissertation, if in the end there's no clear alignment or tracing back to the research question, the work is incomplete.

Thus, it is within this chapter that I map out what I planned to do and why I found each choice to be of importance within my research. In the chapters that follow, I share what actually happened as a result of my plans and reflect upon the experience.

## **Research Design**

### **Pilot Study**

This study was partially informed by a pilot study conducted in 2015. In this small study, I sought to learn more about student use of the tools and affordances within e-book readers. In my initial interviews with the participants, I discovered that they were all familiar with the e-book format. As a matter of fact, soon after beginning their reading of *One Crazy Summer* by Rita Williams Garcia within the Kindle app on their iPads, it became obvious that the use of the e-book tools and affordances was not considered novel, or of interest to my participants. Instead, the participants saw the use of these tools as commonplace. They'd been messaging, highlighting, saving notes, sending great snippets to friends, and searching for definitions since they'd been old enough to use a computer. What I had seen as interesting and research worthy was considered to be simply an ordinary part of their day-to-day lives. During interviews the participants were curious as to why I wanted to talk to them about this. I was only a few weeks into the study when I shared my predicament with a fellow doctoral student. She laughed and then told me that my study had been hijacked. There was no study; there was no phenomenon.

From my pilot study I learned an important lesson—it is important for a researcher to step away from her own preconceived perceptions and expectations. Thus, with the pilot study fresh in my memory, I began to design this study. I began by taking into account elements that the students were already familiar with (i.e., highlighting, Google, messaging) and decided not to include them as a part of the phenomena to be studied. There wasn't a need for me to study my

participants' already existing levels of interaction with digital tools; that familiarity with the interface is assumed. My pilot study provided valuable information surrounding the participants' attitudes and perceptions towards e-book readers, and it was that information that led me to this study.

### **Case Study**

Strauss and Corbin (1990) define qualitative research as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p. 17). Qualitative research seeks to understand or provide insight into the focus of a study.

Case study is one of many different qualitative research models. Merriam (1998) explains case study as a means by which to “describe the nature of a belief, attitude, event, or behavior” (p. 68). Due to the fact that I was seeking to understand a phenomenon in its actual context, using a wide variety of methods to produce my data with no desired or measurable outcome, I found case study to be a good match for this research.

The fact that case study embraces the use of a wide variety of data sources gave me confidence that I would be able to generate rich descriptions of the experience. I wanted to detail the happenings through multiple areas of focus, including individual participant's viewpoints as well as my own observations. Through my case study, I sought to explore how collaborative e-book reading experiences and their subsequent face-to-face conversations might work together to build a community of practice.

One hallmark of a case study is a bounded, integrated system in which a phenomena or entity (the case) is studied (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). In this study, the book club itself was the bounded entity, and the possibility of a community of practice forming was the



phenomenon or entity to be studied. Thus, according to Stake (2000), this would be considered an instrumental case study, one that seeks to understand something beyond the actual case itself. At its core, this instrumental case study sought to examine a lunchtime book club to provide insight and facilitate the understanding of communities of practice.

With its wide variety of options, case study is more analogous to a menu of design and implementation choices intended to assist researchers in crafting studies that “facilitate the examination of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). Merriam (1998) uses three words to describe case study: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. It is particularistic due to the specific situation or phenomenon under study. The fact that case study data brings forth a rich, thick, deep understanding of the phenomenon makes it descriptive. Case study is heuristic because it provides enough descriptive information about an experience to enable readers to come to an understanding of the phenomenon on their own. In discussing the affordance of the underlying narrative structure of case study reporting, Stake (2000) addresses the obligation of the author to provide a rich, almost vicarious experience for the reader:

Our accounts need to be personal, describing the things of our sensory experiences, not failing to attend to the matters that personal curiosity dictates. A narrative account, a story, a chronological presentation, personalistic description, emphasis on time and place provide rich ingredients for vicarious experience. (p. 86)

Adhering to the tenets set forth by Stake, I worked to provide a rich, thick and descriptive narrative gleaned from the wide variety of data gathered. I have not simply “reported” my findings, but rather have woven a story that works to pull the reader into the research.

## **Securing the Site**

This study took place in an elementary school that sits in the shadow of a major research institute in the Southeastern United States. The county in which the school is located has a population of 34,035. The median income in the county would be considered high at \$77,569 when compared to the state median of \$50,861. Serving 6,686 students, the county's school system includes one primary school, five elementary schools, one middle school, two high schools, and an Alternative Education Program (6th-12th). The schools have a 1:21 teacher-student ratio in K-3, 1:25 ratio in 4-5, and 1:26 ratio in 6-12. Of the 412 teachers in the system, 25 are National Board Certified Teachers, and 100% are ranked as highly qualified. There are 225 teachers and administrators with master's degrees, 159 with specialist degrees, and 23 with doctorate degrees. The teacher retention rate is high at 92%. Surprisingly, at \$8,290.89, the per pupil expenditure is the 2nd lowest in the 13 surrounding districts and below the state per pupil expenditure of \$8,593.97. A 2012 Census Bureau report indicates that this system has the 2nd lowest percentage of poverty among five to seventeen year olds in the state. The student population is not highly diverse.

Enrollment at the school for the 2015- 2016 school year is 572 students, with the student body makeup as follows: 79% white, 11% Asian, 4% Multiracial, 3% African American, and 3% Hispanic. The percentage of children receiving free or reduced lunches is 12%. The gifted education program serves 18.5 % of the school's student population.

The school provides a SmartBoard and 4 computers in each classroom. There is one computer lab, as well as 10 Chrome-book carts (30 devices on each cart), an iPad cart (25 devices) for checkout, and 15 iPads for use in the media center. Additionally, thanks to

fundraising on the part of students and parents, the classroom in which this research took place has a 1:1 iPad ratio and an iMac used for audio recording and video production.

**Site selection rationale.** As a full time teacher and doctoral student, site selection was not difficult for me. I needed to do my research within the school where I taught. It was not feasible financially or professionally for me to take off time to do this research at another site.

Additionally, as you will read later in this chapter, I wanted to learn more about the possibility of communities of practice in an elementary setting, an age group that has been given little attention in communities of practice studies.

### **Book Club Setting**

This story unfolded during the spring semester of 2016, between March 14 and May 18th. The book club meetings took place in my classroom during lunch. On meeting days, the teachers agreed to allow participants to come to my classroom at the start of the first 4th grade lunch period and not leave until the end of the final lunch period. Thus, our meetings usually lasted between 40 and 50 minutes, beginning around 11:50 and ending between 12:30 and 12:40.

My classroom (Figure 3.1), the meeting place for the book club, would be considered atypical by most standards. The room actually resembles a coffee shop more than an actual classroom. It is completely void of desks and plastic student chairs. In their place are multiple sofas, overstuffed chairs, pillows, and beanbags. The overhead fluorescent lights are not used; replaced instead by floor lamps, twinkling string lights, and natural light. The shelves lining each wall are overflowing with books and magazines. Classical music plays softly in the background. The walls are painted a soft orange, and the floors are covered with colorful rugs. It's a place where I like to spend my day and students feel relaxed. Most importantly, it's a spot where we all

feel comfortable, a respite from the rest of the world.



*Figure 3.1.* The research site.

**Setting rationale.** Rather than taking students out of a setting they were already familiar with, it made sense to have the book club meetings in my classroom. This would avoid the need to spend time getting comfortable and settling into new surroundings. In my classroom, we could utilize our limited amount of time to its best advantage.

Additionally, the school really had no other alternatives to offer as meeting spaces. If there were other options, the students would have possibly been confused as to where they were to go. During the first few meetings, we would likely have ended up losing time while waiting for everyone to “find us.”

Another reason for using my classroom was the fact that after lunch, I taught my 4th grade block, which included the students participating in the study. Not having to transition meant that we could have a few more minutes for each meeting.

## **Participants**

Before this study could begin, an approved Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was required. The primary purpose of the IRB is to protect the rights and welfare of human research participants. The University of Georgia IRB committee reviewed and approved my application for this research project in December of 2015 (Appendix C).

I wanted this research to be meaningful to others in the world of academia, as well as provide a sense of purpose and information for me both personally and professionally. The fact that there is a paucity of research in the area of communities of practice with a focus on elementary-aged students was also appealing to me. Most communities of practice research to date has focused on the areas of business, nursing, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Course), secondary educational settings, and post-secondary education. The few that I did find that took place in an elementary setting situated the emergence of a community of practice as secondary to their initial focus (Gholson & Martin, 2014; Beineke, 2013).

**Participant selection.** There was no screening or prerequisite skill required for students to become a part of this research. I chose 4th grade students as my participants because the age range, 9-10 years old, intrigues me. They are not quite as “full of themselves” as 5th graders sometimes tend to be, and in my experience, still quite excited about school and learning. It’s the cusp of adolescence when sincere conversations can still be had and large bits of honesty and wonder remain. It’s also the age that I happened to be teaching during the year I was preparing and conducting this research. During the 2015-2016 school year, I taught two large blocks (2

hours each) of advanced content reading/writing and social studies. One was a group of 5th grade students, and the other was a group of 4th grade students. While the students in these classes were advanced, scoring at 95% and above on MAP tests (Measures of Academic Progress), not all were served within the school's gifted program.

Letters of interest went home to all of the parents of the twenty students in my fourth grade advanced content reading/writing/social studies block. Eleven families expressed interest in the study. However, in the end, only nine students agreed to participate.

### **Participant Biographies**

At the start of the study, I already knew and had relationships with the book club members. I had known four of the participants for over four years, since their entry into the school. I had only met the remaining five participants during the current school year (2015-2016).

This was a group of passionate readers with curiosities and opinions that they were not afraid to voice. While there were similarities in terms of age and academic achievement, that's actually where the similarities end. As you read through the chapters that follow, you will become keenly aware of the ways in which each student's unique personality contributed to the success of the club in different, but equally important, ways.

On the next few pages, I have provided brief biographies of the nine participants (4 boys and 5 girls) that took part in this study. Two of the original eleven changed their minds prior to the start of the book club meetings. To protect their identities, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant.

**Allie.** Allie exudes confidence, yet not in a way that's off-putting. Everyone enjoys her. Every teacher that has taught her in our school still asks about her. Allie has been at the school since kindergarten yet only entered the gifted program last year. She often exhibits signs of a teacher pleaser and at times I feel as if she's treading water just trying to stay afloat. Her sunny attitude sometimes masks her struggle. However, she's always been able to ask for help or stay after class for clarification on something she hasn't quite grasped.

In the Google Form questionnaire she filled out during the first few days of research, Allie shared that while she had been in a book club before stating, "I loved the books we read and I loved having discussion about the books". Her reason for joining the study was that she loved to read and that she usually read for about 40 minutes each day. Additionally, she shared that she preferred e-books over printed because of their tools.

Allie is slender and tall for her age. She is white with an olive complexion and big brown eyes. She is a member of both a tennis team and a swim team. Additionally, she takes riding lessons on the weekends. Allie, Missy, Madison, and Matilda are close friends. The students often get together outside of school as well.

Allie has her own iPad that she brings to school each day, and when there's downtime, she chooses to read. Additionally, she likes to talk with me about books or get me to recommend books for her. During the last few months, however, the tables have turned a bit, and she's been coming to me with book suggestions.

Allie's parents would be considered to be upper middle class professionals. Her mother, a real estate agent also finds time to stay involved at the school. On more than one occasion, Allie's mom has shared that she expects her children to fend for themselves when it comes to

school work. Thus, she is not one to coddle or hover over her children. I have only briefly met Allie's father. He works for a public relations firm.

**George.** George is a white child from an upper middle class family. George has two moms. He has no problem sharing or explaining his family dynamics. Both parents are involved in his education. The family travels extensively and George has learned much during their travels. One of his moms is a computer programmer and the other is a licensed psychiatrist, but currently works in computer programming within the entertainment industry. The entire family is into gaming. Additionally they not only attend but also cosplay at Dragoncon and Comi-Con each year.

In the first Google Forms questionnaire of the study George shared that he had never actually read an e-book. He had participated in a book club prior to this experience stating, "I liked it, however some people didn't read their books so we had to pull them along". He joined this group because he liked reading and that he tried to get in at least 3 hours of reading a day. Additionally he shared that he preferred print over e-books because, "they give me a cool feeling".

George did not enter the gifted program until he was in third grade. He has a sister in middle school that I also taught. Not only is she gifted, but she has a bubbly, outgoing personality that no one can seem to resist. George, on the other hand, is quiet and takes time to think before he speaks. He chooses his words wisely and when he's ready to say something, we all stop and listen. He may not say much, but what he does say is usually well worth the time it takes to stop and listen.

George is into Comic-Con and film production. His parents recently donated a Mac to our classroom and he's enjoyed teaching everyone about the great audio recording capabilities



available. Additionally, he has helped us all master the full version of iMovie which has many more capabilities than the iPad version we've been using in class.

At times George can be a bit of a loner. However when it's time for group work or projects he's always one of the first students chosen for a team. George is a voracious reader. He's always trying to see what I'm reading and isn't shy about asking for a book recommendation. His closest friend did not participate in the research. However, even without a friend in the book club, he really seemed to open up, speaking both freely and often.

**Jeffery.** One of the brightest students I've ever met, Jeffery is also well liked by his peers. He is what one would describe as a typical gifted learner. He tested into the gifted program in kindergarten and has one of the highest IQs in the school. His father is a professor and his mother is a professional photographer that also finds time to volunteer a great deal at our school. Jeffery has a younger sister who is in the gifted program as well. Jeffery's family would be considered a white upper middle class family. His family has traveled extensively.

In his first Google Forms questionnaire Jeffery shared that he had participated in other book clubs, but preferred to vote on the books he read rather than having books assigned to him. He wanted to be a part of this study so that he could talk with other people about books. Jeffery also stated that he tries to work in at least 45 minutes of reading a day and like George, prefers to read printed books rather than e-books.

Jeffery has a fair complexion and hazel eyes. I have known him since he was in first grade and over the years I have seen him grow in many ways. He has always been very serious and literal. His seriousness makes his smiles seem almost magical. As a young child, he cried often. The reasons varied from people not listening to his ideas, to not winning a game, and most often when something didn't come together in the way he'd planned. Additionally, Jeffery has

never suffered fools easily. His ideas are usually great, and when he does point out a fault within a discussion, he's often correct. Over the years he's tempered some of his more negative personality traits. As a fourth grader he has a great deal of friends and everyone respects his sometimes too honest opinions.

Jeffery's best friend is Tim. They have been in the same class every year since kindergarten. While Jeffery is outspoken and sometimes pushy, Tim is quiet and accommodating to everyone. They balance one another and work well together.

This book club, which was a non-academic activity with somewhat academically equal peers, was a good experience for Jeffery. He is a very legalistic child that follows rules, sticks to schedules and has been known to remind people of boundaries (both his and their own). During the course of this study he seemed to loosen up a bit. He laughed a lot, and didn't take things nearly as seriously as he does in the regular classroom situation.

**Julia.** Julia is not in the gifted program, but she is a member of the advanced content class. This year has been tough for her. I'm not sure that the decision to place her in the advanced class was the best idea. She's maintained a high B average all year, but she seems to be working so hard all the time. In class she doesn't answer questions and even seems reluctant when we break into pairs or small groups.

Julia prefers to read e-books. "I prefer this because e-books are electronics and I am used to gaming of electronics. I do not like audio books because they take forever and I do not have a long attention span." In her Google Forms questionnaire, she went on to state that, "I am interested in being in this book club because I love reading and trying new things even if I don't like them or it is hard". She shared that she reads about 45 minutes each day. In reference to her earlier book club experience, Julia stated, "One thing I love about book clubs is that you get to

see what other people think, maybe look at text differently than you had”. She also shared that finishing a book that she doesn’t like is always difficult.

Julia was adopted from China when she was three years old. She has two sisters who are much older than her and are the biological children of her parents. Her parents and sisters are white. Her mom is a healthcare professional and her father works for an engineering firm. I’ve only known Julia for a few months, yet during that time, more than once she has mentioned being curious about her birth mother and China. A few weeks before the study began, Julia and a friend were eating lunch with me when Julia told me that she wished she could go back in time because she doesn’t remember her real mother. I couldn’t shake the sadness I felt after that for a while.

Julia’s closest friend was not a part of this book club. But during the research she became close with Matilda. They sat together at every meeting and later I discovered they were spending time together outside of school as well. Julia always found Jeffery’s comments funny and interesting. At times her own comments showed a level of immaturity, yet she was able to stay current with the reading and contributed to conversations.

I was happy that Julia wanted to be a part of the book club and thought that it might help her develop a little more self-confidence. In the beginning, the others were talking over her, interrupting, or simply not listening to her comments. However, about halfway through the study, she suddenly came into her own and learned to command an audience. The others started listening to her, and she seemed to blossom under the attention.

**Madison.** This sweet girl is half the size of the other students in fourth grade, yet easily packs double the amount of determination. I met Madison when she was five years old and her mother came to work at my school. It was a tough time for their family. Madison was constantly

seeing doctors across the state and beyond. Late during her first grade year, she began growth hormone replacement therapy. She's now a healthy, thriving nine year old. While she has grown a bit, she's still much smaller than most of the other students.

On her first Google Form questionnaire, Madison wrote that she had been in a book club prior to this experience stating, "I really liked it because we got to talk in deep interest about all the books we were reading". She decided to become a part of the study because the idea really interested her. She estimates that she gets in around 30 minutes of reading each day and that her preference when reading is a print title rather than an e-book. "It just feels more relaxing than seeing bright lights on a screen."

Madison is white with blonde hair and blue eyes. She entered the gifted education program in first grade and has always been one of the hardest working students in her class. She is close friends with Missy and the two of them can often be seen playing together in the after school program. Outside of school, she's a dedicated gymnast taking classes or working with her coach 4-5 nights a week. From what I've been told, she's actually quite talented in this area.

Madison's mother is now an assistant principal in our county and her father is a county commissioner. She is an only child who enjoys being an only child (she actually told me that one day). She's a typical teacher's kid, always eager to please and follow the rules.

Madison doesn't just follow the rules; she's a tiny little police officer in training. In the beginning of this experience, the group created their own goals and rules for the club. In Madison's eye, a rule is a rule, is a rule. If a decision is made to do something one way, then that's the way she expects it to be done. Thus, often to the point of frustration, she kept the group on task at all times. In complete honesty, there were times when I thought she might enjoy the

experience a little more if she'd just relax a little, but then I also realized that she craves order and instilling order, so she was probably just fine.

**Matilda.** Although she has been tested twice at the request of her parents and teachers, Matilda is not in the gifted program. I had hoped that she would enter the program this year as I can tell it bothers her a bit that her best friends, Allie and Madison are both in the program. This along with the fact that she's a bit larger than a few of the other girls clearly have an effect on Matilda's self-esteem. Most of the time, she's a happy and hardworking girl. However, she does have dark days where she simply stops talking and seems to step away from us all.

On her first Google Forms questionnaire, Matilda wrote that she had been in a book club prior to this experience stating, "I liked the books, especially when there was a little humor". She explained her reason for wanting to be in this club, "So that I can read good books and see what my classmates think of the book". Matilda reported that she reads at least one hour each day and that her preferred type of reading is printed books because e-books sometimes bother her eyes.

For Matilda, being in my advanced content class has allowed her to be with her friends for a large portion of the day. However, as with Julia, this year was difficult for her. She seemed to constantly be playing catch-up and had a perpetual look of a deer in headlights. I was glad that she wanted to be a part of the research. The book club presented her with a much smaller group, and I saw her grow from the experience. She spoke out during meetings and basked in the approval others gave her when she commented on what they were reading. By the end of the experience, it was almost as if I was looking at a different child.

Matilda is white and comes from what would be considered a middle class family. Her mother is a teacher in a neighboring county and her father works in construction. She has blonde hair and big brown eyes. Her smile can light up a room and her work ethic is commendable.

Outside of school she is a member of a tennis team and does lots of volunteer work in and around the local university.

During book club meetings I saw another side of Matilda emerge. She was bold and opinionated. She had her own ideas that she wanted to push forward and she did. Best of all, when people listened, she simply glowed with happiness.

**Missy.** The best words to describe Missy are slow and steady. She's not a perfectionist, dwelling over each and every mark she makes on the paper. She's a thinker. She's even slow and steady with her processing of information. However, all that thinking and planning pays off, she's almost never wrong. What I admire about Missy is the fact that she doesn't let things get to her. I've never seen her get flustered or nervous. She simply chooses to take her time. This year her reading scores really took off, and in addition to class reads, she kept a book of her own going as well. I was both surprised and pleased when she chose to take on the challenge of the additional reading that would be a part of this book club.

Missy prefers audio books. In her first Google Forms questionnaire she shared, "It helps me understand the book more when I hear it". Like many of the others, Missy had been in a book club prior to this experience. "I like it when we get together and talk about the books. Sometimes I really just wasn't interested in the books, but I still liked when we talked about it." Interestingly, she stated that she had never read an e-book. Missy tries to read or listen to a book for about 20 minutes each day.

Missy's mother is in her first year as principal at an elementary school and her father is a physician's assistant. The family stays busy. Her mother is currently enrolled in a doctoral program and in addition to his duties at an orthopedic clinic; her father is also a volunteer

fireman. Missy is white with light brown hair and blue eyes. She is the oldest of three children in her family, all girls.

Missy entered the gifted program in second grade. When we tested her for the program, we had to request special accommodations. We knew that she would never be able to complete the parts of the testing that included time limits. We also knew that there was nothing we could do to make her speed up. In the end it all worked out. She is an asset to the program and a constant reminder that slowing down is often a really good thing to do.

Missy gets along with everyone and everyone seems to love Missy's calm spirit. Missy's best friend is Madison. She also participates in swimming and tennis with Allie. An interesting bit of information is that she gets up early enough each morning to run two miles with her mother.

**Tim.** Tim tested into the gifted program when he was five years old. On the day that his mother came in for his test results, she wasn't quite sure what we were there to discuss. When I told her he was being placed in the gifted program, she started crying and said, "So I was doing this parenting thing right." Tim was her first child, and she told me that she was just doing the best she could. Tim's family doesn't run in the same social circles as most of the families in the area. Both parents are blue collar workers with hourly jobs at a local manufacturing plant. Vacations have been few and most of what Tim knows about the world comes from the many books he's read.

In his first questionnaire after joining the research, Tim expressed a preference for printed books, finding them simply easier to read. He had been in a book club before stating, "I liked the book club because you get to really talk into detail about a book. One thing I didn't like though

was when people didn't read the book." He cited wanting to become a better reader as his reason for joining this research opportunity and that he usually tried to read at least two hours each day.

Tim is white. He has sandy brown hair and blue eyes. He has a younger sister that is two years old and he adores her. Tim is loved by all. However, his best friend is Jeffery. The two of them have been in the same class since kindergarten and often spend time together outside of school as well. The two friends balance one another. Both have a thirst for knowledge and are voracious readers.

Tim is quiet and introspective, but when he has something to say, everyone stops to listen. This was true in book club as well. As a matter of fact, if Tim hadn't contributed to a topic, other group members would stop and ask him what he thought. Tim doesn't like attention and actually blushes at times when the spotlight lands on him. He walks away from a situation if it appears to be going in the wrong direction and always looks out for others. He's the kind of child that often sacrifices of himself for the good of the group.

**Vance.** Vance is a bright and outgoing nine-year-old boy. He moved to our school from Texas halfway through the school year, but he only took a few days to settle in and become comfortable with everyone. While he still speaks of Texas often, I believe he's happy in his new home and school.

This was Vance's first experience with a book club. "I wanted to join this club so that I could experience different genres of books." Vance tries to read at least 45 minutes each day and prefers printed books over e-books. "I like the feel of actual pages."

Vance's father is a Baptist minister and his mother works at a local preschool. He has two younger sisters that he speaks of in glowing terms. I've often seen Vance and his father walking along the busy road that runs in front of the school. Recently he told me that they only have one



car now. If his family is having a hard time, one would never know it by talking to Vance; he always has a smile on his face and something nice to say.

Vance is white. He has dark brown hair and intense blue eyes. He is always happy and enthusiastic in class, at times possibly too enthusiastic, answering questions before being called on or speaking over others. I haven't noticed him with a close friend just yet, but he seems to enjoy the company of a few of the girls in his class. In book club, he always sat beside George. He likes to talk and while he operates most of the time without a filter, one of his most endearing characteristics is his honesty. He always seems to sense when he's gone too far and almost always apologizes. I welcome and embrace his unabashed enthusiasm. Not long after joining our class, Vance described me as "a fiesta waiting to happen".

During book club meetings Vance was constantly jumping out of his seat to act out the parts of the book being discussed. He over talked and the other members were quick to tell him to calm down or wait his turn. He was very emotional when something bad would happen in the books and often spoke as if the characters were real people.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role during this research was one of participant observer. I read the books as the students read them and attended the face-to-face meetings. However, I was not an active participant in their club. I felt this stance was important and necessary due to the comfort and familiarity the students may have already established with me. While five of the students were new to me (Allie, George, Vance, Julia, and Matilda), the others were already familiar with me as a teacher during some part of their day over the few years. Thus, there was a level of familiarity not often present in research settings.

I pride myself in my ability build relationships with my students that last throughout their elementary years. Now that I'm older, I'm so pleased and pleasantly surprised to discover that I've actually had a lasting impact on many of the students I've taught over the years. I love when my former students, some now well into adulthood come to visit. The conversations take me right back to our time together. I haven't changed much about my approach over the years. I treat the students with respect, I listen, and I care. There is good in everyone and I relish the opportunity to help each child find that good and shine brighter than they'd ever imagined. Much of what I do to make this happen has nothing to do with common core or state standards. It can't be proven through standardized tests and there's not a column for it on the report card.

Thus, full disclosure of my relationship with the participants in this study is important. Missy, Madison, Tim and Jeffery were with me for an hour each day during their first grade year. During their second and third grade years I was not their teacher. However, during this study, their fourth grade year, I was their reading, language arts, and social studies teacher for two hours each day. They all knew me and my classroom as a comfortable spot. A place that wasn't threatening and never judged. In short, they were comfortable.

As for direction and authority, I did not tell the participants what to do. I wanted their actions to evolve as they read, spent time together, explored and discussed their reading. Whatever plans emerged, directions taken, rules adopted, or goals set were completely of their own making.

While I was present each and every step of the way, I was not an active member of the book club. I was simply there to witness and record what happened. Prior to the actual reading and meetings, I did assist in the selection of what books were to be read through the creation of

Google Forms interest questionnaire. Based on the results of the surveys, I provided books for the members to view prior to their voting on which books they would read.

There are, of course, problems associated with the role of participant observer. As a person already familiar with both the students and the setting, some of these problems required my attention. I needed to remember that I was in a social setting to study a particular phenomenon, which required me to take an involved—yet detached—demeanor. As Murray (2003) notes, there is also a danger of “going native” by failing to question the activities observed. In attempting to keep my distance, I had to keep in mind that asking for clarification and discussing their experiences were permissible. However, it is important to note that if there was any direct involvement on my part after the book selection, the students had been instructed to look me in the eye and boldly state, “It’s not your club.” In the interest of full disclosure, this did happen, but only four times. The participants had no problem whatsoever telling me when to “step back.” I can say that I definitely understand what Hong and Duff (2002) refer to as the “dilemma of distance” (p. 191).

I enjoy discussing books just about more than any other part of teaching. Thus, I can honestly share that maintaining a proper distance was probably one of the most difficult parts of this research process. Were there times when I wanted to squeal with excitement, suggest topics for conversation, or just become a member of the club and abandon my research? Most definitely. However, keeping a completed dissertation at the top of my priority list, I chose instead to simply keep a researcher’s journal, audio record the meetings, provide iPads for audio and video confessionals, and keep detailed field notes.

## **Researcher's Background**

This is my twenty-fifth year as an educator. I received my master's and specialist degrees within a few years of my bachelor's degree in education. I've always had an affinity for teaching reading and language arts, but would of course teach any subject I'm asked to teach. While my early years of teaching were spent in a first grade classroom, over the last twelve years I've mainly focused on the upper elementary grades, technology and gifted education.

In addition to my degrees in education, I also have a degree in journalism. Halfway through my teaching career, I took some time off to put that degree to work. As it turns out, I found writing to be exciting and rewarding work. During that time I authored 17 books and numerous magazine articles on education, reading instruction and educational technology. I also spent time writing curriculum, web content and training materials for Scholastic, Apple Computer, and Learning Resources. The final two years before I went back to the classroom were spent as an educational consultant for Apple Computer. However, if truth be told, I am happiest when I am reading to children or discussing great books.

On a more personal note, I have been married for twenty-seven years. My husband, John, is a builder. We have two children, Jessie and John-Michael. Jessie is a first grade teacher in a neighboring county and John-Michael is a United States Marine stationed in San Diego at Camp Pendleton.

## **Researcher's Role Rationale**

Due to the fact that I was already well acquainted with the participants, I felt that remaining a passive observer was important. I was present as a witness to everything that transpired, yet not an active contributor. Instead, I simply observed, took notes and recorded audio. Due to my already existing relationships with the participants, any input I might have

added could have easily influenced their behavior. As mentioned earlier, the participants were instructed to look me in the eye and say, “It’s not your club” whenever I forgot my role and tried to contribute insights or ideas.

### **Timeline/Implementation**

- December 2015 - IRB update approved
- March 14, 2016 - Letters of interest sent to parents of entire class
- March 20, 2016 - Letters of permission to the 11 students/parents who showed interest in the research
- March 31, 2016 – Data collection begins.
- April 1, 2016 - Met once again to practice within Subtext and allow the participants to decide upon their meeting day each week. They also decided on their own to create rules for their club and came up with a name, Robinette’s Readers.
- May 19, 2016 Last day of data collection

### **Literature Selection**

Originally, in the early plans for this study, I was going to enlist the help of friends and coworkers to help with the book choices. However, if I truly wanted this to be “their club,” I realized that I needed to allow the participants to choose the books to be read.

Thus, once the participants had been selected, just prior to the study beginning, I first asked the students to share their two favorite genres. Their responses included fantasy, realistic fiction, historical fiction, and books about obstacles. The last genre had to be explained to me. In their opinion, these were books that could be fiction or nonfiction, but dealt with tough issues in life.

Once the genres were determined, I handed the list off to our media specialist and asked her to think about it and pull a few great samples from each genre. The only caveat was that I wanted her to keep in mind that these were advanced readers. I was not as concerned with Lexile levels as I was with ensuring a quality read that would keep them interested. Having her take on this portion of the selection process was important in that it meant I had no influence over the titles. A few days later, the kids went to the library to peruse her choices. Due to the fact that each participant in the research self-identified as an avid reader and I wanted the books read to be new to everyone, the first task involved the removal of books that any of them had already read. This narrowed the choices considerably. I narrowed the selection a bit more when I quickly checked that each book had an e-book format available. At this point, the selection options were narrowed down to twelve books, three for each of their genre choices. While the participants spent time previewing the books, I created a Google Form survey.

You Choose!

\* Required

Realistic Fiction - pick 2 \*

☐ The Wednesday Wars by Gary Schmidt

☐ Freak the Mighty by Rodman Philbrick

☐ Each Little Bird That Sings by Deborah Wiles

Fantasy- pick 2 \*

☐ The Giver Lois Lowry

☐ City of Ember by Jeanne Duprau

☐ The White Giraffe by Lauren St. John

Historical Fiction- pick 2 \*

☐ Chains by Laurie Halse Anderson

☐ A Long Walk to Water by Linda Sue Park

☐ The Great Trouble: A Mystery of London, the Blue Death, and a Boy Called Eel by Deborah Hopkinson

Overcoming Obstacles - pick 2 \*

☐ Upside Down in the Middle of Nowhere by Julie T. Lamana

☐ Paperboy by Vince Vawter

☐ Everest by Gordon Korman

SUBMIT

Figure 3.2. Google Form book choice survey.

The final selection of books is reflected in the table that follows. Originally, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry had been chosen by the participants, but it had to be replaced with another title when I was reminded by my principal that this was a book the entire grade level would read in 7th grade. *The Giver* was replaced *The City of Ember*, their second choice in this genre.

*Table 3.1.* Final book choices.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Published</b>
<i>The Wednesday Wars</i>	Gary D. Schmidt	2011
<i>The City of Ember</i>	Jeanne DuPrau	2004
<i>A Long Walk to Water</i>	Linda Sue Park	2011

### **eReader Selection**

The e-reader used in this study was Subtext. Subtext is an e-reading platform with capabilities that allow students to annotate as they read, while simultaneously responding to the annotations of others within their group. This concept of real-time social annotation aligns with the participants' already existing use and knowledge of text messaging, blogs, and even certain gaming platforms.

There are other online e-readers that allow social annotation including, Glose, Shareader, and to some extent, Google Docs. Additionally, there are multiple platforms that allow annotation and even markups on the text itself, including a.nnotate, Diigo, FloatNotes, Pliny, Adobe Digital Editions, and iBooks. Many of these competitors admittedly do offer parts of what can be accomplished within Subtext, but none of them seemed to have the whole package I desired for this study. However, the main reason I chose Subtext for this research was the fact that I was definitely interested in *social* annotation and its possibilities, not simply annotation.

Additionally, Subtext was already established as a secure provider by my school system. The school had access to and had already paid for Subtext through our contract with Renaissance Learning, the company that owns Accelerated Reader (AR).

### **Data Collection and Sources**

“The quality of your study starts with the data, as does its credibility” (Charmaz, 2014, p 32). While Charmaz is best known for her work in grounded theory, I feel that this statement concerning data is by no means specific to a single methodology. Within case study research, the most common methods for generating data include observations, interviews, and document analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Simons, 2009; Stake, 2005). The design of this research offered multiple opportunities for data collection, making it easier to ensure the triangulation of multiple sources and types of information. The data I collected within this study included the following:

- Google Forms surveys/interviews
- Online annotations
- Audio transcriptions of video “confessionals”
- Face-to-face book club discussions
- Researcher’s journal
- Researcher field notes

Prior to collecting data, I discussed anonymity with the participants and allowed each of them to choose his or her own pseudonym for the study. During the six weeks of data collection, the students read three books and met face-to-face nineteen times. I audio taped each of the face-to-face meetings and took field notes.



In the end I had gathered the following:

- 43 data sources
  - 19 of the data sources were actual face-to-face book club meetings.
  - 9 of the data sources were video confessionals
  - 9 of the data sources were Google Forms Questionnaires
  - 2 of the data sources were Subtext transcripts
  - 2 of the data sources were unplanned interviews
  - 1 data source was my researcher's journal
  - 1 data source was my field notes
- 721 excerpts were created from the data sources
- 1,603 instances of codes were applied within the excerpts

### **Detailed Descriptions of Each Data Source**

In this next section, detailed information on how I will gather and use information from each data source. I will also explain how each data source will be used to address my research question.

**Google Forms surveys/interviews.** Google Forms are part of the Google suite of apps (Google Docs, Google Sheets, Google Slides, and Google Drive). With Google Forms, I was able to create and analyze surveys in my browser. Once the questions are entered in what functions like a word processing document, the questionnaire can be sent out via email for completion, or participants can be given a link to the questionnaire. There's even an option for marking specific questions as mandatory for completion before leaving the questionnaire.

On my end, I was able to see real-time results. When the data are based on a choice, or have a numerical basis, Google automatically creates a graph to better represent results. If questions are open-ended, Google shows me the answer and the name of the participant who provided the answer. I used Google Forms to create a book choice questionnaire, my pre- and

post-interviews, and a few staggered “check-ins” during the study to see how the participants were feeling about the book club.

**Online social annotations.** Subtext, the platform the students used in this study to read, highlight, and annotate, made it easy for me to download student data. The annotations are social in that others in the group can read and respond to the annotations of others in real time or later when they have time to address other participants’ questions and annotations. I downloaded and read through their annotations prior to each face-to-face meeting. This helped me understand what information being discussed within Subtext was being carried over to their face-to-face discussions. Additionally I also noted when face-to-face discussions carried over into Subtext. Another bit of data that I was able to glean from Subtext was whether or not participants were simply writing comments of their own in lieu of responding to others. For example, if a participant asked a question or sought clarification on an aspect of the book he or she was reading, I could see if students were responding to that person and offering help or if the questions were simply ignored. Additionally, I could also monitor the number of responses each participant entered.

**Video and audio “confessionals.”** Interviews are another rich source of data within case study research. As Rubin and Rubin (1995) explain, “Though ordinary life roots you in one position, when you are interviewing, you see life in the round, from all angles, including multiple sides of a dispute and different versions of the same incident” (p. 4). The method of questioning is also important. Weiss (1994) call for the abandonment of uniformity in questioning in order to achieve fuller development of information. I agree with Weiss on this point, especially when working within the classroom. It’s impossible to predict what questions to ask. The classroom and lives of students evolve and change minute by minute. My use of video confessionals,

where the students take the iPads and find a private spot within the school to talk to me via video, provided priceless amounts of good data. While the videos were collected, only the audio from these videos was transcribed. Weiss also finds value in the use of direct quotes from interviews as a way to further support the findings of a case study. Whenever possible, I relied on their words to explain my findings. I believe this adds volumes to the concept of “rich and thick” description. The video confessionals and researcher’s journal are probably the two strongest data sources in my arsenal.

**Face-to-face book club discussions.** Each weekly face-to-face lunchtime meeting was audio recorded and transcribed within a day or so after each meeting. During these meetings, I also took field notes (see next entry) to remind me of things I was seeing that would not necessarily be evident on the audio recordings.

**Researcher’s field notes.** While there are many ways to collect data within case study research, observation is by far the most common. I observed and took notes on online activity within the Subtext app and also observed participants during weekly face-to-face meetings. According to Merriam (1998), “There are several stances an investigator can assume when conducting observations, which range from being a member of the group and a complete participant—an insider—to being a complete observer unknown to those being observed; each stance has its advantages and drawbacks” (p. 111). For this study, I considered myself a known observer and did not provide input to students’ online or face-to-face conversations, but instead, simply served as a host for the club meetings.

**Researcher’s journal.** When it was suggested that I keep a research journal, I wasn’t really thrilled about the prospect. Field notes, by all means; but keeping a journal has never been something I’ve done, and I had no time in my schedule to start journaling during this study.

However, because it was a request from my research committee chair, I went along with the idea. Starting with the participant selection process, I stayed after school each day to take time to share my feelings and thoughts surrounding the process.

I'm so glad that I gave in and kept a journal. My journal has probably been one of the best, if not *the* best, data source I had for this study. In addition to being a great data source, my journal also served as a therapist when I was in the thick of things. As I read through it later, it was almost like I was reliving the entire journey, complete with agonizing pitfalls and exhilarating highs. As I worked to write up this experience, it was my journal that I went to when I needed to fill in a blank in my memory. Is it subjective? Yes. Is it truthful? By all means.

Table 3.2 Data Matrix

<b>Evidence of Practice</b>	Shared goal Shared purpose	Subtext data downloads <i>Proof of Practice</i>	Transcripts from face-to-face meetings <i>Proof of Practice</i>	Field notes <i>Proof of Practice</i>	Researcher's journal <i>Proof of Practice</i>	Shared Google Doc <i>Proof of Practice</i>	End of Study questionnaire <i>Proof of Practice</i>		
<b>Creation of a Group Culture</b>	Sense of belonging Sense of trust among members	Transcripts from face-to-face meetings <i>Group Culture</i>	Field notes <i>Group Culture</i>	Researcher's journal <i>Group Culture</i>	End-of-study questionnaire <i>Group Culture</i>				
<b>Question</b>	<b>Specific Elements</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>
<b>Value Creation</b>									
Window Snip									
<b>Immediate Value</b> Description of day-to-day interactions	Participation Fun Collaboration Meta Conversation	Subtext data downloads <i>Immediate</i>	Transcripts from face-to-face meetings <i>Immediate</i>	Field notes <i>Immediate</i>	Researcher's journal <i>Immediate</i>	Shared Google Doc <i>Immediate</i>	End-of-study questionnaire <i>Immediate</i>	One-on-one interviews <i>Immediate</i>	Video confessionals <i>Immediate</i>
<b>Potential Value</b> What is being produced?	New skills or knowledge Confidence Trust Change in perspective	Subtext data downloads <i>Potential</i>	Transcripts from face-to-face meetings <i>Potential</i>	Field notes <i>Potential</i>	Researcher's journal <i>Potential</i>	Shared Google Doc <i>Potential</i>	End-of-study questionnaire <i>Potential</i>	One-on-one - interviews <i>Potential</i>	Video confessional <i>Potential</i>

<b>Question</b>	<b>Specific Elements</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>
<b>Community of Practice</b>									
<b>Evidence of Domain</b> An identity that's created by a shared interest	Love of reading and discussing books is the domain of this community	Interviews <i>Domain</i>	Field notes <i>Domain</i>	Standardized test scores <i>Domain</i>	Researcher's journal <i>Domain</i>	Pre-study questionnaire <i>Domain</i>	End-of-study questionnaire <i>Domain</i>		
<b>Evidence of Community</b>	Time spent together Discussions Learning from one another	Subtext data downloads <i>Community</i>	Transcripts from face-to-face meetings <i>Community</i>	Field notes <i>Community</i>	Researcher's journal <i>Community</i>	Shared Google Doc <i>Community</i>	End-of-study questionnaire <i>Community</i>	One-on-one Interviews <i>Community</i>	Video confessionals <i>Community</i>

<b>Applied Value</b> Changes in the practice?	New ways of doing things New guidelines New perspectives	Subtext data downloads <i>Applied</i>	Transcripts from face-to-face meetings <i>Applied</i>	Field notes <i>Applied</i>	Researcher's journal <i>Applied</i>	Shared Google Doc <i>Applied</i>	End-of-study Questionnaire <i>Applied</i>	One-on-one Interviews <i>Applied</i>	Video confessional <i>Applied</i>
<b>Realized Value</b> Did the changes in practice result in the improvement of the community's performance?	Personal performance Improvement Community performance improvement Change in community's reputation	Transcripts from face-to-face meetings <i>Realized</i>	Field notes <i>Realized</i>	Researcher's Journal <i>Realized</i>	Shared Google Doc <i>Realized</i>	End-of-study questionnaire <i>Realized</i>	One-on-one Interviews <i>Realized</i>	Video confessional <i>Realized</i>	
<b>Question</b>	<b>Specific Elements</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>	<b>Data Source &amp; Code</b>
<b>Reframing Value</b> Change in what participants or others think matters?	If we were to do this again...	End-of-study questionnaire <i>Reframing</i>	One-on-one interviews <i>Reframing</i>	Field notes <i>Reframing</i>					

<b>New Literacies</b> New Literacies inform this study. Thus, they contribute to the creation of value.	Identity Power Social practice Multiliteracies Discourse (big D) Global/local	Subtext data downloads <i>NewLit</i>	Transcripts from face-to-face meetings <i>NewLit</i>	Shared Google Doc <i>NewLit</i>					
<b>Sociocultural</b> Sociocultural Theory is the strong base upon which this study rests.	Co-construction of knowledge Mediation Scaffolding	Subtext data downloads <i>Sociocul</i>	Transcripts from face-to-face meetings <i>Sociocul</i>	Field notes <i>Sociocul</i>	Researcher's journal <i>Sociocul</i>	Shared Google Doc <i>Sociocul</i>			

## **Data Analysis**

It was a bit overwhelming to consider how I would take all the data I had gathered, analyze it, and develop conclusions worthy of reporting and sharing with others. LeCompte (2000) compares qualitative data to puzzle pieces: “Because these kinds of data have no initial intrinsic structure or meaning by which to explain events under study, researchers must then create structure and impose it on the data” (p. 147). There are numerous approaches to accomplishing this task of creating structure; however, ultimately, I believe that this is a very personal decision. Merriam (1998) advocates a simple system of coding, using the codes to create categories or themes that are found across the data, and then using these themes that develop to reflect upon the purpose of the research. She also cautioned that “it should be clear that categories are abstractions derived from the data, not the data themselves” (p. 181).

Overwhelmingly, practices in qualitative research call for the analysis of data both during the collection period and after all data have been collected (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). For me, this meant maintaining a strict schedule of transcription and coding immediately following each book club meeting. This allowed me to stay close to my data. Through the process of transcription, it was almost as if I was reliving the day’s events and embedding them in my memory. As I typed up the transcription, I was also giving myself a first glance on paper at what I’d witnessed.

## **Using Dedoose**

Once the transcribing was completed each day, I immediately uploaded my text into Dedoose. Dedoose is the qualitative data analysis software I used for all my coding and analysis. Details on Dedoose are in the section that follows.

After uploading the transcription, I kept working, capturing the events while they were still fresh on my mind. I began by first attaching descriptors, including the title of the book being discussed, whether it was a face-to-face or online discussion, and of course the date and members present. Descriptors added an additional way for me to pull data at a later time. I could search based on the book read, and then find out how many times a specific code was applied just within that book, or pull based on code comparisons between face-to-face versus online interactions.

Another important step during this first cursory look was my creation of memos (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1998). While the meeting was still “fresh on my mind,” I wrote short notes or memos designed to highlight what I’d observed, themes that may be evolving, and areas in which I may need to refine my focus for future data collection. Dedoose makes it easy to insert memos on their own or attach them to an excerpt. To me, memos provided a way to “mark up” my transcription without actually typing on it. I had memos detailing reasons a participant wasn’t present, noted that a fire drill occurred during a meeting, reminding me to look back on a similar occurrence in another meeting, and noting the mood of a child during one particular meeting. Charmaz explains that “writing successive memos throughout the research process keeps you involved in the analysis and helps you to increase the level of abstraction of your ideas” (p. 162). I compare memo writing to “thinking out loud” or discussing my work with a colleague. This type of analysis often brings forth new ideas or directions for research (Glaser, 1998). Both the memos and descriptors added to the ways in which I could later parse my coded data. As I worked through my analysis, my memos along and my researcher’s journal were two of my most valued data sources.



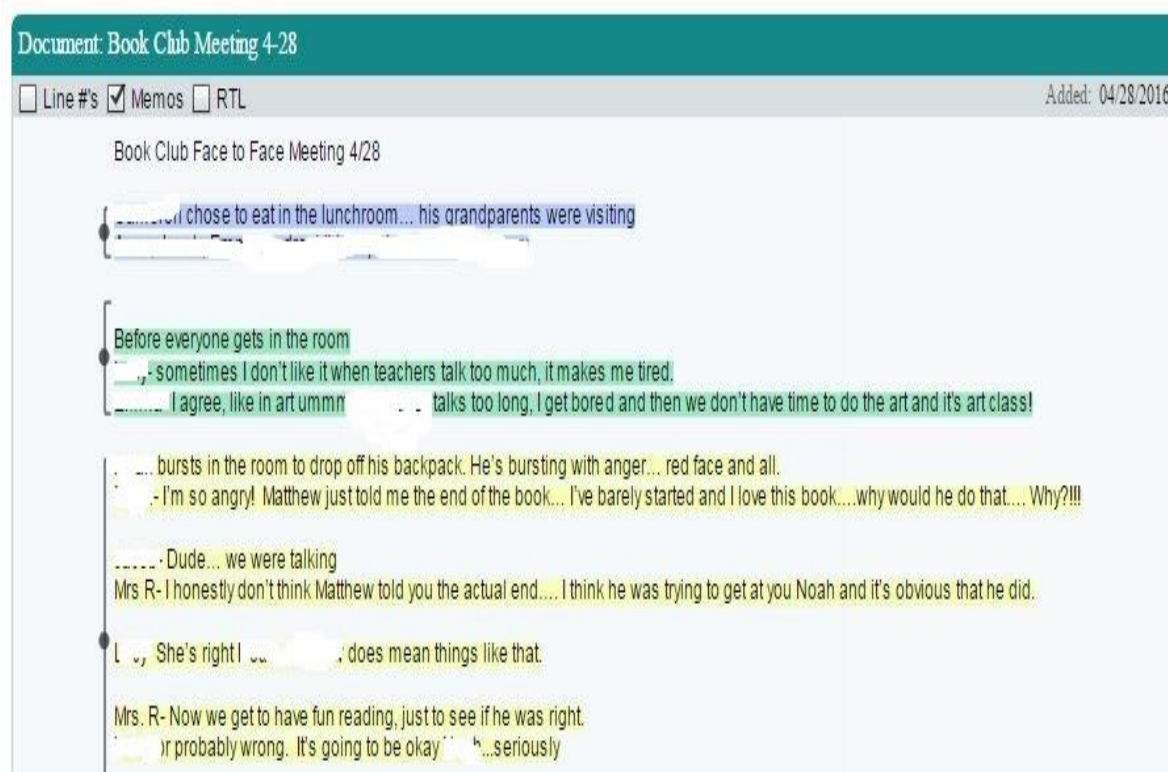


Figure 3.3. Creating excerpts within Dedoose.

My next step involved the pulling of excerpts from my uploaded transcript. Excerpts are simply chunks of meaningful data. Creating excerpts digitally is similar to highlighting a printed page with multiple colors. In this case, each color is a bit of data for me to later code. In Figure 3.3, I have pulled up one of my uploaded transcripts and highlighted to begin creating excerpts. By the end of my research, I had created over 800 excerpts, all pulled from my transcribed data. Before beginning to code, I pulled up my data source (transcriptions, uploaded audio, video, or still images) from that day and took one more overall or holistic view of what I had. At this point, I had also already created the excerpts within the source. This would include reading through and possibly adding to my memos.

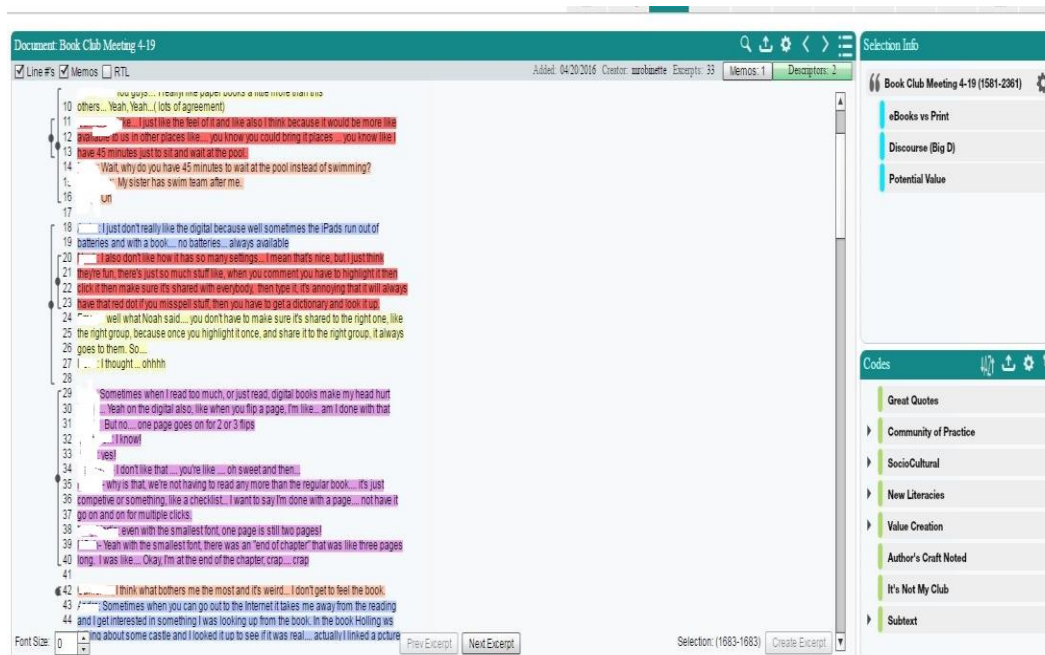


Figure 3.4. Adding codes within Dedoose.

After creating my excerpts, if time allowed, I would also code my data on the same day of the meeting (Figure 3.4). It should be noted that within Dedoose, one excerpt may have multiple codes applied to it. After coding all of the data during from the first few meetings, I noticed that themes were beginning to emerge.

Most of my codes were a priori codes, codes decided in advance based upon what I felt I needed to see in order to determine whether or not the book club developed into a true community of practice. Early on, I realized that my initial coding system needed to be streamlined. I had created 55 codes, and much of what I was coding was redundant or didn't connect directly to my research question. So, after transcribing and coding the first two book club meetings, I went into Dedoose and revised my coding, ending up with a manageable, and more importantly, applicable 30 codes (see table 3.3).

The black headings (Community of Practice and Value Creation) are the broad, or “parent,” codes, and bold titles below those are the “child” codes. The child codes were the

codes I spent most of my time applying. In the right-hand column, I made notes to help remind me what the child code represented. Before long, there was no need for this sheet; it was all committed to my long-term memory. Near the bottom of this list, I have New Literacies and Sociocultural as parent codes; their individual child codes are listed in the right-hand column. Interestingly, there is a setting within Dedoose that allowed me to command that whenever I applied a child code, the program would automatically attach a parent code.

In addition to the codes listed in Table 3.3, as I worked through the data, I ended up adding a few additional codes shown below.

- Great quote - This was almost always coded along with one of the codes below, making it easy for me to pull a participant quote to accompany a finding.
- It's not my club - This was a way in which I could track my transgressions.
- Subtext - This was added as I discovered that the participants were not pleased with Subtext. I created this code because I wanted to be able to specifically pull data relating to their frustrations.
- Author's craft noted - While author's craft was not necessarily a focal point in this research, I added this code a few weeks into the study when I realized how often an appreciation of the author's writing ability was noted. This may be an area that I revisit in future research projects.

Table 3.3 Codes and Descriptors

<b>Community of Practice</b>	
<b>Evidence of Domain</b>	A love of reading and discussing books is the domain.
<b>Evidence of Community</b>	Time spent together Discussions Learning from one another
<b>Evidence of Practice</b>	Shared goal Shared purpose
<b>Creation of Group Culture</b>	Sense of belonging Sense of trust among members
<b>Value Creation</b>	
<b>Immediate Value</b> Description of day-to-day interactions	Participation / Attendance Fun Collaboration Meta-conversations
<b>Potential Value</b> What is being produced?	New skills or knowledge Inspiration Confidence Trust Change in perspective
<b>Applied Value</b> Changes in practice	New ways of doing things New guidelines New perspective
<b>Realized Value</b> Did changes result in the improvement of performance?	Personal performance improvement Community performance improvement Change in community's reputation
<b>Reframing Value</b> Has participation changed what members or others think matters?	Moving forward Redefining success
<b>New Literacies</b>	
New Literacies inform this study and are present in the community of practice. Thus, they contribute to the value creation.	Identity Power Social Practice Discourse (big D) Multiliteracies Global/Local
<b>Sociocultural</b>	
The base upon which the study exists	Co-construction of knowledge Mediation Scaffolding

The concept of value creation within a community of practice was introduced to me in Wenger, Trayner, and deLaat's (2011) *Conceptual Framework for Promoting and Assessing Value Creation in Communities and Networks*. In this work, the authors describe *value* as the level of impact a community of practice has on its participants. I was aware that I would only be able to use the value creation data if it was first indicated that the book club had developed into something that could be considered a community of practice. As you will read later in Chapter 4, this book club definitely exhibited the characteristics of a community of practice. Thus, two post-research surveys (using Google Forms) were created to seek additional information about the impact the book club had on the participants. These surveys provided the bulk of the data surrounding value creation, or perceived impact of the community of practice.

In the end, staying on top of my transcription and coding left me ready to begin actual analysis just days after data collection was complete. Within Dedoose, I could easily see what themes were rising to the top and what areas seemed to be less significant. What follows are a few of the reporting tools available within Dedoose.

Code Co-Occurrence

Include Overlappi

	Codes	Great Quotes	Community of Practice	Evidence of Domz	Evidence of Comm	Evidence of Practi	Evidence of Group	SocioCultural	Co-Construction c	Mediation	Scaffolding	New Literacies	Global /Local	eBooks vs Print	Identity	Discourse (Big D)	Multiple Literacies	Power	Value Creation	Immediate Value	Potential Value	Applied Value	Realized Value	Reframing Value	Author's Craft Noted	It's Not My Club	Subtext	Link to Outside Int	Asked/Not Answer	Asked/Answered	Online vs Face to	Unknown Words	Totals
Great Quotes			23	21	18	39	3	13	9	2	3	1	11	48	27	6	10		17	25	24	15	15	7	1	3	2				19	362	
Community of Practice																																	
Evidence of Domain	23			7	1	4	1	6	3	1		1		10	7	6	1		14	4	2	1	3	5									100
Evidence of Community	21		7		9	5		41	27	8		2		17	8	10	9		29	40	8	3	1	8				3			2		258
Evidence of Practice	18		1	9			10	1	13	14	8	1	4	5	10	9	10	13	8	12	13	5	5	1						4		175	
Evidence of Group Culture	39		4	5	10			1	13	11	2		3		36	14	6	14	11	29	20	6	5	3						1		233	
SocioCultural	3		1		1	1			3	1	1		1	1	3	2	1	1		5	1												26
Co-Construction of	13		6	41	13	13	3		34	8	2	10	3	14	12	16	15		54	72	10	2	1	4	1	2		2		1	3	353	
Mediation	9		3	27	14	11	1	34			10	3	10		20	1	23	13		17	29	19	1	1	2		2			2		252	
Scaffolding	2		1	8	8	2	1	8	10			1	6		2		13								1	1		1			1		89
New Literacies	3					1			2	3	1			1	3		1	7		4	5	3				1							36
Global /Local	1		1	2	4	3	1	10	10	6				6		10	1			4	6	3							1	1		70	
eBooks vs Print	11				5		1	3				1		5	18	7	3		6	6	8	4	4							5		87	

Mediation x Power: 13

Figure 3.5. Code co-occurrence matrix within Dedoose.



Most of the entries within Dedoose are clickable links that enable the user to go directly to the source document associated with a code.

The code co-occurrence report (Figure 3.5) allowed me to easily see which codes had been used, how many times they were used, and what codes they were coded with (code co-occurrence) most often. Clicking on any of the numbered squares in the chart would take the user to the excerpt(s) where the code occurrences were present.

Figure 3.6 illustrates how clicking on an excerpt within Dedoose takes the user directly to the data source (e.g., transcribed text, audio or video source) from which the excerpt was pulled. While there are many more ways to use Dedoose to drill down within data, I am simply highlighting the features I used for this research.

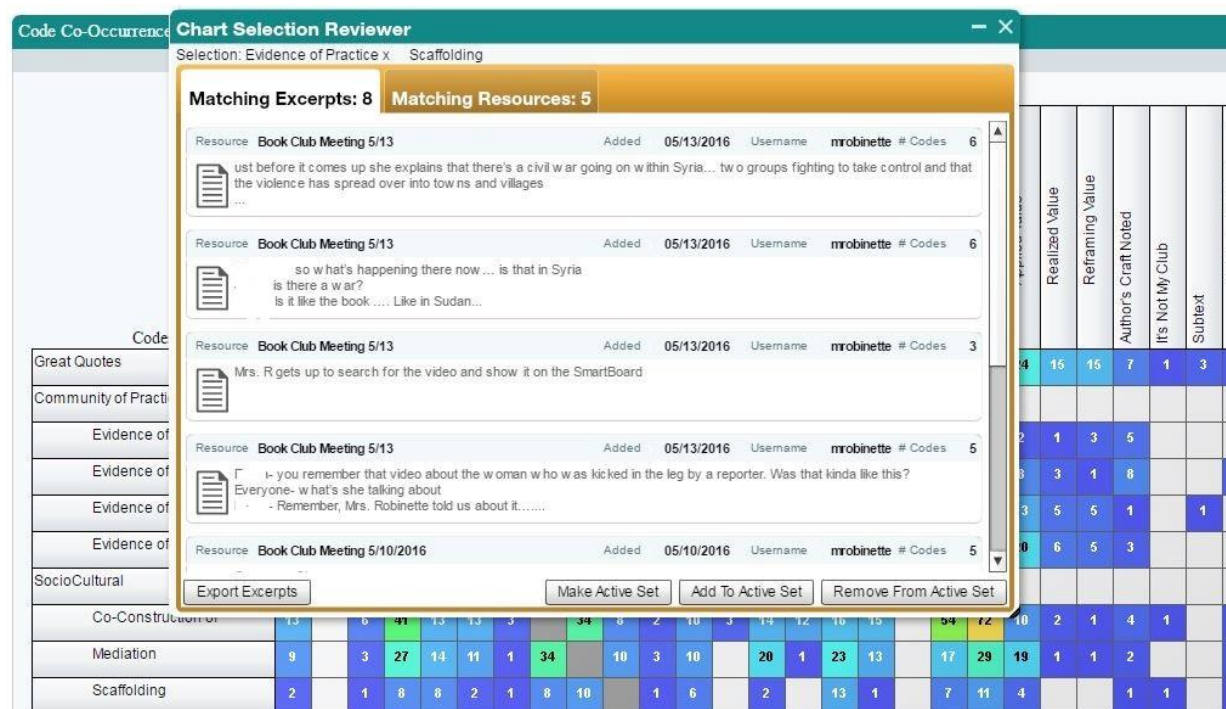


Figure 3.6 Direct access to excerpts attached to codes within Dedoose

Finally, while probably not considered to be scientific or able to provide reportable data, the “code cloud” (Figure 3.7), always in view on the Dedoose home screen, provided a quick visual of what codes were being used most often. The larger the text, the more often the code was applied. It was interesting to watch this visual grow and change as the study progressed.



Figure 3.7. Code cloud within Dedoose

### Trustworthiness

Ensuring the credibility of results is of the utmost importance if research—and in turn, a specific area of study—is to garner the respect it deserves. Denzin (2009) speaks to the lack of trustworthiness often associated with qualitative research. He states that “only under the most rigorous of circumstances can qualitative research exhibit the qualities that would make it scientific, and even then trust will be an issue” (p. 150). In the end, aren’t truth and understanding two of the most important goals of scientific research?

The credibility and validity of qualitative research results begin with researchers ensuring the validity of their data. Multiple data sources help to give a more truthful and well-rounded picture of what is happening during the research. Ruben and Ruben (2004) report that “observing life from separate yet overlapping angles makes the researcher more hesitant to leap to conclusions and encourages more nuanced analysis” (p. 4). This research had multiple areas of overlap and agreement, including the use of qualitative data analysis software, multiple sources and types of data, member checking, prolonged engagement, and triangulation.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis Software**

After taking a course in Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS), I knew that I wanted to organize all of my research observations, documents, videos, field notes, interviews, and data from the students’ online reading within one of the many qualitative data analysis software options available. After experimenting with NVivo, Atlas.ti, and Dedoose, I decided that Dedoose was the best fit for my research needs. A number of reasons contributed to this decision. The first was the fact that Dedoose is web-based and cross-platform. This was important to me because I work on a PC at my school and a Mac at home. Additionally, I found Dedoose to be more intuitive than the other alternatives, such as with searching and combining codes. In the end, I preferred the ease of use and accessibility inherent in Dedoose.

Dedoose made it easy for me to upload all of my data, including not only transcripts, but also video and audio files. This enabled me to easily search for and locate specific codes, view instances when codes overlapped one another, access how many times a code was used, and identify which codes were used with which book. While it may seem complicated in the beginning, once mastered, this is a powerful, yet relatively easy-to-use tool. Figure 3.8 provides a screenshot of my Dedoose home screen.



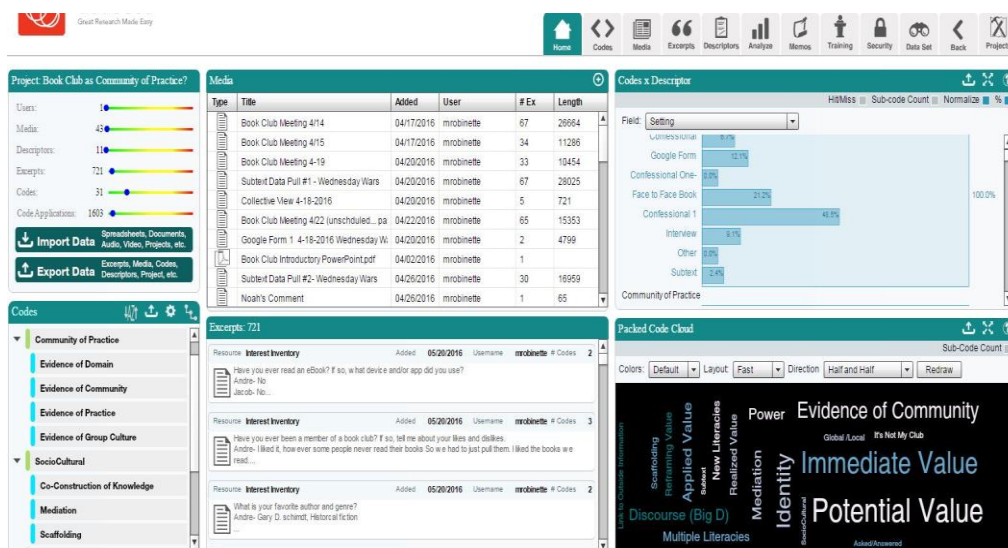


Figure 3.8. Dedoose home screen

### Multiple Sources and Types of Data

The validity of my results was first established by the number of different data sources and data types my study employed. There were not only multiple participants, but each participant contributed multiple sources of data. Additionally, data were not simply gathered around a single book, but around three different books, each from a different genre. In the end, I had 43 data different sources (book club meetings, interviews, confessionals, Google Forms, Subtext-pulled text). Nineteen of the 43 data sources were our actual face-to-face book club meetings. From those data sources, I created 721 excerpts. Within those excerpts, I applied 31 specific codes 1,603 times.

### Member Checking

Member checking is another way in which I ensured the validity of my data and final report. I gave students access to transcripts following each meeting and allowed them to preview their audio or video interviews and confessionals. Maintaining high levels of transparency

strengthened the final report and allowed me to write a thorough and careful account of students' experiences. No changes were requested to be made to the data based upon student review.

Another form of member checking included my Google Form check-ins. Through Google forms I was able to ask questions and then give the students the final results. Everything remains anonymous while the forms are being completed by the participants. When everyone is finished, the compiled results appear on one page for me to share with the participants. The results proved to not only keep me informed, but also gave the students feedback that they used to make decisions on book titles, number of days to meet, or changes they'd like to make to the club.

### **Prolonged Engagement**

While the book club only met between April 10 and May 20 (6 weeks), we were able to meet face-to-face twelve times, complete two whole-group confessional interviews, complete three Google Forms surveys, and record a private video confessional for each child as a wrap-up to the study. Thus, while the time period may not have been as substantial as other studies of this kind, I had 26 opportunities to gather data from each child.

Weekly Check-In 4/18/2016 All changes saved in Drive

QUESTIONS RESPONSES 9

What's working in your book club? (9 responses)

- The amount of pages we read a night.
- Getting conversations started
- most of us are reading what we are supposed to read.
- Something that is working is everyone is agreeing on page of the book we like, and parts we don't like.
- We are all reading the thirty pages that we needed to
- Everybody talking about and understanding what other people are saying.
- I think that everyone is listening to what everyone has to say and also I think that everyone is trying really hard to write and comment on other people's discussions.
- I can do everything but see other peoples commints.
- We are all on the same page when we meet.

*Figure 3.9.* Google Forms check-in.

## **Triangulation**

Triangulation, using multiple sources or methods to clarify meaning or viewpoints of a phenomenon (Stake 2000), is one way in which a researcher can insure validity. Triangulation uses multiple data sources, data types, and researchers to arrive at an understanding (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Stake, 2005). Creswell (2013) highlights the importance of a type of cross-verification of data, When qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme within different sources of data, they are triangulating information, providing validity and developing a deeper understanding of their findings” (p. 251). With the multiple data sources I had in this study, there were many options for triangulation, which provided a well-rounded analysis of events.

An example of triangulation within literacy research can be seen in White and Hungerford-Kresser’s (2014) study of character journaling through social networks. In this study, the researchers collected field notes, email correspondence, and screenshots of student posts as data for their study. Using these different data sources, they were able to identify eight emerging themes within their data. These themes surfaced due to the fact that they were located or exemplified in some form within each of the data sources. Triangulation was further insured through participant feedback of the findings and an outside data review. Reading this study, with a setting so similar to my own research, helped me to realize how in sync my data from various sources were.

## **Ethical Considerations**

I already had an IRB in place for this study. Copies of the protocol along with other requested documentation are attached within Appendix C of this document.. My current IRB does not expire until December of 2016, providing ample time for the completion of this study.

### Summary

A qualitative case study approach was utilized to explore, identify, and describe ways in which a lunchtime book club might support the emergence of a community of practice.

Additionally, if a community of practice were to become evident, my research plan included the identification of perceived value or impact as a result of the community of practice. With a heavy emphasis on a natural setting and boundaries within the fifth-grade classroom in which the research was conducted, this study lent itself to a qualitative case study design. The qualitative methods embedded in this design invited descriptive data collection, inductive data analysis, and a focus on process rather than product.

Nine 4<sup>th</sup> grade students, along with their teacher/researcher, participated in this study. Throughout the study, I assumed the role of participant observer. Guided by the research questions, numerous data sources were explored. These included audio recordings of face-to-face book club meetings, group and individual video confessionals, field notes, downloaded data from the Subtext app, pre and post Google Forms surveys, and a personal researcher's journal. To attain an overall sense of the data, the analysis initially involved a general review of the collected data. Using categorical aggregation (Stake, 2000), multiple sources of data were examined in search of emerging categories of information. In this study, trustworthiness was established through member checks, triangulation, prolonged engagement, and rich description.

The next chapter tells the story of what actually occurred during the data collection and shares the results of the data analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter presents an analysis of the collaborative e-book reading experiences and subsequent face-to-face conversations of a group of skilled 4<sup>th</sup> grade readers. Through a case study design, I sought to discover how my participants might work together to build a community of practice. I begin this chapter with a snapshot of where we started and then share my research story, complete with rising action, conflict, struggles, and a climax that surprised even me. After the story, I focus on what the data showed concerning the creation of a community of practice, the participants' use of peer scaffolding as a means to promote understanding within the community of practice, and evidence of value creation within the community of practice, and the use of peer to peer scaffolding as a means to promote understanding. The discussions of my findings directly relate my research question:

How might collaborative e-book reading experiences, along with subsequent face-to-face conversations, support the development of a community of practice amongst skilled upper-elementary readers?

#### **The Story**

Within this story, data supporting the formation of a community or practice is evident. You'll also see that scaffolding between the participants worked to maintain and build the community of practice. Additionally, upon looking back at the story in its entirety, proof of value creation is evidenced from the simple high level of attendance and interaction all the way down to the request for the club to continue over the summer.

As with all great works, there was a plot with more than its fair share of twists, turns, and surprises. The characters were and full of surprises. There was plenty of conflict and an early climax that took me by surprise. Best of all, I found the ending of my “story” to be truly satisfying in its revelations.

### **In the Beginning**

Good writers take the time to fully develop their characters. In doing so, it helps the reader—and in this case, the researcher—to better understand what might be the motives or reasons behind their actions. This was also important in my research. While I did already know each participant as a student, I didn’t know why they wanted to participate in this research, how much they read on their own each day, or if they’d ever been a part of a book club. I wondered if they’d ever read an e-book before, and if so, what they thought about the experience. Thus, in an effort to round out my understanding, I created a simple Google Form questionnaire that each participant completed prior to the first book club meeting. The results are found within Table 4.1. This information was for my benefit only and was not shared with the participants. As the story unfolds, you’ll start to understand why I’m glad that I was able to gather this ahead of time.

*Table 4.1 Early Data*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Estimated Time Spent Reading Each Day</b>
George	3 hours
Tim	2 hours
Matilda	1 hour
Vance	45 minutes
Madison	30-45 minutes
Allie	40 minutes
Jeffery	45 minutes
Missy	20 minutes
Julia	45 minutes

Participant	Read an e-book?	What Device?	Preference	Reason
George	No		Printed	It gives me a cool feeling.
Tim	Yes	iPad	Printed	It's easier to read.
Matilda	No		Printed	If I look at it a while, my eyes still feel fine.
Vance	Yes	iPad	Printed	I like the feel of the pages.
Madison	Yes	iPad	Printed	It just feels more relaxing than seeing bright lights or people reading to you.
Allie	Yes	iPad	e-book	You can use tools and the book cannot get damaged.
Jeffery	Yes	Kindle	Printed	I just like the feel of a book in my hands.
Missy	No		Audio	It helps me understand the book more when I hear it.
Julia	Yes	Kindle	e-book	I prefer this because e-books are electronics and I am used to gaming on electronics. I do not like audio books because they take forever and I don't have a long attention span.

Participant	Reason for Joining Book Club
George	I like reading.
Tim	I like to read and I want to get better at reading.
Matilda	So that I can read good books and see what my classmates think of the book
Vance	To explore different genres of books
Madison	I am interested because I really love to read.
Allie	I love to read!
Jeffery	It will allow me to talk with other people about books
Missy	I am interested in being part of this book club because I think it will be interesting and fun.
Julia	I am interested because I love reading and trying new things even if I don't like it or it is hard.



Participant	Ever Been in a Book Club Before?	If so, what did you think of the experience?
George	Yes	I liked it, however some people didn't read their books so we had to pull them along. I liked the books we read.
Tim	Yes	I liked the book club because you get to really talk into detail about a book. One thing I didn't like was when people didn't read the book.
Matilda	Yes	I liked the books, but sometimes I don't like series books. Sometimes I like a little humor.
Vance	No	
Madison	Yes	I really liked it because we got to talk in deep interest about all the books we were reading.
Allie	Yes	I loved the books we read and I loved having discussions about the books. I really did not dislike anything.
Jeffery	Yes	Yes, but I would have like to vote on the books.
Missy	Yes	I like when we get together and talk about the books. Sometimes I really just wasn't interested in the book, but I still liked when we talked about it.
Julia	Yes	One thing I love about book clubs is that you get to see what other people think, maybe look at text differently than you had. My dislike is when you don't like the book and you can't force yourself to read it.

**A minor character.** Prior to the first official meeting of the book club, the books for the study had already been chosen. That process was explained in depth within the previous chapter. However, there were still quite a few hurdles we needed to cross before any reading could officially begin.

One of the first things we did as a whole group was to discuss my own role within the book club. After explaining that I would not be guiding, commenting, scheduling, or creating the rules, the participants became totally silent. This silence was quickly broken when Jeffery asked, “So...we are in charge, not you?” Then, with a somewhat mischievous grin on his face, he turned to the others and said, “Guys we can do this!” When I went on to further explain what they were to do if I ever did try to take part in their club, the girls giggled and the boys’ eyes took on a gleam, as if they couldn’t wait to test their power. Once again, it was Jeffery who jumped in for a bit of clarification: “So, if you start to say anything, we are supposed to say ‘It’s not your club’



and you have to be quiet?” I knew right then that I had them, and I also knew that they’d already begun to exhibit a few of the traits that I would be coding—namely, power, a shared goal, confidence, and a sense of belonging.

**Learning about subtext and setting up guidelines.** After we’d established what my role was to be, but before I stepped out of the picture, I needed to get everyone up to speed on how to use Subtext, the reading platform we would be using. I’d used Subtext on my own and was excited to see what the participants thought. As mentioned earlier, each participant had access to an iPad that was theirs during the school day and was allowed to take the iPad home each night during the duration of the study. With the few minutes remaining during this first meeting, I had each child open Subtext so we could begin to explore the features. We first discussed basic annotation, how and why it would be used. We then started looking at other features, such as the ability to jump out to Google. My explanations took longer than I’d expected and were mainly focused on me demonstrating with very little “hands on” practice for the participants. We ended our time with a promise to get together the next day during lunch to further explore Subtext and become proficient within the app.

The club members came to my classroom for lunch the next day. Due to the fact that I had not uploaded their e-books yet, I had them practice on an article that was provided within the Subtext platform. I wanted them to actually add a few comments and respond to the comments of others. However, half of them couldn’t see the comments of others, and Vance couldn’t get Subtext to open with his password. Vance was still relatively new to our school and had not yet been set up within Accelerated Reader, the site that hosts Subtext. We hadn’t even started reading the first book, and I was already having tech issues! However, the kids pitched in and

helped one another. Before the end of the lunch period, everyone had successfully entered a comment within a provided Subtext article and responded to the comment of a friend.

At this meeting, the kids asked how often they would be meeting, and I said that it was up to them because it wasn't my club. They decided to start with two days a week Tuesdays and Thursdays and then add Wednesdays later if they thought they needed it. So, Tuesdays and Thursdays it was! We looked forward to beginning as soon as we returned from spring break. I couldn't believe this was finally happening!

As reflected in the timeline, the participants were soon requesting extra sessions; some weeks, there were as many as three meetings. In preparation for their meetings, the group mutually agreed upon the amount of text that was to be read and discussed within Subtext prior to their first face-to-face meeting. The pace at which they decided to work through each book is indicative of not only their intellect, but also their love of reading.

### **Off to a Rocky Start**

I'm not a nervous person by nature, but I was on edge as I waited quietly in my room for the participants to arrive for the official book club meeting. However, I soon discovered that my nervousness was unnecessary. Each child entered the room full of excitement about the book and couldn't wait to get started. I even remembered to begin my audio recording of the meeting (something I was sure I would forget to do). I was determined to stay quiet, but I worried about how this first session would get started without my help. As you can read in my journal from that day, there was actually no need for me to worry.

From my Researcher's Journal

This was the first lunch time book club meeting-all members were present- My goodness! That was fun.

Jeffery seemed to immediately take the lead in the group. I was pleased with how quickly the group seemed to come together.

The kids chose a name for their club, Robinette's Readers, and decided on meeting days and expectations. I think what surprised me the most today was the fact that the club as a group decided that they needed to come up with ideas for ways in which members would be punished if they didn't complete any reading before their next meetings. I really wanted to jump in, but I didn't. I was actually shocked. Funny thing: As a group, a group at this point led by Madison, they came up with plans for punishing those in the group that did not do their reading or wrote inappropriate or silly comments. The first level of punishment was that the person at fault must apologize to each member. Then things got a bit darker...They also must answer all comments in the text, rather than just the two they'd committed to write and there was even talk of having the person sit out for one club meeting.

They seemed to love the fact that I can't say anything. Each time they added a punishment, heads turned to check my reaction.

As it appeared to be getting a little out of control, I did speak up and remind that they might want to spend a few minutes of today's meeting practicing using Subtext to which a chorus of 9 year olds screamed..."it's not your club". :)

They took this so seriously and this pleased me to no end.

There were two hiccups. There was one huge hiccup; a few of the students had trouble logging in from home to complete their reading for the night. After many emails throughout the evening, we worked things out. I won't deny that my heart sank a bit at the thought of this not working out... why do I always jump to the worst case? I thought that they could access it; they had the app and their login information. The second issue was that a few of them weren't seeing the comments of others. This let me know that we need a little more practice within Subtext.

### **Rising Action**

It took a few days before everyone had worked out their issues and appeared to be rather proficient in using the Subtext app. What stood out to me during this period was how patient everyone was with one another. "We were always good with each other, we were nice with each other and we all just enjoyed this (George's exit questionnaire ). I never heard frustration in anyone's voice as they were all learning to operate within Subtext. Actually, the opposite was true; I would look up to see those who were struggling with Subtext being helped by those who had mastered it somewhat, while at the same time, both were still completely engrossed in the topic of conversation concerning *The Wednesday Wars*, their first book.

I was beginning to see not only the formation of a community of practice, but also how much of this feeling of community was coming from the kindness and eagerness they showed in helping one another with understanding. What appeared to be simple conversation, was actually an example of scaffolding to assist in understanding. The transcript that follows, from a face-to-face meeting, illustrates this point.

George: Is Joe Pepitone ummm real

Tim: Yeah, I think he was a real baseball player, I'm not completely sure.

Allie: I don't know why they would use someone fake.

Tim: And Woolworth's, it's like a burger shop, it basically said it in the chapter

Allie: Really?

George: Yeah, they sell cokes and stuff, but it's not like Sam's Club

Missy: It's not a restaurant?

George: It says here (looking at his iPad) that Woolworth's is like a supermarket.

In this example George is working to help the other's understand about Woolworth's, but early in the conversation, he himself has questions concerning Joe Pepitone. This type of fluid back and forth scaffolding was proved to be a cornerstone in the development of the community of practice as well as value creation.

**A little conflict.** If conflict in a story represents struggle, there were a few minor conflicts building up to the climax of this story; however, up until this point, it was nothing that the group couldn't work through and handle on their own. The first sign of frustration actually came during the second face-to-face meeting. Instead of warm greetings, Madison opened the meeting by admonishing Matilda and Vance over their lack of activity within Subtext:

Madison: Okay, so first let's talk about comments. Matilda and Tim, ya'll haven't commented at all.

Matilda: What?

Matilda: I did

Madison: Have you shared it to the right group?

Matilda: Yeah, I shared it to Robinette Readers.

Vance: I think so.

Madison: Show us, cause we've searched... I've searched everything, and I cannot find it.

Julia: I only saw like two comments from a comment.... from each of ya'll

At the next club meeting, there were a few complaints about the number of pages they were reading each night and the number of times they were meeting each week. It was interesting to watch them maneuver through issues that stemmed from decisions that they had made as a group. They decided that they wanted to create their own Google Forms questionnaire to try and resolve the issue. After the questionnaire was completed by everyone, I printed the results and gave a copy to each member of the group. After reading through the responses and talking through their issues, they worked together to create a set of rules about the number of days they were willing to meet per week (two) and decided to leave the amount of reading to be done between meetings up to the individual. Their final bit of business was the creation of an overall goal for the group. They wanted it to be fun and they wanted to have good conversations about the books.

I was pleased to realize that this early in the research, the group had already exhibited evidence of the first two cornerstones required for a group to be considered a community of practice evidence of domain and evidence of community. Evidence of domain was established in the choice of their books, their creation of rules, and the establishment of a goal. Evidence of community was evident when they didn't want to miss a meeting or requested additional meetings, as well as in the way they helped one another overcome issues within Subtext.

At this point, I told myself that it was probably too early for evidence of practice and the creation of a group culture to be evident; however I was optimistic. The fact that they were

willing to work through their issues rather than abandon the club was promising. However, I also had to remind myself that there were no guarantees when it came to working with kids.

On the next face-to-face meeting day, as the kids were waiting for everyone to arrive with their lunches, the first few that were present started discussing issues with e-books as opposed to “real books.” I went ahead and began audio recording because it seemed like an interesting conversation:

Jeffery: You guys...I really I like paper books a little more than this.

Others: Yeah, yeah... (Lots of agreement)

Jeffery: Like...I just like the feel of it and like also I think because it would be more like available to us in other places like....you know you could bring it places...you know like I have 45 minutes just to sit and wait at the pool.

Vance: Wait, why do you have 45 minutes to wait at the pool instead of swimming?

Jeffery: My sister has swim team after me.

Vance: Oh.

George: I just don't really like the digital because, well, sometimes the iPads run out of batteries, and with a book....no batteries...always available.

Vance: I also don't like how it has so many settings...I mean that's nice, but I just think they're fun, there's just so much stuff, like when you comment, you have to highlight it, then click it, then make sure it's shared with everybody, then type it...it's annoying that it will always have that red dot if you misspell stuff; then you have to get a dictionary and look it up.

Madison: Well, what Vance said...you don't have to make sure it's shared to the right one, like the right group, because once you highlight it once, and share it to the right group, it always goes to them. So....

Vance: I thought...ohhhh

Matilda: Sometimes when I read too much, or just read, digital books make my head hurt.

Tim: Yeah, on the digital also, like when you flip a page, I'm like...am I done with that page? But no...one page goes on for two or three flips.

Jeffery: I know!

Vance: Yes!

Jeffery: I don't like that....you're like, "Oh sweet," and then...

Madison: Why is that, we're not having to read any more than the regular book...it's just competitive or something, like a checklist. I want to say I'm done with a page, not have it go on and on for multiple clicks.

Missy: Even with the smallest font, one page is still two pages!

Vance: Yeah, with the smallest font, there was an "end of chapter" that was like three pages long. I was like, "Okay, I'm at the end of the chapter...crap....crap."

Jeffery: I think what bothers me the most, and it's weird, I don't get to feel the book.

George: Sometimes when you can go out to the internet, it takes me away from the reading and I get interested in something I was looking up from the book. In the book, Holling was talking about some castle, and I looked it up to see if it was real. Actually, I linked a picture in Subtext.

Vance: Yeah, I saw that. I did that too on something else.



George: When I was looking at it, I clicked something else and then something else, and I didn't get back to the story for a long time. I kept scrolling and scrolling and clicking.

Vance: I also don't like when I'm holding it, I'll accidentally hit a button. Once, when I was reading it, I flinched like, "OH MY GOSH! I can't believe that just happened!" and I'll accidentally turn the page or click something.

It was clear that there was some major frustration brewing surrounding the use of Subtext, but the comment that struck me the in the heart came from Vance after this particular club meeting was over. While everyone was getting ready for class, he came to me and asked, "If we want to, can we just read...read and not comment anywhere?" The teacher, reader, and literacy student inside me wanted to hug him and say, "Yes, of course, read as much and as often as you like." However, the researcher in me simply answered, "It's not my club."

The next day, their frustration was still evident if not possibly a little more intense. In a scheduled small group video confessional, the conversation concerning Subtext and e-books in general continued. I was never in the room during any of the video confessionals, including this one. As you can see, they were speaking their minds, peer to peer.

Julia: And so...what do we think about the book club?

Jeffery: I do not like using the...umm...umm...

Vance: Subtext?

Jeffery: Yes. It's just annoying to me that we have to get on a device. It's not like just in a book where we can just comment.

Julia: I don't like e-books that much. That's a problem.

Tim: The transportation is better [with a book].

Jeffery: Yeah, the transportation is a lot better.

Julia: Plus, it's a lot lighter.

Jeffery: And it's [a book] not as big.

Vance: And we can, like, take it to lots of places.

Jeffery: And one page.....

Tim: ...is *actually* one page.

Jeffery: One page isn't really two pages.

Allie: I can't just sit there and keep turning with it staying on the same page, page after page. [She motions like she's turning pages.]

George: And it doesn't always work. [He starts pretending like he's trying to turn a page.] You could be, like, sitting there for an hour.

Vance: Like this is what I was doing. It was like 9:00 at night. I was doing my reading.

George: Why 9:00 at night?

Tim: [holds George's shoulder] George, just let him talk.

Vance: And so basically, I had clicked it and it didn't work, and I clicked it again. And then I went to my settings and I went to transitions and I clicked the normal transition, and then it worked for some reason.

Allie: I don't like the way when you're, like, reading a book on an iPad or device that there are so many settings...

Everyone: Yeah, yeah.

Allie: I just want to read the book. I don't want to mess with the settings.

Jeffery: And then you always feel like, "Oh look... I can change this and this before I read..."

Everyone: Yeah, yeah.

Jeffery: But then you're doing that for like 30 minutes, and you don't have time to read the book.

Everyone: Yeah, yeah.

Jeffery: So I do think we should stick with paper.

Everyone expresses agreement

Allie: It's Subtext. For some reason, I just don't like Subtext. I just read *The Crossover* on my iPad and I liked that. It's Subtext, y'all. [Everyone agrees.]

Allie: Subtext is just kinda weird.

Tim: In Subtext, I was also like, "Okay, I need to comment." But with a regular book, I'm like, "Now I can just read instead of feeling like...I have to do this."

Vance: But, like, it gives you so much opportunities. Oh, like I can change this...

Jeffery: I feel like when you're part of a book club that's on that, you have to comment.

When I think of a book club, I don't think of, um....I don't think of like an online book club. I always think of, like...I like face-to-face talking a lot more than I do...

Everyone expresses agreement

Vance: It's like the future where everybody doesn't interact [acting this out, pretending that he's staring at a screen] and we're just sitting in front of our TV screen: "Mom, what's for dinner?" You don't go tell her anything; you just text her.

Everyone expresses agreement

Julia: Plus, like in the Subtext app, [you] really aren't doing any replying to other people.

Jeffery: Yeah, no one's gonna reply.

Everyone expresses agreement

Tim: And sometimes it doesn't work.

Jeffery: And if someone's ahead of you, they're not going to come back and see your comments.

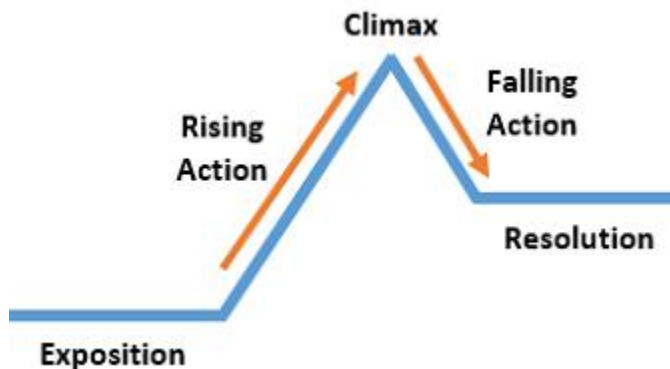
Everyone expresses agreement

George: We're going to see each other face-to-face either way, and that's so much better.

### **An Early Climax.**

When I teach story elements to my students, I describe the climax as the point in the story where the tension or action reaches its highest peak; it's a major turning point in the plot. A fellow teacher describes it as the point in a story when everything changes. I tell my students that a climax may take the form of a crisis, a decisive moment, or maybe the resolution of something that's been building up during the rising action of the story.

Unlike the traditional story map (Figure 4.1), the climax of a story doesn't always appear in the middle of the story.



*Figure 4.1.* Basic story map.

What I identify as the climax in this story came early. It came after they had only finished the first of three books that were to be read. Everything came to a peak during an unscheduled face-to-face meeting requested by the students close to the end their first novel. Here's how the climax unfolded:

George: Well, I do have one problem, too. Do we always have to read on the iPads? Can we ever read real books?

Jeffery: Who would maybe want to go to a printed book?

Matilda: I might want to try it.

Allie: I want to do it.

Jeffery: I think because then it's so much more available to us, portable too, when we go somewhere, like, I go so many places, like, and I'm just sitting there.

Everyone expresses agreement

Tim: Just like yesterday, I forgot to read until 9:00, and I was like, "Why couldn't I have had a paper book to bring to my sister's softball game?"

Julia: I don't like...I can't really like...I don't really like reading books on digital...

Everyone expresses agreement

Jeffery: And gosh, the iPad is just so much bigger than a real book and it's heavier.

Allie: And the page numbers...they are so confusing.

George: But we couldn't speak to each other online. But then again...there's like a battery for that digital...

Vance: George's died like two times.

Jeffery: We could all share a Google Doc and just write on that. Who wants to make a Google Doc?

Allie: We could do that and use our school Gmail.

Missy: Or we could have our own blog.

Vance: A blog would be better.

Missy: It's still basically the same problem if you do a blog. You can't bring it everywhere.

Tim: But at least you could bring the book everywhere.

Missy: Yeah, but—

George: You could always comment later.

Jeffery: Sometimes I feel like just because we're on the eReaders, like I *have* to comment, and I don't really like that. Sometimes I just want to read. I kinda feel obliged and sometimes...sometimes I'll, like, have to search to find the most interesting thing and so it's not really, you know, since we made that rule...we have to comment, but sometimes when you're reading, you don't see anything and you have to go back and find the *most* commentable thing that also hasn't already been commented on.

Vance: What stinks is, like, my mom got my iPad working...okay, like, it takes, it seems like all the comments aren't there until the next day because I'm the first one reading and I read early in the day right after school. So when I, umm, in the morning, before I go to school, I get the iPad out and I start, like, reading through everything.

[Lots of talking over each other]

Tim: I kinda wanna just do...read the paper book and just read.

Jeffery: Okay, so let's vote. Who wants to read a paper book? [Counts hands] Okay, so, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

Tim: We could always switch back.

Jeffery: Okay, so two of you still want the iPad and Subtext. Can we say that's okay?

[Looks at me]

Me: It's not my club.

Matilda: So can we all agree to do print for this next book?

Everyone expresses agreement

And thus, what I identify as the climax of this story appeared as if out of nowhere and was over within the first 10 minutes of a face-to-face book club meeting. Was this surprising? Yes. Was it devastating? No.

Upon reflection, I believe that having the ability to make this decision actually brought the group, the community of practice closer together. They made this decision on their own after much discussion. I witnessed a shift that day. This was truly their club now; their community and their ability to make this decision on their own seemed to imbue them with a sense of empowerment and ownership. It worked to bind them together as much more than just a book club; they were once again exhibiting qualities indicative of a community of practice.

Their actions in that meeting were evidence of a shared goal and purpose, specific elements required for a group to be considered a community of practice. This was yet another step toward the creation of their own group culture. They were telling me what they felt strongly about and what changes they wanted to make in order to improve their experience.

**Additional conflict.** Once I'd had a little time to regroup and adjust to the new direction my research had taken, I realized that I had yet to secure nine print copies of our next book, *City of Ember*, for the next book club meeting. That meant that I had a weekend and one day to track down the copies. I began by emailing my colleagues, which resulted in only one copy. I then called a local used book store and secured three more copies. Our library had one copy, and I found an additional copy at my house. On that Saturday afternoon, I ordered four copies from Amazon and crossed my fingers that, thanks to my Prime membership, they would arrive on Monday or Tuesday. At this time, I should have also been looking for copies of *A Long Walk to*

*Water*, our third and final book. The fact that I didn't even think about it was an indicator of the level of my anxiety.

The books didn't arrive on time, so I did a bit of quick thinking and purchased the book on my Audible account. At the next face-to-face meeting, the group listened to the first chapter, which in retrospect, actually set the story up nicely, while at the same time allowed me to gather bits of interesting data:

Mrs. Robinette: So, they [the books] are arriving this afternoon, which means we can't start reading today, but...I bought it on Audible.

Matilda: I love Audible!

Allie: Me too!

Mrs. Robinette: So, I thought we could listen to the first chapter, and hopefully the books will be waiting for me when I get home today.

Jeffery: Yay! Everybody loves being read to, right?

Julia: Audible makes me "see" the story, so it's good that we are doing it to start the book...what's that word...denouement? No, wait...exposition!

Mrs. Robinette: Okay, Julia, I'm impressed! You do listen to what I say!

Jeffery: Mrs. Robinette, I hate to say this, but...it's not your club.

[Mrs. Robinette stops speaking and then clicks to start Audible]

While the intro music begins to play, a bit of (D) discourse about reading begins. In what Gee (2007, 2012) refers to as "big D Discourse" we are "with our people," a part of a larger group with similar ideas.

Vance: Ohhh, I'm so excited! I've been wanting to read this book, and whenever I go to the library, it's always checked out.



Matilda: So it's not the author narrating. [The title, author, and narrator had just been stated]

Julia: This music is creepy.

Madison: It started out okay, but now it's getting creepier and creepier and creepier.

Jeffery: Ohhh. [During introduction, when the author gives a detailed explanation about the box that holds all the secrets]

Vance: [during a short pause between the introduction and chapter 1] This is good!

Vance: [during a point when the narrator explains the inconsistency of the electricity]

Okay, that's going to be important.

George: That mayor is gross... "The flesh under his chin bulged in and out?!"

Jeffery: Ugh. [When a job as mold scraper was described]

[Later, the narrator says that perhaps there will be no bad jobs this year]

Tim: Oh, don't say that. The next job given is probably going to be terrible.

[Pipeworks laborer job is described]

Everyone in the room says... "Ohhhhh"

Jeffery: That's not soooo bad.

[The first chapter ends, Mrs. Robinette clicks to stop Audible]

Vance: This is a good book!

While not the focus of this study, the concept of identity had a strong presence, and on this day, both Allie and Matilda were honest about their reasons for wanting to take one of the printed copies home.

Allie: I read slowly, so can I use one of the copies you have now to keep reading?

Matilda: I want one, but only because I want to keep reading. I don't want to wait!

Their honesty and forthright ownership of their reasoning also indicated trust, safety, and confidence in their group- additional evidence of a community of practice forming.

When everyone began to throw away their lunch trash and transition to class, there was another example of sociocultural perspectives coming into play as the students discussed their ideas about the book's setting.

Vance: Wait, y'all...before we go, in the book, are they underground or aboveground?

Tim: Pretty sure they're above ground.

Julia: Yeah, it's aboveground

This brief interaction highlights the scaffolding mentioned within sociocultural perspectives. Vance was seeking and understanding and Tim and Julia simply served as his "expert others".

### **Falling action.**

Once the initial hurdle of locating the printed books had been crossed, the rest of our time together was, in a sense, getting more and more comfortable with each passing day. *City of Ember*, although not their first choice, ended up being a book that many of the participants later identified as their favorite. Additionally, as witnessed in my researcher's journal, the club was really functioning as a community at this point.

From my Researcher's Journal:

Today's club meeting had a different feel to it. I can tell that the kids are already becoming closer than they were in the beginning. I loved hearing them talk through portions of *City of Ember* and was excited that they asked to come to me for an unscheduled meeting tomorrow when everyone has finished reading the book.

From my Researcher's Journal:

Today's unplanned meeting was sweet. They wanted to meet because they had all finally finished reading *City of Ember*. I was so impressed by their conversations! They asked great questions of one another, listened, and considered everyone's ideas. I have to say that I just love teaching and being with kids who have a real thirst for the written word.

*A Long Walk to Water* was the third and final book of the study. With this book, I really began to see the group as fully formed and cohesive. They were all eager to get their copies of the book.

From my Researcher's Journal:

This morning I distributed the new books, *A Long Walk to Water*, and by lunch that same day, the little devils were already telling me how great the book is.... That they'd already read past their agreed upon spot. They were so excited! Vance asked me to show him on a map where the countries they're talking about are located. I in turn told him to show me! They Google mapped it quickly and discussed the location of the Nile River and Ethiopia. Julia wanted to see pictures of the Lost Boys of Sudan "because the cover talks like these were real boys." She switched seats with Vance and pulled up images of some of the boys both in Africa and in their new homes.

Another day, during the time they were reading *A Long Walk to Water*, George came in before school started and pulled up a website he wanted me to show everyone. It was the homepage of the main character in our book! He currently runs a nonprofit working to bring clean water to small villages in Africa. To me, this took his connection to the group well beyond that of a simple school club. These were people he was thinking about outside of school and eager to share new information with.

## **Resolution / Denouement**

Prior to completing their final surveys and video confessionals, the group held an impromptu face-to-face meeting in my classroom. During this brief 20-minute gathering, they presented me with the idea of continuing the club through the summer. With all that had occurred in this short study—books changing, technology being pushed aside, and a rush to find printed copies—hearing them ask for the club to continue told me that they had truly become a community of practice. They were looking forward. They wanted more.

While this appears to be the end of the story, so much more remains to be told. Behind all the transcripts, recordings, excerpts, and codes, there were insights and multiple answers to my research question. In short, the story revealed my findings.

## **My Findings**

As is true with many experiences, events are often not truly appreciated until we step away and look back upon the experience. It's easy to get caught up in what's happening during the actual research event. However, the real fun begins when the data are entered and analyzed on a line by line basis and then compared to the similar research of others.

With a total of 43 rich data sources including book club meetings, interviews, confessionals, questionnaires, and pulled transcripts from their time within Subtext, I clearly had an abundance of data and multiple opportunities for the triangulation of that data. In the end, my 31 codes were applied to 721 excerpts for a total of 1,603 bits of coded data. The amount of data gathered was substantial for a study of this size. This wealth of data allowed me to not only definitively answer my research question concerning a community of practice, but also take note of the value created as a result of this community and the significant amount of scaffolding that took place between participants in an effort to promote the group's understanding.

## Development of a Community of Practice

I begin with a brief examination of how perfectly communities of practice nest within the broader realm of sociocultural perspectives. As is true with sociocultural perspectives, communities of practice offer a way for us to study learning that's "not located in the head or outside it, but in the relationship between the person and the world, which for human beings is a social person in a social world" (Wenger, 2010, p. 1). The community formed by the participants in this study positioned literacy as a truly social practice, and the events surrounding literacy activities were negotiated, enacted, and owned in full by the participants. Similar to what Gee (1999) explains, the individuals quickly became a group. There was "a 'social turn' away from individual behavior and individual minds toward a focus on social and cultural interaction" (p. 61.) As a teacher, I had come to believe that I was the conductor, the one that made things happen in the classroom in a certain way and order. It was both humbling and inspiring to step away and observe as these students "took care of themselves" and functioned as a group without any assistance from me. Later in this chapter, you will read how the lack of an adult expert to serve as the creator of scaffolds for learning, the participants served as scaffold creators for one another.

I began to realize early on that without any knowledge of the actual focus of my research, these students—a group that, if it were not for this study, would most likely not have come together on their own—quickly began to function as a community and ultimately as a community of practice.

While the theme that emerged was one of community, my research question was looking for more than a simple feeling of a community. Specifically, I was looking to see if what we were doing within our book club supported the creation of a community *of practice*. The purpose

of my study was to examine students' individual, collaborative, and networked activities around a book club. Specifically, I was seeking to answer the following research question:

How might collaborative e-book reading experiences, along with subsequent face-to-face conversations, support the development of a community of practice amongst skilled upper-elementary readers?

As stated earlier in this work, a community of practice is not simply a shared interest group, and it is not an entity which can be forced into creation. A true sense of community must develop over time through ongoing interactions. Over time, even if a community is formed, an actual community of practice is not present until the group creates their own goals and purpose. It's an almost organic creation that can't be forced or planned. Based on my observations and member feedback, I would definitely view this study as an example of a community of practice evolving.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), not all groups, clubs, or even communities can be considered a community of practice. In order to be a true community of practice, three specific elements must be in place. The following sections will elaborate on these elements.

**Domain.** A domain is an identity that's created by a shared interest. Members of the community must be truly committed to the domain. In this case, the commitment can be seen in the fact that the students had to truly want to be a part of the study. There were no pre-screeners for participants; all the students in my class were offered the opportunity to participate. Additionally, there were no incentives offered in exchange for their participation. Participants in this study chose to give up their free time and take on additional reading that went above and beyond what was required of their normal daily classroom assignments. Thus, the domain was a

love of reading. The attendance at book club meetings was also an indicator of domain (Table 4.2). Very few meetings were missed by any of the members. Additional proof of domain can be evidenced in passages below which were taken from their final questionnaires.

Matilda: I guess I would call this a fun experience because I learned a lot about everybody in my book club and how creative they were, and it was really a time when we could let loose and calm down.

Tim: Well, I think that everybody in the club did share a love of reading, and I think this because everybody read what they were supposed to and they, um, had good conversations about what they were reading, and that means they read pretty deeply in what they were supposed to read. So that's what makes me feel that everyone shared a love of reading.

George: Well, that whole shelf [points to one of my shelves]...That whole shelf is beautiful. I keep getting books off of there to read, and they're all good.

Everyone expresses agreement

While each child provided wonderful examples of domain, I believe George's description of my classroom library has to be my favorite, and possibly the most telling. It wasn't just one book or one author; the whole shelf that was beautiful to him. Books equaled beauty in his mind.

**Community.** Within their shared domain, members share information, conduct activities together, and are involved in discussions about their domain. Relationships form and the members learn from one another. This learning from one another, scaffolding is a significant element within sociocultural perspectives, the idea group helping the individual and in turn individuals assisting the group's understanding.

There is a level of respect and understanding between members of the community of practice. The excerpts that follow are from a face-to-face interview midway through the study.

Allie: Well, I kinda want to do it because our conversations are different than most book clubs I feel like... [Group expresses agreement] I don't know, I feel like our conversations are, like, deeper...like we're digging deeper.

Jeffery: We'll take out the tiniest details and we'll, like, elaborate on them.

Vance: ...analyze them.

This level respect and understanding were was evidenced time and time again throughout the study. It was something that grew stronger as the study progressed. In the beginning they would come bounding through the door already discussing the novel. Later they would purposely wait for everyone to be present so that everyone's voice and opinion could be heard. This excerpt from my journal, written midway through the study, illustrates the level of importance the participants placed upon their domain.

From my Researcher's Journal:

They (the participants) are in a hurry and they are talking about the book as they come through the door. They can't wait for everyone to get there and often leave the room to find the stragglers and hurry them to the room so that the meeting can start. They are always in disbelief when someone doesn't come... even if it was because their parents were there for lunch. Once Jeffery even said, "Why would someone tell their mom to come for lunch on a book club day? How can you miss this?"

In this study, the community is the students in the book club. Proof of this community is clearly outlined in the previous excerpts. Allie's feeling that this is different from most book



clubs spoke to me. It's exactly what I hoped the students would find within their conversations, but had to wait and let it develop on its own.

**Practice.** A community of practice is not simply a shared interest group, and it is not something that can be forced; it develops through sustained interaction. Over time, the members become practitioners with a shared purpose or goal. In this study, I feel that this aspect, this element of practice, is actually the linchpin required to determine whether or not the book club can be considered a community of practice. Early in the study, the participants began to request additional meetings during the week because they couldn't wait to discuss what was happening in their book. This early indicator caused me to take note. Their desire to sustain and increase their level of commitment was impressive. This grew into a respect and appreciation of the ideas each member brought to the group. The excerpts that follow are taken from individual responses to a questionnaire completed at the end of the study are proof that there was a sense of a shared purpose or practice within the community.

Tim: I learned from this club that everybody has different perspectives on what people read. For example, Vance, one of the people in our club, had some hypotheses that, really, I would have never thought of.

Vance: Okay, one of my takeaways was that I love book clubs. I just love them now. I also really like that I can expand my genres of reading...like *City of Ember* and *A Long Walk to Water*, they didn't really look interesting, but then when I read it, I loved it so much...just fantastic.

Midway through the study I wrote in my journal about the closeness I was witnessing between the participants.

From my Researcher's Journal:

Today's club meeting had a different feel to it. I can tell that the kids are already becoming closer than they were in the beginning.

I loved hearing them talk through portions of the book and was excited that they asked to come to me for an unscheduled meeting tomorrow when everyone has finished reading the book.

As witnessed in the above excerpts becoming better readers, broader readers and digging deeper into what they are reading all revealed areas of focus or practice. Additionally, the participants were beginning to consider the interpretations and views of others surrounding the reading.

**Goals of a community of practice.** While communities of practice may evolve around a wide variety of interests and purposes, Lave and Wenger (1991) provide a list of overarching goals that all communities of practice should adopt. The first goal is for the group to provide a shared context for people to communicate and share information, stories and personal experiences. In his final questionnaire, Tim stated, "I feel the book club has helped with trust a little bit. For example, in the beginning of the club, I was hesitant to share some things. Later on, though, I felt like I could share crazy ideas because other people were. That was what this club has helped me with." This quote speaks volumes. Tim isn't always the first one to speak. He's a quiet listener. He's very smart, but not always willing to share what he knows. The same is true for Julia, another quiet child in the study. "One thing I love about book clubs is that you get to see what other people think, maybe look at the text differently than you had." The sharing of others quite possibly enabled her to open up a bit during the study.

The second goal of a community of practice is for people to come together to explore new possibilities and solve problems. This goal wasn't met immediately. It took time for the group to come together at this level. It started small with the participants talking over one another in an attempt to propose possible solutions or understandings and then grew to a point where I felt that each child's voice was truly being heard and respected. In her end of study questionnaire, Allie seemed to embrace the idea of new possibilities, "I think they [ Vance and Jeffery] made the meetings more interesting because Vance always came up with these crazy thoughts on the book, and of course Jeffery had a very strong opinion on everything." In the same end of study questionnaire, Tim also shared an appreciation of the ideas of others, "This has helped me with understanding different peoples point of view. For example some hypothesis I would not have understood. That is why I feel I better understand other people's points of view."

Lave and Wenger (1991) stated that the ability to stimulate learning by serving as a vehicle for authentic communication, communication, and self-reflection should be a goal of communities of practice. In a midpoint group interview, Vance seemed to find authentic communication to be easy because he felt comfortable with the group. "We feel confident with each other, and we talk to each other more often. We share our ideas too, like theories." Likewise, self-reflection was evident in Madison's response within the same questionnaire, "I think participation in this book club has helped me become a better reader with ideas. I think this because in the book club just listening to my friends gave me more ideas and things to think about. It also taught me how to think at different levels. Like in the book *City of Ember*, I thought that the way out of Ember was the Unknown Regions." Her self-reflection is evident in the way she discusses becoming a "better reader with ideas" and finding "things to think about".

Evidence of a collaborative process is also deemed to be an important goal of a community of practice. In my researcher's journal I noted that this collaboration took a while to come into view. It wasn't until the second book that the participants seemed to be acting as a group rather than individuals with separate viewpoints. Vance enjoyed the conversations when they were trying to come together over the setting of the story, "It was fun when everybody was trying to figure out where *The City of Ember* was". Allie also enjoyed the collaborative process that seemed to surround their reading of *The City of Ember*, "Everybody in the book club really sat there and listened to what you had to say. An example was that everybody took turns saying what they wanted, like when we were discussing how we thought *The City of Ember* would end...like were they underground, were they above a city, or were they under something? And so we really started to talk about that, so we went person to person to see what they thought."

Helping members to organize around purposeful actions with a goal of tangible results is not only a goal Lave and Wenger (1991) set for communities of practice, but also a goal of most educational systems. In his end of study interview, Vance stated, "The reason I would consider this book club a success is because how deep our conversations were. I think the deeper you get, it really explains and helps you understand the book. Another reason would be if you answer a question, at least one person can help explain it." Early on Missy had mentioned in a group interview that she wanted to become an even better reader. Based upon her final questionnaire, that tangible goal was met, "I think it has made me a better reader. I think it has because I learned that I need to look at the details more often. I used to not understand a book that much but during this book club I have been understanding them 100 percent better".

The ability to bring about or reveal new knowledge that helps members to better understand specific social issues is a huge goal. However it is a goal that Lave and Wenger

(1991) put forth as important for communities of practice. Matilda reported in her end of study questionnaire that she had a better understanding of friendships, a specific social issue for a fourth grader. “In some ways, the book club has helped me in friendships by understanding more about all of my friends. Like how Madison takes every bit of information the book gives her and finds out something she has not read yet.” After watching the movie about Salva, one of the characters in *A Long Walk to Water*, George commented to me, “When we watched a video on Salva giving a speech to students, it just made me feel like I was there, and that I should totally help”. This one comment showed me that he had not only read about a social issue, but allowed it to become a part of his thinking, he wanted to help. While not acknowledging a new understanding, in his end of study questionnaire, Jeffery did seem to feel that the club helped him to bring about new knowledge, “This book club has helped me to improve as a reader a lot. Especially in the enjoyment and insight. For example, talking about the books really opened my mind up to many other ways to imagine things in books. This helped me to enjoy the books and the online part gave me information as well as being able to say things that I really wanted to say.” I witnessed this first hand during their reading of *The Wednesday Wars*. The students were enraged by the actions of Mickey Mantle towards the main character. Their conversation extended to athletes of today who were good examples and a few who would be considered very poor examples. When the parents of the participants began to email me midway through the study sharing not only how excited their children were about the book club, but also how their dinner conversations had started to include new information they were learning through their reading and discussions, I felt even stronger about the goals of this community being met.

I wasn’t sure what was going to happen when I embarked on this research. Not being an active participant within the book club was one of the best decisions I made when structuring the

study. The absence of my direction, opinions, and prompts allowed room for the participants to step up and lay claim to their territory. They created a community of their own, a true community of practice.

### **Value Creation within Communities of Practice**

After establishing that a community of practice did indeed emerge from the book club meetings and what sociocultural elements came into play to assist in the creation of a community of practice, I was faced with the “and so” question. What did this mean to me, to my participants, and to other researchers in the field of literacy? What was the return on my investment? In education, we must have proof that what we are doing in the classroom is worthy of the time and money invested. In answer to this question, Etienne Wenger, considered by many to be the “father of communities of practice,” along with Bev Trayner and Martin deLaat, began work on a tool or system to help evaluate what occurs within a community of practice. Their intent was to develop a way in which researchers could assess the value created as a result of a participating within a community of practice. They described value as the level of impact a community of practice has on its participants. What resulted from their work was the publication of their Value Creation Matrix.

After reading through their matrix, I decided to extend my research to find out if there was any value in what the participants had created. In order to do, this I coded based upon the five levels of value creation identified by Wenger et al. (2011): Immediate Value, Potential Value, Applied Value, Realized Value, and Reframing Value. After coding, I began the task of evaluating my data. It wasn’t long before stories began to reveal themselves to me. These stories about the community of practice that grew from my small book club showed me that this community was actually quite evolved and fruitful.

It would seem obvious that the primary recipients of value, those who experience the impact of a community of practice, are the participants themselves. Without the benefit of value from one's experience in a community of practice, the group often begins to fall apart.

It should be noted that there are often others—not actual members of a community of practice, but stakeholders—whose views on value creation are also important. In an educational setting, this might be a principal, a curriculum director, the purchasing director, or even the superintendent. In other words, these are the people purchase, sponsor, or in other ways ultimately enable the community of practice to function. These stakeholders are not necessarily interested in the fact that there is a community of practice; they are interested in what value can come out of one's participation in the community of practice.

As technology purchases continue to increase yearly, school systems are in search of ways in which they might be able to calculate a return on their investment (Storberg-Walker, 2012). If test scores rise after the introduction of new technology, can the rise be attributed directly to the technology, or was it a longer school day, a heightened emphasis on attendance, or some other factor or combination of factors? This issue extends beyond the field of education. Businesses investing in technology also need to gauge the impact their purchases have on increased sales, increased productivity, or even employee relations. One way to overcome this hurdle is to focus on the value created by shareholders, those who will actually be using the technology. Wenger, White, and Smith (2009) found that “researchers and practitioners alike have become increasingly interested in the interplay between learning, community and technology where the learning component is central” (p. 172).

In order to appreciate the richness of the value created by communities and networks, it is useful to think about it in terms of different cycles. Wenger et al. (2011) developed a framework

designed to assess this idea of value creation within a community of practice. I utilized this framework as I began to move beyond merely considering whether a community of practice grew out of the book club. The purpose of this framework, according to Wenger et al., is to “provide the foundation for an evaluation process that can integrate heterogeneous sources and types of data to create a compelling picture of how communities and create value for their members” (p. 7). The framework appealed to me because of its ability to integrate multiple types of data to create a realistic image of how a community works to create value for its members.

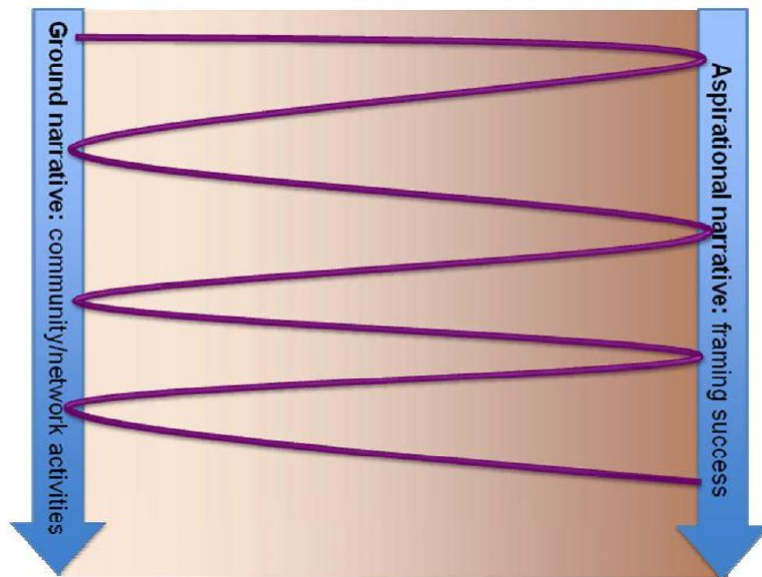
As mentioned in Chapter 3, within a community of practice, the story emerging is in a continual state of revision and change. Some facets of value can be measured quantitatively; including how many times a participant attended the meetings or even how many times they contributed to the conversation within each meeting. This data was gathered and is presented as in Table 4.2. The grounded narratives created from this data are based on the fact that participants did or did not attend regularly, did or did not participate when they were present and the average number of comments each participant made over the course of the study.

*Table 4.2 Evidence of participation*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Number of Meetings Attended</b>	<b>Number of Face-to-Face Contributions</b>	<b>Average Number of Comments per Meeting</b>
Jeffery	18/18	475	26
Vance	17/18	367	21
George	17/18	284	17
Tim	16/18	332	20
Julia	17/18	247	15
Missy	16/18	321	20
Madison	16/18	313	19
Allie	16/18	141	9
Matilda	15/18	121	8

\*Number of meetings includes face-to-face book club meetings, planning meetings, days when surveys were completed, and days when video confessionals were created.





*Figure 4.2.* Tensions between ground and aspirational narratives

Wenger et al. (2011) suggest that individual and collective narratives are another way to measure value within a community of practice; this involves going a step beyond simple quantitative data. The group identified two distinct types of narrative. The first, ground narratives, are those stories that represent what happens within the day-to-day life of the community. In most cases, ground narratives represent observable data, including attendance, participation, enjoyment, and levels of engagement.

Wenger et al. (2011) label the second type of narrative as aspirational narratives. Aspirational narratives are less concrete, and as the name implies, represent the aspirations of the community members— what the group wants to accomplish, how they define their community, and what they think their group is or should be. In this research, both my grounded and aspirational narrative information was pulled from field notes, my researcher's journal, and transcripts of audio recordings of each book club meeting. Aspirational narrative information was also pulled from individually completed surveys, video confessionals, and conversations.

Wenger et al. (2011) suggest that “the tension between these two narratives creates a space for learning and for deciding what is worth learning” (p. 17). I envision this as one feeding the other. Events occurring as ground narratives, those day to day events that add structure and stability to the group, often cause participants to create goals or define what achievement is for the group; these are aspirational narratives. The opposite is also true: a group’s goals and aspirations require ground narratives, the day-to-day functioning of the group. According to Wenger et al., there are five cycles within this framework that carry a community of practice back and forth between grounded and aspirational narratives. For each of the five cycles, I have defined and given examples of indicators of value creation within each cycle. Based upon the model and placement within the matrix, stories can be created that weave the indicators together. A value creation story may be woven through each of the cycles of value creation, or it may use proxies to fill in or make the final connections. Proxies are safe assumptions or safe expectations.

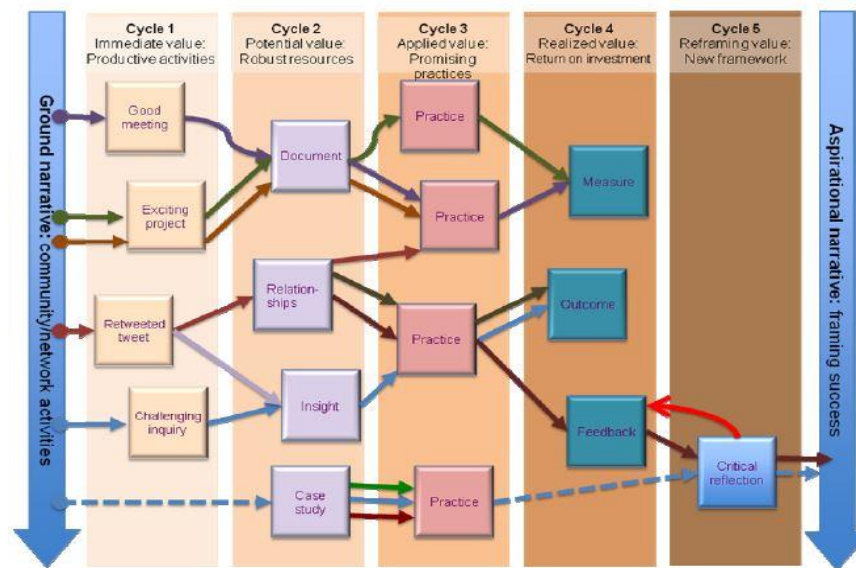


Figure 4.3. Value creation matrix

Figure 4.3 is an example of a value creation matrix created by Wenger et al. (2011). The boxes represent indicators or data. The lines with arrows represent stories told about that data and its connection to another indicator. The dotted lines represent proxies, or safe assumptions, used to make a connection that's assumed but not backed by data.

While this may sound and look a bit confusing, as I work through a matrix with the data from this research project and write a value creation story, everything comes more clearly into focus. Over the next few pages, I will work through each of the five cycles of value creation, providing examples of data (indicators) that were collected for each cycle. Next, I will plot the indicators within a value-creation matrix. Then I will use this partially filled matrix to begin writing the actual story, the value creation narrative. I add lines to indicate the narratives I write to connect the story. One indicator, possibly a questionnaire, may be used in multiple stories: a story about the amount of reading one does each night and a story about the genres of reading one prefers. In the end, both my matrix and my narrative will provide a clear indication of how the participants moved through the cycles throughout the research period.

**A matrix of our own.** Cycle 1 takes into account the immediate value, the activities and interactions that the book club members experience. Did they have fun? Did they attend meetings? Were there connections and interactions between members? How often did each child speak up online or during face-to-face meetings? Immediate value was evident from the beginning, and all the way through to the end of this research. One way in which immediate value is simply through participation, did the students show up and did they contribute to the group (Table 4.2). This was easy to document. The 95% attendance average and requests for additional unscheduled meetings also provide strong evidence for potential value.

As evidenced in my researcher's journal:

The kids were so excited about meeting today.... An unplanned meeting because they were so excited about the book and didn't want to wait to discuss. Vance was probably the most excited.

Other information supporting Cycle 1 was taken from questionnaires, transcripts, and my researcher's journal. Jeffery reported in his final questionnaire that he'd like to remember are "all the sorts of hilarious moments in the club. Those included a few things, some of which were sort of gross. Also, I think that the other thing I'm going to remember is that book clubs can be more fun than when they're online... Sometimes it's just better to have a face-to-face". Matilda said, "I guess I would call this a fun experience because I learned a lot about everybody in my book club and how creative they were, and it was really a time when we could let loose and calm down." In an early interview, Missy's comparison between book clubs and reading alone made me smile. "It's not much fun to just "regular" read the book and then not share anything with anyone else, just keep it inside you. And some things you don't really understand in the book, you can't really ask anyone because they haven't even read the book and they don't understand it either." And finally, there's Vance's honest report, "I'm a talkative person, like I really am. I'm a talkative person, so I liked sharing my ideas, and I really liked reading the books. *City of Ember* my favorite, *A Long Walk to Water* second, and *Wednesday Wars* least favorite because we used Subtext. I hate Subtext. I didn't like it at all".

Cycle 2 looks at the potential value, or what could result from the community. This is referred to as knowledge capital. Knowledge capital present itself as members' skills and ideas or power resulting from relationships, connections, reputations, or new learning experiences. In a midpoint questionnaire, Matilda shared, "I do trust and feel comfortable sharing my ideas with

others in the book club because I know that they won't laugh because they have their ideas too, and they may be as stupid as mine, but I'm still going to share it because I know that nobody is, like, nobody's going to mean about it." In that same questionnaire, Julia reported it was the comfortability she felt about sharing. "I have a thing where I always have to share, sometimes overshare, what experiences I have, so here I could do that." The revelation George shared in a later video confessional was his newfound ability to speak up in groups. "In fact, I now speak out more often in book clubs and stuff. I mean, yeah. Um, at first, like, I would so want to tell my family about the book when I read something really cool, but they would always be like, "What?" or "I don't care," so it's really nice to have people that understand what you're feeling at the same time, and it just made me really comfortable and just happy that they understood what I was talking about." Additionally, Madison's video confessional revealed the trust she had in the group. "I trusted and felt comfortable sharing with the others because what could they really do with our information? All they could really do is hold it in their head and think about what was happening. Like and they could have more things to help us figure out what was going on in the book if they thought about what I said in a different way."

Cycle 3 considers applied value, or ways in which the participants make use of potential value, the knowledge capital to enact change within their community. This would also include information on how members implemented the insights and advice of others in the group. Tim's final questionnaire provided insight into what he learned as a result of his participation in the study. "I learned that people have different perspectives for what they are reading. I can give another example. Another example would be that some people thought it was the right thing for Salva in *A Long Walk to Water* to run away, and other people thought that Salva should have stayed and fought to avenge his parents." While Tim acknowledged the impact other people's

perspectives had on his understanding, Jeffery shared a similar viewpoint in his midpoint video confessional, “I learned quite a bit more about the book, especially in the setting, how people would tell us how their setting looked, but it would be different than mine, and I would kinda picture it like that from now on. So, like, in *The City of Ember*, the pipeworks and Lina’s house and such, those were...people had very different opinions about that than I did.” I feel that Allie summed it up best during her video confessional, “So some things I learned about reading during this book club was that when you bring a ton of people together and you talk about the book, you get so many different ideas, and when you’re by yourself, you really don’t process all those ideas...like you just want to read the book. But when during this book club, I really, really started, like, actually reading the book and focusing on the details and all the small stuff.”

In Cycle 4, Wenger et al. (2011) look at the realized value, the improvement that occurs when the group applies the knowledge capital and makes a change to their normal functions. At this point, it should be noted that simply because a group makes a change, doesn’t necessarily mean that it was a positive change. Taking note of what impact the change had is the focus of this cycle. During a mid-point group interview, Allie shared “My takeaways would be how the smallest details can make the biggest impact on the story. Like, I learned this from discussions, when Jeffery had a thought about a little detail that was true about the ending and what actually happened.” In turn, Jeffery whom Allie mentions sees change in the group. “I think the group changed by...I think that in the beginning, we were sort of talking about more broad topics and we would focus in on as many details, but we got to notice and remember those details by the end of the book club.” That’s a big statement for a fourth grader. Similarly Madison stated, “I think we started to understand people more towards the end, and I think this because in the beginning, people would say something and then it would be a few seconds before someone else

said something. It would also take a while for us to, like, think all the information through, but then we, at the end once we understood people, we were just, like, blurting out things and, like, talking with each other, and sometimes one group would be having one conversation and another group would have another conversation, and then they would just combine.” As an observer of these changes, I found it extraordinary. These students were “taking care of business” and acting like little adults... often even more organized than adults.

The final cycle, Cycle 5 takes into account the reframing value, or how the group changes its definition of success. It’s a time when groups look toward moving forward. Reframing sometimes occurs when a community reflects on the impact the changes have had on the group. It’s during this cycle that participants often think about what they would do differently if they were to repeat the experience. In their final questionnaires, the participants were asked what they would change if we were to do this again. “If we were to do this again, I would not change anything. I just loved it. Like, just love it all. The one thing I would cut out would be maybe only meeting once a week and not doing Subtext whatsoever, or iBooks or anything. I like the real book in my hand,” Matilda stated. George wanted to forgo the use of electronic devices. “They are evil. They take away from the reading...yes, they do. Um, seriously, Subtext, there were way too many buttons.” Tim seemed to concur with George, “The change that I would suggest—it happened later on in the club—but start from the beginning with paper books, not like reading on the iPad. I really didn’t like that”. A few of the participants had opinions concerning the number of weekly meetings. Missy shared, “Well, I would think, like, maybe three days a week instead of just two. Well, I do like to have lunch with my friends, but it’s just I think we should meet more than just two times a week, ’cause, like, I want enough time to read, but I want more time to actually say what I have to say about the book”.

**Plotting the data within the matrix.** Once I'd pulled the evidence of each of the different cycles of value creation, it was time to plot them within the Matrix and begin to create my own value creation story for this research. When I took the data into account, plotting within the Wenger et al. (2011) framework of a value creation matrix, a story began to emerge. Wenger et al. note that "as the assessment develops and new stories and indicators are added, the matrix grows in size and complexity: it includes new elements and they are more interconnected to produce a more robust picture of value creation" (2011, p. 39). For this research, I focused on and plotted the individual stories and data provided by four participants: Jeffery, Julia, Vance. What follows are the matrices created for each participant, each participant's individual story, and the overall matrix combining all of their stories.

I have included two possible scenarios for the matrix. The first (Figure 4.4) credits the fact that the participants had fun and attended, which caused them to feel trusted, comfortable, and confident, and thus wanting to continue this experience over the summer. The darker lines illustrate this connection.



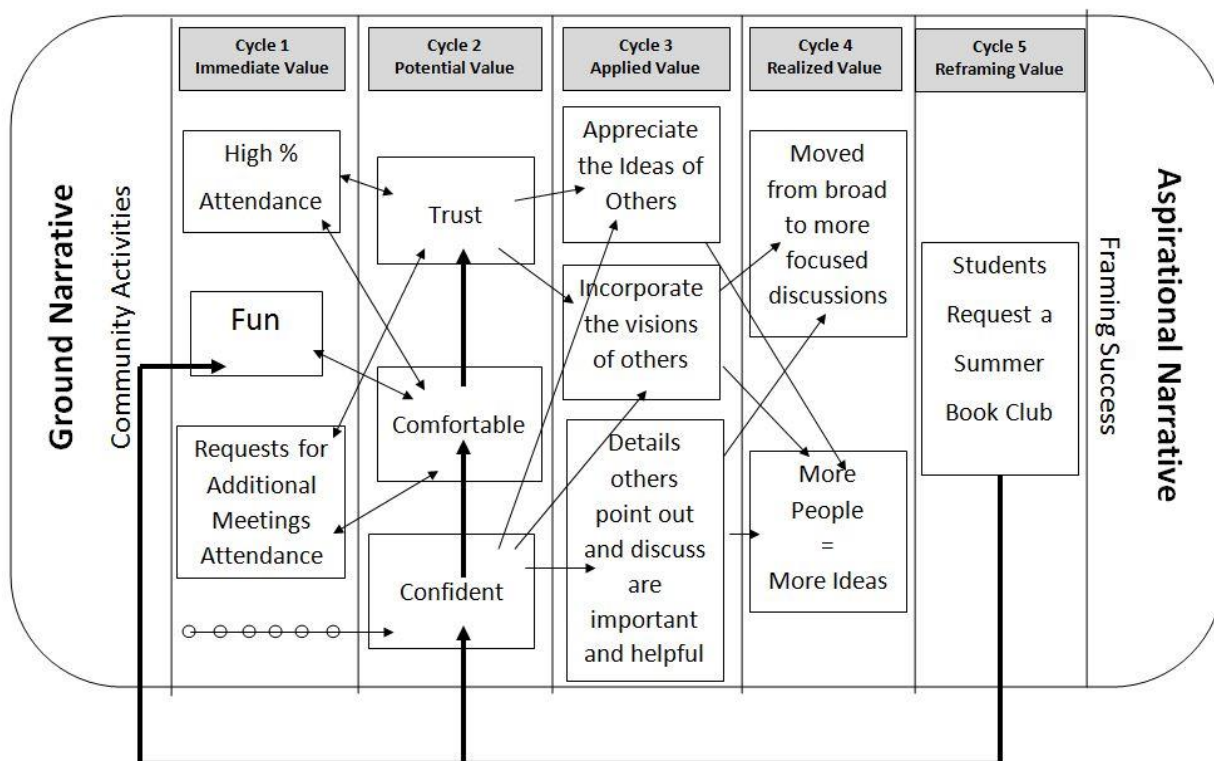


Figure 4.4. Value Creation Matrix A.

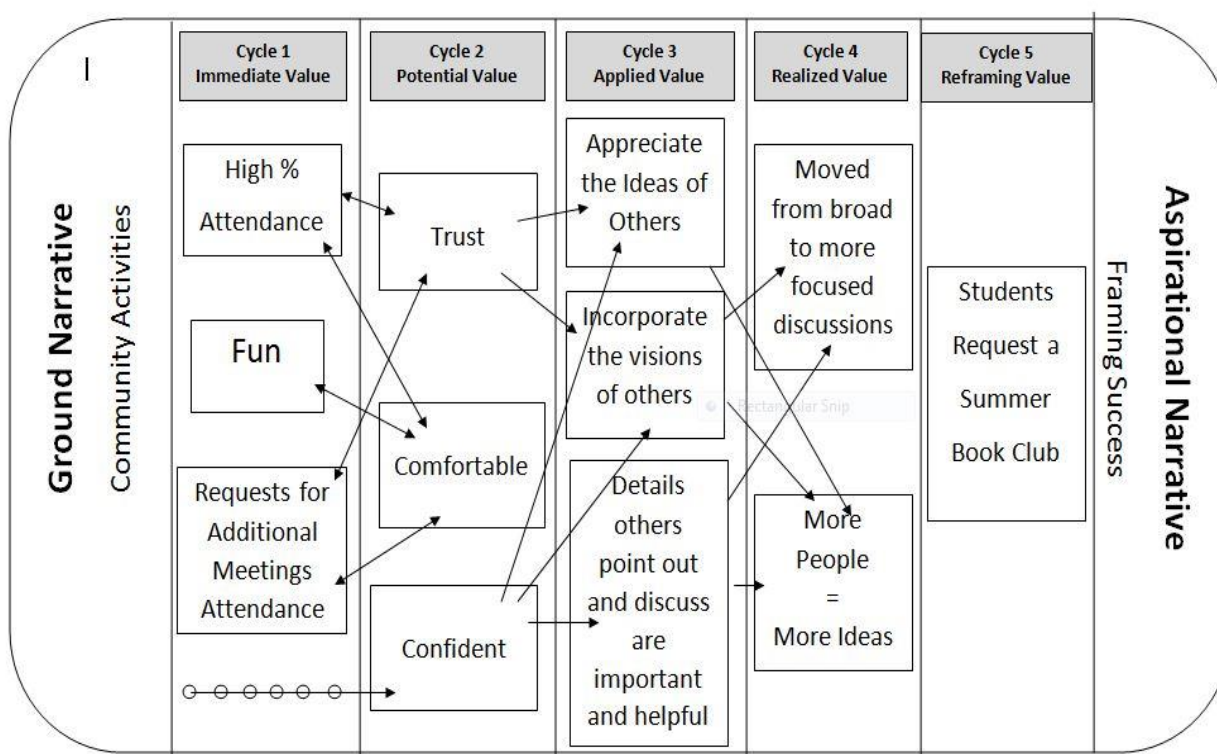


Figure 4.5 Value Creation Matrix B.

In the second matrix, I've left these lines off, with the assumption that all of the indicators worked together to bring forth the cycle 5 request for a summer book club.

**The value creation summary.**

As I began to pull this portion of my research together, I did so with great trepidation. However, working through this concept of value creation and staying true to the tenets put forth by Wenger et.al (2011) led to the creation of my own value creation matrix that was quite informative.

My ground assumptions were my starting point; in my head, I imagined this as ground zero. Starting out, the participants gave rather banal feedback. However, during this phase or cycle, I was only looking at the immediate value, students' first impression take-aways. In this study, the participants had high attendance, they found the experience to be fun, and they requested additional meetings. What I liked about this phase is that the matrix doesn't skip anything; all research has a starting point, and all too often, these basic building blocks are glossed over or left out completely.

As I moved through the matrix, trust, confident, and comfortable were the next key words that came into view. This represents the type of knowledge capital that is capable of being produced in a social learning environment. In the matrix, one can see that I have made a few of the arrows at this level dual-ended. The high attendance enabled participants to feel comfortable and trust their peers; likewise, because they felt comfortable and trusting, they were more inclined to attend frequently. The dotted line leading to confident indicates that there was not a direct correlation between a cycle 1 indicator and the cycle 2 indicator of confident.

However, as mentioned earlier, a proxy is a safe assumption. I felt that I could safely assume something occurred during the immediate value stage that caused my participants to feel confident. Thus far, I liked and agreed with the way in which this was playing out on paper. In cycle 3, I note that the trust, comfortable feeling, and confidence enabled the students to move forward and appreciate and incorporate the ideas of others. Additionally, there was an acknowledgement of details that others pointed out. The leap to cycle 4 makes clear sense. Because the participants had opened themselves to appreciating and incorporating the ideas of others, while also acknowledging the importance of the details pointed out by others, they were able to move from broad discussions to more focused discussions. Additionally, there was a level of understanding from the participants that more people is equal to more ideas.

The final step was not surprising to me. I knew that they were enjoying the book club and might be interested in continuing it if possible. The question that remained for me was exactly what led to this request? In the first matrix, I contributed it to the fact that they were having fun and attended on a regular basis, leading them to feel comfortable and to trust the other members. Additionally, a feeling of confidence would also likely lead one to want a continuation of all these positive outcomes. Or is it impossible to attribute the request to specific indicators? Quite possibly, it was the entire experience, all the indicators together, which led to the participants wanting to extend the book club into the summer.

### **The Co-construction of Knowledge Assisted in the Development of a Community of Practice**

The sociocultural foundation upon which this study rests, was evident in the data used to confirm the presence of a community of practice as well as the creation of value within the community of practice. Co-construction of knowledge was evinced multiple times throughout the

study. Jordan (2004) explains, “Co- construction of knowledge happens when children and teachers work together to find meanings, rather than facts”. This working together involves oral language and a negotiation of meaning. Both scaffolding of knowledge and mediation, practices often utilized in the co-creation of knowledge, were witnessed, documented and coded numerous times within the data.

As I created my codes, I had the foresight to include codes specific to the sociocultural perspective. The parent code I created was “co-construction of knowledge”. The two sub-codes I created under “co-construction of knowledge” were “scaffolding” and “mediation”. Of the 721 excerpts I created to be coded, I applied “scaffolding of knowledge” and/or “mediation” as codes a total of 174 times. Thus, with a little over 24% of my codes calling out examples of scaffolding and/or mediation, I knew that co-construction of knowledge deserved a closer look.

In this study, adults were not a part of the book club conversations and thus the participants often played the role of “expert other”. It was interesting to see how the role of “expert other” changed from child to child depending upon the topic and book being discussed. There never seemed to be one dominating expert. However, it was clear that their social construction of meaning and understanding was enabled by their scaffolding of one another.

**Scaffolding.** In the paragraphs that follow, I used the categories of scaffolding Sipe (2008) identified as being most prevalent when children are discussing literature with one another, serving as scaffolds for one another’s understanding. I feel confident in stating these claims because I was able to triangulate the data. Some excerpts were taken from online discussions, some were the product of face –to-face discussions, and others were taken from small group interviews the students conducted and recorded on their own.

**Explaining or clarifying.** Scaffolding designed to explain or clarify was the most frequently noted type of scaffolding documented in this study.

*City of Ember*, a fantasy, seemed to leave so much open to discussion. What one child might picture, another either discounted, explained, or refined. This refinement or clarification is clear in the transcript from a face-to-face discussion found below concerning the type of animal that was mentioned.

Vance- and by the way, when they saw that animal, I don't know if it was a fox or a dog

Julia- It was a fox because they said red fur

Madison- some dogs have red fur

Missy- did they say it had red fur?

Julia- It said red pointy ears... dogs don't have pointy ears

Vance- yes, they do, some do

Missy- He's right... but they did say a bushy tail

Vance- Which dogs do too, but I guess when you say bushy tail and red pointy ears... now I think fox

I enjoyed hearing their reasoning. First they had a bit of banter surrounding whether or not both dogs and fox can have red fur. Next Julia mentioned that dogs don't have pointy ears which was rebuked by Vance who in the end deduced that red fur and pointy tail must indicate a fox.

This last bit of text is from a transcript of a small group interview in which I was not present but had the students audio tape. The conversation concerns the book *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park. The fact that this book was based upon a true story intrigued the participants, often sending them off on a quest for more knowledge.

George -I would have stayed, you could fish, and you could be by yourself

Vance- they ate like... they didn't cook it....

Missy- No... that's not it. People can eat raw fish... um sushi?

Madison- No they ate too fast

Jeffery- I think they ate too much and they hadn't been eating much at all.

Madison- remember, they kept shoving it in their mouths

George- Yeah- their stomachs couldn't take it.

In this discussion, Jeffery, Madison, and George build upon one another's comments to help Vance understand that it wasn't so much the fact that they didn't cook the fish that made them sick but rather the fact that they ate it quickly and on empty stomachs that had had very little food over the past months.

**Challenging one's perception of reality.** The second most frequent type of scaffolding involved the participants challenging one another's perceptions of reality. This was always interesting. Based on comments made throughout the study and within the context of all the books we read, it was clear that each child's reality was different from that of their peers. At times, this was minor, but at other times, as you will see, there was a huge chasm. The following transcript was taken from group interview in which I was not present but had the students audio tape.

Jeffery- Yeah, he's right, I would have stayed. You'd even have water to drink, because it's a river, not an ocean.

Vance- yeah, it's not an ocean, so it's not salt water, so it's free water.

Jeffery- and you could grow a ton of crops

Vance- and then like.....1000's of people have crossed through there...

Jeffery- yeah but I don't think any of them were trying to settle down there. Actually, I probably wouldn't have stayed. I'd want to be with my family eventually

Vance- Not me, I would have... I would have been like what are you doing, there's free water here.

In the discussion Jeffery and Vance shared their reasons for possibly staying right there on that island. They go back and forth in their reasoning. The two clearly equate the island the safety and security they have within their own homes, their reality. There's good water, the possibility of food, and fresh water. However, at one critical point, Jeffery comes to the realization that staying would mean he wouldn't be with his family and thus determines that he would keep moving. His understanding of reality requires his family.

The end of City of Ember left a few of the students puzzled and clearly questioning the logic of what might happen next. It was interesting in this passage how the students continued with their own understandings, not bending to the explanations of others.

Madison- You know how they left that really quick note...

Tim- that was to the father cause remember....oh wait, they threw it down the ...

Madison- Yeah, they threw it down

Vance- But Mrs. Murdo...found it

Tim- Yeah, so I think that everybody will get out in the next book

Julia- That was such a cool ending though... she's the one who picks it up

Jeffery- Like she was just walking along and boom a rock appears that was just for her... I don't think so

Madison- I know, but I think she would have looked up...

George- Yeah and seen the sunlight

Vance- they were too high up

It was interesting to me how each of them perceived the fact that Mrs. Murdo picked up the rock. Julia found it “cool” that she was the one to pick it up. Jeffery questioned the probability of her just happening to be walking along, he didn’t buy it. Madison wondered why she didn’t look up, to her that seemed the natural thing for a person to do.

This next discussion really surprised me and truly highlighted how each child’s perception of reality varied. This discussion was also taken from a face-to-face book club centered on *A Long Walk to Water*.

Jeffery- I think I wouldn’t keep the baby, because it’s not like I know him yet

Stunned silence and then giggles

Madison- Jeffery!! If it were your child..... Would you keep the baby?

Tim- No No....

Julia- If it was a baby that was not mine, I would give it to someone to take care of....

If it were my child that was older, I would keep him.

Tim- Here’s what I say, If he can do stuff for himself, then he can stay.

It’s clear that Tim and Jeffery have similar views on whether or not the baby should be brought along on the journey. However, I distinctly remember this day and the others in the group were appalled by their line of thinking. Julia, seemed to have clearly thought the situation out and was prepared to justify her reasoning while also having a plan for the child if it were left behind.

**Refine a hypothesis.** Hearing all the predications that came up during the book club discussions provided peeks inside each participants thinking. Much of their time was spent trying to refine the hypotheses of others.



Within City of Ember, the students had much to say concerning what they believed should have occurred at the ending of the book. They proposed a number of different ways to let the others that were left behind know that they were there. This conversation took place on the day that I left the face-to face meeting just to see what might happen if I were not present. I left the audio recording going.

Jeffery- at night, they should shine a candle, and see if anybody noticed

Madison- Or at least lean as far as they can down the hole as much as they can and...

Julia- I would take a, I would find a string somewhere and lower something

Jeffery- You could wait for a black out and then shine a candle down there.

Jeffery- I can't believe... you'd think that there's a little bit of light coming through from up there...

Yeah yeah...

Vance- Cuz, if it's in like a cave... just a slight illumination

George- You can always see even a spot of light when there's no light at all... light travels

Honestly, this seemed to be a very well thought out discussion. They were sharing properties of light and ideas on how to make the light most visible. In the end they seemed to have a revised hypothesis which included the fact that even the smallest amount of light can be visible.

## **Mediation**

Mediation is the idea that all human activity is facilitated by tools or signs (Wertsch 1991). In sociocultural studies, mediation refers to the use of language (spoken and written), maps, regular signs (street signs, warning signs, etc.), mnemonic devices, and even technology as

learning resources or assistance. Mediation is seen as a "go between" in a child's attempt to create meaning when presented with information that's not clear, or instantly relevant to them. Vygotsky did not believe that the use of tools to mediate did not just simplify an understanding that might have happened without the mediation, he found the inclusion of tools actually changed the flow and alter the entire course and organization of understanding (Vygotsky 1987).

Thus, it's not what the tools do, it's how their use changes human actions or understandings. In this respect, learners use the tools to participate together and socially construct knowledge, it's not the knowledge provided directly from the tools, but rather what knowledge can be constructed through the use of the tools (Wertsch and Bivens, 1992). In this study, the iPads and Subtext didn't provide the understanding, they provided the text to be read that was then digested and discussed in order to come to a mutual understanding. Likewise, an individual student's comments during face-to-face book club meetings is considered a mediational tool when it adds to the understanding, not simply at the face value of what is being said. It's a culmination of everyone's conversation towards the end goal of an understanding of what's been read.

In the first book we read, *The Wednesday Wars*, there was a long face-to-face discussion surrounding the waterfall. Multiple ideas were thrown back and forth concerning the appearance of the waterfall. As you will see the students used yard sticks, the walls of the classroom, and yes oral language to mediate a shared understanding of this scene in the book.

Jeffery- how tall do you think that waterfall is

Tim- I don't know

Julia- I'm not really sure

Jeffery I think possibly like as tall as this ceiling

Everyone looks up at the ceiling.

Julia- I thought it was pretty short

George Maybe more than 10 feet tall... go get that yardstick.

George holds the yardstick up for everyone to see

George- I'm thinking like 4 of these

Vance- Twelve feet? I don't know, but it couldn't be too short because it said that

Danny Humfer did two like flips

Everyone Ohhhhhh yeah

Jeffery... (looking at the ceiling in the classroom) well, I could probably do like two back flips off of that ... possibly

Allie- No but he could dive down too

Julia- (moving her arms) okay guys, imagine..

everyone continues to speak over Julia

Vance: no, he said he dived head first and then he did like two flips

Allie: No he jumped off and then did two flips head first

George: It could be really deep, but ummm. Say like the waterfall was like this deep the pool could be like.

Missy- It did say that he did the flip in the air

Jeffery- He could have done it... He could have done it

Julia- I agree, he could have done it.

The discussion begins with the question of how high the waterfall was and then they build upon one another's understandings using the ceiling height, the wall, a yard stick and even hand signals. Vance points out that it can't be too short because two flips were done on

the way down. Jeffery uses the classroom ceiling as a guide deciding that he could do two flips from that height. Finally, Allie mentions that he went in head first causing Jeffery to agree that he could have done it. Jeffery and Julia used the input from everyone, including an “eyeballing” of the classroom ceiling height to help everyone come to a shared understanding.

The brief exchange that follows is also taken from *The Wednesday Wars*, was taken from downloaded Subtext transcripts during their reading of.. The participants were online at the same time and were working together to explain what the erasers looked like.

Jeffery: I'm going to look up an old timey eraser because I've been wondering what is that? (He then proceeds to jump out of the book and into Google.)

Missy: They're like whiteboard erasers but they're a little bit different they're for like blackboards

Julia: and you have to hit them out because all the dust just gathers up inside them... it doesn't spread it out

Madison- Jeffery can you send all of us the picture?

Jeffery posts a link to the image he found.

Julia- Oh wow!

Missy- Okay

Tim- Yeah that's what I thought it would look like.

I appreciated the fact that they came at this mediation from different angles. Jeffery relied on the Internet for his source of explanation. He jumped out of the online conversation for a bit and opened Google to seek further understanding. Missy used what she already knew to help explain and Julia took it a step further explaining why Holling had to beat the erasers

on the side of the school. In the end Jeffery also takes one more step to insure understanding a bit by posting an image.

This last example occurred later in the research, while reading the final book, *A Long Walk to Water*, there was a face-to-face discussion surrounding why some were killed and others were not. It all centered around one tribe, the Neur.

Matilda- Why did they kill him anyway?

Madison- They were the Neur tribe

Multiple... “no it wasn’t”

Jeffery- I think they were the war people

Matilda- They were just bandits

Jeffery- they were bandits, they were bandits

Missy- No, remember when they were sitting around the fire, they came over and Salva said he saw the markings on their heads and they were Neur. I looked it up online.

Madison- Yeah, but the people that killed him were just people fighting

Vance- I think it was kinda cool that Salva didn’t have his markings

Camron- yeah, I wonder what happened to them?

Vance- No, he never got them... he left before he was old enough to get them

Tim- Looking over Missy’s shoulder to read the proof she’d found... “yeah, ya’ll they were Neur.

Missy- Showing the book.... Yeah, they’re Neur

In the above discussion, mediation occurs on two fronts. First with Missy using the computer to discern the markings on the person and thus determining him to be Neur and later

the same child, Missy mediates through the sharing of the actual printed text to confirm the con-constructed knowledge.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have attempted to tell the story of what happened when a group of 4th grade readers came together as part of a lunchtime book club. The data clearly support and give evidence to the development of a community of practice around the book club. An additional area of interest involved an attempt to understand what, if any, impact resulted from the book club ultimately functioning as a community of practice. The data also revealed an abundance of peer to peer scaffolding and mediation. This co-construction of knowledge ultimately worked to bond the group together as a community and assisted in the value creation that was evident.

The primary recipients of value in a community are the participants themselves, both individually and collectively. If they do not find value, they will not participate and the community could begin to fall apart (Wenger et al., 2011). My analysis revealed evidence of value creation in each of the five levels identified by Wenger et al., with a higher number of examples occurring within the lower levels of Immediate Value and Potential value. While evident, there were fewer areas of data alignment within the areas of Applied Value, Realized Value, and Reframing Value.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

This final chapter is often referred to as the “and so” chapter, as in, “And so, now that this journey has come to an end, what has been learned and what still remains a question?” Thus, it is within this chapter that I discuss how the results of my data analysis addressed my research question. Additionally, within this chapter, I will examine both the perceived implications and the limitations of the study. I close with a discussion of possible directions for future research.

I opened this dissertation with what I considered to be a startling directive from my school administration. I was asked to limit the number of novels my students were reading and drastically cut back on the amount of time we spent discussing our reading. This directive flew in the face of what I had for years considered to be critically important to my success as a teacher and my students’ success as learners —the creation of a classroom community. Year after year I’d worked to build this community one “warm fuzzy” conversation at a time. There were no instructions for community building; I simply provided what the students came to see as a safe place to share their beliefs, emotions and questions with an expectation of acceptance and mutual respect.

As I began to develop my research plan, I knew I wanted to focus on discussions about books. However, I also knew that this idea encompassed so much more than just discussions. The bigger picture needed to focus on the importance of studying the social learning and social participation taking place as a result of these discussions (Anstey & Bull, 2006; New London Group, 2000). My decision to center the study within a community of practice framework (Wenger, 1998) allowed me to focus on learning as a shared, social experience. Unlike much of the literacy research that had already been conducted, I was less interested in *what* was being

said in the book club and more interested in the community aspect—the comfortable way we all feel during our discussions, the trust that’s evident, and the confidence that’s on display. I wondered if I was responsible for nurturing this, or, if left to their own devices, the students in a book club might come to experience these feelings on their own. More specifically, I asked the following question:

How might collaborative e-book reading experiences, along with subsequent face-to-face conversations, support the development of a community of practice amongst skilled upper-elementary readers?

### **Summary of Findings**

The educational concept that best aligned with my interests was Communities of Practice Theory. Wenger and Trayner (2015) describe a community of practice (CoP) as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (para. 3). In this study, I found that a community of practice evolved as members of a book club interacted around a shared text without my participation. As the study evolved I also realized that true to sociocultural perspectives, much of the new knowledge and understanding that was working to build this community was a result of the students learning from one another. The group was informing individuals and individuals were informing the group. Their conversations, both online as well as face-to-face, were clearly scaffolding the learning of the entire group as well as individuals. Their scaffolded learning brought about a confidence and trust indicative of communities of practice, which in turn brought a sense of value to what was happening. This value creation was also of interest to me. If I could illustrate the value which could be attributed to the community, I might possibly find a way to illustrate, to



prove that there was value in the discussions I believed to be critical to my own success as an educator.

In the end, I felt comfortable making the following claims:

- Collaborative reading experiences and face-to-face conversations support the development of a community of practice amongst skilled upper elementary readers.
- Within book clubs functioning as a community or practice, value creation is achievable.
- The co-construction of knowledge assisted in the development of a community of practice.

**Collaborative reading experiences and face-to-face conversations supported the development of a community of practice amongst skilled upper elementary readers.**

Communities of practice speak to the social nature of learning. Vygotsky (1978) states, “Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88). This quote speaks directly to the underlying benefits of learning within a community of practice. Stepping in a bit deeper, Kapucu (2015) notes, “Communities of practice act as catalysts for students to internalize the knowledge they are exposed to and allow them to reach different interpretations of the same knowledge” (p. 586).

However, as Lave and Wenger (1991) point out, not every group, club, or even community can be considered a community of practice. In order to be a true community of practice, three specific elements must be in place.

The first element of a community of practice is a domain. A domain is an identity that’s created by a shared interest, and those who are members of the community must be truly committed to the domain. In this case, the domain was a love of reading. When brainstorming

possible titles they might read during the study, their conversations surrounding what they've read, what they want to read, and what genres they preferred were peppered with exclamations, animated gestures, and heartfelt pleas for one title over another. It was obvious within the first few days together that this group had a definite identity—a love of reading.

The second element is community. Within a community, members of an established domain share information, participate in activities together, and discuss their domain. Again, in this study, the element of community was evident almost immediately. During the first few face-to-face meetings, relationships were formed and a true level of respect was witnessed in students' dealings with one another. The data indicated high levels of trust and confidence between the members.

The final element of a true community of practice is practice. In order for the community to have a practice, it must establish goals and share a purpose. During the first few face-to-face meetings, the book club created rules and a goal for the club. Their goal was simple, "We just want it to be fun and have good conversations about the books". Additional evidence of practice was the group decision to abandon the Subtext platform, a decision they discussed and worked through on their own. The practice of a community develops over time through sustained interaction. Toward the end of the study, the group requested that the experience continue into the summer. I found this to be one of the most rewarding outcomes of this experience.

**Within book clubs functioning as a community or practice, value creation is achievable.**

My analysis determined that not only was there evidence that the book club had developed into a true community of practice, there was also strong evidence to suggest that as a result of their time together, value creation was evident within their community of practice. As mentioned earlier in this document, studies of communities of practice are seen more often in

business, nursing, and higher education. The same is true for studies seeking to determine the value these communities produce. Studies seeking to understand value creation have typically had a much broader focus, with value indicators for general satisfaction, knowledge acquisition, or teamwork (Dawson, 2008; Wasko, Teigland, & Faraj, 2009). The value creation matrix enables a view of the work involved in the creation of value at multiple levels.

Using the Value Creation Matrix created by Wenger et al. (2011), I was able to identify examples of value creation within the book club. The purpose of this matrix, according to Wenger et al., is to “provide the foundation for an evaluation process that can integrate heterogeneous sources and types of data to create a compelling picture of how communities function and create value for their members” (p. 7). Within the matrix, five levels of value creation are evaluated: Immediate Value, Potential Value, Applied Value, Realized Value and Reframing Value. In researching online communities, Booth and Kellogg (2014) state that the Value Creation Matrix “illustrates how individuals with varying perspectives and levels of expertise can co-construct new forms of meaning and understanding in ways that are individually and collectively valuable” (p 12). I agree with this statement. When using the matrix, I was able to “hear” from multiple participants through multiple forms of data that came together to construct meaning and understanding. When viewed within the structure of the matrix, a value creation story was easily able to emerge.

### **Co-construction of knowledge assisted in the development of a community of practice.**

Sociocultural perspectives focus on the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge, exploring the social system in which learning takes place to seek explanations for an individual’s thinking and learning. Within this study, the students built a community of practice around their shared interest of reading. Additionally, they

placed value on the input of others and collaborated together in an effort to come to a shared understanding of their reading.

It was clear from the beginning of my study that I would be working within the realm of sociocultural perspectives. Thus, early on I decided to add codes within Dedoose that called out clear indicators of sociocultural themes including: co-construction of knowledge mediation, and scaffolding. What I noticed during my analysis was that much of the coding used to parse out the data indicating the presence of a community of practice, also included the coding of sociocultural elements. The same was true for the for value creation. Codes for immediate value covered participation and collaboration which were also coded for mediation and scaffolding. Identifying potential value included codes for new knowledge, trust, change in perspective and confidence, all elements common within the co-creation of knowledge as well. In all, over 24% of the total excerpts created coded led to the presence of sociocultural elements of scaffolding and mediation.

**Within book clubs functioning as a community or practice, both New Literacy Studies and new literacies were embodied.**

The fact that the students choose to abandon the technology component (Subtext) within this study does not in any way equate to the absence of new literacies or detract from the fact that the study embraced New Literacy Studies.

New Literacy Studies (capital letters) refers to “a particular sociocultural approach to understanding and researching literacy” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 27). The fact that this was a community-building experience, and that understanding came about partially due to the group conversations around a common reading, indicates that understanding was not solely occurring inside the participants’ heads: “Literacy was a social and cultural achievement—it was

about ways of participating in social and cultural groups—not just a mental achievement” (Gee, 2010, p. 2).

What Gee, Lankshear, and Knobel all realize is that it’s not the “stuff” that we need to be studying, because the “stuff”, those digital amazements, are changing too rapidly to even bother to study. It’s obvious by their decision to drop the Subtext app that the participants realized this as well. They weren’t as comfortable responding within the app as they were face-to-face, and thus abandoned it. It’s important to note here that their affinity space didn’t change. They were still a group of kids who loved to read. They built a community around that shared interest.

### **Considerations and Limitations**

The findings of this study reveal the tensions that arise when students are asked to work within environments they find to be ill-suited to their needs. The findings also reveal the power that exists when those same students are given choice and autonomy in decisions related to their learning. Additionally, outside of reading or technology, this study had far-reaching implications for communities of practice.

### **Teacher/Researcher**

My dual role as both teacher and researcher was one of the biggest limitations surrounding this study. I made every attempt to remain objective in my collection and analysis of the data. However, it must be noted that I did play a role in bringing these students together. To justify this, I refer to McWilliams et al.’s (2011) suggestion that “the teacher is essential to building participation structures that enable learners to engage with new tools and ideas with a playful and curious attitude and to regularly reflect on the learning that can result” (p. 243).

One way in which I sought to remain objective was to remove myself from the book club. Other than providing the actual space for the group to meet, I did my best to remain a passive

observer and recorder. Additionally, I allowed the students to choose the books they read (Gambrell, 2006), the purpose of the book club, and even the rules and expectations for their club. Along those same lines, researcher bias surrounding technology should also be noted as a limitation. I came to this research with a strong background and belief in the power of educational technology.

Training and preparation are important in education. While most teachers feel well prepared to teach content area material, the same cannot be said for educational technology or the practice of simply adding technology to content area instruction. There's often a sense of "winging it," and when not successful, a quick abandonment of the technology tools often follows. As Terrazas-Arellanes et al. (2016) note, "For teachers, quality professional development can mean the difference between merely using technology tools and creating transformative change in the classroom. For students, having well-prepared teachers can mean the difference between passive listening and active learning" (p. 335).

## **Participants**

The results presented within this document come from a relatively small sample size. I found the sample to be sufficient to provide insights, as well as indicators for possible future research. However, I would not be so bold as to generalize these results across larger, more diverse populations. The participants in this study were a narrowly defined representation of learners, a group of nine students chosen from my own class of 4th grade advanced content reading/language arts. Each student self-identified as an avid reader. Five participants were male, and four were female.

### **Length of Study**

While at first glance, it may seem as if the length of the study was short, I believe that I was able to generate a large amount of quality data for this study. This large data set was in my opinion, due in large part to the level of engagement shown by the participants. Their requests for additional book club meetings, stopping by unannounced, and requesting that the book club continue into the summer are examples of the participants' levels of engagement. The Google Forms surveys and video confessionals also provided additional data above and beyond the actual book club meetings.

### **Technology**

Technology, something I would not have initially considered to be a limitation, proved to be the biggest limitation of all in this study. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, my classroom is paperless; we do just about everything on iPads or computers. This group of children grew up with technology; they haven't lived in a world without technology. They are the true digital natives. However, in the study, reading e-books and the Subtext app itself each proved to be issues the group could not overlook. Research has not always been positive regarding the use of technology in education and its ability to improve student achievement (Papanastasiou, 2003; Wenglinsky, 2005). Yet, with so many variations in studies (age, type of technology, training, accessibility, etc.), I am not confident that a consensus on such a topic will ever be reached. However, the constructivist use of technology implemented within this research has been noted to support the development of higher-order thinking skills (Churcher, Downs, & Tewksbury, 2014; McWilliams et al., 2011; Pear & Crone-Todd, 2002; White & Hungerford-Kresser, 2014).

## **Implications**

While the research and use of communities of practice is prevalent in both the business (Corso & Giacobbe, & Martini, 2009) and healthcare (Rayner et al., 2016) sectors, research conducted in the education sector is more limited. When communities of practice theory is used in educational research, it tends to focus on higher education and preservice teachers (Liu, 2016), classroom teachers (Charbonneau-Gowdy, 2015; Gardiner, Cumming-Potvin, & Hesterman, 2013; Terrazas-Arellanes et al., 2016), ESL teachers (Rogers, 2000), and online communities of practice (Thorpe et al., 2007). Few community of practice studies have focused on K-12 students, with the majority of those studies highlighting middle (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006 ) or secondary students (Amidon & Trevathan 2016).

After experiencing the development of a community of practice and seeing firsthand the positive outcomes, I encourage others, whether through research or classroom practice, to consider cultivating communities of practice at the elementary and secondary level. Specifically, Communities of practice are important to the field of education because they provide a shared space for likeminded students to learn and communicate around a shared topic of interest in meaningful way that instills trust and confidence.

### **Instructional Implications**

I will begin with what I perceive to be the instructional implications within my own classroom. I would like to continue the lunchtime book clubs, even possibly allowing the groups to develop around specific areas of student interest. In her work involving critical thinking and what she describes as “layered understandings,” Stufft (2016) studied an afterschool video game club that also had a book club facet. The participants read young adult novels that had connections to the interactive video games enjoyed by the students. She found that the book club



discussions moved between their books and experiences within their games. Making real connections within an area of interest could, in turn, allow the book club to serve as a “springboard for students to learn both within and beyond school (p. 98).

Moving to grade level or even school wide implications, the concept of layered learning intrigues me. Encouraging teachers in the use of multiple sources of information to teach concepts within all content areas has proven to be successful for me. The multiple sources could include, but are certainly not limited to an article, that connects with a novel, that’s then followed by a movie, and possibly even a song. However, allowing students to select an area of their own interest (e.g., video games) to see how connections might be made would, in a sense, allow students to create a scaffolding of their own for use in future content area learning. In his research using video games in the classroom, Beavis ( 2012) found that by providing a place for students to have real discussions about the games they enjoy playing, teachers may be able to carry over the discussion skills to content area comprehension.

Another area with school wide and even system wide implication is the concept of a “paperless classroom”. Blomeyer (2002) states, “Online learning or e-learning isn’t about digital technologies any more than classroom teaching is about blackboards. E-learning should be about creating and deploying technology systems that enable constructive human interaction and support the improvement of all teaching and learning” (p. 25). It’s the last bit of this quote, “improvement of all teaching and learning,” schools need to address. While my research isn’t definitive, it did open my eyes and cause me to wonder if what we’re doing in the name of technology is truly in the best interest of the students. For years, we’ve been reading about the inability of our schools to prepare students for the future. Gee (2006) calls for educators to do a better job capitalizing on the digital culture readily available to students outside of school.

Larson (2012) suggests that teachers make their classrooms more aligned with today's learners in terms of technology use in non-educational settings. Additionally, the New Media Consortium's Horizon Report (2006), known for its identification of emerging technologies and their impact on education, reported the following: "Schools are still using materials developed to teach the students of decades ago; today's students are actually very different in the ways they think and work. Schools need to adapt to current students' needs and identify learning models that are engaging to younger generations" (p. 10). However, my findings indicate that the use of technology for technology's sake may not always be the best course. Surprisingly, I am not, at this point, inclined to believe that technology necessarily serves student learning better than traditional means.

In support of my findings, the most recent Horizon Report (2015) seems to have pulled back a bit, now recognizing the emergence of blended learning, a model that borrows the best practices found in both online learning and face-to-face instruction. This year I plan to incorporate this hybrid model into my own classroom instruction. I agree with the Horizon Report's finding that "hybrid learning reflects the reality of a world where work and productivity happen in both physical and virtual settings" (p. 17).

### **Implications for Future Research**

As I began to analyze my data and compile the findings for this study, I was excited about the directions this project was taking me. This study was a great jumping-off point for future studies that could take place over a longer period of time, include larger more diverse populations, utilize different eReader platforms, and possibly look at power and identity within book clubs.

**Longitudinal studies.** I believe that a longitudinal study over the course of 6 to 9 months would provide more insight into student perceptions of the community of practice. Longitudinal studies often reveal patterns over time, and thus provide a more detailed view of cause and effect relationships. A longer study might also allow hidden or repressed actions to be revealed as the community becomes more involved. Charbonneau-Gowdy (2015) conducted a longitudinal study that examined the role eReaders might play in changing the literacy habits of EFL students in Chile. Based on their findings, they suggest a restructuring of the prevalent Chilean literacy education model. Their recommendations include a more equal or fair distribution of technology resources throughout the country so that all students will be prepared for the global future they will inherit. Terraazas-Arllanes et al. (2016) conducted a two-year longitudinal study that examined student online research and teacher training prior to implementation of the program. Their research highlighted the value of quality face-to-face instruction prior to implementing a student online research curriculum. Students who were introduced to the program via teachers who received face-to-face training reported higher scores and attitudes toward research.

Thus, I believe that much more could be discovered through the use of longitudinal studies.

**Larger and more diverse participant pool.** To increase the possibility of generalization in future research, one might consider widening the scope, pulling participants from a larger geographical area or even multiple geographical regions. Additionally, the sample sizes could also be larger, better representing more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. Choosing from a wider range of ages, reading proficiencies is also a possibility. An additional factor that might be considered would be to focus on a single gender. Evans's (2002) study of

student perceptions of literature discussion groups interested me because the findings addressed areas I would like to further explore. During her year-long study, she noted certain difficulties in mixed-gender discussion groups, noting that “students said that the gender makeup of their discussion groups influenced how they participated in and experienced their discussions” (p. 59).

**Cultural capital, power, and identity.** While power and identity were not focuses of my research, as I read through and coded my data, it became clear that these factors were definitely in play. Bourdieu’s (2002) views concerning the concept of cultural capital examined the inequities that occur when the roles played by cultural background, preferences, and behaviors are passed along to children. Students of higher socioeconomic families are favored in the school system, perpetuating the inequalities. I fear that this is the case in my school system, and thus my study. As mentioned earlier in this section, a larger and more diversified pool would likely reveal much about the influence that cultural capital has on students’ attitudes towards many issues examined within this study, including communities of practice and e-books.

Warschauer’s (2006, 2011) work might also provide insight into the cultural capital, power, and identity at play within a study such as this. His research on laptop use in schools has provided strong evidence of the role technology plays in learning, specifically literacy learning. Additionally, his focus on multiliteracies provides evidence of this power in connection with at-risk populations.

Alvermann’s (2008) commentary on adolescents’ online literacy practices notes the ease with which online content can be distributed and the ability to remix content using a wide variety of tools and contexts. However, Alvermann also points out that “this capacity, while noteworthy, leaves unaddressed the degrees to which adolescents’ online literacies have relevance for

classroom practice” (p. 13). I wholeheartedly agree. Much of what I’ve witnessed as technology integration in my own school usually has a thin or nonexistent connection to the curriculum.

Within my coding, there was one student who came across as bossy and legalistic. The rules were the rules, and she let anyone who stepped out of line know this. Evans (2002) notes the exhibition of power during her year-long study of literature discussion groups: “Students said that the presence of a bossy group member influenced their participation in discussions” (p. 62). Interestingly, students in this study were able to make clear distinctions between a member who acted as a leader and a member who was simply bossy. Again, while this was not a focus of my research, I believe that the same might be said of our book club—the bossy group member was not looked upon as a leader, but more as a parent or disciplinarian. In Evans’s research, as well as in my own observations, leaders were actually appreciated and kept the group on task, while the opposite was true for bossy members. Bossy members seemed to cause halts in conversation and uncomfortable feelings. This is an area that also warrants additional research.

**Different eReader platforms.** The very specific complaints put forth by the participants concerning the Subtext platform leads to much speculation. Their reports were directly connected to Subtext, not e-books in general. In short, the participants in this study found Subtext to be a bit cumbersome, offering too many tools and choices. They would have preferred a stripped-down version with just the book, a highlighter, and annotation tools. A part of me wondered if this preference came about because the participants all self-identified as avid readers. They want to read, not play with tools. Or, could it possibly be their age? At ten years old, there tends to be a lack of self-control and restraint. Were all the “bells and whistles” simply too tempting?

Subtext was not the online choice for this study; other possibilities included Glose, iBooks, Kindle, nook, and even Diigo. However, none of these offered the two most important elements in one package—security and social annotation ability. The ability to easily go between the e-book and reference sources also ranked high on my list of preferences, as did the ability to highlight and save. However these capabilities are already commonplace on most eReader platforms.

Student security and safety are always concerns when working within a school setting. I chose Subtext for a number of reasons. However, the most important reasons were the level of security it offered and the fact that my school system approved the platform. Subtext is part of the Accelerated Reader family, in which our school system already participates. Thus, this meant that my students could log in securely and that I didn't have to worry about their online safety. This, above all else, is something the other social annotation readers could not provide.

In his article "Five Reasons for Optimism about the Future of e-books," Sanders Kleinfeld (2014), an industry insider, didn't write about the paring down of tools and amenities offered within e-book readers. On the contrary, he wrote about the addition of open annotation to most readers, the ability to add widgets within books (e.g., calculators, calendars, slide show viewers), and research into the addition of more onboard tools for the reader.

I'm also interested in getting this platform selection correct because I believe that it would allow the in-school/out-of-school barrier to be broken down. Reading and responding should not, in my opinion, be relegated to the classroom. I agree with Alvermann's (2011) statement: "Preferable, in my view, are studies designed to treat contexts not as structured, impermeable containers, but as sieves through which social, cultural, economic, and political discourses animate one another" (p. 158).

## Summary

As we participate and communicate in an increasingly digital world, the importance of understanding and embracing social learning has become more important than ever (Anstey & Bull, 2006; New London Group, 2000). Within this study, the interdependence of both the social and the individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge were evident. The collaborative reading experiences, along with face-to-face conversations, supported the development of a community of practice (Wenger & Trayner, 2015).

The data gathered clearly indicate the presence of the three elements Lave and Wenger (2011) identified as key elements of a community of practice: domain, community, and practice. The domain was evidenced in the group's common love of reading. The element of community was evident early in the study. The participants walked into each meeting ready to discuss the books, often before the meetings had actually started. Respect for one another was present in the beginning, and became even more evident as the study progressed. This, along with students' ability to listen to one another and share ideas, was clear evidence of community. The element of practice was evidenced in the group's requests for additional non-scheduled meetings, their desire to continue the book club meetings into the summer, and most importantly, the decision to drop the Subtext platform in favor of printed books.

While not originally a part of the research question, this study also explored the idea of value creation within a community of practice. The Value Creation Matrix put forth by Wenger et al. (2011) provided a clear path for charting the various types and levels of value creation throughout the duration of the study. I appreciated the way in which the matrix's design enabled an understanding of the type of ebb and flow that is evident with most educational endeavors. The concept of a value creation story enabled the "big picture" that traditional/standardized tests

cannot take into account. I believe that this concept of value creation and the Value Creation Matrix itself deserve additional research and use within a wide variety of educational settings.

Additionally, my analysis revealed that the students in this study participated in the co-construction of knowledge through the scaffolding and mediation information to create understanding. This co-construction of knowledge was evident in multiple areas including their reading within Subtext, at face-to-face book club meetings, and during small group interviews. In the end, I believe that this co-construction of knowledge contributed to the creation of the community of practice as well as the value creation within the community of practice.

The findings of this study are limited to the context in which it took place. Thus, the age and ability levels of the participants, along with the overall socioeconomic status of the community, limit the generalizability of the study. However, I do believe that the concept of communities of practice works well in the elementary environment and is deserving of further research, research not necessarily limited to book clubs or even literacy.

The findings of this study bolster the already existing research in support of socially constructed learning. I am excited to share this data in the hopes that others may take the next step to learn more about communities of practice within elementary classrooms.



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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### IRB Approval and IRB Protocol

#### IRB Protocol

(approved December 2015)

#### 1) **Protocol Title**

Using iPads and e-books to Construct and Share Knowledge:

Book Clubs as Communities of Practice

#### 2) **Research Design and Methods**

Type of Study: Case Study

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine students' individual, collaborative, and networked activities around an e-book. The goal of the weekly book club at the center of this research will be the development of a community of practice with their reading possibly serving as a catalyst for social action.

Central Questions

How might collaborative e-book reading experiences and subsequent face-to-face conversations support the development of a community of practice amongst skilled upper elementary readers?

- What role does technology play in developing and sustaining the community of practice?
- What role do the face-to-face meetings play in developing and sustaining a community of practice?

- What if any evidence points to the community of practice creating a plan of social action?

**Participants-** 4<sup>th</sup> grade students (3 females, 3 males)

### **Methods of Data Collection:**

- Field Notes
- Downloaded data from each child's Subtext (notes & highlights from books read)
- Screenshots and Data Pulled from Google Classroom
- Digitally Recorded Interviews
- Transcripts from and tape recorded interviews

**Control Groups-** Control groups are not a part of this study.

### **Research versus Normal Classroom Instruction for All Students**

With the exception of the face-to-face interviews and data collection, which are considered voluntary participation activities involving only the research participants, all other activities listed within study are considered to be part of normal classroom instruction in which all students will participate in regardless of their research participation or not.

### **3. Study Timeline**

The anticipated period for subject involvement is February 1, 2016 – December 30, 2016

- Within this time period, each enrolled student will participate in no more than 2 one-on-one interviews with the researcher and 9 whole group book club meetings
- The length of each interview will be no longer than 10 minutes
- The length of each book club meeting will be 45 minutes
- Total duration of face-to-face participation= 7 hours and 10 minutes

- Additional time, reading within the Subtext app and will be at the participants' discretion but should not total more than 20 hours.
- Total duration of participant involvement including face-to-face and participant online/Kindle app individual work for the study = 27 hours.
- The enrollment process should take less than one week after IRB approval. All subjects will be enrolled early March 30, 2016.
- The estimated date for the investigator to complete the gathering of data for this study May 31st, 2016.
- Primary data analysis to be completed by June 30, 2016 with final analyses completed by September 2016

## **Procedures**

It should be noted that with the exception of the face-to-face interviews and data collection (Subtext app annotations, Subtext app tool use, Subtext annotations, field notes, interview notes, interview audio) all other procedures are considered regular educational practice within the researcher's 4th grade reading classroom. All students in this classroom, research participants and nonparticipants, will take part in the activities listed as part of this study.

### **Breakdown/Timeline of Procedures**

- Early March 2016 -Students selected and notified of study intent and parental permission secured
- Mid-March 2016 Purchase and load e-books to iPads (Subtext app)
- Mid-March 2016- Whole class (research participants and all other members of the class) meeting to explain the study, timeline of events, and documentation expectations including: journal keeping and use of Kindle tools.

- Mid-March 2016- Meet with students that have agreed to voluntary participation in the study and explain that I will be downloading their online notations, taking field notes, photos, and videos throughout the reading of the book. In addition, I will use this time to explain the face-to-face interviews.
- April 2016- Students begin reading. Allow for a 2-3 week reading period with weekly lunchtime book club meetings weekly. Additionally, students may choose to make intermittent entries Google Classroom.
- Late April begin second title and repeat the process
- Late May 2016-After all students finish the second title, researcher will conduct individual post interviews with each students. These interviews will be digitally recorded.
- June/July 2016- Code data, transcribe interviews and video footage
- August/September 2016- Write up the research findings and seek publication

### **Devices**

Devices used in the research include 10 Apple iPads (3<sup>rd</sup> generation)

### **Source Record**

- There are no source records that will be used to collect data about subjects. All data will be gathered based on student involvement within the Kindle app on the iPad, within their individual journals, and their activity within the secure, password protected blog.
- During the face-to-face interviews with voluntary research participants, students will simply be discussing their reading notations in the above listed environments. There will be no script for these interactions.

#### **4. Data & Specimen Banking**

Data will be collected anonymously. Identity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms.

All data gathered, including audio and video recordings will be securely banked for two years for future use in subsequent studies. All data will be stored in a safe deposit box (CD and flash drive copies) and within a password protected Google Docs within Google Drive.

The researchers, Donna Alvermann and Michelle Robinette, are the only people with access or permission to use the data.

After five years, all data will be destroyed by the researcher.

#### **5. Data Analysis**

Gather and code data from each voluntary research participant's Subtext app. Search for common themes within the data.

Google Docs and code for common themes

- Transcribe field notes and interviews of each voluntary research participant.
  - Read through and code/search for themes within field notes and interviews
  - Create data sets surrounding use of the experience
  - Develop the findings. Write a description that identifies themes.
  - Report findings
- 
- With such a small sample (6-10 subjects) it may not be necessary to use qualitative data analysis software, but I would like to leave that option open. If I decide to use software for analysis, I will use Dedoose.

## Appendix B

### Introductory Letter to Parents

3-15-2016

Dear Parents:

As many of you are already aware, in addition to serving as your child's reading/language arts teacher, I am also currently attending UGA in pursuit of a PhD in language & literacy. Having presented my prospectus, I am now ready to embark on gathering data for my research..

The purpose of my study is to examine students' individual, collaborative, and networked activities around an e-book. The goal of the weekly book club at the center of this research will be the development of a community of practice with the reading possibly serving as a catalyst for social action.

It should be noted that everything we will be doing is considered regular educational practice within a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5th grade reading/language arts classroom. While I would like to gather data many different students, I will need your permission to do so.

For this study, over the course of 6-9 weeks, your child would read novels using the Subtext app on the iPad. Prior to beginning their reading, he/she would receive instruction on how to use the tools that are a part of the app including the highlighter, annotation tool (notes within the text), dictionary, and outside of the app research choices (Wikipedia and Google). Your child will be expected to make use of these tools as they read the novel. Additionally, as a participant, each child will be expected to attend weekly face-to-face book club meetings.

Your child will also be expected to participate in four brief (15-20 minute) one-on-one interviews with the researchers where they will be asked about their e-reading experience and

discuss their use of the tools available within the Subtext app, the e-reading experience, and what learning they feel has taken place that wouldn't have occurred within instruction using a traditional print book. These interviews will be audio and video recorded.

The researchers may also photograph your child and download their notations from within the Subtext app.

The anticipated period for subject involvement is April 2016 - May 2016.

I will be working with my advisor and principal investigator of this project, Donna Alvermann.

Please feel free to reach out to either of us if you have questions or concerns about the study.

Donna Alvermann

University of Georgia

Language and Literacy Education

309 W Aderhold Hall

110 Carlton Street

Athens, GA 30602

[dalvermann@uga.edu](mailto:dalvermann@uga.edu)

The eligibility criteria for this study simply require that your child be a member of my reading/language arts class and be willing to participate in the study as outlined above. It should be noted that there are no incentives being offered for participation in the study.

If you are interested in having your child participate in this study, please send me an email and I will forward consent forms along with more detailed information.

Thanks!

Michelle Robinette

[mrobinette@oconeeschools.org](mailto:mrobinette@oconeeschools.org)



## Appendix C

### Parental Consent Form

#### UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

### Parental Consent Form

Using iPads and e-books to Construct and Share Knowledge:

#### Book Clubs as Communities of Practice

##### Researcher's Statement

My name is Michelle Robinette, and I am a Ph.D. student in Language and Literacy Education at the University of Georgia, Department of Language and Literacy Education. I am conducting a research project, under the supervision of Dr. Donna Alvermann (dalvermann@uga.edu), at the University of Georgia, Department of Language & Literacy Education. I am asking that you allow your child to take part in a research study. Before your child decides to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you information about the study so that you can decide whether or not to allow your child to be in the study. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you or your child need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you and your child can decide whether to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will also be given to your child.

##### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine students' individual, collaborative, and networked activities around an e-book. The goal of the weekly book club at the center of this research will

be the development of a community of practice with the reading possibly serving as a catalyst for social action.

### Study Procedures

If you agree for your child to participate:

- The anticipated period for subject involvement is April 1, 2016 – May 20, 2016
- Within this time period, each voluntary research participant will participate in no more than 4 one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The length of each interview will be no longer than 20 minutes. These interviews will be audio and video recorded.
- Each voluntary participant's notes within the Subtext app will be downloaded and analyzed as part of the research project's data set.

### Methods of Data Collection:

- Field Notes
- Downloaded data from each child's Subtext (notes & highlights from books read)
- Screenshots and Data Pulled from Google Classroom
- Digitally Recorded Interviews
- Transcripts from and tape recorded interviews

### Risks and discomforts

There are no risks or discomforts anticipated as a part of this research study.

### Benefits

- Probable benefits of participation in the research include increased reading comprehension and improved attitudes towards reading and writing.
- With the increasing attention on the use of portable technology in the classroom, local and national educational communities may benefit from information gained from this study.

### Incentives for participation

There are no monetary or non-monetary incentives provided for participation in this study.

### Audio/Video Recording

In order to document findings, audio and/or video recording devices will be used as a part of the research process. Upon completion of the research, these recordings will be archived after transcription and destroyed after 5 years.

Please provide initials below if you agree to the use of photos, audio, and video recordings.

Your child may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the recordings or photos.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to recordings or photographs.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am willing for my child to be recorded or photographed.

This research process will include photographs, audio recordings, and video recordings in which your child's name, likeness, image, and/or voice will be included and may be used for activities beyond research analysis (e.g., in publications, presentations, or other promotional purposes)

\_\_\_\_\_ I am NOT willing to have my child's likeness (photo, audio or video) included in publications, presentations or for promotional purposes.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am willing to have my child's likeness (photo, audio or video) included in publications, presentations or for promotional purposes.

### Privacy/Confidentiality

Data will be collected anonymously. Identity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms.

All data gathered, including audio and video recordings will be securely banked for two years for future use in subsequent studies. All data will be stored in a safe deposit box (CD and flash drive copies). The researchers, Donna Alvermann and Michelle Robinette, are the only people with

access or permission to use the data. The researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required to do so by law.

The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight. After five years, all data will be destroyed by the researchers.

Taking part is voluntary

Your child's involvement in the study is voluntary, and your child may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which your child are otherwise entitled.

Your decision about your child's participation will have no bearing on their grades or class standing.

If your child decides to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about your child up to the point of your child's withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

If you or your child have questions

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Michelle Robinette at [mrobinette@oconeeschools.org](mailto:mrobinette@oconeeschools.org) or 706-310-1998. If your child have any questions or concerns regarding your child's rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or at [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to allow your child to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____	_____
Your Child's Name	Your Printed Name	Your Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____	
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date	

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

## Appendix D

### Assent to Participate in Research (Ages 7-11)

The University of Georgia

### Assent to Participate in Research (Ages 7-11)

Using iPads and e-books to Construct and Share Knowledge:

#### Book Clubs as Communities of Practice

I want to tell you about a research study that I hope to conduct. The study will take a look at the e-book reading habits of 4th grade students. We are asking you to take part in the study because you are in a class that uses iPads for instruction, and because your name was selected randomly from Ms. Robinette's cup.

The purpose of this study is to examine students' individual, collaborative, and networked activities around an e-book. The goal of the weekly book club at the center of this research will be the development of a community of practice with the reading possibly serving as a catalyst for social action.

If you agree to be part of the study, you will, read two novels within the Subtext app, take part in a weekly lunchtime book club that meets once a week for 8 weeks during April and May, 4 brief (20-30 minute) one-on-one interviews where you'll be asked about your e-reading experience, discuss your experience in the book club, both online and face-to-face, your use of the tools available within the Subtext app, and share what learning you feel has taken place with the e-book that wouldn't have occurred with a traditional book. These interviews will be audio and video recorded. The researchers may also take notes while you work and download your notations within the Subtext app.

Methods of Data Collection for this study will include:

- Field Notes
- Downloaded data from each child's Subtext (notes & highlights from books read)
- Screenshots and Data Pulled from Google Classroom
- Digitally Recorded Interviews
- Transcripts from and tape recorded interviews

Being in the study may improve your reading and help you become more comfortable in an eReading environment. We also hope to learn something about reading that will help other children in the future.

You do not have to say "yes" if you don't want to. No one, including your parents, will be mad at you if you say "no" now or if you change your mind later. We have also asked your parent's permission to do this. Even if your parent says "yes," you can still say "no." Remember, you can ask us to stop at any time. Your grades in school will not be affected whether you say "yes" or "no."

At the end of the study, I will work on a report for other teachers and people who do research about education, to make recommendations about how to help students. We will not use your name on any papers that we write about this project.

If you have any questions at any time, please contact Donna Alvermann or Mrs. Robinette using the information listed below:

Donna Alvermann University of Georgia

Language and Literacy Education

309 W Aderhold Hall

110 Carlton Street

Athens, GA 30602

dalvermann@uga.edu

Michelle Robinette

Oconee County Schools

Malcom Bridge Elementary

2600 Malcom Bridge Road

Bogart, GA 30622

mrobinette@oconeeschools.org

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Parental Permission on File: Yes No

*(For Written Assent)* Signing here means that you have read this paper or had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign.

Signature of Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*(For Verbal Assent)* Indicate Child's Voluntary Response to Participation: Yes No

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Your Name Here	
Sign Your Name Here	Today's Date



## Appendix E

### Recruitment of Minors Script (Ages 7-11)

The University of Georgia

### Recruitment of Minors Script (Ages 7-11)

Using iPads and e-books to Construct and Share Knowledge:

Book Clubs as Communities of Practice

*Note: This script will be used in a small group setting with the students who are randomly chosen to participate in the*

**The researcher will:**

**Read the script below to randomly selected students allowing time for questions as they are posed by students. If, after hearing this introduction, a student is interested in participating, and their parent has already agreed, move forward with the presentation and signing of the Minor Assent Form.**

Thank you for coming to this meeting.

I want to tell you about a research study that I hope to conduct. The purpose of this study is to look at how students use e-books and face-to-face meetings to come together around a shared reading.

I am asking you to take part in the study because you are in a class that uses iPads and the Subtext app for instruction. Your name was selected from a jar of those wishing to take part in the study, and this is why I invited the ten of you here, to invite you to participate in the study.

If you agree to be part of the study, you will, read two novels within the Subtext app, take part in a weekly lunchtime book club that meets once a week for 8 weeks during April and May, 4 brief (20-30 minute) one-on-one interviews where you'll be asked about your e-reading experience,

discuss your experience in the book club, both online and face-to-face, your use of the tools available within the Subtext app, and share what learning you feel has taken place with the e-book that wouldn't have occurred with a traditional book. These interviews will be audio and video recorded. The researchers may also take notes while you work and download your notations within the Subtext app.

At the end of the study, I will work on a report for other teachers and people who do research about education.

Are there any questions?

Please raise your hand if you think this is something you might be interested in doing.

## Appendix F

### Timeline

- December 2015 - Update IRB and add Dr. Alvermann as PI
- April 2-10 (Oconee Spring Break) Prepare Site (download books, setup Google Classroom Assignments, email participants a reminder, post the pre-interview docs in Google Classroom)
- April 11 2016 - Begin Formal Data Collection
- May 30, 2016- Complete Formal Data Collection
- June- August 2016 Analysis of Data and Writing
- August 2016 - Feedback from Committee
- September 2016-Revise
- October 2016- Resubmit
- Early November 2016- Final Defense

## Appendix G

### Interest Inventory and Book Choice

This was presented as a Google Form questionnaire and completed by each participant online.

- 1- On average, how much time do you think you spend reading each week?
- 2- What's your favorite format for reading? Hardcover, paperback, e-book, or audio?
- 3- What's your favorite genre and author?
- 4- Have you ever been a member of a book club? If so, tell me about it including your likes and dislikes. If not, what makes you interested in becoming part of this book club?
- 5- Have you ever read an e-book? If so, on what device or app?

## Appendix H

### Book Choice Survey Based on Interest Inventory Results

This was presented as a Google Form Survey and completed by each participant online.

You Choose!

Take some time to explore each of these titles on Amazon. Sorry, the form would not allow me to insert direct links. PLEASE do not simply choose without doing a bit of investigation.

Additionally, a few of the titles we discussed today had to be replaced due to the fact that you will be reading those next year if you are in advanced content.

#### **1. Realistic Fiction - pick 2**

The Wednesday Wars by Gary Schmidt

Freak the Mighty by Rodman Philbrick

Each Little Bird That Sings by Deborah

Wiles

#### **2. Fantasy- pick 2**

The Giver Lois Lowry

The City of Ember by Jeanne Duprau

The White Giraffe by Lauren St. Joh

#### **3. Historical Fiction- pick 2**

Chains by Laurie Halse Anderson

A Long Walk to Water by Linda Sue Park

The Great Trouble: A Mystery of London,

the Blue Death, and a Boy Called Eel by

Deborah Hopkinson

#### **4. Overcoming Obstacles - pick 2**

Upside Down in the Middle of Nowhere by

Julie T. Lamana

Paperboy by Vince Vawter

Everest by Gordon Korman

## Appendix I

### Google Questionnaire 1 (administered via Google Forms 4-18-2016)

This was presented as a Google Form Questionnaire and completed by each participant online.

1. What's working in your book club?
2. What's not working in your book club?(10 responses)
3. How would you describe a successful book club?(10 responses)
4. Do you have any requests ?
5. If you were given permission to create a goal for this club, what would it be? What would you like the focus of your book club to be?

## Appendix J

## Google Questionnaire 2 (administered via Google Forms 4-25-2016)

This was presented as a Google Form Questionnaire and completed by each participant online.

1. Are you happy with the changes in the number of pages you are reading each night?

Yes

No

2. What do you like about reading in Subtext?

3. What do you NOT like about reading in Subtext?

4. Are our lunch meetings necessary? If so why? If not why?

5. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate this experience thus far?

## Appendix K

### Google Questionnaire 3 (administered via Google Forms 5-13-2016)

This was presented as a Google Form Questionnaire and completed by each participant online. Please take the time to thoughtfully answer each of the questions listed below. I really would love for you to give me more than just short one or two word answers. Be specific and be honest. You are the center of this study and what you think truly matters not only to me, but to all those who later read about and hopefully learn from our time together.

1 - Has participation in this book club helped you improve as a reader? (ideas, insights, understanding, enjoyment...) Please share specific examples.

2 - Has participation in this book club helped in your ability to influence others ?(confidence, trust, contribution, speaking out, recognition...) Please share specific examples.

3 - Please share any meaningful experiences or memories you have from this study.  
(conversations, specific meetings, projects, friendships)

4 - What impact did the use of Subtext have on this experience?

5 - Would you use Subtext again if given the opportunity? Why or Why not? Explain your reason.

6 - What did you enjoy about the face-to-face meetings?

7 - What did you enjoy about Subtext ?

8 - Some events change your understanding of success. Would you consider this book club to be a success? Please explain why or why not.

9 - What do you want me to know about this experience that you haven't already mentioned?



## Appendix L

### Google Questionnaire 4 (administered via Google Forms 5-17-2016)

This was presented as a Google Form Questionnaire and completed by each participant online.

A few final questions...

Please take the time to thoughtfully answer each of the questions listed below. I really would love for you to give me more than just short one or two word answers. Be specific and be honest. You are the center of this study and what you think truly matters not only to me, but to all those who later read about and hopefully learn from our time together.

1- In what ways has membership in this book club affected you socially? (friendships, pride, understanding others points of view...)

2- What if anything frustrated you about this experience?

3- How do you think your participation added to the book club? What did you "bring" to the group?

4- Were there individuals who made meetings more interesting and/or added to the group in ways that helped to improve the meetings? Be specific. Give examples.

5- Describe a specific resource (website, video, book...) you or other members shared as a part of this book club. How was this helpful or not helpful?

6- Would you be interested in an online only book club? Explain your answer.

Your answer

7 - On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the worst and 5 being the best, how would you rate this experience?

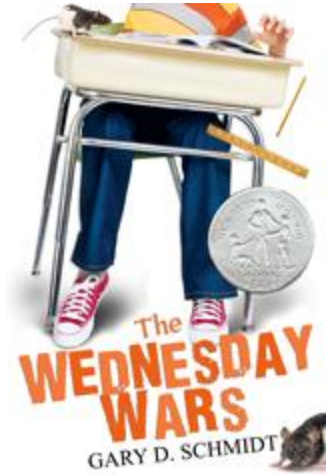
## Appendix M

## Information on Titles Read

**The Wednesday Wars**

Gary D. Schmidt

Meet Holling Hoodhood, a seventh-grader at Camillo Junior High, who must spend Wednesday afternoons with his teacher, Mrs. Baker, while the rest of the class has religious instruction. Mrs. Baker doesn't like Holling—he's sure of it. Why else would she make him read the plays of William Shakespeare outside class? But everyone has bigger things to worry about, like Vietnam. His father wants Holling and his sister to be on their best behavior: the success of his business depends on it. But how can Holling stay out of trouble when he has so much to contend with? A bully demanding cream puffs; angry rats; and a baseball hero signing autographs the very same night Holling has to appear in a play in yellow tights! As fate sneaks up on him again and again, Holling finds Motivation—the Big M—in the most unexpected places and musters up the courage to embrace his destiny, in spite of himself.



Lexile -990

272 pp

Text Level: Ages 10-12

May 2009

ISBN 978-0547237602

Source: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

[http://www.hmhco.com/shop/books/The-Wednesday-](http://www.hmhco.com/shop/books/The-Wednesday-Wars/9780547237602#sthash.Rk212aO5.dpuf)
[Wars/9780547237602#sthash.Rk212aO5.dpuf](http://www.hmhco.com/shop/books/The-Wednesday-Wars/9780547237602#sthash.Rk212aO5.dpuf)

## The City of Ember

Jeanne DuPrau

It is always night in the city of Ember. But there is no moon, no stars.

The only light during the regular twelve hours of "day" comes from flood lamps that cast a yellowish glow over the streets of the city.

Beyond are the pitch-black Unknown Regions, which no one has ever explored because an understanding of fire and electricity has been lost, and with it the idea of a Moveable Light. "Besides," they tell each other, "there is nowhere but here" Among the many other things the people of Ember have forgotten is their past and a direction for their future. For

250 years they have lived pleasantly, because there has been plenty of everything in the vast storerooms. But now there are more and more empty shelves--and more and more times when the lights flicker and go out, leaving them in terrifying blackness for long minutes. What will happen when the generator finally fails?

Lexile -680

270 pp

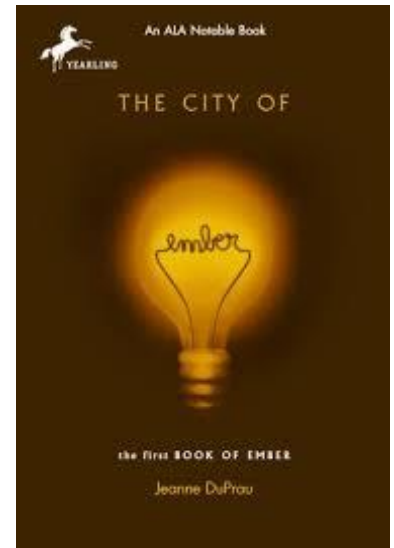
Text Level: Ages 8-12 years

May 2004

ISBN 978-0375822742

Source: Yearling Books

<http://www.jacketflap.com/bookdetail.asp?bookid=0375922741>



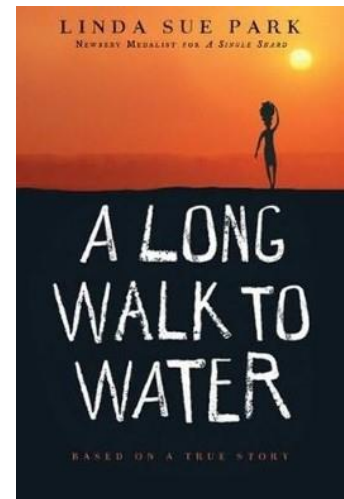
## A Long Walk to Water

Linda Sue Park

Salva and Nya have difficult paths to walk in life. Salva's journey, based on a true story, begins in 1985 with an explosion. The boy's small village in Sudan erupts into chaos while the 11-year-old is in school, and the teacher tells the children to run away. Salva leaves his family and all that is familiar and begins to walk.

Sometimes he walks alone and sometimes there are others. They are walking toward a refugee camp in Ethiopia, toward perceived safety. However, the camp provides only temporary shelter from the violent political storm. In 1991-'92, thousands are killed as they try to cross a crocodile-infested river when they are forced out of the country;

Salva survives and gets 1200 boys to safety in Kenya. Nya's life in 2008 revolves around water. She spends eight hours a day walking to and from a pond. In the dry season, her family must uproot themselves and relocate to the dry lake bed where they dig in the mud until water eventually trickles out. Nya's narrative frames Salva's journey from Sudan to Ethiopia to Rochester, NY, and, eventually, back to Sudan. Both story lines are spare, offering only pertinent details. In the case of Salva, six years in a camp pass by with the barest of mentions. This minimalism streamlines the plot, providing a clarity that could have easily become mired in depressing particulars. The two narratives intersect in a quiet conclusion that is filled with hope.



Lexile -720128 pp Text Level: Ages 10 -12 years

October 2011 ISBN- 0547577311 Source: School Library Journal (2010)

Appendix N  
QUESTIONS FOR FINAL CONFESSIONALS

**Individual Interview Questions- Final Week of Data Collection**

1. Do you think that everyone in the club shared a love of reading? What makes you feel this way?
2. What were your “takeaways” from the time we spent together and discussions?
3. Did you learn new things about what you were reading as a result of our discussions or time together? Can you give an example?
4. What was the goal of the book club meetings?
5. Did you feel like you were a member of something special? Example?
6. Did you trust and feel comfortable sharing with the others in the book club? Example?
7. Would you consider this to have been a fun experience? Example?
8. How did this group change over time?
9. How do you think others viewed this group? Did the group have a reputation?
10. If we were to do this again, what changes would you suggest?

## Appendix O

## DATA MATRIX

[illegible]

<b>Evidence of Practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shared Goal</li> <li>Shared Purpose</li> </ul>	Subtext Data Downloads <i>Proof of Practice</i>	Transcripts face to face meetings <i>Proof of Practice</i>	Field notes <i>Proof of Practice</i>	Researcher's Journal <i>Proof of Practice</i>	Shared Google Doc <i>Proof of Practice</i>	End of Study Questionnaire <i>Proof of Practice</i>		
<b>Creation of a Group Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sense of belonging</li> <li>Sense of trust among members</li> </ul>	Transcripts face to face meetings <i>Group Culture</i>	Field notes <i>Group Culture</i>	Researcher's Journal <i>Group Culture</i>	End of Study Questionnaire <i>Group Culture</i>				
<b>Value Creation</b>									
<b>Immediate Value</b> Description of day to day interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation</li> <li>Fun</li> <li>Collaboration</li> <li>Meta Conversations</li> </ul>	Subtext Data Downloads <i>Immediate</i>	Transcripts from face to face meetings <i>Immediate</i>	Field notes <i>Immediate</i>	Researcher's Journal <i>Immediate</i>	Shared Google Doc <i>Immediate</i>	End of Study Questionnaire <i>Immediate</i>	One on One Interviews <i>Immediate</i>	Video "Confessionals" <i>Immediate</i>
<b>Potential Value</b> What is being produced?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New Skills or Knowledge</li> <li>Inspiration</li> <li>Confidence</li> <li>Trust</li> <li>Change in Perspective</li> </ul>	Subtext Data Downloads <i>Potential</i>	Transcripts from face to face meetings <i>Potential</i>	Field notes <i>Potential</i>	Researcher's Journal <i>Potential</i>	Shared Google Doc <i>Potential</i>	End of Study Questionnaire <i>Potential</i>	One on One Interviews <i>Potential</i>	Video "Confessionals" <i>Potential</i>





<p><b>New Literacies</b></p> <p>New Literacies inform this study and are present in the community of practice.</p> <p>Thus, they contribute to the creation of value.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• e-books vs Print</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Power</li> <li>• Social Practice</li> <li>• Multiliteracies</li> <li>• Discourse (big D)</li> <li>• Global /Local</li> </ul>	<p>Subtext Data Downloads</p> <p><i>NewLit</i></p>	<p>Transcripts from face to face meetings</p> <p><i>NewLit</i></p>	<p>Shared Google Doc</p> <p><i>NewLit</i></p>					
<p><b>Sociocultural</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co- Construction of Knowledge</li> <li>• Mediation</li> <li>• Scaffolding</li> </ul>	<p>Subtext Data Downloads</p> <p><i>SocioCul</i></p>	<p>Transcripts from face to face meetings</p> <p><i>SocioCul</i></p>	<p>Field notes</p> <p><i>SocioCul</i></p>	<p>Researcher's Journal</p> <p><i>SocioCul</i></p>	<p>Shared Google Doc</p> <p><i>SocioCul</i></p>			

## Appendix P

## Robinette's Code Descriptors

<b>Community of Practice</b>	
<b>Evidence of Domain</b>	A love of reading and discussing books is the domain.
<b>Evidence of Community</b>	Time spent together Discussions Learning from one another
<b>Evidence of Practice</b>	Shared goal Shared purpose
<b>Creation of Group Culture</b>	Sense of belonging Sense of trust among members
<b>Value Creation</b>	
<b>Immediate Value</b> Description of day-to-day interactions	Participation / Attendance Fun Collaboration Meta-conversations
<b>Potential Value</b> What is being produced?	New skills or knowledge Inspiration Confidence Trust Change in perspective
<b>Applied Value</b> Changes in practice	New ways of doing things New guidelines New perspective
<b>Realized Value</b> Did changes result in the improvement of performance?	Personal performance improvement Community performance improvement Change in community's reputation
<b>Reframing Value</b> Has participation changed what members or others think matters?	Moving forward Redefining success
<b>New Literacies</b>	
New Literacies inform this study and are present in the community of practice. Thus, they contribute to the value creation.	e-books vs. Print Identity Power Social Practice Discourse (big D) Multiliteracies Global/Local
<b>Sociocultural</b>	
The base upon which the study exists	Co-construction of knowledge Mediation Scaffolding

## Appendix Q

## Final Code Cloud



## Appendix R

## Value Creation Matrices

