LISTENING TO BOYS WRITE – AN EXPLORATION OF THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN 10 YEAR-OLD BOYS' WRITING PRACTICES AND THEIR EVOLVING IDENTITIES

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Abstract

Being literate has long been considered essential in order for individuals to make their way in the adult world, become productive and contribute to society (Olson, 1994). However, across the western world there appears to be a literacy crisis in the form of a gender gap in which 'boys do less well than girls' (Moss, 2007: 13). As a result, boys have been categorised as a problem (Clandinin et al, 2006). Previous research has focused on solving the '*boy problem*', however, this study offers an alternative perspective in that it explores the complex relationship between pre-adolescent boys' writing practices and their evolving identities in the domains of school and home.

The study draws on sociocultural theories of New Literacy Studies and the concept of 'Figured Worlds', as described by Holland et al (1998) in order to consider how three 10 year-old boys participate in the production of themselves as writers and the impact of adult mediation on the boys' developing identities as writers both at home and in school. This comparative case study is informed by both ethnography and narrative inquiry in order to produce three rich narrative accounts which are centred around the boys' writing practices both in and out of school. Each narrative offers a unique insight into each boy's life and their perception of what it means to be a writer through an exploration of their experiences, their ambitions and their relationships with people, technology and curriculum. The narratives are then compared to reveal key themes which highlight the ways in which wider policy and institutional demands influence local practices which in turn impacts on the boys' identity formation.

The significant findings relate to a common theme of relationships. Findings suggest that writing practices are bound to close familial relationships and to each family's figurative or narrativised identity. Therefore, educators may need to look beyond engaging experiences in the classroom to the space and structures of homes in order to both fully understand boys' meaning making and to inform their assessments of boys as writers. This extends the current research on early mark making and relationships in pre-school children to this under-explored group of pre-adolescent boys. In addition, the findings also suggest that the way in which schools

engage with digital practices will have to be carefully considered if children are to understand digital communications as being writing and not talking. Therefore, the findings offer an alternative perspective to the two great divides in literacy, those being school and home and speaking and writing.

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Contents

1 Introduction

This study considers the writing practices of three 10 year-old boys. According to O'Brien and Neal (2007: 2), there is a 'rising sense of alarm' with regard to the national standard of writing, and in particular with boys and writing. The perceived problem of boys and writing is one that continues to persist. Unlike much of the research associated with boys and writing, which according to Myhill and Fisher (2005) tends to focus on initiatives to raise standards, this study offers an alternative perspective to understanding the relationship between boys and writing. Drawing on sociocultural theories, it provides members of this problematized group (Clandinin et al, 2006) with a voice, as it focuses on the stories of experience of three 10-year old boys as they both engage in, and talk about, their writing practices in and out of school. Those voices offer a unique understanding of the relationship between the boys' writing practices and their developing identities.

This chapter sets out the context and key concepts that both inform my research and are required to understand this study. I begin by presenting a vignette, which is significant in that it frames the study in a personal context, a context which relates to my experiences as the parent of a son. I will then go on to consider other stories of experience, both as a parent and as a primary school teacher, which have informed my thinking about boys and writing in relation to the sociocultural theories that underpin my research.

Following the explanation of the contexts for this study, I will present the main research objective and the five specific research questions. I will end this first chapter by providing an outline of each of the subsequent chapters.

1.1 Background

Every day was the same. At just before 3pm, I joined an orderly line of other parents, grandparents and carers outside my son's Year 1 classroom in an old Victorian school building. We were all there to collect our children at the end of a school day. Voices echoed off the exposed brick walls and high ceilings and, as a result, the 'collectors' (as I now refer to the), had learnt to whisper so as not to attract too much attention. At exactly 3pm the door opened. Children were lined up in an equally orderly line inside the classroom. The teacher greeted each collector in turn in a voice far from a whisper. She then called the corresponding child, bent down to be more at the child's level and, with a formal handshake and a, 'good afternoon', dismissed the child to their collector. This was a well-rehearsed routine and the collectors and their children generally left school promptly and happy, unless there was a problem. If there was a problem, everybody waiting would know about it, as the teacher made an announcement and asked the offending child and collector to walk to the other side of the classroom door and to wait. In 1998, I made that walk to the far side of the door, wondering what could have happened.

The teacher asked me to make my way to my son's desk. She informed me that she was worried about my son's writing ability and she thought that there was a problem. This was because he did not appear to have any imagination because he wrote only about football or aeroplanes. That day had represented the last straw for her because he had managed to include both football and aeroplanes in the one piece of writing. She explained that she had been reading the story 'The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark' to the class. The class had been asked to write an alternative ending so that Plop, the baby owl in the story, need no longer be frightened of the dark. The teacher thrust my son's writing book under my nose. I did not get the

opportunity to read my son's work but noticed half a page of writing and on the remainder of the page, a large 2D drawing of a football stadium with an aeroplane flying overhead. The floodlights on the flat representation of the stadium were coloured yellow, as were the windows in the aeroplane. There were red dots on the end of the wing to represent lights. The teacher then flicked through his writing book and I could see other similar illustrations. She told me that she could not understand it. She questioned whether he was being lazy by not thinking of other things to write about. My son stood next to me, silent, throughout the teacher's outburst.

Vignette 1 - 1998, Year 1

In September 1998 my son entered the Year 1 class in his primary school. He was aged 5. During his time in the Foundation Phase he had been considered to be an articulate boy with exceptional literacy skills. He was often asked to read to teachers in Key Stages 1 and 2 in order to to demonstrate his advanced decoding skills. At home he loved to read, to be read to and to write. We had shared books from birth and reading together became synonymous with relaxation. From an early age he had particularly enjoyed writing on large sheets of computer paper and on his Megasketch, a toy that allowed him to write with a stylus and then pull on a lever to erase what had been written. He would use his Megasketch to set my husband and I challenges, those being to read his writing before it magically disappeared. Those early marks had presented us with a huge decoding challenge but fortunately our son would always interrupt our efforts to tell us what he had written. During his pre-school years, I remember leaving a note for my husband. My son said, '*I wants a message.*' And so I wrote a single word message for him to read. This was the beginning of a game that would last for a number of years and those messages evolved into written conversations. Therefore, when I was approached by his Year 1 teacher in 1998, it did not occur to me that there would be concerns relating to his writing.

My initial reaction to the teacher's comments was to ask myself how a child, who was so interested in reading and writing at home, and who had been considered exceptional in terms of literacy development, could suddenly be categorised as a

problem. As a parent I felt that I needed to understand what had caused this shift in his teacher's thinking. However, the timing of this event also coincided with my entering the teaching profession, as September 1998 was when I began my teacher training whilst on a career break from my job as a manager in the Civil Service. At this point in my training, I was not fully aware of the discourse surrounding boys' underachievement in literacy (Moss, 2007; Myhill and Fisher, 2005; O'Brien and Neal, 2007). However, this event proved to be significant in that it marked the moment that I began to take a personal interest in boys' writing development. This interest would go on to influence my professional practice as a primary school teacher and my future academic research, including this doctoral study. I now return to Vignette1 because as a parent in 1998, I wanted to discover more about my son's inspirations for his writing.

I can remember vividly my son's reasoning at the time for including a football stadium and aeroplane in his re-writing of the 'Owl who was Afraid of the Dark' (Tomlinson: 1973). He suggested that if Plop, the baby owl, nested in the floodlights of the Reebok Stadium (home to my son's favourite football team, Bolton Wanderers), he would never be frightened of the dark again as the floodlights would be really bright. If for some reason the lights were not turned on, Plop would be high up and, as a result, much closer to the aeroplanes passing overhead, or at least closer than he would have been if he had been nesting in a tree. Aeroplanes had bright flashing lights, so again it would not be very dark up in the floodlights. As I probed more deeply, I went on to learn that writing in Year 1 always involved producing an accompanying illustration and that this requirement to draw a picture was an apparent barrier to my son's writing. My son had always disliked drawing and colouring, and despite encouragement, had never chosen to draw. At age 5 he felt confident only in his ability to draw aeroplanes and football stadia. Therefore, he adapted every writing activity in school to include one or both of these subjects in order to be able to complete the task to an acceptable level, hence the repetitive content of his writing. I can remember feeling rather impressed by the way in which he seemed able to manipulate the content of each piece of work to include either one or both of the two subjects he felt able to draw. In my mind, such an ability required not only developed thinking and problem solving skills but also

imagination. In my opinion he was far from unimaginative and lazy as had been suggested by his teacher. Such demands on composition required hard work and a developing sense of agency.

When I reported my findings back to his teacher, I was surprised at her response. She simply told me not to worry too much and she would monitor his progress; that it was typical of a boy to write about football but that he would have to learn to be much more confident in his drawing. This confidence never developed and he continued to write about (and illustrate) aeroplanes and football beyond Key Stage 1. As a result, he continued to take control over how he achieved writing lesson objectives due to having to accommodate his limited repertoire of illustrations.

In the early years of school, drawing pictures could be considered a part of an acceptable culture of a writing classroom. Yet illustrations were acting as a mediating device to my son's writing and appeared to have a stifling effect on composition and content of his work. The demands of the writing classroom began to affect how he perceived himself as a writer and as an illustrator in school. However, it also affected how others viewed him as a writer and as a person, what Holland et al (1998) refer to as positional identity. Holland et al (1998) in their theory of identity and agency, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 2, offer two aspects of an individual's identity formation, those being figurative and positional. Vignette 1 highlights each of these aspects in relation to my son's developing identity, both as an individual and as a writer in the domains of home and school. The teaching staff continued to view his writing as unimaginative and considered him to be lacking in drive to attempt anything new. They figured him as being 'lazy.' His peers considered him to be a football and aeroplane obsessive, as was evidenced in the birthday presents he received from classmates. My son himself was aware of his teacher perceiving his writing ability as a problem, after all she had voiced her opinion to him. However, at the age of 5 he appeared unconcerned. He continued to enjoy writing and practised writing at home without providing supporting illustrations, perhaps in anticipation of a time in school when they would be less important. Interestingly, the event described in Vignette 1 has become a part of his personal history. Now in his early 20's he often recounts the event,

usually in relation to his lack of drawing ability as he attempts medical diagrams, which he describes in a mock pretentious way as 'naïve'. This highlights the fact that he continues to identify himself as a bad drawer. However, he never took up the ascribed identity of problem writer, for his experiences of writing at home and in school were quite different. In the home domain he was supported and encouraged and therefore did not subscribe to his teacher's figuring of him as either 'lazy' or a 'problem.'

Over the years I have undoubtedly been influenced by the discourse that problematizes boys, a discourse that could be said to be grounded in boys' underperformance in statutory testing. When I began my career in education, my classroom-based research focussed on ways to engage the reluctant boy writer. I quickly became a part of the teaching establishment that looked for solutions to the *'boy problem'*. However, the experiences described in Vignette 1 highlight the fact that the situation is not straightforward and I often return to that and other significant moments to remind myself of the complicated nature of being and becoming a writer.

<u>Writing, Identity and Agency</u>

It was evident from the personally significant event described in Vignette 1 that aspects of identity and agency were present in my 5 year old son's writing as he drew on his interests and abilities to negotiate prescribed teaching objectives. However, at that time I had not considered either identity or agency in any great detail. As a trainee teacher, I was determined to investigate ways to encourage boys to write. Because of my son's experiences, I focussed on removing barriers to writing. In those early days I had a rather simplistic view in that I thought that children should not have to manipulate lesson objectives, rather the teacher should ensure that children were able to access writing through carefully planned writing opportunities. Nevertheless, as a teacher I was to find out that even the most well-planned writing activities in school offered significant opportunities for children to take control, as like my son, they found ways to respond and manipulate lesson objectives and classroom rules. As a mother, my son's developing sense of agency

continued In fact I considered my son's sense of agency continued to develop. The following year, when my son was in Year 2, I was one again summoned into the classroom. The brief discussion that took place is described below:

> *Mrs Scanlon, can I have a word? J and I had a little run-in today. He was writing in his news' book and spelt Wrexham, 'Wrecsam.' I asked him to correct the spelling and he refused. He said he had spelt it in the Welsh way, like on the front of the bus, because he is Welsh. I said you are at a school in England, so you will spell it in the English way. He insisted he was Welsh and refused to amend the spelling because it was spelt correctly, in Welsh. He has a very defiant attitude.*

> *Vignette 2 – 1999, Year 2*

My son had spent three and a half days of his then six years in a Welsh hospital following his birth and yet he identified with being Welsh. This obsession with a Welsh identity had stemmed from his developing interest in the Welsh language. Earlier that year, we needed to apply for a copy of his birth certificate, as we had mislaid the original and it was needed for a passport application. We had gone as a family to collect the replacement certificate. Our son was intrigued by the dual language nature of the document and this in turn sparked an interest in the Welsh language and Welsh spellings. I was also learning Welsh as a part of my teacher training course and would share new and very basic vocabulary with the family. The experimentation with language that we all so much enjoyed in the home was not welcome in school where accuracy of transcription skills was seen as paramount to success in writing. His behaviour was described as defiant and was not viewed as acceptable in school. As Holland et al (1998) consider behaviour to be identity in practice, this event is significant in that it demonstrates a determination to be figured as Welsh in an English setting. Therefore, his writing was strongly connected to his cultural identity, in this case through the transcriptional skill of spelling. The earlier Vignette 1 highlights the fact that his compositional skills were also connected to his cultural identity, that of him being a football supporter.

His teacher was clearly unhappy with his defiant attitude and like any parent I did not want my son to be labelled as naughty. However, I can remember feeling a professional tension as I did not see a problem with his original act of writing 'Wrecsam.' As a then trainee teacher I would have championed the child for attempting to use a second language, but his very experienced teacher called into question my initial thoughts. My son was beginning to develop a reputation for not conforming to expectations for writing and two years later, when he was in Year 4, he described another event which explained why he had been very late leaving school.

> *Mrs B ripped my maths work out of my book today. She marked it all right first and then told me that my writing was too small that and I hadn't set it out as I was told so she ripped it out of my book and told me to do it again. I did do it again in exactly the same way. I thought it looked neat, and it was right. She got really angry and said I had to write and set things out like she told me or she would keep ripping it out. That's why she made me stay late after school to tidy my desk. I did it really slowly because I knew she wanted to go home. I'm not changing my writing.*
>
> *Vignette 3 – 2002, Year 4*

This example highlighted three issues for me at that time. Firstly, it made me realise that my son, and therefore other children, perceived writing as being more than words written down. Secondly, as he referred to his number work as writing, this suggested that he considered all work that required drawing upon the transcriptional skill of neat handwriting to be writing. Thirdly, the relationship between him and his teacher seemed to have broken down and this social relationship and power struggle was undoubtedly going to impact on his future behaviour and attitude towards written work whilst in her class.

The three vignettes represent significant moments in my son's life that went on to inform my own interest in the intentions behind children's writing and fuelled my curiosity as to how children and particularly boys, who have been categorised as a problem group (Clandinin et al, 2006), perceive themselves and are perceived as

writers. As a beginner teacher I would constantly hear staff refer negatively to boys' attitudes towards writing. There were also differences in opinions when assessing and moderating written work across the school. There was one little boy in particular that I remember. He was in upper Key Stage 2 and had poor transcriptional skills. His handwriting was often barely legible and following a moderation exercise staff considered him to be in need of an intervention. With the exception of handwriting, I disagreed as this boy loved to write. He told me that at home he was writing a novel. Every few weeks he would present me with a new chapter and we would discuss it. I wanted to find a way to nurture his passion and to convince other staff that he was a writer. I set up an author's chair and when it was my turn to take a whole school assembly we had a reading from his book. He was very proud as the children loved to listen to him throughout the serialisation of his work. I was thrilled at their response and both his enthusiasm and ability to construct a chaptered science fiction story, in which he developed a plot, built suspense and introduced memorable characters. I shared his work with a senior member of staff who commented that it 'did not count' because it was done at home and it only demonstrated he could write a story, nothing else.

The mismatch between attitudes to writing at home and school is evident in my own experiences and is an enduring theme of New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1991, 1996; Street, 1993, 1995). This literary theory will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2. My own experiences of boys and writing presented in this chapter suggest that the boys discussed had multi-identities as writers; identities which appeared to be dependent on both the people and places associated with particular writing practices, and which were often contradictory. As a result, those experiences form an important foundation to the development of the research in this thesis.

1.2   Research Aims and Questions

At the heart of the negative discourse around boys and writing presented in both academic literature and the media, there seems to be an expectation of failure within the school system and this expectation continues to be borne out annually in

the results of the statutory tests at age 11. However, I wanted to understand more about writing from the perspective of boys themselves in order to better understand the relationship between their evolving identities and their writing. When I began the study I was not long out of the primary classroom and I initially approached the task from the perspective of a teacher who wanted to understand more about a problem. It was from this position that I developed my study's aim which is to explore the complicated relationship between boys' writing practices and their evolving identities. To enable me to address this aim I devised five key questions:

1) What writing practices are 10 year-old boys engaging in, both in and outside of school?
2) What are the boys' perceptions about what it means to be a writer?
3) How are boys participating in the production of themselves as writers?
4) How do adults mediate writing practices and how does this mediation impact on boys developing identities as writers?
5) To what extent do digital literacies encourage new writing identities?

In developing my research questions I took into account the fact that the nature of writing is now very different from my son's school experiences, as children now have access to electronic gadgets with which they can communicate. Rather naively, as I planned my study of three 10-year-old boys, I expected to see them engaged in a range of digital writing practices both in and outside of the home.

As my study is focussed on pre-adolescent boys' writing practices and identity, Chapter 2 provides a review of literature pertinent to these areas. It considers the influence of policy on writing practices and how policy may have contributed to the negative discourse surrounding boys and writing. It then examines literacy and identity theory and draws on New Literacy Studies (Street, 1993; 1998; 2003) and the concept of 'Figured Worlds' as described by Holland et al (1998) in order to provide a theoretical framework to underpin the research.

In Chapter 3, I move on to discuss the methodological approach to studying the three 10-year-old boys involved in my research. It tells the story of my journey from identifying a methodology that draws on ethnography and narrative inquiry, to recruiting participants and the methods used to gather, analyse and re-present data.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are dedicated to each of the boy participants. Each chapter provides a rich narrative account of the boys' lives including their relationships, their interests, their memories of writing and their writing practices. Although I begin to analyse each boy's experience in these chapters, it was essential that the chapters were written to represent the boys' voices with the aim of bringing their characters and experiences to life.

Following the participants' individual chapters, in Chapter 7, I extend my analysis by discussing the pertinent key themes that are common to each of the narratives and which relate to the participants developing identities as writers.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I summarise my findings and present a conclusion to my study. I also consider the study's contribution to knowledge and the implications of the key findings in terms of future research. In addition I offer an autobiographical reflection which considers how my research journey has influenced and changed my thinking and conclude with a final word about the participants in this study.

This chapter has introduced the context for my study which is rooted in personal experiences and interests. The following chapter will present a review of literature and the theoretical frameworks which underpin this research.

2   Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

I began my introduction by presenting a vignette relating to my son's experience of writing in school. This event was pivotal in developing my interest in boys and writing for two reasons. Firstly, it happened at a time when I was becoming more conscious of the general negative discourse associated with boys and literacy. Secondly, I was also increasingly aware of how my own son was adapting his practice to take some control over meeting the expectations of the lesson objectives, and therefore the curriculum in school. This second aspect highlighted the relationship between his writing practice and his developing identity.

In this chapter I present a review of literature associated with literacy and identity theory. I begin with an overview of policy relating to the teaching of literacy in school as this provides a context for understanding the school literacy experiences of the boys in my study. I then move on to consider the relationship between that policy and literacy theory. I focus on the theory of New Literacy Studies (Street, 1993; 1998; 2003) as this approach will enable me to explore the idea of literacy as socially situated practice and to define the term 'literacy practices' in the context of this study. In this discussion of literacy theory, I also investigate the changing nature of writing and writing in and out of school. I then go on to consider the term 'identity' and the relationship between literacy and identity before moving on to provide a review of the concept of 'Figured Worlds' as described by Holland et al (1998), who draw on the work of Vygotsky, Bakhtin and Bourdieu to develop a theory of identity and self- formation. Finally I go on to consider how combining these two theoretical approaches better enabled me to explore the relationship between the participants' writing practices and their evolving identities as individuals and as writers.

2.1   Beginning with Policy – the Writing Curriculum

Being literate has long been considered essential in order for individuals to make their way in the adult world, become productive and contribute to society (Olson,

1994). Therefore, it is not surprising that successive governments have put literacy at the heart of education policy. In England, the Education Reform Act of 1988 (HMSO, 1988) was significant as it introduced the first National Curriculum (DfES/WO, 1988) for children aged 5 – 16 which had three key features. Firstly, it outlined a basic curriculum to be taught in all schools. Secondly, it identified specific attainment targets and thirdly, it outlined testing arrangements. English was one of three core subjects, the others being mathematics and science. The National Curriculum (DfES/WO, 1988; DfE/QCA, 1999; DfE, 2013) has since been twice re-written but the three key features outlined above have persisted across all versions (Mallett, 2012). As a policy document, the National Curriculum can be considered an 'information artefact,' a form of cultural artefact within the world of education and school (May, 2001). In terms of the teaching of writing, this artefact appears bound in the past whilst shaping the future, in that the writing curriculum has changed little in more than twenty-five years and arguably remains focused on writing as a set of skills to be learnt; skills which are seen as 'essential to participating fully as a member of society' (DfE, 2013: 3). In the context of this study, the National Curriculum (DfES/WO, 1988; DfE/QCA, 1999; DfE, 2013) becomes a cultural artefact that has a direct impact not only on the teaching of writing in school today but also on society's understanding of what it means to be literate. Implementation of the National Curriculum in the participants' respective schools will, therefore, impact on their writing practices and their understanding of what it means to be a writer.

Influences on the Primary National Curriculum in England

In 1921, the Board of Education (BoE) published 'The Teaching of English in England' commonly known as the Newbolt Report. This Report is thought to mark the beginning of a progressive approach to the teaching of English in that it promoted children's self-expression, linked spoken language with literacy and recognised the place of literature in helping to form children's personalities (Mallett, 2012; Millard, 1997). However, it was not until the latter part of the twentieth century that there was evidence of the Report's liberal approach impacting on policy recommendations.

In 1937 the Board of Education published guidance for consideration by primary teachers that emphasised the importance of writing at a reasonable speed, spelling words often seen and acquiring manual control in making curves in preparation for cursive writing. The document stated that, written composition, as such, does not belong in the infant school (BoE, 1937). It was not until 1949, that policy outlined a shift in thinking more in line with the Newbolt Report (BoE, 1921). In new guidance, the Government of the time recognised the fact that composition should form part of the curriculum in infant schools. It also suggested that writing in the classroom should be based on experiences that the teacher and the children have in common and that there should be time allowed for discussion before writing. This was seen as a 'heartening development' (DES, 1959:160) and it marked a change in terms of democracy and power in the classroom, which was now recognised as a place for sharing experiences. The classroom became a place of text construction and, therefore, authorship. However, despite this more liberal approach, research undertaken by the Assessment of Performance Unit (1988) and the National Writing Project (National Curriculum Council, 1988) showed that children generally disliked writing and that equated writing with transcriptional skills rather than with those of composition and authorship.

The National Curriculum of 1989 was heavily influenced by the findings of the National Writing Project, a project that involved thousands of educators across England from 1985 to 1989. Two of the main messages from the project were that children:

> *…needed to be involved in writing for a defined and recognisable audience…and that writing should have a meaningful purpose* (Wyse et al, 2013: 13)

These messages supported the thinking of academics who had been researching the teaching of composition (Graves, 1975; 1981; 1983; Murray, 1978) and who recommended a shift in emphasis from teachers focusing exclusively on an end product, to a focus on the processes involved in writing. The 'Process Approach' as it became known was actively promoted by American Donald Graves in 1980 and involved children learning to write by developing and refining a piece of writing

(McKensie and Tomkins, 1984). The 'Process Approach' involved thinking and shaping meaning through a set of stages that included planning, drafting, responding, presenting and publishing, and reflecting (Graham and Kelly, 1998; Hodson and Jones, 2001; Wyse, 1998). The first stage, known as pre-writing, underpinned the whole process and required the writer to give consideration to purpose and audience as these aspects influence the decisions made during the writing process. The 'Process Approach' has influenced the National Curriculum since its first incarnation in 1989. The latest version of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013: 15) has incorporated aspects of the first stage of writing into a programme of study for composition, in which it states that:

> *Pupils should be taught how to plan, revise and evaluate their writing…Effective composition involves forming, articulating and communicating ideas and then organising them coherently for a reader. This requires clarity, awareness of audience, purpose and context…*

According to Johns (2005), the Process Approach has been found to be problematic for boys, especially when teachers adopt an over-mechanistic, regulatory approach to the planning process; an approach that is often encouraged in the commercial writing schemes which appear to have become increasingly popular in primary schools following the Government's report 'Reading by Six: How the best schools do it' (Ofsted, 2010). The report acknowledged that commercial publishers were responding to the recommendation of promoting a 'rigorous and sequential approach to …teaching reading, writing and spelling' (Ofsted, 2010: 4). In addition, I would argue that in practice, the policy relating to revision of writing is often reduced to addressing the transcriptional aspects of writing, such as the correction of spellings or improved handwriting, rather than the compositional aspects relating to authorial choices. The regulatory nature of planning and the overemphasis on transcription at the drafting stage has been found to demotivate boys at Key Stage 2 (Maynard, 2002). Wyse and Jones (2001: 125) suggest that such regulation has resulted in one key principle of the 'Process Approach' being lost in its translation into policy in England, that being the 'central and fundamental point about child choice.'

As Graves was developing his 'Process Approach' to writing, there was another set of theorists in Australia, led by linguist Michael Halliday, who were advocating a 'genre-based' approach to the teaching of writing. This approach involved translating linguistic theory into teaching practice and has strongly influenced national policy since the mid-1990's. Research in the area brought together a group of academic scholars and experienced teachers who explored the 'implications of systematic perspectives on language, register and genre for classroom teaching' (Martin, Christie and Rothery, 1994: 232). Genre-based theory categorised texts into 'types,' or 'genres' and highlighted the common organisational, grammatical and cohesive features of each text type, for example procedural texts such as recipes. Genre has been defined as a staged, goal orientated social process because members of a given group or culture interact in order to achieve them, for example to make meaning from a joke (Martin, 1985; Martin, Christie and Rothery, 1994). According to Rosen (2011), this one single theory was embedded into the National Literacy Strategy (1998) and the later National Curriculum (DfE/QCA, 1999) and was used to justify how different ways of writing and speaking would take place in every primary (and later, in secondary) school. Since children would all be taught the same thing relating to a particular text type, genre-based approaches could ensure an equity of the curriculum and in so doing, empower those children from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not otherwise encounter such a variety of genres (Rosen, 2011). Kress (1982) also recognised that the teaching of genre had great social and ideological effects as through a genre-based approach 'the child is being socialised into the structures and value systems of his or her society' (Kress, 1982:125). Kress (1982) provides an example of an institutional memo as a generic type. The memo not only contains content in the form of an overt message, it also offers information about lines of communication and hierarchy within an organisation and the positional identity of the sender in relation to the recipient. As a consequence, the specific genre could be said to construct the world for its users. Viewed from this perspective, rather than being a process of empowerment as Rosen suggests, a genre-based approach to writing can be considered a form of social control (Kress, 2003) and as 'a subordination of the child's creative abilities to the demands and norms of the genre' (Kress. 1982: 11) as the genres become fixed, formalised and codified.

However, it is important to recognise that prior to the incorporation of genre theory into the National Literacy Strategy (1998) and the National Curriculum (DfE/QCA, 1999), the two genres that had received most attention in schools were stories and information texts (Kress, 1982). Since the 1960s, there appeared to have been an overreliance on the teaching of story genre as a means of developing writing (Daly, 2002; Maynard, 2002). Therefore, it could be argued that adopting a genre approach in the curriculum provided the potential to expand opportunities for writing beyond narrative and in so doing, to appeal to boys. According to Maynard (2002) and Millard (1997), boys did not particularly enjoy story writing nor did they have their story writing valued by their teachers due to the inappropriateness of their preferred action-packed content in relation to a particular set task. When writing narrative, boys often fail to perform in ways that attract teacher approval and are therefore seen to fail, as was the case with my son in his retelling of 'The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark' (Tomlinson, 1973) as detailed in the Chapter 1. Myhill (2001) suggested that this is because teachers are often alienated by what boys are writing about in their narratives, regardless of their skill in accurately crafting the writing. This idea of teachers being alienated by what boys write is significant in light of the recent changes to the policy relating to statutory testing, an area to which I now turn my attention.

2.1.1   Policy and Statutory Testing

Boys under-performing girls in literacy is not a recent phenomenon and has been widely commented upon (Moss, 2007; Myhill and Fisher, 2005; O'Brien and Neal, 2007). There is no doubt that boys' lack of success in statutory English tests at age 11 has both caused concern and has fuelled the '...discourse about boys' failings in the education system in general, and within the core subject of English in particular' (Moss, 2007: 13). Whilst I acknowledge that research has been undertaken relating to a gender divide in performance in the literacy classroom (Millard, 1997; Moss, 2007; White, 1996), exploring this division is beyond the scope of this particular study.

The Education Act of 1988 introduced standardised national testing in addition to a National Curriculum. The advent of standardised national testing (SATS) for seven year olds in 1991 provided an opportunity to measure individual child performance and to compare the achievements of boys and girls against the expectations of National Curriculum Level Descriptors. The Level Descriptors offered descriptions of performance at nine levels for each subject area of the National Curriculum. Prior to standardised national testing, 'there was little sense of how pupils were performing' (Warrington and Younger, 2006: 2), due to inconsistencies in assessment and data collection throughout the country, despite the 'sampled assessment programmes of the Assessment and Performance Unit begun in 1975' (Alexander, 2004: 17). In 1995, the Government extended the statutory tests to include eleven year olds thus providing a picture of attainment at the end of the primary phase of education. The results of these tests at age 11 have been used not only to compare performance, but to compile school league tables. Evidence suggests that this has put considerable pressure on schools to ensure that their children perform well in the statutory tests, not only for their own sake but for the future of the school as 'funding follows pupils and so poor performance can have serious consequences' (Burgess, Wilson and Worth, 2010: 1).

Pupils' performance in Key Stage 2 English SATs increased steadily from their implementation in 1995 until 2008 with the number of children achieving the expected 'level four' rising from 49% - 71% respectively. It must be stressed that the statistics quoted take into account both the reading and writing elements of the English tests. Since testing began, children have traditionally performed considerably better in reading than writing. For both girls and boys, writing is the subject where children perform less well. However, it is in writing that the gender gap is most apparent with typically 15% fewer boys than girls reaching the desired level. In 2011, 81% of girls achieved level 4 or above in writing compared to 68% of boys (Rogers and Gibbs, 2011). This figure suggests that almost one third of boys were leaving primary school unable to write at the expected level. This apparent failure prompted action by the Government.

In 2011, Lord Bew carried out an independent review of statutory testing in Key Stage 2. His review considered the purpose of statutory testing and it made recommendations that resulted in changes significant to the assessment of writing. Bew (2011) recommended that writing composition should be subject to teacher assessment whilst the 'measurable' aspects of spelling, grammar, punctuation and vocabulary would 'lend themselves to externally marked testing' (DfE, 2012: 6). This test quickly became known by children and teachers as the 'SPAG Test.' As one of its main purposes was to 'hold schools accountable for the attainment and progress made by their pupils and groups of pupils' (Standards and Testing Agency, 2012: 4), its implementation had the potential to reduce writing opportunities in school to skill and drill exercises in preparation for the test itself (Bearne, 2002: Gee, 2004; Whitmore, 2010). It could be said that like the National Curricula, statutory tests also represent artefacts of political force that have gone on to shape society's understanding of what it means to be literate. The organisation of the test, arguably, shifts the emphasis from writing composition to transcription at upper Key Stage 2, as the externally marked SPAG paper is prioritized over the teacher assessed composition. Therefore, the SPAG Test, and the model of literacy associated with it, has the potential to affect the child's understanding of what it means to be a writer.

Such an approach to statutory testing could also be considered to have the potential to be more detrimental to boys' performance at the end of Key Stage 2. Firstly, the emphasis on transcriptional skills is likely to be a demotivating effect on boys (Higgins, 2002). Secondly, there are likely to be inconsistencies in the teacher assessment of boys' writing composition if teachers fail to understand the influences and ideas behind boys' writing. As children carry the outcome of their performance in statutory end of Key Stage tests through to the next phase of education, their individual results reinforce the positional status of the child as a particular type of writer within the school community, for example poor or able. The high profile nature of boys' underachievement in statutory testing has, unsurprisingly, prompted a large number of studies that have examined why boys are falling behind in reading and writing. The studies tend to fall into three key areas; the place of intervention strategies in raising boys' attainment (Barrs, 2000;

Price, 2011; Younger et al, 2005); teachers' perspectives of boys and their attitudes towards reading and writing (Barrs and Pidgeon, 2002; Browne, 1996; Lindsay and Muijs, 2006, Maynard and Lowe, 1999, Moss, 2007) and identifying skills deficits (Beatie, 2007; O'Brien and Neal, 2007). According to Daly (2002) there is a common thread linking such studies in that 'boys mostly feature as the objects of research, on whom alternative practices are being trialled, rather than being measured in terms of their writing behaviour' (Daly, 2002:4). As this study has boys' writing behaviours at its heart, I now turn to examine literacy theory to better understand the connection between policy and theory and to examine writing beyond the school setting.

2.2   New Literacy Studies and New Literacies

The research area, which has come to be known as New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1991, 1996; Street, 1993, 1995), considers the nature of literacy as a social practice, an emphasis that sees literacy as more than a set of skills to be learnt (Flewitt, 2011; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Pahl and Rowsell, 2012; Street, 1984). New Literacy Studies challenged the traditional, 'standard view' (Street, 2012: 28) of literacy, which works with the assumption that literacy, in itself, 'will…have effects on [individuals'] social and cognitive practices.' This traditional view suggests that it is only once literacy skills have been given to the illiterate that social effects are experienced.

<u>From a traditional perspective to literacy as social practice</u>

A number of psychologists and anthropologists, from the 1960s through to the 1980s suggested that being literate was essential for economic progress, civilisation, liberty and social mobility (Anderson, 1965; Goody, 1968; Ong, 1982). Jack Goody (1977: 11) purported that it was the development of an alphabetic form of writing that allowed 'the setting down of speech that enabled man clearly to separate words, to manipulate their order and to develop syllogistic forms of reasoning'. Goody considered language to be a 'technology of the intellect' (1977: 10) and as

such highlighted the notion of a 'great divide' between oral and literate societies. The ability to write was associated with the development of cognitive practices such as logic, reasoning and critical and abstract thought (Goody, 1977; Hildyard and Olsen, 1978). Goody was seen to promote Victorian notions of social hierarchy, as the 'dichotomy between illiteracy and literacy was viewed as being synonymous with that of primitive and civilised' (Maddox, 2007: 256). This viewpoint considers literacy as unitary, a single thing that is essential for everyone and although individuals may be literate to varying degrees, what literate people share in common is their possession of this thing called literacy (Lankshear, 1987). At a national level, raised levels of literacy are signifiers of economic prosperity and social well-being (Canneiro and Gordon, 2013). According to Barton (2001: 93), New Literacy Studies, a term first used by Gee in 1990, 'grew out of dissatisfaction with conceptions of reading and writing which were based on over simplistic, psychological models.' Ethnographic studies of language use in different cultures during the 1970s and 80s had brought this standard or traditional 'unitary' view of literacy into question.

Brian Street (1984) developed the concepts of autonomous and ideological literacies. Street (1984) described the traditional perspective as an 'autonomous model' of literacy, that is one which privileges particular literacy practices familiar to dominant western cultures (Street and Lefstein, 2007). It is a model in which literacy has autonomy from the particular social contexts in which it is employed (Lankshear, 1987), and is therefore viewed as a set of decontextualized skills to be learnt, for example phoneme-grapheme correspondence, letter formation etc. As the skills are highly valued, individuals' performance can be assessed and monitored. These skills, once learnt, can be transferred to any situation that requires an individual to read and write. The trend of conceptualising literacy as a set of skills, the acquisition of which will go on to boost cognitive practices and improve the individuals' employment prospects, is questionable yet remains firmly in place (Street, 2012). The earlier review of policy and statutory testing suggests that the autonomous model of literacy has been, and continues to be evident in England's various Primary National Curricula (DfES/WO, 1988; DfE/QCA, 1999; DfE, 2013) for English over the past twenty-five years with the most recent version of

the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) emphasising transcriptional skills over compositional skills for children in Key Stage 1.

The alternative to the autonomous model offered by Street (1984) and New Literacy Studies, is the 'ideological model,' which suggests that literacy varies from one context to another and from one culture to another and is, therefore, culturally sensitive. It considers how individuals use literacy and adapt their practice in relation to their needs and the power structures within society and can, therefore, capture the negotiations of power involved in reading and writing (Bartlett and Holland, 2002). Street (1984) developed the concept of the 'ideological model' following his fieldwork in Iran where he undertook a study that focussed on literacy practices in different 'domains', that is spaces or places where literacy practices are carried out. Street was concerned with the everyday uses and meanings of literacy both inside and outside school. His research offered a more social constructivist perspective of literacy, that is literacy as 'a set of practices which are domain specific, varied and multiple, tied to specific uses and functions within social institutions of power' (Stein, 2008: 30). Street and Street (1991) recognised the fact that sometimes the domains where literacy practices are carried out, and the sites that the literacy practices originate from, may be the same. For example school literacy practices can be identified with a site called school. Sometimes they are different, such as when school work is taken home in the form of homework. Therefore, the ideological model of literacy addresses the fact that literacy learning does not just take place in the formal context of schools; instead it is a key aspect of everyday life and concentrates on the 'overlap and interaction of oral and literate modes, rather than stressing a great divide' (Street, 1984: 3). In doing this, it also recognises that there are multiple literacies, literacies that do not conform to the dominant written print text of highly valued 'schooled literacy' practices.

In recent years the autonomous and ideological literacies model has been the subject of some debate and criticism. In his more recent work, Street (2005, 2014) suggests that the autonomous model of literacy, on which so much practice and educational programmes have been based, is not an appropriate tool for understanding the diversity of reading and writing around the world. He recognises

that 'the "autonomous" model is in fact always "ideological" in both its view of what literacy counts, and its view of how literacy should be acquired' (Street, 2005: 418). This focus on the ideological literacies model, that is the social and communicative aspects of literacy practices, is considered by some researchers to be at the expense of the autonomous, cognitive aspects which relate to the mental work literacy can do (Barton, 2001; Maddox, 2007; Stromquist, 2004). Stromquist (2004) suggests that there should be an acknowledgement that literacy does enable people to process information in a way that is more detailed, deliberate and coherent than oral communication.

The concepts of autonomous and ideological literacies will be particularly pertinent to this study as they will provide a framework from which to explore the relationship between the participants' varied writing practices in the domains of school and home, and to identify what they have in common and what is distinct. The divide between home and school literacy practices has been the subject of much debate. However, one of the purposes of this study is to challenge this thinking and to highlight what Barton (2001: 97) would describe as the 'furry' relationship between 'domains [which] are more fluid and...practices more hybrid.' It is to the issue of the home school divide that I now turn my attention.

2.2.1   Writing Domains – a Home School Divide?

The Newbolt Report (BoE, 1921: 64) described English as 'being not merely a school subject, but also a 'home' or 'life' subject' ...always being taught...often badly independently of the school.' Whilst recognising that learning takes place beyond the classroom, the report goes on to suggest that there is limited time in which to counteract 'by good teaching at school bad habits...acquired outside' (ibid). For all of its liberal intentions, it could be argued that the Newbolt Report (BoE, 1921) has influenced thinking relating to home and schooled literacies that is still in evidence today. Geisler (2013) writes of a great divide between reading and writing in and out of school. She suggests that literacy in school requires 'an abandonment of...home culture...in favour of the formal culture' (Geisler, 2013:91). She is not

alone in this view as it has been strongly argued that the standard literacy curriculum offered by schools is dislocated from the real interests and home literacy practices of children (Dowdall, 2006, 2009; McClay, 2002; Marsh, 2003; Millard, 2003).

The concept of situated literacies within New Literacy Studies has suggested that different literacy practices can be associated with different domains of life (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, Barton et al, 2000). According to Maybin (2007: 516), it has been suggested that 'the home/school mismatch hypotheses is the most resilient theme in the last two decades of New Literacy Studies' and as such a number of studies have focused on comparing literacy practices in the domains of school and home. They have been undertaken by researchers who are interested in exploring the dissonance between home and school literacy practices (Pahl, 2014). Such studies have tended to focus on three main groups; young children who are in nursery or starting school (Dyson, 2013; Levy, 2008, 2009; Marsh, 2003), bi-lingual children and their families (Gregory and Williams, 2000; Kenner, 2004; Pahl, 2002) and adolescents and the use of technology (Carrington, 2009; Dowdall, 2006).

Cairney and Ruge (1998) undertook research into the school and home literacy practices of 35 primary and secondary aged children in Australia. They found that school literacies dominated the home setting and that writing practices associated with school, for example homework, spelling tests etc., were not only the most prominent sources of writing, but were also the practices most valued by parents who were often 'goal directed' (Cairney and Ruge, 1998:30).

Equally, it would appear that teachers and schools do not always take into account the writing children do outside school (Heath 1981; Cairney and Ruge, 1998; Bradford and Wyse, 2013). Pahl (2002) undertook a study of three families of 5 – 8 year old boys and found that by 'paying attention to the space and structures of homes, a different set of pedagogical supports to children's meaning making can be discovered' (Pahl, 2002: 165). Her study emphasised the importance of teachers recognizing 'their students' intentions and the sources of their influences in writing' (McClay, 2002: 47), as failing to do so can result in tensions between home and

school literacy practices and the child's perspective of writing (Dyson, 2013). This is particularly relevant to the boys in my study as research has shown that boys tend to draw on a media culture to inform their writing (Newkirk, 2000), a culture that is arguably limited in the school setting.

There have been limited studies into understanding the literacy practices of pre-adolescent boys both in and out- of -school. Dowdall (2006) undertook a small-scale case study of one ten year old writer and the influences on his out-of-school text production. The study recommended 'a framework for considering children's text production that brings into balance the social, material and agentive factors' (Dowdall, 2006: 39). Maybin (2007) carried out an ethnographic study of 10 and 11 year olds in two British primary schools in which she drew on examples of unofficial and official literacy activities. Her aim was to demonstrate Barton's (2001) suggestion that the division between in-school and out-of-school, or 'vernacular literacy' (Maybin, 2007: 515), is not as clear cut as is sometimes assumed. In her study she documented children's informal language and literacy practices in order to investigate their role 'in the construction of knowledge and identity as they moved from childhood into adolescence' (Maybin, 2007: 518). I hope that my research will contribute to and add to this debate by considering how the boy participants author themselves as literate within the domains of school and home whilst recognising the complex relationship between the two. One important aspect of this research will be to understand the many literacy practices that the boys undertake in the different domains. Therefore, I now turn my attention to the notion of multi-literacies.

2.2.2 Multi- literacies

The term multi-literacies was introduced by the New London Group, a group of ten academics who first came together in 1994 in New London, New Hampshire, USA to discuss the state of literacy pedagogy. The group discussed:

'...the pedagogical tensions between immersion and explicit models of teaching; the challenge of cultural and linguistic diversity; the newly prominent modes of technologies of communication

(New London Group, 1996: 62)

The New London Group (1996: 61) recognised that in terms of traditional institutional pedagogy, 'literacy' meant 'learning to read and write in page-bound, official standard forms of the national language' and that literacy teaching and learning had been a 'restricted project… restricted to formalised, monolingual, monocultural and rule governed forms of language.' This type of literacy has been referred to as essayist literacy (Farr, 1993; Gee, 1996; Scollon and Scollon, 1981) and it is the form of literacy most valued in academic circles. My examination of government policy in England suggests that literacy teaching remains focussed on essayist literacy and it ignores other ways of demonstrating literacy competence. Therefore, this form of literacy has arguably cemented the notion of a school/home divide previously discussed. This restrictive yet traditional pedagogical approach serves the function of disciplining and skilling people for the regimented, hierarchical, industrial workplaces typical of those found across the western world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The New London Group called for a reassessment of literacy pedagogy in order to meet the needs of a linguistically diverse and increasingly globalised society and to ensure that differences in culture, language and gender are not barriers to literacy and therefore educational success. The New London Group, in their reassessment of literacy pedagogy, coined the term 'multi-literacies' to describe the 'multiplicity of communications channels and media combined with the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity…to focus on modes of representation much broader than language alone' (New London Group, 1996: 63). The New London Group identified six elements of meaning making or modes of representation: linguistic, audio, visual, gestural, spatial and multimodal. The multimodal element considers how the first five elements relate to each other. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 2), like language, 'visual images, gesture and action have been developed through their social into articulated or partly articulated resources for representation.' The group argued that the concept of multi-literacies as a pedagogy, overcomes the limitations of

traditional approaches by 'emphasising how negotiating the multiple linguistic and cultural differences in our society is central to the pragmatics of the working, civic and private lives of students' (New London Group, 1996: 60).

The contribution of the New London Group and the concept of multi-literacies are important in the context of this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, I can use their definition of traditional institutional pedagogy, which could be said to support Street's autonomous model of literacy, to understand my participants' experiences of the teaching and learning of writing within the context of their primary schools. Secondly, I can understand the participant's approaches to writing and their end products in terms of the six elements of meaning making as outlined above. Thirdly, I can identify how the participants access and negotiate the multiplicity of writing practices which will provide an insight into how they are 'designing their social futures' (New London Group, 1996: 60). I examine in more detail the multiplicity of writing practices as I consider new literacies, those being electronic forms of communication that have influenced writing practices. I begin by considering the desktop computer and word processing packages before moving on to newer forms of digital writing associated with electronic communications that I anticipate will be familiar to the boys in my study.

2.2.3 From Word Processing to a New Digital Landscape

Successive governments in the 1980s and 1990s recognised the computer's potential to transform both the workplace and education. During the early 1990s personal computers were introduced into schools in the UK and it was word-processing and desk top publishing applications that promised to reform the writing process (BESA, 2015). The Cox Report (DfES, 1989), which provided recommendations on attainment targets and programmes of study for the then new National Curriculum, made reference to the use of information technology to enhance the teaching of English. In the area of writing, it recognised the potential of the word processor in being able to extend 'opportunities for development and reflection on ideas and meanings, for example in designing, outlining and

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restructuring' (para 9.12) as well as being able to assist with the transcriptional aspects of writing through the use of 'spelling checkers, thesauruses etc.' (para 9.11). Therefore, the word processor was seen as a tool to support the process approach to writing and to offer new opportunities to both teachers and learners. Cochran-Smith et al (1991: 27) described the word processing tool as being 'seductive to the educational community' of the time because:

> *…the speed and ease with which one could produce and revise text would let writers keep their writing tentative and exploratory whilst they discovered and refined the intricacies of what they wanted to say…word processing was a tool that would help writers write better.*

It is not surprising that a number of studies were carried out during the 1980s and 1990s to review the impact of this technology on children's writing. The majority of studies focused on the use of word processors on the revision of texts (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Macarthur, 1998, Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1982, 1986). These studies concluded that much of the revision that took place was superficial as the children involved in the studies had not been taught revision strategies. In reality the word processor was not being utilised in ways that had been anticipated. Instead it was being used to present an end product, rather than to support the writing process, with children working on hand written drafts (Mumtaz and Hammond, 2002). Sadly, this still appears to remain the case in many primary schools in England. Anecdotally, during a recent lecture with a class of 29 post-graduate trainee primary teachers, 19 of the 29 had only ever encountered the word processor being used by a child to produce a best copy of a hand-written draft for a display. The remaining 10 students had seen no use of the word-processor or any other use of ICT in their placement schools to support writing. All 29 students reported that pen and paper was the preferred method of transcription in their placement schools because 'it is easier to have evidence for Ofsted in their [the children's] books' (PGCE student, 2014). The anecdotal evidence provided by the students supported the views of Andrews et al (2006: 6) who found that much of the practice in schools involving the use of a word-processor is 'concerned with 'secretarial' or surface features, rather than with structural or more deeply compositional aspects of writing.' I

suggest that the persistent emphasis on transcription skills in the primary school classroom highlights a continuing problem with teachers' understanding of writing as a process and the benefits of word-processors in supporting that process, as previously described by Cochran-Smith et al (1991).

Arguably the apparent inappropriate or lack of word-processor usage could be the resulting legacy of computers' initial introduction into schools. According to Potter (1994) when personal computers were first introduced to schools, the main problem was shared access as there was often only one computer to a class of thirty children, resulting in insufficient time and opportunity for all children to learn and practice the skills associated with word-processing. The limited availability of the computer to all children meant that the computer was little used for direct teaching. Instead, children would often find themselves using a word-processor in a classroom situation where detailed direction and supervision was minimal (Jessel, 2005).

The apparent lack of direct teaching and supervision could also be said to have impacted on the development of writing skills at a more basic level than the editing process. Arguably, the ability to use a keyboard is essential for communicating when using a computer, or indeed other digital technologies. Typing skills require knowledge of the QWERTY keyboard, whether using a traditional keyboard or a touch screen. A number of studies have examined children's keyboard skills and have compared handwriting and typing (Berninger et al, 2009; Cochran-Smith et al, 1991; Connelly et al, 2007; Feng et al, 2010). The majority of these studies have identified that experiencing difficulties with typing is a prime cause of frustration for children when using technology (Berninger et al, 2009; Connelly et al, 2007; Feng et al, 2010). Much of the frustration is due to the fact that children struggle to locate the letters on a QWERTY keyboard which results in them beginning to type using a 'hunt and peck' method that is 'very slow…and the text generated has frequent spelling errors' (Feng et al, 2010:18). Connelly et al (2007) found that children both preferred to use and wrote more quickly and fluently with a pen and paper. This ability to write more quickly with a pen has been attributed to a combination of children having more experience of traditional writing tools and the relative lack of

explicit teaching in keyboard skills (Berninger et al, 2009; Christensen, 2004; Connelly et al, 2007). MacArthur (1998) and Peacock and Breese (1990) recommended the systematic instruction of keyboarding skills in preparation for word processing in order to remove any potential frustration and to ensure that the potential of the word processor was fully realised. Robson (1986: 66) commented that the benefits of the word processor 'do not manifest themselves until the children become more familiar with the keyboard' (cited in Potter, 1994). Despite these early calls for explicit keyboard training, it has never been included in the Primary National Curriculum in England, unlike in Massachusetts, USA where the state curriculum specifies the teaching of keyboard skills for children aged 11-14, who are expected to type 25-30 words per minute with fewer than 5 errors (Furber, 2012). In England, the failure to include keyboard skills in policy guidance suggests that children are expected to acquire the ability to touch type, a skill which according to Feng et al (2010), neurotypical children will eventually acquire. I would argue that 'eventually' could put many children at a disadvantage as they grapple with the process. Speaking from personal experience, as a mature adult with no keyboard training, I am still only able to type with two fingers and it is not for want, or lack of trying. My son, however, now in his early twenties attended a small independent primary school that was free from the constraints of the National Curriculum. It was at that school that he was taught to touch-type by his school secretary and a teacher, who had been trained as a typist. Throughout Years 3 and 4 he and his classmates would perfect the art of touch-typing in a small computer suite, and when this was not available, by using paper replicas of a QWERTY keyboard to locate the letters. Following on from keyboard skills, they progressed to learning about the word processor tools, for example how to employ spelling and grammar checks, to manipulate the text on the page, to change font styles and to insert pictures and shapes. Through this direct teaching he learnt about the possibilities that the word-processor offered. At age 9 he was able to type using both hands and without looking at the keyboard to locate the letters. He was also able to recognise the benefits of being able to record his thoughts directly onto the computer screen with speed and to be able to edit those initial thoughts and to personalise his work through use of the editing tools. The boy who had reportedly been unimaginative in his writing, due to the requirement to illustrate his work in

Key Stage 1, was now empowered by the use of Clipart. He was now a confident producer of multimodal electronic texts.

For many, including my son, the word-processor offered a different way to engage with the process of writing. As technology has moved on, children now have far greater access to networked computers, tablets and other mobile technologies. This new digital landscape offers technologies which provide 'a more complex space for writing, offering writers a whole new set of options to consider' (DeVoss et al, 2010: 21). These options relate to the multimodality and the collaborative and sharing nature of text production. I now turn to pay more attention to the concept of multimodality which was central to the discussions undertaken by the New London Group and therefore informs debate over what constitutes literacy.

Multimodality

Jewitt (2005) argues that print-based writing has always been multimodal as it allows semiotic resources such as colour, font style, spacing and image to be seen as something beyond decoration. My past research with 10 and 11 year old children, and their interpretation of visual images generated an interesting discussion around facial expression, colour and the significance of a gent's suit. This exercise in visual literacy (Scanlon, 2006) demonstrated the children's understanding of image choice in relation to supporting a word-bound text, and the impact of that choice on the reader. My research was paper based and sourcing images was time consuming. However, new technologies now enable images to be imported into written texts very quickly whilst also offering a wealth of choice to the meaning-maker allowing for a freedom of expression, as is shown in the earlier example of my son's experience. These images can be still or moving images and can be supported by other modes such as music, or a spoken soundtrack. According to Snyder, (2003: 64)

> *Now for the first time in history, the written, oral and audiovisual modalities*
> *of communication are integrated into the same electronic system...being*
> *literate in the context of these technologies is to do with understanding how*
> *the different modalities are combined in complex ways to create meaning.*

As Kress suggests, multimodality is made 'easy, usual and natural' (Kress 2003:5) by digital technologies. It is the use of multiple modes that is forcing a reassessment of 'what writing is, what it does and does not do and what it can and cannot do' (2003: 11).

Gillen (2014a) offers an alternative perspective to the language-based, social-semiotic approach to multimodality (Jewitt, 2005; Kress, 2003) in relation to the study of digital literacy practices. Gillen (2014a: 31) suggests that the study of digital literacy practices requires a focus on mode as 'modality is a central, essential feature of language that does not allow us to take any particular instantiation or simple linear characterisation for granted', that linear characterisation being a continuum which has speaking at one end and writing at the other (Georgakopoulou, 2006a). In such a continuum, writing is represented by traditional print based texts whilst speaking is represented by everyday, synchronous conversation. Linguist David Crystal (2005: 1) comments that:

> *The properties which differentiate CMC [Computer Mediated Communication] from speech include its lack of simultaneous feedback (critical to successful conversation), the absence of a non-segmental phonology…and its ability to carry on multiple interactions simultaneously (in chatrooms). The properties which differentiate CMC from writing include its dynamic dimension…its ability to frame messages…its hypertextuality…introducing novel features of grammar, vocabulary and spelling.*

In relation to the digital context, there appears to have been a 'deliberate confusion between speech and written language…the speech-writing blur' (Gillen, 2014a: 19). In her work relating to digital literacy she has found there to be a 'seeming lack of orientation to mode by language users themselves' (Gillen, 2014a: 26) as they construe digital writing as a form of talk. I hope to investigate and better understand this connection between speaking and writing as I engage the boys in my study in a conscious deliberation of their digital text productions. I now turn my attention to those digital spaces.

<u>Digital spaces and places</u>

In addition to the wide range of modes available to writers, writers also have access to a plethora of digital spaces to compose and share texts, for example text messages, instant messages, social networking, blogs and interactive on-line games to name but a few. I would argue that these different writing spaces challenge the traditional view of audience as such spaces not only provide the writer with a larger more diverse audience, they also allow for a 'virtually instant sharing of texts throughout the writing process' (DeVoss et al, 2010: 21). This in turn enables the composing process to be public and interactive from the earliest stages.

Children are engaged in digital writing practices and social media from an increasingly early age. In 2010, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) reported that 25% of all UK Internet users between the ages of eight and twelve had profiles on social networking sites such as Facebook and Bebo, despite the minimum age for registration being set at thirteen. A 2014 Office of Communications (Ofcom) study of 186 children in the UK aged between six and eleven found that the children spent 26% of their 5.5 hours per day using media devices, in communication and gaming activities, although this figure increased significantly at age 12. The remainder of the time was spent listening to, reading and watching media texts with boys spending most of their time gaming. According to Apperley and Walsh (2012: 115) 'when children play digital games they participate in a complex constellation of literacy practices.' These NFER and Ofcom reports highlight the fact that children are 'motivated producers and consumers of digital texts' (Dowdall, 2009: 50), although their findings suggest that children in the primary age group are more likely to be consumers. According to Carrington and Robinson (2009) digital texts have become 'embedded into the everyday fabric of …society' (Carrington and Robinson, 2009:1). Therefore, digital technology is considered to be intrinsic to the social practices and the cultural lives of children today (Davies and Merchant, 2009; Levy, 2011). Yet studies have shown that digital writing receives no formal recognition in many classrooms and falls outside dominant discourses about the literacy curriculum (Merchant, 2005), despite

offering the potential 'to provide genuinely engaging and rewarding activities' (Honan, 2008:42).

In addition to engaging children in writing activities, Merchant (2001, 2005) found in his research with pre-adolescents, that children's digital text production also provided examples of linguistic innovation as the children developed a personal style that included adapting spelling and non-verbal paralinguistic features such as the use of emoticons (Merchant 2001, 2005). As the children tended to communicate with people they knew, for example existing friends and relatives, they tended to be more adventurous with their experimentation, deviating from standard forms of English. This experimentation within their on-line domain, and with friends, suggests that such practices are significant in terms of developing a peer culture, defined by Corsaro (2011: 21) as being 'a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with their peers.' As children develop a peer culture, they take information from the adult world and reconfigure it to address their own needs. In the world of digital writing, this may mean adapting the standard English of school to meet their group's needs. As children do this they are actively contributing to cultural production and change whilst developing their own multi-literate identities. A number of studies have found that children's home digital writing practices involve creating multimodal texts which provide a representation of the owner to the social networking community therefore highlighting the place of digital media in personalising identity (Davies, 2006; Dowdall, 2009; Marsh, 2011). However, the fact that the studies and their findings focus on digital literacy in the home domain suggests that digital literacy practices are less evident in the school setting. The reluctance of schools to engage with digital literacy activities has been commented on by a number of scholars (Honan, 2008). Leander's (2007) study suggested that this reluctance to engage is due to the fact that teachers themselves are often challenged by digital writing practices. This is a view supported by Honan (2008) who, in her study of literacy practices in a primary school in Australia, found that teachers 'emphasised barriers…to finding spaces to incorporate digital texts into their literacy teaching and learning' (Honan, 2008: 41) and saw it as an add-on to those traditional paper-based literacy practices that are valued in the classroom.

Squire (2010) developed this point by commenting that teachers found digital texts and digital text production to be trivial, rather than influential cultural artefacts and practices. Such studies have highlighted tensions, or a digital dissonance (Clark et al, 2009; Leander, 2007; Lim et al, 2010) between the mind-sets of teachers and pupils, and socio-cultural practices at home and in school. I now turn my attention to defining 'practices' within the context of this study.

2.2.4   Literacy Events and Practices

In this study I refer to literacy or writing practices, as opposed to literacy events for reasons I will now discuss. A literacy event, first acknowledged by Anderson et al (1980), is derived from sociolinguistic studies and the notion of a speech event. Anderson et al used the phrase literacy event to mark an occasion when an individual attempted to make sense of written text. Heath (1982: 93) went on to develop this understanding by describing a literacy event as an occasion when a piece of writing is 'integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretive processes.' Over the years the notion of a literacy event has been developed, and as a result the term 'literacy practice' introduced. The terms 'literacy event' and 'literacy practice' have been much debated (Street, 1984; Barton and Ivanic, 1991; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Prinsloo and Briere, 1996). Whilst the term literacy practice takes into account the literacy event as described by Heath, it also considers the socio-cultural aspects of literacy, that is descriptions of everyday usage of literacy in which the literacy event and the patterns of activity around it that link it to 'something broader of a cultural and social kind' (Street, 2012:37). Accordingly, literacy practices incorporate 'not only the social, political and historical contexts…but also the relations of social power that envelop them' (Bartlett and Holland, 2002: 11). As this study considers boys writing in different domains, the concept of writing practices is important as I try to understand the broader context of my participants' writing activities and the ways they think about 'doing…writing in cultural contexts' (Street, 2012: 37), and how those contexts inter-relate.

In this study I explore both school and out of school writing practices in order to understand and appreciate how the boys engage with writing. However, it is important that I remain mindful of the fact that 'engaging with literacy is always a social act imbued with power relations from the outset' (Street, 2012: 29). Therefore, exploring the interactions and power relationships between the 10 year old boys in my study and the other actors in those domains, will help to better understand how relationships 'affect…ideas about literacy' (Street, 2012: 29).

As the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between the participants' writing practices and their evolving identities, understanding how identity is shaped through writing practices is significant. Therefore, in addition to the literacy theory underpinning New Literacy Studies, it is important in this review of literature to consider theories of identity as well as those connections between identity and literacy. It is to such issues that I now turn my attention.

2.3   Identity and Literacy

In academic research, the concept of identity is challenging to define due to the many different theories that are presented (Gee, 2000/2001; Moje et al, 2009; Rogers and Elias, 2012). According to Holland et al (1998) it could be argued that identity theories fall into two key areas, a culturalist perspective and a constructivist perspective. The culturalist perspective of identity has its roots in anthropology and is concerned with the identities that form 'in relation to major structural features in society: ethnicity, gender, race, nationality and sexual orientation' (Holland et al, 1998: 7). The constructivist position 'emphasises the social positioning that goes on whenever people interact' (Holland et al, 1998: 11) and is an extension of sociolinguistic theory.

Current conceptions of identity tend to relate to identity as a social construct and it could be argued that social psychologist George Herbert Mead (1934) laid the foundations for developing this perspective. Mead developed an explanation of personhood, which linked identity and self and which suggested that humans had

an instinctive ability to coordinate their actions through engagement in social life. The self exists because people are aware of their relationship to the social processes and their relationship to other individuals (Holland et al, 1998; Moje et al, 2009). Corsaro (2011) put forward a theory of interpretive reproduction in which children enter the culture through their families at birth and then begin to participate in other institutional locales or domains, for example school, and, as a result begin to participate in a series of peer cultures which, in turn, contribute to society. Therefore, children can be considered to be in the process of being and then becoming, drawing on their experiences of the past to influence both the present and future (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012; Uprichard, 2008). James (1890, cited in Stryker and Burke, 2000) suggested that the number of identities a person has equates to the number of groups with whom they interact, therefore implying that an individual has multiple identities which are based on the subject's position within a social situation. The New London Group (1996) developed this idea as they suggested that people are 'simultaneously members of multiple lifeworlds, or spaces for community life where local and specific meanings can be made' (New London Group, 1996: 71). From this perspective, people's identities have multiple layers that are complex in relation to each other. The boundaries of these lifeworlds overlap and therefore become blurred and language takes on a 'multiplicity of meanings' at their intersection. Gee (2000/2001: 99) further develops this idea by suggesting that identity involves 'being recognised as a certain kind of person in a given context,' therefore suggesting that others give the individual a sense of identity and that individuals have multiple identities that are connected to their performance in society. For Gee, identity is bound to the workings of historical, institutional and social forces, a view supported by Compton-Lilly (2006:59) who states that 'identities are formed within relationships with others and are constantly subject to the influences of other people and institutions.'

According to Moje et al (2009: 415), there has been a 'recent identity turn in literacy studies' which they recognise as being motivated by two key factors. Firstly, the shift from an autonomous view of literacy to recognising literacy practices as being socially situated. This shift has led theorists to recognise that people's identities mediate and are mediated by the texts they read, write and talk about

(Lewis and del Valle, 2009; McCarthey, 2001; McCarthey and Moje, 2002). Gee's work with Native Americans explored the relationship between language and the performed identities of a group who wished to be recognised as 'real Indians' (Gee, 1999: 15). He found that, 'Literacies, like other uses of language, entail social identities' (Bartlett, 2005: 2). Pahl and Rowsell (2012: 115) suggest that 'Literacy practices are infused with identity…and are intimately bound up with the different discourse communities which in turn shape identities further.'

The second motivating factor for focusing on identity in literacy studies has been the recent interest in new media, and cultural and digital texts, and the agency and power that individuals may exhibit when they engage with such texts (Dowdall, 2006; Lewis and del Valle, 2009; Merchant, 2006). New media has provided an array of new textual forms and 'what and how one reads and writes can have an impact on the type of person one is recognised as being and on how one sees oneself' (Moje et al, 2009: 416). For example my son, who does not own a motorcycle, shares news stories on-line related to motor-cycle racing in order to give credibility to his status as a race marshal. Other recent research has considered children's identities as producers of digital texts (Dowdall, 2006, 2009; Hansford and Adlington, 2008; Merchant, 2007) and how these identities may clash with a school literacy identity.

According to Moje et al (2009: 416), '…the subtle differences in identity theories have widely different implications for how one thinks about both how literacy matters to identity and identity matters to literacy.' Exploring literacy and identity provides an insight into 'how humans make sense of the world and their experiences in it, including their experiences with texts' (McCarthy and Moje, 2002: 228) as 'the identities people construct and the relationships they form shape their…writing practices' (Compton-Lily, 2006: 60). For the purpose of this study I have selected the theory of identity and agency in figured worlds, as described by Holland et al (1998), which draws on 'different schools of thought, including culturalists, constructivists, and universalists' (Urrieta, 2007:107). I found it to be particularly relevant to my study as I felt able to draw on significant aspects of the theory to understand each participant's identity development in relation to literacy.

Those aspects are related to positional and figurative identities, authoring of the self and cultural artefacts. Each will now be discussed in more detail as part of establishing the literature base in this chapter. However, Holland et al's (1998) work also provides a theoretical foundation for the methodology which is discussed further in Chapter 3.

2.3.1 Identity and Agency in Figured Worlds

In 1998, Holland et al produced a seminal work on identity theory in order to understand how people shape and re-shape their sense of self, how they negotiate their worlds and how they disrupt and rebel against social norms. They introduced a key concept of 'figured worlds', which they perceive as being crucial to understanding identity formation. I begin with a definition of the term 'figured world' as described by Holland et al (1998). Their definition states that a figured world is,

> *'...a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognised, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others'*
>
> *(Holland et al, 1998: 52).*

Holland et al (1998) argue that as individuals, we either enter into or are recruited into different figured worlds. We may also be denied entry to some figured worlds because of our status, likewise we may deny others entry into any of our figured worlds. In figured worlds the individual 'figures out' who he or she is through both the activities that take place in that world and in relation to the social types that populate the world. Therefore, the individual's social relationship with the people who take part in these worlds is important in that figuring. The boys participating in this study are each participating in a variety of figured worlds; those into which they have entered, for example school and family, and those into which they have been recruited, for example friendship groups, sports clubs and on-line gaming communities. I would like to explore the figured world of the primary school, which

is common to all of the participants, in order to illustrate and further define the concept.

The figured world of the primary school recognises certain characters and their roles, for example the head teacher, class teachers, teaching assistants, children, support staff and parents (although there may be other stakeholders). Each of these characters may be attributed a particular trait, referred to by Holland et al (1998: 43) as a 'lexicon of types', for example the inspirational head teacher, the strict class teacher, the hardworking child, the typical boy or the worried parent. Some traits are valued over others because of the outcomes they produce. For example, the inspirational head teacher, who can lead, inspire and empower her team to improve school results; the strict teacher who can keep order in the classroom and ensure that her pupils remain on task; the hardworking child who completes their work in accordance with a particular lesson objective and who does not cause disruption, all demonstrate 'valuable' traits. In the figured world of the primary school, it is important to achieve, and those characters who conform to expectation and contribute to the school's success, are highly valued especially by those in authority.

In the figured world of the primary school, there is a tendency to invoke and deploy such figurings (as outlined above) and identities in order to characterise children and their behaviour and attainment. In the figured world of the primary school, it could be said that the 'typical boy' is also recognised as a familiar character. In contrast to the hardworking child, typically acknowledged as a girl, the boy who does not complete set tasks or who appears to be disengaged is, in my experience, often referred to as a 'typical boy.' Such behaviour does not produce the desired performance outcomes and it could be argued is often considered to be a contributor to boys' underperformance in the high stakes, statutory testing in literacy at age 11. Therefore, in the figured world of the primary school the 'typical boy' is not valued, indeed he is often perceived as a problem. The result is that collectively boys are often viewed negatively, as a problem group. In 2002, the importance of 'tackling a 'laddish' culture in order to motivate boys to do well,' (Alexander, 2004:18) was highlighted by the Government who blamed boys for the nation's failure to meet the 80% target in the end of Key Stage 2 English statutory

tests. The perceived problem of boys and writing in relation to educational policy has already been discussed. However, it is difficult to ignore the fact that boys who struggle, or appear to struggle to read and write, are often referred to as 'typical.' Therefore, this figuring of boys as 'typical' has an association with 'struggling' in terms of literacy, and this may lead boys to feel undervalued in the figured world of school and may impact on their ideas about, and attitude towards writing. This in turn will affect their literate identities as Holland et al (1998: 57) suggest that 'identities are formed in the process of participating in the activities organised by figured worlds.'

Identity in figured worlds

Recent anthropological studies have emphasised the social negotiation or the positioning involved in identity studies (Holland et al, 1998; Bartlett, 2005). In this constant negotiation,

> *People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves, and then try to act as though they are who they say they are.*
> *(*Holland et al, 1998:3)

In addition to the individual creating this sense of self, identities are also constructed by others' perceptions of him or her. Holland et al (1998: 60) suggest that figured worlds 'provide the loci in which people fashion senses of self – that is, develop identities.' They make a distinction between two specific elements of identities, those being positional identity and figurative identity. Drawing on the work of Bakhtin and Vygotsky, they demonstrate how the two elements interrelate in a number of ways in order to 'understand people's actions and possibilities.' (Holland et al, 1998: 8).

Positional or relational identity is concerned with how an individual identifies his or her position relative to socially identified others, that is understanding his or her position 'in systems of power, hierarchy, or affiliation' (Bartlett, 2005: 3) in the day-to-day, lived world. Positional identities develop through social interaction, through

practice and over time as people develop 'a sense of their relative social position' (Holland et al, 1998: 132). As positional identity is the result of social position, this results in individuals displaying dispositions according to their status, for example knowing when to voice an opinion or to remain silent. Therefore, positionality is mediated by the amount an individual feels either comfortable or constrained by a situation. Positional identity is linked to what Gee (2000/2001) referred to as being recognised as a certain kind of person in a particular situation.

From my own experience as a mature student in the world of academic research, I admit that I have at times felt both uncomfortable and constrained. As a student, I positioned myself as being inferior to my supervisors. This often resulted in deferential, non-questioning supervisions and a fear of writing due to a feeling of inadequacy. However, the relationship with my supervisors was complex, as my supervisors were also my work colleagues. My positioning with them in the student/supervisor relationship was in sharp contrast to my experiences in my day-to-day role in higher education. My role required a pragmatic rather than philosophical approach, and I felt confident in the practical day-to-day activity of my job. In my job I felt comfortable when communicating with, and advising senior academic and management staff from across the University and indeed the world. In my position as a senior manager in the Faculty of Education, I could speak and write, confidently and competently. Therefore, there were tensions between my two positionings in the figured world of the Faculty - being recognised as a student and as a senior manager- as they resulted in disabling and enabling identities.

From this personal experience, I would argue that an inferior positioning can negatively affect an individual's voice and agency, which can in turn detrimentally affect their literacy practices. In the context of this study, understanding discourses as 'socially valued ways of talking, thinking and acting' (Clarke, 2008: 25) will provide a valuable insight into the positional aspects relating to the boys' identities, in accordance with the predetermined roles in their figured worlds. This will allow me to better understand how such positioning both shapes each boy's literacy practices and impacts on their developing identities.

Unlike the positional aspects of identity which are socially constructed, the figurative or narrativised identity relates to culture and the values learnt in childhood. Such aspects include symbols, for example religious symbols, and socially shared meanings (Bartlett, 2009). Holland et al (1998: 128) state that 'figurative identities are about signs that evoke story lines or plots among generic characters.' Therefore, figured aspects of identity involve characters and storylines that are culture-specific and encourage expected behaviours, for example, the once traditional role of the housewife in western society or the routines and rituals associated with a particular faith. In relation to this study of boys and writing, I suggest that there is an engrained cultural acceptance that boys take part in active pursuits, rather than those considered more passive such as reading and writing. Those passive activities are generally perceived as being feminine pursuits, as reported by Millard (1997), who found that boys reported female members of their families as being the key people involved in both reading and writing activities. Figurative identities, therefore, have to do with aspects of an individual's 'world that make it a cultural world' (Holland et al, 1998; 127). Barron (2014: 255) suggests that:

> *Figurative identities are created from experiences, activities and utterances provided to us by others and from our responses to them and from the responses of others to the ways in which we appropriate, participate in and transform experiences, activities and utterances.*

It is the transformational aspect of a figurative identity that gives rise to the sense of agency, that is, an individual having a sense of control that can go on to influence his or her positional identity. This sense of agency is developed by 'living in, through and around the cultural forms practised in social life…that allows us to conceive of identities as always forming' (Holland et al, 1998: 8).

In combining positional and figurative aspects of identity, Holland et al (1998) are recognising the fact that 'identity is not entirely determined by social forces but can be refigured by individual actors' (Dagnenais et al 2006: 208). However, this refiguring or mediation involves a process of self-authoring and the use of cultural

artefacts and changing behaviours. Holland et al (1998) draw on the work of both Bakhtin, and his vision of self-fashioning, and Vygotsky to develop this notion.

2.3.2   The Authoring of the Self

A key component of Holland et al's (1998) identity theory is the idea of the authoring self, and the way in which individuals can 'create novel self-understandings and envision themselves in new social worlds' (Skinner, Valsiner and Holland, 2001: para 1). Although Bakhtin's work was concerned with literary theory, he was interested in the living language, speech as spoken by individuals in specific situations (Lachicotte, 2002; Skinner, Valsiner and Holland, 2001). He recognised that within a national language, for example English, there were a variety of living languages, which were attached to particular social groups, for example the jargon of doctors, or the language of the teenager and that these social groups were not equal in power, prestige or authority. The voice of one group may carry more authority than that of another and as such certain groups may be suppressed (Bakhtin, 1934/1990). However, in any society, there are groups or voices that threaten to weaken the authoritative ones, therefore language is a cultural artefact with the power to disrupt social norms and dominant discourses. He referred to this diversity of voice as heteroglossia.

Bakhtin was particularly interested in the dialogic nature of speech utterances in that he paid particular attention to the variety of ways in which the self-as -author incorporates the words and voices of others. Commenting on Bakhtin, Holquist (1990:23) points out that 'there is an intimate connection between the project of language and the project of self-hood' as meaning is created when two or more different voices come into contact, what Bakhtin referred to as dialogism. In his theory of dialogism, he recognised an author will use words that he or she has encountered in the past, from a collective experience as part of a social group, and that 'each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life' (Bakhtin, 1981: 293). The individual author makes the language his or her own only when he or she populates it with his or her own intentions. The

author makes careful choices relating to the words used and their audience, anticipating any interjections and responses. Holland et al (1998: 169) suggest that in the figured world of dialogism 'people exist in a state of being addressed and in the process of answering.' Therefore, in figured worlds, individual's self-identity or identities, 'form …dialogically through continued participation with those actors populating those worlds' (Skinner, Valsiner and Holland, 2001: para 11). Eventually actors' voices become a part of what both Bakhtin and Vygotsky refer to as inner speech (Holland et al, 1998).

In considering the figurative aspects of identity formation, the dialogism that takes place in the figured world has the ability to disrupt positional aspects of identity. According to Vygotsky, 'typically a child will reproduce the comments of adults in his own egocentric speech' (Holland et al, 1998: 142) and this will result in the child experiencing a particular version of him or herself as an object in the social world. This objectification results in an assigned position for the individual. As the individual focuses on the objectifications of themselves they find unacceptable they can turn to their figured worlds to imagine, rehearse and recreate versions of themselves and therefore develop a sense of agency.

In the context of this study, this has implications for the participants and their perceptions of themselves as writers. In the figured worlds of home and school, adult opinions of each participant's ability and behaviour are likely to be re-told to them and therefore reinforced. In listening to the participants' narratives, the adult figurings of the boys in relation to their writing will be evident in that I will hear the comments of adults in the boys' voices. My interest lies in understanding if, how and in what ways the boys refigure and 'rework ways of being' (Compton-Lilly, 2008: 23).

2.3.3   Negotiating Identity – Cultural Artefacts and Mediation

Holland et al (1998) look to the work of Vygotsky to inform their theory of figured worlds. Vygotsky had examined children's ability to move from the world of reality

into that of play, to take an everyday object and to transform it into something else, for example a stick may become a gun or a horse. A pen may become a magic wand, or in the case of my son, an office cupboard became a 'curry shop' when the door was opened. In these imagined 'play' worlds children are able to use such objects to gain some control over their environment; my son was the gatekeeper for entry to his 'curry shop'. Vygotsky referred to these objects as 'mediating devices' (Clarke, 2008). As children grow, they may no longer play with sticks or cupboard doors, but they can still partake of an imagined 'figured' world which overlays the real world. In this world there are rules, just as in play, rules that have been learnt as a set of values. The figurative aspect of identity therefore allows for imaginative framing. Through imaginative framing, an imagined world can be created to allow an individual to improve, change or rehearse ways of being. In this world, the older child struggling with handwriting may want to be seen carrying a pen. The pen is a symbolic cultural artefact in the figured world of the primary school and the literacy classroom because it signifies the child's ability to write, as the move from pencil to pen tends to be sanctioned by the teacher only when a child is considered to be competent. Therefore, in such a scenario the teacher also plays an important role in the way the child is shaping their world and their developing identity as a writer. The Vygotskian concept of mediation emphasises the role played by such human intermediaries, who are 'placed between the learner and the material to be learned' (Kozulin et al, 2003:2). Therefore, the ways in which parents, teachers and other significant individuals in the lives of the participants mediate their writing practices will be considered as a part of this study.

According to Holland et al (1998) individuals use cultural artefacts from their figured identities to mediate their positional identity in their social world. Gee, in his work on identity, has also recognised the importance of artefacts, that is 'using objects, symbols, tools and technologies to recognise yourself and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways' (Gee, 1999:7).

<u>Developing a sense of agency</u>

It is the process of imaginative framing that gives rise to a sense of mediation and agency (Bodrova and Leong, 2003, Holland et al, 2008). In figured worlds, rules and values can be challenged. Attitudes, or changes in attitude, a breakdown in relationships, and a desire to take control can result in 'deviant' behaviours. Deviant behaviours are considered to be behaviours that are unacceptable to a social group and therefore, involve breaking accepted rules, or norms, and result in sanctions (Adler and Adler, 2003). The writing classroom can have many rules, for example the requirement to use a correct handwriting style or specific writing tool. Rules can also relate to the generic structure, the amount of time allowed to complete a piece of work, or to the more general collaborative sharing of resources or ideas. It is often said that, 'Rules are there to be broken'. Monin and O'Connor (2011) use the term defiance to refer to deliberately breaking a rule, or 'flaunting the norm, when one had the means and ability to conform' (Monin and O'Connor, 2011 : 265). They classify defiance as a special case of deviance. As I reported in Chapter 1, my own son was considered to be defiant on two occasions when he was in primary school. He carried out two intentional acts; one based on a principled disagreement in a literacy classroom (he wanted to be recognised as Welsh, and so would use a Welsh spelling of a place name, using his language as a cultural artefact). The second was out of spite as he wanted to upset his teacher who, in his eyes, represented a powerful minority. He did this by experimenting with his handwriting style and deliberately not spacing his work, despite understanding that there would be consequences in the form of detention. Therefore, acts of defiance are significant in the development of a child's identity as a writer and as a member of their social group. Acts of defiance are behaviours which Holland et al (1998) refer to as identity in practice.

Vygotsky also recognises changes in behaviour as crises. Vygotsky suggested that child development is marked by periods of stability transitioning into crises when a child 'passes from one method of experiencing the environment to another' (Mahn, 2003: 123). During these times of transition, or critical periods a child can become 'relatively difficult due to the fact that…the pedagogical system applied to the child does not keep up with the rapid changes in his personality' (Vygotsky, 1998: 193).

The participants in my study are entering a period of transition as they anticipate their move from one phase of education to another (primary to secondary). At age 10, they are also about to enter adolescence. Therefore, as boys have been considered to be less engaged and often troublesome in the classroom, understanding the reasoning behind their acts of defiance and the relationship between periods of stability and those critical periods of development may help to better understand the relationship between power, identity and writing and how pre-adolescent boys negotiate their positions within their worlds of school and home.

2.4   Chapter Summary

This study draws on both New Literacy Studies and the concept of figured worlds in its aim to understand the complex relationship between pre-adolescent boys' writing practices and their evolving identities. Adopting a New Literacy Studies perspective provides an opportunity to consider writing practices as being 'embedded in…the relationships and politics of everyday social life' (Freebody, 2001:108). The importance of social relationships to the writing process is highlighted by Lancaster (2014: 29) who states that the 'learning of inscriptional systems is associated not just with individual minds but with social and cultural cognition.' In her work with children of pre-school age and their families she found that 'inscriptional activity involves networks of relationships' (Lancaster, 2014: 32). Therefore, a New Literacy Studies perspective will allow me to examine the networks of relationships that influence the writing practices of the 10 year old boys in my study. Combining this socio-cultural perspective of New Literacy Studies with that of figured worlds will also enable me to consider how the 'outcomes of literacy practices …can have consequences for identity and empowerment' (Holland and Skinner, 2008: 850).

A number of studies have examined literacy practices through the concept of figured worlds although, unlike my study which concentrates on pre-adolescent boys, these studies tend to have focused on adolescents and adults, and

multilingual children. Luttrell and Parker (2001) undertook a study of high school students in North Carolina, USA in order to consider how the students' uses of reading and writing were linked to their interests and identities. They found that 'as the students fashioned themselves through their daily literacy practices, they were able to 'negotiate their place within the hierarchy of figured worlds' (Luttrell and Parker, 2001: 239). Holland and Skinner (2008) carried out an ethnographic study of women in Nepal and argued that literacy practices should be analysed for their 'centrality to the formation of new identities' (Holland and Skinner, 2008: 849). Other studies with bi-lingual and multi-lingual children (Ali et al: 2007; Dagenais et al, 2006) examined the notion of success in literacy and how multi-literate children are constructed as literate in the figured world of school. Dagenais et al (2008: 205) highlighted the fact that 'representations of writing practices invoked in relation to certain people frame their [the students'] social position and the construction of their identities as writers.'

As I look to the previous studies that have drawn on figured worlds to explore literacy practices I realise that linking both figured worlds and New Literacy studies will be particularly 'useful in looking at how individuals engage with literacy, and the processes of embodiment and changing personhood' (Maddox, 2007: 259). As Norton and Toohey, (2002:115) point out:

> *'Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice in which the value and meaning ascribed to an utterance are determined in part by the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks.'*

This chapter has provided both a review of academic literature and an outline of the theoretical frameworks that underpin my study which aims to consider the following research questions:

1) What writing practices are 10 year-old boys engaging in, both in and outside of school?

2) What are the boys' perceptions about what it means to be a writer?

3) How are boys participating in the production of themselves as writers?

4) How do adults mediate writing practices and how does this mediation impact on boys developing identities as writers?

5) To what extent do digital literacies encourage new writing identities?

The following chapter will consider how this study sets out to answer these questions. It offers the methodology and its justification in addition to considering the challenges I faced as a beginner researcher.

3 Methodology

The previous chapter provided a review of literature related to literacy and identity theory and the theoretical frameworks that underpin my study. In this chapter I turn my attention to refining the methodologies used in this research and outlining the methods of data collection, presentation and analysis. I discuss my journey, from designing the research through to undertaking research in the field and the presentation and analysis of data. This journey was not straightforward and during its course I had to overcome my own anxieties and adapt to deal with unanticipated difficulties and unforeseen events. Therefore, this journey has revealed much about me as a person in terms of my values and prejudices, as well as my place as a beginner researcher.

I adopted a qualitative approach to my research for a number of reasons. Firstly, such an approach 'consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 3). Secondly, Flick (2009: 12) suggests that, 'qualitative research is of specific relevance to the study of social situations.' Finally, such an approach allowed me to deploy 'a wide range of interconnected interpretive methods' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 21) in order to study the participants in their natural and social settings of home and school. I designed my research to take the form of a comparative case study that would draw on two 'distinct qualitative approaches to inquiry' (Creswell, 2013: 44) ethnography and narrative inquiry. Initially I was concerned about combining ethnography and narrative inquiry as Clandinin et al (2013: 43) suggest that 'whilst narrative inquiry shares features in common with other forms of qualitative inquiry, such as the emphasis on the social in ethnography… it is a unique research methodology.' However, I was reassured by Leggo (2004) who argues that narrative inquiry requires a range of diverse approaches, including ethnography, in order to compose a story in order to represent experiences. As my research questions focussed on understanding boys' experiences of writing, their perceptions about what it means to be a writer, how they participate in the production of themselves as writers and how adults mediate their writing practices, it was essential that the approach, or

approaches to inquiry, could capture their experiences. Hale et al (2008: 1425) also advocate bridging narrative and ethnography as it 'provides educators with an avenue for the education of self and others, the world they live in [and] how that world affects educational experiences.' I begin by reviewing ethnography and narrative inquiry as methodologies and my reasoning for adopting a mixed approach before moving onto the story of the research journey and its associated challenges.

3.1   Ethnography

In order to explore the research questions which relate to the complex relationship between the participants' writing practices and their developing identities as writers in the domains of school and home, it was important for me to be involved in their 'social world[s] to find out how [the] participants see that world and…to describe how its culture ticks' (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005:16). Goldbart and Hustler (2005) consider such involvement to be the purpose of ethnography. Traditionally ethnography has been based on direct observation and long-term immersion into a culture (Green and Bloome, 1997; Gobo, 2011; Tracy, 2013) which results in thick description (Geertz, 1973). This definition presents three issues in relation to my study. Firstly, the notion of what constitutes long-term immersion. Wolcott (1995) suggests that two years is an ideal amount of time whereas earlier anthropologists, who researched rural cultures, had a minimum ideal of twelve months in order to study the annual cycle of the growing season (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004). In terms of educational research it could be argued that an academic year would equate to an annual growing cycle. As a part-time PhD student and full-time university lecturer, the six months I had planned for data collection fell someway short but it was all that my schedule would allow. It did cause me to question whether this would be sufficient time in the field, especially as Grenfell (2012:176) suggests that it is unlikely that a researcher will achieve an understanding of any culture 'through a brief encounter of just a few weeks, or simply by periodic sampling.' Secondly, whilst I intended to enter the world of the boys in my study in order to carry out observations into literacy practices, observation was not going to be my primary

source of data. According to Gobo (2011) it is the active role assigned to observation that distinguishes ethnography from other methodologies. However, I was reassured by Goldbart and Hustler (2005: 16) who suggest that ethnography is a term linked to a 'wide range of studies, not all of which make extensive or even any use of participant observation.' Thirdly, there was no connection between the participant group other than age and gender. They did not form part of the same school class or social club and, therefore, did not interact together. As a result they could not be considered a culture-sharing group as described by Harris (1968) in that they would not share learned behaviours, values, beliefs and language. Therefore, I began to wonder about the extent that the participants shared a cultural context, as Creswell (2013) suggested they should.

Consequently, I began to question whether or not an ethnographic study was possible. Instead I felt that I needed to frame my approach slightly differently and use an ethnographic methods and techniques approach (Green and Bloome, 1997; Ashcraft, 2007) that would still use ethnographic tools, such as observations, but would also include conversations, semi-structured interviews, artefacts and visual sources. Although this approach was much more in keeping with my original intentions, I was still a little concerned about using an ethnographic methods approach to undertake research with individual children rather than a group. However, Heath and Street (2008) suggest that ethnographic research methods can relate to individuals, as well as groups or institutions, and Hale et al (2008) who recognise that individual ethnographic case studies are possible when time is limited. The focus of my research was not 'to advance or test theories of learning' (Heath and Street, 2008: 122); instead I was concerned with examining the relationship between writing practices and boys' developing identities. Because of my focus, Heath and Street (2008) suggest that ethnographic methods are an appropriate approach.

I had planned to undertake my research into the participants' writing practices in their homes and classrooms, in order to answer my research questions. According to Bloome (2012: 11), a good classroom ethnographic study 'not only seeks to understand what is happening in the classroom but also how the interactions of the

people in the classroom both reflect and refract the multiple social and historical contexts in which they are embedded.' Such an understanding would be essential to gain an insight into how home and school writing practices are connected. Shortly after I had begun work with my two initial case studies, I began to question the use of ethnographic methods in isolation, as the children were offering rich stories and vignettes of experience that I was able to relate to, and which supported Dewey's notion that life itself is education (Dewey, 1938). It was at this time that I considered narrative inquiry.

3.2   The Shift to Narrative

It was during the initial stages of data gathering that I began to question both the relevance of my initial research methods and ultimately my research aims. I had expected to gather significant evidence and examples of writing using different media from the child participants that would allow for a structured analysis. In reality this was not the case. The boys produced fewer examples of writing than I had anticipated, both at school and at home, and technology was not being used to any great extent at all. However, as I built strengthening relationships with each of the children and the adult participants, they began to share their stories and their experiences of writing, and of their friendships, their worries, their passions and ambitions. Their stories were often prompted by an artefact, such as a school book or an activity, for example using a games console. It was as if our relationship had developed to an extent that they were all suddenly empowered to provide stories and share experiences, often in the form of a narrative autobiography or the recounting of an event, and this realisation was an important turning point for me. This was because research relationships that are close to friendship, in order to allow a sharing of experience, live at the heart of narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 1988; Huber et al, 2012). Although I had begun an ethnographic inquiry, I needed to rethink my methodological approach.

According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006), narrative inquiry shares features in common with other forms of qualitative inquiry, such as ethnography. What makes

it distinctive is the simultaneous exploration of temporality, sociality and place. I was aware there were theoretical divisions or interpretations of narrative inquiry and therefore approaches to narrative analysis, however, all involve the use of story. I needed to consider the different interpretations in order to adopt the most appropriate perspective for my project. Labov and Waletzky (1967) presented the idea that 'people's oral narratives of everyday experience are worthy of study' (Chase, 2005: 653). They considered oral narratives to be a specific form of discourse that could be considered in terms of structure, as a series of events. Labov (1972: 360) went on to provide a definition of a minimal personal narrative as, 'a sequence of two clauses that are temporally ordered' and that fundamental to narrative analysis, was the ability to relate the sequence of clauses to the sequence of events. Such analysis presented a formal approach to examining linguistic features of a narrative rather than trying to interpret the meaning or content (Bold, 2012). Whilst Labov and Waletzky (1967) offer an ordered way to analyse oral narratives, Patterson (2013: 38) notes that a Labovian approach 'takes little account of context.' I believed that understanding the context would be crucial in order to make sense of both my participants' and my own personal narratives (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Bold, 2012) and this caused me to question whether or not a Labovian interpretation of narrative would be appropriate in the context of my study. After much consideration I decided that it would be impossible for me to separate structure and context if I was to recognise, interpret and analyse the participants' stories effectively.

At this stage I felt the need to clarify the terminology associated with this methodology as I was encountering conflicting definitions in the literature relating to the inter-changeable use of story and narrative. Fulford (1999) suggests that a story has to be charged with meaning otherwise it is simply a sequence of events. Narrative, however, refers to the retelling of the story and how the storyteller selects some events and omits others (Cobley, 2001; Leggo, 2004) and crafts a meaning. Narrative relates to the stories we tell to ourselves and retell to others (Abbott, 2002). In keeping with my understanding of story and narrative, I wanted to understand my participants' stories of experience as narratives. Therefore, I felt

it was necessary to consider how narrative analysis had evolved in recent years to enable this.

The move away from viewing narrative as a description of events, to understanding narratives of experience as socially situated, interactive, interpretive texts has been referred to as 'a second wave of narrative analysis' (Georgakopoulou, 2006b; 123). According to Barthes (1977:79) 'narrative is present in every age in every place in every society,' therefore viewing narrative from this perspective seemed to be much more appropriate for a number of reasons. Firstly, I was very aware that both the child and adult participants' narratives were shaped by both the setting and the audience. Therefore, when I was gathering data it was essential to carefully detail the setting and who was present. I became very aware that as a listener I was also the audience for the narratives and as such, I too impacted on what was being said or indeed written confirming that 'a narrative is a joint production of narrator and listener, whether the narrative arises in naturally occurring talk, an interview or a fieldwork setting' (Chase, 2005: 657). Keeping Chase's interpretation of a narrative in mind, as this seemed to support my own understanding, I searched for a definition of narrative inquiry that would underpin the aims of my study. It was Connelly and Clandinin (2006: 477) who provided the definition that was most appropriate:

> *Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or a series of places and in social interaction with milieus.*

The importance of understanding experience is at the heart of the definition and according to Dewey (2011 [1916]) there is a link between shared experiences and understanding. In order to learn or gain meaning from experience, there needs to be a 'backward and forward connection' (Dewey, 2011 [1916]: 78). This notion could be likened to story structure in that it is temporal although not linear. It is as we move backwards and forwards that we understand how the past can influence the present and inform our decisions for the future. It is in this way that narratives

of experience have the potential to be tools of learning and significant to an individual's identity formation.

Clandinin et al (2013: 44) talk about the three dimensions of a narrative inquiry space being 'temporality, sociality and place'. The first, temporality, relates to time and like Dewey, they recognise that people have a past, a present and a future and that they are linked and impact on our daily lives. The second dimension is sociality and the relationship between the participants and the researcher. Thirdly, they recognise the place or space in which the inquiry takes place. Due to the relational nature of their approach to narrative inquiry they stress the importance of understanding that people, places and events 'as always in transition' Clandinin et al (2013: 44). I knew that this was something I would need to keep in mind.

I was also aware that there were some concerns around the use of a narrative inquiry approach to research that were specifically linked to the validity of the inquiry itself. Hargreaves (1996) suggested that placing the participant's voice at the centre of the inquiry risked it becoming uncritical. However, I wanted my participants' voices to be heard and to emphasise the role of the social forces that shaped their stories and their lives (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010). What was most important was that I remained true to their stories. Therefore, I did not feel this presented an issue. A second tension was the concern over the control the researcher has when re-presenting the participants' accounts (Willinsky, 1989; Bell, 2002). In this case, control is related to ownership and interpretation. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Elbaz-Luwisch (2010) argue that once the phase of interacting with the participants in the field is over, the phase of interpretation and writing begins and this is primarily the job of the researcher. Gudmundsdottir (2001) further develops this argument by suggesting that it is incumbent upon the researcher to exercise their interpretive authority. However, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommend that the participants participate in the re-presenting process. This can be a virtual collaboration in which the researcher is mindful of the participant's presence and potential thoughts as the represented narratives are constructed. They insist that what is written should be an acceptable portrayal. This is the stance I would take when I constructed my narrative accounts.

As I progressed with my study I found that the inquiry process became what Clandinin et al (2006: 19) describe as 'messy and emergent...and uncertain.' I could not be absolutely sure of the direction or impact of the research, as until the selected participants chose to share a narrative, I had no idea of the content (Bold, 2012). This was a little unnerving for me as in my world I like a structure and order. However, the process had been messy from the start, beginning with identifying participants. I now turn my attention to that sampling process.

3.3   Making Connections and Identifying Participants

'I can find you some boys…how many do you want?'

(Local Headteacher, 2009)

The aim of this section is to provide an 'insight into the backstories of negotiating access and seeking out participants' (Tracy, 2013:66). There has been much written about the complexity of sampling and the challenges facing researchers in identifying participants. Patton (1990, 2002) could be regarded as an authority in this area as he identified sixteen sampling options or strategies that are frequently used in qualitative research. Before identifying my participants I wanted to ensure that I was familiar with these sampling options, as I was keen to make sure that I selected boys with the potential to be 'information-rich cases [that would enable me] to learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry' (Patton, 1990: 169). I had, of course, set a basic criteria for identifying participants in my study in that they had to be male, they had to be in Year 5 in order to fit with the parameters of the study, and they had to agree to my entering their home settings. As I was a regular visitor to primary schools located in a variety of social settings, I rather naively thought that I would be able to select my three cases from a large sample of eager participants. I also thought that the diversity of the settings would present opportunities to allow for maximum variation in terms of social background, perceived writing ability and access to technology. I was hoping to engage in what Patton described as purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990; 2002), as I identified a sample of cases that I hoped would provide rich data relating

to my research questions. In reality, case selection proved to be both limited (despite the generous offer from the headteacher quoted above) and challenging.

The hunt for participants begins…

As I have previously stated, as a part of my job, I visit a range of schools supervising students on teaching practice. I also had connections from my previous employment as a teacher. However, I wanted to avoid using those connections in case I was drawn to families with whom I had previously built relationships in that former role. Instead I felt I needed a little more distance and so thought it would be useful to mention my proposed research to teaching staff during my supervision visits, if an opportunity arose. As the proposed study required access to the boys' homes and schools, I was aware that schools may be reluctant to be involved in the study as they would have to consider both willing children and parents, and the impact of having a researcher in the participant's class. However, staff from five of eight schools visited did respond positively with three of the schools each offering a child who 'would benefit from the additional support.' Another offered a child whom they thought 'I would find interesting' with the final school telling me that if I made my own contact with parents and identified a child, I would be welcome on site at any time. This was not to be the case as we will see later when the gatekeeper analogy is explored. I had prepared an information letter and consent form (Appendix A) for distribution to the parents of those boys and families that schools thought might be interested.

I decided to investigate all offers even though I was a little uncomfortable with the fact that schools were misinterpreting my request as being an offer of potential support or provision for struggling writers. I was, however, confident that I could clarify the purpose of the research before undertaking any research activity in the field. At this stage, I did think that a range of children from different backgrounds would provide rich data, therefore my initial follow-up was to a school situated on a large 'peripheral council estate' (Hanley, 2007: 27). The school's assistant head told me that there was a family who would be keen to take part. The Year 5 boy concerned was a struggling writer and he was the eldest of four children. The

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location of the school and the boy's home was one in which social inequality was evident. The council estate was bordered by an area of expensive private housing, much of which was in the form of gated communities, which served only to emphasise the difference in social-ness and to cut the estate off from mainstream society (Hanley, 2007). This isolation of the estate and the people who lived there could be said to have been worsened by the local press, as they regularly reported on issues related to drugs, gangs and criminal activity. As Hanley (2007:222) suggests, such estates:

> *don't just suffer from poverty and unemployment but from a sort of social disease, which has caused the people who live on them to be treated as though they are somehow less human…*

At this point I had to admit that I was influenced by what could be viewed as a 'stereotypic public cultural representation' or the 'text of poverty' represented in the local media and popular discourse (Jones, 2014: 60). This caused me to be a little fearful about visiting the boy in his home. Having previously received training in counselling and having spent a number of years as a Samaritan volunteer, priding myself on the ability to remain impartial, non-judgemental and supportive, I was saddened and ashamed by my reaction. According to Hanley (2007: 169) 'we gravitate to where we feel most comfortable, and, if we can, stay away from places that make us feel uncomfortable' and I made a conscious decision to reject the potential participant on those grounds. I justified that decision to reject by turning to Gibson and Brown (2009: 57) who argue that, 'one common pitfall in constructing samples is to assume that all social variables must be considered.' Flick (2004) suggests that such variables in the sample selection should only be included if they are of specific relevance to the research project. I re-evaluated the necessity of including boys from a wide range of social backgrounds and decided that it was not relevant to my small-scale study. Whilst I could return to my original basic criteria with confidence, the experience had made me realise at that early stage that the researcher's life story is intrinsic to the study (Trahar, 2009).

Relying on headteachers to recommend and provide a sample of boys had highlighted previously buried issues in terms of my personal attitude and expectations. The experience had also made me question both the process and the ethics of drawing on boys selected by schools as I could not be sure of either the motive for recommending a particular child, or the method the school had adopted to approach parents. However, I felt under pressure to begin my research and identify participants. I decided at that stage not to take up any further headteacher recommendations and to review my approach.

One evening, just a few months later, I was hosting a dinner for a visiting professor from overseas. He was in the UK visiting his students who were on an exchange programme that involved a block teaching practice. Because of this, the professor and I invited the hosting class teachers to the event. At that time I was unaware of how important this unrelated event was going to be in terms of my research. It was during conversation that one of the teachers told me about her eldest son, who liked to argue with her through the medium of the text message. We began to talk about boys, literacy and technology. By the end of the evening she had asked if she and her youngest son could take part in my study. I was delighted. This parent was volunteering because of her own interest in literacy development. In addition to being a class teacher, she was acting as deputy headteacher and agreed access to both her home and school. I was keen to develop the relationship with her and to meet her son, David, before gaining formal consent from them both. Engaging this participant could be viewed as an example of convenience sampling (Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011).

My second participant, Tim, could be considered to be the result of snowball sampling tactics (Patton, 2002; Noy, 2008) and it was this case that would go on to highlight key issues relating to access. Snowball sampling relates to the researcher accessing participants through contact information provided by others. On this occasion my parents had been talking to a neighbour and had, unbeknown to me, asked if the neighbour's son would like to take part in my research project. The result was that my parents appeared on my doorstep with contact details in hand. This of course put me in a difficult position as I did not want to offend the

neighbour by declining in case it affected the neighbour's relationship with my parents. Neither did I want to upset my parents who were obviously very pleased with themselves at being able to help their daughter. At this stage I questioned whether the use of snowball sampling was appropriate, despite Noy (2008) suggesting that this system of sampling could deliver a unique kind of knowledge. Perhaps my concerns stemmed from the informality of the process and the additional complication of my parent's indirect involvement. In any case I made contact with the neighbour and agreed to an initial meeting with her and her son, Tim.

I turned to my personal network of friends and work colleagues to identify a third child, Steven. This child was clearly a sample of convenience (Marshall, 1996; Patton, 2002; Tracey, 2013). Although Patton (2002) would argue that this strategy of accessing a sample is the least desirable, the method at that time not only suited my purpose but also provided an extremely interesting case study in that English was not this child's first language.

Following the disappointment of losing Tim, the second potential participant for reasons relating to access which will be discussed later, I was debating whether or not to redesign the research and to focus on either one or both of the remaining boys when, one Saturday afternoon I bumped into an acquaintance from 15 years ago in the vegetable aisles of a local supermarket. Her eldest daughter is the same age as my son and many years ago we had shared countless afternoons at Tumble Tots, a gym club for babies and toddlers. I knew that she had gone on to have two more children but I learnt, during that meeting, that her youngest was a boy aged 10. After we had finished catching up, we separated. A few minutes later I found myself chasing after her, trolley in hand, to ask if she and her son would like to take part in my research. This was a clear example of opportunistic sampling whereby I added to my sample by taking advantage of unforeseen opportunities after my fieldwork had begun (Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011). We exchanged telephone numbers and two days later I had a call agreeing to meet to discuss the project with a view to her son, Mark, taking part.

3.4   Negotiating Access to Schools and Homes

When developing the research design, I thought that I may have problems negotiating access to the home but had not envisaged difficulties in accessing school classrooms. In order to access schools I needed to inform the headteachers about my research, as in the world of the school, the headteacher acts as the 'formal gatekeeper' (Reeves, 2010) who has the authority to grant access. As soon as I had received consent from the participants, I contacted the headteachers of their schools. All of the named schools had worked with the university where I work, and all had positive relationships. In fact I had visited all of the schools in question at some point in my role as a supervising tutor for trainee teachers. Therefore, as Reeves (2010: 192) recommends, I had 'learnt the social structures of the research site' and had built positive relationships with staff and headteachers during my visits. Therefore, gaining access should have been straightforward. However, this was far from the case.

Access to David's school was not a problem, mainly due to the fact that David's mother was also the acting deputy headteacher and as such acted as the gatekeeper to the school. We worked together to review the school's policies relating to ethical issues around observing and videoing in the classroom. This cooperative relationship went on to inform my own practice relating to ethical access. I hoped that the positive and collaborative attitude would carry into the classroom where the teacher acted as another gatekeeper. Ensuring the cooperation of the class teacher was going to be essential as she was in a position to restrict my access, activities and experiences (Reeves, 2010). Therefore, I met the teacher in advance of undertaking my fieldwork, and following discussions she signed a teacher consent form (Appendix B). There was no evidence that she felt resentful about participation, in fact as the literacy coordinator she was interested in the subject matter. But I was aware that I would be entering her classroom to observe a senior manager's son and to discuss writing practice. I would need to remain aware and sensitive to this, as the power relationship between the official and intermediate gatekeepers could affect cooperation (Wanat, 2008). I needed to

be sensitive to her position in both the research relationship and school. This was a complicated power relationship that is highlighted in Chapter 4.

Access to Steven's school was not a problem, mainly due to the fact that his mother had built up an exceptional working and personal relationship with the headteacher at her son's school. This personal contact made access to the school much easier to negotiate (Duke, 2002: Reeves; 2010), as mum set the research context prior to my making contact. As with David's school, I negotiated terms of entry in-line with the school's ethical requirements and safeguarding policy.

Things were less straightforward at Tim's school. The headteacher, who had previously agreed access, had been removed from post to take over a larger, struggling school. A new headteacher had been put in post but the structure within the school had changed and I was no longer dealing with familiar staff. The new headteacher was now the formal gatekeeper and I tried on numerous occasions to talk to her by telephone. Eventually I spoke to a senior teacher. I informed her of my research and of discussions with the previous headteacher and asked if I could visit the school for an informal face to face chat about my research proposal. The individual was hesitant but not dismissive at that stage. However, she did ask for the name of the child who had consented, along with his parents, to take part. I was taken aback at the response when I gave Tim's name:

> *Not that child and not that family! We will have to say no and I strongly recommend you find somebody else.*
>
> *(Conversation Notes, September 2012)*

This response placed me in a difficult situation as the parents and child were very enthusiastic about taking part in the research. The response from the school also suggested that the relationship between the school and family was strained and I did not want to make that situation worse. I was faced with two options. I could continue with the child in the home setting and notify the parent that I would not be going into school, but this may cause a backlash in school, or I could end the relationship with Tim and his family. After much deliberation I decided to withdraw

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but was very aware that the way of exiting the situation was as important as that of entry. I had spent some time with Tim and his family in his home setting and as result had been privy to information relating to him and his experiences. Therefore, I knew that I had to exit the situation with care and consideration as I wanted Tim to understand that our previous discussions would be treated confidentially and with respect (Allen, 2005).

I experienced similar issues attempting to gain access to Mark's school. However, at this stage in my research I had begun data collection with the other two boys and had come to the conclusion that it was the boys' experiences of writing, both in school and at home, that I was most interested in and that classroom observations were not a vital part of the research. As the relationship between Mark's family and school was also very different to that of Tim, there was not a problem when the school refused access. Interestingly it was the teacher in this instance who did not want research to be conducted in her classroom. The headteacher had been amenable to my accessing school but respected the wishes of her staff. No specific reason for refusing classroom access was given.

Negotiating the formal gatekeeper of the school settings had presented challenges and had caused me to reassess how I was going to undertake my fieldwork with my three remaining participants; David, Steven and Mark.

Accessing the home

The gatekeepers to the home were of course the parents. Therefore, in agreeing to be a part of my research study they had given permission to enter the home. However, the terms of the access had to be agreed in advance. I was very aware that I was in a privileged position and that access needed to be on the parents' terms, after all I was entering their homes as a guest and as such had to satisfy the social conventions of being a guest in their homes, a situation which according to Coad et al (2014), could present a number of ethical dilemmas. Mayall (2008: 116) refers to research in the home as a 'triangle of conventions and negotiations' involving the parent, child and researcher, where the researcher has to take

account of the views of the parent and child but where the child and parent may have already negotiated between themselves how the research event will be played out. I would have to remain mindful of this potential prior-negotiation but I hoped that I would minimise this risk as I built a friendly and trusting relationship with the participants. Therefore, my priority was to create a non-threatening climate (Christensen, 2004).

I had undertaken some informal research in the home with a 10 year old girl in 2010 (Wilson and Scanlon, 2011) and was aware of the difficulties I would face in being allowed time alone with the child. I had been able to use this experience as a pilot test in anticipation of my doctoral research in order to refine approaches to interview and observational data collection, as recommended by Yin (2009). During this pilot research I found that the girl's parents wanted to be present constantly in order to either direct the child's activity or to comment on the child's conversations. For example, the girl demonstrated sending a message to her friend via the Moshi Monsters' website. Moshi Monsters is a popular on-line gaming site aimed at children aged 6 to 12 that also offers access to social networking features. On the website's virtual pinboard she wrote '*Hi wuu2*', (Wilson and Scanlon, 2011: 153) demonstrating an understanding of text messaging language conventions. Nevertheless her parents showed concern that she was not 'writing properly' and immediately interrupted the demonstration and discussion to chastise her for not using conventional syntax and to assure me that she could write properly. I wanted to minimise this sort of interruption during my time with my study participants as I wanted open discussions relating to the child's lived literacy and particularly writing experiences rather than accounts based on perceptions of my needs and/or their parents' perceptions of what constitutes literacy. Whilst I recognised that this was going to be challenging, the previous experience had taught me that it was crucial that I built trusting relationships with the boys and their families so that I was accepted in the home setting. I did this by undertaking regular visits to their homes, gradually increasing the time I spent with them and not always with the intention of gathering data.

Logistically it proved quite difficult to visit the boys. Their evenings were taken up with sports and social activities, and family events. Also, my own work schedule involved a lot of travelling both in and out of country. This meant that I was not always available when the families felt it was convenient for me to visit them, and vice-versa. I was also keen to avoid weekends as this time together was valued as 'together time' by all of the participating families. Therefore, research in the home had to take place in the evening and as such had to be carefully planned well in advance. Day time visits took place during school holidays.

3.5   Ethical Responsibilities

Josselson (2007) argues that the researcher has an ethical duty to protect the privacy and dignity of participants in a study. Whilst I kept this in mind throughout the research process, from planning to writing up, I was also aware of the challenges that faced me as I strived to be an ethical researcher. In this section I would like to focus on three key areas, gaining informed consent, confidentiality and my role as an ethnographic and narrative researcher.

<u>Gaining informed consent</u>

In order to gain informed consent, I had followed the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) (2004) guidelines which state that:

> *'researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported'*
>
> *(BERA, 2004: 6)*

In line with the BERA guidelines I knew that it was necessary to gain consent from the adults and children involved in the study. Gaining approval from the adults was going to be crucial in accessing the children as not only were they going to take part

in the study but they were also going to act as intermediaries between myself the children. To this end, I produced a written overview of the aims of the study and I met with each adult to discuss the research process and their role within the study. Having written information that could be taken away and re-read by the participants was valuable as they could give serious consideration to their role before signing the consent form and making a commitment (Alderson and Morrow, 2004; Gallagher et al, 2010). All adults took the information away and I suggested returning the form to me within a 7 day period. It was whilst I was carrying out this out this process with David's mother and teacher that I began to question whether simply replicating the process would be appropriate for gaining informed consent from the child participants.

The child participants were all aged 10 and had sufficient 'intellectual capability' to understand and agree to their role within the study (BERA, 2004; Gallagher et al, 2010). Therefore, I felt that consent rather than assent, which could be conceived as simply indicating a willingness to take part, was more appropriate. However, as Gallagher et al (2009: 475) argue, focusing on intellectual capacity 'neglects the social nature of consent giving.' I was aware that the significant adults in the worlds of my child participants had already consented and that because of this the children may feel obliged to co-operate (Hill, 2005) or even worse, feel coerced into taking part. As a result I felt that I needed to adapt my approach when dealing with the children. I made the decision to personally present the children with the same written documentation as provided to the parents, because I felt it was important to gain explicit written consent from each child. Looking back I question whether or not a simplified, more child-friendly version may have been more appropriate. However, as the priority was to involve each participant in a 'transparent discussion' (Alderson and Morrow, 2004: 8) I did not see a need to adapt the documentation at the time, as the discussion would provide an opportunity for me to provide the information verbally, and for the children to question and negotiate aspects of the study and their role within it. To a certain extent this would, I hoped, enable the child participants to contribute to shaping the project. And so I initiated one-to-one meetings with the children allowing me to discuss the research project, my role, their role and how I hoped to gather data and keep it secure. I was particularly keen

to negotiate access to their homes with them, as I thought that this may afford them some control and go some way to alleviating my concerns around the children feeling pressured into taking part by the influential adults. Therefore, in addition to presenting the consent form, I put the following question to all participants:

I would like to come and visit you in your home. How do you feel about that?'

The responses were as follows:

David: (shrugs shoulders) I don't mind (pause) so long as you don't make me write anything (pause) and it's not on a football night.
Steven: (smiles) That is fine. My mum will arrange it. (pause) You can come for tea and I will show you our computer.
Mark: That's OK. What do you want me to show you when you come? (short pause) Oooh I know, you can come and see the writing in my tree house!
                                            (*Consent Meeting Notes, various 2012/13*)

The responses were all different, but at this consent stage each child was indeed shaping the research to some extent, whether it was setting clear boundaries as with David, or suggesting data sources (Steven and Mark). The transparent discussion approach, as discussed earlier, had been successful and showed that they were aware of the research focus and also had the confidence to negotiate boundaries. I considered the pauses that were evident in all of the responses to be an indication of a thinking process and the follow up dialogue representing an understanding of what may be required of them. Therefore, the responses validated my decision to seek informed consent over assent.

However, I did provide detailed information about my study on my initial consent visits to the children. Graham et al (2007) argue that children may not take in all of the information in one go. In addition, Gallagher et al (2010: 479) argue that:

Neither researchers nor their participants can hope for anything more than a partial, contextual and incomplete understanding of what they are doing.

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Discrepancies between researchers' and participants' understandings of a project may be hard to spot, and may also be unstable, changing over time as research unfolds'

Therefore, I felt it necessary to return to issues of consent as the study evolved. When working with the children, I would remind them about the aims of the study and about the fact that they could withdraw from taking part at any time. I also reviewed their input with them at each meeting, constantly asking for approval and authorisation to use their responses and stories. Heath et al (2007) describe this process as consent-as-ongoing-negotiation and for me it was an essential part of the child participants being seen as autonomous agents. On occasion I did question whether I was doing this for my benefit, to ensure good ethical research conduct, rather than for the benefit of the boys as they seemed indifferent to the precise details of the research project. They did, however, as time passed, become interested in each other's contributions and this highlighted issues of confidentiality.

Confidentiality

It was during a home visit that Mark asked, '*Do the other boys have mobile phones*?' Hesitantly I replied, '*No.*' My response was an honest one as no boy possessed a phone, although the other two boys did have access to phones. However, I felt uncomfortable about divulging this additional information, and so did not. I had not really anticipated the participant's curiosity and tried to overcome these issues by sharing my own stories and co-constructing stories obtained in the field with each of the individual participants (Huber, Murphy and Clandinin, 2012). I also tried to discourage talk about the other participants by not extending responses as demonstrated in the above. This short dialogue highlights issues relating to confidentiality and my own concerns about sharing participant information. After all, anonymity or confidentiality is a key ethical principle. I was aware that ensuring anonymity may present problems in the writing up of my project, as recording the participants' personal narratives may make them identifiable to family and friends, despite using pseudonyms to disguise individual's identities (Elliott, 2005). I made a

deliberate decision to allocate pseudonyms rather than to allow the boys to select their own, as Clandinin et al (2013) had done in their narrative inquiry into the experiences of early school leavers. I felt that the boys might elect names that would make them more recognisable, for example, their favourite sports star. Therefore, I chose commonly used boys names. In the case of Steven, this was a difficult decision as I wondered if I should have been more culturally sensitive and adopted a Japanese name, for example Yasunari after Yasunari Kawabata Japan's first winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. As I chose their names I was aware of how I was bringing my 'own interpretations and cultural orientations into the picture' (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005: 16).

I tried a more logical approach when assigning pseudonyms to the mothers of the boys. As I began my research I had not given much thought to how I would identify the familial participants and initially I had been content to refer to each of the boy's mothers as 'mum,' using the direct voice of each child participant. However, as my research progressed I realised that this generic term carried its own social and cultural connotations and failed to recognise the individual qualities of each mother. Therefore, I elected to assign pseudonyms and chose names that were the feminine form of the boys' pseudonyms in order to highlight the close connection, those being Davina, Marcia and Stephanie.

The role of the researcher

Both ethnography and narrative inquiry acknowledge the fact that the researcher is a part of the social world he or she is studying and as a result the researcher's own interpretations of a social and cultural world and their position as an author need to be taken into account (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005; Wolcott, 1995). Becoming a part of those social worlds presented me with two dilemmas as an ethical researcher. First was the tension between being in a close and developing friendship-like relationship with the participants whilst also being that academic professional who was going to present research findings. Bold (2012: 55) refers to this as a 'dual role' and the term sums up exactly how I felt throughout the research. I tried to overcome this by thinking about how I presented myself as a researcher, being

aware that there was likely to be an 'inherent power imbalance,' if the participants viewed me as an authority figure (Kellett, 2010, Coad et al, 2014). Therefore, adopting a relaxed and friendly manner was crucial (Kirk, 2007), if I was going to develop a close relationship akin to friendship. However, I also needed to ensure that the participants remained aware of my research intentions whilst still thinking of me as a friend, as somebody they could trust. I felt that this was crucial to the success of the study, because I did not want the participants to feel betrayed at the point when I re-presented their narratives. Therefore, it was essential that I thought about the extent to which the participants would be involved in the construction of their narrative accounts.

The second issue became more apparent as I began to write the thesis. I was aware that the narrative discourses made reference to other people, to characters who had not formally consented to being a part of the study. Equally whilst I had planned semi-structured interviews and conversations that were referenced in the consent documentation, during these events other school teachers, or family members drifted in and out of the research space and often made contributions. Therefore, the study evolved to include my noting down events, feelings, conversations and snippets of conversations between those individuals in my presence. As a beginner researcher I had not anticipated this as an ethical dilemma and questioned whether I should have taken time to negotiate the research space and manage potential interruptions as advocated by Coad et al (2014). However, in narrative inquiry, these opportunistic occurrences are welcomed and are often more important than the planned and structured meetings (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Clough, 2002; Trahar, 2009). This gave me more confidence and whilst I realised it would be impossible to gain written consent from those individuals, I attempted to overcome the dilemma by securing a verbal agreement to use the information from these chance encounters.

3.6 Gathering Data

As my study was a comparative case study, informed by ethnography and narrative inquiry, I felt justified in using multiple forms of data. These consisted of conversation notes (written as almost verbatim accounts in the field), full and partial transcripts of conversations, audio-visual data, scribbled notes, samples of writing produced by the boy participants, school reports and my own personal journal entries which allowed me to reflect on my experiences as a researcher. As Mead (1977) suggested, everything and anything that has been written down, noted, photographed and recorded becomes data. I had planned to collect the data over a five to six month period and during six focused research visits (excluding the initial visit to gain consent). This happened in the case of both Steven and Mark. Data relating to Steven were collected between January and June 2013 and data relating to Mark between July and November 2013. This was not the case with David. I had begun to work with David in September 2012 and hoped to complete data collection with him in February 2013. However, establishing convenient access times during the first three months was challenging. Therefore, David's data were collected over an extended period, although the majority of the formal research meetings took place between February and August 2013. I kept a record of my visits to each participant in an attempt to organise my research activity (Tracy, 2013). The visit diary relating to David can be seen overleaf:

Date	Location	Purpose	Time Spent
12/09/12	School	Initial meeting with D. Outline project and gain consent.	45mins
08/11/12	School	Meet class teacher. Gain consent from her. Provide video consent letter for parents. Carry out initial observation of D.	1hour 30 mins
18/01/13	Home	Informal catch up and coffee	1 hour
19/02/13	Home	Research meeting with D in the home setting. Understanding the context – social relationships, initial review of technology available and writing in the home.	2 hours and 30 minutes
26/03/13	Home	Informal catch up and coffee	1 hour
11/06/13	School	Catch up and arrange dates for filming in the classroom with class teacher and deputy headteacher.	30 mins
24/06/13	School	Filming – observations and research conversation with D.	2 hours
25/06/13	School	Filming – observations and research conversation with D. Interview with class teacher. Provide camera and voice recorder.	3 hours
21/08/13	Home	D's guide to using the Xbox. Parental interview. Collect camera and recorder.	3 hours
14/11/13	School	Final meeting – review and transition to Year 6.	1 hour

Key

	Pre-arranged data collection sessions
	Informal, pre-arranged relationship building meetings

Table 3.1

In addition to the focused, formal research visits, I did see the child participants on other occasions to maintain the relationships, as highlighted in Table 3.1. In some

cases I had additional chance meetings for example, bumping into Mark in a well-known department store. I recorded these more informal meetings in my personal journal. In this section I wish to focus on observational data before moving on to consider conversations and audio-visual materials.

<u>Observations – in the classroom and at home</u>

I had planned to undertake observations of the boys in both their classrooms and their homes. In terms of an ethnographic methodology I was aware that there were two key strategies to observing participants; non-participant observation and participant observation (Gobo, 2011). I had envisaged adopting a non-participatory approach in the form of unstructured observations (Jones and Somekh, 2005) when I was in the classroom setting, as I wanted to observe from a distance without interacting with the participant or his peers. However, I was aware it was going to be difficult to be unobtrusive, and that my presence may result in the participant, his classmates and I all assuming, what Angrosino and Perez (2000) referred to as 'situational identities that may not be socially or culturally normative' (cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005:643). Therefore, I had to consider how I entered the setting, the impact of me as an observer both on the participants I was observing, and on the rest of the group. I would also need to reflect on the impact of observing in relation to my own situational identity.

According to Heath and Street (2008: 31) there is a 'need to think consciously about ways to enter into the life of the individual, group or institution.' This view is also supported by Clandinin at al (2013). Therefore, I discussed my entering David's classroom with his teacher before my first observation and had requested that it be as discrete as possible. As a result she asked me to enter the class before the children and made no reference to me or my presence in the room at any time. Despite this, observing from a distance in the classroom was extremely challenging. From a former primary teacher perspective, the challenge was to not to adopt a teacher role and to remain detached from the day to day workings of the class. For example, during a second observation in School A, one child approached me and said, *'Please can I go to the toilet?'* (Fieldnotes 2013) and another informed me of a

child who was swearing. This led me to understand, at an early stage in my research, that I was taking on the role of an authority figure in the eyes of the children and therefore contributing to the power structures within the classroom setting, despite trying to remain unseen. I also found myself taking on this role of authority in responding to the request to go to the toilet by granting permission, and then have to quickly retract my response and refer the child to the class teacher.

I had made the same request of Steven's teacher in School C. However, School C had insisted that I was formally introduced to the class as a researcher, by the class teacher. In addition, the teacher had also asked the participant to introduce himself as the object of the research. I was uncomfortable with this as it not only singled out Steven but it made it impossible for me not to engage with the class. The initial introduction appeared to encourage requests for help from a number of children with their English class-work suggesting that they perceived me as a literacy expert. Although the two experiences were very different they each presented issues in relation to how I was perceived in the field and the power structures in the classroom.

Undertaking non-participatory observations in the home proved to be impossible. I had recognised that this would present a challenge and adopted a participatory approach to observations. Observational data collection resulted from collaborative activities such as conversations, sharing books or photographs or participant demonstrations and teaching. However, there were opportunities to undertake unstructured observations of interactions between family members and the subtle signs of non-verbal communications. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) suggest that narrative inquirers cannot subtract themselves from a relationship and it was in the home that this felt most evident and powerful.

When interviews become conversations

As I began my research, with a focus on ethnographic methods, I had anticipated interviews and conversations as being the prime means for gathering data. I had

thought that semi-structured interviews would be most appropriate for both child and adult participants. Holstein and Gubrium (2011: 149) suggest that the standard version of an interview 'keeps the interviewers involvement to a minimum' whilst the 'respondent provides pertinent information.' In my naivety I had fully expected this to happen. However, I had to rethink the process for both adults and children following my first semi-structured adult interview. During the interview with a teacher participant, I found that she responded with short two, three or four word utterances. For example:

Me:	*How do you go about planning for writing?*
Teacher:	*With difficulty.*
Me:	*With difficulty?*
Teacher:	*It's a difficult class….*

(Interview Transcript, 15/11/12)

She did not appear to provide pertinent information at all, in fact she went on to talk about her class and the politics within the school, appearing to go off on a tangent. Initially I found this really interesting but frustrating. However, when transcribing the interview I realised that it was those 'off on a tangent' moments that were most revealing, and so I asked to speak to her again, as I adopted a more narrative approach to interviewing. According to Chase, (1995: 3)

'…if we want to hear stories rather than reports then our task as interviewers is to invite others to tell their stories, to encourage them to take responsibility for the meaning of their talk…our questions should be phrased in everyday…language.'

To do this there is a dialogic interaction between the researcher and the participant, resulting in a joint construction which often tells a lot about the researcher as well as the participant (Shacklock and Thorp, 2005). I would argue that such joint construction requires both skills and confidence on the part of the researcher; the skill of being able to listen actively, to respond appropriately in order to empower the participant and to be ethically aware, results in the confidence to share

experiences and acknowledge the stance of the participant. I felt able to do this due to my experience as a counsellor, but initially I had been focused on my role of asking questions. I realised that I needed to build a relationship with the participants before I could comfortably change my approach to that of a narrative interview. This was because such interviews bore some resemblance to a collaborative conversation in which I shared the impact on me of the stories being told, albeit with a focused starting point (Trahar, 2009).

Conversation is a two way process, in which participants take turns in talking. During a conversation it may be necessary to create conversational space to allow a participant to tell a story. In this situation the turn taking is suspended as the storyteller takes over the talking. The listener takes an active role in the recounting of the story, as the speaker makes decisions about what to tell and how to tell it based on the listener's response (Brown, 1995; Coates, 1996; Sacks, 1992; Elliott, 2005). Therefore, it was important for me to create conversational space by offering open-ended interview prompts in order to invite the participants to construct a narrative or share an experience (Kramp, 2004). Chase (2005) suggests that it is this interactive process that results in the emergence of different stories, stories that are co-constructed. This process evolved naturally with the child participants following the initial meetings, which felt like a two way interview. In those initial meetings the children wanted facts about me. The boys were clearly trying to connect with me, for example during my first meeting with David:

> Me: So you go to football?
> David: Yes I play a lot of football. I like playing football (pause) I used to
> go to gymnastics but I don't anymore. Do **you** like gymnastics?
> Me: Yes (short pause) to watch, but I like watching football too.
> David: Who do you support?

> (*Interview Transcript, 12/10/12*)

As the research project progressed, the interrogations stopped and we were able to hold more natural conversations. I was able to use a range of initial prompts with all boys, for example, *'Tell me what you can remember about learning to write?'* Such open-ended prompts allowed the boys to take ownership of their responses and

subsequent narratives (Kramp, 2004). Giving the boys ownership was important, as it was their stories I wanted to hear. This is particularly relevant in the context of my study, as according to Reissman (2008), individuals and groups construct identities through storytelling and I wanted to understand the complex relationship between the boys' writing practices and their developing identities.

Visual and auditory materials

In addition to the general unstructured interviews and conversations, I also planned to use video to record writing lessons in the classrooms of the participants. I negotiated dates and times well in advance and as with the observations, I wanted the recording to be as unobtrusive as possible. Therefore, my first challenge was where to position both the camera and myself in order to capture the 'naturally occurring interactions' (Perakyla, 2005: 875) of the participants. This was more of a problem in Steven's school as some of the children in the class did perform to the camera on my first visit. However, in David's school, the first filming session was fine but David himself became irritated by the camera's presence towards the end of the second filming session, so I made it my last. In all cases I set the recorder to continuously record on either a tripod or a tall cupboard towards the back of the classroom. Jones and Somekh (2005) suggests that the researcher has more control over what is recorded if the camera is operated manually but as I wanted to reduce the impact of recording on the participants I felt that continuous recording was more appropriate. In doing this I was also able to make supporting notes, including my personal response to what I was observing, and these responses fed into my personal research journal. I was also able to note any key action and utterances. I did experience two problems with the camera during my first observation, despite testing the equipment at home. It was a battery operated digital camera and the batteries ran out during the recording. I ensured that I took spare batteries to each subsequent recording session, however, on each occasion I had to stop recording to change them. The second problem related to sound. The camera picked up voices well during the trial at home but in a busy classroom the sound quality was less good. It was a challenge to transcribe the all of the recordings. Fortunately I had my observational notes to support the transcription process which will be discussed in

more detail later. The notes proved to be essential in making sense of the video recordings, to such an extent that I realised the video recordings offered no more than my observations. This was most likely due to the problems I had experienced with setting up the recording equipment and the subsequent quality of the output. Therefore, I made a decision not to proceed with further with video recordings. Whilst my observations had been useful, it was the narrative interviews, described above, that proved to be the most interesting source of data.

In addition to attempting video recordings, I also made use of still images. Making connections between photographs and experiences can be a valuable tool in a narrative inquiry (Bach, 1998; Clandinin, 2006; Mwebi, 2005). Pahl and Rowsell (2012) suggest that a good way to research home literacies is to use disposable cameras to create opportunities for discussion. I set the boys a mission (Appendix C), to select up to twelve pieces of writing they produced at home during the course of a given week, and to take a photograph of each using a disposable camera. In addition I provided a digital voice recorder so that they could talk about the writing in each photograph and provide a backstory to each piece. I felt that this activity would provide the boys with a sense of ownership and control. However, it presented three issues. Firstly, the quality of the photographs was exceptionally poor. I immediately questioned why I had imposed disposable cameras and not asked the boys to choose a digital method of visually recording their writing. Secondly, I had not considered that the boys would be anxious about speaking into the digital voice recorder. Mark told me that had to spend two days getting used, *'…to talking into the thing,'* Steven, *'…had to practise working it and speaking into it'* whereas David *'…wasn't really bothered.'* I had opted to use a voice recorder as at the time of consent I had promised that I would not ask them to write anything specifically for me and I thought that they would find the activity enjoyable. The third issue related to control and ownership, as the majority of recordings suggested that parents had mediated the activity as their voices could be heard in the background, advising the child participants what to say.

In all three cases I was given the participants' school literacy books with examples of their work and teacher feedback. I had planned to examine samples of the boys' written school work. However, I was able to use these as a stimulus for discussion with the participants. Therefore, I made use of them as artefacts which 'opened up stories and gave opportunities for telling stories' (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012: 50). By asking the participants to select pieces of writing to talk about they were not only able to offer insights into the writing process but they talked about their compositions in relation to their lives and relationships both in and out of school.

In addition to school books, I was able to examine and discuss samples of digital writing. In some cases this involved me taking on the role of apprentice as the participants demonstrated their expertise in constructing digital texts, such as David using his Xbox or Mark generating iMessages. Unfortunately I did not obtain any screen shots, nor did I photograph the sources. This was due to my lack of expertise in using digital technology. Instead I wrote copious notes relating to both the instructions the boys gave and the products of their efforts. I realise that I have to acknowledge this as a weakness in relation to gathering evidence concerning digital text production. Yet, in handing control over to the boys, the conversations and actions were owned and directed by them. Both their stories relating to the texts they produced and to the written texts themselves proved to be vital sources of data in relation to answering my research question, 'To what extent do digital literacies encourage new writing identities?'

3.7   From Data Collection to Analysis

At the end of my time in the field I found that I had amassed a huge range of data. I then turned my attention to the process of analysing, interpreting and presenting the data. As with the whole research process, I found that this aspect evolved over time. I understood that I had begun the analysis process during my first day in the field as I made notes, and then later when I returned home and began to write up

my reflections and transcribe my recordings. In this section I will consider my approach to preparing the data for a more structured analysis. I will then go on to consider my analysis of spoken and written texts, an approach that focussed on interpreting narrative and aspects of critical discourse analysis.

<u>Spoken texts – beginning with the transcription process</u>

Tracy (2013) suggests that there is no such thing as a universal method for transcribing interviews and Gibson and Brown (2009) recognise that, whilst there are general approaches to transcribing, researchers may create their own modes of transcription and representation that works for them. I found that as my study progressed my own transcription methods changed. In the early stages of my data collection I would play back the conversations or watch video clips and transcribe every word, recognising features of talk, such as pauses, pace and intonation. However, the process was really time-consuming. This should not have been a surprise. As Gibbs (2007) suggests, it takes four to six times as long to transcribe data as it does to collect it. I found that as I was undertaking the transcription process, there were parts of the conversations that were of particular interest; particular experiences, single word utterances and interactions. I realised that in most cases I needed my fieldnotes, in which I had noted non-verbal communications, to make sense of the audio recordings. Words themselves were not enough. My method of transcribing and recording events began to evolve and in so doing highlighted the fact that transcription is an interpretive process (Reissman, 2008). My aim was re-present each participant's story. To do this I listened to and initially watched the recordings. I read my supporting fieldnotes. I then revisited and re-watched, re-listened and re-read. I was then in a position to 'preserve and investigate particular instances, sequences of action…[and] the way participants negotiate language' (Reissman, 2011: 311). Focusing on particular instances rather than the whole became the most efficient and informative way of dealing with the mass of conversational data. Nevertheless, I was also aware that the transcription process, including the transcription of selected elements of conversations and interviews, is a retelling and therefore a reinterpretation of a text (Reissman, 1993; Mishler, 1991, Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Speedy, 2005, Gibson

and Brown, 2009). Kress et al (2005) describe transcription as translation and things can get lost in translation. Therefore, I was glad that I had many hand written observational notes and my own research diary (extract Appendix D) that I could refer to as they provided an insight into a situation at a specific moment in time making me feel more secure in my approach to analysis. As I became more confident with a method of partial transcription, I also began to question the relevance of recording conversations in full. I was drawing heavily on my observational notes at this point and I realised that these notes were comprehensive and often were almost verbatim accounts of what was said. I had also noticed that the boy participants were becoming more aware of the recording equipment, looking at the voice recorder as they spoke. Therefore, I began to write the conversations as they took place. This allowed me to focus on the sociality of the conversation in relation to my relationship with the participants. In so doing, this added a different dimension as it allowed for a form of collaboration, as I checked with them that I had captured their stories as told by reading back my notes.

Written texts

Alongside the transcripts of interviews and conversations, video clips, verbatim fieldnotes and my research journal, I had examples of the participants' written work and photographs. I had also been present as the participants composed texts, both verbal and written, and had made choices in relation to how those texts carried meaning (Kress, 1997; Pahl, 2006). For example, Steven chose to import a picture of the Parthenon in Athens to support a holiday costing, *'…because they [the prospective holidaymakers] need to know where they are going'.*

David also used pictures in order to develop a draft character study. When set a task to explore characters with a view to creating his own cartoon story, David chose not to write about key characteristics but to draw a grid of familiar cartoon characters (*Fig 3.1*). He has clearly been influenced by popular media, for example Bart Simpson is recognisable by the use of the colour yellow. This piece will be commented on in David's story in a subsequent chapter but he had interpreted the

task in a particular way in order to avoid writing. In so doing he had presented a piece that drew on his textual experiences, prioritising the popular media influence through his choice of colour. This shows how it is possible to locate the cultural within the visual (Pahl, 2006) and the importance of multimodal text analysis (Kress, 2011) to this study. Multimodality refers to the resources beyond speech and the written word which societies and cultures have come to recognise as carrying meaning. Therefore, multimodal text analysis allows the researcher to see the relationship between what Pahl (2006: 21) calls 'cultural stuff and the writing on the page.' I hoped that multimodal analysis would allow me to gain a deeper insight into the boys' cultural and social worlds and therefore their developing identities, both as boys and as writers.

Fig 3.1

At this point I had begun to analyse and interpret my data using a range of approaches, however, I was still struggling to make sense of how I was going to analyse, order and re-present the information in the form of a narrative account for each boy participant. I was pleased to note that Maple and Edwards (2010) believe that it is important for the researcher to give herself permission to remain bewildered during the transitional period of data review and synthesis.

3.8   Re-presentation of the Data – Creating Narratives

I knew that I would be constructing three storied narratives based on the data that I had collected. The purpose of each narrative was to examine each participant's developing identity as a writer. To do this effectively I would have to investigate the narratives of experience constructed by the participants. However, I would need to go beyond simply telling stories and provide an analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that each story illustrates (Bell, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1995). Only then could I develop a narrative inquiry in its fullest sense (Bell, 2002). The challenge at this point was moving from my state of bewilderment.

Maple and Edwards (2010) suggest that the use of metaphor can 'provide a mechanism for organising and making meaning of the data as the use of metaphor 'provides a mechanism to relate compare and make meaning of new knowledge with lived experiences' (Maple and Edwards, 2010: 40). With this in mind I visualised a tree. In deciding on a tree metaphor I was able to adopt a coding method that was 'data driven to allow codes to emerge' (Burnette et al, 2014: 8). The trunk was the boy writer and from the trunk there grew a number of main branches which related to my research aim and questions, for example writing in school and technology and writing. I then took the themes emerging from the coding to create sub-branches, for example joined handwriting and keyboard skills, adding branches as I re-visited and analysed the data. I then reviewed the transcribed data in relation to each main branch and sub-branch themes.

Critical discourse and narrative analysis

According to Rogers (2011) there are a number of approaches to critical discourse analysis, each one being subtly different. For the purpose of this study I draw on primarily on Gee's (2005, 2011) approach which considers three aspects of discourse analysis; firstly, utterance type (words, phrases and syntactic structures); secondly, situated meanings, that is how words and phrases take on more 'specific or situated meanings in specific different contexts of use' (Gee, 2011: 25); thirdly,

social practices which considers the implications of social relationships on such things like power and status. Gee (2011: 30-33) considers language-in-use as a tool for building one or more of seven tasks which can also be used as a tool for critical discourse analysis. Those tasks are:

Significance

Activities (practices)

Identities

Relationships

Politics (distribution of social goods)

Connections

Sign systems and knowledge

According to Gee (2011:43) adopting such a task building approach moves the researcher beyond situated meaning 'to the world of identities and institutions in time and space …through varieties of language…and people's taken-for-granted theories of the world.' Therefore, as I reviewed the transcribed data and written pieces I considered how the participants used language in relation to the seven tasks and drew on specific examples that were pertinent in relation to each participant's developing identities as writers. An example of such a conversation, which details the time when Marcia learnt that Mark had access to social media, can be found at Appendix E and its analysis at Appendix F.

In order to produce each narrative account I was careful to focus on the 'unique aspects' (Reissman, 2011: 311) of each case. The participants were all providing biographical accounts of their experiences and in keeping with narrative inquiry it was important that I preserved particular instances whilst interrogating the participants' use of language and their use of narrative genres in conversations as they provided their stories of experience. As a narrative inquirer it was essential that I also interrogated the influence of the setting, the historical context and other dimensions that shaped those speech acts (Reissman, 2011). Therefore, my heuristic use of Gee's (2011) approach to critical discourse analysis complemented

the analysis of the participants' narratives and provided me with some sense of clarity and rigour.

Organisation and structure of the narrative accounts

The participants' narratives are presented in such a way that they include distinctive textual qualities associated with narrative genre, those being examples of predictable and unpredictable situations, obstacles, conflicts and resolutions (Chandler, 1997: 13). Each has a similar structure, for example I chose to begin each narrative in the same way, with my first meeting with the participants and gaining their consent. Each ends by looking forward. The narratives include both storied accounts and word images. In the storied accounts I lifted the participants' own words and phrases from the research texts as quotations in order to ensure that each theme was recognised as being delicately nuanced and personalised (Kramp, 2004). The word images were a development of this process. They were created by 'utterance type' analysis which resulted in my selecting specific words and short phrases that appeared repeatedly during research conversations. Although they represent a highly interpretive process, they were intended to provide a 'more vivid rendering' (Clandinin et al, 2006) of a particular experience This is an approach that has been explored and adopted by narrative researchers such as Clandinin et al (2006) and Huber et al (2013).

In fact the whole process was one of interpretation in which I was bound up with the experiences of the participants and constantly reminded of my own experiences and those of my family. I felt the enormity of the task in hand, aware of the fact that how stories are received and passed on are important. The three boys' stories can be found in the following three chapters, beginning with David – the story of the reluctant writer.

3.9   From the Individual to Comparative Analysis

Following the production of the individual narrative accounts, I then re-read each several times to identify the pertinent key themes that were common to all participants. This was a challenge as the temptation was to describe those common experiences and to regurgitate examples from each narrative account rather than to provide an analysis of the key issues in relation to my chosen theoretical frameworks as discussed in Chapter 2. At this point I returned to the identity theory of Holland et al (1998). One development of this theory is that of 'history in person' (Holland and Lave, 2009: 1) in which the researcher tries to make sense and understand the relationship between 'enduring [or institutionalised] struggles... local practice and intimate identities' (Holland and Lave, 2009:2). Holland and Lave (2009) developed a visual model to explain the relationship.

History in person

Local

'Contentious '

Practice

History in Institutionalized

Struggles
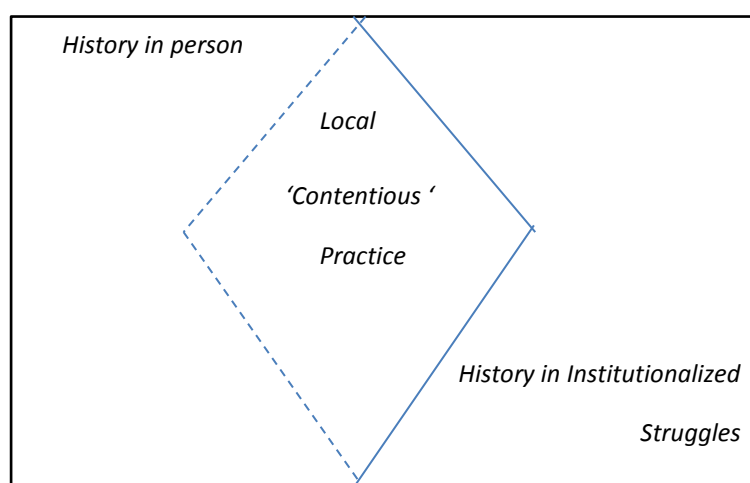
Fig 3.3

Such a model recognises the fact that local practice comes about in the encounters between people as they address and respond to each other and wider political and cultural demands. At the heart of the model is local everyday practice and what it means for the different people taking part in it. I understand the dotted and solid lines to represent the different ways that history is brought to the present. The lines therefore signify intersections that allow for a researcher to 'emphasise different facets of analytical practice' (Holland and Lave, 2009: 13), those being either the

processes of history in person or historically situated institutionalised struggles, whilst giving consideration to both. Therefore, such a model asks the researcher to question 'social process: how are persons participating in the production of their lives…?' (Holland and Lave, 2009: 2). In the context of my study, I felt I could adapt this approach to structure a comparative analysis as it would help me to focus on my group of research participants in order to understand the processes that shape the individuals' developing identities as writers and how they participate in the production of themselves as writers.

In my adapted model (Fig 3.4), the social nature of local writing practices is at the heart of the analysis. It also recognises that individuals are part of bigger historical, cultural 'institutionalised' struggle, that being the influence of wider policy in shaping local writing practices and society's understanding of what it means to be literate. Therefore, over time the self is 'shaped by people and forces and institutions external to himself' (Holland and Lave, 2009: 4). Adopting this adapted model would therefore allow me to better understand how Government policy and what Gee (2011) would describe as wider politics, shaped the participant's literacy practices which in turn would shape the individuals' evolving identities as writers.

Identity – self-forming in/ through- practices

Local Writing Practices

including

encounters with others

Policy/institutional/
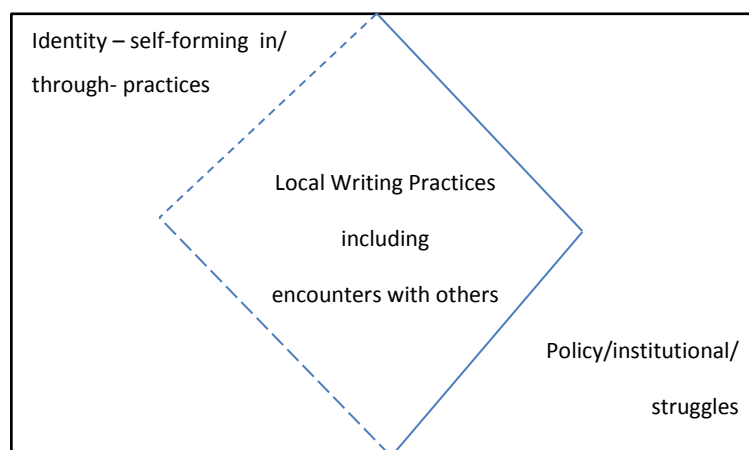
struggles

Fig 3.4 Adapted from Holland and Lave: 2009: 3

As I re-read each participant's narrative account I noted specific examples that related to each of the three parts of the model. I began by looking at the impact of wider policy and the struggles and tensions it created, before moving to writing

practices at home and in school, looking for moments of tension and conflict and relations of power. Finally I looked to examples of the self-forming-in-practice. I produced a hand-written, three column outline (Appendix G) which I used to guide the discussion in Chapter 7.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a journey that was both long and hard. I have tried to capture the challenges that I faced as a beginner researcher and the decision making processes that led me to adopt an approach that drew on both ethnography and narrative inquiry. At this stage I was satisfied that I had made the correct choice as 'narrative refuses the impulse to abstract and explain' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 744) instead it 'stresses the journey over the destination' (ibid.) However, this presented further challenges as I looked to analyse the narrative accounts for discussion. Although I had identified theoretical frameworks through which I could interrogate the data (outlined in Chapter 2), I had felt that I needed a structured model that would allow me to provide a rigorous analysis of the data whilst still remaining true to those theories. It was to Holland and Lave (2009) that I turned for that purpose. The following three chapters are made up of the narrative accounts which include a first level of analysis. Chapter 4 belongs to David, Chapter 5 to Mark and Chapter 6 to Steven.

4 David's Story: the reluctant writer

'I can write. I do know what to do. I just don't want to.'

4.1 In the Beginning…Meeting David

It was the 12th October 2012. This was a significant day for me as I was about to meet David for the first time. This meeting represented the first meeting with any of my child participants. I had arranged to meet him in school to talk about the project and to take him through the consent form. I remember that I dressed carefully in navy blue linen trousers, white tee-shirt and navy blue and white jacket to achieve a balance of smart yet casual to satisfy not only the expected dress code within the school, but to make sure that I felt comfortable and would not look too authoritarian to David. This, I thought, would be vital if I was going to have a successful meeting, as we would both need to feel relaxed. As I parked my car in the lay-by outside school, I felt far from relaxed. Instead I was suddenly overcome with nerves and began to panic about how I would introduce myself to him and explain my research and his role, even though I had rehearsed it in my head many times before. I need not have worried.

I was escorted through the school by Davina, David's mother, who was also the deputy headteacher. When we arrived at David's classroom he was in the middle of a literacy lesson. '*This is David*,' said Davina, patting his head. David did not appear to be embarrassed, instead he looked up at Davina and smiled. I was then introduced very quickly to the class teacher, before Davina left the classroom. I was surprised at the positioning of the child and teacher in the order of introductions:

> *Davina immediately introduced her son before acknowledging the teacher. This seemed odd in terms of school etiquette. I had expected to be introduced to the teacher first. Was this just maternal instinct or was there something more?*

> *(Research Diary, 13/10/2012)*

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I suspected that there was a tension between the adults and wondered if David was involved in this. I hoped to find out. The teacher asked David to leave his work and to take me to a quiet place so that we could talk. Without making eye contact, David led the way to a community space in a neighbouring building, outside the boundaries of the school. I was curious as to why we had moved to a more neutral space, but glad. During my journey to school I had begun to regret agreeing to a first meeting in an institutional setting, perhaps David sensed this or he too wanted a neutral and comfortable space. During that short walk, David did not engage in conversation. Instead he offered simple directions to where we were going.

We sat down in large, comfortable chairs in the foyer of the building near to the reception and began to chat. Well, I began to chat. I tried to make small talk, asking about his summer holiday and about the function of community building he had brought me to. David listened, eyes fixed to the floor. I knew that he was trying to get the measure of me as I rambled on. The receptionist disappeared into a back office to give us some privacy. We were alone. After a little while David looked up and, meeting my gaze, he said, *'I like it here. It's where they do afterschool and homework clubs and things.'* I knew at that moment that David had tried to take control of the situation and had taken me to a place where he felt at ease. I went on to explain my study and how he could contribute, if he chose to. I showed him the consent form. He glanced at it, and then at me and said that he would take part in the study as long as I did not make him write anything. I agreed and we shook hands. That gesture represented a pivotal moment in the development of our relationship, as from that moment on, David tended to take the lead in our conversations. For the remainder of that initial meeting, following a verbal consent, he did talk about himself. What follows represents a word image of that meeting which provides an account of David's initial positioning of himself in his world.

Gymnastics and swimming

I was good at them

But doing more football now

My brother (*pulls face*)

plays football,

He's older than me

He's just gone to high school.

Caravan.

France

Italy

Love holidays…

and the Olympics.

I'm good at maths

But I hate English…and art

I'm rubbish at that

I'm learning to play the guitar and…

I have my lessons during the BIG WRITE

YES!

Mum arranged them so I don't have to do it

YES!

Mum

(I tell her everything)

Smiles

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I learnt so much about David's world in that short half hour meeting; his love of sport, his dislike of English, the untold story of sibling rivalry and the close bond between him and Davina which had seemed to result in questionable collusion. However, at that stage I was unaware of just how much of what he had told me was linked to his experiences of writing. Although subsequent conversations often began with a writing prompt, David often returned to these themes.

We strolled back to his classroom. David was in no hurry to get there. As I left him at his classroom door, I told him that I would pop back after half-term and that we could sign the consent form. This would give him some time to think a little more about being involved. I assured him that completing and signing the form would be the only writing that I would ask him to do.

The next time I saw him, he was sitting alone in Davina's office at the end of the school day, spinning around on an office chair, waiting to go home. I produced the form and asked him if he was still happy to take part. This time I read through the form and asked him to initial the boxes as he saw fit. He took this job very seriously, adjusting the size of his handwriting with each initialling so that eventually his initials fitted comfortably into each box. When we got to the end, I asked him to sign. He looked at me hesitantly. *'I've never done that. How do you do it?'* he said. I explained that a signature is just a way to write your own name and after a while you find a style that you like, a bit like choosing a font style when you write on the computer. *'It's usually just an initial and surname,'* I said. He held the pen and thought for a moment. *'Like that?'* he said, looking for reassurance as he carefully crafted a signature. *'That was my first one. I may change it. I'll practise until I do one I like.'*

With the exception of his first initial, David joined all of the letters in his name and included loops and flourishes, although he had not been asked to do this. He confided that he had seen Davina and his dad write their names like this on a number of occasions but did not know that they were *'writing a signature'*. The process of signing and our conversations around that process had resulted in David recognising the significance of a signature, his signature. Although on this occasion

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it was for the purpose of consent, David was also aware that perfecting his signature might serve a purpose in the future.

4.2   Relationships and Interests

David spoke a lot about his relationships with family, friends and teachers throughout our conversations. I learnt that he lived with his parents, both of whom were professionals, and his older brother in a small market town. His grandparents lived some distance away. He told me of two close friends with whom he shared his interests of sport and gaming.

The relationship with his brother was complex. As we explored life at home, school and beyond, he would often include references to his brother. Whilst most of the references suggested tensions, there were also examples of David trying to emulate him, for example joining a football club because his brother played. When Davina was present at our meetings, she too would include a reference to David's brother, often comparing the two:

> *David is better [at writing] than Brother was. He uses more punctuation.*

During one visit, David told me that his parents were going away for the weekend, and that his brother was away on a scout camp. His grandparents were coming to look after him. *'I can't wait, I get them all to myself…they'll probably spoil me.'* Whilst he was looking forward to the attention, he was also keen to know if his brother was enjoying camp, asking Davina if she had received a text message from his brother, and using his Xbox to send a message himself.

During our meetings, David only mentioned his dad when we were talking about signatures. All other parental references related to Davina. The closeness of the relationship was also evident in school, as Davina made a point of going to see him in his class every day, and David looked forward to it:

> *I like being at the same school as Mum. I like it when she comes to see me…I'll miss her when I go to high school…but I know she is not far away.*

As David began to tell me of his early experiences of school and writing, it was clear that close and positive relationships with teaching staff were important to him. At his current school, that close relationship with staff was represented by Davina. Relationships with other members of staff were sometimes tense, and these relationships were explored during our meetings as David spoke about his experiences of writing.

Personal interests

Sport played a huge part in David's life. From an early age he had attended both swimming and gymnastics classes and loved them both. He no longer went to gymnastics classes but had won medals in the past. He recounted life at the gymnastics club at our first meeting:

> *I used to go to gymnastics club you know but I've given it up. I was good at it…I really liked it. I won medals and things. You had to go quite often. Not many boys went… I stopped. I do more football now like Brother…but I still practise, in my bedroom when I am on my own.*

As I listened to David talk about gymnastics I sensed his sadness at no longer competing. I wondered why he had stopped, as it clearly remained a significant part of his life and identity. I was left feeling that there was an expectation to do something that was seen as being more male orientated and therefore more acceptable. For David however, gymnastics had not disappeared from his storied world.

In 2012 the family had been to London as spectators at a number of events at the Olympic Games. This had been the highlight of the family's summer, Davina referred to it as '*an adventure*.'

Early start

Train to London

Feeling sick

Boring journey

The Stadium

Wow!

Fantastic!

So many people

Lots of shouting

Brilliant

So much sport!

Mum…

We'll do it again for the Commonwealth Games

David…

No boring train though!

The family had lots of adventures. They were keen caravanners and were in the process of buying a new caravan. David was particularly enthusiastic about one model as the beds were configured as twin beds rather than as bunk beds. This meant he would not have to share a bunk with his brother, who according to David was *'annoying'*. David had travelled all over Europe with his family and their caravan. He particularly liked the Italian Lakes, although he informed me that he wished they were a bit closer as it took a long time to drive there. David clearly

found travelling to be tedious whether by road or train. As we shared stories of caravans and travels, Davina suddenly said, *'my boys have been taken to museums and have travelled all over Europe and they still can't get ideas for writing.'* David nodded in agreement. In later discussions with Davina, it was evident that understanding her boys' experiences of writing, of the problems they faced despite being offered lots of opportunities and experiences, made her question how the teaching of writing was approached in school.

4.3   Learning to Write

> *I haven't always been at this school. I used to go to another school...it was quite small... and then mum moved me and my brother to the school where she worked. The teachers were nice at my old school. I liked it there... I don't remember learning to write. I do remember writing about 'The Great Fire of London'. That was at my old school. The teachers were nice there.*

For David, memories of writing were linked to his relationship with his teachers. As I listened David shared not only his feelings about staff at his first school but also an untold story of his strained relationships with some teachers at his current school. His relationship with his teachers represented a significant thread that connected both enthusiasm for and performance in writing in David's experiences.

4.4   Writing in School

School writing is…

Making stories.

Teaching you how to write

      instructions

      non-chronological reports

      and things….

The BIG Write…BAD!

You must

      have neat handwriting

      join your letters

      check your spelling

      do VCOP[1]

And…write A LOT!

Writing hurts.

My problem…No ideas,

I can't think.

Not enough time…to think

So I draw.

It's easier than writing

Writing in school?

There's a kinda point…

But it's not useful.

---

[1] Vocabulary, Connectives, Openers and Punctuation – an acronym promoted by the commercial writing scheme 'Big Writing' (Wilson, 2009)

<u>Beginning with story writing</u>

One afternoon, David and I had a conversation about the type of writing he did in school. It was the end of the academic year and David had his literacy book at home. We settled down to look through his book, with David selecting genre specific examples. He quickly flicked through the pages until he came across an example of a story, 'The Return of the Cybermen' (see Appendix H). It was the piece of work that had baffled his teacher. He was particularly proud of it but there was disappointment and irritation in his voice as he mimicked his teacher's response, pulling faces.

> *This one [pointing at the story title], it's funny. She [the teacher] said, 'You were supposed to set your story in Victorian times not write about gyms and cybermen'. She wanted to know why I had written it. I don't know why I did it. It was funny. I had to write a story about the workhouse and it's all I could think of. The cyberman [pointing to his pictures of the cyberman] is the baddy and he goes really fast on the treadmill. It was funny...it is a story.*

His relationship with his teacher was clearly strained and recalling the memory had irritated him. He pointed to her written feedback to justify this irritation.

> *See what she's written [I'm not sure how many gyms or cybermen they had in Victorian times...] and then she tells me to write a sentence in joined up handwriting. I wrote some more but it's not joined up. I hate joined up...I just wrote some more of my story.*

The frustration he had felt at his teacher's next steps request had resulted in a defiant response from David. I wanted to probe a little more to understand his inspiration for his story idea. I wondered if he was a fan of the television drama Dr Who, as a recent episode had been set in the Victorian period, but this was not the case. David was not a Dr Who fan. On the contrary, he found it scary, unlike his brother. We talked about the cybermen and he was very aware that they were *'evil and scary'* characters but quite easy to draw. He told me that gyms were *'cool'* so

he put a gym and cybermen together. I wondered if his ability to draw was also influencing the content of his writing as it had my son, although perhaps in a different way.

David spoke of story writing in school on two other occasions, once when I met him at home during a half term break and once during our final meeting. On that first occasion at home, following a prompt from Davina, he looked me straight in the eye and made an announcement:

> *You won't believe it…I'm writing a story for fun! It's my first one…it's in my mum's office…it's set in a tropical rainforest…I wouldn't like to visit a rainforest…I wouldn't like the animals…well I'd like the monkeys and insects but not tarantulas and gorillas and things ughh! I set it there because I've done it before in Year 4 for a long writing test so I thought I'd do it again…you can see it if I finish it…I've only written about one or maybe two sentences.*

When David told me of his writing, I felt that he had been keen both to surprise me and to please me. I felt a little emotional and very honoured. He was very upbeat as he spoke about his potential story and very animated as he spoke about the different animals. He had visited many places with his family, but a jungle was not one of them. Although he was not using a real life experience of a visit to a jungle as an inspiration, he was drawing on his previous experience of writing about this topic area in the previous academic year. That previous year, with a male teacher, had been an enjoyable one for David and he had positive memories. He remembered that he had got a good mark for his jungle story in Year 4 and that was why he was writing it again. I later learnt that David never finished the story begun in Davina's office. He had thrown his effort away. I never did see it.

When I met David for the final time, it was in school in Davina's office at the end of the school day. I arrived late as there had been a lot of traffic congestion and I had struggled to park my car. When I arrived I was flustered and flopped down in an office chair next to the door. David was sitting in the dark playing 'Candy Crush' on

Davina's iPad. I rummaged in my bag for my note pad and voice recorder whilst apologising for being late. Then we sat together in silence. A few moments passed. Without looking up, David reassured me that the traffic was always bad at the end of the day and that I should not worry about being late. It had been a while since I had seen David and I was relieved that the silence and general mood was comfortable. We began to talk about his day. During much of our conversation David continued to play on the iPad, looking down at the coloured images on 'Candy Crush' occasionally turning his chair towards me so that I could see his face. It was on this occasion that David also played a game with me. As David recounted his day, he told me that the class had been practising for SATs. In English, they had been asked to complete two pieces of writing, a long and a short piece. One of those pieces had been to write a diary entry:

> *First I had to pretend it was the night before I won a competition for hot air*
> *ballooning holiday and then the next diary entry had to be the day of going*
> *in the hot air balloon. I had to make it up. I said was excited and worried*
> *before I knew if I had won the competition… a bit like before I got my Xbox. It*
> *[what he had written] wasn't good though.*

David did not want to tell me why it was not good. Instead he wanted me to guess where he had been on his trip. I provided a list of options; on Safari with all the elephants running beneath the balloon, to the jungle, over his favourite football stadium, France and finally above the swimming baths. I had suggested places that I knew were meaningful in some way to David. After each suggestion David shook his head, said, *'Na'* and smiled. Eventually I gave up. David paused his iPad game, looked directly at me and without smiling said:

> *It was nowhere really (pause) well actually it was above our house. I didn't*
> *get a good view...that was the whole point I didn't see anything it is*
> *rubbish…I didn't say where it [the flight] started exactly or where it finished*
> *exactly. It just started and finished in the same place nowhere really. It really*
> *is rubbish.*

As I listened to him talk, I sensed both sadness and anxiety. He had chatted comfortably about the first part of the task but his mood and manner had changed as he spoke about the second part. His sense of anxiety in not knowing what to write was palpable. The balloon flight represented a metaphor for his writing experience, in that he did not know where to begin, where to go or where to end. He was visibly upset and was fighting back tears. He told me how he hated Year 6, how even last year was better and I knew he had not enjoyed the previous year. This outburst relating to hating school had stemmed from him reflecting on his writing and the insecurity he felt during that writing process. Whilst I wanted to understand more about this growing dislike of school as it had stemmed from him reflecting on his writing, I also felt a need to change his mood as my research diary entry showed:

> *I felt really sad, and responsible for this change of mood. I had encouraged him to talk about his day and as a result he had opened up about his writing test. Did he do this because he wanted to or because he felt he had to? He seemed so vulnerable. My first thought was how am I going to make him feel better? I didn't want my last visit to end on a negative note. I thought about how I could get him to talk about something more positive. I opted to focus on the game he was playing on the iPad. It was a good move as it prompted him to show me his favourite driving game which involved some tricky parking manoeuvres. He was very good and I told him so.*
>
> *(Research Diary, 5/12/13)*

David began to relax as he played the driving game. Following my praise, he went on to talk more about his day, but this time his mood was more positive. He told me about how he had also done a maths practice paper and spoke confidently about his performance, *'I think I've got 37...He [the teacher] said two people have got 37 and I think I'm one of them.'* I asked him if it was out of 50. He was horrified. Sniggering in disbelief he informed me that it was out of 40 and that *'it was maths not English and I'm good at maths!'* I apologised and acknowledged this fact. This response prompted David to list his school subjects in order of preference, beginning with PE closely followed by mathematics, topic (all foundation subjects)

and ending with religious education and English. I asked if he had stopped playing the guitar. He said that he still played and thought for a moment *'actually that would be third from bottom, guitar, yes third from bottom…guitar, RE then English.'* For David, English was situated at the bottom of his list but as we spoke I realised that RE had been placed near to the bottom of the list following an incident with the specialist teacher.

There was a lot about the school curriculum that David did not like. During my introductory visit he had informed me that he hated drawing but, *'I hate English more…I'm not very good at drawing'.* It was for this reason that I was surprised at how much drawing he did during writing lessons. On my first visit to David's classroom, I observed a guided reading lesson. I sat awkwardly at the back of a cramped, Portakabin classroom. It was difficult not to engage with the children, and particularly difficult not to engage with David, who was sitting close by. David's group had been allocated an independent task to design a cartoon following a reading of 'The Diary of a Wimpy Kid' by Jeff Kinney (2007). David decided to focus on developing character. As I watched David, I saw him take his ruler and carefully draw lines on his page to divide it into sixteen boxes. He then began to draw a character in the first box. David was quiet and appeared to be on task throughout. Every so often he would rise from his chair and collect a book from a shelf or book box. One of those books was 'Letters from an Alien Schoolboy' by Roz Asquith. The common feature of the texts he was selecting was that they all contained a graphic element, a series of cartoon characters. David carefully copied the main characters' faces from the selected texts into the boxes he had drawn in his book. As I observed, I noticed that David did not write, instead he continued to draw. It was when the teacher informed the children that there were 5 minutes to the end of the session that he began to write.

After the session, David shared his work with me. I felt more comfortable now that I was able to interact with David. David sat with the book in front of him. He pushed it slowly across the desk so that it was shared between us. I thanked him. I did not interrupt him as he talked me through his work and reasoned about the decisions he had made. He was keen to share, pointing at specific examples in his book as he

spoke. I was keen to listen, curious as to why he had chosen to draw rather than to write about his characters. He did not make eye contact with me until he had finished talking.

She [the teacher][nods head towards the front of the class] wants us to design a cartoon. We were supposed to be looking at characters. I found these characters in books and that… Look…Bart…he's yellow 'cos everybody knows it's Bart then…I just found lots of characters and drew them… I didn't write anything because I'd rather draw and I hate that…well it's not actually drawing it's copying and I'm good at copying cos you've already got the picture there... I know there are a lot of characters. I'll just tell her they are all going to be in it [the cartoon]. She'll be happy with that.

As he spoke about the session objectives and the teacher's expectations David revealed an awareness of how he could interpret the lesson objectives with enough relevance to keep the teacher happy. He was also able to defend his approach with the teacher. However, this was not going to be the case with the specialist RE teacher.

For David his overall performance and his relationship with the teacher were both clearly linked to his enjoyment of a subject and to school itself.

Writing non-fiction

David's workbooks showed evidence of David writing a range of genres, for example explanation, newspaper report, discussion and persuasion, although David recalled very few writing experiences other than story writing. As I got to know David, I wondered whether this was due to the fact that he found story writing more challenging because he had to 'make' stories for himself, as opposed to non-fiction writing which he referred to as being 'taught':

> She definitely taught us something...sub headings and that. We had to write about the stupid tree… some people want the tree to stay and some want it to be chopped down. I looked at the character list. I didn't know who to be then I thought I'd be Joe cos he is young and doesn't care about the tree and wants it to be chopped down so they can build a playground… Bob [pseudonym] had picked him too. I don't care about the stupid tree…I drew it… yeah, for ages. She said we could…it helps me think...when I draw. I know I spent ages drawing the tree. It's rubbish [the drawing]. I didn't know what to write for ages then I thought about the Olympics. It had been really good…lots of sports and athletics and everything, so I thought I know, if the stupid tree was cut down we could build an athletics stadium so the Olympics could come to [home town]. It might persuade people to come here. There were lots of people in London in the summer… The stadium was massive. If there was a stadium in [home town] I wouldn't have to go all the way to London to see sport. We all had to get up really early. The train journey was so boring I couldn't be bothered doing that again.

As I observed the lesson it was very clear that David struggled to get inspiration for his writing. He was engaged in the writing process for six of the seventy minute lesson. He read and reread the information sheets that had been provided to support the task. He noted down the lesson objective. He whispered to his

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neighbour, asking for some ideas. He was ignored. He gazed out of the window. He played with his pencil, spinning it around and around in what was a small hole in the arm of his sweatshirt at the start of the lesson, and a much larger hole at the end. He drew the outline of a tree and continued to shade in the trunk with gentle scribbling. He remained quiet and seated throughout the lesson, watching his teacher and putting up his hand as she moved around the class and got closer to his table. Following some discussion with the teacher, David settled on writing from Joe's point of view. Joe was the only fictional character in favour of felling the tree to create a park.

> *Teacher: What are the benefits of a park, David?*
> *David: Dunno. Running and things.*
> *Teacher: You need to be specific if you want to persuade (moving away)*

David looked at the teacher and nodded. He picked up his pencil as if to write. The teacher moved away. David stuck the pencil in the hole in his sleeve and turned it slowly. He gazed out of the window. He looked across at his neighbour. He wrote nothing. With a five minute warning to the end of the lesson, and a return visit from the teacher, David finally began to write (Appendix H).

At the end of the lesson, David also discussed what he had written in relation to the learning objective:

> *I've done it under sub-headings…that's what she asked for. It's got a*
> *persuasive word in it. Boring is persuasive… [pointing to word boring]. It'll*
> *do. We'll probably have to do more tomorrow.*

David made no comments about grammar, punctuation, spelling or handwriting, and he was correct about doing more, the class did go on to complete the piece of work and also to write a letter of complaint. The word 'boring' appeared 3 times in his persuasive sub-headed piece, the final usage being fully capitalised for emphasis. It also appeared as a road name 'Boring Lane', in his letter. This was corrected to 'Silly Lane' by his teacher. This irritated David.

There were clearly tensions between the expectations of the teacher and what was produced by David. The teacher told of how she had provided considerable support through class discussion prior to the writing lesson and through the information sheets. She had expected much more:

> *All of the information was there. I can't understand why it was so much of a problem. What else can I do?*

David's reluctance to write resulted in him continuing to find ways to negotiate and to personalise the 'writing' curriculum. I continued to think about the experiences and stories he had shared with me and two themes kept coming to the fore. They were being unable to think of an idea, and insufficient time to think and to transfer this idea to the page. His concerns were around composition. However, David felt that the teacher was unaware of this as she mainly addressed transcriptional issues when she responded to his writing. David however, did not think too much about handwriting and spelling. If he could read his writing that was fine. He did not feel the need to join-up his handwriting because it hurt his hand, even though he knew it was expected and he was able to do so. He learnt spelling patterns for homework but when he was under pressure he relied on phonic strategies, *'I just think about how it sounds.'* This was of interest to his mum. Whilst she acknowledged this was the case, she found it difficult to believe as he had not been through a phonics programme at his first school.

He was also responding to his teacher's written assessment comments, sometimes when asked and others because he *'felt like it*.' In the case of the letter, his response was in joined handwriting and told of his confusion:

> *I kept getting mixed up with my writing*

He wanted her to take this comment seriously. He presented his comment in his best handwriting.

David and the 'Big Write'

David groaned. '*The Big Write', that's what we have to do in school... Nearly every week'*. It was actually every other Thursday. David had told me about his dislike of 'The Big Write' in our first meeting, however, as time went on, David shared more about this and his other experiences of writing in school. Initially, his focus was the Big Write as that was what was uppermost in his mind. Part of the 'Big Writing' (Wilson, 2012) approach is to set talk homework, so that the children can discuss and share ideas to inform their writing, with their family, in advance of completing an unaided piece of writing in school. David told me about how he no longer completed his talk homework and tried to avoid the Big Write sessions at all costs:

> *It's not just me... we all cheer when she [the teacher] says it has been cancelled. Even Mum thinks it's stupid that's why she arranged my guitar lesson for when we have to do it in class. I miss most of my lesson so I end up only writing about this much. (David proudly holds his thumb and index finger about 2cm apart.) I'm lucky.*

David had discussed his feelings about the Big Write with Davina. She acknowledged the fact that:

> *This year he's just not interested so there is no point doing it [the talk homework]. It's different to last year. It is the way it is being approached. It's not working... I'll have to look at it across school.*

As I listened, I heard David talk of there being too much to think about in the time he had to write. The Big Write caused him to feel overwhelmed. He did not feel able to meet the expectations of set tasks, therefore avoiding the task also meant that he avoided any conflict with the teacher and this was important to him. The ability to engage with writing and to complete tasks at an expected level was a point of tension between David and his teacher, and not just in the Big Write:

David often writes very little. He is quiet, but when I look over he is never working, just staring. I think he is thinking… but sometimes he only writes three lines. I'm not sure if he is lazy or can't think of an idea…when he does manage some writing I've really got no idea what is behind his thinking…who's heard of gyms and cybermen in Victorian times?

(Fieldnotes, 24/06/13)

Being good at not writing

My time in the classroom with David had shown that he was not disruptive, in fact he could be considered to be very compliant. His class teacher recognised the fact that he was 'no trouble' but she was also aware that he often wrote very little or failed to complete tasks. Yet, she had placed David in the top ability group, despite her concerns about his writing. As she considered this grouping she simply sighed and said '…it's easier that way…with his mum and everything.' David was a member of a challenging class and other children needed the teacher's attention. She felt guilty about not 'bringing all the children on,' including David.

During my observations in David's year 5 class, I found that he spent much of his time engaged in not writing. I wondered if he was aware of this. Was he consciously avoiding writing? David spoke about this during one of our research conversations:

Now I'm in year 6 I have to do more [writing]…Yes I'm really good at that [not writing], when we have to do writing I really don't do much…Well the thing is you have to do something not nothing, you just don't have to do very much (looks up and smiles). So when the teacher is looking at you you're writing…Mr X [Year 6 teacher] doesn't notice or tell me off.

This worked with the established, permanent members of staff but David had recently encountered a new member of staff:

When we do RE I always get told off then… That's a different teacher that just comes into teach us RE…I feel sad [when he gets told off]…it makes me want to do nothing. I'm going to do nothing on my next RE lesson. I don't care.

David was aware that he needed to conform in school in order to succeed, this was a story learnt from his mother. He learnt that by being compliant he would stay out of trouble and be able to negotiate the curriculum on his terms. In fact he wanted to be liked by his teachers and did not enjoy being singled out or chastised. The RE teacher had created a problem in David's storied world. David's tactics had not worked. He had not met the RE teacher's expectations and had been made to stay behind at break and finish his work. This had upset him and he was in a defiant mood. This episode with the RE teacher had caused him to doubt his own storied world. He was determined to find a way to overcome this new problem.

4.5   Technology and Writing

Technology was very much a part of David's life outside school. In school his teacher had commented on the difficulties she faced when trying to use technology to support writing. Sitting in the classroom at the end of the school day, we were discussing approaches to teaching writing that were included in the school curriculum. The children had all been safely delivered to their parents or buses and the classroom was silent. There was a palpable sense of relief. Another day was over, without incident. It had been a long day but the teacher was keen to talk and to share a series of unit plans for persuasive writing. I glanced through the plans as we talked about the school day and David. There was no reference to using any form of technology in any of the lesson plans and I wondered why this was the case:

'I would love to do more… [work with technology] They [the children] would love us to use more technology. I would love a computer for every child. It would motivate them to work. The problem with that is we can't teach them 'cos they know more than us…'

At this point we were joined by a fellow teacher, who promptly sat on the table and made herself comfortable. The class teacher continued to speak, aware of her extended audience and looking towards her friend for support:

> *'They do don't they, know more than us? (Turns to other teacher. Does not pause for response) They could teach us and we **should** be teaching them and well… (pauses) we just wouldn't be able to. They always know more than we do because they use technology all the time. The problem is that because of that they have no imagination to bring to writing. There is a huge connection between writing and reading…they will write about shooting and war games because that is all their input at home.*
>
> *(Fieldnotes, 25/06/13)*

Her friend nodded her head in agreement. They chatted to each other commenting on their pupils being part of a technology generation who do not have that fear that, *'things will blow up if you play with them'*. I sensed a real anxiety as the teachers talked. There was a feeling of being left behind, a growing chasm between their world and that of the children, a feeling of despair. Technology had disrupted the teachers' storied worlds in which they were in control of what and how something was written.

I went on to learn that the school had an IT Suite. The computers were used primarily as a tool to search for information related to topic work rather than to supporting the literacy curriculum which according to the teachers was '*was jam packed'* leaving the teachers feeling under pressure to, '*move onto the next thing'*. The children were not shown how to search. The class teacher ensured that they were all logged on to the system and then the children helped each other as it was assumed they would know what to do. Yet David did not make any reference to using any form of technology in school.

At home, David enjoyed using his Kindle and playing on an Xbox. I spoke to David about technology during my first visit to his home. When I arrived he was playing balloon football between the conservatory and the lounge, taking great care not to

let the balloon land on the floor. I was greeted with a header and a smile. Whilst Davina made a coffee, David came and sat next to me in the conservatory and told me that his brother was playing on the Xbox in the playroom. He informed me that he loved the Xbox but:

> I don't get to go on it much 'cos it belongs to my brother and I have to wait until he is out. He's going to football tonight so I'll get a go on it then.

We talked about using the Xbox, a piece of technology that I was unfamiliar with. David enjoyed explaining how he could play on-line with his friends and promised to show me how he used it on my next visit. Their favourite games were 'Minecraft' and 'Quantum of Solace', one of which is a violent, shooting genre of game that the teacher had referred to. He went on to tell me about how he could speak to his friends whilst they were all playing a game by typing a message or using the 'microphone thing that we bought,' giving an example of inviting them to a party in the middle of a game. This was the first time that David had connected speaking and writing, or so I thought.

> 'No, it's typing not writing. I speak to my friends by **typing** a message'.
> (David's emphasis)

We spent a long time discussing the virtual keyboard, a term he was unfamiliar with but registered and stored for future use.

> It's different to a proper keyboard 'cos this screen like pops up. You don't actually use a pen but you have to move to the letters using the controller…I prefer to use a pen than a keyboard 'cos the keyboard takes much longer. I don't know where all the letters are. They are in the wrong order.

Not being able to find the letters frustrated David. He had never received any teaching or guidance relating to keyboard familiarisation and touch typing. During my research time, David had a birthday and with the money he had received as gifts, he bought his own Xbox. The purchase had not been stress free. It had not

been bought on the high street, instead it been bought on-line through an EBay auction:

> *Mum did it [took part in the auction] I hadn't won. I came second so I thought I had lost. Then we got a message to say the winners didn't want it and I could have it. I was sooo happy. Then it didn't turn up when they said they had sent it. I started to get really worried but it arrived the next day. My Xbox is in the playroom now.*

David was thrilled by the fact that he had his own Xbox which now had pride of place in the playroom whilst his brother's had been relegated to his bedroom. This move delighted David as it meant that he could play on the machine in the playroom, a room he shared with his mum, whenever he wanted to *'which is a lot!'* David thought that there was one significant benefit to having his own console. The increased gaming activity had improved his skills in using the keyboard:

> *You just get used to the keyboard and where the letters are…so I've got faster.*

He recognised that this would be a useful skill if he received the present at the top of his Christmas wish list. At the top of the list was a mobile phone and he was convinced that he was going to get one:

> *I think mum's already got it anyway 'cos she had a small package and said it needed recharging…it will be a phone I know it…I think it will be a Samsung*

Most of David's friends already had mobile phones and David was very excited at the prospect of having one and being able to talk to all of his friends, not just the Xbox owners. To David 'talking to' his friends did not mean calling them for a chat. To David talking was texting and texting was definitely not writing. Texting was talking.

4.6   Writing at Home

I write nothing at home.

Every Friday evening David brings work home from school. Every Friday evening there is a piece of writing, usually a cloze exercise or worksheet related to spelling patterns. It would not be unreasonable to think that David puts off completing his homework until Sunday afternoon but this is not the case:

> *I do my homework on a Friday night. I just want to get it done so that I get the weekend to play and that. Brother doesn't. I'm a good boy (smiles). He [brother] does most of his school work on the computer. I don't but when I go to high school I suppose I will then. I think you have to. I am getting better at the using a keyboard now though so I'll be OK*

David had been worried about using the computer for homework because of his frustrations with not being able to locate letters on the keyboard. This was a theme that we returned to regularly as we talked about technology and writing.

The technology expert

I settled down next to David on the sofa in his playroom. Davina was on the other side of him on a chair. David glanced at his mum and then stared hard at me. *'Are you ready?'* he asked. David had invited me to his home to show me how to use his Xbox. He was the expert. I was the novice. He took control immediately telling me that he was going to show me how he talked to and played games with his friends. He was very patient, explaining with precision the steps taken to send a message to a friend, and checking my understanding after each step:

> *You press the silver and green buttons. Click on 'friends'. Select your friend. Press 'send message'. Move the joystick left, right, up and down to select the letters you need. You select a letter and then press green on the console*

handset. For a space you press 'y' and for a backspace you press 'x'. A backspace means delete. You click on 'accents' to get a question mark. When you have finished you press done and send your message. More of my friends are coming online now.

David had been engaged in a game of Minecraft when I arrived, building a trap to stop people entering his virtual world. He had been happy to pause his game. After his confident demonstration of how to send a message he pointed out that friends' names appeared on the screen in green if they were on-line. Davina suggested that he send a message to one of them, and he did. He concentrated hard, staring at the letters on the screen as he manipulated the joystick.

David's message: join my world
Friend's reply: k in a minute

David looked at me, and pointing to the reply on the screen assured me that 'k' meant 'OK' when he and his friends were talking to each other. David then went on to tell me why he had written his message without a capital letter, J and a full stop:

You don't really need it. It's not real writing it is just sending a message to a friend. It's like talk. That's it (raises voice), you don't need capital letters when you talk… You don't need to think much about punctuation and spelling when you are on your Xbox. That's what makes it better than writing in school. You get told off there if you don't…

To illustrate his point, David sent a longer message to his friend

join my party it's a meant to be a trap so w h *(backspace)* when people spawn they die and ican take there map.

As he talked me through his message he told me, with a smile, that he had chosen to end the message with a full stop because he '*felt like it*.' He had also re-read his sentence, something that he was asked to do in school. He informed me that during

that re-reading he had spotted a mistake with, *'the homophone 'there'.'* He had not changed it because his friend was Russian and, being Russian, he may not notice there was a mistake.

In that short message, David displayed an awareness of purpose and audience, but it was not writing, it was messaging. He was able to make choices relating to syntax and vocabulary, but it was not writing, it was messaging. He made editorial choices, but it was not writing it was messaging. He also confidently used metalanguage when talking about the piece. But it was not writing, it was messaging and messaging was talking.

There were clearly tensions between writing at home and writing at school. In the home setting, David felt able to make choices without the fear of being '*told off*'. He recognised that those choices were framed within a knowledge base gained in school. However, as David himself said, *'I never write like I do in school when I'm at home…only for homework.'* His audio and photographic diary supported this comment.

4.7   Secret Agent David

> *'Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to use the camera and voice recorder at home to record top-secret information about your writing.'*

The mission was accepted and David had a two week period at the beginning of July, to gather information. Like all spies he attended a training course on how to use the equipment. This was held outdoors at school on a sunny afternoon. He followed the operating instructions carefully for both the camera and the voice recorder. I demonstrated how to use the voice recorder and then, reluctantly he took a turn. He assured me that he *'wasn't bothered'* about using the equipment, despite him appearing a little awkward and embarrassed. Unconvinced, I left him alone and the equipment with Davina in her office. This was at David's request.

I collected the recording equipment during the summer holidays. David was playing on his Xbox. *'You'll be disappointed'* said Davina, *'he's not done much. He's quite enjoyed it though.'* I quickly glanced at the camera and noticed that 6 pictures had been taken.

It had been a number of years since I had sent a film for processing. As I passed David's film over the counter at the chemist, I felt quite nostalgic. This was a sense of excited anticipation, wondering what the pictures would show. I had vowed to listen to the sound recordings only when I received the developed film so that I would engage with David's complete experience. However, I was about to be disappointed. The old fashioned photograph packet contained only negatives with what appeared to be a few smudges on them. The pictures had not been developed due to their poor quality. However, I still had the audio recordings which detailed what David perceived to be examples of writing at home.

David had made 5 voice recordings. The first was, *'A message to my brother saying how is his foot today.'* To my surprise, David had documented a message, sent via his Xbox, as writing. This represented a small shift in his thinking. However, his language continued to connect the process with speaking. The remaining 4 recordings related to homework tasks and 3 of those included whispered dialogue with, and prompting from Davina in the background. They were definitely collaborations but in each case David took control and provided minimal information.

Recording 2

> *David: I had to do a description to (hesitates) of a fire which you had to do*
> *Davina: (whispers) simile*
> *David: similes and metaphors… mmm (pause)… and adjectives... (long pause) (whispers) stop (pause) stop it*
> The recorder was stopped, by Davina.

Davina tried hard to encourage David to provide more information often using metalanguage which David fully understood, as above. On one occasion, David recorded the fact that he had completed a piece of homework on adverbs. She was heard asking, *'Are you pleased with what you've done?'* David's reply was, *'Shut up! I don't want…'* He added no more information. His final piece was very matter of fact.

> David: *This is a report of how I felt the year went. Done!*

There was a confidence in his delivery. Whilst the first sentence was spoken in monotone, this was in sharp contrast to the inflection of the word 'done' suggesting that he was upbeat, about finishing the year. This also drew to an end his mission. I was disappointed that I had not been able to see any of the writing that David had commented on.

4.8   Writing Reflections – looking back and looking forward

David considered the place of writing in his storied life. As he reflected on his writing ability he wanted to make it clear that he was an able but reluctant writer, *'I can write you know if I have to. I just don't want to.'* As he looked back he felt that he had gained sufficient knowledge to get him through school. As he looked forward he struggled to see a place in his life for writing. For David at age 10, writing is not going to play a significant role in his life.

> *When I grow up I'm going to be a swimmer. I know I like gymnastics but I'm going to be a swimmer. Maybe I could be a diver? I've been allowed on a diving board but only to jump off and it was quite a low one. You have to do really steady handstands at the top of a really high board. I could do that because I'm good at gymnastics. B couldn't 'cos he's scared of heights. If I'm a swimmer or a diver I probably wouldn't have to write very much. That would be good, very good.*

I knew that sport was important to David but wanted to understand further about his ambitions. He had tended to follow his brother but he clearly wanted to break away. To do something his brother would not and could not do. He also was looking for a career that would involve as little writing as possible. This was interesting because he was surrounded by a family of writers. How was he unable to see the place and benefit of writing to them in their careers? I returned to my fieldnotes, transcripts and research diaries to try to understand this from David's perspective. In so doing, I became more aware than ever of the apparent disconnect he was experiencing between traditional writing practices requiring a pen and electronic writing practices that involve typing. To David, writing was school writing, with a pen or pencil. There was no place for electronic writing practices in school. There was no place for school writing practices at home, other than for homework. David saw limited evidence of his family writing with a pen. Typing was something different. His family typed a lot.

In school he tried to make sense of writing tasks by negotiating the curriculum with his teachers. He made tasks relevant to him, by drawing on experiences and by interpreting lesson objectives to make them both achievable and as enjoyable as possible. This involved taking control. I was taken back to my own son's experiences of writing and drawing. He too had found ways to interpret and negotiate the curriculum. He too had taken control within the expected boundaries of a pupil-teacher relationship for like David he had learnt a story of respect. David's writing was bound up in his relationships.

5   Mark's Story: the confident writer

'I don't mind writing…I like finding interesting words'

5.1   In the Beginning…Meeting Mark

It was an exceptionally warm day in July, 2013 and Mark's mum, Marcia, had invited me to their home for a coffee and to meet Mark for the first time. I sent a text message to Marcia, 'On my way be with you in 5 mins,' as I did not want to arrive unannounced. I set off feeling quite relaxed. I was looking forward to meeting Mark as Marcia had painted a picture of a lively, enthusiastic yet anxious young boy. I hoped that he would feel confident enough, at least over time, to share his experiences and stories with me. I arrived a few minutes later feeling a little stressed. I had been chased by a dog that had run away from its owner as the owner had tried to put on its lead. It was not a big dog but the incident represented one of my greatest fears. I needed to calm down. I stood outside Mark's house and took a few deep breaths before walking up the drive. As I approached the front door, I glanced through the window to my right and spotted Mark, sitting cross-legged on the floor playing with his Lego in what I was later to learn was his playroom. I reached out to ring the doorbell but there was no need. The door was already open.

I knocked on the open door and shouted, *'Hello!'* I was greeted by the younger of Mark's two sisters, whom I had met in Sainsbury's when she was shopping with her mum a few weeks earlier. *'Mum, it's Julie!'* she shouted as she gestured to me to come in. Marcia appeared at the kitchen door with a welcoming smile. She beckoned me into the kitchen and invited me to sit down, asking if I would like tea or coffee. I took a seat at the kitchen table. The door to the back garden was open and it was lovely and cool. Whilst Marcia made the drinks, I recounted my incident with the dog, apologising for being a bit flustered. Marcia apologised for the disruption in the house due to ongoing building work. On the worktop I could see Mark's school books.

Marcia, sister and I settled into a conversation about kitchen design, granite worktops and university open days. Mark's sister then returned to the computer in another room. She was completing some school work that had been set for the holidays. Mark continued to play with his Lego in his playroom. Marcia suddenly asked, '*Shall I get him (Mark)? I've told him that you are nice and that he'll like you.*' I felt flattered but wondered what Mark himself would make of me, and of becoming a participant in my research. At this stage I felt as if I was building a positive relationship with Mum and with sister as I had spent time with them, but I was still a stranger to Mark. As it transpired, the relationship with the family was going to be crucial in terms of working with Mark.

Mark hopped into the kitchen, said hello and pirouetted on the spot. He was instructed by Marcia to sit down to have a glass of juice and to talk to me. He did as he was asked. I wanted to break the ice with Mark before seeking his formal consent and, as I had seen him building with Lego, I thought that this might be a good topic of conversation. Mark did not need much prompting to talk about Lego. It was his favourite toy. He explained that:

> *Every Christmas, Father Christmas brings me some Lego. I love Lego. Dad builds things with me….*

Marcia added that the whole family builds with Mark. In those few moments and those few words I learnt that Mark was very much at the centre of the family and that his world remained one of innocence in which he still believed in Father Christmas.

<u>Gaining consent</u>

 As with all of the participants, I began the consent process by describing my study and by assuring him that he would not have to write anything specifically for me. He nodded in acknowledgement but said that he would not mind if he did have to write. Sitting at the kitchen table, I read through each statement and then explained it in child-friendly language, whilst Mark swung his legs and moved his head from

side to side. Marcia, who was sitting across the table, asked him to pay attention and apologised. I told Marcia he was fine. Mark was fidgeting but he was clearly listening and engaged. He made statements, for example *'I probably won't'* when he was informed that he could withdraw or 'stop taking part' whenever he wanted to. When completing the form he printed his initials in each box commenting on how '*tricky*' it was to keep within the boxes. The handwriting style of each initialling was slightly different, some being upper case only and others combining lower and upper case. This had been a deliberate decision on Mark's part to ensure the letters fit within the boundary of the box. However, when we reviewed it together, his confidence in this decision waned as he sought reassurance:

> *It doesn't really matter that the letters aren't the same so long as they fit. (short pause, looks directly at me) Does it?*

Then I asked him to sign. He was very much aware of being able to personalise his signature and spoke out-loud as he signed:

> *I'm doing my initial and last name… Oooh (Short pause…puts top of pen in mouth) I know (puts head to one side and sticks out tongue and begins to write). Will this do? (Pushes form closer to me and gets up from his seat)*

Mark had written his signature using lower case for each of the six letters, including his initial. He had also carefully joined each consistently sized letter. However, the script was much larger than his usual handwriting style. I wondered if this had been a conscious decision. Mark informed me that he felt it made it appear more *'grown-up'* associating the signature and consent process with being an adult. After completing the last letter, Mark paused again and went back and added a long horizontal line from the final letter to the second letter of his surname. *'That's better,'* he said confidently, taking a step back, looking from signature to Marcia…to signature to me, suggesting an unspoken 'isn't it?' and a need for affirmation.

5.2   Relationships and Interests

Mark is the youngest of three children and is described by his Marcia as being the 'baby' of the family. He has two sisters, both considerably older than him. The elder sister is away at university studying English. She is the first member of the family to attend university. The younger is in the sixth form in the process of making applications to universities. Pouting, Mark told me that he would miss her when she too left home as they *'often work on the computer together to look things up.'* The relationship between Mark and the younger of the two sisters is clearly very strong and loving. Both sisters have a strong work ethic instilled by their parents and they are keen to succeed academically. This attitude has also begun to inform Mark's thinking. During our meetings he would often comment on the value of education and the importance of doing well in school. In fact, Mark had strong opinions of how people should behave socially. Being seen to behave well, to be polite, to be kind and to try hard are important values for the whole family, and Mark is no exception.

Marcia and Mark's father both work. His Father is a plumber by trade but is employed at a local engineering factory and works a shift pattern, which allows him time at home with the family. Marcia works part-time as a term-time support worker for students in post-compulsory education. Mark's parents have strong moral values and a positive work ethic, and are very supportive of their children and keen that they are successful in life. They are also committed to providing their children with a wealth of experiences outside school, music and dancing for the girls and football and tennis for Mark. The family sit down to meals together and the kitchen is the heart of the house. Family days out and walks at the weekend are common place and activities and locations for days out are agreed as a family group. For Mark, his Father is seen as an additional playmate, building his tree-house, playing football and tennis etc. whilst Marcia, he said *'organises things,'* helps him with his homework and reads with him.

Mark also has a close extended family including aunties, uncles and cousins. His cousins are regular playmates and Mark's family holidays are often with some of the extended group. He looks forward to those times, especially camping in Devon and Cornwall with his cousins.

<u>Personal interests</u>

Mark engages in a variety of activities outside school mainly revolving around sporting activities. He is a member of a local football team which involves regular weekend matches. His parents take him and spectate. Marcia said, '*he is often the substitute…he's not really very good. He's not as competitive as the other boys you see.'* Mark admitted that he was not the best but that he enjoys playing football. He also:

> *'like(s) to do other things too…tennis. I'm quite good at that. I can beat Dad…Oh and riding my bike.'*

During my conversations with Mark I found out that he had just been allowed to cycle around the block, unaccompanied. I wondered how it had made him feel:

> *It's only round the block. Some of my friends go to the shops on their own but I'm not allowed. When I go to high school I will go on my bike so I'll be allowed to do things then.*

I had expected some excitement but instead there was a feeling of slight frustration that others were doing things he could not yet do. Yet mixed with this frustration was resignation. He was able to see a time when, in his mind, things would be different and he was willing to wait, showing an acceptance of the family rules that were in place.

Mark had asked Father Christmas for a table tennis table, as this was a game he and his family had enjoyed playing whilst on holiday. During one of my visits the family were discussing where a table tennis table would be housed, should Father

Christmas oblige. There were jokes about it taking the place of a dining table, and ponderings over the potential competition for space between a table tennis table and the boxes of Lego in Mark's playroom. After all, the room needed to accommodate not only Mark, but family members who joined him to undertake collaborative building projects.

As I spoke with Mark I realised that this family collaboration was really important in his world and made him feel secure. One pastime that he absolutely loved was to read, and to be read to:

> *Me and mum read every night. I really like it. We are reading… (shouts across kitchen excitedly, 'What is it Mum?') The Famous Five, that's it…It's really exciting…Some of the words and that are a bit old-fashioned (mimics in high pitched voice, attempted received pronunciation) 'and they all sat down to tea,' and they 'drink ginger beer!' (sniggers and shakes head. Long pause) We read upstairs when I go to bed. Mum comes and sits with me and we take it in turns… It's the best time.*

Mark's passion for books and reading together was clearly evident. His association of received pronunciation and old-fashioned text was interesting and I wondered if he would adopt other accents when discussing other books he had read. Marcia said that they *'put voices on'* when they read to each other at bedtime, Mark's *'best time.'* Marcia also looked forward to this time with Mark. She informed me that it was a very special time when they would talk about the book they were reading. She felt that this was important as it not only helped to improve Mark's reading but also kept him enthused about books. However, she also recognised that this time spent together was valuable in so many other ways. I learnt that it was at bedtime that Mark would share stories with his mum about his day. She would find out about his friendships, his successes and his worries. This time of closeness was important to them both, yet Marcia was beginning to worry about the appropriateness of reading to him, questioning whether or not he was too old and whether the selection of books was *'too young'* for him. But she did not want this routine to end… and neither did Mark.

Mark has a favourite author, David Walliams. During my initial visits, Mark informed me that David Walliams had written a new book that was *'due out soon…I can't wait! I'm going to have to get it as soon as it comes out!'* I wondered what it was about David Walliam's books that he liked:

> *Well I like good characters and when the author builds up pressure… and he does that.*

A couple of months after our initial meeting, I met Mark and his family quite by chance in town on the day that he bought the long awaited book. As soon as we stopped to say hello, he proudly whipped the book 'Demon Dentist' from its Waterstones' bag exclaiming, *'Look!'*

5.3   Initial Thoughts about Writing

> *I don't mind writing (pause). I don't really like the ACTUAL (Mark's emphasis) writing…I'm not very neat. I do try different ways to write but I don't like joining but I do like finding interesting words.*

Mark was quite direct during that first meeting. I was aware that he had been told by Marcia that I was interested in his writing. I felt that he had given some thought to the writing process, perhaps trying to pre-empt any questions I might ask. He was prepared, volunteering the above statement immediately following the consent process. I noted in my diary that Mark 'seemed to want to get down to business and needed little prompting.' However, throughout our conversation he continued to glance at Marcia for reassurance that he was doing and saying the right thing.

I was interested that Mark had described handwriting as '*actual writing'* but was clearly aware of author choice as a part of the writing process. I wanted to know a little more about his desire to find interesting words. The following is the response to the statement above:

Me: Do you?

Mark: Yes. I heard a really good one…no definitely not in school…what was it now (moves hands rapidly as he thinks)…perplexed. That was it and I thought I wonder what it means so I looked it up in a dictionary and used it. Let me show you (opens school book at example). Then I told Sister 2 and she said we could check it together so we looked the meaning up on the computer and I was right! (spins around on the spot saying 'perplexed' in different ways – adjusting the stressed syllable and dynamic). I really like that word.

Mark recounted this event in the presence of Marcia, Younger Sister and me, barely taking a breath. The excitement and pride in identifying an unfamiliar word and using a dictionary to define it before going on to use it in his work, was unmistakeable. Younger Sister nodded during Mark's retelling, confirming his version of the story and adding how they had looked on the computer together after school to see if he had been right. She was impressed by her brother commenting how *'it was good that he wanted to do it'* (check the meaning and use the word). I probed a little more trying to find out how Mark went about finding such words. Mark became a little flustered. In my research diary I noted that:

It was as if he thought there should be a correct response to my question. However, despite the apparent anxiety, his response suggested that he liked the sound of certain words when they were spoken. I wondered if this was another reason for him enjoying his reading time with his Mum… being able to hear a story.

(Research Diary, 24/07/13)

Mark decided to get his school books to show me the piece of work in which the word 'perplexed' appeared. In doing this he took control of the situation in the kitchen. Mark had written:

> The Man felt worried because he
> didn't know where his family, and
> friends were ... ✓
>
> The Man felt confused when he
> saw the strange creature so he
> walkeed Quickly away. ✓
>
> Ⓥ The Man felt perplexed when he saw
> the creature. He thought it was an
> alien or was it a Mouse? ✓

This writing was in the form of a series of sentences which had been produced in response to looking at the cover and reading the blurb of Shaun Tan's book 'The Arrival'. As I glanced at his writing, I could see evidence of Mark the reader; his use of ellipsis in his first sentence, the positioning of the adverb 'quickly' in his second sentence, and the posing of a question in his final sentence. Mark pointed at the word perplexed and exclaimed, *'I can't believe I missed the 'ed'! Can I go and play now?'* The 'v' in the margin suggested that his teacher had spotted it, as in the classroom code 'v' related to vocabulary, but the marking did not have an impact on Mark. He made no reference to it at all.
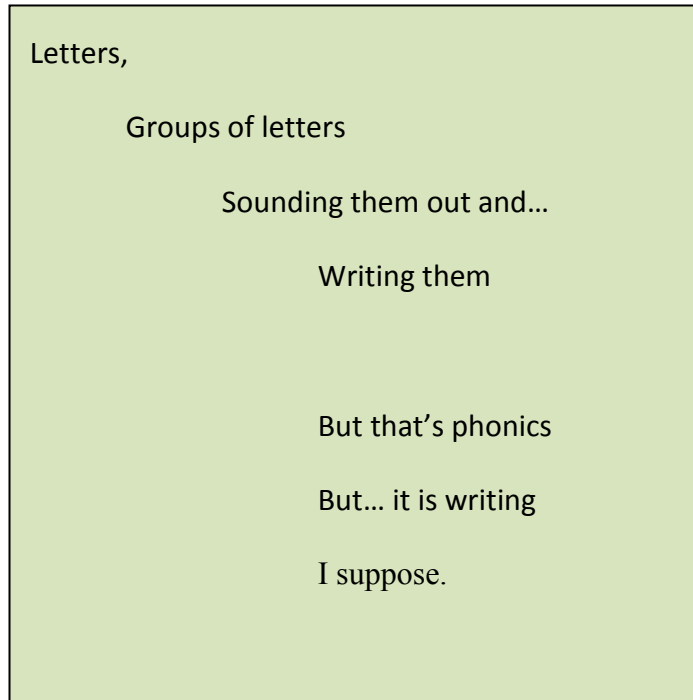
Mark's request to play signified the end of my initial meeting with Mark. As he got off his chair I asked him if he would mind me visiting his home again to talk to him. Thankfully he did not have a problem with this. He turned to me and said:

> *What do you want me to show you when you come? (short pause) Oooh I know, you can come and see the writing in my tree house!*

During that first visit he had shown me his books and he clearly felt that there needed to be a purpose to any subsequent visits. By making suggestions he was taking control over what would be the focus of conversation. This was a pattern

that was to be repeated as at the end of my second visit, he promised to show me his PlayStation and iPad.

5.4   Learning to Write

Letters,

 Groups of letters

  Sounding them out and…

  Writing them

  But that's phonics

  But… it is writing

  I suppose.

Marks earliest memories of learning to write were forming letter shapes in his Reception Class. He went on to describe phonics lessons in great detail although he did not refer to them as such, at least not initially. He told me that during the lessons he would be shown flashcards with, *'…a sound on them. We read the sound and had to write it.'* In his opinion that was all he did in Reception and Key Stage 1. It was at this point there was a realisation that his writing had been bound up in phonics lessons. As he spoke, he began to debate with himself about whether learning phonics was learning to write, concluding that you had to *'be able to write letters and spell but…(unfinished sentence)'* the unspoken message showing an awareness of the complexity of the writing process and the fact that writing was more than handwriting and spelling.

The discussion about learning to write and early memories of writing took place during my second visit. Mark was talking to me at the kitchen table. Marcia was at the worktop across the kitchen. She commented that they had always done writing at home too. Mark nodded in agreement.

5.5   Writing at Home

I do write but I do much more reading than writing

Mark writes often at home. In addition to his homework, which usually consists of spelling or grammar exercises, Mark has work from a personal tutor. Mark initially had a personal tutor for mathematics as according to mum he 'struggles' a little. When I began my study with Mark, Marcia helped him with his English but as SATS loomed in Year 6, she was concerned that his predicted assessment level was a little low and had also appointed a tutor for English. Marcia thought for a moment and made a comment about her two daughters' experiences of primary school as if to justify her decision:

> *Somehow it was different then. The school has changed. They seemed to get on much better with their teachers. They seemed to do more writing…*

However, the concern about Mark's ability was not simply to improve his current performance, it was also linked to his future wellbeing. His parents wanted him to be successful and to achieve to the best of his ability in primary school, as they were aware that children were grouped on their reported SATS performance when they arrived at secondary school. They were worried that if his performance was low then he would be grouped with people who did not want to learn and who may be disruptive. If this was to happen, at best Mark might not feel comfortable or able to learn, and at worst Mark might be led astray by an unruly group. As Marcia said, *'Mark is not streetwise in any way.'* She was also worried that his current teacher's opinion of him might go on to influence the secondary school's grouping of children, as she said, *'I don't think Mark's teacher understands him...she sees him as the*

class-clown…she doesn't think he's interested in work.' I was able to empathise and understand her anxieties which were centred around Mark being happy.

One afternoon during the school summer holidays I spoke to Mark about having tutors that gave him extra work:

> *Well they are just there to help me. I just do it. Actually last night I did maths with my tutor, then Mum made me read five chapters of my book! I'm going to play! Bye! (turns briefly) Oh, I'll show you the PlayStation when it's plugged in.*

Mark was resigned to the fact that he would have to work with his tutors, however, as he spoke about the previous evening, there was a realisation of how much work he had done. Mark obviously felt that he had earned some playtime and he was not going to loiter and talk to me. He was off to the sanctuary of his playroom. My topic of conversation had sent him away but it had also revealed much about Mark's compliant nature. His response also suggested that he may occasionally read under duress. This had not previously been evident, as he had enthused about reading, but his use of 'made me' suggested that he had not read by choice. I wondered if it was due to the fact that he was not enjoying his current read, or to the fact he was tired after completing his mathematics work. I was about to learn from Marcia that it was something completely different.

Marcia produced an A4 sized workbook in which Mark had written a number of short synopses of books that he had read with her:

> *I make him write about the books we read so I know he's understood them (pause). Is that bad?*

She was clearly worried about her actions and was looking for reassurance from me. I could sense her anxiety. I suggested that she should ask Mark if he minded doing this. She did. *'No'* and a smile was the simple response from Mark, although the raised eyebrows suggested otherwise.

5.6   Writing in School

Some rules:

Plan your work.

Use good VCOP.

Anything less than three sentences is **NOT** a paragraph.

Use two or three adjectives.

Write neatly.

Join up.

Say it, spell it!

Plan. You must plan.

I always plan.

Mark, Marcia and I sat together in our usual places at the kitchen table, literacy books and topic books stacked in front of us. Mark was calm and wanted to share his school books with me. However, this had not been the case a couple of minutes earlier. Mark had rushed inside after falling off his bicycle. He was quite distressed and calling for Marcia. He had hurt his arm, an arm that he had previously broken and he was worried that it might have happened again. He cried, clutching his arm and running on the spot. Marcia gave him a hug, checked his arm and reassured him that he was fine. She guided him to his usual seat next to me and gave him a drink and a biscuit.

This was not the first time I had seen Mark's books, but it was the first time that Mark was going to talk to me specifically about writing in school.

<u>Beginning with planning</u>

Throughout our conversations about writing in school, it was the word 'planning' that was continually repeated. Mark considered planning to be the most important part of writing:

> *'after all how would you know what to write if you didn't plan? Like this we*
> *did on Africa…*

> *So in the middle I wrote Africa. We write the idea, or the thing we are writing*
> *about in the middle and then we list the vocabulary around the side that we*
> *are going to use. Then we think about how we are going to join everything*
> *together. Actually I've done better ones (long pause). I think it is best if I*
> *actually show you.*

At this point Mark adopted a teaching role. He grabbed a loose piece of paper from his book that had a list of words written in pencil on one side. The words represented a list of vocabulary that Mark had wanted to use but had struggled to spell and we went on to discuss these on another occasion. For the purposes of the demonstration, Mark flicked the paper over to its blank side and asked for my pen. I passed it to him and dug another from my bag for my use:

So remember when I told you about my favourite word, 'perplexed'? (Mark begins to write) Well that was when I was writing about 'The Arrival', sooo I would write the word 'arrival' here (rings word to create a central hub). Then I would write the vocabulary we are going to use so I would write 'perplexed' (adds a spoke and starts to write perplexed) and under pressure for example (adds a spoke and writes the word under and pauses). I can't spell pressure…if I can't spell they (teachers) tell me to say it and write what I hear…

At this point Mark paused and said the word pressure. He attempted a spelling. He repeated this process once more and then asked Marcia and I to say the word. Following our soundings, he had a third and final attempt and wrote 'preasure'. He had broken the word into syllables and had provided a phonetic representation. He acknowledged this by saying, '*they (the letters) make the sounds so they will do.*' Mark was not at all anxious about his spelling, although he recognised that he found it difficult, and we went on to talk about this later. However, following the short diversion, Mark quickly and confidently returned to the planning process, drawing three more spokes from the central hub:

So when we've done the vocabulary we need to think about punctuation so I list the punctuation I am going to use like this (writes a series of punctuation marks to the right of the bottom hub). Then I need to think about paragraphs (writes 'para' next to another spoke). Ooh another good thing to think about is simile. They (teachers) like it when you use simile (writes word 'simile' next to the punctuation marks).
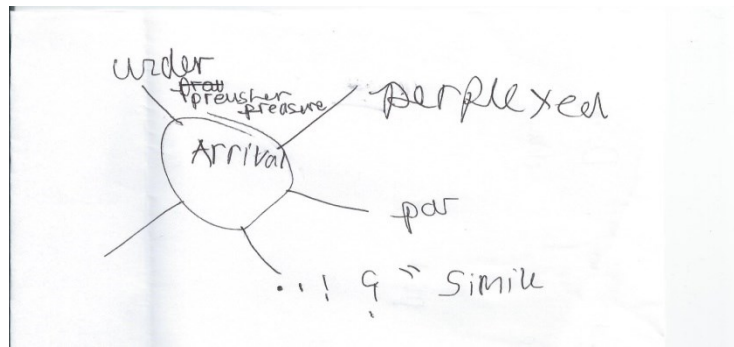
Until this point Mark's demonstration had been very precise. It had been delivered slowly with an air of confidence. He was aware that he was teaching me a process. Throughout, he had glanced at me for an acknowledgement that I understood each step. His use of the first person and the ability to switch from first person plural when explaining a step in the process, to first person singular to highlight a specific example had been very effective. He had joined most of his handwriting, deliberately, as he was talking, to provide a visual representation. However, the word 'simile' was an afterthought and it was written quickly. For Mark, speedy writing resulted in a printed form. I was interested in why he had decided to include 'simile' in 'punctuation':

> *It's not punctuation. It was just the nearest bit (on the paper) to write on and I didn't want to forget (Mark resumes his teaching mode). When we've got all our ideas, we think about how we are going to join them together. That's it!*

From planning to writing

> *We write everything in school...everything.*

Mark informed me that his class had to do lots of different '*types of writing*', in fact in his opinion they wrote *'everything.'* The broad range of genres was evidenced in his books. I wondered if this presented a problem to Mark, as there were a number of unfinished pieces. Did he struggle to generate ideas or with the structure of a particular genre, or was there one genre of writing that he particularly liked? I was

aware from my own experiences as a teacher that generating ideas for an unfamiliar topic or genre could pose a problem. However, as we shared his books he spoke confidently about his approach to his work:

> *I don't have a problem getting ideas…no not for anything I write. I always know what I want to write and planning helps me order them (ideas)…I do have a problem with not being given enough time. You spend ages planning and writing and there is not enough time to get it finished… It makes me feel sad, like the teacher isn't really interested in what you have done. If they were really interested they would allow you to finish (pause). Wouldn't they?*

Mark's emotions were clear. He was saddened and confused by the attitude of his teachers and he did not feel valued. I also felt sad, and a little embarrassed as Mark was talking. As a teacher I too had been guilty, on occasion, of not allowing sufficient time for children to complete a piece of work. I did not know how to respond.

I probed Mark a little more about where his ideas come from, *'I don't know. They are just in my head.'* However, Mark did inform me that any writing they did at school was as part of a topic so all of the class knew about the subject because they *'did it all the time.'* The mantra of VCOP (vocabulary, connectives, openers and punctuation) underpinned the whole writing process, including the all-important planning. He mimicked his teacher, saying in a high-pitched voice, *'We must think about VCOP.'* For Mark, to *'use good VCOP'* was another very important rule, one that also informed the planning process as he had preciously explained. For Mark, it was vocabulary that was most important and it was *'finding good words'* that was time consuming, but enjoyable. One aspect of VCOP that Mark was less enthusiastic about was connectives. For Mark, 'connectives' was not simply about selecting an appropriate conjunction or phrase. Mark recognised 'connectives' as referring to cohesion[2] in its entirety and talked about organisation and paragraphing.

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[2] Cohesion refers to the grammatical and lexical linking within a text.

Mark: The teacher says I must work on paragraphing. She says that a paragraph has to have more than three sentences (pause) mmm…

Marcia: She does. Look she's written it here (shows a handwritten comment in Mark's book which states: Less than three sentences isn't a paragraph.) That doesn't seem right.

Mark: Some paragraphs are short only a sentence. I've seen them.

Marcia: It doesn't seem right, does it?

Mark: (Directed to Mum) But I'll just have to do it.

Mark questioned this advice as indicated by his thoughtful *'mmm'*. His reading experiences led him to believe otherwise. Marcia too was baffled by the imposed rule, and in our conversation looked for an agreement from me. But Mark realised that despite the confusion and apparent disagreement, he would have to conform if he was going to be successful in his school setting. It was just another rule.

<u>Transcriptional skills</u>

Mark felt confident about the compositional aspects of writing. However, the skills of handwriting and spelling presented more of a challenge. As we talked about writing he commented frequently about the difficulty of joining letters and maintaining a neat style of handwriting. Joining letters was the one aspect of writing that he did not like. He had tried to find a solution by trying *'different ways to write'* but he had not been successful. He remarked*, 'it doesn't matter what I do I'm still not very neat'.* Mark liked to be neat. Being neat was a writing rule. As well as experimenting with styles, Mark also experimented with different tools. His preferred tool for writing was a pencil because as he said, *'I'm neat with a pencil.'* However, this was not an option in school. Either a fountain pen or a school handwriting pen had to be used for all writing. It was a rule.

Spelling was also an issue, in fact it was the only aspect of writing that caused Mark to *'worry sometimes'*. It was evident from his books that he relied heavily on a phonic strategy but not in its simplest form. He was aware of a complex alphabetic code and various graphic representations of a phoneme. However, I was surprised

that, as a reader with an interest in words, he was not obviously drawing on morphemic[3] or graphemic[4] strategies to spell and wanted to find out more about his approach to spelling. As we talked he reminded me of his teacher's mantra, *'say it, spell it!'* As Mark presented with a slight speech impediment, this caused him further problems. In one case he had written the word 'weafer' instead of 'weather'. On another occasion he wrote 'duawing' and the teaching assistant had written 'drawing' and 'during' above his attempt. He had been attempting to write 'during' and he had written what he had heard when he said the word. As he recounted the episode, he sounded 'dur-wing.' Spelling was frustrating. The vocabulary was in his head. He was attempting to write the words but his attempts were often incorrect, and he knew it. It was frustrating because as Mark said *'I like to be certain about what I write.'*

Neither the handwriting nor the spelling issues presented as barriers to writing. Mark was still confident in his ability to write. Nevertheless they did represent an irritation, as the difficulties he experienced impacted on his final result and the certainty of producing a good quality piece of work.

Setting targets

Mark's school had a policy to provide specific learning targets for every lesson. These were presented in the form of 'WALT' (What are we learning today?) statements next to which there were two boxes for assessment, one to be completed by the teacher and one to be completed by the child. Therefore, every piece of work in Mark's books was preceded by a WALT assessment sheet, firmly stuck onto a new page, which was completed by the teacher and child after the lesson. This was also used for target setting and Mark informed me that he was encouraged to set himself a target at the end of most lessons. Mark and his classmates also had to highlight *'good VCOP'* at the end of each lesson using a colour coded system. According to Mark you could see *'if you weren't doing it (using*

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[3] Morphemic – drawing upon knowledge of morphemes, that is units of meaning in a word that have a fixed spelling in English.
[4] Graphemic – the visual presentation of letters to represent a phoneme.

good VCOP) then.' At the beginning of the academic year, Mark had completed these sheets religiously at the end of each lesson. He had also set himself targets for the next lesson. Highlighting *'good VCOP'* had proved to be problematic. Mark showed me a particularly interesting example that had involved re-writing the opening of the story 'The Arrival.' He had been guided through the VCOP highlighting process at the end of the first lesson by the teaching assistant and had attempted it himself after the second lesson, which had been focussed on developing the story. However, as I listened to him talk about the process, I sensed both confusion and irritation at the process and the teacher's comments.

WALT: Use paragraphs / sections to organise ideas.	Me	Teacher
Steps to success.		
I have used our story mountain to think about the beginning of the story.	G	9
I have used 2a sentences.	G	9
I have written a paragraph to describe the beginning of the story.	G	9

Guided AP

Early, one gloomy morning a Man had to say, farewell to his beloved, happy family, as he left for a better life. AS he gave his one way ticket to the train driver he whisped to himself, "I don't want to do this!" Then the old express train rattled off heading in to the shadowy night. Was he going to see his family again?

I will use more exclamation

✓

★ Well done

Day 1

As we shared the two pieces of work it became clear that he was confident highlighting what he felt was *'good vocabulary'.* In Mark's eyes, good vocabulary was *'unusual and interesting words'.* He was also able to highlight the range of punctuation he used, commenting that he had *'missed some.'* However, the confusion arose when he had to colour code 'good connectives,' after all a 'good

connective' was often a 'good word' and sometimes a 'good opener.' This presented a dilemma. What colour should be used to highlight the identified word? As he spoke, Mark pointed to the word 'meanwile' (Mark's spelling) in his story as an example of such a word. He had made a decision to highlight it in 'blue' denoting 'good vocabulary' because he liked it even though it could be '*the other things as well.*' Interesting vocabulary was important to Mark, and vocabulary trumped the other VCOP categories.

WALT: Develop use of paragraphs to structure writing.		
Steps to Success	ME	Teacher
I have colour coded my use of VCOP from paragraph one and set myself a target to improve.	O	
I have thought about the build up for my story.	o	
With support, I have written the middle section of my story using paragraphs to structure my writing.	O	g
I have used 2A sentences with a comma in between my adjectives.	O	O
I have used simple and complex sentences effectively.	o	O
I have used capital letters at the beginning of sentences and a full stop at the end.	O	g

V
C
O
P

the train arrived in the dark, misty, Station. The was strolling sadly, to the harbor giving the dusty, ticket to the captin. Looking at strange, sea sick poor people, Meanwile his family, where they were crying their eys out, while he was in his caib he looked at a picture that his daughter had done for him to remember her and his wife. He reconis he might not even see his family, again.

✱ Great effort
6C3 I thought you were going to try to use !

sp eyes
cabin

using good openers.

Day 2

Mark talked about setting himself targets. After writing the opening to his story he had, with support from a teaching assistant, set himself a target to use more exclamation marks. After writing the continuation to his story, his teacher had written a comment, 'I thought you were going to use more!' I wondered why this had been written:

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She wrote that because of my target… (tuts) I couldn't have used more (exclamation marks) in what I had written. It didn't need them.

Mark had just re-read his work to me as a part of the VCOP discussions. He found the comment made by his teacher mildly irritating, as shown by the 'tut.' However, Mark spoke in a very matter of fact way and was clearly confident in his ability to use exclamation marks, if they were needed. The lesson he learnt from this experience was to be careful about *'what you put as a target.'* In fact Mark stopped setting himself targets when he realised that he was not going to get into trouble if he did not bother. Mark also stopped self-assessing against the WALT targets, unless he disagreed with his teacher's assessment of his performance. Mark told me that there was an assessment coding where 'O' equated to outstanding, 'G' to good and 'R' to re-do or re-visit. On occasion, he would confidently grade himself as 'outstanding' as opposed to her 'good.' He was using the system to challenge the authority of the teacher.

5.7   Technology and Writing

It isn't really writing it is talking that's typed

Mark had access to technology at home and it was beginning to play a greater part in his life. In school access to technology was limited. Mark informed me that he sometimes uses a computer to write up his work and then it is stuck in his book. As we searched his literacy and topic books he found only one example to show me, a piece of persuasive writing promoting tours to Africa. Like much of his work, it was unfinished but he told me that he had enjoyed *'playing with the different font styles.'* As much of the content was taken from brochures Mark described the activity as 'copying' rather than writing, however, I wanted to probe a little deeper to establish why font style had been important to him. Mark informed me that he had been looking for a *'posh'* font style because his promotion was for *'adventures done in-style.'* He had tried different ones but the one he had selected for the title *'was best.'* Mark traced the loops in the title as he was talking suggesting that the

loops were the key feature. I wondered why he had changed the font in the opening paragraph but I did not need to ask. Mark went on to tell me that:

> *The next bit is really important so I wanted to use capital letters. That (font) was better for all capitals…I can't remember if I was going to change the rest or just leave it.*

I commented on the picture of a deserted beach. Mark informed me that he loved going to the beach and would love to go to the one in the picture. That was why he had chosen it.

Mark used technology at home in a very different way. At home he had access to a PlayStation and an iPad. He did not have a mobile phone. I wondered if he used them to write and so asked the question:

> *Me: Do you use them to write?*
> *Mark: What do you mean?*
> *Me: Well do you play games with your friends and type messages?*
> *Mark: Yes and I can speak to them (pause) well type things to them.*
> *Me: That's what I mean. You write messages to them.*
> *Mark: I type things to them…I'll show you next time you come*.

For Mark, typed messages represented speaking to friends, not writing to them. His question, in response to my initial question, highlighted this fact as he was clearly unsure of how the technologies could be used to write. His final statement was made to correct my understanding, with the unspoken meaning of the aside of '*I'll show you…'* being, I'll need to show you so that you understand the difference between typing and writing. We agreed a date and time.

I arrived at Mark's house ready for my PlayStation tutorial. As I entered the hallway, Mark burst out of his playroom and announced*, 'I can't show you my PlayStation because the plasterers have taken the sockets off…I'll show you my iPad.'* Marcia apologised for the *'state of the place'* and invited me into the kitchen. There was no

need to apologise. She made a cup of tea and explained that the family were going away on holiday the next day so she was a little preoccupied and Mark was very excited. Younger Sister joined us for tea and as she took a seat, Mark ran into the kitchen, iPad in hand, excited as promised.

Mark's parents had imposed rules about technology use. The rules related to the amount of time Mark could spend on his PlayStation, accessing the Internet and texting. As Marcia said anxiously and without taking a breath:

> He doesn't go on-line or anything we don't believe in it but we do let him play over the Internet with a couple of other friends…He doesn't text message.

There were two key reasons for these restrictions. Firstly, Mark's parents were keen for him to be active and to take part in a range of activities that were '*better for him*'. Secondly, and more importantly Marcia was very anxious about e-safety and the people and content that Mark might access on-line. Therefore, it came as a great shock to her when Mark announced that he had just had a text message on his iPad. The conversation went as follows:

> *Marcia: No you don't (text message) we don't let you.*
> *Mark: I've just had a message now*
> *Marcia: What?*
> *Mark: From D (Cousin)*
> *Marcia: Mmm That's just your cousin.*
> *Mark: Yeah but it IS text messaging.*
> *Mark and his sister confirmed that Mark was using the iMessaging service on the iPad. His sister informed their Mum that it was the Apple texting service.*
> *Marcia: So he can text anyone?*
> *Younger Sister: Yes if they are on Apple.*
> *Marcia: Oh! (loudly) I had no idea!*

The reaction was one of horror and Marcia was visibly shocked. Mark looked from Marcia to his sister and smiled at me. He sensed the awkwardness of the situation and wanted to reassure me. I was keen to talk to Mark about his text messaging but was also aware that I needed to be sensitive to Marcia's feelings and values. Therefore, I took the opportunity to ask Mark if he would like to share his message. I felt that this would allow Mark to demonstrate text messaging and that in doing this, Mum would be reassured.

Mark informed us all that he had been receiving messages from his cousin, who was on holiday in Devon. Jumping up and down he said:

> *That's where we are going tomorrow…Guess what…he's won NINE prizes in the arcade…look (Sits down next to me and shows iPad - Marcia and sister look over my shoulder)*

Mark then engaged in a text messaging conversation with his cousin. Throughout the conversation he provided a commentary. Sometimes this was indirect in the form of talking to himself, on other occasions he directly addressed us as an audience and prompted a discussion. He was enjoying being the centre of attention.

iMessaging

Mark resumed his text conversation with his cousin, commenting on his winnings at the arcade. The written text is shown in bold and his spoken comments are shown in italics (written in bold). My notes are shown in brackets.

> *Mark: **That's good** oh look it's self-corrected.* (Mark had typed thats).
> *Cousin: **Are you looking forward o coming tomorrow?** He's missed the 't' it doesn't matter.*
> *Mark: **Yep** I would not be allowed to use this in school because it's not correct English…its slang.*

At this point Younger Sister interrupted, *'Not even if you were writing a story?'* Mark responded with '*No.*' His sister sighed and shook her head in disbelief. Mark continued to type:

Mark: **I can't wait till tomorrow** *Would write until at school*

Mark's comments demonstrated a clear knowledge and understanding of standard and non-standard English. At school standard written English was the accepted norm, regardless of context. When he was iMessaging, Mark was aware that he could break the rules. He enjoyed breaking the rules and found the correcting technology a little frustrating on occasion, for example when he typed 'thats' . However, he also recognised the fact that such technology had benefits as *'you can't make spelling mistakes as the iPad gives you the spellings for words as you write them.'* Mark finished his conversation by providing his cousin with his family's estimated time of arrival the following day. He then sat there for a moment, uncharacteristically quiet:

'I'm just thinking about nothing…I want to show you something in a minute.

After approximately one minute of silence Mark began to hum to himself whilst scrolling up through previous messages on his iPad. *'There,'* he said pointing to one message. It simply read:

Gooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooood

There were 36 letter 'o's. Mark informed me that it meant *'REALLY (Mark's emphasis) good!'* He had wanted to teach me about this form of communication and his quiet time had indeed been thinking time. He had been thinking about which iMessage to select to improve my knowledge and understanding. He informed me that he would never write such a word in school. In fact he said '*I would never write extra 'o's if I had to physically write.'* This comment highlighted two key points. Firstly, for Mark, 'physical writing' or handwriting had to take the form of standard written English. Secondly, he was apparently making a connection

between writing with technology and 'physical writing'. I wanted to find out more about this connection.

As we had spent some time sending iMessages and speaking about the differences between using the iPad and 'physical writing' I asked Mark if he preferred to write on his iPad. I was surprised by his very matter of fact response:

> *Well it isn't really writing it is talking that is typed…it is different from writing…I don't plan what I type like I don't plan what I say. It just comes to me.*

For Mark the compositional aspects of writing that were so important in school were not part of his technology experience which was to hold a conversation via iMessaging. Therefore, his writing on the iPad was akin to speech. However, Mark did connect the process of typing with handwriting commenting that:

> *…typing itself is like handwriting…if I could choose I would prefer to write with a pencil because I'm neat with a pencil but the iPad doesn't allow you to make spelling mistakes so that's good…it takes time to find the letters on the iPad.*

The fact that Mark considered the advantages of each tool was an indicator of his positive attitude. However, as I had watched Mark type, I had been aware of his finger hovering over and around the keyboard, and of a non-descript vocalisation as he located letters, which suggested a sense of frustration. My observations and Mark's comment suggested that for Mark the disadvantage of using technology to transcribe was the unfamiliarity of the QWERTY keyboard and 'finding' the letters.

5.8 Secret Agent Mark

> *Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to use the camera and voice recorder at home to record top-secret information about your writing.*

I had visited Mark's home and shown Mark how to use the voice recorder and how to wind-on the disposable camera after each shot. He had not wanted to trial the equipment with me, instead he looked thoughtfully at the voice recorder, turning it over in his hands. I waited for his response. Was he going to accept my mission? There was a sense of relief on my part when he looked up at me and said *'OK I'll do it.'* It was mid-September and he had two weeks to complete his mission. I informed him that I was not going to make contact with him during that time. We shook hands to seal the pact and he smiled. I left the equipment with him, said goodbye and left. Well he left to go and play outside with his cousin. I chatted with Marcia who wanted to know exactly what he had to do. I informed her that this was Mark's mission and that he could choose what he wanted to photograph and talk about. There was no specific requirement. I left wondering how much would be Mark's own input.

It was a week and a half later that I met Mark, Marcia and Younger Sister in the food hall of a well- known retailer. We chatted. Mark showed me a new door plaque for his newly decorated bedroom door, and then smiling proudly, his new David Walliams book. It was then that Marcia informed me that the challenge I had set 'them' was really difficult because Mark was really embarrassed about speaking into the voice recorder. She told me that 'they' had to write everything down so that he could read from a script. Mark acknowledged that he was 'a bit shy' about using the equipment. After the conversation I felt disappointed that the mission had not been solely Mark's and also concerned that I had unintentionally put pressure on them as a family. My husband, who was with me at the time, commented that they wanted to get it right for me. Despite these concerns, I was still keen to establish what had been recorded.

Agent Mark had made 11 voice recordings and had taken 18 photographs. This was because he had taken multiple photographs of his tree house. Each voice recording, with the exception of that made in the tree house, began in the same way with 'Hello Julie, this is Agent Mark, and, with the exception of that made in the tree house, all ended with a polite 'goodbye'. The sense of each recording being scripted was obvious. Of the 11 recordings, 7 related to English homework and 2 to

mathematics homework. Occasionally there was audible prompting by Marcia or Sister 2. For example, Mark was explaining about writing down mathematics problems in which he had to take the area of one country away from another. In the background '*Give an example*' could be heard. Only 2 related to specific home writing activities. One was a card he had made for Younger Sister's 18th birthday using her favourite colours and his favourite writing tool, the pencil. The second was a visit to his tree house and this appeared to be the only truly independent input to his mission.

Inside the tree house

Mark had been keen to show me the inside of his tree house from the first that time I met him. I had been less keen, worried about negotiating the climb, although I had never admitted this. Mark must have sensed my anxiety and took the opportunity of having a camera at his disposal to show me this personal space where Mark said '*only people I invite are allowed.*' I felt honoured.

The commentary is as follows:

> *Hello Julie. I'm in my tree house (pause). In here it says…err…members club only, Mark's pad and no entrance and (pause) err (pause) there's a piece of paper explaining who my spy group numbers are (pause) to spy on people erm…erm…goodbye Agent J.*

This message felt more personal than all of the others. He had addressed me directly in his opening and closure. He had also been confident enough to keep the recorder running through the moments when he had been a little unsure of what to say. These spaces had been filled with 'err' and 'erm' to give him thinking time. The fact that he had taken 4 photographs also suggests a keenness to show and to share his special space.

The photographs show writing formed from a variety of tools. The 'No Entry' is scratched into the bark of the central tree whilst 'MEMBERS CLUB ONLY' is crayoned in upper case onto the timbered walls and framed within a crayoned box highlighting the fact that it is an important notice. Beneath the notice, also crayoned in the same colour but in lower case, is 'Marks Pad.' There are other letters scrawled on the walls, but for Mark the notes relating to the ownership of the space and its function are what is important. Mark's 'spy group list' is written in his tool of choice, the pencil, on a piece of paper and is stuck to the wall with two pieces of roughly torn masking tape suggesting that this is very much a temporary document. I was disappointed that I could not see the content of the list due to the poor quality of the photograph.

The virtual visit to the tree house had given me a glimpse into a special place, Mark's private world; a small world where he was very much in control.

5.9 Looking Ahead

As I sat with Mark for the final time I hoped that he would share dreams about his future. We sat alone at the kitchen table. The rest of the family were watching television. He spoke about going to high school at the end of the year and I sensed that he was a little anxious about the change but was looking forward to *'doing lots of subjects.'* I wondered if he had thought about a future career, perhaps as a footballer, as I knew football was a passion. Mark smiled when I told him. I sensed he was humouring me. He took a deep breath and said in a very sensible and matter of fact way:

> *I have not decided what I want to be when I grow up but I know that if I want a good job I will need to go to university, like my sisters. They work really hard.*

He went on to say:

> *'It is important that I do well if I want to go to university. That's why I don't mind doing the extra work for my tutor and for my mum. They are just trying to help… Writing is important (pause). School is important.'*

Then the moment passed. Mark suddenly said, '*Have I told you what I'm reading at the moment?'* In the middle of the sentence he leapt off his chair and went bounding up the stairs shouting, *'It's an Anthony Horowitz. I'm going to get it to show you!'* And he did.

6   Steven's Story: the worried writer

'Writing…it's tricky and I don't like making mistakes.'

I first met nine year old Steven on the corridor, outside my office. He was hobbling towards me on crutches with his mum following behind. He had badly sprained his ankle and was taking the day off school whilst he learnt to use his crutches. I commiserated with him but suggested that he should enjoy the attention and being pampered. I remember Steven smiling politely and his mum, Stephanie laughing and commenting that there would be no time for pampering. This was a brief but significant meeting that was to result in Steven agreeing to be a participant in this study, although at the time neither of us was aware of that fact.

It was a few months later, when I was chatting to Stephanie about the problems I was experiencing with gaining access to research participants' schools, that she suggested that Steven now in year 5, might be interested in taking part. Although in year 5, Steven had only been in the UK for 18 months and did not have English as a first language and I was concerned that taking part in the study may cause him to worry. However, as an academic herself, she stressed that the decision would have to be Steven's and that she would be careful not to influence him. However, she did inform me that he would probably delight at the chance, as Steven both liked to please and be seen as a grown up. Relieved at finding a potential participant, I did not hesitate in providing her with a study outline and parental consent form. She agreed to talk informally to Steven, and to report back his initial response which was that he remembered me from his visit to work when he had hurt his ankle, and that I had been kind, therefore he was happy to help. I thought that it was interesting that he saw himself in a position 'to help' and that there was somehow an element of reciprocity for my perceived kindness in his actions. Stephanie also presented me with an envelope in which there was a piece of writing that Steven had produced especially for me. This act suggested that he was keen to let me know both that he could write, and that he was willing to take part. Stephanie informed me that he had used the computer to research the content for his piece of writing.

She had not read it because Steven had asked her to pass it directly to me, but he had told her that it was about rare plants and that they were 'doing animals and life cycles in school'. Her actions provided a brief insight into the respect and trust this family had for each other. She also commented that he would probably be writing all of the time now in order to please me. I took the envelope into my office and opened it with eager anticipation. Before reading it I noted that the content would be loosely based on science work in school. The piece of writing was longer than I had expected and Steven had written in a joined handwriting
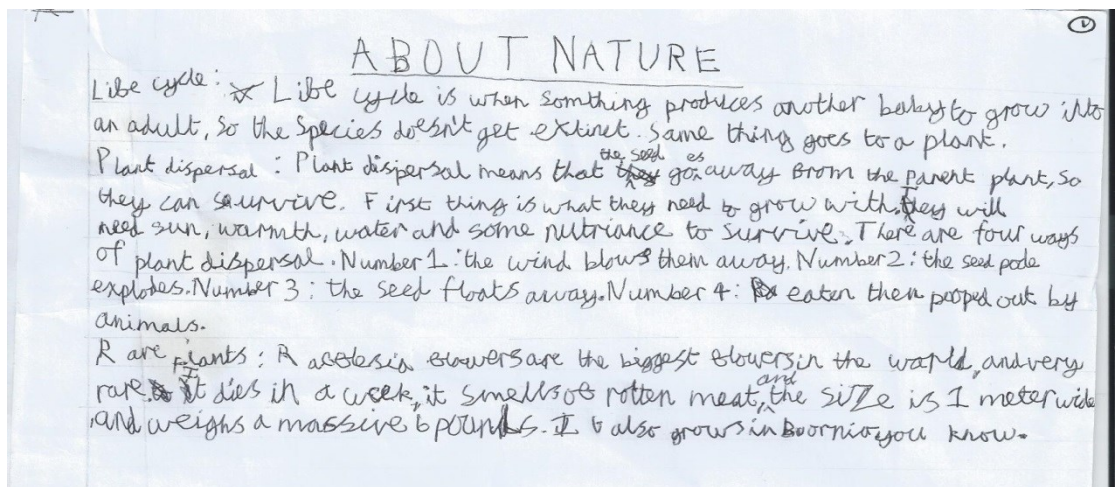
What immediately stood out was the final sentence, which was addressed directly to me as the reader. It suggested that Steven wanted to make me aware that he had a good general knowledge, the 'you know' implying that he may in fact be adding to my own knowledge. I also felt that his use of the word 'also' suggested that he was aware of other plants that grow in Borneo (spelt phonetically as Buornio). This made me consider that Steven may have a connection with the island. I hoped that I would find out during the time I would spend with him. As I looked more closely at the piece, I could see evidence of copying from his research source, for example the name of the flower 'Rafflesia'. However, much of the information was presented in a non-standard English form, for example the clause, 'so the species doesn't get extinct' and vocabulary such as 'pooped out.' I was aware that Steven was a child learning English as an additional language and I had expected some non-standard grammar constructions, however, his use of colloquial language suggested that Steven had good language comprehension skills and was

able to interpret and to re-present what he read, a feat that many children find challenging, as I know from my own experiences as a teacher. There was some evidence that he relied on phonetic strategies to spell e.g. 'nutriance' instead of nutrients and Borneo as previously described, but this was limited.

After reading this piece of writing, I dated it and put it carefully into an envelope. Although Stephanie had provided a context for the writing, I would take this with me to my first meeting with Steven so that I could thank him for his work and show that I valued his input. I hoped to use it as a starting point for our conversations. I sensed from his proactive response to becoming a participant, and from the content of the piece of writing, that Steven might be a keen writer with lots of experiences that he wanted to share. However, in order to establish if my initial thoughts were accurate, I needed to gain his formal consent, despite the implied consent provided in the form of his writing.

6.1   In the Beginning…meeting the family and gaining consent

I was working in my office when Stephanie popped her head around the door and told me that Steven had signed his consent forms. I had provided her with the forms as she had asked for as much information as possible about my project. Because of her research experience and her role within the university, I had not hesitated in handing the documentation to her. However, when I was told that they were signed, I remember feeling a little worried about the fact that I had not been with him. How sure could I be that he had not been coerced into agreeing to take part? This anxiety must have been evident in my face and demeanour, as she told me not to worry and that I could go through the process again with Steven myself when I had tea with him and the rest of the family the following week. This invitation came as a surprise. Of course I wanted to visit Steven in his home but I had not expected to be invited to tea with the whole family. Again, Stephanie must have been able to sense my surprise as she reassured me that tea would not involve her or her husband going to any trouble and that I would have an opportunity to talk to Steven alone and gain consent in person. Feeling somewhat relieved I agreed to the visit.

On 14th January 2013 I took the train to Steven's local station. Stephanie collected me and drove me and a car full of children to the family home. At the door she asked if I would mind taking off my shoes before entering the house as this was a tradition in Japan, Steven's home country. I removed my shoes carefully whilst the children kicked off theirs and ran past me into the house to greet their dad and half-sister who were inside.

Steven is the eldest of three children. He has a younger sister and brother. However, he also has four half-siblings from his parents' previous marriages, one of whom was living with the family at the time of my research. Steven's half-sister had joined the family whilst she studied for her 'A' levels, after transferring from a school in New Zealand. As I got to know Steven, I realised that this extended family is very important to him. When I visited him in his home he would often point out family members on the numerous photographs displayed about the house. He was particularly proud of becoming an uncle, an event that happened during the time I spent with Steven. However, as he pointed to the photographs I sensed a sadness, a sadness at being so far away from the people he loved for his family, with the exception of one set of grandparents an auntie and a cousin on Stephanie's side, lived in Japan.

Stephanie is English and Steven's father is Japanese, although Stephanie had moved to Japan with her first husband when they had both finished university. She had remained in Japan and had brought up her children there, only recently returning to England to take up the offer of a new job. This was not to be a permanent move but mum felt that it offered her youngest children an opportunity to experience her culture before returning to Japan. When I began my study, Steven had been in the country for 20 months. He had moved house and school once. This temporary move to England also presented an opportunity for her daughter from her previous marriage to join the family, and for her also to experience living in England. For Steven and his two younger siblings, having their older half-sister to come to live with them was very well received. Not only did she enjoy reading to and playing with the two younger children, she also chatted and shared her computer and other technology with Steven. Steven enjoyed her company.

In the home, for all of the family members, the language of choice is Japanese. Stephanie and Steven's half-sister would occasionally talk together in English if they were alone. Over the years Steven has heard his mum and members of his extended family using English but he has not been brought up as a bilingual child. This was particularly interesting as his father, also employed in the education sector, had some experience of teaching English as a foreign language. Until he arrived in England, Steven had never been formally taught to read and write English, although he had attended a kindergarten in New Zealand when his family were located there for twelve months. His half-sister, born to English parents but brought up in Japan, had not shown any interest in reading English books until she was in her early teens. Identifying with being Japanese was important to the whole family but for Steven, Japan was home. He would often remind me, *'I love it when we go home.'*

During that first visit to Steven's English home, each of the children vied for my attention. His brother, aged 5, jumped on me repeatedly. His younger sister climbed onto my knee with a book, pushing her younger brother out of the way, and asked if she could read to me. I felt a little overwhelmed. Steven's half-sister came to my rescue and grabbed his little brother holding him upside-down telling him to leave me alone. Steven looked on from his seat at the table with raised eyebrows, an expression that suggested his siblings were being childish and he was too mature to get involved. It was when his brother began to play with a recently rediscovered Nintendo DS that Steven joined in with a *'let me show Julie how you do that,'* and a brief scuffle ensued. This lively and competitive atmosphere was far removed from my own home experiences and by the time we sat down to dinner I was exhausted! However, as I got to know Steven I realised that this environment, his culture and his relationships with his family impacted on his approach to writing and attitude to school.

We sat down to an early dinner of a mild Japanese curry prepared by Steven's father. Stephanie explained that there would be a short blessing known as 'itadakimasu' before eating. This was traditional in Japan. Sitting down to dinner together was a part of the family's daily routine. There was a lively conversation at the table with the children slipping in and out of Japanese and English, for my

benefit. I noticed that I was surrounded by books stacked on the floor and by the children's drawings and messages stuck to the walls. The books belonged to Steven's father who was completing his PhD. Steven was clearly immersed in a language rich and literate environment in which all of the family's work was valued.

After dinner I was able to spend some time alone with Steven and go through the consent form. I thanked him for the writing that he had already provided for me. Looking down at the paper he asked:

> Was it OK? [the writing] I was not sure what you wanted... It was a bit scruffy really but I did try to be neat. I have to work on my presentation…That's what my teacher says.

I sensed his anxiety. He had wanted to please me. He had made a decision to write for me without being asked, anticipating my requirements, but this action had caused him to worry because he wanted it to be right. This worry about being accurate was a theme that we would return to throughout our time together. He was also clearly concerned about his presentation skills. This desire for affirmation and reassurance was an unexpected response. After all, my original thoughts about Steven during that first reading of his report 'About Nature' were of a confident individual who liked to take control. I hoped that as our relationship developed I would come to understand this apparent disconnect. We talked a little more about his piece of writing, me telling him how interesting it was and Steven telling me about his love of animals and Borneo. He wanted to talk:

> We used to go there on holiday when we lived in Japan. It is beautiful. My sister is thinking of going to university there. We would really like to go back there.

The importance of family and spending time together was evident in those couple of sentences. I was glad that I had taken the writing with me. It had highlighted some of Steven's hopes and fears and it had taught me a lesson, never to assume.

As we reviewed the consent form, I asked him if he would mind if I visited him at home again and also at school.

> *I know, mum has explained (the study). I'm happy to take part… I've written my name there look (points)…I don't mind doing this… (smiles). Of course you can visit again (smiles). My mum will arrange it (pause). You can come for tea again and I will show you our computer (smiles politely).*

In my research diary I had written that Steven was 'charming'. In fact he had a very calm and reassuring manner and I knew at that point that he would make sure that mum arranged the next meeting. However, that first meeting with Steven had provided me with a unique insight into his life, his culture, his familial relationships and his personality.

6.2   Interests

Steven is involved in a number of social activities both inside and outside of school. In school he is a member of the choir and he enjoys singing. He is also a member of the School Council, a position he takes very seriously. Stephanie was not surprised at him being elected so soon after joining the school:

> *The children must be able to recognise his steady nature, that's why they voted for him. He is very sensible and reliable.*

Steven spoke fondly of the very strong friendships he had formed with two girls and two other boys that he calls his 'group.' He described the operation of the group as if it was an organised club with members taking on specific roles:

> *We are really good friends. We decide we are going to do something and then we set each other tasks. It is good fun (smiles).*

I wondered what sort of tasks they set each other:

Well actually at the moment we are writing a book. 'G' had the story idea so she's in control. My task is to find characters…No I'm not actually doing any writing…I'm finding pictures of the characters on the computer. I am searching images of quite scary things… That's because I'm good at using the computer. The others have different things to do like designing a cover or helping her write…It would be good if we could get it published.

Steven spoke quickly and was clearly very excited about this latest project. As he spoke I sensed that his enthusiasm was linked to the project's potential success, which involved a collaboration in which he could focus on a task he was 'good at.' This expertise had been recognised by his friends. He was proud of this fact and yet relieved that he did not have to contribute to the written text, as he said, *'I don't actually have to write anything but we are all authors.'* To be published would be the ultimate measure of success and, for Steven, being published was an achievable target which brought together his child-world with that of his parents, both of whom had numerous publications. I was looking forward to following the project's progress as I got to know Steven.

Outside school, Steven has an interest in puzzles and chess. Both Steven and Stephanie consider him to be 'good' at chess. He also shared with me his enthusiasm for martial arts and Cub Scouts. As I listened to Steven talk about these interests I sensed a real passion, the word 'love' being used and emphasised to describe both activities, *'I **love** Cubs it is like an adventure…my friend has got loads of badges'* and *'I **love** jujitsu. I persuaded my mum and dad to let me go to the club with my friend…she's been going for ages.'* I sensed that the combination of fun and structure and being amongst friends really appealed to Steven. Having a clear hierarchy and expectations of behaviour were also important to him. He told me that one of the most important aspects of jujitsu was *'discipline…that's what you learn.'* For Steven, living in a village community meant that his in-school and out-of-school interests were inextricably linked as he socialised with the same friends.

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6.3   Steven on writing

What is writing?

Numbers…

I like writing numbers

And working out

I'm good at maths.

Handwriting …

is difficult and it hurts

It's hard to join up…

and be neat

      I have to work on that.

Spelling…

That's really tricky.

So many spelling patterns

I have to work at that.

Starting off…

is hard.

When I'm in the flow

I can keep writing.

But starting off is hard.

Do I like writing?

      In a couple of ways I do

      But not much.

6.4   Memories of learning to write

'I can't remember learning to write.'

Steven thought hard. He could not remember learning to write. This puzzled him and seemed to worry him. After a pause, he told me about the different schools he had been to:

> *I spent a year in New Zealand at a school… then I went back to Japan for a year to another school…and then we moved to England and I went to ___X__ school before I came to Y... I can remember learning to read and write some Japanese.*

As Steven shared his experiences of his early schooling, he spoke about moving with his parents because of 'their jobs'. As he remembered the different schools and their locations, including his current school, he talked about family events, for example his half-sister staying at school in New Zealand and the promise of European holidays on the move to England. Steven's memories of school were inseparable from the stories of his family. As he shared his experiences, he appeared to struggle with the fact that he had no specific memories of learning to write. It was as if he felt he should know. I reassured him that it was not the case and asked him about reading and writing in Japan, as this 'home' location provided his most detailed memories. He told me that it is different to English, that the writing is *'the other way round and in columns…I can still read it a bit.'* But he was unable to write in Japanese and had no memories of writing and this troubled him. I asked Stephanie about Steven learning to write Japanese, she informed me that he was just about to start before they left the country. She explained that the post-war Japanese Government had introduced a structured teaching method that began with children learning a simplified notation called 'hiragana.' Steven was beginning to do this in reading. Hiragana is based on spoken syllables in words rather than phonemes. More difficult Chinese characters are introduced as the child progresses through the phases of schooling.

His memories of writing in school in England were also limited. He spoke of reading and *'learning sounds'* suggesting that his memories are linked to phonics teaching. For Steven, learning English in an English school with a curriculum emphasis on phonics as the primary strategy for decoding and encoding, could have presented a problem as it was different to his syllabic experience in Japan. I hoped to explore this in more detail with Steven.

6.5   Writing in School

I worry about it…there's quite a lot to think about

I spoke to Steven about writing in school on the first of my three visits to his classroom. Steven had given up a part of his lunchtime to have a conversation with me. I had already observed a literacy lesson and we used that morning's activity as a starting point. Although polite and smiling, I could see that Steven was a little fed up as there were signs of a frown. I thought that this downturn in mood might be as a result of the camera being in the classroom, but I was wrong.

Steven was a member of a large mixed year group class of 37. Steven's current teacher was a supply teacher who was covering the class for the summer term. Steven described the teacher as being *'different'* to his class teacher and lessons as being *'not the same'*. As Steven spoke, I sensed that this was not a positive difference, his voice constricted. Steven told me that they had written lots of different things in the past including stories, poems and reports but he said, *'I'm not sure what we are doing now.'* For Steven, a boy who liked routines and structure, this was clearly very difficult. I thought back to that morning's lesson.

The supply teacher had introduced the literacy lesson by providing a brief introduction to the George Orwell novel, '1984.' Using a prepared PowerPoint presentation, he went on to link '1984' to the contemporary television programmes 'Big Brother' and 'Room 101.' *'Does that ring a bell?'* he asked. A murmur had gone around the classroom with a couple of children shouting *'yes!'* The majority,

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including Steven looked at each other, puzzled. Steven shrugged his shoulders and leant across to his friend and whispered, *'No'*. The supply teacher offered a suggestion of rats being consigned to Room 101 as, *'they are revolting and spread disease'*. 'So now you are all going to select three things that you would consign to Room 101,' said the supply teacher. He suggested they talk to their partner to *'explore ideas'*.

Steven sat for a while. He looked around. Then he tentatively put up his hand. There was no response. He put his hand down. He turned to the girl sitting next to him for clarification of the task. *'I'm not sure,'* she said, *'but I don't like teddies and you don't like somersaults.'* Steven wrote 'somersault' and 'teddy.' He sat looking at the piece of paper in front of him. He half put up his hand, his arm bent at the elbow. He was not convinced that 'somersault' and 'teddy' was right. There was no response from the supply teacher. Steven put down his arm. He chatted to the other three children on his table. They were listing things they did not like. Steven caught my eye and beckoned me over with his hand.

> *Julie, what do we have to do? We **don't know** (Steven's emphasis).*

Steven was clearly distressed. There was a sense of urgency in his voice. Although it was Steven that was anxious, he spoke for the whole table, using the first person plural. The others were not absolutely sure of the task but they had decided on a way forward in identifying things they disliked. For Steven, this decision posed a problem. It might be the wrong decision and he needed to be right:

> *Julie please can you explain…I've tried asking Mr X but he doesn't come over. Please help.*

 I checked with the supply teacher that it was acceptable for me to discuss the task with Steven. I had not wanted to be directly involved and felt a little awkward, however, I felt obliged to help as he was clearly distressed. Following my explanation Steven said:

> *I think I'll start again (pause). I really hate violence (long pause).Oh but I like martial arts and they can be quite violent.*

Steven had recognised a potential tension in his thinking. I suggested that he could think about how they were different. He could talk to his partner about it. Steven thought that was a good idea and began an animated conversation with the children on his table. As he talked he crumpled the paper on which he had written 'somersault' and 'teddy.'

He took another piece of paper and hurriedly wrote the following;

The piece shows a renewed confidence as he not only lists his choices for Room 101, but justifies them. The work was rushed and was not thoroughly checked, although there is evidence of some editing in the form of crossings out. It shows an overuse of the apostrophe. Steven is aware of how to use it for a contraction as in 'there's', however, he also uses it when pluralising a noun e.g. 'pet's' and 'art's.' There is also evidence of a phonetic spelling of defence. I talked to Steven about this work after the lesson. As he spoke he confirmed his initial anxieties but that he had *'felt better when he knew exactly what to do.'* We discussed the use of the apostrophe, something he admitted to finding *'a bit confusing'* but he was *'getting*

better.' I was curious as to how he had segmented 'diffence' to arrive at the spelling.

It's 'dif-fence…that is how you say it.

Steven had returned to the Japanese syllabic method, but had considered the phonemes within each syllable.

I wondered how Steven had arrived at the three choices, so far removed from somersaults and teddy. All were linked in some way to survival.

When I put somersaults and teddy, I did not know what I was doing. When I knew, I thought about real things (pause) not childish things…I would put death at the top of my list… definitely death. I really don't want any of my family to die.

There was a real sadness in Steven's voice. Death was another worry for Steven.

It was the day's activity and Steven's thoughtful response that had brought about his downturn in mood. We chatted about his little brother, who Steven describes as being *'naughty sometimes, not like me,'* and this seemed to lift his spirits. Steven was keen to be considered the sensible child, as his mum had suggested. As an aside I said:

Me: By the way, have you heard of the television programmes Big Brother or Room 101?
Steven: No
Me: They are on at 9 or 10 o'clock at night
Steven: Oh that's why then (pause) it's too late. I'd be in bed then and we don't watch much television anyway.

Steven seemed relieved that there was a good reason why he would not be familiar with the programmes. I guessed that many of his classmates would also have been

in bed. The supply teacher had tried to connect with popular culture but it was not relevant to this group of children.

On my final visit to school, I had asked Steven if we could look at his writing book together. He had frowned and I suddenly realised that I had not seen Steven using a book, all of the writing I had observed had been done on paper. Steven clarified the situation:

> *We have writing books but this teacher makes us write on paper. Maybe they will be stuck in.*

Steven did not mind writing on loose pieces of paper but preferred everything to be neat and in one place. He shared his book with writing from earlier in the school year, and his most recent work on paper. We sat at a table together and Steven turned his book diagonally towards me. He did not directly ask me a question but the inflection and pause after *'recently'* suggested he was looking for a positive response as he said, *'My writing has improved recently (long pause).'* I nodded. *'It's a bit more neater. I've been working on handwriting,'* he said with a smile. Steven had moved from a mainly printed to a joined style and was feeling proud of himself. I could not help but notice that there were a number of unfinished pieces of work. I asked Steven about them:

> *Well there sometimes isn't enough time to finish. There is so much to think about…starting off is hard. I need time to think but when I'm in the flow I can keep writing but sometimes there is not much time left.*

As he spoke there was a sense that he blamed himself for the unfinished pieces. He seemed disappointed that he could not generate ideas more quickly in order to give himself more time. Until he did this, unfinished work was a fact of school life. Steven did not find *'starting off'* difficult for all genres of writing. However, he was keen to point out that the:

Hardest is when you are told what to write. I'm better when it is my own idea and I can use my own imagination.

I wondered if this meant he liked to write stories so I asked him to explain. He thought for a moment.

No it's not just stories. I mean my own idea, when it's not right or wrong because it is mine

Steven worried about being wrong.

6.6   Technology and Writing

*Using a keyboard is **much** easier than writing*

Steven attended a school that was well-resourced in terms of technology. I was keen to find out how this was used to support writing and was advised to speak to the teaching assistant in Steven's class, as she had been with the children throughout the year. I asked if we could have some time together after my classroom observations and she kindly agreed. We sat down together in an empty reading corner. The teaching assistant began talking immediately:

I'm so sorry, it's not usually like this, it's just that we haven't had a teacher for weeks. I've tried my best but…the class…you are not seeing it like it usually is.

There were few pauses. The teaching assistant clearly felt a need to explain so I let her talk. She went on to tell me that the supply teacher had a very different manner with the children than that of the previous teacher or indeed herself and that until he came she had been 'running' the class. His manner was undoubtedly authoritarian and I felt that there was clearly a tension between them. I wondered if this tension was beginning to affect the children. She went on to explain that

there were no longer any plans and that she did not know what she or the children should be doing. Her control had gone and she had no clear direction. Like Steven, she was floundering and needed to know what to do. I thought that this presented me with an opportunity to take her back to a time when there were plans for teaching and learning, as I hoped to find out how technology was used in school to support writing.

I learnt that there was a bank of laptops that could be booked out by the class teacher, but that these were never used for English. *'In English, well literacy, we do English…you know, proper English.'* I was not sure that I did know so I continued the conversation to find that 'proper English' was linked to skills and preparation for tests. The teaching assistant listed handwriting, spelling patterns, grammar teaching (in dedicated 20 minute slots for Year 6 from Christmas until SATs) before adding, as an afterthought *'reading and writing a range of genres.'* There was a clear emphasis on the transcriptional elements of writing in 'proper English' sessions. I was curious as to why the terms 'literacy' and English seemed to be used in an interchangeable way. On further discussion I established that the teaching assistant used the term 'English' to denote the content of sessions timetabled under the title of 'Literacy.' I was intrigued as to why the laptops were not being used to support the teaching and learning of English:

> *The computers are used for IT (pause). Well we do sometimes use them in literacy but only for children who struggle to write. The others have to learn to draft and redraft…no not using a computer.*

I was disappointed but not surprised that the laptops were seen simply as being a tool to support struggling writers especially as their use required a specific skill-set to use them effectively. This response also made me think of Steven, who was considered to be 'a more able writer' by the teaching assistant. Steven loved computers but if they were only used to support the less able he would never be allowed to use them to support his writing. I was saddened by this response but I felt that I needed to probe a little deeper to find out if the children were taught specific skills associated with word processing.

Well most children in this class can use computers. They don't need us to show them. Most of the children have access to Moshi Monsters, Club Penguin and even Facebook. You wouldn't believe it (pause). We do have a school E-Safety Policy (pause) for what it's worth.

The teaching assistant was clearly disapproving of parents allowing access to these social networking sites. However, the comment also highlighted her feelings of insecurity, of not being needed, of the children having a greater knowledge than her and other staff. If that was the case, what did the children do in IT sessions and how was the teaching of English kept separate in a school, which according to the teaching assistant, approached teaching and learning in a cross-curricular way? I wanted to find out more.

We have used a text like the Highwayman and the children have then used the computers to research it… you know about highwaymen, to take the poem into non-fiction… but that was done in IT…we just logged them on to the Internet. They know what to do. We didn't do it as English.

I knew that Steven would have enjoyed this activity. I had observed a cross-curricular mathematics lesson in which the children had worked in pairs to cost a holiday for the supply teacher, his wife and grandchild. The working partners had to select a location, hotel and flights. The supply teacher had provided a requirements sheet, on which was his budget and some web address details relating to low cost airline websites, for example www.easyjet.com.

Steven was very excited about this activity, an activity he referred to as a *'challenge.'* He told me that he was sending the family to Athens, as it was very interesting and he would like to go there. There were also low cost flights available from the local airport. This was a mathematics lesson, but as Steven said:

*We have to persuade Mr X to go. So I am going to find some really good pictures that will **amaze** him. I will also tell him about **all** of the interesting*

places he can visit…and how much it will cost. I should be able to get him a
good hotel. (Steven's emphasis)

Steven was clearly aware of his audience and the purpose of the task. He also understood the relationship between the written text and image in persuading his audience. For Steven a multimodal text was essential. However, this was a paired activity yet Steven paid no attention to his partner. For the first 25 minutes, Steven used Google to confidently source maps and photographs, his favourite being one of the Acropolis, and to import the images into a Word document. Steven's partner sat with his head on folded arms, kicking his feet through and against the legs of his chair. There was no discussion. In fact there was no interaction of any sort between them. I could not help but think how different this was to Steven's recounting of the collaboration between friends for the home-book project. After 25 minutes the supply teacher, with a raised voice, called across the classroom:

Steven, *are you* **hogging it** *(the laptop)? (Pause) You* **should** *be working*
together! *(supply teacher emphasis)*

Steven was embarrassed. He reddened but did not immediately involve his partner. In an act of uncharacteristic defiance he retained control of the laptop for a further 5 minutes and adjusted the font style and font size of his heading, 'Amazing Athens.' Only then did he turn the laptop towards his partner, who just sat and looked at the screen. Ten minutes later, Steven was using a calculator to add the cost of the different elements of the holiday. His partner was accessing websites, as instructed by Steven. Steven had control.

We spoke about the lesson afterwards. There had been a fault on the school system that had meant the children could not print or save their work. As I was unable to take a copy, I was keen to understand the choices Steven had made in terms of content and presentation.

I was looking for a really good font for my title. Something that looked posh
so he (the supply teacher) would think it was a really nice place to go to. I
chose a picture of that castle thing…what is it called…(pauses, looking up
and following my prompt) the Acropolis that's it…at night because it looks
much better lit up…The writing about the hotel (repeated my question) I
copied and pasted from a website…I changed the font style so that it looked
old… I just tried a few…it's an ancient place you know… I thought old would
be good… The best bit was the sums... That was the easy bit (sums)…You
know my Mum…she flies over there (Athens) on her way back to work (smiles
and bows head).

As Steven shared his experience there was a sadness in his voice. Stephanie had just
taken another job in Central Asia and was waiting for her family to join her at the
end of term. She had been returning home for weekends every few weeks but
Steven and his siblings were finding the separation difficult. As Steven spoke, he
lowered his head and his voice, but smiled in an attempt to disguise his true
feelings. He was going to be brave. We sat quietly for a moment:

That's how I knew about Athens…I looked on a map at where she was
working and how she got there. You know the places she flew over. It
(Athens) looks like a really interesting place. I would like to go there. Maybe
we could all go there?

Steven posed the question to himself. I was taken back to my first visit to his home
and him recalling the happy times they all spent together in Borneo. For Steven,
time spent together with his family was very important and under his current
circumstances, precious. The desire to be together was influencing the content of
his writing and his use of the internet. Stephanie's absence was a catalyst for
learning.

Steven's writing about Athens had not been his own in terms of content, but he had
made some significant choices relating to presentation that highlighted a clear
understanding of purpose and audience. I wanted to find out more about his

feelings on using a computer to write. I also wanted to distract him from Stephanie's absence as I could see that he had tried hard not to become upset in school. I posed a question, 'What do you prefer, writing with a pen or writing using the computer?'

> *Writing on the computer feels a bit (pause) more better (than handwriting). You see (wrings hands) you are not worrying about your handwriting. You can change the font style to make it look neat, and you can go quite quickly with a keyboard, and you don't have to do joined up...well I can (go quickly with a keyboard). My teachers tell me I have to work on presentation...I do worry about it...it's tricky...I don't like making mistakes.*

This was a clear message from Steven. His body language and the content of his conversation suggested that his anxieties about writing were confined to the transcriptional skill of handwriting. He was worried about joining, about neatness and about fluency and speed. The computer took those anxieties away and yet he was not encouraged to use a computer in school. Steven also made the connection between writing and word processing, perceiving the keyboard as another handwriting tool. I wondered how he had become such a confident and competent user of the keyboard. I hoped that I would find out.

On my second visit to Steven's home, I was taken on a tour of the computer, as promised. Steven had decided to share his attempts to source characters for his friendship group's collaborative book writing project. We sat together at the dining table, the laptop open in front of us. *'Mum!'* he shouted, *'it's in Japanese, I can't remember how to change it!'* Before Stephanie could reply, Steven decided he was going to try to rectify the problem and confidently took matters into his own hands. He turned to me and pointing at the screen said:

> *You see, the websites are in Japanese on the computer, dad's been on, but that is hard... I don't know enough so I learn the symbols so I know what to click on...The main symbols are in the same place as English ones...I keep forgetting how to change it to English...there!*

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Stephanie and half-sister both arrived at the same time to help. But it was too late. Steven had sorted out the problem. He explained to them how he remembered what he had to do and that to do it he memorised where the symbols where located to get to settings. They left us alone. Efficiently, Steven returned to the business in hand. He typed the web address for Google into the search bar on Internet Explorer. Being a slow, two fingered typist myself I was impressed at the speed with which he carried out that simple task. I told him so. He laughed and I felt that Steven was beginning to relax in my presence.

> *It's easy you just have to practise. You get to know where the letters are. Watch!*

I did as I was told. Navigating his way around the Google toolbar to images, he began his mission. After a couple of minutes of cutting and pasting pictures into a Word document he identified a problem.

> *Mmmm…I have just thought. I know that I have to find scary pictures but I don't really know what the characters are like…in the story…they may look wrong. I know what I will do. I'll print off what I've got and show them to the others so we can decide.*

Steven's thoughtful response, highlighted by the pondering *'mmmm'* suggested an awareness that there needed to be a clear link with the written text and the pictures, if the group were going to be successful in publishing their book. He was worried that he might make the wrong choice in identifying specific character images and was happy to defer to a democratic decision. This collaboration was very different from the lack of collaboration seen in school during the mathematics lesson. Exploring this further with Steven, I learnt that his lack of collaboration with the boy was the result of Steven's fear of failure. In Steven's opinion his partner in school was, *'not interested and was not very good at maths so I just did it.'* Steven had faced a dilemma. Carry out the instructions, work with a partner and potentially be unsuccessful or work independently and be accurate. He chose the latter but had not factored in the teacher's response to him not conforming to the demands of the

task. Reflecting on that moment, Steven displayed a momentary embarrassment and awkwardness as he talked about *'being told off.'* Nevertheless he was accepting of the fact that the teacher *'was like that,'* the unsaid being that the teacher often singled children out and raised his voice and that it was worth the moment of embarrassment to be successful.

6.7 Writing at Home

I don't do much writing at home, only homework

For Steven, writing at school was different to writing at home because in school, *'you get asked to write… so you do it.'* This statement proved to be very informative in terms of understanding my relationship with Steven. In the early days of our relationship, Steven clearly saw me as an extension of school, as somebody that he needed to write for.

During my first visit to his home Steven had asked me directly if I would like him to do some writing. This question was put to me as we were sitting together having examined the consent form and his initial impromptu piece of writing. I did not want him to feel under pressure but Steven clearly wanted to please.

Me: What are you going to write?

Steven: A sum (calls to step-sister)…Give me a sum so that I can write for Julie.

Steven and his half-sister settle together at the table. As I observed the siblings working together, I sensed a genuine closeness. Half-sister was smiling and giving random numbers and operations, which Steven was calculating in his head as she dictated. She turned to me and said, *'He's really good.'* Steven smiled proudly, asking for more numbers. The calculation is set out below and shows that Steven had used feint pencil markings to support his mental operations, for example 9 x 4 to support 99 x 4.

$21 \times 3 = 63 + 7 = 70 \div 10 = 7 + 92 = 99 \times 4 = 396 \div 3 = 132 - 64 = 68 \div 2 = 34 \times 4 = 136 \times 6 = 806$

$9 \times 4 = 36$

100
132
128
68
120
806
23

Home observation in response to "would you like me to do some maths?"

14/01/13
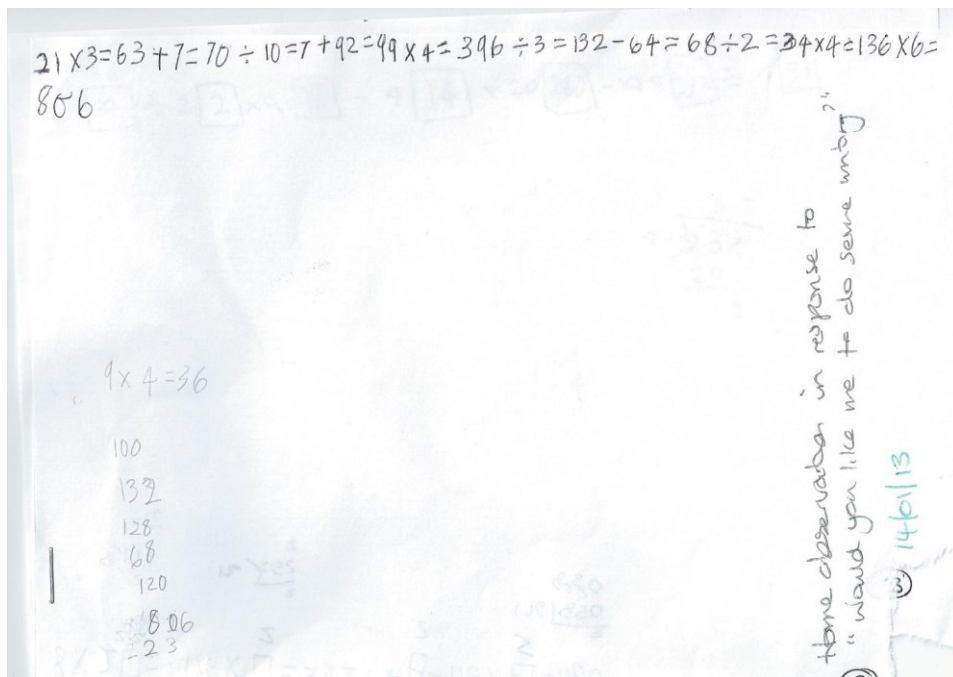
He passed it to his half-sister, who passed it to me. As I looked at the lengthy calculation Steven said, *'It's right*.' Although a statement there was a slight inflection in his voice, suggesting that he wanted confirmation. I suggested he checked it using a calculator, which he did.

He went on to complete another calculation. This time his half-sister had provided boxes for Steven to write in. Again workings can be seen below the calculation. The formation of each digit in this second calculation provided an indication of the speed with which it was calculated. The '4' in '14' and the '0' in '280' both show small uplifts as the pencil was removed from contact with the paper, with speed and confidence. *'Done!'* exclaimed Steven, *'how long did that take?'* He was very competitive when it came to mathematics.

$$4 \div 2 \boxed{2} \times 9 \boxed{18} - 4 \boxed{14} \times 20 \boxed{280} - 48 \boxed{232} \div 4 \boxed{53}$$

$$4\ \overline{)232}\ \ \ \ 53$$
$$\frac{20}{12}$$

$$\frac{232}{4}$$
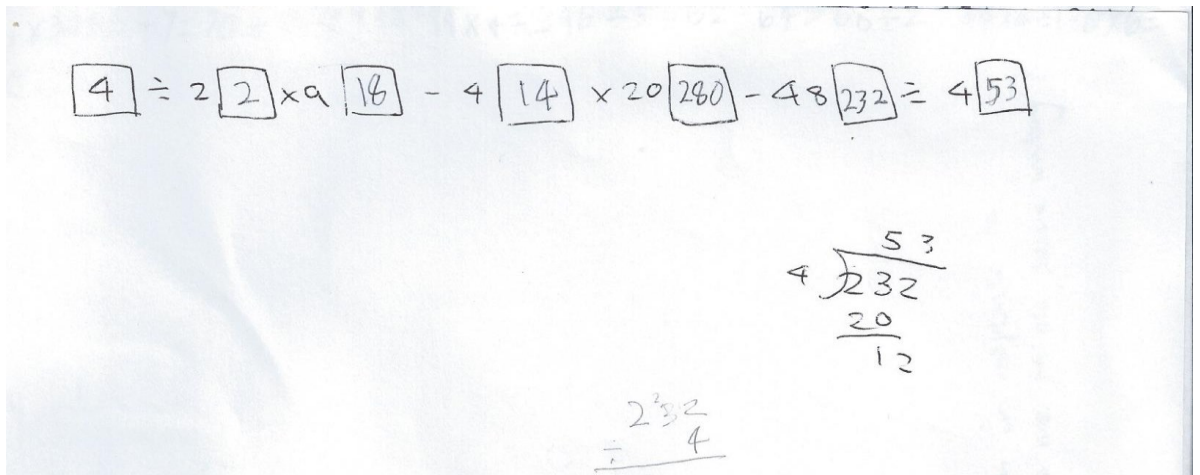
Steven had offered to write and this had taken the form of calculations. I knew that his interest lay in mathematics, after all he had told me that it was his favourite subject at school. He referred to mathematics often when talking about writing. I needed to probe further to understand Steven's link between writing and mathematics. I asked him why he had written numbers rather than words:

Why not… it's still writing. I am still using a pencil and writing on the page.

Over the months, Steven provided a number of examples of writing that he had done at home. Some of it was spontaneous, such as the weekly menu he provided for his dad to ensure that he was given his favourite food for his evening meal. In one example, written in pencil, there is a rubbing out next to Thursday's meal choice. Steven had changed his mind. He asked for sweetcorn rather than salad to accompany his gammon. This was because he *'didn't want the same as the day before.'*

Much of the writing he did at home was school work, as he suggested. However, he took this very seriously. On one visit to his home, Steven was keen to share a very exciting upcoming event:

We are getting a new teacher and because I'm on the School Council I get to interview.

The children on the School Council had been asked as individuals to develop and write a list of questions that they would put to the candidates attending for interview. As a group, the children and facilitating teacher would together select 10 questions for the interview process. Steven had lots of interesting ideas and had written lots of questions. Two of Steven's questions had been selected. They were:

> *How do you make sure that you are fair to every child?*
> *I am in Year 5 and if I still had difficulty to spell even the easiest words correctly, what would you do to help me?*

Steven was most proud of the first question as he thought it was important that teachers treated everybody in the same way. There could be an unspoken message which, based on Steven's recent experiences, would suggest that 'fairness' was not something that was currently evident. The second question highlights his insecurity in terms of his spelling ability although his use of 'if' provides a hypothetical tone. He did not want to share his weaknesses with a potential teacher. Although Steven was excited about being involved with recruiting a new member of teaching staff, he also appeared to be a little nervous, perhaps due to the uncertainty of what would ultimately happen.

> *They can ask us questions too, but we don't know what they are…*

However, this was a role he took very seriously.

Other examples of writing at home were for my benefit, or in the case of the example below, for his mum's benefit. The piece was presented falsely as 'writing for Julie'. Following advice from his half-sister, he had decided to write a list of the benefits attached to owning a PlayStation 3 game. Steven had just discovered gaming. The game he wanted had educational benefits, as he was keen to point out. He was also promoting the fact that it was *'fun to watch'* repeated twice, so as to detract from the solitary gaming experience. A feature he knew would be appreciated by his parents. Unfortunately he had omitted one crucial piece of information, the name of the game.

Educational
Lern earn diffrent kinds of animals including indangered speceis
Fun to watch
Over 100 Animals
no violence at all and is scutaded 80T 4
fun to watch aswell "playing it
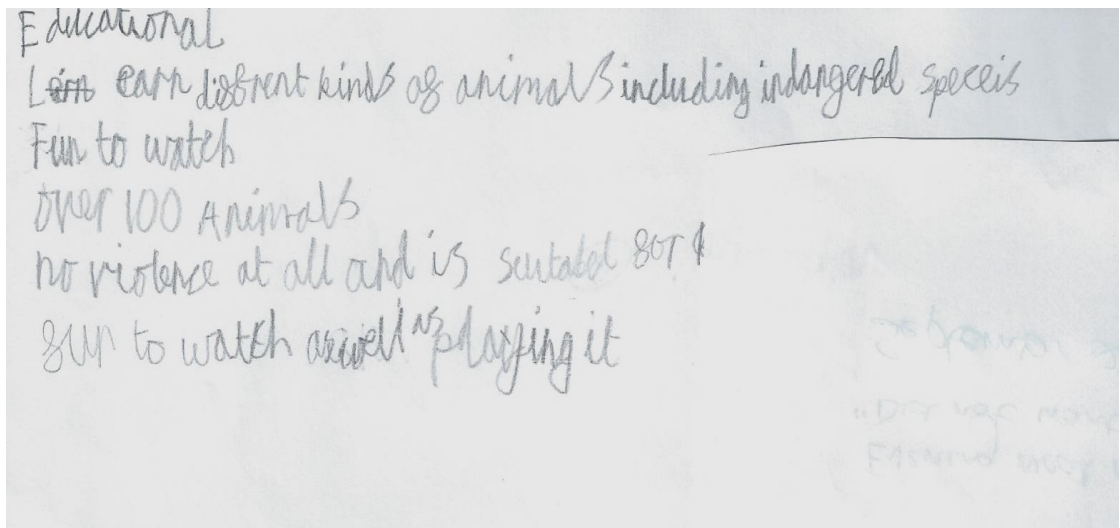
This piece of writing was written in December, on the approach to Christmas. There is evidence of him editing and checking his writing as he corrects the phonetic spelling of learn. He insisted that Stephanie read this before passing it to me. Stephanie did as she was told and she smiled as she passed it to me, *'You can't blame him for trying,' s*he said. I felt a little like a pawn in one of Steven's games of chess. I was being used, albeit indirectly to manipulate his parents decisions on buying Christmas presents. Steven was aware that writing to persuade was a useful skill and he hoped that addressing the benefits to the whole family would be an attractive proposition. Having a game suitable for the whole family was important to Steven and deep down he knew it would be important to his parents.

As the oldest son in his parent's family, Steven felt responsible for his younger siblings. As he shared his stories of family life it became evident that he considered himself to have a clear role and function within the family. That role was to act as a mentor and guide to his younger siblings. During my final conversation with Steven we had discussed his *'job'* (Steven's word) with the younger children, and how Stephanie's absence had impacted on his role. He spoke of how he and his father helped the two younger children with their homework.

> *I help younger sister with her maths because she's not really very good at*
> *that and I can explain it. Dad helps younger brother with his reading and*
> *that…no I never help with English homework. That's not my job.*

The unspoken message was that he and his father shared the task of helping with homework and that they both worked to their strengths. Steven himself had help from his father and half-sister if he needed it, but he rarely called upon them. He never needed them for mathematics work.

6.8   Secret Agent Steven

I explained the writing mission to Steven and invited him to take part. He listened attentively and then read his mission invitation letter. When he had finished he put it down on the table in front of him, looked up at me and unsmiling and with great determination announced, *'I accept.'* I knew that Steven was going to take this mission very seriously. Before his training could take place, he had removed and replaced the batteries in the voice recorder, turned on the device and with a question to himself ,*'Now how do you do this?'* began to investigate the buttons and their usage. After a few moments he had discovered how the device worked. *'It's OK you don't need to show me, look!'* Steven began a demonstration on how to use a voice recorder. *'I'm going to enjoy this but I'll have to practise working it and speaking into it,'* he said. I doubted that he needed much practice but I knew that he would want to do his best and that practising using the recorder would stop him from worrying.

Steven did practise and he took 13 photographs of his writing and made a voice recording to accompany each. Unfortunately the photographs were not successful but the voice recordings were detailed and confidently delivered. Of the 13 recordings, 8 related to communicating with family and friends, 1 to gaming on his portable Nintendo DS, 3 to Pokémon and 1 to Manchester United following a tour of the Old Trafford stadium. His family and friends clearly represented that which was most important to him.

The communications with friends and family ranged from a list of items to pack for an overnight stay at his auntie's house, to Skype communications with Stephanie who was now living in Central Asia. *'I'm talking to my mum on Skype,'* was Steven's

first input. In one of our earlier conversations, Steven had told me that he loved Skype because he could see Stephanie when she was working away but that *'actual talking did not always work,'* and that *'the picture did not always work either.'* He felt sad when the video link failed because he liked to see her as it made him feel *'comfortable'*. When the link failed he would resort to typing messages, *'I talk to her through typing,'* he said. As he described the problems with Skype, I became interested in why he used the term 'talk and type', as when we had discussed using laptops in school, Steven had always connected typing with writing.

> *I'm not sure… I suppose it is a bit of both because I'm actually speaking to my mum and then I might have to carry on speaking to her by writing a message that I type. Sometimes we can see her and talk to her and we write things as well.*

One of Steven's messages had related to this. It was the only message that had any adult input and it was recorded when the whole family were settled around the computer talking to mum. There was a lot of chatter and laughing in the background and then Steven's voice, *'Mum wants to speak to you,'* he said seriously.

> *Hello Julie. Sorry to interfere but we are trying hard (broken sound). Steven is talking about picture writing. We are getting all of the children including Little Brother to do it. It's a mix of emoticons and writing …Have you got a picture of yours Steven? Take one of Little Brother's too!*

Stephanie spoke quickly and excitedly, albeit sounding a little distant. Steven calmly informed her that he had taken the photograph, in an apparent attempt to bring order to the group proceedings.

Apart from Skyping Stephanie, neither Steven nor his siblings had access to any form of social media. Steven's half-sister sometimes let him use her mobile phone to play games or to send an occasional text message under supervision. Steven had been desperate for an email account as a number of his friends were

communicating via email or through gaming technology. Therefore, as I listened to Steven's final 3 entries on his voice recorder I was hit by a sense of euphoria:

1) *Letter to Half-sister. My new Gmail address is….from Steven. Smiley face, thumbs up…because I'VE GOT A NEW GMAIL ACCOUNT!*
2) *Letter to J. My new Gmail address is….from Steven because I'VE GOT A NEW GMAIL ACCOUNT!*
3) *Letter to O. My new Gmail address is….from Steven because I'VE GOT A NEW GMAIL ACCOUNT! (all Steven's emphasis)*

Steven was describing his first emails as 'letters'. He was using salutations, 'to' and 'from' and some 'picture writing' as practised when he was writing to Stephanie. He spoke quietly and sensibly about his writing, holding back his excitement until he shouted, '*I've got a new Gmail account!*' I had never heard him shout before, or sound so delighted. I was looking forward to talking to him about it.

6.9   Looking Forward

On my last visit to Steven's house I felt quite sad. I knew that he was days away from moving away with his family and that we may not meet again. I had grown fond of them all. I wondered how Steven felt about the imminent move.

As Steven talked about his move, he clearly had mixed emotions. He talked about how he would miss his Auntie and cousin and all of his friends from school. He explained that:

> *Being able to send emails will mean that I can keep in touch. We can talk to each other all of the time. We'll stay friends*.

He was likening his future emails to conversations, rather than written letters, as he had done previously. He was now going to have close family members and friends in

another part of the world and I wondered if this would change where he called home.

> *Mum said we are only going to Central Asia for 5 years, then I'm going back to Japan. Then I'll go to a high school or a private school until I might want to go…or my mum and dad get a job…somewhere else.*

For Steven, Japan remained his geographical home but as long as he was with his family he was happy.

Steven had not thought about future careers or about the part writing would play in his life. I wondered if contributing to his friendship group's publication had inspired him to become an author, *'Oh that! We never finished it.'* The collaboration was but a distant memory and there seemed to be no desire to embark on another such venture. Steven had more immediate issues to occupy his mind. He was focused on his place in the world in a literal sense but he did offer one final thought on writing, *'Writing, it's tricky but you just have to be able to do it.'*

For Steven, not writing was not an option. Writing was a necessary part of life wherever that life took him.

7 Discussion

The purpose of this comparative case study, informed by ethnography and narrative inquiry, was to explore the complex relationship between 10 year-old boys' writing practices and their developing identities as writers. The previous three chapters provided rich narrative accounts of each of the boy participant's experiences and were constructed in order to address the key questions that guided the research, those questions being:

1) What writing practices are 10 year-old boys engaging in, both in and outside of school?
2) What are the boys' perceptions about what it means to be a writer?
3) How are boys participating in the production of themselves as writers?
4) How do adults mediate writing practices and how does this mediation impact on boys developing identities as writers?
5) To what extent do digital literacies encourage new writing identities?

The data were collected between September 2012 and November 2013, when all of the participants were in Year 5, moving into Year 6 of the English school system. Data collection methods included: observations, semi-structured interviews, conversations, written text analysis and researcher reflections (see Chapter 3). Each narrative account was organised into seven main sections in order to allow an interrogation of the key questions. Those sections were:

- In the beginning – meeting and getting to know the participants
- Learning to Write
- Writing in School
- Technology and Writing
- Writing at Home
- Secret Agent
- Writing Reflections – Looking Forward

In each case, the data that were collected in relation to each boy were analysed using a variety of methods which were discussed in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I go on to extend this analysis by discussing the pertinent key themes that are common to each of the narratives and which relate to the participants developing identities as writers. I have drawn upon and adapted Holland and Lave's (2009) model of social practice theory (see Chapter 3 Section 3.9 for further details), to provide a structured framework to enable me to identify key themes for discussion. The model allowed me to bring together the two theoretical frameworks of New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1991, 1996; Street, 1993, 1995) and identity formation using the concept of figured worlds (Holland et al; 1998). It was particularly useful as it enabled me to identify the key themes that relate to the ways in which wider policy and institutional demands influence and shape local writing practices, which in turn impact on the participants' identity formation as writers. As a result of my analysis, this chapter is organised in three main sections; policy, perceptions and practice, writing practices and encounters with others and self forming in practice – boys participating in the production of themselves as writers. I end each section with a brief summary of the key findings in that area.

7.1   Policy, Perceptions and Practice

I began my review of literature (Chapter 2) by considering why successive governments have put literacy at the heart of education policy and the significance of the Education Reform Act of 1988 (HMSO, 1988), which introduced the first National Curriculum for children aged 5-16. In Chapter 2, I described both the National Curriculum and statutory testing as cultural artefacts. Both represent artefacts of political force that have gone on to shape society's understanding of what it means to be literate. These cultural artefacts connect schools across England and overseas, as schools meet the challenge of curriculum implementation and preparing children for statutory testing. The cultural artefacts appear to perpetuate the autonomous model of literacy first proposed by Street (1984) in that they focus on writing as a set of skills to be learnt. Therefore, it could be considered inevitable that the decisions schools make in relation to teaching and learning will

go on to influence pupils' perceptions of what it means to be a writer. It is for this reason that this section will consider the impact of policy on school writing practices, including the participants' own awareness of that wider policy.

Neither David, nor Mark nor Steven make any direct reference to the National Curriculum, as would be expected. However, they do make indirect reference to the issues associated with the policy document in a number of ways, as they describe classroom practices associated with writing. These inferences tend to be focused on the challenges they face in relation to meeting lesson objectives, on the demands relating to the transcriptional aspects or measurable skills associated with writing and statutory testing at age 11, and writing assessment practices, including making reference to their National Curriculum (1999) level of attainment. As they describe their experiences of writing in school it is evident that the boys feel that being seen as a writer involves developing good transcriptional skills in relation to spelling and handwriting. They talk about composition in relation to developing ideas and they provide interesting insights into sociocultural factors that influence the content of their writing, however, composition is less important in terms of defining their school writing identities. They do speak of writing in a range of genres, both fiction and non-fiction and of their specific generic features and structures. This suggests that genre-based theory, which according to Martin, Christie and Rothery (1994) highlights the common organisational, grammatical and cohesive features of each text type, continues to influence the curriculum and classroom practice. However, there is little evidence of a process approach, as described and advocated by Graves (1975), in which children learn to develop and refine a piece of writing (McKensie and Tomkins, 1984). Therefore, the boys' awareness of policy suggests that they perceive writing to be a set of skills to be assessed including those skills of generating formulaic generic structures. I now turn to the teacher's relationship with policy in order to better understand how implementing policy into practice impacts on the boys' perceptions of what it means to be a writer.

<u>Policy into practice – Writing in school</u>

A successful teacher, in the figured world of the primary school, is expected to achieve outstanding results. Therefore, the teacher's understanding of, and relationship with, the national policy affects the way the curriculum is interpreted and the teaching that occurs at a local level. In order for the teacher to be figured in a positive way, she/he must interpret the policy to create lesson objectives that result in measurable outcomes and allow for progression. A successful pupil has to meet and exceed the expectations of the tasks that are set. Therefore, the extent to which the boys engage with their lesson objectives influences both their own and others perceptions of them as writers, as is evident in their stories. The data and the subsequent narratives presented in Chapters 4. 5 and 6 describe lesson objectives that are often either prescriptive and narrowly defined, numerous and unclear or lack purpose. The extracts presented in Chapter 5 from Mark's books offer good examples of such objectives. Each extract offers a single general objective such as 'develop use of paragraphs to structure writing,' followed by up to 6 measurable 'steps to success', for example 'I have used 2A (2 adjective) sentences with a comma in between my adjectives.' As a result, such objectives can cause anxiety in that they restrict the content of the boys' writing. The prescriptive and restrictive nature results in the boys feeling that the teacher has an expected end-product in mind. This suggests that in addition to meeting the expectations of the lesson objective, the boys also have to anticipate an expected response. If they deviate from this expectation, as David did when writing his story about cybermen in Victorian London, they will be reprimanded and their work will be rejected. Therefore, there appears to be little opportunity for the boys to draw upon their own experiences and the world beyond the writing classroom to inform their ideas for writing (Millard, 1997; Maynard, 2002). If they do, their reasoning appears not to be fully understood by their teachers nor valued, as was found by Maynard (2002). Steven sums up the problem with the prescriptive nature of lesson objectives:

Hardest is when you are told what to write. I'm better when I can use my own imagination...I mean my own idea, when it's not right or wrong because it is mine.

7.1.1 The Importance of Understanding the Influences on Boys' Writing

The most resilient theme in the last two decades of New Literacy Studies has been the home-school mismatch hypotheses (Maybin, 2007) and the need for schools to engage more with children's experiences out-of-school to make writing relevant and meaningful (Dowdall, 2006, 2009; McClay, 2002; Marsh, 2003; Millard, 2003; Pahl, 2002). There is no doubt that David, Mark and Steven all appear to write about subjects and experiences that are of interest to them, if they can create an opportunity. David writes about sport and the Olympic Games, Mark chooses to include words from the books he reads and Steven writes about his previous and anticipated travels. However, on closer inspection it seems that there are deeper, more personal reasons for writing about these subject areas.

As I re-read the accounts and compare the boys reasoning for their writing, I see boys writing not about their interests alone, but about events and experiences that are significant in terms of highlighting positive family relationships. Although David is interested in sport and writes about the Olympic Games, our conversations about his writing, and therefore the subsequent narrative, make no reference to the names of specific athletes who were competing, or to the races themselves or to the quality of the sports event. Instead he talks about the event as a family day out, travel routines and being together with his mother, father and brother. This aspect of togetherness is important to him and such days and weekends away have formed a part of his childhood, mainly through involvement with the Caravan Club.

Togetherness is also important to Mark and Steven. Mark enjoys reading and using new vocabulary that he encounters in books in his writing but it is the one-to-one time with his mum that is really special and important to him. Steven is an experienced traveller who has lived in three countries. He chooses to write about

and to recommend Athens to his teacher as a place for a holiday. Steven has never visited Athens but it is a place in Europe that he associates with Stephanie, his mother. That is because she had flown over the city to start her new job and, more importantly, continues to do so when she returns home on visits. It would be a journey that Steven himself would soon make with both of his parents and siblings. Therefore, a focus on Athens signifies being reunited as a family. Being together as a family is also important for Steven.

Although research has identified that writing in school apparently involves an abandonment of home culture (Geisler, 2013) the boys' narratives show that they will search for ways to include a reference to it. However, the boys are not simply writing about what interests them out of school, they are writing about what is important to them; relationships with close family members. They are ideologicising their literacy practices in a world where autonomous models prevail. Similarly, Lancaster (2014) found that the process of meaningful mark making with pre-school children was integrally linked to sequences of interactions between carers and children, and their shared histories. The boys' narratives suggest that at age 10 this remains the case and each narrative provides an insight into how they each draw on the stable periods of their life and aspects of their families' narrativised identities as sources for their writing in school. For example Mark's nightly story sharing had become a family tradition that had begun with his mother and her first born daughter some twenty years earlier.

The previous section has addressed research question 3 as it has considered how the boys are participating in the production of themselves as writers in terms of developing their ideas in relation to composition. I now turn my attention to the aspect of transcription.

7.1.2   From Composition to Transcription

Although the boys' lesson objectives often relate to the compositional aspects of writing, for example Mark's work on story writing and his objective, *'I have thought*

about the build-up for my story,' the assessment of the boys' work tends to focus on the transcriptional aspects of writing, for example, *'I thought you were going to use more '!'.'* The majority of assessment related comments in the boys' school books make reference to spelling corrections and or to the quality of their handwriting. Therefore, it is often through assessment and marking that the teacher prioritises the transcriptional aspects of writing over the compositional. As a result, it is not surprising that the boys tend to associate writing in school with developing skills of transcription, that is spelling, handwriting and those measurable skills associated with VCOP (vocabulary, connectives, openers and punctuation). It could also be considered inevitable that this association impacts on the boys' perceptions of what it means to be a writer (research question 2) and the transcriptional challenges they face. One of those key challenges related to spelling.

Spelling – An over-reliance on a phonemic strategy

Each of the boys' narratives highlights worries associated with spelling. For David it is the chore of checking spellings. Mark wants to get spellings right and Steven, who is learning English as an additional language, muses about the fact there are so many spelling patterns to learn. However, their narratives also show a common feature in that they all rely heavily on a phonemic approach to spelling. All of the boys are a product of the recent government policy that puts phonics at the heart of learning to read and spell (Rose, 2006). Although this is intended as an initial strategy for children in Foundation and Key Stage 1, the boys who are in Year 5, have not developed an understanding of a range of strategies to spell unfamiliar words. Instead the phonemic approach was the method of choice, and in Mark's case, still being advocated by his teacher. Mark is keen to point out his teacher's mantra of *'Say it, spell it!'* This presents a real issue for Mark who has a slight speech impediment which is clearly identified in his phonetic spellings. David too explains that when he is under pressure to spell an unfamiliar word he just '*thinks about how it sounds*.' This over-reliance on one strategy has impacted negatively on all of their confidence as spellers. They know they make mistakes. Although they are all able to attempt a spelling, they are clearly disheartened as they are aware that there is a correct way to spell every word and they all want their spellings to be

correct. This positioning of themselves as struggling spellers impacts negatively on their identities as writers in school, for good transcriptional skills equate to being seen as a writer in the figured world of the primary school. However, their stories also highlight broader issues relating to the implications of the phonics focus policy in Key Stage 1, and the subsequent repercussions this policy has at upper Key Stage 2 and beyond, if teachers fail to introduce alternative strategies to support spelling.

7.1.3 Section Summary

Having discussed the key findings relating to 'policy, perceptions and practice', I am able to summarise them as follows:

- The National Curriculum, as a policy document and cultural artefact, significantly shapes teachers' understandings of writing. This in turn affects the boys' perceptions of what makes a writer. For the boys, it is the ability to perfect the transcriptional skills associated with writing that determines success.

- In relation to transcriptional skills, the boys rely on phonemic approaches to spelling, reflecting the teaching method that is prioritised in school. They do indicate an awareness that this approach can be problematic and is not always helpful.

- Each boy draws on the stable periods of his life and aspects of his family's narrativised identity as sources for his writing in school. In so doing, the boys appear to manipulate lesson objectives, and therefore the National Curriculum, to meet their own needs.

- Teachers are not fully aware of the influences on the boys' writing and this appears to affect their judgement when assessing writing.

In this section, I have considered aspects of my findings relating to policy, perceptions and practice at the institutional or macro-level. I now move on to consider writing practices in and out of school, and how encounters with others act as mediating devices. I will also discuss the impact of such mediation on the boys' developing identities as writers.

7.2 Writing Practices and Encounters with Others

The fact that the boys are drawing on their families' narrativised identities as they take part in writing practices in school highlights the 'furry' (Barton, 2001) relationship between the domains of home and school and the social nature of writing. As I re-read the narratives I was struck by the power of those close and positive familial relationships on the boys writing and the fact that the significant actors do not have to be physically present at the time of writing to influence the writing process. This suggests that significant adults and other individuals from the boys' narrativised family identities are mediating the writing process in absentia. However, there are other more direct ways that family members and other significant adults mediate the boys writing practices and this mediation appears to give rise to the boys developing a sense of agency.

In the following section I focus on the participants' relationships with the significant adults in their lives and on their relationships with their peers and siblings. It is through their encounters with others that the boys begin to self-author their identities as writers. A key focus will be to consider how adults further mediate the writing process and how that impacts on the boys developing identities as writers. Therefore, this next section will address research question number 4.

7.2.1 Parents and Family – Drawing on Past Experiences

The boys' narratives provide examples of parents' past histories influencing the present. The parents draw on their own past experiences to make sense of current policy in relation to becoming a writer and developing literacy skills. This conjuncture impacts on the parents' perceptions of what it means to be a writer and this in turn affects the writing practices that are valued and encouraged both at home and at school. Therefore, as the parents look to the past they draw on their previous experiences to mediate present day writing practices.

Both Mark and David's mothers draw heavily on their past experiences, both of their own personal experiences and those of their other children. Both are critical of the current practices relating to writing in the schools that their children attended. Mark's mother, Marcia challenges the knowledge and understanding of the teacher based on the written comments in Mark's books and Mark's re-telling of events during their bedtime conversations. She also questions the quantity of writing being carried out in school, feeling that the school is failing Mark in a way that it had not done previously with her two daughters. As a result, she has taken Mark's education into her own hands by employing a tutor to further develop his writing skills. The tutor adopts a formal exercise-based approach to teaching English with a focus on grammar, which sits comfortably with Marcia's experiences of schooling when she was a child, supporting Taylor's (1983: 23) view that 'the educative style of the parent becomes the dominant factor in shaping the literate experiences of the children within the home.' In prioritising school literacy, Marcia was reinforcing the message that being a writer involved mastering a set of skills. However, during their close reading times in the sanctuary of Mark's bedroom, Marcia adopts a more natural and supportive role as she provides opportunities to discuss texts and to encourage Mark to use vocabulary in his writing.

Davina, David's mother also draws on her past experiences of school and education. Unlike Marcia, her personal experiences focus on her time as a primary school teacher, literacy coordinator and more recently as a senior manager. Like Marcia, she compares the experience of her elder child with that of David. She draws on both of her sons' stories of the literacy classroom to compare teaching staff and their approaches to teaching writing. For example David's Year 4 teacher had successfully implemented the 'Big Writing' programme (Wilson, 2009) in such a way that it was a relevant and interesting learning experience for David and the other children in his class. This was unlike David's current teacher who set '*pointless'* talk homework and was inconsistent in her approach to using the same programme. This negative view of current practice results in Davina being complicit in helping David to avoid dedicated writing classes, by arranging for his guitar lesson to take place during the weekly 'Big Write.' This disengagement with the 'Big Write' also validates her decision to abandon the supporting, pre-writing 'talk' homework set

by David's class teacher. Davina is able to use her senior position in school to mitigate the writing process on behalf of David. However, these actions highlight a tension between Davina's identity as a parent and her identity as an education professional. Helping David not to write and not to take part in a literacy class contradicts her expected behaviour and positioning as a senior manager in the figured world of the primary school.

Unlike David and Mark, Steven is the oldest child in his family group, although he does have older half-brothers and sisters. Steven's parents provide a rich literate environment for their children who are exposed to texts written in English and Japanese. Steven is seen as the dependable and able older son who can support his younger siblings with their homework. Steven's parents allow him to see the value of writing by placing him at the heart of family writing practices and allowing him to take some responsibility for both his own and his siblings writing development.

Although the parents tend to mediate by control, their child's experiences and a desire for them to be happy and to be successful drive that control. This became apparent as I reviewed the 'Secret Agent' activity, an activity that required the boys to have autonomy. However, this was not the case. Both Marcia and Davina can be heard directing their boys in relation to their selection of written text for photographing, and in what to say in response to the photograph. Their approach is covert in that they whisper so as not to be heard. Steven's mother, Stephanie, however, addresses me directly in the voice recordings. The recordings from all of the boys appear to highlight the proliferation of school literacy in the home. However, this could be because the information that was recorded related to each mother's opinion of what constituted appropriate writing examples for the research project. Mark does manage to escape this control to record details of the writing in his tree-house suggesting that if left to their own devices the boys might have captured a very different landscape.

7.2.2   Teacher Mediation – Controlling the Environment

In the figured world of the primary school classroom, the teacher is in control. The way the teacher maintains control in the writing classroom is through the management of pupils and resources. In addition to the setting of lesson objectives, which has previously been discussed, the most significant ways that a teacher mediates writing practices is through the implementation of ability groupings and the control of the available resources. Such mediation provides the boys, and others within the world of school, with an understanding of their positioning as writers in their classrooms and the wider school. This in turn affects how they see themselves as writers. Therefore, this section will consider research questions 2 and 4.

Ability groupings in the classroom are symbolic in that they provide socially shared meanings and encourage expected behaviours. They could be considered to be one of the most powerful ways that the teacher can both exert a control over the writing process and also shape the individual child's perception of themselves as writers. The boys' narratives show that they are all aware of the fact that they are grouped by ability in the classroom, and of the National Curriculum (DfE/QCA, 1999) level at which their teachers think they are working. David and Steven are each in a top group. Mark is in a middle group. However, the boys' narratives suggest that they do not always agree with their positioning and, therefore, their teacher's opinions of their ability as writers. David is surprised by the fact that he is in the 'top' group because he does not consider himself to be a good writer and often struggles to both '*get ideas*' and '*write them down*'. He tries to make his concerns known to his teacher by writing comments such as, '*I kept getting mixed up with my writing.*' Steven, like David, does not always feel confident or able to complete writing tasks, although he is keen to be positioned in the top group. Mark, however, views himself as an able writer who can generate ideas for writing regardless of the genre, although he does recognise a weakness in his spelling and handwriting skills. He is frustrated by his position in a middle group. Each narrative highlights tensions between the boys' own opinion of their positioning in the writing classroom and that of their teacher. However, each narrative suggests that there were factors beyond assessment judgements that influenced each teacher's groupings of the

boys. Those factors appear to be linked primarily to the perceived social position of the parents.

In the case of David, the teacher appears to be influenced by her position in relation to David's mother within the world of school. Davina is her direct line manager and the teacher is aware of the close bond between mother and son. As a result, the teacher is keen to present both herself and David in the best way possible. The teacher feels challenged and under surveillance by her manager's regular visits to the classroom to see her son. Therefore, David's narrative suggests that his teacher feels that it is both less problematic and in her own best interests to keep David in the top ability group, despite recognising the fact that he is not always coping with lesson objectives and is often off-task. This action however, impacts negatively on her relationship with David and, therefore, on his attitude to writing. For David feels out of his depth and the only way to cope is to try to gain some control. He does this in two ways; firstly, by avoiding writing and secondly, by making use of his mother's position to enable such avoidance and to try to influence change in approaches to teaching writing.

Like David, Mark's narrative suggests a tension between his own opinion of himself as a writer and that of his teacher. In positioning Mark in a middle group, a group that are struggling to achieve the required standard of writing in accordance with the National Curriculum expectations, the teacher has sent a message to Mark and his parents that she lacks confidence in his ability as a writer. This grouping has three major effects. Firstly, it makes Mark determined to succeed in writing and to prove his ability. Secondly, there is a crucial negative impact on Mark's relationship with his teacher as there is a sense that he does not value her opinions and, therefore, there appears to be an evolving lack of respect for her which contradicts the cultural narrative learned from his parents. Thirdly, this positioning of Mark in a middle group validates Marcia's decision to employ a home tutor to support and improve Mark's writing. Mark's parents are not involved in school life. They view the teaching staff as being in positions of authority and this message is instilled in their children. Marcia does not want to be seen as a nuisance by Mark's teacher, despite harbouring concerns about Mark's relationship with his teacher, which she

feels has a significant influence on the teacher's opinion of Mark's potential. Marcia does begin to question whether or not she should get involved more at school.

Steven is studious and keen to please and these attributes are valued in the figured world of the primary school. The headteacher's end of year report states that Steven is *'an exemplary pupil who works hard, behaves excellently and makes super progress…I will miss him so much next year*.' His parents are actively involved in school life. Stephanie in particular is recognised as a senior academic whose interest in international education is comparable with the school's developing international focus. The unspoken in Steven's narrative suggests that this combination of his disposition and the relationship between the school and the family, especially Stephanie, is looked upon favourably in the school and does influence groupings which position Steven in his preferred place.

Peers and practice

It is only natural for other children in the classroom to question others' inclusion in particular groupings. As I re-read the narratives in order to understand how this teacher mediation impacts on the boys' relationships with their peers, I am struck by the apparent isolation of the boys as they take part in writing practices. Although the social nature of writing is displayed in their reference to their familial relationships and their life stories, in their classrooms there appears to be little collaboration and social interaction with their peers.

David's narrative is particularly poignant as he presents a picture of feeling isolated and producing individual pieces of work. David asks a child in a low ability group for help but when it is not forthcoming he tries to copy in a desperate measure to write something before the end of the session. David's narrative reveals a child who acts alone.

Steven asks his female friend for help with his Room 101 conundrum but he appears not to trust her and seeks assistance from the teacher. This is the only interaction that appears in his narrative and he appears to alienate his friend. He does not

engage with the other boys in the class during writing activities and is keen to avoid those considered to be less able than him. Therefore, Like David, Steven tends to operate alone but is only confident in doing so when he has the reassurance of the teacher and is clear about the expectations of the lesson.

For both boys, the writing classroom environment does not appear to be relaxed and this in itself can be seen to affect the boys' attitude to both interaction with others and to writing. Any interaction appears to be rooted in the power relationships within the classroom which could be said to stem from the boundaries created by the teacher through ability groupings. I now consider timing and tools as other ways in which teachers mediate the classroom environment.

<u>Timing and tools in the classroom</u>

Re-reading and analysis of the narratives suggest that the time that is allocated to writing practices in the classroom is another significant way in which the teacher controls the writing process. Each of the boys expresses a concern about there being insufficient time given to them in school to both develop an idea and then to transfer that idea onto paper. They all speak about there being no time to think. Mark is frank in his comments relating to the time available to write, and the impression this gives to him of the value that his teacher places on his writing. He simply states, '*if they [teachers] were really interested they would allow you to finish (pause). Wouldn't they?* The other two boys do not consider their teacher's perspective but instead allude to Mark's opinion as they point out the number of unfinished pieces of work in their books. They too show their frustrations in leaving work unfinished.

Their frustrations also extend to resources beyond time. Each of the boys share experiences of being irritated by other constraints placed on the writing process by their teachers. The boys recognise these constraints as rules, for example Steven and Mark having to use a pen when they prefer to use a pencil, or having to follow a formulaic structure to meet a lesson objective when they would prefer more freedom in terms of content, as previously discussed. They recognise the fact that

their teachers are mediating their writing by making such demands and setting rules.

7.2.3   Section Summary

Having discussed the key findings relating to 'writing practices and encounters with others', I am able to summarise them as follows:

- Through their own experiences, past and present, parents and significant adults mediate the boys' writing practices both directly and indirectly.
- In school, ability groupings are significant mediating tools that cause the boys to question their positioning within the writing classroom. This in turn affects the boys' relationships with their peers, often in negative ways.
- The ability groupings appear to be influenced by each teacher's perception of the parents' social position, rather than by the child's writing ability alone.
- The rules and constraints imposed by teachers frustrate the boys and are shown to influence both their attitude to writing, and their relationship with their teacher.

The final point is significant as rule setting constitutes a part of the figured world of the primary school. It is how the boys negotiate that world to disrupt and rebel against those social norms that provides a real insight into how they participate in the production of themselves as writers. It is to that area that I now turn my attention.

7.3   Self Forming in Practice – Boys Participating in the Production of Themselves as Writers

The boys perceptions of the position of both themselves and of others, and their social role affects not only how adults mediate their writing practices as shown above, but also how they themselves negotiate writing practices. This section

focuses on research question 3, 'How are boys participating in the production of themselves as writers?' and it considers both positional and figurative aspects of identity formation.

<u>Boys' initial positionings</u>

The importance of positional identity and the boys of 'being recognised as a certain kind of person' (Gee, 2000/2001) is evident from the start of the study. The first meeting with each participant provides examples of them telling stories with culture specific story lines and of expected boy-behaviours which highlight the figured aspects of each boy's identity. They use those stories to position themselves so that I see them in a positive way.

David is quick to admit that he does not enjoy writing. However, he counteracts this negativity as he goes on to describe his enthusiasm for and success at gymnastics. He also tells of his move from gymnastics club to a local football club because gymnastics is considered a more feminine activity and becoming a footballer, like his brother, is more appropriate at his age. He is careful to position himself as a good gymnast and sports enthusiast.

Mark is the baby of the family and his positioning within the family is evident from family members' interactions with him. However, the conversation at our first meeting suggests that he wishes to present a different positioning of himself as a writer. He wants to be identified as an able writer and to therefore improve his status. He provides evidence of preparing for my visit in his direct approach to discussing writing. However, like David he is also keen to point out that he enjoys sport and occasional success, especially in beating his dad at tennis. Being seen as an able writer is not enough for Mark. He also wants to be positioned as an able sportsman.

For Steven, writing includes the setting down of mathematical algorithms, an area not considered by the other boys when they talk about writing. Steven offers a more ideological perspective of writing through his conceptualisation of what

counts as literacy (Street, 1984; 2005). However, his story also suggests that this focus on writing digits allows him to position himself as a successful writer. For Steven knows that he is a very able mathematician. This message is reinforced in the voices of significant others in his life, those others being his parents and his older half-sister. As a learner of English as an additional language, he is less confident in presenting a piece of alphabetic text. Therefore, in choosing to write digits Steven is able to present himself as a successful writer from the start.

<u>Teacher figurings</u>

The dominant discourse surrounding boys and writing is a negative one. Boys are perceived as a problem due to their lack of success in statutory testing. This discourse has resulted in a negative labelling of boys as writers. The boys' narratives suggest that they have been identified by the staff in school as 'lazy' (David), 'not interested' (Mark), and 'more-able' (Steven). In the figured world of the literacy classroom, David and Mark are recognisable characters and Steven could be considered an exception. However, the narrative accounts suggest that the boys do not perform these figurative identities. Instead the accounts offer a critical insight into their developing sense of agency and their participation in the production of themselves as competent writers in the world of school.

7.3.1 Becoming a Writer in School – Negotiating the Writing Classroom

In the figured world of the primary school, the daily routine of a morning literacy lesson is an example of historical policy in the form of the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998) continuing to influence current practice. It is such routine practices that offer what Holland et al (1998: 49) consider to be 'what if' moments in that the boys all provide examples of imaginings beyond those practices that highlight their developing sense of agency.

David dislikes writing and tries to avoid writing in school at all costs. In asking himself the question, *'What if I don't write?'* he has establishes the bare minimum

of writing that will be acceptable to his teacher for each set of lesson objectives. This is demonstrated by his comment, '*She'll be happy with that*.' He is able to resist engaging in written tasks for long periods of the lesson although he has learnt that putting up your hand and asking a question related to the lesson outcomes will buy him time. Hence David sees himself as being good at not writing whilst still satisfying the requirements of the lesson. The arrival of a new teacher, who challenges David's output, causes him a problem and he has to re-think his strategy, beginning with writing nothing.

Unlike David, Mark engages in writing practices in school. However, he does not value the opinions of his teacher in relation to the assessment of his work. Therefore, Mark imagines the consequences of not engaging in the self-assessment routines expected at the end of every writing session. Unlike David, he waits for others to dis-engage before he decides not to complete a self-assessment sheet after every task. However, he becomes more confident in breaking this rule and begins to see these documents as providing an opportunity to register his dissatisfaction when he disagrees with his teacher's assessment of him.

Like Mark, Steven wants to complete writing tasks to the very best of his ability and he wants to maintain his high status with teachers. In Steven's 'what if' world he is often confronted with questions that result in him deviating from classroom rules and expectations in order to achieve personal success. Steven would rather suffer a chastisement for not co-operating with a less able writing partner if it results in him producing a piece of work that is acceptable to him. For Steven, being seen as successful in the classroom is important. It is quality versus co-operation and he worries about ensuring quality on every occasion.

The boys all use their classroom routines to provide them with an opportunity to take some form of control over the writing they do in school, to reassert a representation of themselves that contrasts with their teachers' negative figurings, or in the case of Steven reinforces such figuring. David may appear lazy as he is not engaged in writing throughout the session, but he still meets the requirements of the lesson and has manipulated the situation to address his needs whilst still

remaining compliant. Mark far from being disinterested tries to write confidently and uses his teacher's criticism as an agentive tool. Steven deliberately disobeys instructions to co-operate in his efforts to maintain that more able figuring. Interestingly, the boys draw on their knowledge of the teacher's role within the figured world of the primary school to display a sense of agency over writing in the home.

7.3.2   Becoming a Writer at Home

There is no doubt that all of the boys identify with the teacher as being the person with authority in the classroom. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the most obvious way to gain authority is to take on the role of teacher. Each of the boys demonstrates an ability to do this with ease in their homes, especially as they instruct me on various aspects of writing during my visits. David shows me how to communicate with friends using a gaming console, whilst Mark teaches me how plan writing and Steven demonstrates his search for story illustrations. Each boy, on each occasion, sets the parameters in terms of the time they spend with me, the resources they use and the knowledge they impart. On each occasion I defer to them as the expert. Interestingly the language the boys use during instruction is familiar classroom language, both verbal and non-verbal, learnt from their experiences in the classroom as a pupil. They all set simple objectives, '*I will show you how to*…' They check my understanding by asking questions or by inferring a question with an upward inflection, for example *'OK?'* Perhaps most importantly David and Mark display a keenness to use meta-language in order to emphasise their expert knowledge and understanding of literacy practice. For example, David refers confidently to homophones and Mark to similes. Steven does this less so but is keen to discuss the role of author and illustrator. In addition to the verbal content associated with being the teacher, each boy also demonstrates a familiarity with non-verbal communications. For example they point to key words in the text they create, look directly at me in expectation of a nod to affirm my understanding or change their facial expression to encourage me to keep listening and looking. Their actions show a deep understanding of classroom culture and an awareness of how

the teacher gains and maintains control over activities. Their identities as teachers of writing in the home are developed from their own experiences of being taught. Beyond their episodes of teaching me, each boy takes control of writing in the home in other ways. David diligently completes his writing homework as quickly as possible because he wants to do other things. He is also able to avoid writing related homework by persuading his mum that it is pointless. Mark conforms to Marcia's wishes and has extra tuition. However, Mark also has his tree house where he is in total control of the environment. Steven maintains a teaching role with younger siblings as he supervises their mathematics homework. Steven takes personal responsibility for completing his homework activities to the best of his ability, and volunteers his services as part of his friends' writing group to complete a task that he knows he can undertake with a degree of success. Just as the teacher controls the timing of the writing sessions in school, the boys develop their own routines that allow them to control the timing of and space for writing activities in the home, although the majority of writing in the home appears to be related to school writing. One type of writing that is visible in the home but which appears to be absent from the school curriculum is digital writing and it is to that aspect of writing that I now turn my attention.

7.3.3 Becoming Digitally Literate

In this section I focus on research question number 5 which asked, 'To what extent do digital technologies encourage new writing identities?' David, Mark and Steven are all involved in digital writing practices at home for example, texting, gaming and social messaging. However, all have limited access to technology in school and this may be a significant factor in how they perceive writing in the digital domain. It is how the boys connect their school experience of traditional writing practices with their digital writing practices and how they make sense of this relationship by relating speaking and writing that offers an interesting insight into the self forming in practice as digitally literate.

<u>Connections between traditional literacy and digital literacy</u>

The boys' narratives reveal developing digital writing identities that could be described as creative, playful and confident as they play with language and experiment with breaking the rules of conventional writing that is most commonly associated with the domain of school. Steven's story shows a boy anticipating more opportunities for digital writing with his peers, although he had been practising via communications with Stephanie. David, Mark and Steven, however, all provide examples of linguistic innovation such as adapting spellings, ellipses and the use of non-verbal paralinguistic features such as the symbols used by Steven when communicating with his mum. The findings support those of Merchant's (2001: 124) study in which he found that teenagers deployed such features in their digital communications in a 'drive to maintain pace, relationship and conversational flow of synchronous interaction.' All of the boys demonstrate an ease and confidence in creating multi-modal texts as Kress (2003) and Snyder (2003) suggested. They also show an ability to consciously adapt the standard written English form to a style and format that would be suitable for purpose and considered acceptable to their digital audience. This awareness of purpose and audience is evident in the way they talk about the relevance of what they write to their reader. For example David reflects on how a spelling mistake will not be a problem for his audience as the boy involved is Russian and '*probably won't notice*.' Having a relevant purpose and audience is an aspect of the writing process that is missing from their stories of writing in school. The boys also provide specific examples of how digital writing differs from school standard-English. For example, when Mark talks about his multiple use of the letter 'o' in 'good' to portray his feeling of excitement about his cousin's amusement arcade win he makes it clear that he would not be allowed to do that in school not even if he was writing a story. They also use metalanguage when talking about such innovations, for example David refers to a mis-spelling as a *'mistake with the homophone 'there'.'* Their use of metalanguage suggests that they are exposed to such language as part of their school curriculum and that they understand the terminology. In using such language, I suggest that they are assuming that I understand and are affecting either an equal or a superior positioning of themselves as knowledgeable about language.

David, Mark and Steven are in the process of creating a set of writing codes and practices that are acceptable within their digital worlds. They are developing a communicative style that will influence their identity online as they introduce themselves and develop relationships in and through their writing, as found by Merchant (2005) in his study of primary aged children. To do this they are drawing heavily on their knowledge and understanding of traditional writing practices. However, their stories tell of a more complicated relationship between technology and writing as the participants struggle to see on-line communications as writing at all.

It's not writing, it's talking

The boys' stories highlight a schizophrenic relationship between both speaking and writing and typing and handwriting. Whilst the boys talk about their experiences of digital writing by reflecting on how their language use is different to the written language of school, without exception they acknowledge digital writing practices as being talking not writing. This is an area and finding about which I have been unable to find any explicit research with pre-adolescent boys.

David, Mark and Steven make specific comments suggesting that digital communications are perceived as oral communications. As they discuss the process of digital communications they make comments such as *'typing is talking not writing'* (Mark) or, *'it's not real writing …it's like talk'* (David). Steven's view is a little less straightforward as he provides examples of beginning Skype conversations with his mum and then when they lose the video link he *'carries on speaking by writing a message that I type'.* Perhaps this association with speaking should not be a surprise, as Gillen (2014a) had suggested. All of the boys point out the fact that when they type messages they are in conversations with friends and/or family and are *'talking'* to them. Because the boys consider typing in the context of direct communication to be talking, they therefore assign the conventions of spoken language. This aspect offers an interesting insight into the boys' understandings of the differences between the modes of speaking and writing. David states that he does not think much about punctuation when messaging during gaming on his Xbox

because *'you don't need capital letters when you talk'* also he is quite clear that grammar is less important because *'you don't speak in sentences.'* Mark takes this a step further by stating that *'I don't plan what I type like I don't plan what I say.'* However, their digital 'written down speech' does involve planning and a thinking process as they deliberately adapt their language from the traditional written form and they discuss this process from a traditional literacy perspective and yet assign the communication to an oral form. This highlights a complex relationship between the boys' perceptions and understandings of the modes of speaking and writing in the digital world.

Keyboard skills and handwriting

One useful skill associated with digital writing is the ability to use the keyboard. The boys' experiences of digital writing practices highlight their struggles in becoming familiar with and using the QWERTY keyboard, described by Gillen (2014b: 93) as a 'mediating tool.' Whether using a touch-screen, traditional keyboard or a gaming handset they speak of the challenge of locating the letters, which are presented in an unrecognisable order. The narratives tell of their frustrations, of fingers hovering above keyboards, eyes searching for the correct letter. However, their stories also tell of learning through experience and of lessening frustrations as they become more familiar with the keyboard. As their speed in locating letters increases, their frustrations decrease. They demonstrate an ability to self-teach through practice and through trial and error. The boys receive no formal instruction on mastering keyboard skills but all of the boys recognise the importance of being able to type efficiently, although for different reasons. David sees it as a skill to master as he will need to use a computer to do homework once he gets to high school. Steven views it as a benefit because it removes the worry about producing neat handwriting and correct spellings; it enables him to adjust the font style and size not only to make his work legible but to suit the purpose of the writing task. Mark is able to experiment with language more easily with a keyboard than with a pencil although he does experience frustrations with autocorrect.

7.3.4 Section Summary

Having discussed the key findings relating to 'self forming in practice - boys participating in the production of themselves as writers', I am able to summarise them as follows:

- The boys use their classroom routines to provide them with an opportunity to take some form of control over the writing they do in school. In so doing they offer representation of themselves that either contrasts or reinforces their teacher's figuring of them.
- The boys are developing identities as digital writers. Those identities appear to be confident and creative as they experiment with and consciously break the rules of conventional writing associated with school.
- The boys highlight a complex relationship between the modes of speaking and writing in the digital world. They describe digital text production as speaking, whilst explaining their linguistic choices using a metalanguage associated with writing.
- There are shared frustrations and a recognition that practice is needed to master the QWERTY keyboard.

In the boys' stories, the keyboard is not only a mediating device for writing, it also represents an interesting cultural artefact. Each of the boys is aware of adults and older siblings using a keyboard regularly and this validates their decision to become competent users of the keyboard. Considering the place of the keyboard and the actions of older, significant others in their lives provides them with an opportunity to look to the future and it is to those matters that I now turn my attention.

7.4 Looking Forward

In this section I consider the boys' responses to the relevance of writing to their future lives. As the boys imagine their futures I am taken back to the moment when they signed their consent forms. Encapsulated in that moment are possibilities as

they appear to see a purpose for a signature in the adult world. In providing a signature they are rehearsing their adult role. Providing a signature could be considered representative of social status for all of the boys. Although all of the boys regard joined up handwriting as a chore, without prompting they join the letters in their signatures. Perfecting a joined signature could be said to be a signifier of both adulthood and success. The signature has a purpose for all, regardless of future ambitions.

However, it is interesting to see that at the age of 10 they have established the significance of being able to write in terms of their future careers. Mark and Steven are both keen to persevere in order to be more successful in writing as they both consider being able to write as essential for future academic success and career choices. David, however, does not feel the same. He acknowledges that he has learned how to write but that he does not envisage a future that requires him to do so. Whilst Mark and Steven continue to work on the production of themselves as writers in order to achieve their ambitions, David continues to be good at not writing. For David feels adequately equipped to survive in his world of writing.

7.5 Chapter Summary

The boys' narratives highlight the relationship between policy, practice and the boys themselves as they develop their identities as writers. What is evident from their stories is the fact that they develop multiple writing identities, in school, at home and in the digital world. School literacy can be seen to be the dominant form of literacy. As the boys engage in school literacy practices their success is measured by teachers and the teachers' comments go on to inform the boys' opinions of themselves as writers. At home their success is measured by their parents, siblings and peers as they engage in a variety of writing practices. The boys draw on positive relationships with their families to underpin their writing. They acknowledge adult mediation and it is through adult mediation that the boys gain some control over the writing process, both at home and at school. The boys live in and are a part of these culturally and socially defined worlds and they understand themselves as

writers in relation to those worlds. Therefore, they develop multi-literate identities as they operate within those worlds, for example the writing teacher, the good planner, the scruffy handwriter, the poor speller, the good- at- not- writing writer. In the developing digital world their writing identity could be considered to be in-process, as they experiment with language, although this is something that they fail to see as they perceive the digital world to be one of oral communication. Perhaps what is most striking is that the boys, who are representative of this problematized group, want to be seen as writers, even David who does not see writing form a part of his future. In fact I would like to leave the last words of this chapter to David as he makes a very valid point, '*I can write you know if I have to. I just don't want to.*'

8   Conclusions and Implications

The previous chapter presented a discussion and analysis of the key findings of my inquiry. That discussion related both to my research aim, which was to explore the complex relationship between 10 year-old boys' writing practices and their evolving identities, and to my research questions:

1)   What writing practices are 10 year-old boys engaging in, both in and outside of school?
2)   What are the boys' perceptions about what it means to be a writer?
3)   How are boys participating in the production of themselves as writers?
4)   How do adults mediate writing practices and how does this mediation impact on boys developing identities as writers?
5)   To what extent do digital literacies encourage new writing identities?

In this concluding chapter I consider the implications of the key findings presented in Chapter 7 in relation to literacy and identity theory and make suggestions for how the findings might provide a greater insight into and influence educational policy and practice. I go on to highlight my contribution to knowledge and implications for future research. I then address the limitations of the study and end the chapter with an autobiographical reflection and a final word about the boy participants.

The study is rooted in my own personal experiences and an interest in the educational policy and practice which has resulted in a negative discourse around boys and writing; a negative discourse which is evident internationally in academic and media literature. As both the parent of a son and a former primary school teacher I embarked on my study with the intention of better understanding the relationship 10 year-old boys had with writing. This was because my own experiences had caused me to question the discourse that categorised boys as a problem (Clandinin et al, 2006) in relation to attainment in writing. Drawing on the stories of experience of three 10 year-old boys, my study provides details of how

those boys participate in writing practices both in and out of school. In placing the boys themselves at the heart of the inquiry I was able to gain an understanding of their lived experiences - their relationships with people, spaces and technology, their histories and their ambitions. I was able then to re-present those experiences in order to provide glimpses into the boys' lives and their evolving identities as writers and as individuals. In so doing, I ensured that the boys' voices were heard and I was able to offer a unique contribution to the debate surrounding boys and writing; a contribution that has implications for policy makers, educators and families.

Throughout the study I returned to the 5 research questions listed above. Over time I began to realise that the questions were inextricably linked. For example adult mediation was influencing not only the boys' perceptions of themselves as writers but also the ways in which they participated in the production of themselves as writers and their engagement with technology. It was as I considered this interconnectivity between the research questions and my findings that the social nature of writing, as described by New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1991, 1996; Street, 1993, 1995) became evident in ways that I had not previously imagined. This is because the notion of 'social' can be seen as being more far reaching than the relationships directly involved in the writing process. The discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 7 highlights how writing practices are entwined in a web of relationships. The boys in my study looked to people and experiences from the past, the present and to the future to make sense of and to inform their writing. As identity formation is bound in relationships (Esteban-Guitart and Moll, 2013; Holland et al, 1998), it should not have been a surprise to see the extent to which wide-ranging and indirect relationships impacted upon the boys' evolving identities as writers. For example, the relationships between the teachers and the boys' parents which appeared to affect ability grouping in school; groupings which went on to affect the boys' positional identities, and which led to them being figured in a particular way in the world of school (see Chapter 7).

The interconnected nature of my findings in relation to my research questions presented me with a challenge as I began to summarise my findings, draw

conclusions and consider the implications of my study. Rather than addressing each question in turn I made a decision to combine aspects of my research questions as I focussed on three key areas which I feel represent the most significant findings and offer valuable contributions to knowledge. The three areas which highlight the connection between writing practices and identity formation are: writing domains, mediation and technology and writing. I now go on to consider each area. In each case, I will begin with a brief summary of the key theme.

8.1 Conclusions

8.1.1 Writing Domains - Practices at Home and in School

Each of the boys was engaged in a variety of writing practices both in and out of school. Cairney and Ruge (1998) found in their research that literacies associated with school were dominant in the home. My study supports their findings as the boys all connected writing in the home with completing homework activities, thus the boys' narratives highlight the dominance of literacy practices that originate in school. However, to a lesser extent each boy shared examples of practices that both originate and are carried out in the home and as such are domain specific (Street and Street, 1991). As they discussed their examples of home writing, it was clear that they were producing texts in which the content was both relevant and specific to them. It was writing with a clear purpose, for example Steven writing his persuasive Christmas list (Chapter 6) or Mark his list of tree house club members (Chapter 5). At home the boys could be considered to be in more powerful positions as they instigated the writing and they knew that there was no teacher making a judgement about the quality of their work. Even David felt comfortable making mistakes as Davina, his mother, took on a different role from that of teacher when in the home setting. These could be the reasons why the writing that originates at home does not appear to present the boys with any anxieties, unlike writing that originates in school. Those anxieties associated with school writing are rooted in educational policy and practice and affect the boys' perceptions of themselves as writers.

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<u>The impact of a skills focused policy</u>

In order to be identified as successful writers, each of the boys stressed the importance of developing the transcriptional skills of neat, joined handwriting and accurate spellings. The boys' perceptions of what it means to be figured as 'good writers' in school suggest that Street's (1984) autonomous model of literacy remains dominant within schools, which appear to focus on writing as a set of skills to be learnt. This approach could be seen as a symptom of the pressures placed upon teachers to ensure that the children in their classes are successful in those aspects of writing that will be externally assessed as part of the Government's statutory tests. This is because the results of the statutory tests provide a judgement, not only of the child's ability but of the teacher's success in relation to meeting targets, and therefore the school's success. A good school needs to be populated by children figured as 'good spellers' and 'good punctuators' which in the current testing regime suggests 'good writers.'

Writing as a process has been lost in educational policy which focuses on transcriptional skills. In the process approach to writing, there is a requirement to draft, redraft and edit work. Whilst the current National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) has not fully embraced this approach, it does recommend that children edit their work. However, the editing process seems to have been reduced to the checking of handwriting, grammar, punctuation and spellings rather than improving the overall composition, thus emphasising the transcriptional aspects of the process. This can be seen in the boys' references to VCOP as a tool for improving writing, and their teachers' comments when they mark their work (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). Such an interpretation of 'editing' by a teacher may result from the limited time available to allocate to writing tasks in a crowded curriculum, in which the teacher has to focus on curriculum priorities and measurable outputs. More worryingly it may suggest a lack of understanding of both the writing process and the challenges faced by a writer when composing a written text. Such a lack of understanding is likely to result in teachers being unaware of how to develop children as writers. Instead they will continue to focus on handwriting and spelling.

Although it is not my intention to generalise due to the small sample involved in the study, it has highlighted a potential negative impact of the recent policy relating to the teaching of early reading and writing on the boys' ability to spell. Since the review of early reading (Rose, 2006) there has been an emphasis on phonics as the prime method for teaching both decoding and encoding skills. When I undertook my data collection, two of the three participants had been taught to decode and encode using this approach. In Year 5, the boys were all adopting a 'say it, spell it' strategy. This point was explicitly made by Mark (see Chapter 5). This was resulting in the boys becoming frustrated by their spelling errors, especially as so much emphasis was being placed on spelling as an essential skill. The National Curriculum (DfE, 2013: 19) continues to stress the importance of phonics in early writing by suggesting that in Key Stage 1, children should be taught to 'encode the sounds they hear in words.' Although the policy document does also stress the importance of understanding the morphology and orthography of words, these aspects are not emphasised in the initial years of schooling. The findings of my research suggest that children become reliant on the spelling strategies that are taught in those early years of schooling. I would argue that teachers need to ensure that they introduce alternative strategies to children to support their spelling development at the earliest opportunity; failure to do so suggests that children in upper Key Stage 2 could be let down by the system, as they rely on phonetic approaches and experience the frustrations and anxieties of David, Mark and Steven.

Whether it is the pressure of achieving success in statutory tests, or a lack of understanding of the process of writing that often results in reducing writing to a set of basic skills and routines, there are implications and challenges for the teaching profession. Firstly, teachers should be aware that writing is not simply a technical and neutral skill. Whilst writing is about knowledge, it is embedded in socially constructed principles and power relations; writing is associated with identity and social position (Street, 2005; 2013). Therefore teachers should recognise that engaging in writing practices is always a social act and that their teaching methods, their priorities and their interactions with pupils will determine the pupils' perspective of what it means to be a writer.

Secondly, it will be important for teachers and teacher trainers to re-assess their own perceptions of what it means to be a writer, and to ensure that their subject knowledge and understanding of writing as a process during which the author makes choices, is adequate in order to develop children as writers. This could be achieved by introducing policy that requires teacher training organisations to include specific training on writing as a process. For teachers in school, a deeper understanding of writing development and the process approach could be developed through professional development units. Such education may give serving teachers the confidence to challenge the existing 'skills-based' policy in their classrooms. It will also be important for teachers to understand the diversity of children's out-of-school writing practices and how children's out-of-school experiences can affect their writing. It is to those matters that I now turn my attention.

Bringing home into school - understanding the relationship between writing practices and figurative identities

Much has been written about schools failing to take into account children's interests out of school (Bradford and Wyse, 2013; Heath 1981; Cairney and Ruge, 1998; Marsh, 2003; Millard, 2003). Therefore, I was not surprised to find out that the boys in my study were not encouraged to write about experiences and subjects that were of interest to them. In fact when I began my study I considered this to be the key argument underpinning the home/school divide. Davina, a deputy headteacher, also viewed experiences as being important to the writing process. She spoke desperately about having taken her two sons all over Europe and yet they still failed to be inspired to write. However, as I talked with the boys themselves during and following their writing practices, it became evident that the relationship between home and school was much more complex than simply allowing boys to write about subjects that interested them. This proved to be a significant finding. All of the boys' narratives of experience were charged with emotion as they spoke of close family members, recalled fond memories of family activities or looked ahead to happy times. Those close family times and relationships were influencing the content of their writing. However, those

influences were not directly apparent in the written end product. As a result, the teachers often failed to understand the relevance of the boys' writing in relation to a given written task, for example when David wrote about cybermen and gyms in his piece about Victorian Britain. This lack of understanding resulted in negative comments from the teachers in relation to both the boys' written output and their apparent attitudes to writing. In the figured world of the primary school, the lack of understanding also caused the boys in the study to be figured as a certain type of writer, for example David as 'lazy' because he was considered to lack focus and not to give serious consideration to the expectations of the writing task.

Had the teachers listened to the boys' stories they would have been aware of the fact that their writing in school was closely linked to their home routines and familial relationships. All of the boys drew on times that had become a part of their family's narrativised or figurative identities to inform their writing. The school writing tasks themselves may not have been particularly relevant to the boys and they often required the boys to work individually, with just the teacher as an audience; for example Steven and the Room 101 activity (Chapter 6), and David and the protected tree (Chapter 4). However, the boys made each activity a social one by drawing on their family's figurative identities and the periods of stability in their lives. They brought people and places to each writing activity. This finding affirmed my decision to adopt the term literacy practice throughout this study as it highlights the fact that the patterns of activity around the writing events are of 'a broader cultural and social kind' (Street, 2012). Taking account of Street's (1984) concepts of autonomous and ideological literacies, the boys experiences suggest that within the world of school, where writing practices are often reduced to developing a set of skills, they 'ideologicise' their writing as they adapt their writing to take into account their own needs within the power structures of the classroom.

It is in the area of educational policy that this finding has the potential to have most impact. Firstly, I would like to consider policy relating to the assessment of writing. Current statutory testing of writing at age 11 focuses on the transcriptional skills of grammar, punctuation and spelling. As teachers are now responsible for assessing writing composition at the end of Key Stage 2, and as those assessments are

significant in that they follow the child through transition to secondary school, it seems to be more important than ever that educators are equipped to make well informed judgements. Therefore, being aware of the influences on boys' writing from the perspective of understanding their narrativised identities could be crucial in developing an assessment policy that benefits all children. This is because it would give full consideration to writing as a social practice and dilute the notion of a home school divide. However, I am aware that such changes to policy would present a challenge to a profession that is expected to standardise results through internal and external moderation. Teachers would need to be confident in justifying their assessments. Therefore, there are implications for teacher training, as providers develop input on assessment and personalised learning. Perhaps in the more immediate future, local school rather than national policy could be addressed to provide children with an opportunity to engage in writing on a daily basis; not objective-driven writing tasks but through personal journal writing over which the child has control. This writing can then be shared with the teacher at the child's discretion. Through sharing their writing, they would provide their teachers with a window to their worlds and an understanding of how the child brings a part of him/herself to their compositions.

Such a shift in practice at a local level would be challenging as it would involve teachers revisiting and re-interpreting the National Curriculum, which as an educational and cultural artefact has mediated the teaching of writing in schools. It is to that notion of mediation that I now turn my attention.

8.1.2   Mediation of Writing Practices

The boys are aware that significant adults mediate their writing practices in a number of ways. As with my son and his experiences described in Chapter 1, it is such mediation that provides them with opportunities for agentive actions as they find ways to negotiate writing practices both at home and in school. Those negotiations are significant as they demonstrate how the boys actively participate in the production of themselves as writers. However, it was the hidden ways in

which adults mediated the boys' writing practices that provided an unexpected perspective to the study. One such aspect of mediation involved the parents own learning experiences.

I was surprised by the extent to which parental histories mediate the boys' writing practices in the home. The parents have their own understandings of what it means to be a writer. This understanding is bound to the past and to their own experiences of writing in school, or to the primary school experiences of the boys' older siblings. Therefore, parents control the writing environment in the home by prioritising writing practices to meet with their own perceptions and expectations relating to the importance of writing. These tend to be associated with the transcriptional skills that are an expectation of school literacy, for example Marcia employs a tutor to improve Mark's grammar.

In school, the teachers were seen to mediate the boys' writing practices by controlling the writing classroom. This control takes the form of setting lesson objectives and managing both the classroom environment and resources. Ability grouping has been recognised as a powerful controlling tool. All of the boys demonstrate an awareness of how their ability grouping affects their writing practice as their grouping dictates the specific lesson objective, the level of activity and the peers with whom they will work. Unsurprisingly, ability groupings impact on the boys' positional identities as writers as they affect how they see themselves and how others perceive them in the writing classroom. However, whilst recognising that this is a small-scale study, I was surprised at the apparent relationship between the teachers' perceptions of the parents' social status and the grouping process. The findings suggest that there is a relationship between the extent to which parents directly involve themselves in school life, with the assessment of ability and the subsequent grouping of children for writing. The evidence from the three boys suggests that higher the perceived status of the parents and the more directly involved the parents are in school life, the more likely the teacher is to prioritise the expectations of those parents and group children accordingly. However, if children are grouped by status rather than ability alone this could impact negatively on the social relationships with others who are taking part in classroom writing practices.

For both David and Steven, the writing classroom environment does not appear to be relaxed. Their stories suggest tensions between their peers and their teachers which result in a classroom environment that is not conducive to writing. Those tensions could be said to be grounded within the ability grouping framework of the classroom, as the grouping negatively affects their relationships and interactions with both peers and their teachers alike. For example, Steven is not keen to work with a child he considers to be less able and makes a decision to work in isolation. Any interaction appears to be rooted in the power relationships within the classroom and, as Bartlett and Holland (2002) suggested, the boys' stories capture the negotiations of power involved in their writing practices. Therefore, I suggest that if schools continue to group children by ability, careful consideration needs to be given to such relationships in order to create a writing classroom that is not just socially situated but is also sociable and purposeful.

8.1.3   Technology and Writing

The boys in this study all have their digital writing practices mediated by their parents; that said there may have been technology usage of which the parents and I were unaware. Despite this mediation, the boys are all developing identities as digital writers. These digital identities differ from their identities as writers when using traditional print in that they could be considered to be playful and confident as they interact with their families, friends and peers in the on-line world, experimenting with language and multimodal text production. It appears to be the sense of purpose and audience that drives their linguistic innovation and experimentation in their text production. However, in defining their new identities as digital writers they draw heavily on their knowledge of schooled literacy and standard English to highlight the differences in their language use on-line and to rebel against conventional writing practice. Interestingly, this genre of writing is not viewed as writing by the boys themselves. Instead it is considered to be talking. Therefore, whilst the study has shown that digital literacies do encourage new writing identities, it has also highlighted a complex relationship between both

speaking and writing, and home and school digital writing practices which I will now discuss.

In a world where reports of children aged between six and eleven suggest that they spend 26% of their 5.5 hours per day using media devices in communication and gaming activities (Ofcom, 2014), it is not surprising that a digital dissonance (Clark et al, 2009) between home and school has been highlighted. I had expected the boys in my study to be engaged in a wide-range of digital writing practices at home. In reality, whilst they all were producers of digital writing, their access to certain devices was restricted by their parents, showing that this aspect of writing was heavily mediated. The relatively small amount of time the boys in this study spent engaged in digital writing practices did, however, highlight an interesting perspective of such writing, a perspective that I feel could be of significance in terms of both future research and policy related to educators' understanding of the relationship between technology, writing and speaking and how, therefore, digital writing is taught in school.

It was evident that engaging with new digital technologies encouraged new writing identities. It was also clear that the boys in the study valued the freedom and experimental nature of writing when using technology, and that they were developing playful identities as digital writers and were performing those identities on-line. They spoke with authority and enthusiasm about engaging in digital writing practices. This finding was not new and supported the research of others such as Merchant (2001, 2005) who found that children introduce themselves digitally, through and into their writing. However, what was significant in my research was the fact that the boys did not recognise themselves as digital writers. This was because they did not associate engagement in digital writing practices with writing at all. For them it was a process they linked to talk. Their discussions highlighted a complex and often inconsistent and contradictory relationship between their conscious understandings of the modes of speaking and writing; they considered themselves to be speakers but relied on metalanguage, and more specifically the language associated with school writing, to describe the process of digital communication.

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The perception of digital writing as talking by these novice users of technology, could stem from the fact that the National Curricula (DfE/QCA, 1999, DfE, 2013) does not emphasise the place of technology in the programme of study for English. This results in teachers seeing it as sitting outside the writing curriculum, which in turn influences the boys' understandings of what constitutes writing, or not writing. Both the teaching assistant in Steven's classroom and David's teacher make comments supporting this (see Chapters 4 and 6). If the National Curriculum specifically recognised digital writing practices within the programme of study then teachers would be obliged to include this form of writing in their classrooms. However, this could have a negative effect on the current playful nature of digital text production as it may institutionalise what is currently a vernacular literacy (Barton et al,2000), and there would be a risk that the currently innovative digital writing practices would be reduced to a set of skills to be learnt and applied.

One useful skill associated with writing and technology is the ability to use a keyboard efficiently. In the boys' descriptions of digital writing practices they identify their lack of keyboard skills as a major frustration. It is to this issue that I now turn my attention.

Keyboard skills

According to Crystal (2005) the interactive nature of digital communications requires a swift response. Therefore, developing the skills to be able to use a keyboard efficiently using a form of touch-typing appropriate for both keyboard and touch screen would benefit children in two ways. Firstly, it would remove the anxieties associated with handwriting. I had experienced this benefit first hand with my own son, who had been taught to touch type in Year 4. Secondly, it would enable children to take part in digital text production more confidently and competently. Merchant (2005) suggests that keyboard skills acted as a mediator for digital communications because a fast response was needed in order to become involved in synchronous text production. As a result, the ability to respond quickly could be considered important in developing an on-line identity. However, the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) makes no reference to keyboard skills in either the

English or Computing Programmes of Study. Like the teachers in the narratives, there is an assumption in the policy documentation that children know what to do, that such knowledge is simply acquired.

As I consider the findings in relation to the overall research aim, I realise that adopting a theoretical framework that combined New Literacy Studies with Holland et al's (1998) theory of figured worlds has enabled me to interrogate the data to produce findings that offer a unique insight into the relationship between 10 year-old boys' writing practices and their evolving identities. I now go on to consider how this study has contributed to knowledge in the field of literacy and identity.

8.2   Contribution to Knowledge

My research is bound in the lives and experiences of the boy participants. However, they have offered new understandings that represent a significant contribution to existing knowledge in relation to literacy and identity. In this section I highlight those significant contributions to knowledge. I begin by examining the relationship between each boy's writing practices and their family's figurative or narrativised identity.

This finding is significant in that it challenges the traditional view of the home-school divide. The traditional view highlights the failings of schools to take on board children's out of school interests to influence their writing in school. However, the findings of this study provide a new dimension to this home-school mismatch hypothesis. The study offers an alternative and unique perspective of the ways in which home becomes meaningful to the writing practices of 10 year-old boys in school; a perspective that recognises the importance of relationships, routines and artefacts of home as the boys draw on aspects of their own family's narrativised identity to mediate writing practices.

This notion builds on the work of both Lancaster (2014) and Pahl (2002). Lancaster (2014) explored the significance of close familial relationships in supporting early

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mark making with pre-school children. Pahl (2002) in her study of 5-8 year olds highlighted the importance of educators attending to the way in which the 'home is structured and the cultural resources the home draws upon' (Pahl, 2002: 145). My study extends the relevance of their work with pre-school and young children to the world of the pre-adolescent boys, an under researched group who are reaching crucial points of transition in their lives.

The second key contribution to knowledge is concerned with understanding the relationship between traditional and digital modes of writing. Merchant (2007) suggests that if schools are to equip children for literacy of the future, then they need to recognise the differences in the character of digital writing compared to traditional paper based writing. The findings of this study add to Merchant's (2007) thinking by suggesting that before reconceptualising writing, educators and policy makers need to understand more about the relationship between digital writing and oracy. My research has offered a new dimension in that it highlights a blurring of the lines between the pre-adolescent communicator's perceptions of the modes of speaking and writing in a digital writing context.

This notion offers an alternative view to the reported digital dissonance between home and school (Clark et al, 2009; Leander, 2005; Lim et al, 2010) in that it suggests that replicating digital writing practices from the home in the school domain will potentially be meaningless to children who do not consider such practices to be writing, despite the digital world offering them, as writers, 'a whole new set of options to consider' (DeVoss et al, 2010: 21). In addition it also contributes to the debate surrounding the divide between oracy and literacy. Goody (1977) considered written language, as opposed to oral language, to be a technology of the intellect. In their stories of digital writing the boys in this study can be seen to carry out significant cognitive processes, such as reasoning, as they describe their thinking behind consciously representing speech as writing.
I now consider how my contributions to knowledge have raised further questions and opportunities for future research.

8.3 Future Research

My time spent undertaking this study has helped me to offer a better understanding of the relationship between 10-year old boys' writing practices and their developing identities as writers. It has identified a number of key issues that have implications for both educational policy and practice. However, it is in the two areas that I feel I have made the most valuable contribution to knowledge that I have further questions that I would wish to explore. Those areas relate to the relationship between pre-adolescents' narrativised identities and their writing practices, and the relationship between speaking and digital writing practices.

As boys of this age remain a problematized group within the education system, further research into understanding the relationship between their narrativised identities and their writing may help educators to better understand and assess boys' written texts. This is because effective assessment appears to be bound to understanding the close relationships and the spaces of home. I realise that my study lacks diversity in that it focusses on boys of a similar social background from supportive and nurturing families. Therefore, I would like to extend my work and consider aspects of a family's identity and their times of stability and transition across a broader socio-economic grouping. I feel this is particularly important in a changing world where there are now many forms of family beyond the traditional nuclear family experienced by my participants, and where families and unaccompanied children are being forced to migrate to different socio-cultural settings or where home might represent a place of fear and insecurity.

Expanding my research to a wider socio-economic grouping will also provide opportunities to explore children's access to digital technology. I recognise that the boys in my study had limited access to digital technologies, as this aspect of their lives was strongly mediated by their parents who imposed a number of restrictions. Therefore, I acknowledge that their experiences may not be representative of others in their age-group. I would hope that by widening the parameters of my research that I would be able to further investigate the complex relationship

between the modes of speaking and writing in digital communications. Further research into this area would help educators to better understand how to incorporate digital writing effectively into both policy and practice. However, in order to do this effectively it will be necessary to develop an understanding of the cognitive processes involved in representing speech as writing in the digital world as this will also provide an understanding of how language processes develop in a digital age.

The two areas for future research highlighted above relate to identity and the two much discussed great divides in literacy, those of home and school and speaking and writing.

8.4   Limitations of the Study

Undertaking the study had presented a number of challenges and some of the challenges represent the limitations of my work. In this section I acknowledge those limitations, focusing mainly on methodological issues.

<u>Time in the field</u>

One of the key limitations of my study relates to the amount and the organisation of the time I spent with each participant when gathering the data. I had anticipated gathering data over a period of five or six months with each boy. It transpired that I was in contact with David for twelve months, although the main research meetings were held over a six month period. My time in the field with Steven was as I had anticipated, but as Mark joined the group a little later, his time allocation was reduced slightly to four months. I took the decision to gather data over this relatively short period as I had limited time available to me due to completing my research part-time alongside a demanding job. As I noted in Chapter 3, this decision caused me to question whether or not drawing on ethnography as a methodology was possible, as it had been suggested that a two year immersion period was the ideal (Wolcott, 1995). I remain convinced that for both part-time research students

like myself, and established academics who are working to tight project deadlines this longitudinal immersion would represent a challenge. As I reflect on the way I organised my time with relatively short but regular visits over the varying periods of four to twelve months, I wonder whether this was in fact the best method and whether a shorter more intensive spell with each of the participants would have been more practical and just as informative. I felt that both David and Steven were less enthusiastic towards the end of the study. Mark who had not been involved for quite as long and who had one less visit, but longer periods of time spent at each visit, remained enthusiastic. I realised that perhaps I was intruding too much in some cases. This study has convinced me that it is about the quality of the time spent with participants and the data that is produced as a result, rather than the quantity of time.

Case selection - social background and gaining access to research sites

I must acknowledge the fact that this is a small scale study, and as a result it has recognised limitations in terms of making generalisations. However, the intention was to explore the relationship between the literacy practices of 10 year-old boys and their identity formation by giving members of this problematized group, a voice. To this end I feel it has been successful. However, the challenges of recruiting those participants, as discussed in Chapter 3, resulted in the boys being from similar socio-economic backgrounds and traditional nuclear families. This lack of diversity resulted from the fact that two of the participants were drawn from acquaintances from within my professional world and one from my domestic, social world. The case selection could be said to represent personal limitations relating to my role as a researcher, as I gravitated towards people and places where I felt most comfortable (Hanley, 2007). Yet, despite the apparent similarity in each of the participant's family's social position, the findings of the study did highlight subtle differences in the participants' perceived status, and that of their family members within the world of school.

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As I reflect on this finding relating to a family's perceived status within the world of school, I think about the potential participant from the large council estate, whom I rejected. Hanley (2007), comments on the challenges faced by children in such communities, challenges which she describes as a 'wall in the head' (Hanley, 2007: 148). The wall represents a limiting environment which results in children not being aware of opportunities or 'believing what is out there is either entirely irrelevant to them' (Hanley, 2007: 153). According to Hanley (2007), council estate education could be described as 'a take-it-or-leave it approach to learning' which results in children failing to see the value of education and teachers failing to recognise children as having potential. This can result in 'the collusion of some teachers in believing a pervasive stereotype… which suggests all council estate dwellers are ignorant' (Hanley, 2007: 170). Jones (2014) in her study of literacy practices of three families on a predominantly white, working class council estate, considers how such communities are presented in policy discourse and how they are 'often defined according to deficit models based on quantitative measures of disadvantage' (Jones, 2014: 59). Therefore, I now question my decision to exclude the participant. Exploring this child's literacy practices would not simply have broadened the range of social backgrounds of the participants. As it would have involved the boy's family and his teachers, the research process may have helped to challenge both the policy discourse and the stereotyping of children by educators. It may have helped to break down the 'wall in the head' and offer an opportunity to the boy and to his family; an opportunity that had initially been welcomed by the boy's mother.

Negotiating access to both school and home was also problematic. I had envisaged there being difficulty in accessing the participants' homes, however, it was gaining access to the school setting that ultimately proved to be most challenging despite having contacts at all of the schools involved. This resulted in Mark's story being told without access to his classroom and his teacher. This caused me to question the parity of the data collected for each my participants, however, as I wanted to understand writing practices from the perspective of each boy, it did not detract from or cause problems in constructing Mark's narrative account. However, the unwillingness of schools to participate is suggestive of a wider issue relating to the importance of engaging schools in research to inform educational practices. The

recent government proposal (DfE, 2016: 37) 'to increase teachers' access to and use of high quality evidence' and to 'ensure teachers are trained in understanding and applying evidence,' may go some way to improving this situation. This move towards evidence based practice will encourage schools to understand the benefits of research by ensuring it is relevant to their needs by focusing 'funders of research and academics on generating evidence in areas which directly inform classroom teaching' (DfE, 2016: 39).

8.5 Autobiographical Reflection

From a personal perspective, the writing of this thesis has been both challenging and enlightening. It has been an incredible journey that has resulted in huge shifts in my thinking which will in turn go on to influence my future professional life. I began this study eager to build on my undergraduate thesis which had been a small-scale action research project to investigate how I, as a teacher, could help children to overcome their fears of writing. My interest in writing and the relationship between children's perceptions and attitudes to writing and the actions and expectations of the teacher, had stemmed from my son's experiences described in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Between completing my undergraduate thesis and starting this study I had spent a number of years in school as a teacher and in university as a lecturer on initial teacher training programmes and I acknowledge that I had begun to subscribe to the negative discourse surrounding boys and literacy, and in particular writing. Therefore, when I embarked on this research journey it was from a position of wanting to understand the perceived *'boy problem'* from the perspective of the boys themselves.

Initially I found it to be a personal challenge to adopt a philosophical lens through which to investigate an area which I felt was grounded in a real world issue and therefore warranted a more pragmatic approach. As I reflect, I realise that this was because it was difficult for me to make that transition from teacher to researcher and to look beyond the practicalities of the classroom, despite my intentions. Although I had developed a love of learning during my undergraduate studies and

was keen to progress academically, I was challenged by the various theories and how they might apply to my research aim. This in turn affected my own positioning as a beginner researcher as I felt uncomfortable and less able around my research peers and research staff. However, it was as I began to analyse the variety of data and apply to the theories of New Literacy Studies and Figured Worlds that I began to appreciate how adopting a particular theoretical perspective could indeed help the researcher to understand a situation differently. That moment came as I examined examples of the participants' school-writing and I thought back to my own son's experience outlined in Chapter 1, Vignette 1 of this thesis.

Vignette 1 described my son's story writing and his apparent lack of imagination because he continuously wrote about football and aeroplanes. Following a conversation with him I had understood this to be due to his teacher imposing a rule that every piece of writing had to be accompanied by an illustration. As he felt confident drawing only aeroplanes and 2-D football stadia, these subjects formed the basis for all of his writing. However, as I returned to this moment and viewed it through the lens of New Literacy Studies and Figured Worlds it took on an added dimension. I saw a boy who was not simply constrained by rules and his ability to draw. Instead he was drawing upon those events from our family's figurative identity as he wrote about two subjects which were close to his heart. At that time we had a family season ticket for Bolton Wanderers Football Club. Match days involved a routine which included my son sitting on the kitchen work surface, chatting whilst I made a flask of coffee, helping my husband to pack the car with warm clothes for us all and a visit to his grandparents for lunch on the way to the stadium. Saturdays were family days. As with football, aeroplanes were also important to our family's story. My husband, who had taken flying lessons, has always had a passion for aeroplanes. From the time our son was two years old, as a family we would go plane spotting, visit aeronautical museums and take regular flights on holiday. My husband's passion became my son's passion, showing how the past can influence the present. As with football, aeroplanes were representative of stable, family periods. In drawing upon those stable periods and the relationships that underpin such times, my son like the boys in this study, was creating an ideological model of writing in the domain of school.

That one occasion described in Vignette1 had stimulated my initial interest in boys and writing, however, it has become significant for me in another way. I feel the re-interpretation of events from a more philosophical perspective marked the occasion when felt I became a researcher, or at least I felt more credible in a research role as I was able to apply my thinking beyond the direct boundaries of the study.

As my study is concerned with writing practices, I feel it is also important to reflect upon my own journey as a writer and the challenges I faced. Although I am very much aware of the processes involved in writing, the drafting, redrafting and editing, and am a published author of scholarly work, I was not experienced at academic writing before beginning this thesis and therefore unprepared for the personal challenges of writing at this level. The modern day workplace is one that values speed and brevity when communicating by email or writing reports. In the beginning I almost felt that I had lost the ability to write at length. This in turn presented another challenge, that of being able to transfer my ideas from my head to paper in an appropriate style and register. I wanted my work to be of an appropriate academic standard whilst remaining readable. For each chapter I would write numerous drafts, as I tried to carefully craft each sentence. At the end of each writing session I would always feel that I needed more time. Therefore, I am able to empathise with the boys in my study who were also trying to write in a way that would be appropriate to the task set by their teachers, and within tight time constraints. Underpinning the pressures associated with the act of writing was the greatest personal pressure of all, the desire to succeed and be recognised as 'credible' within the world of academia.

Although my reflections have focussed on two key aspects of my journey, they are both particularly relevant to me in the context of my professional identity as an academic and teacher trainer. My research has already begun to inform my teaching as I realise that I now include more theory and opportunities for debate around some of the central themes that have emerged from my research. For example, a PGCE student recently returned from a placement and provided an example of a little girl writing, *'I would give the baby Jesus a Top Shop voucher for a present'* in response to the question, *'If you were a wise man what gift would you*

take to the baby Jesus?' The student described the child's response as *'stupid'* for a variety of reasons. However, having an understanding of Holland et al's (1998) identity theory I was able to challenge and encourage the student to think differently about the response and what 'Top Shop' may mean to the child. I hope that such challenges will benefit my students and the children they go on to teach, by encouraging them think more deeply about each child's situation and the inspiration behind their writing as part of the assessment process.

I also hope that my own recent experience of writing for an academic award makes me a more understanding academic supervisor. I feel more personally aware of the stresses and strains that students encounter as they undertake the researching and writing of their undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations and their need for support. This has meant that I offer that support in a different way by combining group and individual tutorials, thus allowing a degree of peer support in addition to tutor support. Writing this thesis reminded me that writing can be a lonely and isolating experience, therefore extending the support network should benefit my students.

8.6   Final Word

To conclude, I would like to provide an update on the boys who took part in this study. The boys have all now left primary school. Steven is being educated outside the UK and follows a US curriculum. He likes being closer to his family in Japan and still enjoys mathematical problems. Mark, despite concerns from his teacher but much to the relief of his mum, achieved the expected Level 4 in the statutory tests for writing at the end of Year 6. Now settled in secondary school, he has sadly lost his enthusiasm for writing but still enjoys reading. His reading preferences have changed and he now enjoys Top Gear magazines and a good thriller. David also achieved a Level 4, a little lower than his teacher's prediction but in keeping with his own self-assessment. He remains *'good at not writing!'*

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Appendix A – Consent Letter to Parents

Faculty of Education

Our Ref:

Date

Manchester
Metropolitan
University

Dear Mrs. _____I,

PhD Research Consent

Thank you for showing an interest in participating in my research entitled 'Boys, Technology and Writing'.

I hope to begin working with _____in the Spring Term. This will involve a number of visits to observe _____ in both the home and school setting. Please read the information enclosed with this letter carefully and complete and sign the consent form. I will explain the project to _____when we meet and ask him to also complete a form.

I will also need information relating to the school. If you could provide this on the form provided, it would be much appreciated. All paperwork can be returned to me using the SAE provided.

I look forward to working with you both.

Kind regards,

Julie Scanlon

Appendix B – Participant Consent Form

Manchester Metropolitan University

Consent Form

Title of Project: Boys, ICT and Writing: A Comparative Case Study for PhD.

Name of researcher: Julie Scanlon, Faculty of Education   Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 04 October 2012 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. The purpose and aims of the study have also been explained to me.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I, _____am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. I understand that semi-structured interviews, observations and documentary evidence will be used to gather data.

4. I understand that audio visual recordings will be used and that they will be destroyed at the end of the study unless I provide written permission to retain them for training purposes.

5. I understand that any data gathered will be kept securely e.g. password protected files, in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

6. I understand that findings will be shared with participants and education professionals although the anonymity of the participants will be retained.

7. I agree to take part in the study.

_____ _____ _____

Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____ _____ _____

Name of person   Date   Signature

Appendix C – Photography and Voice Recording Mission

<u>**Photography and Voice Recording Mission**</u>

Agent ……………,

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to use the camera and Dictaphone at home to record top secret information about your writing. The mission will run from 27th June until 11th July 2013.

<u>**Instructions**</u>

If you have written ANYTHING that you think is interesting:

1. Take a photograph of the writing using the disposable camera.

2. Turn on the voice recorder by sliding the 'hold' button on the side of the machine away from the arrow.

3. Press the red record button.

4. Say the number of the photograph you have just taken (for example Photo 1).

5. Tell the recorder:
    Why you have chosen to take a photograph of the piece of writing?
    What you think is interesting about it?
    How is the bit of writing you have done at home like the writing you do   in school…or isn't it like the writing you do in school?

6. When you have finished talking, press the button with the square on it to stop the recording.

7. Slide the hold button towards the arrow and wait until the word 'off' appears on the screen. This will save the batteries.

Good luck!

Agent J

Appendix D – Research Diary Extract

Meeting M+S. notes traded on return here.

M with Mum + sister F. I am with my husband. Introduce him. Chatted about chances of bumping into each other + quality of food + M+S!

M held up a bag and told me he had just bought the latest David Walliams book - his favourite author. He had been waiting for it to come out. He also showed me a room plaque for his newly decorated bedroom - it's so everybody knows it is mine.

Mum says M is embarrassed about using the voice recorder to record details about his writing. I turn to M + ask him about it

He told me he felt really shy + that he suddenly forgot what he was going to say. He said His mum was helping as she wrote down what he wanted to say + then he saved it. Said he was beginning to feel more confident with it.

My husband commented on how enthusiastic the whole family was re research and how keen M was to show me his purchases.

I just felt sad that he was anxious about using the recorder and that mum was so involved - it sort of defeated the object ... We'll see.

Appendix E – Conversation Extract

Purpose – to investigate Mark's use of technology for writing in the home.

Arrival: Mark is playing in his playroom, building Lego models (seen through the window). Sister answers the door. She goes back to completing some holiday homework on the computer. Mum is folding washing in the kitchen as they are preparing for a long weekend's holiday. Dad is at work.

Mark leaves the playroom as soon as I arrive. He opens the door to the hall and says, 'I can't show you my Playstation because the plasterers have taken the sockets off.'

I tell him that is OK and that I will have a coffee with Mum. 'OK (pause) then I'll show you my iPad' was Marks response.

When I was settled into my usual seat at the kitchen table, Mark brought his iPad into the kitchen. He was followed by his sister.

Conversation Extract:

Mum: He doesn't text message.

Mark: I do. (Looks directly at Mum and then across to me)

Mum: No you don't we don't let you.

Mark: I've just had a message now.

Mum: What?

Mark: From D (cousin)

Mum: Mmmm (Pause) That's just your cousin.

Mark: Yeah but it IS [Mark's emphasis] text messaging (smiles at Mum and me)

J: Is that iMessaging you are using?

Mark and Sister: Yes (in unison)

Sister: (to Mum) It is the Apple texting service.

Mum: Oh! (loudly) I had no idea!

J: Anyway, do you want to show me your message or is it private?

Mark: I'll show you. It's from my cousin. They are on holiday and that is where we are going tomorrow. Guess what?

All: What? (in unison)

Mark: He's won 9 prizes in the arcade, look! (holds iPad towards me)

Mark replies to message by typing '==that's== good' Mark typed it without the apostrophe for contraction but the iPad ==self-corrected==. As it did so Mark muttered *Doh.*

Cousin: Are you looking forward o coming tomorrow ('t' omitted) Mark comments *==he's missed the 't' it doesn't matter.==*

Mark: ==Yep== (as he writes he comments *==I would not be allowed to use this (yep) in school because it is not correct English. It is slang.==*

Sister: Even if you were writing a story you couldn't use it?

Mark: No (Continues texting conversation)

Mark: I can't wait ==till== tomorrow (as he writes he comments, *==would write 'until' at school==*

<u>Key</u>

   	Non-standard forms and reasoning
   	Non-verbal/gestures

Appendix F – Conversation Analysis

Research Question/s Text Relates to: 1) Writing in/out of school 3) Participating in production of self as writer 4) Adult Mediation 5) Digital writing and new writing identity

Activity	iMessaging cousin. Making plans for holiday. Demonstrating iMassaging to me/researcher.
Significance	Demonstrates ability to use iPad and iMessaging technology. Demonstrates awareness the difference in language use when writing in school and digitally at home – refers to 'yep' as slang 'would not be allowed to use this in school'. 'till' would write 'until' at school. Demonstrates the cognitive process and the decisions being made to send a message in a socially acceptable format (peer culture). Marks a significant moment in Mark's relationship with his mum and highlights a developing sense of agency as he admits to breaking a family rule.
Identities	Demonstrates different writing identities at school and digitally through language choice – formal/informal. Shows awareness of this process and active participation in the production of himself as a writer. The text demonstrates the expected 'figured' identities of the individuals in it – Mum in control, son/daughter compliant. iMessaging as a cultural tool provides opportunity for agentive action.
Relationships	Informal and close relationship with his sister (suggestive of previous collusion in relation to both being aware that iMessaging was a form of texting/open communication). Close relationship with cousin – allows Mark opportunity to experiment with language. Mum's silence after learning about iMessaging suggests an initial straining of the relationship between her and her children.
Politics – distribution of social goods	Highlights a breaking of the family rule that Mark is not allowed to text message/have open access to the digital world. Should be limited to close family and friends. Mum speaking for Mark: 'He doesn't text message.' Short affirming response 'I do.' Suggests collusion between Mark and sister to allow this to happen.
Connections	Mark connects non-standard English with digital writing and standard English with schooled writing. Draws on standard form and adapts for digital communication. Mum connects texting with danger. Wants to keep Mark safe – horror at learning he was able to communicate widely.
Sign Systems/ Knowledge	School English(standard English) is superior to colloquial forms as using slang is seen as breaking a rule – 'would not be allowed' Family rules signify order, respect and wellbeing.

Appendix G – Key Themes Map

SELF TEACHING IN PRACTICE

Negotiating the writing classroom – adult mediation results in figurings eg lazy, classroom + positionings (Holland et al 1998) boys use cultural artefacts to take control/ develop a sense of agency
. behaviour
  language
  experiences

Identity forming in practice as digitally literate. using language differently

felt/ making connections between being traditionally literate + and digitally literate : use of meta language etc.

DESIGNING A SOCIAL FUTURE (NLG, 1996)
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORACY + LITERACY – Digital writing practices = speech
LINK TO HOME/SCHOOL DIVIDE

LOCAL PRACTICES
- ENCOUNTERS WITH OTHERS.
  • others mediate to writing practices
- TEACHER MEDIATION – policy + school driven creation of a controlled environment – not relaxed objective driven time. ability groupings

Discussion – Key Themes

- PARENT MEDIATION – culturally driven based on their own history + understanding of what it means to be a writer.

- PEER RELATIONSHIPS

→ Keyboard skills : likents crazy/illiteracy due to typing not writing.

Policy + Institution
- NC as a cultural artefact, shapes society's view of what it means to be literate.
- NC + Testing perpetuate autonomous view of literacy (Street 1984).
- Lack of emphasis on new literacies
- skill based NC + boys experience suggest Teacher's LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF WRITING AS A PROCESS.
- Emphasis on transcription. Failure to recognise boys interest + stimulus for writing (Dowdall 2006, 2009, McClay 2002, Marsh 2003 Millard 2003) therefore orientated by what boys write (Nyhill, 2001)

Appendix H – David's Writing 'Return of the Cybermen'

Tuesday 21st May 2013

The Return Of The Cyber Man

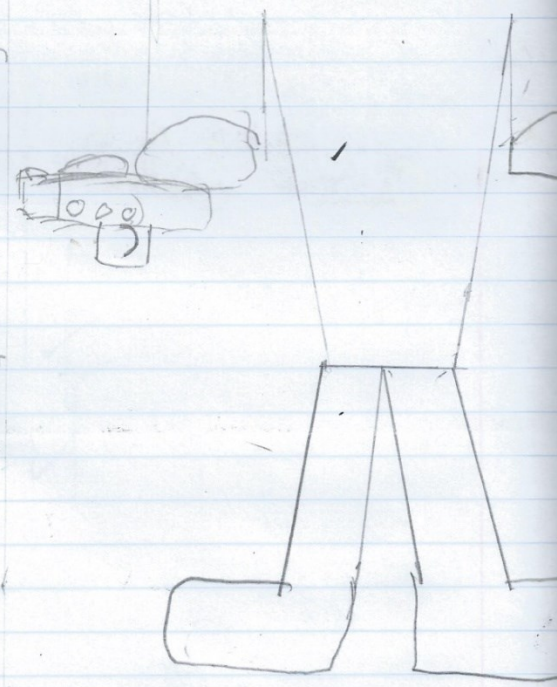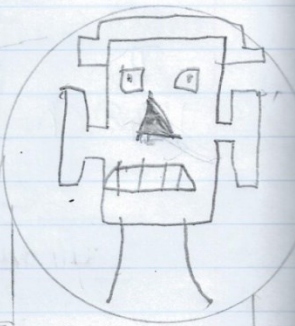Whilst working in a gym class (excercising his chubby body). After a while of training all the lanterns and torches went off. All alone in the gym of the workhouse he lay thinking who could be in the room with him. IS it Shaba? No he wouldn't do this to me. But then he thought Could it be the disastrous cyber man? Suddenly In a blink of an eye the lights came back on and in the coner of my his eye stood the cyber Man. Bobby rushed to the door after turning seval Sally walking tread mills on. The cyber man

The dreaded cyber man returns to London! (1834

Stagged ^sp across the room but then when
he was ~~being~~ too agressive he stood on a
Treadmill that was going at 260mph.
In the time
being Shaba
came f, sprinting
to bobby, he
slipped when
he got their
Bobby Said"
look, look
It's the
cyber man"
"Awsome" replied
Shaba.

I'M not sure how many gyms or cybermen
they had in Victorian times ...

→ Next steps:
Please keep your writing joined up.
Write a sentence in cursive writing here:

"Do you See him he's on the end of
the treadmill" gasped Bobby in excitement of
Joy in what he has done to the cyber man.
"Shall we go in their" asked baba Shaba.

→ You need to join each letter
together.

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Appendix J – David's Persuasive Writing

Monday 24th June 2013
L.O. I can write persuasively

Stay or go? ✔

Joe: I want the ~~tree~~ boring old oak tree to be chopped down so an athletic Stadium could be built. So the olympics could come to Clewe.

Ticking time bomb ✔

This is not an ecoligical dissaster. The anim will not die because they can be caught and pat in cages and Sent to a wildlise Park and be looked astor b

Local Seature ✓

We will never miss the fat boring oak tree because it has no seatures at all. An athletics stadium could be a lot better because all the children could come and get batter at athletics. ✓

Should the memories go?

The tree is belived to have been living sor over 100 years old so some people like the oak tree. People will have lots os memories but not much because it's BORING

Tree - Saster.