“Club Reports” Queered Considerations of Children’s Understandings of Families, Relationships, Social Practices, and Literature in an Afterschool Reading Club

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“Club Reports” Queered Considerations of Children’s Understandings of Families, Relationships, Social Practices, and Literature in an Afterschool Reading Club

Abstract
This qualitative inquiry uses queer theory and an epistemic justice framework to analyze interactions in a reading club for first graders. The title “Club Reports” is a play on words referring both to this dissertation and to a bound book of the children’s work. The literary event of a weekly reading club is a lens to consider literacy as a social practice. I ask: what happens when a diverse group of children participate in an afterschool reading club that focuses on representations of families? Data was gathered using ethnographic methods including audio and video recordings, participant interviews, artifact collection, parent interviews, and researcher documentation. Through the analytic framework, I consider if and how our meetings queered normative understandings of gender, family, relationships, literacy practices, childhood, and child cultures. Findings suggest that current knowledge resources about families, children, and social organization more broadly situate cisgender males and heterosexual relationships as the norm. This pervasive heteronormativity may have limited how the group discussed variations in their homes and personal beliefs. This epistemic injustice – or lack of collective resources that reflect the true breadth of experiences – has the potential to harm all participants. This study raises awareness of ways that variations in family and child experiences may be stultified in normative social discourses. Findings are potential resources for researchers, educators, and those interested in inclusiveness in educational settings for children.

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“CLUB REPORTS”

QUEERED CONSIDERATIONS OF CHILDREN’S UNDERSTANDINGS OF
FAMILIES, RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL PRACTICES, AND LITERATURE IN
AN AFTERSCHOOL READING CLUB

Rachel Jocelyn Skrlac Lo

A DISSERTATION

in

Education

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2016

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Dedication

The Butterfly Dream
- Chuang Tzu

Once upon a time,
Chuang Chou dreamed
he was a butterfly,
flitting and fluttering around
enjoying itself.

It did not know
it was Chuang Chou.

Suddenly
he awoke, and veritably
was Chuang Chou again.

He did not know:
was it Chuang Chou dreaming
he was a butterfly;
was the butterfly dreaming
it was Chuang Chou.

This work is dedicated to teachers, formal and informal, who have assisted me on this journey and especially to those who encouraged me to look for new perspectives and to question the way things are.
Acknowledgements

Like many ideas that materialize, there is no moment when this dissertation started. The grains for this study seem to have been inside me always, shifting and churning, fermenting and growing. This document is a milestone symbolizing thousands of hours of work. What I present herein is a first significant attempt to convert a kernel of an idea into part of a larger discourse.

Before I delve into the project itself, I wish to thank the many people who helped to buoy me up when my stamina was flagging: my dissertation committee - Vivian Gadsden who had faith in me and countless perfect suggestions for overcoming hurdles – Gerald Campano who asked tough questions with confidence that I could find answers – and Mindy Blaise whose supportive words from the other side of the globe affirmed that I should listen to myself; Amy Stornaiuolo who was both a mentor and confidant throughout; Ebony Elizabeth Thomas for her curiosity and enthusiasm; Nancy Hornberger (and the Seminaristas) for creating a safe and generative space to share first drafts; and especially to Larry Sipe, who set me on this path and from whom I learned so much. My gratitude extends to mentors who offered feedback and read early drafts, including Caitlyn Law Ryan, Jill Hermann-Wilmarth, Corrine Wickens, Lee Galda, Newtown Murce, and the many amazing people at the International Youth Library in Munich, Germany including Petra Woersching, Jutta Reusch, Lucia Obi, and fellow Stipis Melek Ortabasi, Bahar Gursel, and to Lara Hedberg, who introduced me to José Esteban Muñoz’s work, which was so essential to this dissertation.

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ABSTRACT

“CLUB REPORTS”
QUEERED CONSIDERATIONS OF CHILDREN’S UNDERSTANDINGS OF FAMILIES, RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL PRACTICES, AND LITERATURE IN AN AFTERSCHOOL READING CLUB

Rachel Jocelyn Skrlac Lo
Vivian L. Gadsden

This qualitative inquiry uses queer theory and an epistemic justice framework to analyze interactions in a reading club for first graders. The title “Club Reports” is a play on words referring both to this dissertation and to a bound book of the children’s work. The literary event of a weekly reading club is a lens to consider literacy as a social practice. I ask: what happens when a diverse group of children participate in an afterschool reading club that focuses on representations of families? Data was gathered using ethnographic methods including audio and video recordings, participant interviews, artifact collection, parent interviews, and researcher documentation. Through the analytic framework, I consider if and how our meetings queered normative understandings of gender, family, relationships, literacy practices, childhood, and child cultures. Findings suggest that current knowledge resources about families, children, and social organization more broadly situate cisgender males and heterosexual relationships as the norm. This pervasive heteronormativity may have limited how the group discussed variations in their homes and personal beliefs. This epistemic injustice – or lack of collective resources that reflect the true breadth of experiences – has the potential to harm all participants. This study raises awareness of ways that variations in family and child experiences may be stultified in normative social discourses. Findings are potential resources for researchers, educators, and those interested in inclusiveness in educational settings for children.
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To understand gender it is necessary to realize the power and pervasiveness of heterosexuality.

– Mindy Blaise, 2005, p. 22
Chapter 1
Introduction

Mrs. Lo: Some people believe there are many Gods.
Richard: Yeah, there are. You are one.
Mrs. Lo: I’m a God?
Richard: Yeah.
Mrs. Lo: Why?
Stephen: The Reading God!
Mrs. Lo: Oh the Reading God! Thanks Stephen!
Stephen: You made the book club!
(2015/04/23)

This silly moment reflects the playful nature of talk in this literacy study, which investigated what happens in an afterschool book club when young children have opportunities to explore stories about families who vary from the mother-father norm. In this excerpt, Richard and Stephen sidestep a conversation on the origin of humans. Building on my comment about polytheism, they anoint me their Reading God! In this dissertation, I make no claims to be a ‘Reading God’ but I do work to translate our high-energy gatherings into a cogent study on family diversity and social literacy practices of these young children. During our 14 weeks together, the children and I discussed a variety of themes that included talk about families, books, popular cultural, friendships, make believe play, potty talk, and romantic crushes. To do this, I draw on queer theory – a theory that considers how heterosexuality influences social organization – and epistemic justice framework, which explores how collective knowledge resources are shared. I use these lenses to analyze how we interacted with one another, with literature and literary events, and with the world at large.
The study emerges from a longstanding interest in social organization and ways we come to see the world, and especially how gender informs and guides social interactions. My understanding of gender was complicated when I audited at a graduate course on gender and education in 2009. This course challenged my belief that gender is inherent, or biologically determined, and it complicated gender with intersections of race, class, ethnicity, language, culture, religion, physical ability, sex, and sexuality. Gender and other characteristics of identity have complex and dynamic relationships and society favors some ways of being over others. My expanded understanding disrupted my tidy definition of gender, gender roles, and ways that interactions are gendered. Borrowing from Judith Butler (1990/2008), I came to see gender as a verb, not a noun.

I also discovered Virginia Woolf’s (1984) *Three Guineas*. In this piece, Woolf argues why donating money to the war effort for World War I would perpetuate an oppressive hierarchical system that favors males. I remember struggling to read this piece, trying desperately to comprehend the importance of rejecting institutional structures during a time of crisis. I came to appreciate that gender was more than a verb enacted by an individual, but gendering was intrinsic to social order. To see this order, we may need to take a step back from moment-to-moment encounters. In hindsight, my reading of Woolf sparked an interest in the tension between individual and social groups and how one’s actions are situated within a greater context. Woolf’s words also encouraged me to see other ways of being in the world, ways that resisted dominant narratives of order. While her work is not widely recognized as queer, her desire to disrupt normative practices mirrors queerness, or the desire for alternative ways of being.
My doctoral work has explored norms and how they are transmitted from generation to generation. Driven by a similar desire to disrupt norms, I focused on cultural and commercial products for children because they transmit social heritage generationally from producers (adults) to consumers (children). As I developed and expanded my research, I repeatedly was asked how I could know what children were understanding in their encounters with these products, which included books, games, toys, and media programming. How was my adult-centered perspective different from the producers whose products I studied? Like producers, I was drawing on ideas and ideals about childhood and child cultures without any sense of the ways children were understanding or incorporating these ideas into their interactions with these products. In this study, I attempt to go beyond adult-centered perspectives to consider children’s responses in order to explore their understandings of the world. I analyze disruptive moments, which are easy to identify by their nature. I also study rote behavior, or interactions that are uncontested and unconsciously enacted, in hopes of observing ways dominant ideologies about childhood, family, gender, sexuality, and social interactions are naturalized. Throughout the dissertation, I draw on a range of data to consider how interactions in the reading club may help illuminate social norms about families, romantic relationships, childhood, and literacy practices.

Overview of Study
This dissertation study is a qualitative inquiry of an afterschool reading club with seven first graders from a predominantly white, upper-middle class urban neighborhood. Our weekly meetings were held afterschool for about four months in early 2015. The
study explored what happens when a diverse group of children participated in an afterschool reading club that focused on representations of families. By working with these children, I hoped to learn about their cultural and social beliefs, particularly those informing understandings of family models, and to learn more about how literary events can engage children in literacy practices. Literacy is more than the ability to decode texts; it is a form of ideology that values a certain social order or set of social practices—“norms”—that give preference to those who best adhere to these practices and reflects “the moral philosophy of a particular society and its education system” (cf. Berggren & Berggren in Street, 1984, p. 184). As Street (1984) writes, “understanding literacy as a form of ideology at least enables us to recognise [sic] these problems at the level at which they may be resolved” (p. 208). I wish to explore the ideological model of literacy to better understand how certain social practices define and constrain how particular practices and groups are taken up and integrated into our literary events.

To do this I needed to be a participant observer because ideological demarcation required self-awareness of my own habits and practices. Heath (1983) notes the importance of taking a subjective stance when working with children (groups) because this raises awareness of personal habits and how we bring our “home habits” in our behavior and beliefs. In doing so, norms applied to our interactions become more apparent (p. 266). Throughout this study, I adopt an active stance intended to question my own stance with regard to literacy, the children, and families.

The project design was influenced by a pilot study with first graders. In 2013, I volunteered in first grade classroom in a K-8 public school in a large Mid-Atlantic district
undergoing a fiscal crisis. Situated in an historical neighborhood, the school is well funded due to supplemental private donations. The population is diverse racially, religiously, culturally, and socio-economically as are parents’ educations and jobs. Family models include heterosexual and same-sex two-parent households, single parent households, young and old families, foster care, extended families, families with incarcerated or institutionalized members, divorced and separated families, and blended families. Most children live within walking distance, and many have social relationships extending beyond their time at the school. Although the pilot study ended in June 2013, I continued to volunteer in a first grade classroom one day/week the following school year (starting in September, 2014).

In January 2015, I invited children from this classroom to participate in my research study, which was an afterschool reading club that focused on family diversity. Seven children signed up and the first club meeting was in February 2015. We met at Old Falvey Café, a coffee shop near the children’s school, so the children and I could interact freely without constraints of school oversight or schedules. Parental involvement was limited to pre- and post- interviews and brief conversations when they picked their children up from the club.

My theoretical framework draws deeply on queer theory, specifically the work of Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz. Muñoz (2009) defines queer theory as more than “sexual object choice but …that dominant and overarching temporal and spatial organization of the world” (p. 154). Queer theory explores heteronormativity, a set of }
social beliefs and structures that normalize heterosexuality and position non-heterosexuality as deviant (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). In this dissertation, I explore heteronormativity and queerness as identity (e.g., “sexual object choice”) and also as spatial and temporal organization. I first consider ways that identities were queered. This includes looking at the experiences of one boy with two dads as well as the children’s intertextual and interpersonal exchanges. Secondly, I consider how time and space were queered in this club. By holding our literary events away from a formal school environment, it was possible at times to observe ways that our behavior reinforced heteronormativity and notions of childhood. There also were moments when heteronormative boundaries were pushed against or traversed in ways that I had not observed in their classroom. That the club was an out-of-school activity, with an alternative location and time created opportunities to engage with one another and literature in ways that were new to us.

Framing my study through this breakdown of queer theory provided opportunities to reflect on my experiences with this curious group of children. It also pushes against the idea that queerness rests solely in identity. By using a queer lens to consider the organization of time and space, I hope to contribute to a greater conversation about queerness and heteronormativity. I use the term gender/sex/uality to acknowledge “the complex and shifting relationships that exist between gender, sex, and sexuality” (Blaise, 2014, p. 115). This term resists binaries such as “straight” and “gay” and complicates identity within a broader framework of social organization.
A second major influence on the theoretical design was epistemic injustice (Frank, 2013, Fricker, 2007), which draws attention to epistemic practices – or how we draw on our knowledge resources – that privilege certain groups to the detriment of others. An epistemic justice framework, a term I using to complement epistemic injustice, seeks to identify epistemic practices that lead to a more accurate representation of the world. This situates epistemic diversity as a social benefit: “if the perspectives of those positioned without power in our social world go unheard then our collective epistemic resources are less robust than they otherwise should be” (Frank, 2013, p. 365). Epistemic justice acknowledges that expanding collective knowledge and improving epistemic resources better prepare individuals for a greater variation of encounters. Integrating epistemic justice with queer studies recognizes the efforts of queer scholars to raise awareness of the silencing of queer identities and logics (Butler, 1990/2008; Hames-García, 2011; Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009) and offers a framework to analyze minoritization of those who identify or exist in queer spaces.

Fricker (2007) argues that epistemic injustice occurs when our epistemic practices are violated either through an inability to have our voices heard when we speak (e.g., testimonial injustice) or through a lack of available resources to help us make sense of our social experiences (e.g., hermeneutical injustice). This framework, which focuses on knowing the world through our ability to draw from collective resources and through our ability to be acknowledged as speakers, seemed especially appropriate with this group of young people. How did their position as children create challenges for them to be seen as intellectual equals with me? And how did their own range of family backgrounds affect
our interpersonal interactions? By analyzing interactions though an epistemic justice framework, I am able to identify ways that we lacked collective knowledge (i.e., hermeneutical) resources to make sense of one another’s life stories.

A third aspect of this study is the consideration of children, child culture, and childhood. Very often children are research objects, perceived as unable to articulate well on their lived experiences. One goal of this study was to make room for children to follow their impulses and to ‘get out of their way’ so to speak. Inspired by Karen Murris (2013, 2015), who argued that children could be intellectual equals if adults are willing to bypass epistemic privilege bestowed by age, I strove to honor the children as “knowers”. This was a challenge for me especially when my community of “knowers” frequently diverged from my research goals. For example, several of the girls preferred to spend their time drawing pictures rather than talk about the books I brought to club. Through a collection of practices best named diffractive, I came to see how my own responses with the children impacted group dynamics. Davies (2014) claims that diffractive practice differs from reflective ones in that reflective practices reveal what is already there, while diffractive focuses on “on-going production” (p. 2). As we were all part of this new reading club, each week together was part of our on-going production, and each of played a role in how we interacted as a group of people interested in literature and reading.

This philosophical shift of children as intellectual equals is a reconsideration of the way society positions children and parallels ideas that children are queer constructions. As Bruhm and Hurley (2004) observe, children are queer in their asexuality, “architects of the child in culture have developed elaborate means of editing
out or avoiding the kinds of sexuality children aren’t supposed to have” (pp. x-xi).

Children, because they are not yet heterosexual exist on a kind of queer plane. Children’s literature reinforces an asexuality → heterosexuality trajectory of “normal” child development. Idealized childhood is portrayed through nostalgic utopianism, either through depictions of “what was” or the “what could be”. In this sense, children’s literature functions as a source of cultural reproduction (p. xiii). When an epistemic justice framework is overlaid on this portrayal of childhood, then children’s literature can be seen as privileged hermeneutical resources that both “instruct and delight” children and their adult caregivers (Sipe, 2008). When studying children and child cultures, considering how adults depict childhood, especially in those resources intended for children, offers insight into ways heterosexuality is organized as the norm.

This notion that the child links to queer theory and queerness extends beyond sexual object choice is relevant in an era with shifting definitions of what constitutes legal romantic relationships, notably gay marriage. This intersects with my reading club, which included two children with gay parents. Little research has been done that takes into account perspectives of children with gay parents. In the literature review, I could not find one study that tried to understand the experiences of children with gay parents from the perspective of young children. Children’s voices remain largely silent due to concerns about their validity and a fear that talking about their parents’ non-normative sexuality may be risky and cause potential harm to their sense of self (e.g., Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). In this study, I challenge this perspective and have attempted to address this by creating interactions that were initiated and led by child participants. As you will read,
giving children the space to talk about their families and family diversity was informative and may provide new insights for scholarship in the field.

The study evolved as I learned more about queer theory, namely the shift from focus on sexual identity toward a new way of considering our relationship with time and space, and it is through this reconsideration that I discover new ways to make sense of the children’s interactions in the club and our literacy events. As Ryan (2010) suggests “contextualizing LGBT families as part of a larger concept of family diversity could be an effective tool for researchers and practitioners in certain situations, yet the particular stigma of queer sexuality, especially in relation to children, must be acknowledged” (p. 293). By welcoming these children as intellectual equals and informants, I hoped to disrupt any stigma and explore ways heterosexuality is normalized in young children’s interactions and how non-normative interactions are received and taken up in our group.

**Study Outcomes**

This dissertation study contributes to academic scholarship in three ways: (1) it examines emerging definitions of family models; (2) it offers perspectives of children’s meaning making practices during literacy events; and (3) it reconsiders conceptions of children as research participants. In the beginning, the reading club was designed as a way to learn about the experiences of an understudied group (i.e., children of gay parents) but it came to represent a physical space and time when we could imagine reading/writing/literacy differently. We considered “alternative methods of alliance” and “forms of representation dedicated to capturing these willfully eccentric ways of being” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 1). So much of early elementary school is about learning to be a
learner and to overcome these seemingly ‘willful eccentricities’, but this club was a site where the eccentricities were (mostly) welcomed. The reading club became a space and time to engage differently with literacy and literary events. Our reading was transformed from what was done in the classroom and at home to one that responded to the dynamics of the group, the setting, and context for coming together. In a sense, the study troubled the idea of the “official” worlds of the classroom and the “unofficial” worlds of children’s peer relationships (Genishi & Dyson, 2009) because it was a site that drew from both worlds. This resistance to binaries is one way the study queered the reading experience, since queerness is about alternative ways of being. This expansive interpretation of reading and readalouds, in particular, opens up our understanding of children’s engagement with and responses to literature (building on Sipe’s (2008) model). I discuss how this space became a place for children to break from classroom-oriented reading and reader roles, a space where voice and body were able to explore new frontiers. Through this synthesis of identity/identification, time/movement, and space/location, I hope to offer a framework to reconsider how queerness and epistemic justice can positively influence literacy practices in classrooms.

**Chapter Overview**

The research question guiding this study is *what happens in an afterschool reading club when young children have opportunities to explore stories about diverse families?* The proceeding two chapters discuss the conceptual framework as well as data collection and analytic methods. Chapter 2 expands on ideas introduced in this introduction and includes theoretical background and a literature review to explain the
rational for undertaking this study. I use the term *conceptual framework* rather than *theoretical framework* because of wide-ranging influences on my thinking, some of which do not align neatly with a school of thought or “theory”. I draw from a range of theories including New Literacy Studies, queer, and theories of childhood to describe our interactions as a reading and research community. Using this conceptual framework, I inductively designed curriculum based on my preliminary findings and analyzed data gathered during our meetings. In Chapter 3, I outline what I did, why I did it, and how it was executed. This chapter will help people understand my data collection and analytical methods; it provides material information on how to replicate some of the methods in their own research/practice.

In the subsequent chapters, I present the data analysis. In Chapter 4, I conduct a parallel analysis of award-winning children’s literature and Richard’s experiences in the club. First, I share results from a critical content analysis of award-winning children’s literature to highlight how heteronormativity, and a particularly narrow kind of heteronormativity, predominated in this body of children’s literature. I then share telling moments from the club to discuss how the children invoked their identities. Focusing particularly on Richard, who has two dads, I describe how the children responded to Richard’s description of his family and romantic relationships. Applying an epistemic justice framework to their interactions enabled an exploration of the children’s collective knowledge resources, which did not prepare them for these interactions. This chapter highlights heteronormative preference in children’s literature and juxtaposes this finding against Richard’s efforts to explain his family model to his peers and their reactions.
Chapter 5 shifts queerness from identity to a critical examination of the organization of time and space. I consider how time and space are socially constructed by heteronormativity, and I draw on different ways the club’s organization queered time - and the different ways the children responded to this queering. I focus on the readaloud as a unit of analysis because it was a weekly activity that brought us all together. Thinking of the reading club as a site of queering creates openings to re-imagine routine practices and provides insight into alternative ways children engage with literature, literary events, and one another.

In Chapter 6, I continue to explore how the reading club queered time and space. I seek ways to integrate children’s voices into research literature by focusing on their play, which was mostly self-directed. I consider different ways to write myself into their play, which I attempt to do by creating multimodal vignettes to summarize core themes in their play and talk. For example, I draw from the children’s romantic play to create “Crushes”, a found poem I created from dialogue recorded during the clubs. Creating this multimodal found poem emphasized the romantic nature of their talk and creates an artifact to discuss how the children enacted and understood romantic gestures.

The last chapter of the dissertation offers a summary of my findings and implications this study has on literacy research. I return to my overarching question, what happens in an afterschool reading club when young children have opportunities to explore stories about diverse families? This is where I started; the question is open-ended and reflects my desire to be open to possibilities and the unknown. Through my iterative approach (i.e., a process of reflexivity and the integration of my own explorations in
theory with my encounters with the children) I have come to understand that using queer theory and epistemic justice as a framework to work with children creates openings for new understandings of childhood, children, and child cultures, specifically the adult-researcher’s relationship to them. This study revealed, for me, the complexity of heteronormativity and its influence on society.

**Final Thoughts**

The pedagogical implications of this study are to question how educational settings are organized: whose voices are heard the most and how are variations from dominant beliefs and practices acknowledged, taken up, and integrated into classrooms and teaching practices? I have chosen queer theory and epistemic justice as frameworks for considering voice and representation because they may offer new ways of understanding children and families. Throughout the study, I consider the question: *How do I honor the children’s voices, intentions, expertise, and desires when their objectives don’t align with mine?* While queer theory frequently ignores or dismisses gay families as homonormative – or blindly accepting of the dominant overarching social organization that favors heteronormativity (Muñoz, 2009) – conducting research with young children is one way to disrupt heteronormativity. In this study, I draw on postdevelopmental approaches of childhood to incorporate the children as research participants. By following their lead and by recognizing that they have unique perspectives on what it means to be a child in our club and at this unique moment in history shifted the children to agentive roles in our club. This is queering because it contests developmental time, an organization of time deemed heteronormative because it naturalizes the human lifespan
as a trajectory from infancy to heterosexual adulthood (Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009). Situating children as I have in this study resists the comfortable stance of positioning children as incomplete or not-yet-adults, and it requires that I let go of my understanding of childhood to be open and responsive to their ways of knowing the world. This connection between concepts of childhood and queerness thus allows us to consider how heterosexuality extends beyond physical attraction (or sexual object choice) to a predominating organization of the world.

Queer theory, in this application, encourages us to reconsider the organization of space and time, to question ideas and practices that seem natural. By expanding my understanding of queerness beyond sexual object choice, I was able to identify important ways that assumptions about society – particularly spatial-temporal organization – are naturalized, especially in this particular context. By reconsidering our relationship with time/movement and space/location, this study identifies openings – or Muñoz’s (2009) potentialities – to see the world differently. Ryan (2010), specifically, points to the liminal space of children from gay families, whom she identifies as “cultural chameleons” able to “straddle the line between gay and straight worlds” (p. 287). Acknowledging and attempting understand how children from gay families make sense of their worlds is one part of the study.

Another aspect of the study is attempting to make sense of the different ways children use space and time in literary encounters and how their use reflects and/or incorporates heteronormativity. Adopting a wider understanding of queerness also informed my reading of epistemic justice – which Fricker (2007) defines as being
satisfied when both testimonial justice and hermeneutical justice are upheld – and childhood more generally. In this dissertation, I noted the importance of exploring hermeneutical resources – or collective knowledge resources – and made connections between the everyday experiences of my participants and the resources they had to help them interpret these experiences. Hermeneutical and testimonial justice are not only preconditions for epistemic justice but interdependent. This study may add to our hermeneutical resources about family models – as well as children, childhood, and child cultures – and thus move us toward a model of education that is more epistemically just.

To close, I turn to bell hooks (1994a):

If I had the power, I would make everything in the world be the right size for children, and grown-ups would have to learn how to do everything differently. In many ways progressive cultural revolution can happen only as we learn to do everything differently. Decolonizing our minds and imaginations, we learn to think differently, to see everything with “the new eyes” Malcolm X told us we needed if we were to enter the struggle as subjects not objects. (p. 7)

Like hooks, I draw attention to ways our minds and imaginations are influenced – or colonized – but I focus on heteronormativity, an organization of the world extends beyond sexual object choice to temporal and spatial structures. In this study, I hope to make visible ways these structures are adhered to, resisted, and integrated into children’s literary events and play.
Chapter 2
Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework offers a window into my thought process from the first germination through to this dissertation. As the blueprint of my research, it provides the rationale for the study and the theoretical, empirical, experiential, and philosophical influences that influenced the design, methods, and analysis (Maxwell, 2012; Ravitch et al., 2012). It provides a series of lenses that informed and guided me; the broadest of these lenses is social constructivism, or the idea that learning is collaborative and occurs in interactions with others. The study’s structure and data collection methods were designed to honor participants’ contributions and to analyze ways that our interactions shaped the club’s dynamics.

Throughout the study, I draw on queer theory to consider how gender, sex, and sexuality shaped and influenced our interactions and group organization. Queer theory emphasizes being open to other ways of knowing and being in the world, particularly resisting heterosexuality as “natural” or correct. This complements social constructivism as it influences what I attended to in our interactions. I use an epistemic justice framework – which explores collective knowledge resources and how individuals are heard, responded to, and integrated into the group’s collective understanding – to think about how the children were participating and making sense of interactions. Through this two-step process of analysis – first, thinking about how our events took up gender, sex, and sexuality, and, second, by considering how knowledge is shared – I was able to
interpret varying ways the children understood and enacted gender, relationships, and even literary events. But I am getting ahead of myself. In this chapter I outline the idea that directed or motivated the study, my commitments that create parameters for the study, an argument for why the topic matters, and evidence that the means are appropriate and rigorous to justify the findings.

**The Idea**

The germinating idea for this dissertation topic was that experiences of children whose parents are in same-sex relationships – that is parents who are gay – may have perspectives and experiences that may offer a window into perceived social norms about families and gender roles (Evans, 2009; Gustavson, & Schmidt, 2011; Ryan, 2010). These children, whose home lives include two mommies or two daddies, may offer rich insights into the constructivist nature of gender roles and relationship normatives\(^2\). While my dissertation is not about the unique experiences of children with gay parents – since my participants include children from a range of family models – the motivation for this study is to queer the family and to consider the experiences of the child when queered.

Queerness “is more than just sexuality. It is the great refusal of a performance principle that allows the human to feel and know not only our work and our pleasure but also our selves and others” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 135). In order to truly know us, we must reject the notion of performance or a “right” or “correct” way and be aware of alternative ways of doing and being.

\(^2\) Note on terminology: for the purposes of this study, I have decided to use the term “gay families” to refer to families that are headed by same-sex couples who are openly gay. See Appendix A for a longer discussion of terminology and terminology choices.
In this study, I work to resist normative definitions – in this case of families, identities, texts, and even reading practices – to consider potential; it is “a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 96). How can I untangle my socially constructed understandings of certain norms and what do I discover when I do this? Queer scholars (for example, Blaise, 2005; Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009; Ryan et al., 2013) suggest using queer theory as a critical approach may reveal identity categories in new ways and may lead to questions that challenge and reconstruct dominant ideas about families and relationships (Ryan et al., 2013) because we shed expectations of certain ways of being. As Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth (2013) note, framing discussions about texts with a queer lens encourages “an exploration of non-normative sexualities and genders that can work against the silences currently found in elementary schools without requiring the reading of LGBT-inclusive texts” (p. 144). Situating my research outside a school space enabled me to work with participants in ways that may not be permitted in official school spaces, including how time and space are ordered.

This reading club became a site of queerness because it disrupted notions of identity, families, reading, and childhood for all participants, including myself. In this sense, the club achieved what Muñoz (2009) suggests is the goal queer critique, “to read outside official documentations” (p. 148). My desire was to create a generative project that offered expansive conceptions of a particular community (empirical study), a variety of research practices (methodological implications), and conceptualizations of children, development, community on our understanding of literacy practices (theory building).
The idea of working with children from gay families emerged from my past research that looked particularly at considerations of gender representation in children’s media (Skrlac Lo, 2007, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c) specifically television and literary content. While abundant research has been done on issues of gender representation\(^3\) much of the research situates gender in binary terms of masculine-feminine, ignoring more complicated conceptions of gender identity. For example, educational studies of gender focused on identifying differences between girls and boys (e.g. Cherland, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Goodwin, 1980) and “discovered” inherent and profound differences between boys and girls, including ways of speaking (Goodwin, 1980), thinking (Gilligan, 1982), and learning (cf. Shibley-Hyde, 2005 for a complete list of studies that consider within- and across-group variation of the genders). Challenges to this differences approach emerges starting in the 1980s with third wave feminists and other poststructural and critical theorists, who contested that a differences approach defined gender and sexuality in narrow ways. Many did not see themselves in these categorizations and felt this approach essentialized what it means to be gendered; gender becomes uniform and universal (e.g., Butler, 1990/2008; hooks, 1994a). The difference approach is critiqued for overemphasizing the impact gender has an individual and underemphasizing different characteristics or traits that may have equal or greater influence on how individuals see and experience the world (e.g., race, class, culture, educational level, religion, sexuality).

\(^3\) For example, Bleakley, Westerberg, & Hopkins, 1988; Cherland, 1992; Clark, 2006; Crisp et al., 2011; Davies, 1989/2003; Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, & Young, 2006; Karniol & Gal-Disegni, 2009; Kohl, 1995; Kok & Findlay, 2006; Lester, 2008; Mallan, 2009; Marshall, 2004; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003; Riggs & Hanson-Easey, 2014; Ryan, 2010; Ryan et al., 2013; Tabor & Woloshyn, 2011; Wickens, 2011.
It also largely ignores overlap between gendered individuals, positioning those who do not fit gender norms on the margins. Looking at gender variation rather than gender binaries may open up space to identify and discuss social influences that inform gender norms. Sedgwick (2004) calls for a variation rather than a difference or dichotomized approach because variation implies a range of possibilities while difference implies a center or ideal from which one deviates. Drawing attention to word choice, such as variation versus deviation, are small ways to raise awareness of the ways that norms around gender/sex/uality are socially rather than biologically constructed (Bruhm et al., 2004; Butler, 1990/2008; Davies, 2000; Sedgwick, 2004). As I designed the study, I considered how families were represented, and I looked for stories that included variations of genders and sexualities rather than deviations from an implied norm.

I use children’s literature as a way to explore representations of and ideas about gender, sex, and sexuality with children, specifically in the context of family diversity because children’s literature portrays ideal families and childhoods (Alston, 2008; Bruhm et al., 2004; Sedgwick, 2004). Families least frequently depicted in literature include single parents, same-sex parents, racially and culturally minoritized families, extended families, blended families, interracial families, among others (Bothelo et al., 2009; Brooks, 2006; Crisp et al., 2011; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003; Riggs et al., 2014; Ryan, 2010; Ryan et al., 2013). Bruhm and Hurley (2004), for example, suggest that children’s books represent an idealized forms of children, ones that draw on adults’ revisionist histories and dreams for the future:
The child is the product of physical reproduction, but functions just as surely as a figure of cultural reproduction. Thus both the utopianism and the nostalgia invoked by the figure of the child [in literature] are, in turn, the preferred form of the future. (p. xiii)

Books rarely portray the present as it is because of these adult-mediated filters. This is problematic because it ignores or limits the child’s agency as a living actor and active reader⁴. Children have few sources to see the world or depictions of the world that mirror their child-centered perspectives. Children’s literature also fails to include depictions of the world as it really is for many people. When young readers do not see their families and family lives reflected in the texts, they may become aware that their family may not be internalizing family ideology correctly, and the further from normative family ideology, the greater the risk of harm to the child (Alston, 2008). Few studies on literacy acquisition, families and literacy, and educational practices more broadly examine closely the perspectives of young children from gender-diverse families; yet by focusing on these families, it may be possible to generate new understandings of social and contextual learning and the significance of cultural practices such as reading literature with children. Highly regarded children’s literature, as I show in Chapter 4, mirrors normative preferences for heterosexuality and reproductive time, the idea that a human lifespan follows a trajectory toward heterosexuality and biological reproduction (Halberstam, 2005). These narrow representations of family may potentially harm children who do not see their own lives reflected in the texts.

⁴ Yet I also recognize that children have neither the language skills nor access to resources to be regular producers of children’s literature.
My own research on representations of gender and gender roles in children’s television and literature also found that gender roles tended to be narrowly defined, ascribing to either male-female dominant power binaries (i.e., Butler’s (1990/2008) heterosexual matrix), or a role reversal of gender roles, typically in books defined as feminist (cf. Altman, 1990; Marshall, 2004). This narrow representation of gender roles in children’s media, especially literature, is consistent with other studies on gender representation in children’s media (Hamilton et al., 2006; Karniol et al., 2009; Kok et al., 2006, Riggs et al., 2014, etc.). From these findings emerged new questions. How do these gendered portrayals inform readers/viewers about the roles of males and females? How do these portrayals set up expectations for children who will become adults? How do people whose own realities did not mirror these portrayals make sense of the discord between their lived worlds and the fictional worlds they encountered? In short, I am curious about engagements with literature (and media) influence our sense of place, family, school, and community.

These questions, a pilot study I conducted in 2013-14, and an extensive literature review guided this dissertation project, which was an afterschool reading club for first graders. During the pilot study, which was a participant observer study in a first grade classroom, I realized that if I wanted to interact in literacy events with children with minimal restrictions to content and activities, then I would have to leave the classroom. The educational climate in this classroom included restrictions on space and content as well as limited opportunities to veer from curriculum and to engage in small group interactions. Since I am interested in alternative interactions with children, I decided to
relocate the study. For this project, I asked: **what happens in an afterschool reading club when young children have opportunities to explore stories about diverse families?** The following secondary research questions guided this study:

**RQ1:** How are families represented in literature?

**RQ2:** How do children talk about books, reading, and engage in literacy practices in which variations of family are included?

**RQ3:** How do I honor the children’s voices, intentions, expertise, and desires when their objectives don’t align with mine?

A sociocultural approach situates participants as negotiators of social and historical events that influence conceptions of self across space and time. This approach can draw awareness to “the inextricable link between children’s literacy learning and their participation in community activities” (Dyson, 2007, p. 17). To do this, I turn to queer theorists who argue that gender/sex/uality are not bound by a biological imperative, rather these bonds are social constructions privileging certain groups and types of relationships, namely heterosexual ones (Butler, 1990/2008; Blaise, 2005; Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009). New Literacy Studies informs how I frame my definition of literacy; I draw on Street’s (1984) definition of literacy practices as rooted in ideologies that often unquestionably shape local practices and beliefs.

As I reviewed scholarly literature and considered how my background, interests, and experiences could inform my dissertation topic, I discovered a gap in the literature – first-hand accounts of children, specifically those children whose parents’ relationship or sexuality did not align with the majoritarian male-female binary. Let me be clear, this
study is not about isolating children with gay parents, putting them under a microscope in order to extract information about how their home lives are different. Rather, I have committed to a study that is designed to honor and respect these young participants, to make space for their ideas and voices, in hopes that they can shed insight into the powerful ways heterosexual family models are socially constructed as biological normatives. Moreover, the study was not limited to children with same-sex parents; it was open to all students in the first-grade class where I volunteered one day per week. I had developed a relationship with many of these children and felt that a small group of these children would be comfortable with me and with one another to speak freely.

This sociocultural constructivist approach draws from the work of literacy scholars whose work adopts this approach (e.g., Campano, 2007; Dyson, 1997, 2003, 2010, 2013; Edelsky, 2006; Genishi et al., 2009; Heath, 1983; Janks, 2010; Roche, 2015; Sipe, 2008; Street, 1984; Vasquez, 2004; Wohlwend, 2007). My work is also informed by a range of scholars who use critical theories (Bothelo & Rudman, 2009; Comber, 2011; hooks, 1994a, 1994b) especially queer theory (Blackburn, 2004; Butler, 2000; Halberstam, 2005, Muñoz, 2009; Ryan, 2010; Ryan et al., 2013). This work raises awareness of different ways minoritized individuals are aware of norms due to frequent exclusion and/or limited immersion in the majority group. Queer theory turns our attention to subjectivities often taken for granted and works to destabilize normative assumptions around gender/sex/uality (Ryan et al., 2013). Finally, my research is informed by childhood studies scholars (e.g., Davies, 2000, 2014; Murris, 2013, 2015), chiefly Mindy Blaise’s (2005, 2010, 2013b, 2014; Blaise & Taylor, 2012) scholarship.
Her work on gender/sex/uality and postdevelopmental considerations of understanding children influenced how I interacted with the children and families. Adopting postdevelopmental logic is one approach to challenging normative conceptions of childhood, which are rooted in developmental psychology and reductive biological and socialization theories (Blaise, 2013a, 2015). It requires an open stance and a willingness to seek new understandings of childhood and children’s experiences that shift away from this linear trajectory in order to be receptive to “unpredictable moments when perceptions of childhood are subverted and twisted” (Blaise, 2015, p. 2). Collectively, these bodies of scholarship recognize that knowledge is incomplete, subjective, and influenced at varying rates by different ideologies.

My work is guided by a desire to uncover social patterns to better understand how certain ideologies about families and relationships are institutionalized or normalized at a societal level. In this dissertation study, I wanted to see what happened when I designed a space to work with children who came from a diverse range of families that included gay families and created opportunities for these children to share home experiences through encounters with literature. I chose to use children’s literature for several reasons (e.g., personal interest, social status as a cultural product – literature has high status, reading is a highly desirous activity according to many adults, program of study, and personal knowledge). By meeting at an afterschool reading club, we were able to explore ideas and interpersonal connections in ways that extended and countered classroom practices. These small group interactions proved to be fertile ground for expanding my understanding of childhood, families and heteronormativity more generally.
Commitments

From the start, I have been mindful that this topic of studying the experiences of young children of same-sex couples is risky. It is risky to me as a novice scholar because I am exploring issues that remain taboo especially with young children and in school settings (dePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2013; Thein, 2013). This perception is rooted in the social taboo about discussing sexuality with children, and same-sex relationships are deemed inherently sexual in ways that heterosexual relationships are not (Bruhm et al., 2004; dePalma et al., 2010). Pre-adolescent children often are regarded as asexual or without sex (Bruhm et al., 2004; Foucault, 1990a) so to introduce a discussion that challenges normative sexualities (e.g., monogamous heterosexual partnerships) may be an unnecessary risk that should be avoided. Moreover, because children of gay parents are perceived at particular risk of being exploited, gay parents and organizations that support gay families, such as COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere) are cautious about supporting any research on children and young families (Kuvalanka, personal correspondence, May 7, 2013).

There also is some perceived risk for participants. First, depending on setting, participants risk being ostracized and/or bullied (Chevrette, 2013; Gustavson & Schmidt, 2011; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Movement Advancement Project (MAP), Family Equality Council (FEC), & Center for American Progress (CAP), 2011). Second, depending on previous experiences and group norms, there was a risk that this study could create a sense of self-consciousness in participants about their family models. Being sensitive of children’s positionality and perspectives of their family models was my first commitment.
I committed to designing a research study that was respectful of all children in the group and to not create a sense of “Othering” – or consciousness that they do not align with the norm – by drawing attention to a particular family model. To assure this personal and ethical commitment I established two ground rules:

(1) I never insisted that children talk about their home lives. If a child chose not to answer a question, I respected this desire not to participate.

(2) My method for selecting literature was based on an extensive critical content analysis of children’s books. I purposefully picked books that did not objectify particular family models. For example, I did not share the book *In Our Mothers’ House* by Patricia Polacco (2008) because it tells the story of a family that is ostracized and discriminated against due to the mothers’ same-sex relationship.

Based on my observations in the classroom, discussions with parents and the classroom teacher, and preliminary discussions with the children, it was unclear if any children felt any overt, conscious sense of difference because of their parents’ sexual identity. During pre interviews, parents who were in same-sex relationships said that they were not aware of their children experiencing any discrimination or differential treatment by adults or other children due to their relationship. My encounters with Richard, who has two fathers, would suggest that he was aware that his family model was non-normative, but he never directly expressed any sense of being different or troubled by this status. During my time with these children, I wanted to be mindful of how our conversations and the literature could create a safe space to discuss home lives without drawing particular attention or stigma to diverse models.
A second commitment that guided my study was ethical. I wanted to ensure the study respected the participants. I wanted to honor children’s voices since the purpose of this study is to create moments for the children to talk. This commitment to ethical investigation was deeply informed by work on epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007; Murris, 2013, 2015) and epistemological shifts required to provide participants with resources to make sense of their worlds and to provide me with resources to understand them. As the study progressed, I used reflective and inductive coding to improve our communications and interactions. Each week I would review the audio and video recordings noting how my engagements with the children affected dynamics. For example, I wrote a fieldnote about Stephen’s behavior, which I noted initially as disruptive and usually off task. After reviewing the video and audio footage, I realized my perception of him as a “trouble-maker” was biased. His behavior did not differ significantly from the other children although my response to him did. I was firmer, more direct, and often expressed frustration with him. After noticing this, I adjusted my response to him and our interactions shifted from antagonistic toward collaborative.

This leads to my third commitment, which was to create an onto-epistemological study, or one that acknowledged “the inseparability of being and knowing” (Lam, 2015, p. 486). By being aware of positionality – and particularly mine – throughout this process, I worked to create a consciousness of practice that could raise awareness of moments that may otherwise be deemed natural or normal. This aligned with my desired to destabilize normative assumptions about families, relationships, and childhood. By reflecting on my own positionality as well as the children’s I hoped to queer idea(l)s
about family, children, reading, and research. In this study, I reconceptualize notions of family and use literature that reflects this more expansive conception of family in hopes of opening discussions with young people about families, relationships, and identity. Through these discussions, I hope to gain insight into family models, gender roles, childhood and ways that engagement in literary events can lead to more diverse conversations. This approach is designed to include – or recognize – a wider range of experiences thus welcome more people through expanded definitions of family/relationships and literacy practices.

**Why the Topic Matters**

This research study on child engagement may add to our understanding of how engagement with books is impacted by content and quality of texts. Children are situated as “active contributors to evolving communities that both draw on and influence larger cultural systems” (Dyson, 1997, p. 6); they actively draw on various resources – including personal ones – to connect to texts, which contribute to their textual fluency and their communities (Dyson, 1997; Sipe, 2008). Failing to explore non-normative representations of families perpetuates heteronormativity (Crisp et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2013) and may harm at least two groups: children from families that do not conform to heteronormativity and whose life events are silenced through omission, and those from communities where heterosexuality is the norm are denied opportunities to see realistic representations of families and individuals. My research seeks narratives that range from naturalizing non-normative relationships to building inclusive and expansive collections that recognize the shifting subjectivity of readers (Ryan et al., 2013) and their agency to
make texts relevant (Sipe, 2002). An inclusive collection includes books that welcome a diverse range of readers into the stories through near-universal features that most (all) readers recognize, such as playing with friends. An expansive collection has books that include diverse portrayals of people and experiences, which provide readers entry to worlds that may not resemble their own lives. This approach to literary engagement situates learners as active participants in their literacy acquisition and creates space for children from diverse families to include their worlds in structured literacy events. I now turn to the literature review of scholarship on LGBT families and representations of LGBT communities.

LGBT themes in children’s literature

Initial findings from a literature review of scholarly material demonstrated that there is insufficient consideration given to diverse family models in the literature (both literary and academic) and that considerations of these families have long been almost absent except in very narrow ways. In literary texts, gay families are rarely present and when they are, the story usually problematizes this relationship. When they are not problematized, gay families are hyper-normalized; that is, they are portrayed as exactly the same as a heterosexual family except for the parents’ sexual identities. This is problematic in many ways, which I discuss in Chapter 4 when I describe results of an extensive critical content analysis on award-winning children’s literature.

The research literature on representations of gender and LGBT individuals in literary texts can be divided roughly into two groups: those that address gender as a

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5 See Appendix A for a discussion of terminology.
binary (e.g., masculine and feminine) and those who question when and how LGBT characters are included. While the former has decades of published research (Altmann, 1994; Bleakly et al., 1988; Brooks, 2006; Clark, 2006; Davies, 1989/2003; Dyson, 1997; Karniol et al., 2009; Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, & Young, 2006; Kok et al., 2006; Marshall, 2004; among others), much of this research focuses on gender as a categorical variable and few studies break the male-female gender dichotomy. When studies, such as Elizabeth Marshall’s (2004), adopt a feminist poststructuralist perspective and explore the fluidity of gender roles across contexts, genders remain distinctly male and female even if these categories are understood as socially produced.

Several recent studies begin to question this binary and to tease apart texts that suggest heterosexuality is a dominant discourse (Bullock & Friedman, 2008; Crisp et al., 2011; Lester, 2008; skelton, 2015; Taber et al., 2011; Wickens, 2011). Drawing our attention to this heteronormativity disrupts the status quo. It becomes difficult to read a text without considering who is included and what way are characters represented. Corrine Wickens (2011) explores how gay characters are represented in two different young adult texts. Using discourse analysis, she describes how LGBT characters are represented as passive, often portrayed as victims, waiting to be rescued by heterosexual characters, whose act of rescuing represents acceptance of the LGBT character. Wickens argues that this type of representation is oppressive since it connects gay character’s well being to acceptance by the heterosexual community. To effectively speak out to and represent LGBT communities, storylines need to shift from acceptance by heterosexuals towards empowered characters whose gay identity is not the issue for resolution. Jill
Hermann-Wilmarth and Caitlin L. Ryan (2013) reiterate this criticism of LGBT-themed literature. They are concerned that by making sexual orientation of the character a central feature of a story a sort of “Othering” occurs, which overemphasizes identity, ignoring the complexity and layering of our identities (p. 228-229). Thomas Crisp and Brittany Hiller (2011) conduct a deeper exploration of identity and challenge conventional ideas about gender representation by insisting that text is the only marker of gender (e.g., “girl” “man” “he” “she”). They argue that by disconnecting gender from symbolic representations, the books become accessible to a wider audience, particularly those who may be transgender or without gender.

The work of these scholars helps to reveal a homogeneity that infiltrates most literature for young people, especially the very young. As Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer (2003) note, this homogeneity overlooks the experiences of children with gay and lesbian parents or “who themselves may be trying to understand their own homosexual feelings” (p. 130). Literature, like other objects produced by adults for children, idealizes the experience of childhood but often at the expense of essentializing or narrowing the diversity of experiences that all children inevitably face in their day-to-day experiences including those at school.

*Treatment of LGBT families and children in scholarly literature*

In the scholarly literature, research on gay families tends to have roots in sociology, psychology, and education research. Scholarship tends to focus on the impact
of non-normative family models on parenting practices⁶ and the child’s sexual identity⁷ as if testing for a link between intergenerational sexual orientation. Much of this research adopts a deficit perspective: children raised by gay parents may be at risk or face long-term harm. Whether it is moral panic (e.g., an underlying fear of reproducing sexualities (Hosking et al., 2012; Kosciw et al., 2008)) that motivates these studies or an objective interest in understanding the psychological and sociological elements of individuals who offer a relief to the heterosexual normative, the body of literature is growing. More recently published articles are pushing against discourse that dominates this literature and using language that refuses to position LGBT families in the passive role of “the researched”. See, for example, Jamie Evans’ (2009) piece, “A queer spawn manifesto: Empowerment and recognition”. Fewer studies, though, consider the link between LGBT family constellations and education.

While more literature is emerging in the field of education (e.g., Kuvalanka et al., 2009) and from the popular press (cf. Howey & Samuels, 2000), much of it adopts the perspective of youth or adults⁸. This parallels classroom research, of which the majority of the research explores middle and high school settings. These studies focus on inclusivity, allyship, and agency (Blackburn, 2003, 2004; Clark, 2010) or bullying and exclusion (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar & Azrael, 2009; Birkett et al., 2009; Bullock et al, 2008; MAP et al., 2010; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Thein, 2013).

⁶ For example, see Frias-Navarro & Monterde-I-Bort, 2012; Gartrell, Bos, Peyser, Deck, & Rodas, 2012; Goldberg, 2007; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; and Patterson, 2006.
⁷ A range of studies include Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, Mikach, 1995; Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; and Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004.
⁸ See research by Blackburn, 2003, 2004; Clark, 2010; Bailey et al., 1995; Goldberg, 2007; Kosciw et al., 2007; Wainright et al., 2004; among others.
Another body of scholarship focuses on teachers’ sexuality and barriers teachers face in schools if they are not heterosexual (DePalma et al., 2010; Donelson & Rogers, 2004). In the few studies on same-sex families (e.g., Kosciw et al., 2008) the work focuses on older children (ages 8+), and even these relied on parent surveys to gather information rather than attempting to ask children about their experiences. It is unclear if this lack of information from young children is a result of social concerns about the innocence of the child (i.e., the topic is inappropriate for young audiences, risk of Othering or creating self-awareness of “difference”) or a broader social belief that children are unreliable and lack intellectual capacity to speak about life experiences.

Despite research (Kosciw et al., 2007; Thein, 2013) that illustrates homophobia and heteronormativity persist at equal rates across all K-12 school settings (Thein, 2013), this focus on older children and young adults may be due to epistemological beliefs about sexuality and childhood, specifically what is appropriate to discuss with younger children (Blaise, 2013b; Bruhm et al., 2004; Butler, 1990/2008; Chevrette, 2013; Davies, 2000; DePalma et al., 2010; Donelson et al., 2004). Yet scholars who use queer theories are repositioning how gender is considered. Roberta Chevrette (2013) notes that queer and feminist theories can work symbiotically to overcome the “challenges of ‘queering’ interpersonal and family communication research…by (a) revealing the heteronormative assumptions perpetuated by dyadic models…, (b) challenging the public/private bifurcation, (c) complicating notions of identity, and (d) emphasizing intersectionality” (p. 170). Mindy Blaise (2005) describes queer theory as helping to “deepen understandings of the social constructions of gender” by “recognizing and questioning
concepts of normalization and privileges found within heterosexual culture” (p. 20). Current discourse around fair and equal marriage rights for all couples regardless of sexual orientation is an example of public questioning about marriage as a uniquely heterosexual institution. By engaging in this discussion in a public way, such as near daily national news coverage, the focus of LGBT relationships shifts away from sexual orientation towards other aspects of romantic relationships. As a researcher who is interested in working with younger students, this shifting discourse may be beneficial since other (non-school) institutions (e.g., news and popular media, which Wineberg, Mosborg, Porat, & Duncan (2007) identified as important sites of knowledge transmission) may have started to normalize LGBT individuals as positive and active members of the public community, and this may reduce homophobia and transphobia.

Other research about LGBT families

One rich source of information about the experiences of LGBT parents is research from advocacy groups, such as the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) (e.g., Kosciw et al., 2008), MAP (MAP et al., 2011), Human Rights Coalition (Smith & Gates, 2001), and Our Family Coalition (Wilson, 2007). These groups have provided the most significant and detailed studies about the number of children being raised by LGBT parents and provided descriptive statistics about the families. Their research methods are

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9 I have chosen the term romantic relationships rather than sexual relationships because sexual relationships risks focusing the nature of the relationship on sexual interactions and intercourse; however, for most children the relationship of two parents living together is asexual. Furthermore, since LGBT relationships often are sexualized in a way that heterosexual relationships are not (DePalma et al., 2010), choosing “romantic” rather than “sexual” is a political decision to disconnect this focus on LGBT relationships.

10 I define the following reports as “other research” because these are not peer-reviewed studies. Rather, they are reports by advocacy groups and research think tanks. Given the under-treatment by the scholarly community, these reports often were the most descriptive sources of information.
mixed, using surveys and other data collection instruments to provide evidence that this population, which is overlooked and understudied (MAP et al., 2011), exists and has unique characteristics. All Children Matter (MAP et al., 2011) recommends that advocates “press the Secretary of Health and Human Services to include sexual orientation and gender identity for the purposes of data collection…to combat health disparities” (p. 117) between the LGBT population and the heterosexual population. The report also found that while most people believe LGBT families are relatively well off and headed by professionals, LGBT individuals and families have lower incomes, in part due to social stigma and subsequent high levels of relocation, but also due institutional structures, such as the tax code, which limits the benefits same sex parents can access for their households.

In Involved, Invisible, Ignored (Kosciw et al., 2008), which included 588 adults and 154 children (aged 13-20), the authors note that while same-sex parents face increased discrimination and stigma in school communities than other parents, they are more involved in their child’s education than other families (p. 32). While this report is the most detailed of all reports I came across, the study did not go into classrooms but gathered data from surveys. Participants were either parents of K-12 students or students between 13 and 20 years old. It paints a broad picture of school experiences for LGBT-headed families, something that has not previously been done.

One international study, Culturally Queer, Silenced in School (Gustavson et al., 2011.), addresses the lack of information by conducting a multi-site, multi-city European study in order to discover “the powerful and everyday workings of normative
understandings of what family should be” that “re-constructs ideals of family, childhood, sexuality, and gender” (p. 185). The authors question the definition of family and identify why homophobia and transphobia, direct and indirect, should be actively resisted through intolerance towards it and a questioning of everyday practices that normalize these phobic practices. For the authors, the reasons are straightforward: to prevent the silencing of children who may be queer or “queer by association”, and to provide children of heterosexual parents with alternative ways of perceiving family structures.

Finally, there also is a body of literature, popular and scholarly, that is retrospective; adults who grew up with gay parents provide narrative analysis (Evans, 2009; Howey et al., 2000). While it is important for these voices to be heard these types of analyses suffer from two shortcomings. First, these narratives are dated – they reflect a world that differs greatly with regard towards attitudes toward same sex couples and families. For example, many adult children with gay parents did not grow up in households with same sex parents due to legal and social barriers. Second, these narratives are told with adult voices, tempered and filtered by the experiences the authors have had in the decades since they were children.

My literature review, outlined above, affirmed my belief that a gap exists in the literature: children who have gay parents are invisible, omitted from popular and academic scholarship. This omission is troublesome for because it prevents policy makers, educators, scholars, publishers, doctors, social workers, neighbors, friends, and just about everyone from incorporating these diverse families into their conceptions of family models.
This study provides an opportunity to explore a rich source that has been largely invisible in the scholarship. By engaging these oft-ignored voices I hope new information will be available for policymakers, educators, and scholars. Green, Dixon, and Zaharlick (2001) note that qualitative research contributes to generalizable knowledge by acknowledging and documenting previously ignored voices. They note, for example, Judith W. Solsken’s (1993) ethnography, which found that boys’ attitudes toward female teachers were influenced by father’s attitudes toward females. Until Solsken wrote about these findings, this was not a variable that scholars considered when analyzing student outcomes in educational research. Solsken’s ethnographic work on a small community contributed to generalizable knowledge not because of her particular empirical findings but because she identified and brought to light a relationship that previously had not been considered (Green et al., 2001). Like Solsken’s work, I hope to identify kinds-of-things and kinds-of-kinds-of things (Erickson, 2004) that may otherwise go unnoticed or are otherwise folded into normalized discourses.

My research was conducted during a time of great change for gay couples in the United States. In late 2012, when I started work on my proposal, gay marriage was legal in less than a quarter of the states, was banned in most states, and was not recognized by the federal government. In June 2013, the US Supreme found Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) to be unconstitutional citing that the law deprived same-sex couple of their right to equal liberty as protected by the Fifth Amendment (U.S. v. Windsor). As a result, the federal government was required to recognized same-sex marriage. Two years later, on June 26, 2015, the US Supreme court recognized marriage
as a fundamental right guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court struck down remaining state bans and required states to recognize out-of-state marriage licenses (Obergefell v. Hodges)\textsuperscript{11}.

While some still refuse to recognize gay couples as legally married, these people are becoming the minority and are stigmatized for their bigotry. This is not to say that gay discrimination has magically disappeared – in some ways it has become more explicit as certain individuals and groups feel entitled to challenging this new legal status – but this new status affords people who identify as gay or lesbian a level of state protection and legitimacy previously unfounded. This changing status of gay marriage also makes it easier for gay couples to become parents and may mark a shift toward inclusion at an institutional level since this legal status creates a new visibility. For example, the US Census did not provide an option for individuals to identify as being in a same-sex relationship until 2010 and even less information on how many children are being raised by one or more gay parents. Depending on the source, the number of children being raised by one or more gay parents ranges from 1 to 14 million (Kosciw et al., 2008; MAP et al.; Ryan, 2010).

The notion that families are led by heterosexual parents is so deeply rooted in our culture that large-scale data sets such as Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies (ECLS-B, ECLS-K) do not even ask about parents’ sexual identity, and when it is gathered, such as in National Household Education Survey conducted in 2003, none of the final reports even discuss these findings (Herrold, Donnelly, & Mulligan, 2008; IES, 2006). Given

\textsuperscript{11}Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_same-sex_marriage_in_the_United_States#2013
that policy and political decisions are informed by these large-scale data sets – and the often long periods of time before surveys are repeated – failure to collect or incorporation these findings into final reports demonstrates the silencing and omission of gay families. When institutional bodies like census bureaus and other large data collection agencies narrowly define what constitutes a relationship, it leads to a dearth of questions about sexual identity. This makes it nearly impossible to rationalize a research study because there is no data to prove the population exists. While this study in no way attempts to make generalizable claims about the experiences of all children being raised by gay parents, this project does provide definitive evidence that gay families have a lot to share about personal and broader, ideological issues. The challenge is to ask in a way that resists categorization, recognizes intersectionality, and honors participants as agents and experts of their lives.

**Appropriate and Rigorous Means**

As mentioned, this dissertation adopts a sociocultural constructivist approach to understanding society, including collective knowledge about education and literacy practices (Dyson, 1997; Heath, 1983; Sipe, 2008; Street, 1984), childhood and child cultures (Blaise, 2005; Bruhm et al., 2004; Wickens, forthcoming), and gender/sex/uality (Blaise, 2010; Butler, 1990/2008; Foucault, 1990a, 1990b; Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009). Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2* (1990b), opens the door for a rich discussion about constructivism influencing social understanding of normative sexual behavior. Foucault offers different lenses to understand the philosophy about sexuality as understood by the Ancient Greeks and he draws from textual evidence to suggest that
their sexuality was not about the naturalness of certain relationships as much as the right of the free man to engage in the acts. Self-conduct was highly valued and sexuality was to be expressed with equal control if the man was to be seen as a leader in the community. The man may have engaged in a range of relationships at different times in his life; censuring would occur only if the (free) man did not act in a way that indicated self control and sense of dignity that extended to those with whom he interacted on all levels, including sexual partners. A man’s relationship with his wife, for example, had more to do with household management and harmony than sexual chemistry, and his relationships with adolescent boys was also not censured in and of itself. Foucault maps out for the reader the normative sexual practices of Ancient Greece and demonstrates how sociocultural factors influenced, guided, and dictated human relationships in ways that may seem unnatural to a contemporary reader. In doing so, Foucault provides evidence that normative sexuality in contemporary society is rooted more in sociocultural constructivism than biological imperatives. In this dissertation, I accept this premise and believe that children of gay parents can be informants to help us tease apart normatives that are otherwise defined as “natural”.

In this final section, I shift the focus to my methodological approach. As I have already written, my project was guided by a desire to listen to children. They are the experts of their own lives and I wanted to develop a research design that created opportunities to observe and engage with children. After a one-year pilot study in a first-grade classroom I decided that this would be achieved in an out-of-school context. Drawing on my own interests in children’s picturebooks, my focus on literacy, and the
high status afforded to reading practices\textsuperscript{12}, I decided to create an afterschool reading club. This decision was influenced by feedback from the classroom teacher and Dr. Vivian Gadsden, my dissertation committee chair.

This dissertation project is designed as interpretive qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). This constructivist approach acknowledges the reflective nature of research and the influence interactions with research participants and social and historical norms (i.e., sociohistoric constructivism) have on me. I acknowledge that I am a co-participant and have an active role throughout in generating data. I designed the project, I created curriculum, brought materials, and managed my time with my research participants. I decided what to record, how to record it, what to pay attention to, and what to share with parents of research participants. Even in writing this dissertation, I exercise control of content starting from framing the research questions through designing the means to answer them.

My work is rooted in a desire to explore ethical dimensions of qualitative methodologies and research protocols when working with young children. I recognize that this research design is interactive rather than observational; nevertheless, through these interactive encounters with seven first graders (and their families to a lesser degree), I offer some new understanding to the fields of literacy studies, elementary education research, and childhood studies. This concept aligns with Cochrane-Smith & Lytle’s (2009) concept of “inquiry as stance”, an approach to research that is generated “out of the dialectic and synergy of inquiry, knowledge, and practice and from the

\textsuperscript{12} For example, Philadelphia School District has an Anchor Goal that 100% of third graders will be reading on grade level by 2016 (check www.philasd.edu).
institutional conceptual blurring of theory and practice, knowing and doing, conceptualizing and studying, analyzing and acting, researchers and practitioners, and public and local knowledge” (p. 3). My research study, in its iterative structure, offers a blend of theory, inquiry, and practice in order to understand what happens in my moments with my research participants. Given that this study involves a small number of children and my role as adult-in-charge and designer of curriculum, it would be negligent to not consider how my own ideas, actions, and desires impacted our meetings. The sole purpose for our after-school gatherings was for me to conduct this research. I remain indebted to these children and their parents for agreeing to be in the study.

This qualitative inquiry is also influenced by the pilot study completed in a neighborhood school in 2013-14. During this pilot study I observed and worked with children in a similar first grade classroom. By the end of the pilot study, it was clear that it would be difficult to complete my dissertation in a public school classroom due to the structure of the day and types of opportunities to engage with children or observe their interactions in uncontrolled, unsupervised, and unmediated ways.\textsuperscript{13}

During the pilot study, I experienced a critical moment with an African-American child whose understanding of a readaloud story was very different from the response the student teacher had anticipated. Through a private conversation with the student, I came to understand the dissonance the child experienced and saw how there was little opportunity in this time-constrained space for children to work through texts and stories.\textsuperscript{13} The fact that the school district would not approve the study also played a very significant role in the structure of this study. Despite have letters of support from the classroom teacher and school principal, the school district would not approve the study noting that it did not align with the district goals and offered not generalizable findings (personal correspondence, May 27, 2014).
This moment coincided with my reading of *Epistemic Injustice* (Fricker, 2007), and I realized that there were instances in this classroom when children were denied opportunities to understand the world in which they lived especially when their worldviews and private lives did not parallel the majority.

Epistemic justice considers how individuals are heard (testimony) and the material and knowledge resources available to make sense of the world (hermeneutical) (Frank, 2013; Fricker, 2007; Murris, 2013, 2015). An individual experiences epistemic justice when both conditions hold: he must feel confident that his voice will be heard (testimonial justice) and that he will have access to collective resources that reflect his social experiences (hermeneutical justice). “Intellectual courage” is eroded when either of these conditions is compromised, leading to “an under-confidant subject [who] will tend to back down in the face of challenge… and this tendency may well deprive him of knowledge he would have otherwise gained” (Fricker, 2007, p. 50). Epistemic injustice denies individual’s subject identities, or the right to be acknowledged as a “giver of knowledge” (p. 5). Adhering to an epistemic justice framework allows me to consider both knowledge resources available (hermeneutical) as well as opportunities to speak and be heard (testimony).

In this case, the child learned about desegregation of buses, an event that would have occurred in his grandparents’ lifetime, but it was clear that he was unfamiliar with this history and did not understand that the story was set in the past. This child faced a testimonial injustice because his voice (or misunderstanding) was not heard and taken up for discussion in the community. He also faced a hermeneutical injustice because there
was no effort made by this student teacher to see if the children understood the story she read to them. Fricker (2007) defines hermeneutical injustice as the inability to understand one’s own experiences, or

The injustice of having some significant area of one’s own social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural inequity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical response (p. 155)

In this classroom exercise, the student teacher used a storybook about Rosa Parks as a device for a grammar exercise, but she did not take into account that this picturebook about racial segregation may have invoked a range of emotional responses that could not be discussed due to power inequities in the classroom. The most notable inequity was between the adult (student teacher) and the children (students) since the adult was the official authority in the room and controlled the pace as well as whose voice could be heard. Additionally, there were racial inequities, since the majority were not African American and did not see characters that reflected themselves harmed or treated inequitably in the story. This boy suffered a hermeneutical inequity because his reading of the book was not brought into the class’s collective identity. Because of his double minority position (age, race), he was unable to put words to this experience, a testimonial injustice. Additionally, the entire community suffered hermeneutical injustice because they were not given the opportunity to learn from this child, and thus all suffered due to insufficient collective knowledge resources (Beeby, 2011). Epistemic justice as a methodological framework provides a rich structure to consider and analyze interactions.

By considering participants’ contributions and how they are taken up, this study may make visible ideological power structures that give voice to certain individuals and
provide knowledge resources that enable all members of the community to make sense of the shared information.

In this dissertation, I explore what happens when children are co-constructers of knowledge and events, when they are given agency to participate, to resist, to challenge, to select, to guide, to lead, and to instruct. This was harder than I thought it would be for several reasons: my own embedded adult authority, which privileged my perspective as “knower” of the club; the expectation by others – parents and guardians, teachers and school administrators, and other adults with whom we interacted – that I was in charge of the children and therefore would manage them with a certain decorum (in keeping with an academic group like a reading club); the children’s learned behavior, which privileged and positioned adults as guardians of children (e.g., recordings of the children when I leave the table indicate that at least one child assumes this behavior and offers corrective behavior to children who transgress behavioral norms); and my desire to conduct a study that would provide answers for my predetermined research questions.

After reading Fricker’s (2007) work on epistemic injustice, I was less confident about advancing my research and creating a site that worked to overcome some of the silencing and omissions that I saw in the classroom. Karen Murris (2013) wrote about the value of recognizing the philosophical contributions of children. Murris envisions conversations that situate children as active participants who engage with confidence that their contributions would be listened to and recognized as having value. Adults tend to engage in an adult-child power hierarchy that is strengthened when children transgress normative behavior. While this hierarchy may be enacted unconsciously, Murris
identified moments in teacher-child engagement where the teachers used their position as adults to redirect or end children’s interactions. Drawing on Fricker’s (2007) model of epistemic injustice, she determined that the children were experiencing forms of epistemic injustice because of their status as children. They had neither the global knowledge or language skills to describe how they were excluded from decision-making roles (hermeneutical injustice) nor was their voice being heard (testimonial injustice).

In response, Michael Hand (2015) challenged Murris, arguing that the adult-child power hierarchy is necessary for the safety of the children. Children’s naivety and lack of world experiences prevent them from being fully capable and therefore they are not suffering epistemic injustice because epistemic injustice can only occur when a person is fully able. In Murris’ (2015) rebuttal, she acknowledged that children are not independent beings and this dependent-protector relationship should be factored into some aspects of adult-child power dynamics especially in terms of physical safety. She resisted this as a necessary universal dynamic, particularly in terms of exchanging ideas and engaging in intellectual and philosophical activities. Murris discusses inherent differences between preventing a child from physical harm due to a child’s lack of experiential knowledge and preventing a child from expressing a thought or idea in a learning environment. She notes that this frequent lack of distinction between physical and intellectual capabilities does a disservice to children and prevents opportunities for intellectual engagement between adults and children.

This argument influenced my relationship with the children. I had been having trouble balancing my desire to let them be fully autonomous during our gatherings and
the agreement that I had made with their parents and guardians as well as the café owners to protect the children and other customers. By fracturing the nature of the adult-child power hierarchy to include different kinds of engagement, I could differentiate between moments when I had to exercise authority (e.g., when they were running around the café, or ordering and paying for food) and moments when I had to step back. For example, on one occasion they were talking about the origin of humankind and began to debate evolutionism and creationism. When one boy suggested aliens populated Earth, the other children received this as also plausible and incorporated it into their debate. In this instance, I chose to observe rather than participate because I realized my voice had the potential to alter the conversation because they often accepted my perspective as factual.

I was aware of my effect on the group dynamic by watching and listening to previous meetings; more children participated in general conversations when I did not contribute. As the study progressed, I became more aware of how we influenced one another and how my own actions affected the group’s interactions. This awareness changed my engagement with the children and helped to build an environment that Dorothy described as a place where “you just get to be free” (2015/05/28).

As I reviewed materials and considered who is represented and who is silenced, I realized that children with gay parents are almost never present in children’s literature or academic scholarship. Their home lives exist in the true Victorian sense in that they are private and invisible to the world. Heteronormativity predominates. As I continue to discuss, this almost complete omission of these children’s family structure in the public sphere – of which picturebooks are a component – is a form of hermeneutical injustice
for the children of gay parents. They are provided with few resources to integrate their public and private lives. But, as I have already alluded to, there is hermeneutical injustice to all children as they are routinely denied knowledge resources that will help them see the world as it really is (Fricker, 2007). Throughout this dissertation, I discuss what is visible and consider many invisible layers that may contribute to these moments. Then, I explore how issues of power, space, praxis, and ideologies frame our understanding and engagement in research encounters. To do this, I draw from queer theory, specifically the idea that queerness is more than “sexual object choice” but a heterosexual organization of time and space (Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009). By considering queerness as identity, time, and space, I discover ways that these invisible layers of organization influenced the nature of our interactions and events. Through this discovery, I realize how all members of the afternoon reading club enact ideological beliefs around gender/sex/uality, incorporating them as routine and accepting them without questions or resistance.
Chapter 3
Methods: Data Collection & Analysis

If we are to understand how [literacy] becomes ‘relevant’ to children as children then we must also enter their childhood worlds of relations and intentions of power and play...We must study children ethnographically not for who they are becoming but for who they are in life spaces shared with other children.
Dyson, 2013, p. 401

One goal of this dissertation is to think differently about reading as a social practice, about children as learners, and about childhood culture as a developmental phase on a trajectory to adulthood. In the conceptual framework, I introduced the idea of the reading club as a site of queerness. By queerness, I refer not just to identities (individual or family) but also to the way we engage with one another, the way we read together, the space where we read, and each of our roles. In this chapter, I describe my entry into the field, which included volunteering for a year in an elementary school. This was where I established relationships with educators who shared my curiosity and the urgency to attend to children whose family models were glaringly absent from general discussions about families. I describe how this entry informed the study, and how it gave shape to the project by specifically recounting three telling moments. Then, I discuss my selection process for the site, participants, and data collection methods. The next section outlines these methods used and how using them helped to create a space that was child-centered, where our literacy practices were “relevant” to these children as children (Dyson, 2013). Finally, I introduce analytic methods that were applied to the data analysis in the future chapters. While the earlier chapters include an overview of the
study and why I did it, this chapter focuses on how the research was done by discussing my entry into the field, selection criteria, data collection methods, and analytic methods.

*Entry into the field* occurred during the 2013/14 academic year. I spent one day per week in a first grade classroom in a public school. During this period, I built relationships with classroom teachers, the school principal, students, and some parents. I was a participant observer in the classroom. This was an opportunity to interact with children, explore opportunities to engage with and learn from them, and develop my researcher identity. My reflections on this first year in the neighborhood directly informed the study, from selection through analysis. The *selection* component of this chapter lays out how we came to be an afterschool reading club that met in a coffee shop near the school. I describe the site and participant selection process. I also explain which methods I used and why they were a good fit for this child-centered study. The third section describes *data collection* during the reading club, which was the official study period, from when it first met in February 2015 until I completed the post-interviews with parents in June 2015. The final section discusses methods used for *analytic methods*, including data management, inductive coding procedures, member checks, and general analysis. Each phase informs the next and leads to my data analyses in the ensuing chapters.

**Entry into the Field**

On a sunny early autumn morning in September 2013, I alighted a train and took my first steps toward Archibald Elementary School\textsuperscript{14} in a large city in the mid-Atlantic

\textsuperscript{14} All identifying information has been changed to protect the identities of research participants.
region of the United States. After dashing across a large intersection teaming with city buses, taxis, and hurried commuters, I stepped into the past, strolling by Georgian red brick buildings, stately Federal structures with ornamental bald eagles standing sentry, and Greek Revival buildings whose stark white marble and Doric columns shouted for attention among the red bricks of older architecture. As I wandered along, imagining how this part of the city was older than the country itself, I was nervous about my future.

This was my first meeting with the principal of Archibald School. Although we had been communicating for several months, today she would decide if I would work in a classroom as a volunteer and participant observer. As I made my way to the Art Deco building, I was taken by the importance of the physical connection to space on my scholarly journey, recollecting Ellsworth’s (2005) words, “our experiences of a building arise not only out of our cognitive interpretations of the building’s allusion to historical or aesthetic meaning but also out of the corporeality of the body’s time/space as it exists in relation to the building” (p. 5). Archibald Elementary was a K-8 school for approximately 600 students and it was a site of my learning and growth. Pausing to recollect this moment is important because it marks a shift in my dissertation from potential to real. Being aware of my body’s response to the physical, the material spaces, the moment before I climbed the steps to the school’s security buzzer is necessary because it simultaneously acknowledges my uncertainty and perseverance to move beyond the “already-known” (Davies, 2014, p 10) and into a place of learning (Ellsworth, 2005) about myself as a scholar and this building as a neighborhood school.
This journey started months earlier when I called a handful of city schools to discuss opportunities to work with young students who come from diverse families, particularly those headed by same-sex couples. Andrea Franklin was principal at one of only a small number of schools whose student body included children with openly gay parents. When I explained why I wanted to work with this young population, she was wary and asked for specific information about what I hoped to do in the school. I explained that my goal was to volunteer one day per week in K-2 classroom to observe the classroom and to offer help to the classroom teacher. I shared my background, emphasizing my knowledge of children’s literature, and that I would take what I learned in this school to develop a more specific research proposal that would be used to complete my dissertation. I envisioned my time in the classroom as a way to survey the “official” world of first graders in order to design a research study that would help me understand “evolving configurations of child practices” (Dyson, 2013, p. 414) and ways that gender and heteronormativity were enacted in classrooms. I explained my belief that children who have gay parents may be at a disadvantage in the classroom since they have to negotiate their family identities in ways that other children do not (Gustavson et al., 2011; Ryan, 2010). Intrigued, Mrs. Franklin invited me to visit the school once students and teachers had established routines, and so on this sunny September day, I entered Archibald Elementary to learn what my role would be.

Mrs. Franklin welcomed me into her office and explained that she had “just the teacher and classroom” for me. The teacher was highly regarded but new to Archibald Elementary because her previous school had been converted to a charter school. Jessica
Michaels had decades of teaching experience and had served in several administrative roles within the district before eventually returning to the classroom. One parent who worked for the district later told me that she “is a powerful literacy teacher and well known” in district headquarters (2015/06/13). Mrs. Michaels’ new classroom at Archibald Elementary was a first grade classroom with 33 students. She lived within walking distance of the neighborhood and was familiar with this community. While there were no children with gay parents in Mrs. Michaels’ classroom, Mrs. Franklin said this very diverse community would be a rich research site.

As I entered Mrs. Michael’s first grade classroom, I noticed how full it was. To my left was a coat closet, a rainbow of school bags and fleece. Immediately in front were six tables with up to six children per table. There were bookshelves teeming with books on all four walls and jutting inwards as peninsulas on the far wall. Chalkboards on three walls, once the main site for teacher instruction, were covered with a white board, a SMART® board, and teaching materials. The fourth wall was a bank of windows trimmed in curtains alternating panels of primary colors. They looked out into the play yard, an expanse of blacktop bordered by a chain link fence and leafy trees that divided the yard from the faculty parking lot. Supplies, including science, math, art, and writing materials, were oozing out of every spare shelf. The odd plastic coins, dice, and other math manipulative objects sprinkled on the floor.

Mrs. Franklin shared during an earlier discussion that she supported gay rights and believed my research interests reflected issues important to the school and community. When same-sex marriage was legalized in 2014, Mrs. Franklin – at the start of the school’s holiday concert – expressed delight at the ruling and congratulated many families in the Archibald community.
Mrs. Michaels did not have a desk but sat at one of the tables with the children. The children’s spaces were marked with neatly written place-markers safely protected in plastic sleeves. These place-markers were mini-information centers: they included a number line, the alphabet, colors, and shapes. In the center of each table were buckets filled with pencils, crayons, markers, scissors, glue sticks, even pens and Sharpies. Even though school had only been in session for a few weeks, the walls were already filled: a poster listing the self-generated rules of the classroom community, a student-made alphabet, and hand-written posters with tips for being a better reader and writer reached all the way to the high ceiling of this 85-year-old building, whose worn floors, chalkboards, creaky plumbing, and motionless clocks revealed that many generations of students had matriculated here.

In the far corner was a large blue area rug with a border of bright red apples. A rocking chair sat on the edge nearest to the center of the room. Even though daylight streamed in through the windows, Mrs. Michaels had placed a table lamp to illuminate the area on gray days, made greyer by the metal screen over the windows (and subsequent dust trapped between the window and screen). The screen protected the panes from errant balls kicked up from the play yard. There were also two easels, at opposite ends of the rug. Mrs. Michaels used the lower white board nearest the rocking chair for reading lessons and the other, taller board with large easel paper for writing lessons. Although this space was used for interdisciplinary instruction – and children were
encouraged to use it when working independently or in small groups – this was the heart of literacy instruction\textsuperscript{16}.

Mrs. Michaels welcomed us into her classroom. She expressed an interest in my project and we discussed the best way I could help her while also achieving the goals of my work in the classroom. Since the school year was still young, she suggested I come back in a few weeks once routines were better established. Then, we were done. Mrs. Franklin welcomed me to the school and explained the paperwork I would need to be a volunteer in the district. I walked back to the train station, meandering past the same historic buildings, this time with a different connection to them. I was going to have my own history in this neighborhood, one that was going to transform my perspective of the neighborhood from a historical fetish to personal and intimate.

For the remainder of the 2013/14 school year, I spent one day a week volunteering in Mrs. Michaels’ classroom. Very soon the kids anticipated my visits and by the end of the year I would receive hugs and greetings even when I tried to sneak in during whole group instruction. Eventually, I stopped taking the train. Driving halved my commute, and it changed my relationship with the neighborhood because it changed how I entered the community. Coming from the highway rather than the city center introduced me to first the industrial and then modern commercial big box stores that defined the far

\textsuperscript{16} In later reflections on this space, I would note that Mrs. Michaels’ made clear distinctions between the two activities: reading is an activity done closer to the ground, in a rocking chair, where children could be closer to the book or material and the person reading would be high enough that even those at the back may be able to see the book. For writing lessons, Mrs. Michaels’ would stand to demonstrate the writing process for students, sometimes demonstrating writing practices and other times creating “how to” posters that often were hung up on the walls. (Despite her diminutive stature, Mrs. Michaels always had new posters hanging from highest reaches of the walls. I never found out how she got them up there.)
southern borders. The residential buildings, while many were historical, felt less rooted in the history that defined this part of the city and more like places where generations of hardworking people lived and worked. This grounded me in the present and gave me a better sense of what it was like to live in the neighborhood.

My interactions with the children were limited to the classroom and play yard during supervised play. I also met several parents who volunteered in the classroom. During the day, Mrs. Michaels and I had two periods without students: lunch and specials (e.g., art, music, gym, library). We rarely were alone though. Despite being brand new to the school, Mrs. Michaels was quick to make friends and lunches were spent with other teachers. Often during instructional time observers and parent volunteers were present; the children took no notice of most adults unless they were a favorite person. This made their warm reception to me extra satisfying. In the spring, a student teacher joined us adding another dimension to our childfree times. Because I was a volunteer and not a school district employee, I was never left alone with the children. I did occasionally spend time with substitutes but Mrs. Michaels’ usually sent me an email or text message to not come on these days.

Most of my time was spent as a participant observer. I led small group instruction in reading, writing, and math. I worked independently with students, and I would sit in the rocking chair and read storybooks to the class, sometimes with my selections and sometimes with books Mrs. Michaels picked. Aside from readalouds, I almost never led whole group instruction, and on the few occasions when I did, Mrs. Michaels would need to intervene to manage classroom behavior. I would occasionally take notes, especially
once I started driving because I no longer had time to write fieldnotes on the train. My note taking increased after the student teacher arrived since there were fewer ways I was needed. The children were interested in my notebook. I explained that it was to remind myself of classroom events and ideas. Sometimes they would doodle or write in the book, wishing to add their own ideas or mimic my own work. By the end of the year, I felt a bond to many of them and was sad to say goodbye. I enjoyed spending time with them, learning from them and being adored by them.

This was my access point to children and families in this neighborhood. It greatly influenced the direction of my research study, but I share only a few details since this period was not an official study but a prelude that informed my study. It was the lens through which I viewed and joined the community. As Wohlwend (2007, 2011) notes, the dual challenges of participation observation are that my gaze is directed primarily to the students who sought my attention and children engagement in their “own” culture is integrated with adults, often with baggage of adult-child power asymmetries (p. 33). I view this first year in the classroom as an opportunity to engage in ethnographic research methods and to peek into the social world of first graders at Archibald Elementary, complete with an emerging understanding of the space as complex, dynamic, and multidimensional.

I have shared these physical details to create a visual representation of the environment where children spent the majority of their days. This description provides context and creates sensations of the setting, of my mind-body connections, of the rhythms and boundaries of the day, and of my immersion in this physical space.
(Ellsworth, 2005; Blaise, 2015). It broke ready-made categories of school, classroom, gender, childhood, and literacy; it created openings for new understandings, and determinedly pushed boundaries of my knowledge. Through my experiences at Archibald in 2013/14, I was able to learn the routines of a school day for first graders, experience life at a research site, and discover ways to realize my dissertation study.

_Telling moments_

Moving beyond descriptive, I now will share some telling moments (Mitchell, 1984) that influenced how the study progressed. These moments created new understandings and informed the research design. The first is a general observation of the way literature is shared during readalouds. The others occurred once I had established a rapport with students. My interpretation of these moments was influenced by other work I was doing and specifically texts I was reading (Blaise, 2013; Bruhm et al., 2004; Frank, 2013; Fricker, 2007; Sipe, 2002, 2008). This reflects what Erickson (2004) noted as a hallmark of qualitative research: we are influenced by what we read and therefore qualitative research is not “theory-independent or theory-neutral” (p. 489). These telling moments were critical to the evolution of my research design and methods.

_The culture of classroom readalouds_

Readalouds occurred frequently. They were moments when the whole class attended to a single event and it was an opportunity for the children “to bridge the various cultural divides between their world and the world of the story” (Sipe, 2002, p. 4). Readalouds marked a time to build literary understanding (Sipe, 2008) whether the storybook was used to entertain or teach a lesson. Students would sit on the area rug and Mrs. Michaels would sit in the rocking chair. A typical readaloud included an
introduction to the book, observations of paratextual features – such as details on the cover, endpapers, and title page – and a discussion of connections between the content and other events in the classroom community. Mrs. Michaels would read and students would listen. Students were allowed to go to the bathroom but other movement, side conversations, and touching others were not permitted. Students who did not follow these rules would be sent back to their seats. Mrs. Michaels would stop occasionally to ask questions or point out ways texts connected to other classroom events, such as writing techniques, vocabulary, science lessons, etc. Questions typically followed an I-R-E (initiation-response-evaluation) model: she would ask a question, the children would respond, and she would evaluate responses. These readaloud events felt rule bound and ascribed to a particular definition of literary engagement. There were few opportunities for children “to construct the story socially with cultural relevance for themselves” (Sipe, 2002, p. 4), yet the children enjoyed them and were always eager for a readaloud.

My readalouds were not bound by the same didacticism. I embraced readalouds as opportunities to engage with students, to share my love of picturebooks, and to test my performance skills. I asked open-ended questions and encouraged students to share personal connections to the text. These moments lacked the sedateness of Mrs. Michael’s readalouds and often lasted much longer than expected. I realized that Mrs. Michaels’ methods were an effective way to manage the large group, which typically exceeded 30 students. My encouragement to engage more playfully, to create reading experiences that included more space for personal response often resulted in the event shifting from smoothly run with attentive children to chaotic with children moving, talking over each
other and me, wriggling, poking, asking tangential questions until my frustration was evident as I worked to rein their attention back to the text.

By observing and conducting classroom readalouds, I came to understand that a smaller group would provide more opportunities for in-depth conversations about texts and to follow student engagement with texts. As Griffin, Lahman, and Opitz (2014) note, methods should be designed to help the researcher answer the research questions. Using ethnographic methods and participant observation in this large classroom were not appropriate for data generation, for minimizing power asymmetries, or for engaging participants in dialogic inquiries (pp. 6-8). Even though this classroom setting immersed me in the social world of these first graders, it was mostly in official school contexts and I wanted to be a part of their unofficial worlds as well, to be in spaces where I could study the interplay between these official and unofficial worlds.

I decided to shift the focus of the study to a small group. Because the school district did not approve the study, I had to find a research site that was off of school property. Initially, this was frustrating but I realized that this would give me more control over the study design17. Moving away from a school setting helped re-balance the adult-child power asymmetry, and a smaller group would give each child more opportunities to speak up and engage in the discussion. This, in turn, would allow me to get to know the children better and have more time for one-on-one conversations. Since one purpose of my study was to create moments for minoritized children to share their perspectives and worldviews with me, a small group could also balance the demographics to be more

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17 The University of Pennsylvania’s Institutional Review Board approved the study.
equitable. By creating a study that was not in the classroom, I hoped to observe how children engage with and take up the “schooled knowledge” in ways that would help me understand the experience of childhood. It was important for me to create space for children’s voices, but would I be able to understand what they were saying?

*Building a bridge between story world and child world*
To illustrate how hearing children’s voices in the classroom could be a challenge, I return to a moment I shared in the previous chapter. In the previous chapter I described a child who experienced epistemic injustice during a readaloud of a book about racial segregation and the start of the Civil Rights Era. The child did not understand the story was a historical recounting but thought it was present day. Because the substitute teacher was focused on teaching a grammar lesson, she did not ask if the children understood the complicated issues in the story, including descriptions of lynching and segregation, or how certain Black Americans fit into a larger story of community activism. This disservice extended to all the students, because “readalouds are powerful paths to meaning-making…the quality of interaction among the participants determines how children’s growth in literacy is fostered” (Sipe, 2008, p. 8). The student teacher did not perceive literature as a bridge that could connect the children’s worlds to the world of the story (Sipe, 2002) but as a tool to teach grammar and vocabulary. That this lesson lacked any discussion of a complex moment in American history indicates a lack of student access to epistemic resources and privileges. I already described in the conceptual framework how this moment was an important methodological consideration for the study that subsequently guided my methods selection. Upon additional reflection, I am
aware that I was complicit with his lack of understanding because it was a difficult conversation and I was unprepared for it. How was I going to partake in deep conversations about subjects and perspectives that disrupted my expectations? The setting made this exchange with the student even harder: a noisy classroom filled with voices of children and adults. The strict schedule of the school day also limited opportunities to have in-depth conversations with children.

In this brief exchange with the student, I realized I needed a more intimate space—both in size of group and a setting that did not align with the more bounded rules of the classroom—and I needed to develop methods that would improve my listening skills as well as encourage children to talk about their thoughts and ideas. This includes, for example, story prompts (Lit, 2004) and shoulder-to-shoulder interviews (Griffin et al., 2014). These methods are designed to engage participants in natural conversations rather than using conventional question-response format, a format unfamiliar to many younger children (Griffin et al., 2014; Lit, 2004; Roche, 2015). These methods would encourage children to share, but how was I going to improve how I responded to their talk?

The powerful feeling that this child experienced epistemic injustice motivated me to reconsider how I would engage with children, which Murris (2013) calls “the epistemic challenge of hearing child’s voice” (p. 245). If I was going to answer my research questions well, I needed to develop methods that would enable the adult-child relationship to be symmetrical, which would mean being aware of power dynamics—or ways that I denied children agency due to a deficit lens—and ways that developmental notions of childhood created categories that are difficult to transcend. This was true for
one-on-one interactions as well as group interactions, where normative constructions of childhood bounded students’ interactions with one another.

Developmental learning theories identify “typical and variable patterns of development” (McNaughton, 2014), which Genishi and Dyson (2009) suggest are focused on internal growth and are critiqued for overlooking sociocultural factors. Developmental-based research risks defining as a predictable linear trajectory, and children’s abilities are measured according to how well they adhere to this trajectory. Children “are pushed to become school learners instead of players, artists, talkers, loners, or friends with a diversity of backgrounds and interests” (Genishi et al., 2009, pp. 7-8). Childhood becomes standardized and learning is reduced to biological determinism or innate to an individual with little room for variation.

Blaise (2014) suggests applying postdevelopmental logic as a means to consider “other perspectives that are useful in illuminating aspects of children’s subjectivity” and pushes against “biological and simplistic socialization theories,” thus allowing for complex “social constructivist understandings of difference and identity” (p. 117). Applying postdevelopmental logic is a way to push beyond the “manufactured influential and abstract notions of childhood” resulting from the dominance of developmental psychology (p. 1), which would better prepare me for unpredictable events during the reading club. This next telling moment highlights how Mrs. Michael’s developmental conceptions of childhood interrupted their discourse and allowed her to maintain control in the classroom. It involved a group of students, me, and, eventually, Mrs. Michaels. It occurred late in the year, after the substitute teacher had left.
One morning during independent writing, a boy approached me to enlist my help resolving a fight that was brewing between his table and another. This was a significant moment because it was the first time I was approached to be a “conflict resolver” (Lit, 2004) and I felt it marked a confidence that I could resolve the issue. Later, though, I suspected I was invited into this tense dynamic as a “confidant” (Lit, 2004) because the boy who approached me knew that Mrs. Michaels’ response would swift and final.

As I approached the tables, one girl immediately recounted events; the children at the other table decried her statements as lies. Battle lines were clearly established and the children were protecting their tablemates. Suddenly, I was not as eager or confident. How could I calm everyone down before Mrs. Michaels noticed? I exercised adult authority and requested each child speak only when I addressed him or her directly. This was difficult for the children but I invoked additional authority by suggesting that if they did not comply, then I would have to enlist Mrs. Michaels’ help. This worked, briefly, and I learned that one child accused the other (a male) of having a crush on her. This child had persisted until the boy finally said, “I wish you were dead.” This egregious breach was when I was asked to intervene. After several suggestions, I was unable to find a mutually satisfying resolution. The tension was escalating and I was out of solutions. I insisted that they return to their writing since they only had a few minutes to finish their work while I spoke to Mrs. Michael’s, who was working on the rug with students. From the rocking chair, she shouted to everyone that it was impossible for anyone to have crushes since
they were in first grade. She told the two children at the epicenter of the conflict that they would stay with her at lunchtime to have a meeting.

At lunchtime, she told the children to sit at different tables. Mrs. Michaels asked them to describe the events that led to the conflict. When Mrs. Michaels heard that a “death wish” had been uttered, her eyes grew wide and she said that this was never an acceptable thing to say. While Mrs. Michaels reprimanded the boy for invoking violence. He shrank in his chair, saying nothing. When he tried to assert himself, Mrs. Michaels refused to hear him. When she paused, I intervened and explained that it was his response to repeated provocations, including that the girl’s declaration that he had a crush on her. This information transformed Mrs. Michaels. Her irritation was palpable and she told the girl to hurry up and finish her lunch and leave. She turned back to the boy and told him, in a softer voice, that it was never okay to say things like what he said no matter how frustrated he was. She asked him to come to her if he was unable to resolve an issue with another child. Mrs. Michaels then asked if he would like to stay with us for the remainder of the break or join his classmates in the play yard. Unlike the girl, who had been dismissed, he was given a choice and welcomed into our lunch circle as a guest.

This encounter, while impactful in many ways, influenced my research design in three ways. First, it reinforced the importance of letting children to speak and be heard. If I hadn’t spoken up, it is possible that Mrs. Michaels would not have learned about the provocations that precipitated the “threat”. As I designed the curriculum for the reading club, I wanted to ensure that there was physical and metaphorical space for the children to speak up and speak out. I return to Blaise’s (2015) work to consider how
“unpredictable moments when perceptions of childhoods are subverted and twisted” (p. 3) and how my responses could open up or shut down conversations and moments of understanding. This is especially salient when I reflect upon Mrs. Michaels’ declaration to the whole class that first graders don’t have crushes on anyone. This response was a closed stance that reflected status quo; it denied any legitimate emotions that any of the children in the class may have had toward another person.

Second, this silencing of childhood sexuality is a normative practice of flattening “the narrative of the child into a story of innocence” (Bruhm et al., 2004, p. xiv). Mrs. Michaels’ declaration defined children as asexual, which in itself is a queer position in a heteronormative environment since children are not allowed to engage in any kinds of sexualized behavior (Bruhm et al., 2004). This idealized definition of childhood did not reflect the actual experiences in the classroom, but it was what Mrs. Michaels’ desired. Muñoz (2009) suggests, “utopia offers us a critique of the present, of what is, by casting a picture of what can and perhaps will be” (p. 35, emphasis in original). Mrs. Michaels used her adult and teacher authority to share and enforce an ideal of childhood that denied any romantic feelings. For Mrs. Michaels, a utopic classroom was one filled with asexual children, where feelings of like and dislike were limited to non-romantic intentions. Her response to a declaration of affection was a classroom management strategy executed to shut down any conversation about a particular crush and move the class onto the next lesson. She drew on normative ideals of children and childhood, definitions that is reinforced through institutional and societal conditioning (Bruhm et al.,

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18 This may be an exaggeration, but I heard her say similar statements on other occasions.
Yet, it was clear that at least some children saw the concept of crushes as means to exercise power over one another. This “ideological gap” between the children and Mrs. Michaels revealed “larger fault lines in societal power” (Dyson, 1997, p. 18). Mrs. Michael’s response illustrated how language was used to control social dialogues, defining “appropriate, ‘proper,’ and intelligent behavior” (Genishi et al., 2009, p. 19). This event reinforced that if I wanted to enter their childhood worlds, I would need to find a setting that allowed children to move beyond the boundaries established in this “official” space.

This notion of crushes and romantic affections for others continued into my second year in Mrs. Michaels’ classroom – with an entirely new group of children – and was a frequent topic of conversation in the reading club. As a researcher interested in tapping into children’s worldviews, I would need to have “a willingness to give up on the status quo” including “a commitment to the truth of oneself and the situation… being open to new truth, which may be in tension with the desire for stasis” (Davies, 2014, pp. 30-31). Unlike the institutional space of a first grade classroom, which is bounded by curricular goals and a range of social norms, I wanted to design content, activities, and a setting that resisted these norms in hopes of creating a space where children could “intra-act… engaging in dialogue, experimenting, and composing themselves in multiple heterogeneous encounters… listening in ways that enable the not-yet-known to emerge” (Davies, 2014, p. 6). If this not-yet-known included issues around children’s sexuality (or lack of asexuality), I would need to be prepared to address this, to resist the status quo.

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19 As discussed in Chapter 5.
and to be “open to new truth” even if it disrupted my stasis. This is the third way that this encounter affected my research design, a way that would resonate as I moved into my second year as a volunteer in Mrs. Michael’s classroom.

_Looking ahead_

When I arrived at Archibald in September 2013, my plan was to observe ways families are portrayed and represented in classrooms through teacher interactions as well as literature, curricula, and other materials _and_ ways that children bring their families into the classroom. I believed that participant observation that used ethnographic methods, similar to work by Anne Haas Dyson (1997), Karen Wohlwend (2007), and Mindy Blaise (2005), would be rigorous enough to understand ways that young children incorporate or mediate their families in these public education settings. By June 2014, the end of the school year, I no longer felt this was the best setting for my study. The large class sizes and lesson-filled days made little room for child-driven interactions. Also, because I was limited to interacting with the children in the classroom, I was not privy to their social talk during lunch and recess. In short, I was not able to ask the questions I wanted to ask or have extended conversations with the children. I ended my first year in Mrs. Michael’s classroom uncertain about how to move my research interests into a solid project.

Simultaneously, I received news that the school district did not approve my research study. Despite modifying my initial proposal to address their concerns about the study, the school district’s research evaluation team denied the study noting that it did not align with the district’s priorities and will not lead to “generalizable or actionable findings” (letter from school district, May 27, 2014). Despite this setback, I ended my
first year at Archibald Elementary with a strong relationship with the teacher, the principal, and many of the children. In fact, in June, Mrs. Michaels told me that Mrs. Franklin was going to assign all incoming first-graders with same-sex parents to Mrs. Michaels’ as a way to support my research goals. Mrs. Michaels and I kept in touch during the summer and made plans for the new school year. My next goal was to develop a study that built on the goodwill that I had established in the community and addressed my research questions.

After I reviewed my fieldnotes and memos as well as talked to Mrs. Michaels and members of my dissertation committee, I designed an afterschool reading club for a small number of children. In September 2014, I would continue to volunteer in the classroom one day per week. The afterschool reading club would start midway through the year, after relationships with students were established. I believed this out-of-school space would provide more opportunities to observe “unofficial” literacy practices (Dyson, 2013) and to build “interpretive communities” (Sipe, 2002, p. 4) by encouraging dialogue and allowing me to use methods that could not be enacted in a classroom. This setting could create “unofficial composing practices [that] often entail transformations of official ones, reworked to allow children control, relevance, and meaning in their lives together (not to mention fun)” (Dyson, 2013, p. 411). Ellsworth (2005) suggests that by shifting our perspective from the center of the dominant discourse (i.e., the classroom), we are able to see anomalies. I hoped to create a setting and artifacts that represented moments when the children’s perspective’s shifted and “truths” were distorted. This alternative
perspective of “truth” could make visible invisible structures and processes of childhood that are otherwise naturalized or abstracted conceptions of childhood.

Moving the physical setting from official school space would provide better opportunities to explore the processes and experiences of children’s social worlds and their interactions with literature when expectations or rules of engagement were less structured. A smaller group size translated to more one-on-one time and was likely to create a tight bond among participants. Also, I was familiar with running afterschool reading clubs – I started one in another school district in 2012 – and felt comfortable leading one with children from Archibald. By November 2014, the pieces for the afterschool study were coming together and it was time to shift from planning to executing, to which I now turn.

**Selection Criteria**

This section describes how I selected the site, the participants, and the content and data collection methods. Each criterion is essential to the study’s success and offers insight into the methodological considerations that influenced the research design.

**Site**

Once I decided to conduct the study in an out-of-school context with a small group of children, I had to decide where to hold the club, who to invite, and when to hold the club. My main concern was proximity to Archibald Elementary, so I walked through the neighborhood and consulted maps for spaces that would be easy and safe to walk to as well as affordable to rent. Working with the Mrs. Michaels and in consultation with my dissertation committee and Mrs. Franklin, I decided to ask the owner of a coffee shop near the school. Old Falvey Café was within a block of the school and was frequented by
most teachers and many families. There were wide sidewalks between the café and the school, and we would only have to cross one small side street to get to it. From a safety perspective, this was a good location. The owner was happy to reserve a group of tables for one afternoon a week. In exchange for the space, I agreed to buy snacks and drinks for the group. From a cost perspective, this was manageable and ensured the children would have refreshments if they got hungry. The idealness of the location and cost were enhanced by the layout of the café, which was a small space divided into two narrow rooms. The front room was on the corner and had glass windows along both walls. The entrance was in the southwest corner. Customers walked past a few tables and chairs to get to the cash register, food display, and food preparation area. To the left of the cash register was a small archway that led to the second room. It was as long as the front room but darker because windows only ran across one narrow wall about 20 feet to the left of the archway. The windows were partially obscured by tables, chairs, and couches. Straight ahead through the archway was a small area that held four small square tables that, when pushed into a larger square, created a perfect seating area for our reading club, and I would be able to set up a video camera on bookshelf near the tables. The russet orange walls with artwork displaying local historical site and the tables with their dark walnut veneers created a cozy space for our winter reading club. To the right of this area was a hallway that led to two bathrooms. The owner agreed to reserve these tables for us. Now that a setting had been found, it was time to find participants!
Participants
Participant selection was opportunistic (Sipe, 2002) and started after I received IRB approval from the university for the study. In January 2015, I invited all students in Mrs. Michaels’ class to participate in a reading club called “Conversations about Families”. Study participation was limited to students in Mrs. Michaels’ class because I wanted to know all the children and I wanted the children to know me. Being familiar with one another would eliminate a “getting to know you” period since we already saw each other in the classroom. Although my initial population of interest was children with gay parents inviting only these four children to attend risked isolating them or drawing unwanted attention to them. Also, my study had evolved; I was interested in understanding how this emerging family model and other non-dominant models were discussed and included in general discussions with children. I recognized the diversity of this classroom community and as I learned during my time in Mrs. Michaels’ classroom, children engaged in a variety of ways that would help me understand how they engaged in literacy practices and how they made sense of families and their communities.

Invitations were sent home in the children’s schoolbags once Mrs. Franklin approved their distribution. Mrs. Michaels would send me daily updates with the names of students who registered. After one week, I had six registrations but none of the children were from my desired population (i.e., the four students with parents who identify as gay or lesbian). Mrs. Michaels called each of these children to ask each if he would like to join the club. One was not interested. Two others said they were interested.

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20 See recruitment letter in Appendix B.
21 They all identified as boys.
but had other activities on the day the club met. A fourth boy, Richard, who was always excited to see me and often asked me what book I had to share with the class, said he had not understood what the club was. He asked me to call his dad and daddy to talk about it. Once Mrs. Michaels’ got permission from the dad to give me his phone number, I called and he confirmed that his son would joint the club. This boy was participant number seven. In the end, my eighth participant was Brendan, a boy with two moms. Mrs. Michaels had seen them at the school and they had asked her about the club. They decided that the club was an interesting opportunity for their son so they adjusted his schedule for the club. In addition to these two boys, two more children signed up for the club, but I limited participation to eight students. This cap was based on my experience running an afterschool book club in another school. I felt comfortable being accountable for eight children and believed this would be a good number for group interactions.

One week before the club started, I called the parents of the first eight children and confirmed that they would like their children to be in the club and they understood that it was part of a research study for my dissertation. I explained that because the reading club was also a research study, only families who agreed to be in the study could be in the reading club. The reason for this was that this was a small group and each participant would be deeply involved in our activities. It would be too difficult omit any children who didn't consent and blinding parts of our club meetings could alter the contextual meaning of our interactions. All eight parents agreed, so I sent consent and permission forms to them. Then I informed the parents of the remaining two that their
children would not be a part of the study. They were disappointed; one parent asked me several weeks after the study started if I would reconsider.

On the day of our first meeting, I had received only seven consent forms and permission slips. I followed up three times with the eighth parent by phone. While she confirmed each time that she wanted her son to be in the study, she never sent the forms in and she or a caregiver always was waiting to pick him up on the days the club met. When I spoke to Mrs. Michaels about it, she was equally befuddled by the parent’s response. I decided that since the club had started and the group was getting along, it was easier to proceed with seven students rather than add an eighth. This shift in numbers did not affect any of my data collection.

Data collection methods
In order to create a setting that encouraged my participants to engage with and respond to literature with self determination, I chose methods that were passive and relatively unobtrusive, such as video and audio recorders, as well as those that were participatory. Participatory activities ranged from whole group to individual activities including: art projects, writing book reviews, working in individual field journals, and reading books. Participants were free to move between activities, work independently or collaboratively, or engage in other play. Because this was a reading club and there was some expectation that reading would occur – this expectation was confirmed by all parents during the pre interviews – I structured the club to include one whole group readaloud (see Appendix E for complete list of books). While the readaloud was not the only engagement with books during the club, it was the most explicit engagement with
literature and the theme of the club. Book selection was based on the overall theme of the club “Conversations about Families” and also was informed by conversations with the children and their responses to previous books. Books were chosen because of variation of family models in the books or because they created opportunities for us to talk about our own families (e.g., birthday rituals). I also conducted semi-structured interviews with parents at the start of the club and once the club was over (pre and post) as well as semi-structured interviews with the children during the club. These interviews provided rich contextual information and served as a form of member checks.

The reading club was structured as an inquiry-based space and scaffolded literary experiences – such as the readalouds and book sharing – which are intended to enhance children’s access to and comprehension of texts (Clay, 1991), with unstructured time that enables peer cultures to be enacted and observed (Genishi et al., 2009; Wohlwend, 2011). Each meeting was designed to balance the tension between formal, adult-led reading events and informal, child-led activities; this design reflects my own work for the past four years with afterschool book clubs in another school district. The curriculum for the reading group meetings was developed using “backward design” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), which starts with the big ideas and the crafting of essential questions22. The “big idea” or question guiding our gatherings is: How are families represented in literature and how do these representations compare to our own families? Weeks 1 to 4 were designed to “roam around the known”, Marie Clay’s idea that to create effective learning spaces teachers and students need to understand “each other’s goals, resources, and ways of

22 See Appendix F for a sample lesson plan.
acting” (McNaughton, 2014, p. 89). From week 5 to week 9, we read texts that were selected for their diverse representations of family; activities were structured to prompt discussions of this diversity. In the last weeks of our meetings (weeks 10 to 13), we worked collaboratively on a cumulative project. In the final week (week 14), we held a celebration to mark the end of our time together. I presented each child with a copy of our cumulative project at this celebration. This project, other materials gathered during our meetings, and photos of the children’s field journals constitute the artifact collection for this study.

Book selection was informed by queer theory. Titles were chosen because of the variation of family models in the books or if they created opportunities for us to talk about our own families (e.g., birthday rituals). The books and activities were selected to intentionally disrupt heteronormativity, a collection of practices that normalize heterosexual cultures (Blackburn et al., 2010; Blaise, 2005; Butler, 1990/2008). These relationships are often reinforced in childhood through media and schools (Blackburn et al., 2010; Blaise, 2013; Crisp et al, 2011; dePalma et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2013).

Providing resources where representations of more diverse families are normalized serves two purposes: it disrupts heteronormativity, which creates space to consider “another way of being”, and it provides epistemic resources and acknowledges the epistemic resources and privileges children bring to the group. This application of queer theory is a social justice practice since text selection and curricula are intended to denaturalize majoritarian ideas of family and to identify books that more closely resemble the family models of the students with whom I am working.
A critical content analysis, discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, guided my selection of picturebooks. I found that while two-parent heterosexual families were shown most often, other kinds of family models were depicted, including single parent and extended families. A small handful of books indicated parents but text and illustrations obscured identities. For example, in *An Ordinary Day* (Greder & Gleeson, 2001, Scholastic Press, Australia) parents are hidden behind newspapers; only the tops of their heads and their feet are revealed. By not naming the parents, either through explicit language in the text or signified meaning of illustrations (e.g., a mother in a dress, a father in a business suit), children from non-heteronormative families may more easily read themselves into these stories rather than those where parents clearly are filling the male/female and mother/father binaries (Crisp et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2013). This application of queer theory – which encourages broader readings of literature in order to find openings in the texts and in interactions with texts that may enable other ways of being to emerge – resists normative definitions of families, identities, and texts in order to encourage thoughtful dialogue about texts and socially constructed norms of “real life”.

This type of critical analysis can be framed as an “emancipatory project”; as I reviewed literature I considered displays of power as well as subordinated or silenced groups, which helped reveal “representations of social order” (Janks, 2010). My text selection for this study, therefore, is intended to disrupt this any representation and provide children with access to texts that offer as diverse a range of possibilities as the children themselves, whom I describe in greater detail in the next section.
The Study – Children in Action

Starting in February 2015, our group met once a week for 14 weeks for about 75 minutes. We were scheduled to meet for 16 weeks but due to snow days, two meetings were cancelled. Mrs. Michaels would dismiss us a few minutes ahead of the bell so we could leave the school without a crush of students in the hallways. On our short walk to the café, the children would talk and run back and forth. I would ask them to stay together and pay attention to me. Once we got to the café, we would set up the tables and turn on the recording equipment. I would take out the supplies and gather food orders. For the remaining time, we would talk, read, draw, write, and play. Parents or caregivers, classmates, friend, teachers, and neighbors would occasionally drop by to say hi. Figure 3.1 is representative of our time together. It reveals approximate movement and attempts to show the temporal and physical flows of the club. As the figure shows, most of our time together was spent in small groups or individual interactions. My interactions with the children shifted throughout the meetings, as did their own interactions.

Figure 3.1. Flow of participant engagement
Although most of the children were not reading independently, they knew the club was about reading. On the first day, I told them, “We’re going to talk about books and were going to talk about books that have families in them. We’re going to talk about how do we feel when we read different kinds of books with different kinds of families in them okay” (2015/05/09). Later, I read the IRB-approved letter of assent to them and asked each to sign the form as well as verbally agree to be in the study. This initiation into the reading club and the research study was an exciting moment for most and created a sense of importance for the children. During our first club I explained that the IRB required them to read the letter of assent (or have it read to them) and then to sign it. The children were surprised that they had to sign the documents and this led to a lengthy conversation about the significance of signatures, including comments from Dorothy’s, “Now I’m finally a grown up,” and later by Renee, who piggybacked on Dorothy’s comment, “Wait, so if we sign the form then we’re grownups?” (2015/02/05). When I interviewed parents, several others noted that the children felt special for being in the club and this moment of reviewing the official documentation of the research study was a marker of their specialness. As Renee concluded, “All of the rest of our kids in our class… are not going to be grownups?” (2015/02/05).

A significant moment in the club was the readaloud, which I designed to address a family theme (see Appendix E for list). I would explain to the children why I picked the book, and I would follow their lead during discussions. The readaloud was a discrete event that occurred each week and was the only time I insisted everyone pay attention. I picked the book and decided when to share it, but the children had agency as to when the
readaloud started (they could give me or not give me their attention). Unlike other times during the club, the flow of the activity required that everyone be present (in the physical space). If someone was not paying attention, then I would encourage them to join in. If someone left the group – to go to the bathroom, for example – then I would stop the readaloud until they returned. While the children engaged in literature throughout our meeting – I brought a range of books for them to read – the readaloud captures the group interactions with a shared literary event. Children’s engagement varied throughout the readalouds – high points were when the children would jump up to recreate scenes; a low point was when a child packed his bag and tried to leave – each week offered new opportunities to learn more about the children and their responses to the books and how they were making meaning of these literary engagements. By the end of the first meeting, the children in the reading club identified the reading club as a special time and afforded them a special status. They would talk about it in the classroom, at home, and during the club.

*Study participants*

The participants were seven children from Mrs. Michaels’ first grade classroom, who ranged from six to seven years old. Even though they all knew each other from the classroom, only two had played together in an out-of-school setting. Several went to aftercare together and often would talk about the activities in aftercare, but this was seen as an extension of the school day. While they were familiar with each other, they did not necessarily know each other, and I only knew them from my time in the classroom.
As this study focuses on family diversity it was important to gather information profiles on each member. This was done through observations, self-disclosure, and verification with parents. The rich diversity of this group, which is summarized below, is indicative of the community, and highlights the variation in family models, which are markedly different from my findings in my critical content analysis (see Chapter 4).

While I resist categorical definitions of individuals, this is a study that purposefully explores ways to engage with diverse individuals, so it is important that these characteristics are explained. Rather than describe each child, which risks revealing identifying information as well as engaging schemas or stereotypes, I have chosen to aggregate according to various social categorizations. While these categorizations may be problematic since it risks reducing participants to variables and ignores the complex social identities (O’Connor, 2001), this group also reveals the richness of our small group. Selected demographic information for the seven participants is as follows:

- Three males; four females.
- Two had parents who identified in same-sex relationship; the others did not.
- Two children came from blended families; five were from families whose parents had no other children except from this partnership.
- Two children had Jewish heritage, although one had a Christian father; all other children were secular Christians or did not identify a religion.
- All children spoke English as a first language, although three had parents who spoke English as a second language (Hebrew, Spanish, Greek).
- Three children had one parent who was an immigrant (Israel, Argentina, Greece).
- Two of the children had Latino heritage, two Jewish, all others identified as White/Caucasian/European heritage.
- One child was adopted; three children had siblings who were adopted.
- All had one or more siblings; two had half-siblings.
- Socioeconomically, all children came from families that owned homes in the neighborhood. Five had one or more parents who were professionals (e.g., physician, lawyer, advanced degrees), one had a parent who was a professional athlete, and one had parents who were in the trade and service industries.
Academically, the children ranged in ability. This mirrored social abilities; some had mastered what it meant to be a student while others were challenged by routines and expectations in the classroom. This club was designed to disrupt these expectations and routines although I found it challenging to allow the freedoms some desired. The rules of the club were mostly enforced by me and were defined by safety and comfort parameters (for other children and other customers); however, if I left the table to get drinks, I could hear children reinforce these rules, as this transcript excerpt reveals:

*Excerpt 3.1: The children's talk when I step away to order snacks (2015/02/05)*

1. Erin  Guys, guy. We’re in a coffee shop and were not at school or lunchroom  
   [crosstalk 00:13:55]
2. Renee  Did you guys know that they don’t have to listen to rules now because we’re not at school?  
3. Richard  Guys look I wrote Kevin, I wrote Kevin look [character from Minecraft]  
   [crosstalk 00:13:59]
4. Erin  We’re in a coffee shop and we’re screaming!  
   [crosstalk about bananas, Minecraft 0:14:04]
5. Jane  We’re in a public place.  
6. Dorothy  Flower power in a public place.  
   [crosstalk 00:14:10]
7. Jane  Can I tell you something? This is a coffee shop and in a coffee shop you have to be quiet. [crosstalk 00:14:20]
8. Richard  I thought we want that guy and big noodles. [talk about drawing]
9. Stephen  He’s going to draw TNT, TNT. [Minecraft talk]
10. Child  Shh shh shh!
11. Renee  Do you know everything we say is being recorded right now?  
12. Richard  [talk about video game]  
13. Jane  You know the camera is saying blah, blah, blah right now.  
14. Richard  Blah! Blah! Blah!  
15. Erin  Richard, please.  
16. Stephen  TNT! TNT!  
   [crosstalk 00:14:44]
18. Brendan  I’m not talking at all.  
19. Erin  We’re in a coffee shop and it’s a public place.  
20. Jane  And there’s people trying to work.  
21. Erin  And there’s people trying to work and we’re screaming.  
   [I return @15:00]
This transcript reveals that the children recognized that the club was in a setting that was bound by particular rules, and they disagreed over the appropriate way to behave in this space. Throughout our meetings, they frequently negotiated the social norms for this space, although the actors would occasionally switch enforcer and transgressor roles. This fluid identity is an example of the complex and dynamic personalities each participant brought to the group, which I discuss in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

**Data collection**

Data collection was designed to capture the different ways we were acting and interacting. Methods include: observational (e.g., video); artifact creation, such as work by the children; parental involvement, which was primarily interviews with parents; and reflective (e.g., fieldnotes and analytic memos). All data is catalogued in a multi-sheet Excel workbook. Table 3.1 provides an overview of data by method and participant group. The multiple ways of communicating – unstructured play/freetime, whole group readalouds, one-on-one/interviewing, verbal/nonverbal – provide ample ways to capture children’s voices and perspectives. These multiple modes and sources provide diverse perspectives and form rigorous data set.

**Table 3.1: Overview of data collection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Video*</th>
<th>Audio – table*</th>
<th>Audio – Rachel*</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Clubs</td>
<td>Clubs</td>
<td>- General discussion</td>
<td>- Field journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Shoulder-to-shoulder interviews</td>
<td>- Collaborative book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Read-aloud activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Talking sticks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Pick up</td>
<td>Pick up</td>
<td>- Pre interview</td>
<td>- Weekly “Parent Page”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Post interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Clubs</td>
<td>Clubs</td>
<td>- Fieldnotes</td>
<td>- Reflective memos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data was gathered each week but not from all sources due to occasional equipment failure or interference by children.
Observational data methods included audio and video recordings. A Go Pro camera with a fish eye lens was placed in the corner of the meeting area. With video files, I can see non-verbal communication as well as map movement during the club (Wohlwend, 2007). The children frequently spoke directly to the camera, performed for it, referred to it as form of social control, and showed their artwork to it (Figure 3.2).

![Figure 3.2: Checking out the GoPro video recorder](image)

Since it was placed away from the group, it offers a different perspective, often providing a holistic perspective of group interactions that my insider perspective could not capture. I also used audio to record our meetings. There was an audio recorder in the middle of the table to capture the general group discussion. After several weeks, I realized that if I wore a second recorder, I would also be able to capture talk between children and me. Because there was so much talk, these three sources provide a rich data set that captures the complex communications that occurred.
The children were aware of these devices, often choosing to interact with them in various ways. Each week, I would download these files and create a log of main events noting emerging codes and themes. Creating these logs also were an opportunity for self-checks and learning more about the children. How was I resisting the status quo of adult-child power dynamics? What information were children sharing with each other that I had not heard or seen, such as their talk when I went to order food or when I was talking to other children?

The recordings captured all the events that occurred during the club meetings. I also used an audio recorder for interviews with parents and field notes. All recorded material was transcribed for analysis.

*Artifact creation* was any opportunity when we created physical products as a part of our interactions. They include group projects, like the collaborative book we created by the end of the club (Appendix G), weekly art projects, newsletters I wrote for parents (Appendix F), and individual field journals each child had (Appendix F). The artifacts we created were the products of activities designed to engage us in conversations and collaborations. While I had an initial list of activities to do with the children, it evolved based on feedback and interests. Some artifacts were created and taken home, while others had a recurring role.

For example, at our first meeting I gave each child a field journal similar to the one I used. I told them that they were free to use them in any way they wished, although I asked them not to tear the pages out. Each week, I would photograph their entire journals.
to record their documentation\textsuperscript{23}. This weekly practice of recording (photographing) their journals allows the field journals to be a part of the research process rather than simply a product of our time together because I have a record of their interactions with the pages, which – for many – involved inscription and re-inscription of the same pages. This revisiting of their books using nonlinear and layering methods becomes a rich data source and offer insight into the different foci, beliefs, and practices the children had while we were together. At the end of the study period, the children kept their journals, but my photo collection records the evolution of their work.

I also used the journals as prompts during shoulder-to-shoulders interviews (Griffin et al., 2014), which served as member checks with the children. This was an opportunity to discuss their thoughts and contributions to the club and to align our ideas about the club. In Chapter 6, these interviews proved to be extremely important sites of information gathering. Rather than formal interviews, shoulder-to-shoulder interviews shift away from question and answer exchanges, and “deemphasize the power imbalance between adult and children in research” (Griffin et al., 2014, p. 4). The lack of eye contact, because we were sitting next to each other, also limited the confrontational quality of interviews and is intended to encourage the child to talk without feeling pressured to respond in a particular way. I asked them to talk about particular pages, using them as prompts (Lit, 2004) to start our conversations. By visiting their own work, I place the child as creator and owner of the text/image. He or she is situated as the expert, and while I used particular pages to start our conversations, the children often

\textsuperscript{23} See Appendix F for samples of thumbnail images from field journals.
redirected my attention to what mattered to them both in the field journals and in the club. This is a rich data set that reveals “evolving configurations of child practices” (Dyson, 2013, p. 414) and offers insight into individual and collective meaning making practices that were happening within our group. By studying the journals across weeks and children, I am able to discuss commonalities, emergent and persistent themes, and attitudes about the club and one another.

We made “talking sticks” to attempt to create an order to our talk (Roche, 2015). Talking sticks are popsicle sticks that we decorated with markers, pipe cleaners, and pompoms (Figure 3.3). Once the sticks were made, I stored them in a box. Each week, we would select a stick and whoever held the stick had the power to talk. Ideally, this meant that when one person had the stick, others would listen. I introduced talking sticks after several weeks because I was struggling with maintaining conversations, respecting turn taking and listening to other’s voices, and even getting the attention of the children. Additionally, although this was a child-centered study, there was some concern by the café owner that the children were too loud.

![Figure 3.3: Our talking sticks](image-url)
I introduced talking sticks after reading about Mary Roche’s (2015) effective use of them to engage students in critical literacy events. The sticks could be used to create a common focus because whoever held the stick had command of the discussion. The ritual of the weekly stick selection captured children’s attention and the power of holding this stick was used by all to assert authority when group dynamics became too chaotic or when one person wanted to change the direction of the talk. These talking sticks were limited in their effectiveness. At one of the later clubs, Erin, a girl who frequently shifted between enforcer and transgressor roles, told me, “The talking sticks don’t really work” (2015/04/16) as she dug through my supply box to get the sticks out. She enjoyed the ritual of selecting the stick but was not convinced of their authority over the group.

Other artifacts included collective art projects often done after the readaloud. These activities were designed as “tools that play to the strength of the children” (Clark, 2011). For example, after reading Home by Carson Ellis (2015), I ask the children to work together to draw a house that we could all live in. They proceed to draw the “poop house”, which started out as a fairly geometric structure. Once the building was completed, the children proceeded to draw people and animals in, on, and around the house. They decided to add images of poop and this was entirely delightful to most of them. I resisted the urge to tell them that adding poop would “destroy” the picture because the purpose of these activities was to create moments when they made decisions and guided activities. Poop was a frequent theme, taken up in playful and persistent ways over the weeks. After several weeks, I decided to limit the number of collective art projects because they often took these projects home before I could photograph them. I
decided that they needed to use their field journals to record their thoughts and ideas because I kept them with the other club materials. When we did collaborative projects, I asked the children to let me photograph the work before they left or I would gather their work as part of a multi-week project, such as the collaborative book project.

This collaborative book project (Club Reports, see Appendix G) is a significant artifact because it represents the collective nature of our interactions yet the product also reflects each child’s personality. In my original planning, I decided that we would use the last third of our meetings to create a collaborative project but I did not know what the project would be. I introduced the idea of working together to create a single project and built in time for idea sharing. Every few weeks I would remind them of this project and encourage them to build on past ideas, which I would share with them. We decided a good project would be a book “because it is a reading club” (2015/03/26). I embraced this project because it would be easy for each person to contribute and I could reproduce the book at minimal cost. Starting in week 10, we dedicated part of each club to creating the book. I brought in art materials and other supplies they requested. I guided the project in several ways: I supported ideas and explained why some ideas were not feasible if we wanted to reproduce the book for everyone (e.g., size of paper); I encouraged each child to share ideas and made sure other children listened; I managed the project and their time to ensure it would be done in time for the final club meeting.

Unlike other aspects of our time together, this project positioned me as an adult authority that directed children’s focus and entreated them to do certain tasks. This shift from observer and collaborator to a teacherly role was accepted by most of the children. I
adopted strategies that I saw Mrs. Michaels use and worked with each child to ensure they were comfortable with what we were doing. We integrated the books we had read together during readalouds, and each child picked a book to review. I also reproduced some of their artwork (i.e. Wild Things, see Figure 5.3) and asked them to write about these pieces. This reproduction of their artwork and asking them to write about it situated the children in the book. They were excited to see their work as part of the official record of the club and they worked in small groups to make other contributions to the book, including the cover design. At the end of week 13, the children had all finished their contributions. I took the materials home and assembled it into a book. I decided to write myself into the book, so I wrote a brief narrative of the club and selected some of their favorite collaborative pieces to include as additional pages. This contribution is an attempt to recognize my role, to make it visible since I was instrumental in this group of children coming together. I had considered making pages like theirs but worried that mine would be perceived as the ideal. Writing the table of contents, the introduction, and an afterword was my compromise to write myself into the book without overshadowing the children’s work. It also provided context for their families and, possibly, for their own memories if they decided to keep the book. I gave copies to the children at our last club.

When the children received the books they responded verbally and physically with hugs, jumping, squealing, and exhortations of joy. Jane declares, “It’s W-ON-DER-FUL!... This is such a good memory!” (06/04/15). In the post interview, parents also mentioned that the children were very excited about the book. Renee’s mom explains that Renee brought it to the dinner table, “she was really excited about that and proud of it and
wanted to bring it to our attention immediately” (2015/06/12). This collaborative book represents an activity that synthesized our collective strengths. As children, they brought whimsy, joy, ideas and their voices to the book. As an adult, I brought project management and access to printing materials. When I stood back from the creative process, the children were able to engage in creative and interactive ways that led to an artifact that “is such a good memory.”

Finally, there are two artifacts that I created alone. Before each club, I drafted lesson plans that included key activities and roughly outlined how we would spend our time together (Appendix F). Each week I added specific details to this document including a list of books and supplies to bring, a schedule of events, and activities and ideas to share with the club. These lesson plans loosely guided the club and served largely to record the books I brought and lent to children. It was inspired by Understanding by Design (Wiggins et al., 2005) curriculum and work by Marie Clay (McNaughton 2014); my research questions served as the guiding questions. The second artifact was a weekly Parent Page, a page that described our group activities, the books we read, information about the next meeting, and my contact information. Occasionally, it would include a photo of our collaborative projects. These pages were modeled on ones created by Science Explorers®, an afterschool club my children attended.

Other Data
I involved parents only occasionally, usually to share information with them or to gain context on something their children said. I conducted semi-structured pre and post interviews with parents. These telephone interviews lasted about 30 minutes. All
interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. I also spoke to many parents during pick up. Although these conversations were brief, they helped me understand how the children talked about the club when they were at home. These interviews were designed to discuss family literacy practices and learn parents’ perspectives of their children as readers and students. We also talked about expectations for the reading club, school, and general issues related to literacy and children’s engagement with reading and stories (multimodal). These points of contact with parents served as member checks and also were a source of background information about the child.

Finally, I collected personal and reflective data including field notes, which I audio recorded when I drove home from the club. I also wrote reflective and analytic memos. I sent monthly updates to my dissertation committee. These memos and feedback from my committee influenced future interactions with participants. Together, this data was a rich source of information and provided me multiple avenues to analyze ideas, perspectives, and experiences with the children.

**Analytic Methods**

Methods for coding data were iterative and recursive, which reflects the constructivist approach to the research design. Constructivist inquiry recognizes that research is a cyclical process of questioning and re-questioning the relationship between theory, practice, research questions, and personal experiences (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this research study, I started with broad questions about the experiences of children from diverse families and through this recursive design cycle was able to focus in to specific questions. This funnel design “sifts through ethnographic data
to identify the social practices significant to the issues that are central within a community” (Wohlwend, 2011, p. 132). By starting with wider themes, I was able to respond to the children’s responses and be more attuned to their role as co-participants. This stance reflects the queer methodology that informed the study, because “there is not a uniform way to put the diversity of queer theory to use” (Ryan et al., 2013, p. 145). Queerness is not about a particular way of being, but a desire to explore other ways of being and seeing the world (Muñoz, 2009). Given that queer theory is the foundation of my research methodology, the analytic methods had to be open and responsive to events that occur during the data collection phase and analysis.

*Analysis during data collection phase*

The initial round of coding included writing weekly logs, which were a recordkeeping method for key events on audio and video recordings of each club meeting. I photographed all artifacts; the primary artifact collection was photographs of the children’s field journals (occasionally there were secondary artifacts), and I recorded audio fieldnotes to capture my initial impressions since it was difficult to take fieldnotes during the club. Through this documentation, I was able to identify key themes that emerged each week. I also noted how they changed from week to week. Writing memos regularly were part of my reflective practices and documented emerging themes.

Throughout the study, I considered how emerging themes aligned with my research questions and with other readings/experiences. Curriculum for the clubs was influenced by these initial coding sessions because this recursive coding and analysis was a way for me to reflect on my practice and modify it. By watching and listening to video
and audio and reviewing the artifacts, I was able to gauge the children’s engagement with me and also to see what events/moments caught their attention. This process was an opportunity for me to get to know my participants better and to discover new ways to connect with them. I would integrate these findings into my lesson plans and weekly newsletters for parents. This improved the quality of our interactions and strengthened the connection of what was happening in the club with what my research goals were. These iterations heightened awareness of the purpose for initiating the club and how events during the club were informing my understanding and objectives.

The final stage of the data collection phase was post interviews with parents. To prepare for these interviews, I reviewed major moments in past clubs as well as read the transcripts from the pre interviews. The post interviews were semi-structured, open-ended and 20 to 45 minutes long. The interviews were an opportunity for parents to ask me questions about the club, club activities, and my impressions of their children. These interviews were transcribed and added to the data set.

Post data collection analysis

Once the data collection phase ended, my analytic methods became more focused. Using the funnel design approach (Kuby et al., 2015, Marshall et al., 2011; Wohlwend, 2011), I started at the widest categories to sift through the ethnographic data. Emergent themes from the data collection phase became a priori codes and new codes emerged as I looked across data sources. I paid someone to transcribe the interviews and worked with them to ensure accuracy of the transcripts. After receiving each transcript, I “cleaned” it by listening to the audio file while reviewing the transcript. I uploaded all textual data
(transcripts from clubs, fieldnotes, and interviews, video logs, memos) into Atlas.ti and created a map of this large set of codes. This second round of coding was expansive and the number of codes increased. At the end of this round, I analyzed my codes for fit to my research goals to ensure that the data they were identifying (the material records) was relevant to the focus of my study (Hammer & Berland, 2013).

Developing a refined set of codes is important, as Hammer & Berland (2013) note, "a coding scheme itself represents a kind of finding, a claim that the data can be interpreted in this particular way (Marton, 1988) and that this sorting is meaningful and productive.” (p. 42). This coding drew on a queer methodology and I considered how identity, time, and space were invoked and taken up during the club. Once I had identified these core themes, each offering a lens to think about social organization of gender/sex/uality, I considered different ways to understand and analyze each group. Then, for each of these groups, I applied an epistemic justice framework (see Appendix H for an example of a multicolumn analysis using this framework). An epistemic justice framework considers different ways our voices are taken up and acknowledged (i.e., testimonial justice). I also considered collective knowledge resources (i.e., hermeneutical justice) to analyze moments of discomfort as well as uncontested compliance around gender/sex/uality. This analysis is discussed extensively in the Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, I consider queerness as time-space and apply this to Sipe’s (2008) Reader Response analytic framework. Throughout, I draw on a range of methods as a way to read “against the grain”, which Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth (2013) note “are not automatic for children” (p. 150). I suggest that they are also not automatic for adults and I employ them
here to disrupt the routines of academic research, and in doing so hoped to create new ways of seeing and interpreting data.

During my analysis I wanted to be mindful of influences that different data had on my thinking. How did the children’s artifacts get accounted for? Did I comb them to support what I saw/heard or did I review them naively in an effort to understand them as new sources of information? Unlike text-based data, I did not have a routinized method for textually recording the children’s artwork or the video data. Key events in the video data were noted in the logs, which included time stamps in the original Excel files. Photos of the children’s work were saved as contact sheets by child and by week. I printed color copies of these contact sheets and sorted them chronologically by child. Reproducing their work as thumbnails enabled me to look quickly across the 1800+ images. Each image was tagged by child and week and included the digital filename. This ensured easy access when I wanted to look at the image in a larger format.

In the end, I identified four major codes: participants, events, themes, and theoretical framings. To analyze them, I searched across these codes to create chunks of data for theoretical analysis. Search terms evolved in response to my iterative analysis, which revealed patterns and new themes in the data. This back-and-forth movement through the data is necessary, since "authors must explain and defend the construction of data to make the case that the records are adequate and appropriate to inform the research questions” (Hammer et al., 2013, p. 39). Through this process, I selected moments that explain the phenomena I am exploring, which is based on a series of theoretical lenses (queer, epistemic justice, literacy practices, child-centered learning). These moments are
the material artifacts, which I then analyze using constructed codes that identify patterns and key events that help me to tell the story of this afternoon reading club.

In this final round of coding, I created groups of data to be analyzed at a micro level (Kuby et al., 2015). This “fine-grained” analysis reveals moments of queerness in our interactions in this setting, context, and with one another. This close analysis reveals power dynamics affecting epistemic justice between and across participants. Multimodal analysis reveals the complex layering of interpersonal, disciplinary, ideological, and structural domains of our interactions. Keyword searches helped pinpoint key moments in our interactions. Timestamps on the transcripts, cross-referenced to the logs were a way cross-analyze data from specific clubs. This process also was applied to my fieldnotes, data logs, and interviews with parents.

Throughout the study, I conducted self-checks to ensure the environment was conducive to creating a social world that was child centered. I did this by: creating logs of the clubs; writing field notes and reflective memos that recounted activities and noted how I was affecting group dynamics; talking to children and parents during the club and also in the classroom; and reading scholarly material for ideas. This reflective practice was an opportunity to consider ways my status as researcher (and adult) was impacting the group’s dynamics. Below I include clips from two memos to illustrate how these self-checks helped me resolve a challenge I was facing and how it impacted the club.

*Excerpt 3.2: Memo #1 on Stephen (04/09/15)*

Last month, I mentioned that one of the participants, Stephen, follows his own agenda. While he is sweet in nature, I sensed that his behavior was disrupting the group’s harmony. I wrote:

“*I’ve limited my response to Stephen in order to get a sense of how he is*
contributing to the group dynamics, but at this point his disruptions generally are not engaged by others at least not by the majority of the group. He has difficulty respecting the right for others to speak, speaking over them and, if necessary, standing between the people talking in order to physically break the flow of conversation.“

After listening to and watching more of the club meetings, I realize that perhaps Stephen wasn’t the only one whose behavior was disrupting the harmony of the group. The video, particularly, reveals that Stephen is an active participant who frequently moves throughout the field of vision, but he is not the only child to move around, interrupt, and pursue an individual agenda. In fact, almost all of the children do. Some examples: Erin spent nearly an entire meeting jumping in one place, Richard often sings with an opera-like falsetto, Dorothy and Renee collaborate on a drawing during the readaloud, and Brendan will come to the video camera to dance, perform, and share “secrets”. While I occasionally will invite these participants to reengage with the group, I often let them pursue these agendas. My interactions with Stephen, though, have a sharper and more direct tone. Stephen is not invited back to the group, rather he is told what to do. By me. Again and again…

While I have framed each of these examples such that Stephen and his family is the active subject, I must think about how I am responding to these – and other – aspects of Stephen. Stephen, after all, is not in the authority position in this relationship. I need to interrogate my own reactions and consider how I am influenced by my external knowledge of Stephen. Then, I need to reframe my responses to him. This does not mean that I should privilege him or allow him to disrupt others in the group, but it does mean that I should not be stricter with him simply because that is a pattern I have seen and adopted.

Excerpt 3.3: Memo #2 on Stephen (05/05/15)
...Since writing the memo, several interesting things have occurred: Stephen’s father came to me to discuss Stephen’s participation in the club and get feedback on the teacher’s assessment of Stephen; I consciously changed how I interacted with Stephen; and Stephen shared with me his own response to the teacher’s assessment of him. I discuss these moments below.

When I first spoke to Stephen’s father in early February, he expressed great pride in his son, describing him as a constant reader as well as someone who had natural leadership characteristics. Stephen, according to Dad, was often the center of attention for positive reasons. During the pre interview, I remember thinking that parental love was
distorting this father’s view of his child since my classroom observations and interactions with Stephen did not align with this perspective. As I’ve noted, I perceived Stephen’s contributions as negative and disruptive.

Immediately after writing my last memo to you, Stephen’s father stayed after club to ask me about Stephen’s behavior. The teacher had reported that Stephen’s behavior and listening problems were preventing him from completing work and making it difficult for her to teach the class. What did I think? Fortunately, I was aware of my own stance toward Stephen and attempted to offer a perspective that was more positive. I said that Stephen had a lot of energy and was enthusiastic, but he may be having trouble understanding the rules of school. I added that first grade, for many, is not about learning content as much as learning social behavior. Stephen was standing beside us as we had this conversation and his expression became worried, then sad, as he heard us talk. I tried to reassure both father and son that Stephen offered a lot to the club and he wasn’t the first child to have trouble navigating the formal classroom. As if suddenly aware that Stephen was listening, his dad placed his hand on Stephen’s buzz cut head, and said that the teacher had also told him not to worry, that a lot of growth occurs before second grade. I agreed and said that I would be happy to talk at another time if he had more questions.

By our next meeting, I was determined to further shift my stance toward [Stephen]. I’d already observed that he was eager to follow the rules of using talking sticks (in fact, he’d become the enforcer for our group). I wondered how my own stance had prevented him from being an equal member of our reading community. How did my constant corrections and limited tolerance for his transgressions silence him? According to Fricker (2007), this is a form of testimonial injustice, since I was not recognizing Stephen as a contributor to our group. By refusing to understand Stephen’s perspective, I was silencing and isolating him. I was resisting his contributions and using my authority as adult to control his interactions (Murris, 2013). In the following weeks, I worked to overcome my inclination to correct him. Instead, I chose to engage with him. I brought in books that had poop references (his running joke), I asked him questions, and I laughed with him rather than frowning at him. The sea change in our interactions is striking. Stephen remains my talking stick enforcer, and he also is becoming the most avid participant in the club. He often is the only one to make intertextual references, he asks “deep” questions that lead to long, philosophical discussions (e.g., he asked, “Trick question: where did the first man come from?” which lead to a 15-minute discussion on the origin of man/God), and he asked if he could do
a readaloud last week. I have come to understand how my stance toward others shapes our interactions. This mindfulness of my stance makes clear the relational aspects of our interactions. This has occurred several times with several children, but my changed relationship with Stephen is the most profound.

In the first memo, I reflect on a previous memo where I identified Stephen as a problem child. Specifically, I note that I should take some responsibility for the quality of our interactions drawing on sources to help me contextualize the situation. In the second memo, I note a change in his behavior and the impact on the group dynamics. I draw on scholarly texts to understand my role in the group and am delighted by the change. This ongoing, reflective analysis had a significant impact on group dynamics and created a positive bond between Stephen and me. It also demonstrates how my constructivist inquiry stance was responsive to the changing relationship between theory, practice, research questions, and personal experiences.

**Conclusion**

This chapter started with an overview of my entry into the field and ended with preliminary analysis of my data. Because of three telling moments during the pilot, I realized that I wanted to immerse myself in the social world of children in order to learn more about the culture of childhood and children’s perspectives family and literacy practices. I designed a study that made room for children to be participants and co-creators of the research outcomes. Methods were selected to push against the status quo of adult-child symmetries and to create opportunities for play and full participation. As Dyson (2013) notes, “Play may not be visible unless researchers are willing to abandon their comfortable post as knowing, evaluative adults and become learners in children’s
worlds” (p. 404). Throughout this study I attempted to not block the moments when the children were generating “their own knowledge and meaning from their experiences” (Griffith et al., 2014, p. 2). My goal was to make space for children’s voice and agency, and I learned what Blackburn (2004) discovered earlier,

> It’s not our job to increase young people’s agency. Youth are agents with or without us. Rather, it’s our job to tap into their agency for the good of the students and to create communities that allow students to be themselves. (p. 110)

By using queer methodologies and an epistemic justice framework to analyze data, I was able to identify moments that disrupt an adult-child binary and also norms around gender/sexuality including heteronormative ordering of time and space. In the next chapters, I delve deeply into the data to share key findings. As you will read, our reading club became an important community for everyone and was an opportunity to learn about these children’s understanding of family, reading, and childhood.
Chapter 4  
“I’ve Got Two Dads, No Mom”:  
Heteronormative Family Models in Children’s Literature Failed to Prepare Us

“Look what I did!” Richard shows us two plastic Spiderman dolls held together with an elastic band. “They’re kissing!” (makes kissing sounds). Several children and I stop to study Richard’s dolls. “Eww!” shouts Jane, laughing. Erin and Dorothy study the dolls’ embrace, trying to understand Richard’s declaration. When Erin asks if they’re kissing the rubber band, I suggest that the rubber band holds them together so the dolls can kiss each other. Dorothy asks for clarification, “Why don’t you just get their two arms and hug each other?”

Two weeks later, Richard is playing again when he announces that Captain America and Spiderman are getting married. Jane asks him to “Stop the kissing and marrying things” but cannot articulate why when I ask her to explain what she means. Richard offers a reply for Jane, “Both of them are boys.” He quickly adds, “but they still can marry” (makes kissing sound).

(2015/04/09, 2015/04/23)

In this vignette, I introduce Richard, a child with two dads, who draws on popular culture to recreate moments from his home life. He shows awareness that his play transgresses normative depictions of romantic play as he explains for Jane “both of them are boys.” When he quickly adds “but they can still marry,” Richard demonstrates an awareness of social norms about same-sex relationships including knowledge that normative attitudes are not like legal rights. As an education researcher, what can I learn from this moment? How can I, as an educator, create opportunities for Richard to see his family reflected in a way that does not situate them as outsiders? As a group, how do we honor Richard’s contributions and learn from him?

Drawing from Halberstam (2005) and Muñoz (2009), this chapter represents the first lens for considering queerness: queerness as identity. While queerness is more than
“an identification marker” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 87), starting here is a way to connect to common perceptions about queer/ed identities. I consider the experiences of Richard, a child with gay parents, a child “whose sense of self…[is] perhaps both gay and straight, and certainly queer” (Ryan, 2010, p. 287). During the club, Richard initiates, translates, and mediates our discussions about gay families and gay relationships. Richard’s willingness to share and his resistance to accepting normative models of family created rich opportunities to reflect on ways norms about families limit our collective resources.

This chapter has two goals: to discuss representations of families in children’s literature, and to describe how Richard’s family model was integrated into our discussions. At its heart, this chapter lays out a roadmap of hermeneutical resources, particularly high-status ones, available to children to learn about families and compare them to the real-world experiences of this group. By juxtaposing dominant themes in children’s literature against responses to Richard’s contributions, I attend to ways that children were engaged in routine interactions that extended beyond the idealized worlds of children’s literature. Returning to my overarching research question – what happens when a diverse group of children participate in an afterschool reading club that focuses on representations of families? – I briefly outline the theoretical framework for the chapter. Then, I share results from a critical content analysis on award-winning children’s literature. I discuss how the results informed my methods for selecting books and designing curriculum for the club. Next, I shift the focus to the voices of the children and share moments when they bring their own families and family practices into our discussions. I revisit Richard’s contributions, which were introduced in the opening
vignette, and our responses to him to spotlight how his perspectives as a child with gay parents did not conform to others’. These interactions reveal how narrow representations of families in children’s literature may prevent literature from being a collective resource for this group of children to learn about the range of family models in their community. In the last section, I discuss what happened during a readaloud of a picturebook with two dads and note how the children’s understanding of family models had shifted.

**Epistemic Justice and Queer(ed) Families and Children**

I propose that an epistemic justice framework is one way to analyze interactions with underrepresented groups as well as explore the nature of resources that include minoritized individuals and groups. Recall, an individual experiences epistemic justice when two conditions hold: he must feel confident that his voice will be heard (testimonial justice) and that he will have access to collective resources that reflect his social experiences (hermeneutical justice). *Intellectual courage* is eroded when either condition is compromised, leading to “an under-confidant subject [who] will tend to back down in the face of challenge… and this tendency may well deprive him of knowledge he would have otherwise gained” (Fricker, 2007, p. 50). Epistemic injustice denies individual’s subject identities, or the right to be acknowledged as a “giver of knowledge” (p. 5). An epistemic justice framework provides opportunities to honor participants’

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24 I struggle between “queer” and “queered”. The former is more agentive: a person takes on a queer identity, while the latter is an identity imposed on a person. The children in the club moved between queer and queered. Richard, for example, was more outspoken about his family variation, so I may argue that he accepted a queer identity. Brendan, on the other hand, rarely spoke up and never to the group about his two moms. In this study, I have queered Brendan by virtue of his family model, a label he may or may not wish to place upon himself.

25 I have chosen to use masculine pronouns here because the focal participant in this chapter is male.
testimonies and to gain insight into hermeneutical resources that they may be missing. In this chapter, I propose that one source of hermeneutical resources is literature since it is a material representation of cultural norms.

Using epistemic justice as a lens to consider issues of identity and identification of families, I draw from queer and childhood theories to analyze how the reading club simultaneously reinforced and deconstructed normative conceptions of family and romantic relations was. I analyze Richard’s interactions using queer theory to consider how heteronormativity may have affected his experiences in the club. From day one, Richard was willing to share information about his family with the club even when other members of the club resisted or challenged his family model. Considering these interactions through epistemic justice framework and with a queer lens is an opportunity to explore ways that families are normalized as heterosexual. This approach is a means to identify social constructedness of family and offers ways to expand upon naturalized definitions that predominate, particularly in content and contexts intended for children (Bruhm et al., 2004; Crisp et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2013; Wickens, 2010, forthcoming).

Through Richard’s actions and talk (and our responses), I observed the pervasiveness of heteronormativity and some challenges of disrupting dominant perspectives.

Children of gay couples are “queered by their upbringing” and must learn “to find comfort in a variety of settings” due to their liminal position between “straight” (mostly) public spaces and their “queer” private worlds (Ryan, 2010, p. 287; also see Evans, 2009; Gustavson et al., 2011). Among participants, two had parents who identified as gay or lesbian. These couples and their children, while not queer activists, were aware of their
queer(ed) identities. The parents described awareness that their family models varied from the norm and they explained that they appreciated living in this urban neighborhood because the community was accepting and welcoming. Neither of the parents could recollect a moment when their children experienced homophobia, and they interpreted this as an indication that the community was inclusive and welcoming. This choice to live in urban spaces aligns with queer scholarship, which identifies urban area and cities as queer spaces, often a locus of safety and community for those who identify as LGBT (Halberstam, 2005). Yet Muñoz and Halberstam, among others, suggest that same-sex couples who choose to engage in these heterosexual norms of marriage and family – or homonormativity – are not enacting queered identities. This activist positioning of queerness and queer theory may be troubling since it isolates those who fit neither the heteronormative groups nor the queered communities. It also makes assumptions about experiences of these families that ignore increased risk of real or symbolic violence that the parents or children experience due to family model variation.

This notion of “queerness as existence” beyond majoritarian spaces has also been applied to children, especially when considering sexuality and sexual identity. Children are perceived as asexual on a trajectory toward heterosexuality (Bruhm et al., 2004). This idea that a child is asexual aligns with developmental theory, which suggests children are incomplete and must undergo a process of development in order to be a fully-formed, sexualized adult (Blaise, 2014; Foucault, 1978; Wickens, 2010, forthcoming). Although this is a social construction, rooted in modernity (Wickens, forthcoming), this partially formed conception of the child is widely accepted as biologically determined.
Developmentalism has had tremendous impacts on social infrastructure for children yet it has been contested throughout the decades. In education, Paolo Freire (1970) challenged this developmental model. He proposed a dialectical model of education to contrast what he saw as the predominant model: the banking model of education. In the banking model of education, the learner is envisioned as an empty vessel waiting to be filled with knowledge transmitted from a teacher or another knower. Theories of literacy underwent a similar transformation in the 1980s with the rise of New Literacy Studies (NLS). Two scholars at the forefront were Shirley Bryce Heath and Brian Street, whose ethnographic scholarship challenged literacy education’s roots in skill-based instruction. Heath’s (1983) idea of literacy events and Street’s (1984) literacy as practice position reading as a socially constructed activity influenced by social norms and individual backgrounds. Becoming a reader is more than mastering a set of discrete skills; it involves social and contextual information and resources that are dependent on a variety of factors such as race, class, language, among others. There is no universal or “right” way – no formula – to (teach) reading; it is mandatory to think about what each reader brings to the experience or literacy event.

Many literary depictions of children and childhood do not reflect a social constructivist belief about childhood. Children’s literature remains deeply idealized, portraying childhood as time of a pureness or innocence (Bruhm et al., 2004; Crisp et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2013) and this is especially true for younger children and with regards to content that includes sexuality and sexual relationships (Bruhm et al., 2004; Wickens, 2010). When romantic relationships are portrayed among children they tend to be
heterosexual and not sexualized (Bruhm et al., 2004; Crisp et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2013; Wickens, 2010). This extends to depictions of families, which are almost universally heteronormative when two parents and adult family members are depicted.

Utopia is a common theme in scholarship on queerness and studies of childhood. It is an idealization of the present and also a critique because it includes what is missing from the present. Queerness, then, is a kind of utopia because, for many people and for many years, being queer meant being excluded from dominant discourses of the present. Queerness does not include the same affordance for the future as those who identify as heterosexual. Until recently, queer relationships were not recognized as legal unions and the idealized heterosexual future of love, marriage, and a baby carriage was not a legal or socially accepted option. Muñoz (2009) proposes queerness as a utopic present, one that is separated from a preferred heterosexual present that is future-oriented (e.g., reproductive time, looking to the next generation). Queerness, then, can envision a world where present day norms may be ignored or repurposed to disrupt dominant discourses and create new possibilities and potentials for social interactions.

Children and depictions of childhood in children’s literature echo this idea of utopia; “utopianism follows the child around like a family pet” as the child “exists as a site of almost limitless potential” with an unwritten future (Bruhm et al., 2004, p. xiii). Children (most of them), in their perceived innocence, are protected from real-world depictions because they are not ready to experience the challenges and complications of the adult world. This inter-generational protectionism has led to the naturalization of developmentalism as the only possible model of human growth (Blaise, 2014) despite
arguments and evidence that question this universal depiction of childhood across race, class, gender, and other categories of identification. Children, like those who identify as queer, exist outside the heteronormative sites of the majoritarian, and their exteriority is determined less by choice than is dictated upon them.

Applying queer theory to an analysis of children’s interactions with literacy events is an attempt to look at these events differently. Queer theory offers an opportunity to become aware of ways and moments when routine events are naturalized; it is through routine not biological determinism that this naturalization occurs (Halberstam, 2005), echoing postdevelopmental scholars (e.g., Blaise, 2014). In this reading club, I attempted to shift focus from teacher-centered instruction in formal school settings to an informal setting (the café) that was designed to follow the lead of children in hopes of gaining perspectives on both the social constructedness of childhood and of queer(ed) identities26. This chapter focuses on identification, particularly Richard’s, but throughout I weave in other children’s voices, which command our attention in an effort to have their own family diversity recognized. I focus on Richard because his contributions immediately illuminate a heteronormative infrastructure that defines our interactions.

Richard, the child of two gay men, by merely existing, complicates this idea of queerness. Richard acknowledges his family’s queerness and his queered understanding of romantic relationships. Throughout the club, he simultaneously informs and resists dominant ideas about family, reading, and our group interactions. The reading club serves as a metaphorical intersection of heteronormative events and queered moments. By the

26 This follows the work of Bronwyn Davies (1989, 2014), Anne Haas Dyson (1997, 2003), and others whose research considers the “unofficial” worlds of children’s learning and interactions.
end of this chapter, I hope to provide rich details about how our reading club opposed and sustained conventional forms of association, belonging, and identification (borrowed from Halberstam, 2005, p. 4). First, though, I share results of a critical content analysis that I did to prepare for this study. The critical content analysis was a necessary step; it was an opportunity to complete an in-depth analysis of a large selection of children’s literature that I could use for my work with the children. My analysis focused on representations of family, and an unintended outcome of the study was a greater understanding of different ways readers are given opportunities to participate in stories. While my initial hope was to create a reading list for the reading club, by the end of analysis I had created something more valuable: a framework for evaluating literature and creating curriculum for the reading club.

**Building Curriculum for the Reading Club**

Prior to starting the reading club, I completed a critical content analysis of picturebooks that analyzed depictions of families. I hoped that the content analysis would produce a list of books to use in the reading club, but the range of family models depicted in this body of literature was too narrow for this group. Despite this, I was able to develop an analytic framework for evaluating books that guided book selection and curriculum development for the club. My study was designed to make visible challenges that children from non-normative families routinely experience and the resources they draw upon to make sense of the world and help others understand family variation in our communities. Considering these messages and norms more generally may increase awareness of “dominant and overarching temporal and spatial organization of the world”
(Muñoz, 2009, p. 154) that privileges some and silences other groups. A close examination of the representation of families in children’s literature may offer insight into hermeneutical resources that are available to audiences. Whose worlds are most likely to be presented in literature, whose are missing from the literature, and how are different worlds depicted?

When thinking about diversity in literature, the purpose of the text and intended audience should be taken into consideration, as should the nature of representation. A review of children’s literature scholarship reveals a consistently narrow worldview is represented in children’s literature (Bothelo & Rudman, 2008; Bruhm et al., 2004; Crisp et al., 2011; McNair, 2003; Nodelman et al., 2003, Roche, 2015, Ryan et al., 2013; Wickens, 2011, among many others). Since Nancy Larrick’s (1965) seminal study presented in The All-White World of Children’s Books revealed a gross under-representation of non-whites in literature very little has changed in the publishing industry. The obstacle across the years has been a perceived lack of commercial audience for diverse books; book-publishing decisions are market driven and the largest buyers of books consistently seek narrow representations of the world (Bothelo et al., 2008; Koss, 2015). Over the decades there have been calls to increase diversity, the most recent is the movement #WeNeedDiverseBooks, a social media movement that emerged from editorial letters written by renowned authors Walter Dean Myers (2014) and Christopher Myers (2014) extolling the value of seeing oneself reflected in literature. Walter Dean Myers (2014) notes that when he first read James Baldwin’s Sonny’s Blue, “it was a story concerned with black people like those I knew” (p. 1). This experience changed his
relationship to literature, which he had largely removed from his life due to a lack of self-
identification. For Walter Dean Myers, seeing his world reflected in literature was
integral to his engagement with it. While there have been efforts to increase diversity in
children’s literature including a range of awards to raise awareness of underrepresented
communities, such as the Coretta Scott King Award which is given to honor the
contributions to literature by African Americans, but many minoritized groups remain
underrepresented in children’s literature. There are several awards, including Lambda
Literary Award, and the American Library Association has several committees that focus
on LGBT literature, such as the Over the Rainbow book list project. The body of LGBT
literature is growing and gaining recognition, but largely among advocacy and special
interest groups.

A growing number of scholars (Crisp et al., 2011; Crisp, 2011; Mallan, 2009;
Ryan et al., 2013; Wickens, 2011; Wolf, 1989) have addressed this underrepresentation in
literary and literacy scholarship. Earlier scholarship (e.g., Wolf, 1989) focused on aspects
of representation such as the nature of depiction, largely in response to a sudden
appearance of books depicting gay and lesbian families, such as My Daddy’s Roommate
(Willhoite, 1990) and Heather has Two Mommies (Newman & Souza, 1989), and In Our
Mothers’ House (Polacco, 2009). While these books were among the first to address
parents’ gay identities, the audiences for these books were children who were adjusting to
parent’s coming out (e.g., My Daddy’s Roommate), those who were unfamiliar with
same-sex relationships (e.g., Heather has Two Mommies), or for children who may have
experienced discrimination or bullying as a result of their family models (e.g., In Our
Mothers’ House). The parents’ sexual identities were the focus, often the problem to be resolved (through acceptance to the greater community) and all other characteristics of these families reflected a normality of middle to upper-middle class white families and couples (Wolf, 1989). More recently, there has been a shift from centering the story on the ways gay families are “just like other families” toward identifying literature for children who identify as LGBT or who have gay parents. Two educational studies (Crisp et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2013) in particular have used queer theory to reconsider ways that children’s literature can be more inclusive of diverse sexual and gender identities as well as family models. In both studies, the authors recognize the dearth of literature for children and propose ways to use existing literature to increase conversations and integrate queer perspectives into literary and literacy events. Building on their work, I approached this critical content analysis as an opportunity to build a reading list that was inclusive of diverse families and expansive in the ways the audience was encouraged to interpret the story and characters.

My research focuses on the experiences of children with diverse family models, specifically gay families. I want to consider how children from gay families see themselves reflected in texts and how children from more heteronormative families learn about family diversity. Inclusive readings are those that include content where diverse groups of individuals can see themselves or aspects of their lives reflected in the stories. Reading in an expansive way means pushing beyond implied boundaries and creating space for a wider range of readers to see their worlds reflected in the story. Take the images in Figures 4.1a and 4.1b, for example. What happens when, rather than having
icons depict typically male and typically female forms (as in Fig. 4.1a), all figures were
gender neutral (Fig. 4.1b.)? Inclusive and expansive books, stories, and readings are those
that are open the readers to multiple worlds and especially those that make room for a
wide range of readers to enter stories.

Figure 4.1a & 4.1b: Heteronormative and gender-neutral family icons

To explore the relationship between diverse books and diverse audiences, I
considered how stories can serve as a means to enter into storybook worlds. Through the
critical content analysis, I sought ways to select books that are inclusive and expansive in
order to create multiple entry points for children to access the stories. Because books are
mediated through these adult-centered filters (i.e., nostalgia and utopia), they rarely
portray contemporary childhood. This is problematic because it ignores or limits the
agency of the child as reader. When young readers do not see their families and family
lives reflected in the texts, there is a possibility that these children will develop a double
consciousness, or an understanding that their family does not align with the normative
family. As you will see, my focal participant, Richard displays this double consciousness.
He is aware his family model – two dads – is not normative and he attempts to mediate
his status and understanding of adult relationships with his peers’. By using queer theory as a lens to consider epistemic justice, I analyzed how different depictions of homes and families could impact readers’ engagements with stories. This critical content analysis of children’s literature revealed ways to identify books that would be inclusive of the variety of family models in the reading club.

**Critical content analysis of families in picturebooks**

In 2014, I completed this analysis of children’s literature at the International Youth Library (IYL) in Munich, Germany. This endeavor was as an opportunity for me to think deeply about the material I would select to share with my research participants. I considered displays of power and worked to identify subordinated or silenced groups in order to reveal representations of social order (Janks, 2010). Books are cultural products that represent and contribute to naturalized language discourses and social climate, including discourses about families and romantic partnerships. I applied queer theory as a means to resist normative definitions of families, identities, and texts to engage in thoughtful dialogue about texts and socially constructed norms of “real life”. Focusing on these families offers insight into our collective understanding of the social and contextual nature of families and ideological definitions of families (Halberstam, 2005). Naturalized discourses are not natural but come to be seen as natural through routine and consistent use and thus are a social construction. This study was designed to identify routine representation of families from which we, as a society, come to see as naturalized.

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27 I wish to extend my gratitude to the German government for funding my research fellowship and to the staff at Schloss Blutenburg for creating a welcoming and supportive space for me.
In my methods and analysis, I reconsidered identity categories and generated questions to challenge and reconstruct dominant ideas about families and relationships. I wanted to ensure the books I found would represent this diversity of my research population in positive and agentive ways. I avoided books that positioned diverse characters in passive ways such as situating them as dependent on dominant groups. This was important since I did not want to share books that portrayed gay families as problematic, unusual, or different from the norm.

My methods for this content analysis were iterative and included multiple rounds of coding. The first round identified sources of international English-language picturebooks. I focused on national and international awards. These awards represent books held in very high esteem and thus were most likely to be in the IYL catalog and available in international markets, including America. Award-winning English-language picturebooks often are selected for distribution in other countries thus capturing an international audience. They are cultural products that symbolize the country’s “best” literature. I built a list of 39 awards from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, and two international organizations: the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) and the International Youth Library. Awards reveal “representations of social order” (Janks, 2010) and serve as windows to dominant perspectives (Bothelo et al., 2010; Crisp, 2011; Kidd, 2009; Sipe, 2002). These winning books are more likely to be found in a greater number of libraries – including the IYL – and frequently are found on lists of “high-quality” literature.
My decision to restrict my search to award-winning titles was a balanced one. While prizes may ascribe a label of excellence, awards may be given by those with a “traditionalist bent,” one that is intended to direct audiences to books whose messages and media are seen as quality reading material (Kidd, 2009, p. 203). Children’s literature – and particular kinds of children’s literature – are given a purposeful high status, “children’s literature especially prizing…has a regulatory and restrictive function, in that the ostensibly best books for kids aren’t merely celebrated but deemed good for you” (Kidd, 2009, p. 200). Awards may celebrate particular qualities of texts but less frequently comment on ideals or norms. Many national awards do not explore and challenge dominant ideologies about race, religion, class, gender, sexuality, families, etc. (e.g., see Crisp, 2011, for a critique of literary awards) but often have a perceived universalist appeal that may reflect ideals of the dominant group. Yet, not all do. Some are purposefully selective, acknowledging an under-recognized population or recognizing authors and illustrators whose work makes unique contributions. For example, the Coretta Scott King Award is given to recognize African American authors and illustrators, promoting “Peace, Non-Violent Social Change, and Brotherhood” (text on medal). Another example is The White Ravens, a biennial catalogue published by the IYL that includes titles selected for literary and aesthetic qualities as well as for pushing margins and showing new directions in children’s literature. Awards, then, are given for a

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28 This is also critiqued by Kidd (2009), who draws on James English’s work *The Economy of Prestige*, and he suggests that the proliferation of awards goes hand-in-hand with censorship. Both offer moral and social guideposts that evaluate and promote/demote ideologies.
multitude of purposes. By identifying books from a wide-range of awards, my list represented a wide-range of beliefs about what is “best” in children’s literature.

I reduced my initial list of 611 books\(^{29}\) using a funnel method to code the books (Kuby et al, 2015; Wohlwend, 2007). I focused on storybooks for emergent readers, those who are new or relatively new to school\(^{30}\), so I eliminated poems and lullabies, anthologies, biographies, baby books and books for older children. Of the resultant 215 books, 149 books were in the IYL’s collection. A physical review of the books eliminated more titles that were inappropriate because of genre, age, or format. For example, a illustrated chapter books were not included. After this round of coding, 106 books left.

When I coded these for depictions of families, I was able to identify particular groups of people who were either absent or underrepresented. This includes but is not limited to families of color, interracial families, single parent families, poor families, non-heteronormative families, and combination of these family variations. These trends, or over representations of particular groups, indicate how some notions of family are naturalized in our communities. All texts, including children’s picture books, are not

\(^{29}\) Criteria for selecting awards was based on the following:
- The awards were national- or international-level awards. Regional awards, such as Pennsylvania Readers’ Choice, are so abundant that my list would have quickly grown unwieldy and my time at IYL would be filled with creating lists rather than reading them.
- Awards were given out on or after 2000.

This data was selected because:
- I wanted to get a sense of recent social attitudes as reflected in the content of contemporary titles rather than “classics”. Selecting titles from the 21st century seemed like a reasonable starting point.
- Selecting an earlier date would lead to a similar issue of creating an unmanageable number of books to review in the given period.

\(^{30}\) In cases where genre and age-appropriateness was unclear, I referred to various online sources including Amazon, Goodreads, Horn Book, Publishers Weekly, and WorldCat. In the event that I was still uncertain, the book stayed on the list.
neutral but reflect dominant ideologies both in content and in their means of production. This is problematic because it ignores or limits the agency of the child as reader.

*Literary representations of families in children’s literature*

Focusing on ways to include gay families may offer insight into our collective understanding of the social and contextual nature of families and family ideologies. This was as an opportunity to think deeply about the material I would select to share with my research participants. Using critical analysis (i.e., queer theory) to select these texts was intended to denaturalize majoritarian ideas of family and to identify books that better resembled the family models of this group of children. By coding a large cross-section of texts, I identified patterns of family representations including family models that were either absent or underrepresented. The overrepresentation of particular groups indicates how particular notions of family are naturalized in our communities. Those most frequently portrayed are ideal and others are a deviation from the norm. Mindful of this, I reread the books seeking ways to create inclusive readings that included room to resist or disrupt others normalized depictions of children and their families.

As I examined the books, I noticed how a story’s use of time affected how readers could participate in the stories. When stories were set in a particular time, such as an historical event like the Civil Rights movement, they anchored the reader in a way that changed the purpose of the book. These texts were intended to inform the reader to the way life was (for a particular person or group of people) during a specific era or event. Because of this, these titles shifted how the reader could imagine the story and their place in the story. For example, in *Going North* (Harrington, 2004), the reader is invited into
the backseat of the family car as an African American family drives from the Deep South to the northern states during segregation, but it may be difficult for the reader to imagine themselves there. The reader is positioned as an observer rather than full participant because of the historical context of the story.

After rereading the remaining 106 books, an idea emerged that those stories that provided the most space for readers to enter the texts were those that were set in the generic present, a term I am using to describe books set in an indistinct time. These texts may have markers of a variety of periods, such as rotary telephones, but they carry no specific references to dates or events. To code stories as generic present, I considered if they were set in a specific time and place. If not, I removed them from this list. This included biographies and historical stories. In generic present stories, readers are free to imagine the world of the story to be the present, a utopia, or an alternative reality. Even titles like *Pigtails the Pirate* (Elliot, 2002) with its two-mast brigs and long frocks, create space for the reader to step into the story because there are enough signifiers of present day, such as the structure of the homes, to connect the reader to the story. Of the 106 titles, 57 were set in the generic present.

When I analyzed books set in the generic present I noticed diversity diminished significantly: they almost always featured white characters. Exceptions were stories from other countries, such as India, South Africa, the Philippines, and one story from the United States. Another observation was that these books from the generic present almost always reflected middle- and upper-middle class lives. Settings depicted material comfort and wealth, as indicated by an abundance of furniture, toys, food, clothing, etc. Houses
were, more often than not, single-family homes. In instances when stories were set in cities, such as *At Night* (Bean, 2007), apartments were depicted as spacious, often with multiple rooms, balconies, and access to ornate and beautiful rooftop gardens, all which signify material security common to the upper classes. In addition to these narrow representations of race and class, family models almost always included heteronormative parents, grandparents, and extended family members. While generic present texts provide readers the greatest entry to imagine themselves participating in the imaginary world of the story, these texts portrayed normative details – or collective resources – that excluded, for the most part, non-white, poor or working class, and non-heteronormative groups, including single parents. This is a hermeneutical injustice because it excludes groups of individuals from seeing their lives in this particular type of collective literary resource. For individuals who identify in any (or all) of these groups, they would have to first imagine a world different from their own to enter the storybook world.

This is problematic and critiqued by a number of scholarly and literary communities including the social media movement #WeNeedDiverseBooks. One possibility, then, is to dismiss all of these books and search for titles that were explicitly inclusive; however, some literacy and education researchers suggest that queer theory provides ways to use these books with diverse audiences\(^{31}\). A queer reading of a

\(^{31}\)This addresses a concern that many teachers have. Many are reluctant to use literature with LGBT characters or themes in their classrooms due to risk of criticism or more punitive consequences (e.g., formal reprimands, job loss), but teachers are also aware of the need to make space for diverse perspectives in their classrooms (Crisp et al., 2011; dePalma et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2013; Thein, 2013).
heteronormative story can be an expansive reading that creates room for a range of engagements and responses to literature.

Using a queer lens to analyze texts is one way to make visible power asymmetries, specifically those related to gender, sex roles, and sexualities. Framing discussions about texts with a queer lens encourages “an exploration of nonnormative sexualities and genders that can work against the silences currently found in elementary schools without requiring the reading of LGBT-inclusive texts” (Ryan et al., p. 144). For example, Crisp and Hiller (2011) note the adult in The House in the Night (Swanson and Krommes, 2008) “may be hard to conceptualize… as anything other than a female” for some readers, but since no text confirms gender (e.g., gender specific pronouns), there is a potential to connect to children who have nonnormative parents, such as a cross-dressing father (p. 206). Undergirding my research is recognition of readers’ shifting subjectivities, and the potential for teachers, parents, and other adults to follow – or guide – children toward more inclusive interpretations of stories. This is important because of the absence of gender and sexually diverse characters in my shortlist suggested I would need to find ways to queer the readings I did with the children.

As I continued to look for books for the reading club, I applied this framework and share two examples. In Stella Brings the Family (Schiffer & Clifton-Brown, 2015) an observer in the story shares how Stella overcame the challenges of celebrating Mother’s Day because she has two dads. The book’s purpose is to create awareness of Stella’s different family model (i.e., gay dads) and nurture acceptance with children who may not be familiar with it or to comfort a child who may have had a similar experience. Another
book, *Purim Superhero* (Kushner & Byrne, 2013), is told from the perspective of a child who is trying to find a costume to celebrate Purim, a Jewish holiday. That the child has two dads is simply part of the background and figures only slightly into the narrative development. Comparatively, *Purim Superhero* normalizes this variation of family rather than situating it as a deviation from the norm, as was done in *Stella*\(^{32}\).

The problematic depiction of gay families, as in *Stella Brings the Family*, concerns scholars and advocates for queer communities, especially when storybooks make family diversity the center of the story (Ritchie, 2013; Ryan et al., 2013; skelton, 2015; Wickens, 2011; Wolf, 1989). These books increase awareness of diverse families for those who are not aware of them (i.e., normative families in less-diverse communities) but do little to share stories that normalize these relationships or create everyday narratives that reflect families led by gay couples. More troubling is the risk of harm to children with gay parents who may not be aware of any social stigma but learns of it when this type of book is read to them. These texts, rather than normalize diverse family models, succeeds in Othering or minoritizing them by creating a conscious awareness of being different from the majority.

My goal was to expand ideas about normal families so I analyzed the 57 books for their treatment of characters and coded with the following: child alone, child with siblings or other children, child with a parent, child with parents, child with grandparent(s), child with other adults, adults alone, adults with other adults. Most of the

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\(^{32}\) That *Purim Superhero* was self-published and *Stella Brings the Family* had a major publisher also is worthy of discussion, since awards and recognition of “high quality” literature almost always go to large publishing houses.
books depicted children alone, children with a parent or parents, children with other children including siblings, and children with grandparents or a grandparent. Only a few titles included children with other adults. Two parents were shown in 22 books, and they were almost always named “mom” and “dad”.

As I considered depiction of families in the stories, I thought about obvious depictions (i.e., those that most reflected my own worldview) and the potential for other, more varying life experiences. In most instances, the only openings for children with gay parents to read themselves into the stories were in those where children were alone, those with grandparents, and those with only one parent. While these stories do create opportunities to create representative backgrounds, they do not truly depict the children’s home lives. Two stories, though, provide a small entry for these children to see their families in the books: *Falling Angels* (Thompson, 2001) and *An Ordinary Day* (Gleeson & Greder, 2001). Both depict a child with two unnamed, largely unidentified parents. Because neither the text nor the illustrations name the parents in this story beyond “parents”, the reader is free to envision these two adults as their own. They are not bounded by gender or sex, since the illustrations depict only the minimal details of these characters: the tops of their heads and the tips of their shoes. This anonymity does not diminish the story, and raises for speculation the role of naming characters. Of the remaining 20 titles that included both parents, how would the flow and continuity of the stories change if the parents were depicted in this generic, gender-free way?

Because *Falling Angels* and *An Ordinary Day* do not identify the parents, these two books may create openings for children from gender and sexually diverse two-parent
families to enter the world of the text, to imagine that these stories may be their own. In these stories, the parents are props to imply a sort of household normalcy. The child wakes up in a house, the child moves through the routines of a day, such as getting dressed and having breakfast, and the child is bored and/or ignored by parents and thus enters their own world of entertainment, often represented through magical realism. At the end of these stories the children break from the magical world and returns to reality. The parents may not be shown again, but the stability of home is implied by the shift away from magical realism back to realism.

Using queer theory opened up the possibilities in the stories, essential for my work with my reading club children, and marked the start of my expanding understanding of queerness extending beyond sexual object choice. By reading this large collection of children’s books through a queer lens, I identified the generic present and recognized how it situated mostly white, heterosexual, middle-class characters into stories that offered a unique entry point to storybook worlds. Unlike other books, which situate the reader as observer, these books immerse the reader in magical realism, a moment when imagination collides with the everyday, provided the naturalized everyday depicted aligns with the reader’s own worlds. In this way, these books offer a snapshot of idealized depictions of childhood, they inform the reader of normalized homes and childhood experiences. They convey knowledge about what is normal and for those whose lives parallel these realistic aspects of the story, they may be more inclined to see the storybook world as a natural extension of their own. For those who do not identify with the naturalized elements of the story, they have to work harder to access the storybook
worlds, thus access to these worlds require a certain kind of shared background knowledge – or *hermeneutical resources* – to participate in the story.

Through this critical content analysis, I learned that I needed to be mindful of our collective or hermeneutical resources and provide collective resources for my study participants. I came to understand how time and place might create different entry points into storybook worlds. This was an important discovery and provided a framework – *the generic present* – to evaluate books to use with my children. The generic present is important because I wanted to our readalouds and the other literature I shared to serve as prompts or stimuli for the children to discuss their own lives either because the books reflected their own lives (e.g., mirrors) or because they offered them a perspective of a new world (e.g., windows) (Sims Bishop, 1990). In either case, I hoped that our interactions with books would provide opportunities to engage both with literature and in conversations with one another.

*Diverse books for diverse children*

Since family variation in my reading group far exceeded the diversity of families represented in the literature I reviewed at the IYL, I identified different ways to create an environment that reflected the collective knowledge and backgrounds of the group. This effort reflected an effort to provide hermeneutical resources that aligned with group. I designed curriculum that would encourage everyone to contribute and feel heard by our group (i.e., achieve testimonial justice). Through these combined efforts, I hoped to create a space that moved toward epistemic justice or minimized epistemic injustice, or the injustice of being wronged as a knower (Beeby, 2011). Epistemic justice, according to
Fricker (2010), may also be epistemic non-discrimination, and “remains invisible until one draws attention to the contours and colourations [sic] of epistemic injustice of the specifically discriminatory sort” (p. 175, her emphasis). My argument for using an epistemic justice framework, then, is based on the assumption that discrimination did exist, yet my initial evidence of any discrimination was inferred from my literature review. The literature reviewed revealed a body of discriminatory evidence for members of LGBT communities, a paucity of research on the experiences of children from gay families, and a lack of children’s literature featuring these families. These were the “contours and colourations” that justified using an epistemic justice framework for this study and guided my book selection and curriculum development.

By looking at a particular section of books – those identified as being in the generic present – I identified a framework of storytelling that offered a greater entry to imaginary worlds. These stories were fantasies, anchored only minimally to specific places and times, but the range of characters and settings was severely limited. Since my goal was to create a collection of books that reflects more diverse readers, specifically those that came from non-heteronormative families, I carefully read each of these books with a queer lens and determined ways to conduct multiple, inclusive, and expansive readings (drawing on Crisp et al., 2011 & Ryan et al., 2013 methods). My final list of books from the IYL included: *Chato and the Party Animals* (DeSoto & Guevara, 2000), a book about two male cats who come to see themselves as a family; *Flotsam* (Wiesner, 2006), whose wordless illustrations allow readers to imagine the gender and sex of a diverse range of characters; *Falling Angels* (Thompson, 2001) and *An Ordinary Day*
(Gleeson & Greder, 2001). The latter two feature two hidden, anonymous parents in the opening pages. I also included *Everywhere Babies* (Meyers & Frazee, 2001), a poetry book, because diverse families were depicted throughout the book. This short list represented a starting point for literature selection and I continued to use this framework and queer readings to evaluate books that I hoped would appeal to and engage this group of emerging readers\textsuperscript{33}.

The purpose of this careful book selection was to ensure that the literature I shared with my research participants would create openings for children to see their lives reflected in the texts and also to question stories that may not have reflected their home lives. The variation in the community where the reading club was held far exceeded the diversity of families represented in the literature I reviewed at the International Youth Library, and I wanted to create a reading environment that reflected the collective knowledge and backgrounds of the group (hermeneutical justice). In doing this, I hoped all the children’s contributions would be heard and taken up in our group (testimonial justice). I discovered that the children invoked their families differently, ranging from frequent to almost no talk about family members. These books, and the reading club, provided opportunities for us to talk about our home lives, either spontaneously or through questions I asked. The reading club, then, contributed to hermeneutical and testimonial justice for these children, because the children were exposed to a wider range of resources than those in the classroom, including time to direct and lead conversations.

\textsuperscript{33} A complete list of books is in Appendix E
I now turn to back to Richard, whom I introduced in the opening vignette, to explore how his family model – two dads – and the ways he shared it disrupted these normatives.

**Case Study: Richard**

Richard, one of two children with gay parents, was almost always enthusiastic about the books I brought and participated in a range of ways. He was physically appealing, with bright eyes framed by long, dark eyelashes, a curly mop of black hair, and a grin that was contagious. When Richard wanted to share something, his enthusiasm was infectious and he frequently was successful in his efforts to gain attention and redirect conversations. Richard got along equally well with everyone in the club, and he would move amongst the group motivated by his interest in topics or activities. His Dad, Michael, told me that Richard did not love reading but did love the books that I brought into his classroom. Michael and Al, Richard’s Daddy, signed Richard up for the club because Richard enjoyed spending time with me in the classroom. Michael told me that hoped that the club would encourage Richard to read more (2/09/15). Richard always asked for books to take home, so I always packed an extra book for him. His favorite subjects were superheroes, the video games *Five Nights at Freddie’s* and *Minecraft*, and other characters from popular culture.

In this section, I share two examples to illustrate Richard’s awareness of his family diversity. These telling moments are important because they indicate how the group’s collective resources (or norms) do not align with Richard’s. Richard is aware of this misalignment and attempts to explain his family and his play to his peers. Through

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34 Dad and Daddy are the names that Richard used at home.
inductive coding and reflective analysis, I modified curriculum and book selections to account for the children’s contributions and responses. I conclude with a third example that demonstrates how the reading club became a space that helped bridge the distance between Richard’s and the others’ family models.

“I’ve got two dads, no mom”

During our first club meeting, Richard announced to the club that he has two dads. This was a spontaneous utterance following his announcement that his daddy was a doctor. His announcement led to a conversation with Richard, Erin, Renee, Dorothy, and me (Excerpt 4.1). The lines with “…” indicate other unrelated talk that was occurring simultaneously. This transcript is presented in two alternate formats in Appendix H including breaking it into four smaller excerpts and as a Mediated Discourse Analysis (Kuby et al., 2015; Wohlwend, 2007). These varying approaches to analyzing the same data offered multiple perspectives to consider this event.

Excerpt 4.1: Richard tells us he has two dads (2015/02/05)

1 Richard I’ve got two dads no mom.
2 Renee You’ve got, ah!
   ...
4 Renee You’ve got a, wait and how were you ever born if you don’t [have a] mom?
5 Dorothy You got adopted.
6 Renee You shouldn’t be alive if you don’t have a mom.
7 Mrs. Lo Why not?
8 Renee Because that’s how it all happens.
   ...
10 Erin Erin: I know the story; I know the story.
11 Dorothy Because the moms have the babies.
12 Mrs. Lo Not necessarily
13 Renee No because the mom has the baby it comes out of her [inaudible 00:31:20].

See Appendix A for other transcription conventions.
Mrs. Lo: Well, but you know some kids are adopted. There’s all different ways to have babies.

Erin: No, Richard told me the story so [crosstalk 00:31:25].

Mrs. Lo: You were adopted?!

Erin: No, I don’t know [if we should ask these questions]. You know what, sometimes we don’t want to ask those questions [about family history]. That’s Richard’s story.

Erin: I think I remember him saying…

Richard: They met at a coffee shop [crosstalk 00:31:37]

Erin: One of his dad’s girlfriends.

Richard: No, friend. Friends

Mrs. Lo: Female friends.

Erin: One of his dads’ friends

Richard: Were at a coffee shop

Erin: Were at a coffee shop and

Renee: …they fell in love

Richard: Their friend told that that girl knew that knew that Al [his Daddy, crosstalk 00:31:58].

Renee: They had a baby but they never got married?

Richard: No. They never get married, they did not have a baby. They [his dads] adopted me and my brother.

Renee: So who’s your real mom? Do you not know your real mom?

Richard: I have a grandma, two. [Richard may have heard Renee’s first “real mom” above as “grandma”]

Dorothy: You don’t have a mom?

Richard: I don’t have a mom but I have a …

Renee: You don’t know your real mom?

Dorothy: He doesn’t have a mom, he never had a mom.

Richard: I never had a mom.

Mrs. Lo: But you know he has two dads.

Richard: My dad and daddy are getting married next week. It might not be next week, but soon.

Dorothy: Awesome.

Dorothy: That is so exciting. Now they [Richard and his brother] have two dads and two moms because your dads like …

Richard: No. No. they’re not going to get married, they’re not going to come apart they are this. [Holds hands apart; Richard leaves the area.]

Jane: They’re not getting married?
Immediately after Richard makes his announcement Renee questions how this is biologically possible (lines 4, 6, 13), which was affirmed by an unidentified girl\(^{36}\) (line 17). Dorothy and I discussed adoption (lines 5, 14), and Erin offered more information because “Richard told me the story” (line 15). As Richard started to tell the story, Erin filled in details. When she adopted a heteronormative storyline (line 21), “girlfriend”, Richard corrected her (line 22), “No, friend.” Renee, however, adhered to a heteronormative romance and this led to an exchange between her and Richard (line 29-31). Renee was unable to understand that Richard does not have a mom (lines 33-38) even when Dorothy and I supported Richard’s point. Finally, he told us that his dads are getting married “next week” (line 41), which may have been his strategy to convince Renee of his dads’ romantic relationship (because they did not get married the next week); however, this unravels Dorothy’s support. She misunderstands that their marriage is to two women and not to each other. She assumes Richard soon will have two moms and two dads (line 49). Richard rescinds the marriage idea and leaves the conversation.

The girls, especially Renee, experienced dissonance and attempted to construct a heteronormative family history for Richard. He resisted and repeatedly explained his dads’ relationship. Throughout, Richard had to defend his family model. While others

\(^{36}\) Due to cross talk and parallel conversations, it sometimes was difficult to distinguish voices. I did my best to verify speakers by listening to multiple audio-streams and watching the video.
moved in and out of supportive positions, they all experienced some confusion and attempted to align his family model with a heterosexual one. They lacked hermeneutical – or knowledge – resources to make sense of Richard’s testimony. In reaction to this dissonance, they denied his testimony about his family and resisted his efforts to explain it to them. Even though the children had been together for two years, they had not learned about each other’s family variations. This surprised me because parents regularly came into the classroom, including parents who were in same-sex relationships. Dorothy lived next door to and frequently spent time Brendan, who had two moms. Also, Mrs. Michaels read books that had gay families in them, and she told me that the children did not have questions or any remarkable responses to these stories.

When I interviewed heterosexual-identifying parents in pre interviews, most of them noted that they discussed a range of romantic relationships with their children. Renee’s mom explains that, “We’re always bringing in examples of people that she knows from the community who are… gay (or diverse)” to help her children be aware of diverse ways of being in the world (2015/02/09). Many of these parents chose to live in this urban center because of the diversity, and they felt strongly that any compromise on quality of education is offset by the opportunities to live in a community with the rich variation37. During pre and post interviews, those who identified as heterosexual explained that they talked to their children about gender and sexual diversity and felt

37 Interestingly, this desire to live in a diverse community was explicitly named by those would be described as identifying as part of the dominant racial, sexual, gender, and class groups. For Stephen’s dad, a blue-collar worker, the motivation to live in this neighborhood was driven by a desire to be in the school’s catchment area rather than a diverse community: “I stalked this market. I'm not kidding you. No joke” and explains that after being unable to find a house, he and his wife decided to build a house (2015/02/09) to guarantee Stephen a place in this school.
certain that their children understood that romantic relationships and families extended beyond heterosexual norms. Compared to less-diverse communities, these children theoretically had access to a wide range of resources that should have prepared them for Richard’s declaration that he has two dads. In addition to being given opportunities in school to engage with fellow students and literature on gay families, most of the children had exposure to gay families either in conversations with their parents and/or through interactions with people in their social circles. Yet, this exchange during our first club meeting clearly indicates that some of the children were lacking resources to understand Richard’s family model and how it was formed.

In this encounter, Richard experienced testimonial injustice because his story was not heard nor accepted by his peers. Despite their localized experiences with gay families, the children’s response may indicate a residual prejudice, which reveals heterosexist elements contained in collective social imagination. Fricker (2009) notes that this type of prejudice is unconscious, existing in “the atmosphere of social judgment”, and that this “will bring about the most surreptitious and psychologically subtle forms of testimonial injustice” (p. 39). In this instance, Richard experienced testimonial injustice that was not a direct discrediting or silencing of his words, but through repeated calls for clarification followed by continued confusion. Richard remained confident in his understanding of his family. While he did eventually abandon his attempt to explain his family to the others, throughout the club, he does reference his parents and engage in performances that transgress heteronormative romances (e.g., the opening vignette). Richard, by all accounts, was confident and cognizant of his family variation, and this
variation did not prevent him from participating fully or drawing on family resources to make sense of his world. This limits the risk of harm from the repeated testimonial injustice he faced in the club, and presumably in other encounters/settings.

Returning to this idea of a collective social imagination and residual prejudice.

What are possible sources for my research participants to learn about heteronormativity? As noted earlier, children’s literature lacks diversity as does most media content (i.e., pop culture) for young children. This idealization of childhood innocence prioritizes heterosexuality as the normalized developmental outcome, often in the name of safety for the child (Bruhm et al., 2004). Families are constructed as almost universally heterosexual or asexual, as in many books depicting single parents. When sexual diversity is portrayed, it frequently is objectified and becomes the focal point of the story. Recall in *Stella Brings the Family* (Schiffer et al., 2015) the story is focused on what Stella can do to overcome her feeling of being different because she has two fathers instead of a mother and a father. Sexual and gender diversity is depicted as abnormal, thus reinforcing the naturalized position of heterosexual relationships. This organization of heterosexuality at the institutional level is perpetuating residual prejudice against families that do not fit the heterosexual norm. This lack of collective resources represents

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38 In the case of stories of transgender children, an increasing number of books include transgender children (e.g., *My Princess Boy* (Kilodavis & Desimone, 2010) and *Morris Mickelwhite and the Tangerine Dress* (Baldacchino & Malenfant, 2015)), yet no books include transgender adults. This portrayal of transgender characters is beyond the scope of this study, but the focus on child characters allow gender transgressions to be perceived as part of the queer experience of childhood (see Bruhm et al., 2004) and does not rule out a heteronormative future for children or children who read these books. These books also tend to include content that objectifies the transgender character, explaining him or her to the world without giving the character a voice of his or her own (cf. skelton, 2015).
hermeneutical injustice for all children, since they are denied access to knowledge and resources that will be better understand the way the world really is. Richard experienced hermeneutical injustice because he experienced hermeneutical marginalization when he made a “doomed attempt to render [his] experiences intelligible,” all experienced hermeneutical injustice as they were “excluded from shared social meanings” despite any power asymmetry due to the girls being in the dominant heteronormative group (Beeby, 2011, p. 481). They have all suffered due to a lack of knowledge about family diversity, and by considering this exchange using epistemic justice the relationship between knowledge and power becomes more visible.

This exchange stresses how important queered readings of literature are, to consider what is possible when reading and discussing stories (and other media) with children. It also implies that expansive or queered readings of texts may not be enough since they do not include resources that help us understand the rich variation in the world. The institutional and systemic barriers to changing conceptions of what is “good” or “best” for children is stymied by a seemingly glacial pace of policy review and revisions. This supports the queer theorists’ position that heterosexuality is more than sexual object choice, but an organization of time and space. In this club, the children experienced hermeneutical injustice because their collective resources did not prepare them for this

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39 Some examples: (1) Government agencies are hobbled by election cycles and the three levels of government frequently work against one another; the process of collecting, evaluating, and responding to reports takes years to go through a full cycle (for example, 2010 Census data has just started being used, five years after its collection); (2) Profit maximization, the marker of success in our capitalist system, drives publishers and producers of popular culture; this ensures that those with the greatest access to capital are pandered to and those with less money participate in the market only on the terms dictated by the financial majority.
exchange, yet this encounter and others represented moments when they could collectively build upon their hermeneutical resources, which enabled Richard’s future testimonies to be received with less dissonance. Richard rarely raised his family model with us again and no one else ever discussed it, but Richard’s play during club offered all of us a window into his understanding of make-believe, romance, and gender roles.

“Spiderman and Captain America are getting married!”
All the children claimed an affinity to superheroes and each of them engaged in superhero play on at least one occasion. Richard, who frequently brought superhero dolls to club, often initiated this play. The children would reproduce their own superhero play with Richard’s dolls, annotating as they played to bridge their private home play with this public event (see Figure 4.2). For example, Dorothy explains that she knows about superheroes because she and her brother play with them together. For Richard, superheroes were endless sources of joy, and he always was excited to share his knowledge about them with anyone who asked. Richard’s dads supported his enthusiasm for superheroes. In addition to buying him action figures and dolls, they bought accessories (e.g., water bottles, school bags) for Richard and his brother. On at least one occasion, Richard’s daddy was wearing a superhero shirt when he picked Richard up from club. Spiderman characters were Richard’s favorite, and he would bring different heroes and villains to share. His enthusiasm established Richard as a superhero expert in the club, and others – including me – would ask him to explain characters, their superpowers, and relationships to one another. Richard’s expertise extended beyond superhero play; he enjoyed drawing and was recognized as talented by his peers.
One day, Richard offered to draw each person as a superhero (see Figure 4.3). This drawing eventually became the cover of our collective book project, which was the culminating artifact of this study. This portrait-making process started spontaneously, when Richard asked Stephen what superhero he wanted to be. “I want to be… Flash,” replied Stephen. Richard affirms Stephen’s choice and establishes the ground rules for the collaboration, “Ah, nice one. But I’m the leader so – okay?” When Stephen offers Richard feedback on his drawing, “No Flash wears a belt that has, that has bat brain and stuff,” Dorothy corrects him, “That’s Batman.” Richard explains to Stephen, “That’s not original. If you choose Flash it has to be original.” Stephen accepts the terms, “I’ll go Flash” (2015/05/28).

Richard moves in-and-out of drawing the superheroes, sometimes asking people if he can draw them as a superhero and other times being asked to draw the superhero. During this drawing session Richard would ask which superhero we wanted to be, but he controlled our interactions with him because he enforced gender roles and allowing us only to be characters that matched our gender. Toward the end of the club meeting, I
realize that Richard has drawn all of the children, so I ask him to draw me so that we can use the image for the cover of collective book project\textsuperscript{40}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure4.3.png}
\caption{Richard draws us as superheroes (05/28/15)}
\end{figure}

As he completed each drawing, he would evaluate his own work based on his knowledge of different superheroes. For example, when Erin complimented his drawing of her as Wonder Woman, he said, “Thanks, I’m not very good at making DC but I’m pretty good at making Batman, Flash, Green Lantern. I also try, I’m not that good at it, but I try.” (2015/05/28). By “DC” he was referring the DC franchise of superheroes versus the Marvel superheroes. This specialized knowledge indicates his deep enthusiasm for and knowledge of superheroes as cultural products.

\textsuperscript{40} This is a funny, full-circle moment because when I first discussed the collective book project with the children during the first few weeks of the club, Richard said he would only participate in the project if he was allowed to make the cover. At the time, I did not respond to this request, and even discussed in a field note about the fairness of letting Richard have the cover when he did not participate equally to the others in the group. Before confirming that he would have his artwork on the cover, I asked the other participants, and all agreed. I think Erin was the only one who fully considered it, as she had taken over the cover design. Richard’s group portrait was a good idea and satisfied her desire to have a picture of all the group members on the cover.
In addition to drawing superheroes, Richard often brought superhero dolls to the club (see Figure 4.2, above). He would engage in imaginative play with them either with others or alone. Many of the other children also loved superheroes and they often would share stories and build the superheroes into their play. Returning to the vignette at the start of the chapter, I will closely examine what happened when Richard shifts from playing alone with his superheroes to engaging others in his play. Unlike other engagements with the group, which were often more fluid and directed to specific individuals, Richard’s declaration is intended for all of us:

“Look what I did!” Richard holds up two plastic Spiderman dolls held together with an elastic band. “They’re kissing!” (makes kissing sounds). Several children and I stop to study Richard’s dolls. “Eww!” shouts Jane, laughing. Erin and Dorothy study the dolls’ embrace, trying to understand Richard’s declaration. When Erin asks if they’re kissing the rubber band, I suggest that the rubber band holds them together so they can kiss each other. Dorothy asks for clarification, “Why don’t you just get their two arms and hug each other?” The conversation switches to Richard’s birthday celebration. (04/09/15)

Two weeks later, Richard is playing again when he announces that Captain America and Spiderman are getting married. Jane asks him to “Stop the kissing and marrying things” but cannot articulate why when I ask her to explain what she means. Richard offers a reply for Jane, “Both of them are boys.” He quickly adds, “But they still can marry” (makes kissing sound). A moment later he adds, “Oh, I’m having a baby.” Other children move in and out of play with Richard enacting different roles for the baby. The play continues until I shift their attention to a whole group activity. (04/23/15)

In these vignettes, Richard was reenacting the affectionate relationship of his parents not transgressing gender boundaries. He draws on popular culture both in his choice of materials (i.e., dolls) and themes (i.e., superheroes) to recreate moments from
his home life. Dyson (1997, 2010) notes that popular culture is a frequent resource children use to draw connections and create meaning between everyday interactions, their learning, and as a form of expression. Popular culture references are often discouraged or excluded from classroom spaces; in our case, the classroom teacher would draw on a range of pop culture resources but the children were rarely allowed to share their own pop culture materials (i.e., dolls) in the classroom. For Richard, playing with the dolls during the reading club was one way the club differed from the classroom and school. He shows awareness that his play transgresses normative depictions of romantic play as he explains for Jane “both of them are boys.” When he quickly adds “but they can still marry,” Richard demonstrates an awareness of social norms about same-sex relationships including knowledge that normative attitudes are not the same as legal rights around gay marriage (this had been in the news a lot). His response suggests he felt compelled to explain how his imaginary play may have been transgressing Jane’s expectations of romantic relationships. Richard’s response implies that he feels that he has to justify his family models in ways that children with heterosexual parents do not.

When I shared these moments with Michael, Richard’s Dad, he affirmed that their household was affectionate and that Richard and his brother, “We show affection toward each other in front of both of the children, because we don’t want them to be shocked later in life” (2015/06/10). Michael shares as an example that Richard would see his parents embrace when they greeted each other in the evening in order “to make everything as normal as it can be” (2015/06/10). Michael, in both his forthcoming description of affectionate routines and in his desire to present “normal” familial
affection for his children, offers Richard resources about families and relationships that his peers do not routinely have. While Michael did not elaborate beyond this example, his description and Richard’s superhero play during club reveal that romantic affection between same-sex individuals is part of Richard’s collective resources. As I have already noted, Richard’s play may transgress normative gender roles but for Richard these imagined romances do not transgress his own understanding of romantic possibilities.

Richard also demonstrates awareness that his collective resources about family and romance are not universal. His decision to share his play, “Look what I did!” (2015/04/09) and his ability to negotiate meaning for the rest of the group – for example “Both of them are boys” (2015/04/23) – indicates a confidence in his right to testimony. In this sense, Richard did not seem to experience persistent epistemic injustice because he continued to feel confident about his right to speak and be heard despite challenges he experienced during the first club meeting. According to Fricker (2009), in order for Richard to experience testimonial injustice, he would have to experience a crisis of his epistemic trustworthiness, which occurs when the speaker’s competence or sincerity is challenged, which are “both cases of identity-prejudicial exclusion from the community of epistemic trust” (p. 45). Richard initially experienced testimonial injustice by his peers when he tried to explain his family model to his peers, yet his persistence in sharing his worldview of relationships indicates that he did not lose confidence in his belief or justification for sharing with his peers. Despite Michael’s comments that Richard had not experienced homophobia or any negative experiences, Richard demonstrated an understanding of the difference between his own family structure and his peers’ families.
Richard’s peers, though, continue to question Richard’s contributions. When Erin asks if they are kissing the rubber bands, she is revealing a lack of hermeneutical resources that would allow her to envision a romantic relationship between the two Spiderman dolls. Erin’s lack of resources has the potential to harm her – since she is unable to make sense of the world in which she lives – and other group members because her response contributes to their hermeneutical resources. It also may harm Richard because her response is a form of testimonial injustice, a lack of recognizing his testimony. Jane’s responses also are a form of testimonial injustice toward Richard, for when she says “Eww!” and “Stop the marrying and kissing thing!” she is denying his right to share his thoughts and ideas. After carefully listening to multiple audio sources and by talking to Jane directly about her responses, I decided that Jane’s responses were more directly related to any expressions of romance, a possibly conditioned response that she exercised throughout the club whenever romance and affection were initiated by others. Jane often initiated discussions about crushes. Her emotional and verbal outbursts ranged from encouraging (e.g., giggling, asking questions) to dissuading (sobbing, asking me to intervene), and I believe her responses were a way to engage the thrillingly transgressive nature of romantic play for children (Bruhm et al., 2004). Richard, though, is able to adjust to both Erin’s and Jane’s responses. He does this most clearly with his response to Jane’s declaration, “Stop the marrying and kissing thing!” He offers a response that acknowledges a reason for her response and also an evaluative statement that acknowledges the legitimacy of his play.
When I tried to speak to Richard about this directly, he displayed an unwillingness to talk about it or he would disengage with me by changing the subject or leaving my side. The direct approach was not successful and posed risks of objectifying Richard’s family in a way that I wanted to avoid. Because I did not want to exacerbate any potential harm these encounters may have had on Richard, I did not pursue direct questioning. Even when I employed less direct methods like side-by-side interviews and story prompts, Richard was unwilling to discuss these moments with me. I do not know what to make of Richard’s willing public engagement and private reticence. When I talked to Michael, his dad, about this, he said that Richard also did not talk about these issues with him. I did not pursue this because the purpose of the research was not to analyze variance from the norm but to become aware of how Richard interacted and when he drew on family resources to situate himself within his community.

Richard’s sharing offered insight into his experiences as a child with gay parents, and it also warranted study for how others responded to his words and actions. His contributions disrupted the status quo and offered the group transformative possibilities. Richard introduced queerness into the group both in his testimony and his actions; he forced at least some of the others to think about how they defined and understood family formation, “allowing for new horizons and vastness of potentiality” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 145). One way to disrupt the status quo is to consider how those who have privilege negotiate and situate their privilege. Returning to my first example, when Renee insists that everyone must have a mother, she is reinforcing biological determinism at Richard’s expense. Our conversation and Richard’s unwillingness to accept Renee’s and the other
girls’ description of family indicate Richard’s agency. Richard was unwilling to let Renee’s heteronormative privilege define his family or his play. Through his insistence, the children and I were given opportunities to increase of hermeneutical resources and to begin to envision family and romance in more diverse ways. This may have influenced the ways children responded to literature, which I discuss in the next section.

“Wait, he has two dads?”

In this final example, I shift away from Richard’s contributions to the group and start to think about how the children responded to family diversity in literature. For this group, Richard was a knowledge resource about family diversity. His willingness to share was an opportunity for the children and me to learn about localized family diversity, but I also wanted to share “official” resources of childhood discourses (e.g., literature) that aligned with Richard’s contributions. Throughout the club, I continuously reviewed different literature and would bring in books for either whole group readalouds or to share with children. The readalouds, which I discuss in great detail in the next chapter, were a time when the group came together for a shared literary event, and my book selection was intentional and purposeful. I came across one book that I felt would have broad appeal to the group: *Purim Superhero* (Kushner et al., 2013), because it is about superheroes, the main character has two dads, and shares a Jewish tradition. I knew that the latter would be particularly interesting to Jane, who is Jewish and often shared religious stories with group.

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, *Purim Superhero* is told from the perspective of a child who is trying to find a costume to celebrate Purim. That the child
has two dads is simply part of the background and figures only slightly into the narrative development. *Purim Superhero* normalizes this variation of family rather than situating it as a deviation from the norm. I read *Purim Superhero* to the group in week 12, near the end of our meeting time. I introduced the book to the children and asked Jane to confirm the pronunciation of Purim. I did not tell the children that this was a story about a child with two dads because I did not want to distinguish the family variation as a point of difference. The children gathered around the tables, mostly turning their attention to me. Some continued to draw in their notebooks, including Erin, Dorothy, and Richard. In the video, the children can be seen moving slightly – sometimes standing sometimes sitting – but they are quiet and paying attention to me. The main character is Nate, and his parents are called Daddy and Abba.

Since the children were not familiar with the term Abba, they do not notice that Nate’s parents were two dads until the text mentions it. At this point, Stephen says, “Wait, he has two dads?” When I affirm this, he says, “Okay, I just was checking to make sure I heard properly” (2015/05/21). At this point, Jane declares that she knows that “Abba” is Dad in Hebrew. There is no further discussion of this point and I continue reading the story. The dissonance that some children experienced in week 1 no longer is evident. At the end of the story, Richard speaks up. He starts to describe all the different superheroes he knows and the costumes he owns. Some of the other children join the conversation but parents have arrived and we quickly shift gears to end the meeting.

This final example demonstrates that literature that does not objectify or differentiate gay families is available. When this story was read to these children, they
were engaged with the plotline and not distracted by the family variation. *Purim Superhero* appealed to the children because it connected to their lives and their shared experiences in the club. Renee and especially Jane enjoyed seeing one of their religious holidays in a storybook. Most of them, especially Richard, had fun imagining different kinds of superheroes. While we did not have a lot of time to talk about the book, some of the children took turns looking through it the following week. In subsequent weeks, I shared *King and King* (de Haan & Nijland, 2002), which all the children liked although the boys resisted acting out the male characters (even though the girls begged).

This shift from imposing heteronormative ideals on Richard during our first week to unquestioned acceptance suggests that the collective resources of the group may have changed in our time together. While Richard did not discuss overtly his dads’ relationship again, he did engage in romantic imaginary play between superheroes. This did meet some resistance from Jane, which I discussed in the previous example, but comments from others were for clarification or to support Richard’s storylines. Richard’s willingness to share his family story and enact imaginary romantic storylines that mirrored his parents’ affections was an opportunity for members of the club to explore new ways of being.

**Conclusion**

This purpose of this chapter was to consider how literature and literary engagement created opportunities for these children to see diverse representations of families and to find moments when their own families were reflected in the texts. I started with a discussion about the intersections of queer theory and childhood development
scholarship, and I explained why an epistemic justice framework provided a new way to consider parallels in this scholarship. Using queer theory to read literature is about reading expansively, about seeing possibilities that extend beyond the text and the reader’s knowledge resources (Ryan et al., 2013). This desire to see what is “not yet here” (Muñoz, p. 87) reflects the scholarship of other queer theorists and reveals how applications of queer theory disrupt and make obvious the social constructedness of heteronormativity. By moving beyond a literary analysis of highly regarded children’s literature and analyzing these child participants engagement in the reading club, I was able to consider how their knowledge resources interacted in intertextual and interpersonal ways. An analysis using epistemic justice emphasized the value of these knowledge – or hermeneutical – resources. Through both the critical content analysis of international children’s literature and my analysis of Richard’s experiences in the reading club, I identified ways that children are routinely denied expansive hermeneutical resources about families and romantic relationships. It may not be enough to queer readings of heteronormative texts since readers still are denied opportunities to see accurate variations of family and romantic models. This analysis revealed how heteronormativity extends beyond sexual object choice to institutional and systemic infrastructures that privilege some and silence others. This evolving awareness of queerness carries into the next chapter, which shifts our focus to literary events we engaged in, specifically the read aloud, and how participants responded to this queered read aloud, which broke the conventions of classroom read alouds both in content (i.e., book selection) and format.
Chapter 5
Alternative Temporalities, Movement, and Reading Engagement

It is week 10. We set up and order snacks. I encourage everyone to work on our collective final project. Stephen has different plans. He picks up *Everyone Poops* (Gomi, 1993) and announces, “This book should not be for children...you can see his thing [penis], and his other things.” I find this amusing, since Stephen has led much of the poop talk. Renee and Jane assure him that pooping is natural and the author wrote the book to tell people that it is healthy to poop. Stephen resists, challenging them “You said a potty word,” but they ignore him and continue to explain the author’s intentions. After a few minutes, Stephen changes his mind, “Who wants me to read this to them? I’ll read.” Hearing this, Jane and Renee also volunteer. Stephen starts reading, performing his readaloud by first reading the text and then quickly sweeping the book in a broad motion past his audience. When he doesn’t show the pictures, the girls chant, “Show the pictures!” When his audience gets distracted, he commands their attention, “Hey. Reading. Reading, here...I’m reading to everybody, here.” He continues until the book is done, stopping occasionally to ask for help with a word or to show the illustrations.

Jane’s readaloud is different. She reads directly and fluently from *Lily Takes a Walk* (Kitamura, 1987), discussing paratextual details including the cover and end pages. She rarely shows the pictures. At first, this doesn’t bother anyone. Occasionally, someone will walk behind her to see the pictures. This prompts Jane to hold the book up high, tipping it toward the ceiling to “show” the pictures. Soon, Stephen complains, “I didn’t get to see all the pictures.” Jane agrees to show the pictures and continues to read. A few minutes later, the story is done. The children chat briefly, then Renee stands up, “Hey guys, I’m going to read.”

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41 Stephen’s resistance to the book is amusing because in week eight, he attempts to read *Everyone Poops* out loud after I finished reading *Where the Wild Things Are* but I won’t let him:

Stephen: Okay, I’m going to read a book to everybody called *Everyone Poops*.
Mrs. Lo: No, no, there is someone working in here. We don’t want to disturb them with that book. Okay?
Stephen: He can’t hear us.
Mrs. Lo: He is working over there, why can’t he hear us?

It appears that we both experienced a change of heart.
Despite having the shortest book, Renee’s readaloud of *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) takes the longest. Renee reads quietly and slowly, stumbling over words, looking to me for help but determined to read the book by herself. Her face is hidden behind the pages as she reads, and then she carefully turns the book and holds it steady, low to the table for everyone to see. There is much movement and distractions among the audience. This may be because Renee’s reading style is not engaging – she is reading the words out loud rather than performing a readaloud – or because the children know the story. It may be because they have sat relatively still for two readalouds and are ready to move onto something else, or perhaps it is because at least one of the previous readers is more interested in performing than listening. I redirect them to Renee with prompts and questions about the book. Some call out responses and some focus on other work. Only Stephen puts up his hand to answer questions. At one point, I ask a question and Stephen starts flapping and waving his hand in the air. I acknowledge him, but he says, “I’m raising my hand for Teacher Renee.” Renee stops reading, “Yes, Stephen?” Stephen stands up, says, “Bye”, and walks away. In the video, Stephen indicates that he is going to the bathroom but he only walks up and down the hallway then comes back. He is smiling when he returns, seconds later, and his smile and brief absence suggest he is playing. I ask Stephen to sit down and pay attention like Renee paid attention to him. The readaloud continues for almost six more minutes. Renee’s quiet voice and stilted reading pace aren’t engaging the children. At the end, Renee says, “I’m finished. Was anyone listening?” Jane replies, “Oh yeah! I love it!” and Dorothy reenacts sounds from the wild rumpus in approval. Renee and Jane stand up and dance while Dorothy sings/chants.

This vignette demonstrates how my co-participants took charge of the reading clubs. When Stephen decides to conduct a readaloud, Jane and Renee also volunteer. Different reading styles illuminate how each understood the readaloud as a type of performance. Stephen closely models what he sees in the classroom, alternating between looking at the book to read the text and then sweeping the illustrations across the group. While Jane is the most fluent reader, she is least aware of performing readalouds. Jane tries to read the book and show the text at the same time – mirroring what I do – to mixed
effect as her shifting body moves the book in a way that favors some children and blocks others. Renee, who had the most difficult time decoding the text, seems to understand that viewing the illustration is integral. She would read a page with the illustrations facing her and then turn the book, placing it on the table so everyone could see it. Her pace of reading was slower and she gives her audience ample time to look at the illustrations. Renee’s readaloud was nearly three times longer than either of her peers despite having the shortest text. The children’s performances extend beyond reading the book. Stephen, in putting his hand up for “Teacher Renee”, was performing student-teacher play. This play did not mirror their experiences with readalouds in their classroom or the readalouds I did during the reading club. Stephen was drawing on other resources to engage with Renee and the group.

In this chapter, I explore ways the children take up the readaloud. Using a queer lens, I closely examine our readalouds and our engagement with literature to discuss ways that this reading club queered temporal expectations of reading. In doing this, I offer insight into the way heteronormativity structures time and expectations of reading and literary events. Queer time is the resistance of straight time, or the linear trajectory of time, “queers use space and time in ways that challenge conventional logics of development, maturity, adulthood, and responsibility” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 13). In this chapter, I push against developmental models and consider how disrupting their typical conventional adult-child reading interactions affected all of us, pushing us to reconsider reading and our roles in constructing literary understanding. Readalouds have potential to widely engage audiences, but excessive structure or rule may restrict the range of
responses permitted and enacted (Sipe, 1997). I was mindful of my expectations when I planned our readalouds and worked to let go of attachment to my own time schedule. While the readalouds were designed to be a focal point for literary engagement, I recognized that how I structured these events would affect how the children prepared for, interacted with, and responded to literature and to these literary events.

**Chapter Overview**

This chapter explores ways the children talks about books, reading, and engaged in literacy practices that I initiated. I start by discussing our readalouds and then analyze how the children transacted with these literary events, which I define as temporally bound moments. Time, and how we use our time together, is queered in this chapter. Queer time, as opposed to “straight” time, is an exploration of different ways of understanding and representing of time. Queering time is a disruption of heteronormativity through questioning and resisting dominant ideas in order to make visible how these ideas are socially constructed rather than natural. A queer methodology obscures or disrupts the obviousness of straight time in order to denaturalize it.

Our readalouds were queered events because they disrupted expectations of our roles during literary events and shifted our power dynamics. I analyze these readalouds to consider how this variation from classroom readaloud practices – due to being in an afterschool club – is an opportunity to explore heteronormative practices that extend beyond sexual object choice to social organization (Muñoz, 2009). Analyzing the children’s responses to these disruptions represents an opportunity to understand

42 While queerness is about rejecting binaries, queer time is positioned in opposition to straight time. More specifically, it is an attempt to decenter straight time and to present alternative ways of organizing and structuring social order.
normative practices; their observations and discomfort help define normed expectations of reading. This analysis reveals how a seemingly non-sexualized event – the literary event of the readaloud – may reinforce heteronormative social practices.

In the second part of the chapter, I recount a reading of *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) and introduce the Ning-A-Things, a community of creatures the children created, inspired by *Where the Wild Thing Are, Battle Bunny* (Scieszka, Barnett, & Myers, 2013), my curriculum, and their imaginative play. The Ning-A-Things emerge in week eight and reappear frequently until our time together ends. The children negotiated roles and identities, and in the process welcomed me as an observer – and occasional mediator – of their pretend play. Their interactions during the readaloud of *Where the Wild Things Are* and with Ning-A-Things are a window into children’s literacy practices. I posit that there are parallels between considerations of queer time and the way time is managed in the classroom, the site of “official” time. The reading club, and our readalouds, broke from “official” time and this temporal disruption creates opening to negotiate power across generations, gender, and the general setting of Old Falvey Café.

In the last section of the chapter, I focus on Renee, the third reader in the earlier vignette. My initial assessment of Renee’s actions during the readalouds was that she was disinterested in the readings. She often stood up and moved around during the readings. She talked to others, drew, and quite often would step back from the group to dance. While Renee was always excited to come to the club, she occasionally questioned the validity of the reading club. This was due to our activities not aligning with her definition of a book club, “You never give us a book to read together” (2015/03/26). Renee’s
preconceptions about reading and book clubs provide a lens to social literacy practices and may offer a commentary on predominating beliefs about reading. Through conversations with Renee, I came to realize how important it is to talk to children about how they engage with literary events because I misinterpreted her behavior during the club. Renee’s engagement with and responses to the readalouds offer insight into how this reading club transformed understanding of children’s reading practices and the importance of considering children’s voice and agency during literary events. Before I immerse us in the story of Renee and the Ning-A-Things, though, I step back to consider the readaloud as both a site of alternative temporality and a unit of analysis.

The Readalouds

In earlier chapters, I shared observations from different first grade classrooms. These classrooms were not a part of the study, but my time in them was informative and motivated me to enact a research design that positioned the children as experts. I also described tensions that required me to create boundaries on the children’s freedom during the club. These tensions included safety concerns, respect for others in the coffee shop, and meeting parent expectations. A fourth tension was my desire to learn what the children thought about families and to participate in discussions about families with them. I was not sure this topic would emerge unprompted. To ensure it was addressed, I integrated it into our conversations. One way I did this was with the readaloud. Each week I would review data from the club and my research goals in an effort to align my goals with the children’s desires and preferences for activities during the club. I selected a book that I thought would appeal to them and then design an activity that I hoped would
capture their attention while addressing my research goals. Some weeks worked better than others. For example, in week 2, I read *Home* by Carson Ellis (2015) and then asked the children to draw houses that reflected their homes. The children were very excited to draw houses but not necessarily their own. Collectively, we created what became known as the “poop house” (see Figure 5.1a). The exercise started by drawing a series of rectangles that represented the building, windows and doors. When we started to add details, including pets and animals, the children decided to show all the animals pooping. This delighted them. During a reunion several months after the club ended, Erin, Jane, and Renee decided to recreate the “poop house” for my children who also attended the reunion. Drawing the original poop house was a beloved memory for the girls who attended the reunion, and they enthusiastically recreated it at the reunion (Figure 5.1b).
Each week, I experienced an event that challenged my expectations for the club and regardless of my preparation I needed to let go of these expectations if I was going to follow their lead. In this club, I had to be open to poop talk. Scatological humor predominated most of our early meetings. Once I accepted that the children were curious about it, I brought different books that talked about poop. In the opening vignette, I shared Stephen’s hesitation to read *Everyone Poops* (Gomi, 1993) and his enthusiastic reading of the book to the group. As the weeks passed, the children talked less about poop – although puking bananas remained popular – and focused on different types of engagement\(^43\). By becoming a collaborator in their interests, the dynamics changed. This was an important lesson for me and demonstrates how this was a site of dialogic inquiry.

*The readaloud as alternative temporality*

During readalouds, I asked children to participate with the group or work quietly on their own. Readalouds were group events designed to mediate our interactions and bridge the distance between the unhurried pace of the children’s play and the fixed pace of classroom learning. I consider how these varying conceptions of time overlap and, more importantly, inform my analysis of our interactions during readalouds. Literacy scholars Celia Genishi and Anne Haas Dyson (2009) suggest that learning time can be divided between “official” time (i.e., adult or panoptic time) and “unofficial” time (i.e., child or unhurried time). Official time is structured, linear, and generally adheres to a developmental model of childhood: childhood is one phase of a trajectory leading to adulthood. Schools, and especially classrooms, are sites to enact learning and move

\(^{43}\) See the next chapter for an extended analysis on the way children integrated poop and bananas into talk and play.
individuals along this continuum to adulthood. Time in classrooms is “official time”; it usually is teacher-governed and structured around curricular goals. It may lack “curricular flexibility” or the ability to modify instruction to the various needs of the students. Unofficial time, on the other hand, is child-governed and dictated by child-centered play. Learning that is child-centered situates (either consciously or unconsciously) children’s social, emotional, and language development as equally important to cognitive and academic learning, and play “allows children to have a say in the curriculum and to learn skills that are sociolinguistic and cultural” (Genishi et al., 2009, p. 119). Considering time scales and management – who controls what we do and when we do it? – are opportunities to consider both power dynamics and what happens when these dynamics change from the routines I had observed in their classrooms.

Time scales are discussed in literary criticism and queer scholarship. In literary criticism Bakhtin (1981) uses chronotopes to describe time space relationships in literature, and he analyzed how classical texts broke from historical time, which he defined as successive linear events. His textual analysis explores which moments the readers are asked to attend to and the strategies employed to capture the reader’s attention. Literary chronotopes are imbued with social and cultural ideologies from the era in which they were created. Mapping out chronotopes over time may reveal ideological fingerprints of different eras, and this may provide insight into the dynamics of cultural power. Considerations of time scale, then, may reveal cultural ideologies about time and social organization more broadly.
Narrative time interweaves chronos and kairos to help the reader understand context and fill gaps in the story. These terms reflect the Ancient Greek conceptualization of time: “chronos”, a linear succession of events, versus “kairos”, an eternal present (Sipe, 2008). The author manipulates time through the plot, or the sequence of events that carry the story along. In illustrated books, the author and illustrator have the privilege of disrupting chronological time to accelerate, decelerate, or completely interrupt (e.g., flashbacks) a storyline. This portrayal of time in literature reveals the subjectivity of time, directing our attention to the “various guises” of time, including spatialization, memory, “and the relationship between the past and the present and... the significant moment” (Kilian, 2015, p. 336). While chronological time may predominate daily interactions, literature (and art) is a material manifestation of these other possibilities for measuring and capturing time. This use of time (and space) is Bakhtin’s chronotope, “the way time and space are conceived and represented” (Dentith, 1995, p. 52). Literary chronotoposes mediate narrative events. They offer readers multiple temporal and spatial perspectives that round out the story and provide supplementary information to help interpret events.

Sipe (2008) extends this duality of time to the reading experience. He suggests that chronos is a linear reading of the text, but kairos is “when we feel time is obliterated” (pp. 191-2). Kairos may be the desired outcome of an encounter with literature, and art more generally, if the goal of these encounters is to have an aesthetic impulse. An aesthetic impulse is when we “surrender for the moment, to the power of the text” (Sipe, 2008, p. 191). Kairos represents the eternal present, a moment to “free ourselves from our own state of human contingency” (p. 192) or to break from linear time. This lived
through experience is one form of literary understanding, complementing the hermeneutic (different from hermeneutical resource) impulse – or comprehension of the text – and the personalizing impulse, connecting the story to one’s own life. The aesthetic impulse measures the experience of reading and creates a break in time for readers, a break from lived realities dictated by linear or chronological time. Like literary chronotopes, which offer multiple perspectives of time and space, readers engagements with texts can lead to spatiotemporal distortions that disrupt dominant time scales.

Eveline Kilian (2015) suggests time is a “much foregrounded issue in modernist literature” and literature explores “the subjective experience of time” (p. 336). Modernist literature has observable and measurable representations of time; temporal conventions are normalized as a means to connect readers to the narrative. Because chronotopes represent a break from the linear time of the “real” or non-literature world, literary time and temporal representations must be in dialogue with “real” or chronological time if the reader shall be able to understand the story. If not, the story is inaccessible. Time space relationships used within stories carry with them markers of dominant cultural systems, “the chronotope is an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring” (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 425-6). Kilian draws on rising interest in queer time by scholars and explores how concepts of queer time can be understood by re-reading texts that have been read with a modernist lens. Queer time is conceptually framed to “contradict and resist heteronormative time,” which is defined by heterosexuality, reproductive sexuality, family genealogy, and developmental models of growth (p. 337). Queer time aligns with the literary ideas of kairos and chronotopes in
literary criticism as well as child-centered unofficial time in literacy and education scholarship, because all acknowledge that conceptions of time are influenced and guided by ideologies, and particularly by dominant ideologies.

This manipulation of time extends to children’s literature. Picturebook chronotopes include images (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001), and thus offer readers an additional resource to fill gaps in the text – and opportunities to break normalized time space boundaries. The reader must examine textual and illustrative narratives, drawing on linguistic, visual, and experiential repertoires, and then synthesize information from the two modes to create a story. Decoding how the author and illustrator organize spatiotemporal representations is an integral part of understanding stories. For example, in *Everywhere Babies* (Myers & Frazee, 2004), which I read to the reading club during our first meeting, Frazee draws a baby crawling across a page (page spread (p.s.) 12)\(^{44}\). The baby appears 13 times on the page spread, in linear succession to imply the wobbly movements of a toddler’s first steps. This technique of repeatedly drawing a figure is called “simultaneous succession” (Nikolajeva et al., 2001) and is used to indicate a continuous narrative. Young children frequently are not able to connect the sequential images with the passage of time (Nikolajeva et al., 2001). This technique caught Dorothy’s attention (Excerpt 5.1); she noticed Frazee’s multiple images of the same baby on a single page.

\(^{44}\) Because many picturebooks do not include page numbers, the convention is to count double page spreads (p.s.) starting immediately after the full title page (Sipe, 2008).
Dorothy’s observation of the repeating images indicates this page stood out to her because of how Frazee chose to depict movement across time. Renee’s reply suggests she comprehends this as a technique to show movement across time and space. Dorothy’s response suggests a shared understanding of Frazee’s decision to use of simultaneous succession. The girls recognize that the 2D boundaries of the page can be manipulated to represent time and space in ways that do not parallel linear or real, lived time.

This treatment of time and space is interdependent (Bakhtin, 1981), especially in picturebooks since icons of time are frequently used to denote the passage of time. This can include a clock whose hands move, a calendar that changes from page to page, and many other iconic depictions of time. One book that is frequently discussed is *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963). In it the young protagonist, Max, is sent to his room for his wild behavior. Once in his room, a forest grows until his room disappears into an alternative world replete with forest and an ocean. Max sails off on a journey, discovers the land of the wild things, becomes their leaders, yet eventually realizes he “wanted to be where someone loved him best of all” (p.s. 15). When Max returns to his room, he finds his supper waiting for him “and it was still hot” (p.s. 18), implying that Max’s disappearance was short-lived and his adventure was a dream rather than reality. Yet, the text contradicts itself because his journey to the land of the wild things lasts “almost over
a year” (p.s. 8) and the return journey “over a year in and out of weeks and through a
day” (p.s. 17). The illustrations support this longer passage of time: when Max is first
sent to his bedroom (p.s. 3), the reader can see a crescent moon in his bedroom window.
The moon is full (p.s. 18) when Max returns. Sendak’s use of images and text to play
with time are examples of kairos, when the rules of chronological time do not hold. The
reader may imagine Max’s time with the wild things as a dream time (e.g., as Richard
did, see discussion below), which is also not bound by chronological time, but the final
image of the full moon beaming into Max’s bedroom creates an opening for the reader to
wonder if Max really did travel to the land of the wild things (Nikolajeva et al., 2001;
Sondheim, 1991). Sendak’s playful use of time exemplifies ways literature breaks with
linear time and the enduring love of Where the Wild Things Are may indicate the
enjoyment readers get (and perhaps expect) from linear or chronological breaks.

In my analysis of the reading club, I focus on our responses to Where the Wild
Things Are. I extend this idea of reader response to literary texts to include our responses
to literary events: the readalouds. These literary events created opportunities to disrupt
normative conceptions of time in the same way literature uses non-normative time to
disrupt the reader’s expectations. In order for a chronotope to be successful, the literary
events must create “a mutual interaction between the world represented in the work [i.e.,
the reading club] and the world outside the work” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 255). I use queer
time as an optic for studying the normalization of time when engaging in literary events
with children. By creating literary events that were (mostly) child-centered, I hoped to

45 Sipe (1997) similarly notes that analyzing reading curriculum and popular pedagogy will reveal
the “theory of reading” dominating different eras (p. 6).
observe literacy practices in time that broke from curricular goals that defined literacy as a skill to be acquired through repetition of a range of literary and literacy practices. This is achieved, in part, by resisting the desire for adult-centered order during the reading club and readalouds.

*Queering time with children*

For my participants, this unstructured version of readalouds was largely a disruption from their everyday practices in the classroom. I discuss this in more detail below, but before I do I want to consider how altering time management (i.e., who controls the pace) transects ideas of queer time. Queer time and space disrupt safety and safeness (Halberstam, 2005) because the predictability of linear, or straight, time is disrupted by queerness; “straight time is a self-narrating temporality [that] needs to be phenomenologically questioned…queerness’s ecstatic and horizontal temporality is a path and a movement to a greater openness in the world” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 25). Straight time is described as predictable, linear, leading to possibilities that are “a logical real” (p. 99) or within a bounded set of expectations, all defined by the future’s relationship to the past and present (e.g., developmental models of childhood understand that a child will go through predictable stages on a path to (heterosexual) adulthood). Queer time, though, is linked to potentialities, a combination of negating what is in the present (i.e., what is missing such as acceptance of gender variation, marriage equality, intergenerational equality) and what is desired (e.g., utopia).

Queerness denaturalizes time and movement in order to imagine a new horizon, a near future or futurity (Muñoz, p. 125). To experience queer time is to engage in a
dialectical embodiment of past, present, and future that includes a reimagining of the world that conceptualizes the world with new potential (i.e., potentiality). It is the disruption of a linear past → present → future that underlies developmental models of childhood; it shifts the focus from considering the child as an adult-in-process-of-becoming to child-as-whole-being-in-the-present. Redefining adult-child roles during readalouds was one way to break from the heteronormative organization of adult-child dynamics. The reading club, with its focus on family diversity and the context of the era when we met (i.e., legalization of gay marriage in the USA), was an opportunity for this group to consider the horizon, or turning to literary theory, to “imagine other, more just and equitable alternatives” of being in the world (Sipe, 2008, p. 7).

*The Readaloud as Unit of Analysis*

Readalouds were much loved in the classroom (led by a variety of adults including me) so the children were familiar with this type of literary event and eager to participate. Every week, I brought a selection of books to share. Some titles were for specific children, especially Richard and Brendan who showed particular interest in my book choices, while others were selected to stimulate conversations about focal topics. I used picturebooks as a medium to initiate conversations about families and other topics that I thought would engage us in extended discussions. The readaloud represented an opportunity to grab everyone’s attention.

Analyzing readalouds as a unit of analysis enabled me to explore reading engagement in situ. The readaloud represents a discrete time when the whole group came together for a literary event. Unlike other activities, I asked everyone to pay attention or
work quietly without disrupting the group. Even when the children choose to work quietly, video footage reveals that they were attending to the text and my voice. On occasions when some children resisted or were distracted, I would argue with them that their parents expected us to read together since this was a reading club. This is a promise that I made to parents on the parent permission form, “Each week, I will read at least one story to club members and then provide opportunities for the children to respond to the books” (see Appendix B). Thus, I would construct our time together as one that was partially bound by parent expectations, even invoking an urgency to complete the readaloud before small group or independent activities could be done.

Despite our small number, our talk frequently was loud, overlapping, and multidirectional (i.e., there were many conversations going on at the same time). For example, I could ask a question and receive three simultaneous responses, two other children may turn to each other to respond, and another child may ask for help spelling a word or peeling a banana. Following conversations and threads of ideas often was difficult in the moment and challenging to reconstruct from audio and video recordings. These recordings captured our interactions, but they were always partial, defined by multiple factors that failed to wholly capture our exchanges (e.g., speaker too far from the microphone, or hidden bodies obscured by others or outside the range of the camera’s viewfinder). Our time together was complex and layered; individuals threaded their ways between and around others. Even with multiple and multimodal data collection methods, the collected files and artifacts only render a two-dimensional model of our interactions, compressing the richness of our experiences much like a postcard of a masterpiece.
painting records but flattens the medium of the painting. As a researcher, my task is to use this information to build a model that will help us understand how each of these pieces of data represents the story. This is done in two ways: through design and analysis. The readaloud was an intentional design choice: it was a moment constructed to slow down this chaos by creating a common focal point.

Our readaloud practices varied from classroom readalouds, appearing more chaotic and disorganized. I occasionally felt frustrated by the children’s responses, the seemingly endless distractions that occupied them including talking to each other, drawing, bathroom breaks, food and snacks, dirt on the floor, superheroes, etc. I would employ different techniques to engage them and redirect them back to the book. Yet, I also was determined to follow their lead even if I felt like we were veering off course, because one purpose the study was to observe how children engage with books with minimal adult intervention/guidance. Rereading Dyson (2013) reminded me that entering “childhood worlds of relations and intentions of power and play” may be one path to understanding how literacy “becomes ‘relevant’ to children” (p. 401). In this study, I situate the readaloud as a scaffold between the teacher-lead world of literacy instruction and a child-centered world of playful engagement with literacy events. I envisioned children’s participation in the club as a window to their literary understanding including resources from which they draw to make meaning and guide their interactions with one another. It is a way to observe literacy learning as a social process that involves attending to text and images, personal responses, and the responses of others (Sipe, 2008). During a readaloud, literary understanding can emerge from collective meaning-making; I saw this
as a valuable way to consider the children’s roles and responses, which would attend to my interest in studying the social construction of family diversity and the dynamics of child cultures. I was using literature and literary events to gain an understanding of how the children made sense of their worlds.

Drawing on different theoretical perspectives, I consider the intersection of queer theory and postdevelopmentalism. I adopted a social constructionist understanding of difference and identity to consider literacy practices of this diverse group of children. Postdevelopmentalism seeks to “makes room for other perspectives that are useful in illuminating aspects of children’s subjectivity” (Blaise, 2014, p. 117). These literary events were social experiences that I hoped would lead to alternative discourses about gender, sexuality, and family. In the previous chapter, Richard’s efforts to share his family model with the group illustrated ways gender and sexuality entered our conversations. My findings suggest that developmentally appropriate practices may be heteronormative, ignoring particular populations (e.g., children with gay parents) and may limit children’s opportunities to envision a more complete and nuanced understanding of gender/sex/uality. This absence of understanding family variation and the lack of questioning of naturalized heterosexual organization of the world supports queer scholars observations that heteronormativity is more than sexual object choice.

Heteronormativity extends to an organization of time and space that reinforces certain (heterosexual) ways of being in the world. By focusing on our readalouds, I wish to create a connection between more conventional time management (i.e., the classroom readaloud) and our club engagements, which relaxed the parameters of “official” time.
As Sipe (2008) observed in his research on hundreds of readalouds, two-thirds of children’s discussion about a book’s content, or “book talk”, occurs during the readaloud so analyzing the readaloud event as a unit of analysis is an opportunity to explore literary engagement. Our readalouds were similar to classroom readalouds yet the context queered children’s conventions of reading. I propose that the readaloud (and reading club overall) was event that queered time and movement because of the ways our encounters broke conventional interactions with literature, which are bounded by dominant ideologies of ways to read and to teach reading. The location, a neighborhood coffee shop, was a different – and special place – for the meetings as was the structure of the readalouds, which allowed children to speak throughout rather than waiting for prompts. By analyzing how the children talked about books and reading as well as considering how our interactions represented literacy practices, this study contributes to scholarship on literacy as a social practice (Street, 1984) and on the social practices of literacy (Somerville, 2016). My records of the readalouds make apparent reading as socialized practices, and this club, which distorted the children’s typical encounters with texts, queered reading for the children and their parents, for the owners, staff, and clients of the coffee shop, and for me.

The readaloud as a literary event

Our readalouds were semi-structured, designed to encourage dialogue across participants. Because the readaloud was a group task, or a “task with scope” (Clay, 1998), it was easier for me to observe and reflect on ways the children participated in literary encounters than when they were engaged in free play. Tasks with scope are opportunities
for “children to participate in different ways with different resources” and for researchers and educators “to observe what children attend to” in order to “extend [our] knowledge and know how” about specific learning processes (Genishi et al., 2009, p. 82). In this case, I planned the readaloud as a task that could serve as a unit of analysis to observe how children engaged with texts and each other during these literary events. Observing their reactions and responses helped me understand how they engaged with literature. The boundaries of our interactions were informed by our interactions in the club as well as in their classroom. Being a part of their classroom community was an advantage since these shared experiences provided common reference points; they also helped me identify when the children’s behaviors veered from classroom norms. Finally, as a participant observer, I was aware that I affected the nature of the events.

As the person who led the readalouds, I had an interactive role of mediator and observer. Through readalouds, I was able to address my research goals and fulfill obligations to parents, whose conceptions of reading aligned with skill-based definitions rather than broader definitions that situate reading as part of a social process. During pre-interviews, many parents reported that they picked the reading club as an opportunity to get their children reading more and they perceived the reading club as a site to valorize reading skills and the practice of reading. All the parents confirmed that their children liked books even though some parents expressed concerns about how their children were engaging with the books. For example, Brendan’s mom, Allison, reported that he loved to

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46 Other literacy scholars (Kuby et al., 2015; Wohlwend, 2007) may refer to this as a Mediated Discourse Analysis, since the planned readaloud event is the mediating factor that leads to certain reactions and interactions.

47 Except for the spontaneous readalouds shared in the opening vignette.
look at pictures but she wanted to increase his interest in the text (2015/02/12). Allison had a conception of reading fluency that was rooted in reading words, “First graders are reading chapter books, I'm so impressed.” She did not see Brendan as a reader, “He will pick up a book and sit and look at the pictures and read it. Then if I force him he will read.” She perceives his disinterest in text as dispositional, “He’s a little bit on the lazy side, let’s say.” Yet, Brendan was one of the most avid “readers” in our group, alternating between deep immersions in books and his field notebook, where he created complex illustrations that had narrative arcs that continued across pages and weeks. During readalouds, Brendan often drew our attention to details in books, making connections between the images and the text.

For example, during the reading of *Lily Takes a Walk* (Kitamura, 1987), Brendan makes an important connection before his peers. In this story, Lily and her dog, Nicky, are walking through their neighborhood. The text depicts Lily’s actions, and the illustrations show us Nicky’s perspective, which contradict Lily’s story. Like *Rosie’s Walk* (Hutchins, 1971), the contradictions between text and images require readers to pay attention to image and text. This type of narrative can create a humorous story that encourages the readers to attend to both in order to understand the relationship between the characters and the two modes (textual, visual). In this excerpt, I am encouraging the group to consider the gaze of the two main characters (Lily and Nicky) by comparing illustrations across pages, but Brendan’s response is more successful:

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48 Others often imitated Brendan’s artwork. For example, Stephen’s field notebook includes a “computer laptop” drawing that he created after he admired one Brendan shared in club.
Once Brendan shouts, “Look! Look! Look Look!” (line 7), the children see how the images do not match the text. Some of the children mimic the face in the tree, which Sipe refers to as an expressive response to an aesthetic impulse. I acknowledge their reactions (line 10) and take a photo of them (see Figure 5.2). Throughout the club, Brendan was attentive during readalouds, and this thoughtful attention enriched the group’s experiences because he often noticed details the rest of us missed.
The children loved to read and loved having books read to them. They were curious about the books I brought each week and which one I would read out loud. While this club reinforced the importance of reading – particularly reading books – it also offered children (and parents by proxy) a way to engage with literature that differed from school literacy practices, especially in their participatory roles. Our readalouds were less rule-bound and frequently led to tangential conversations and activities. These differences occasionally created dissonance amongst club members who would respond either by rejecting reading activities altogether, preferring to engage in social or solitary play, or they would correct me, enforcing a set of roles/expectations upon me. For example, on several occasions Renee wondered why this club was called a reading club, “But you never give us a book for us to read together” (2015/03/26). When I explained that this was a different kind of reading, a shared reading experience where we read the same text at the same time, she replied, “I think we should read a chapter and then we should talk about it” (2015/03/26). Initially, Renee could not envision our shared literary events as appropriate for a reading club, possibly reflecting her experiences with book clubs in the classroom where they were assigned to groups defined as book clubs and instructed to read a chapter on their own using post-it notes to mark certain kinds of text or ideas. The group would meet regularly with the expectation that each member would come to their meetings having read the chapter. This was different from our reading activities, which included reading one book together, stopping to discuss it as needed.

The structure of our club accomplished what Shklovsky identifies as the goal of literature: “to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar” and, in doing so,
“increasing our power to both critique the world we live in and to imagine other, more just and equitable alternatives” (see Sipe, 2008, p. 7). This, too, is one goal of queer scholarship: to explore queer utopic aesthetic for the potential it offers (Muñoz, 2009). Through imagining these alternatives of what reading can be, spaces are opened for new ideas and potentialities for both the participants in the club – who have opportunities to diversify their engagement with literature and their conceptions of literary events and families – and for my academic audience and me. This reading club and this subsequent analysis may denaturalize normatives that persist in literacy scholarship.

Finally, rather than focusing solely on the literature, I considered how literary events – the readalouds – could disrupt the familiar. Each component of the club was familiar to the children: reading was something they practiced for hours each day in the classroom; members all knew each other; the location – a local coffee shop – was a frequent stopping point for the children; and afterschool activities were the norm for each of the children. But this combination of books + group + activity + setting + time + purpose + structure was strange. By focusing on the readaloud, I am able to draw from a regular event that focused on literature (the familiar) and contextualize how these encounters varied from the norm. The readaloud is a way to engage in “literary meaning-making”, a crucial step to literary understanding, which Sipe (2008) deemed “a neglected part of the literacy landscape” (p. 3). Our readaloud events were opportunities for substantive talk and thoughtful literary interpretations, and our seemingly less structured

\[49\] Recall, “potentialities are different [from possibilities] in that although they are present, they do not exist in present things” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 99).
format encouraged children to respond to the story, to me, and to each other. Studying readalouds is one way to delve into ways children talk about books, reading, and ideas central to literacy. By considering their qualities as chronotopes, I hope to address how this afterschool reading club denaturalized conceptions about reading and families and thus consider the potentiality of the reading club.

I now turn to an analysis of a readaloud. First, I first analyze the children’s responses. Then, I turn to a related activity that followed the reading. During this event, the children extend understandings and ideas from this readaloud as well as previous readalouds and interactions.

**Where the Wild Things Are**

In week 8 (2015/04/16), I read *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) for the weekly readaloud. I chose the book because I knew Sendak’s “wild things” were re-imaginings of old aunties and uncles who would frequent Sendak’s home when he was a child (Haviland, 1971), I planned to use this information as a prompt to talk about our families, and I designed an activity for the children to create their own “wild thing” in response to the questions: “Who is a wild thing in your family?” My imagination depicted them decorating wild things and sharing stories family stories. On one winter evening, I enlisted the help of my family and created a collection of paper dolls and materials for the next club meeting. Little did I know that this material was genetic code for the Ning-A-Things.

*The readaloud of Where the Wild Things Are*

The readaloud went well. The kids enjoyed the book – surprisingly only a few knew the story – and they were very excited about making wild things. They knew that
this craft activity was on the agenda because I told them about it. The children moved around while I read the story, especially Renee, who would jump up to dance and chant rhythmically, “Oo ya, oo ya.” Stephen also got up frequently, sometimes excusing himself other times just moving around the area. He liked to dance and make faces in front of the camera.

When we first started meeting eight weeks earlier, I had asked the children to sit at the table during readalouds but I realized two things early on: this was a losing battle; the children felt the need to move and I needed to honor their need for movement, which broke from the sedate and “proper” behavior expected during classroom readalouds. By attempting to restrict or control their movement, I was enforcing “official” time, which was counter to my desire to find out what happened when children were given the opportunity to engage with literature in an out-of-school context. By week 8, the children and I had an unspoken but peaceful compromise: as long as they respected other customers in the café and each other, then they were free to move around during the readalouds. If someone had to use the bathroom, I would stop and wait until they returned. The children knew that the space was a public space, and they would remind one another about appropriate behavior. For example, before I started reading Where the Wild Things Are, Renee noticed that a customer had sat down near us. She reminds us to be quiet, and Dorothy adds, “We already made one person leave” (2015/04/16). The children were aware of social conventions even if they did not always adhere to them.
The children also were aware that I occasionally felt frustrated by their antics.

During this readaloud, I called their attention to a feature of the book and explained that it influenced by book selection.

*Excerpt 5.3: I love the children*

48 Mrs. Lo Okay, you know why I brought this book? As we watched [read] the wild rumpus – when I watch the video of us together, sometimes it looks like we are having a wild rumpus together.

49 Jane You love us.

50 Mrs. Lo I do love you guys – but.

51 Renee Not as much as you love your children.

52 Mrs. Lo Well, that’s because I have known them longer.

53 Renee Yeah.

Jane’s reaction to my critique of their behavior, “You love us” demonstrates our comfort level. In line 50, I was going to add, “but I don’t love everything you do” but Renee’s interjection on line 51, “not as much as you love your children” shifted the exchange away from my initial goal of correcting their behavior. It may also reflect the normalization of biological reproduction. Renee’s comment (line 51) aligns with straight time and norms around reproductive time. Parental love is a stronger bonder than other kinds of love.

We move on with the readaloud, and the wild rumpus theme sticks with us. Later in the readaloud, Stephen said, “Stop having a wild rumpus” when the other children start laughing too loudly. In week 10, when I am interviewing Jane, she says that she is going to make a wild rumpus. Then, I ask what she would change about the club: “I would change that everybody has to be quiet thing.” (2015/04/30, personal recorder). Erin overhears our conversation and adds, “I wish the whole point of doing this reading club was having a wild rumpus and then you scream and [do] face-plants on the ground.” In
our final week together, I asked what made them want to come back each week. Erin
volunteers, “the wild rumpus and poop” (2015/06/04), which draws on two aspects of the
club that varied from what they got to discuss and do in the classroom. For Erin, our time
together was divergent from the classroom and being able to explore these topics had
value for her. Given that Jane and Erin were two of the most vocal rule followers at the
start of the club (see excerpt 3.1), this transformation to desiring noise and wild behavior
suggests that the alternative structure of the club impacted their understanding of
participation in the reading club.

While the wild rumpus theme carried across other clubs, my efforts to get them to
make their own wild things took a different turn. Here is an excerpt from the readaloud,
where I use the future activity to bribe them into listening to the end of the story:

1 Excerpt 5.4: Children talk about the future but are bribed back to the present

1 Mrs. Lo We are going to read the story together, and then – if you guys keep
talking we won’t have time to make them, but the story will only take
five minutes to read and then you’ll have half an hour to make.
2 Stephen Can I make mine have a weapon? [unintelligible 00:37:16]
3 Mrs. Lo If you insist on it, but what will your parents say? And I brought
googly eyes.
4 Girl [Inhales excitedly]
5 Stephen Yay.
6 Mrs. Lo Because “they rolled their terrible eyes”, remember?
7 Boy I’m going to use the googly eyes.
8 Mrs. Lo There’s the glue–.
9 Dorothy I could cut the little pipe cleaners into three and remember they “threw
their little claws”.
10 Mrs. Lo I like that, I like that.
11 Dorothy And I could make them move–.
12 Mrs. Lo That’s a good idea. But that’s only if we have time, do we have time?
Do we have time?

This excerpt demonstrates my desire to adhere to straight – or linear – time and
how I invoked time constraints to entice them to comply with my desire to read the book
before moving onto their desire to do the craft. When Stephen asks if his wild thing can have a weapon, I further impose adult-oriented expectations onto him. I reinforce the adult-as-correct ideal by drawing his parents’ expectations to support my position. The children comply with my expectations and the readaloud continues.

The children participated in the readaloud by reading along and making predictions. They also notice the time scale in the book, which leads them to question the story. This excerpt starts with Brendan reading along with me and Stephen making predictions, and then Stephen questions Sendak’s use of time (lines 1-3).

*Excerpt 5.5: Children respond to and question Where the Wild Things Are*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Line Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>“And grew,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Brendan</td>
<td>“And grew,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>And never came back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>“And grew until his ceiling hung with vines and his walls became the world all around. An ocean tumbled by with a private boat for Max and he sailed off through night and day, in and out of weeks and months...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>“...almost over a year to where the Wild Things are.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>Wait, almost over a year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>A year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Is this a true story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>No, it’s not a true story. To me it doesn’t sound like a true story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>It doesn’t sound like a - why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Because there is no such thing ... Because it does not sound like these Wild Things are real.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here the children and I enact a more typical classroom readaloud event. Children engaged with the text by echoing me, by making predictions, or questioning the story. They do not stray from their role as the audience more commonly found in “official” time settings. A little later, when they are distracted by another topic, I first ask them to predict the next event in the story (line 32, below), which is ignored. Then, in line 34, I give
them an instruction, “come on you need to study the Wild Things…” Jane responds with an echo, “Study…” (line 35) and I continue to read the story. Jane repeats herself (line 37) and Dorothy simply says “Claws” (line 38). Jane connects my earlier comment about googley eyes. I continue to read the text; the children move in and out of the conversation.

*Excerpt 5.6: Re-focusing on the next activity*

32 Mrs. Lo No, okay so when he came – come on you guys, what happened when he came to the place where the Wild Things are?
33 Jane Only my daddy and my sister that’s all.
34 Mrs. Lo “They roared with all their force and they gnashed their terrible teeth” – come on you need to study the Wild Things because you are going to make one and Dorothy noticed the claws.
35 Jane Study.
36 Mrs. Lo “They gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and they showed their terrible-.
37 Jane Okay, I’m going to make big teeth
38 Dorothy Claws.
39 Jane Oh yeah, rolled their terrible eyes, that’s why you got the googley eyes.
40 Mrs. Lo “Until Max said” – what did Max say?
41 …
42 Stephen I came to the jungle.
43 Mrs. Lo He didn’t quite say that, what did he say to them?
44 …
45 Stephen Be still.
46 …
47 Mrs. Lo “Be still and tamed them with the magic trick of staring into all their yellow eyes at once,”
48 Richard That’s starting to creep me out now.
49 Mrs. Lo “Without blinking and they were frightened and called him the most Wild Thing of all.”
50 [Laughter]
51 Stephen The most Wild Thing of death.
52 Mrs. Lo “And made him king of all Wild Things.”
53 Girl King of the Wild Things.

The readaloud, like others, continues with this back and forth dialogue. This reflects the tension my (adult, official time) goals and the children’s desire to break into
unofficial, child-directed time. But this desire to break from official time does not imply that the children are not engaged in the story, as Richard’s comments demonstrate.

On Max’s journey back, Richard questions why it took over a year to get to his room (line 102) and explains how this was possible “He was actually gone asleep”.

Excerpt 5.7: Richard explains the use of time in the story

101 Mrs. Lo  “And sailed back over a year and in and out of weeks and through the day-.”
102 Richard  It took over a year to get into his room?
103 Mrs. Lo  “And into the night of his very own room where he found his supper waited for him”
104 Richard  He was actually gone asleep.
105 Mrs. Lo  You think he fell asleep in the book?
106 Richard  Yeah.
107 Mrs. Lo  Is that what happens in your dreams?
108 Richard  Yes.
109 Mrs. Lo  What happens when he wakes up then? His food is still?
110 Richard  Yes.
111 Mrs. Lo  Hot? It’s still hot? So you think he just fell asleep?
112 Richard  Yeah he just fell asleep.

Others, who are ready to make Wild Things, do not take up Richard’s final thoughts but his comments suggest that he was engaged and considered ways to explain Sendak’s magical realism. In Excerpt 5.5, when Richard asks, “Wait, is this a true story?” (line 22) this marks his first articulation that he is wondering how the events can occur. Even though he appears to move in and out of listening to the story (as shown on video and revealed in transcripts), his final comments indicate he has processed the events and come up with a reasonable explanation for the events, “Yeah, he just fell asleep” (line 112). Richard was bothered by Sendak’s artistic license with literary time but was able to rationalize it by making a connection to his own experiences, namely dreaming.
Richard’s awareness of Sendak’s different time scales and his discomfort may indicate that there is some rigidity in his understanding of time; breaks from this are a source of discomfort that need to be corrected or straightened. Literary meaning making, then, is about reconciling the literary chronotope with the real time. Richard’s dissonance and rationalization are an example of this bridging. This extends also to Jane’s earlier comment (line 15) that the “Wild things don’t sound real,” but their doubting the veracity of the story does not prevent them being engaged participants.

**Turning Wild Things into Ning-a-Things**

As mentioned earlier, I used the promise of making Wild Things as a proverbial carrot to cajole the children into the readaloud of *Where the Wild Things Are*. When I finished reading the story, the children quickly transitioned to the craft activity, which I hoped would entice them to talk about their families. I pulled out craft supplies, including paper cutouts of bears, felt clothing, buttons, googly eyes, pipe cleaners, markers, buttons, glue, and scissors. The children descended on the supplies, negotiating who could use what. They were focused on their creations and worked with intensity. Initially, I asked them to craft their Wild Thing after someone in their family, but this quickly was disregarded. In the end, none of the children made their Wild Thing a family member. Instead, the Wild Things became a family of their own, inspired and negotiated by the group’s interactions.

My transcript analysis notes that for 23 minutes the children and I did not talk about anything but making the Wild Things. For nearly ten minutes, they talked solely about supplies and their ideas. The children were polite and patient. For example: “Do
you have the scissors?”, “May I have the glue next please?”, and “Who wants some felt?” I tried to engage them in conversation, “What types of rules can you break when you make Wild Things?” (2015/04/16), but only Erin responds “You can jump on the bed, jump on the sofa, jump on whatever you want.”

Figure 5.3: Wild Things/Battle Bears/Ning-a-Things

I continue to encourage discussion, “Do your parents ever call you wild things?” The response is tepid, with single word replies from Stephen (“Hum”) and Erin (“Sometimes”). Richard responds, “My Daddy does” and adds, “I’m always wild… with my brother.” Aside from these brief exchanges, the conversations among the group focus on creating Wild Things.

Stephen is the first to introduce his Wild Thing (Figure 5.4), “It’s battle thing… It’s battle bear… Battle Bear.” Battle Bear is in response to Battle Bunny (Scieszka et al., 2013), which I had shared with the group in an earlier week. In Excerpt 5.8, below, Jane and Erin respond to his introduction.
Excerpt 5.8: Stephen introduces Battle Bear

276  Stephen  Battle bear.
277  ...  
278  Erin & Jane  Battle Bear!
279  Girl  Can you please make a battle?
280  Stephen  Never.
281  Jane  [Laughter]
282  Stephen  Never. Battle bear. No one messes with Battle Bear
283  ...  
284  Girl  [Laughter]
285  ...  
286  Children  [laughter]
287  Mrs. Lo  Does anybody want to put stars?
288  Stephen  He paid the price.
289  Mrs. Lo  Oh, do you want ninja stars for your battle bear?
290  Stephen  Yes.
291  Mrs. Lo  A ninja star?

Stephen makes an intertextual connection to *Battle Bunny*, which justifies his desire to have a weapon for his Wild Thing. He does not have to explain his modification to others; Erin and Jane make the connection instantly and ask him to “make a battle” (line 279). When I try to get all everyone back on task by offering supplies, I am ignored. I modify from the “official” task of craft making into the imaginary world of Battle Bear to get Stephen’s attention, “Do you want ninja stars for your battle bear?” (line 289).
The children remain engaged in their creative work until a minute later when I ask if they have names for their Wild Things. This marks a shift to sharing their creations. Richard, Dorothy, and Erin give their Wild Things names, but the others comment that their Wild Things are not finished, “Because right now my bear is naked” (Jane). Dorothy admits, “My bear has no face!” (line 343, not shown) and this shifts the conversations back to creating the Wild Things. After about 20 minutes passes the children start to introduce their Wild Things and explain them to one another. I suggest that they “walk in front of the camera… and introduce your bear” (line 517, not shown). As this and Jane’s earlier comment reveal, the Wild Things have morphed into bears, in part because Stephen calls his Battle Bear and also because they have a bear-like shape. (They were traced from a craft book for making stuffed animals out of felt.) The children’s discussion makes obvious that they have adhered to gender lines; the boys have created male characters and the girls, females. Despite efforts to queer events through content (of literature, of talk) and efforts to denaturalize normative structures of time, gender normatives – and a gender binary – are firmly entrenched. As the Wild Things continue to evolve, gender normatives guided their interactions.

*Gendered scripts?*

The gendering of the Wild Things according to their creators suggests heteronormativity held, which corresponds to older research on play as gendered (e.g., Cherland, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Thorne, 1994). According to this research, girls and boys are inherently different and these biologically determined differences manifest themselves in material and performative ways. For example, Brendan and Stephen create
soldier bears and Richard calls his "the king". All the girls make female bears, noting clothing styles and nicer personalities as markers of their femaleness.

Excerpt 5.9: Jane and Dorothy negotiate the wildness of their Wild Things

502 Jane  How do you like my bear so far?
503 Mrs. Lo  Your bear doesn’t look very wild to me at all.
504 Jane  I know, she’s not.
505 Dorothy  But the dress is, the dress is like a cape girl.
506 Jane  My – my bear’s name is–.
507 Mrs. Lo  Oh cape girls are wild are they?
508 Renee  Ning-a-Thing. Ning-a-Thing.
509 Mrs. Lo  I like it Dorothy.
510 Jane  Crazy Ning-a-Thing.

In this excerpt, Jane says that her Wild Thing, whom she presently names “Crazy Ning-a-Thing” (line 510), is not very wild. Dorothy shares that hers has a dress, “The dress is like a cape girl” (line 505), perhaps a reference to superheroes, which were frequently a part of the group play. Both Jane and Dorothy negotiate the identity of their Wild Things and try to determine how these align with their understanding of Wild Things. Jane even removes “Wild” from the name, calling hers “Crazy Ning-a-Thing”. Others later adopt this, which I describe more in the next section.

Dorothy draws on the femaleness of her Wild Thing and engages in deeply gendered make-believe play with Stephen. She asks Stephen, “Can I see Battle Bear? Can I see him?” Dorothy, Brendan, and Stephen meet in front of the camera to introduce their bears (Figures 5.5a-c). Brendan shows his Soldier Bear to Stephen and Dorothy, then Stephen says, “I’m a ninja.” (line 539, not shown). When Battle Bear confronts Brendan’s Battle Bear, Dorothy’s response in surprising, “Kill him husband!” It is surprising in two ways: first, Dorothy has married her Wild Thing to Stephen’s Battle
Bear and no one questions or challenges this romantic pairing; and, second, Dorothy encourages this aggressive play against Brendan. Brendan decides he does not like being attacked and he walks back to his seat. Stephen follows him.

Even though this small group disbands, Stephen and Dorothy continue the storyline across the table. Stephen stands up and starts sliding Battle Bear along the wall. He calls out to Dorothy:

*Excerpt 5.10: Husband and wife behavior*

548 Stephen Dorothy, Dorothy, look at this.
550 Dorothy Husband be careful, I’m getting my hair done.
551 Stephen Never.
552 Dorothy No, really she is getting her hair done, but I told you to be careful.

... 
556 Dorothy I told you to be careful [1:06:12]
557 Stephen I can fly
558 Dorothy That’s my dumb husband
559 Renee Oh, you guys are married. Eww

Stephen attracts Dorothy’s attention and asks her to watch. She responds in the character of her Wild Thing, “Husband, be careful” (e.g. Gilligan’s (1982) ‘ethos of care’). She adds, “I’m getting my hair done,” a response that gendered as feminine. When Stephen replies, “Never” (line 551), Dorothy breaks from character and says, “No, really she is getting her hair done, but I told you to be careful” (line 552). Stephen declares that
he can fly (line 557) and Dorothy shares to the group, “That’s my dumb husband” (line 558), which disgusts Renee “Ewww” (line 559). The gendering of the Wild Things and the heteronormative play is not questioned, although Renee sees it as distasteful 50.

The hypermasculinity of the male bears continues as does the hyperfeminization of the girls’ bears. This is recorded in Club Reports (Appendix G), our collaborative project. Brendan and Stephen refer to one another as opponents in battles, and all the boys jostle for leadership positions, claiming titles such as king, solider, and Battle Bear. Three of the girls (Renee, Dorothy, and Erin) acknowledge beauty, particularly beauty related to material or physical looks. Dorothy’s, Renee’s, and Erin’s Wild Things biographies in Club Reports reveal and intragroup competition.

Table 5.1: Biographical sketches of Wild Things in Club Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dorothy’s (p. 5)</th>
<th>Renee’s (p. 13)</th>
<th>Erin’s (p. 11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My ning-a-thing</td>
<td>I am the</td>
<td>My name is Stella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is fancy the other ning-a-things are</td>
<td>creacra [Cray Cray] Bay</td>
<td>and I’m 8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crazy I love</td>
<td>Bay don’t get</td>
<td>old. I live in new york.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me. I have a dress that is fancy.</td>
<td>me rou [wrong] But I</td>
<td>I love to go to the pool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>am goGis [gorgeous] ok I</td>
<td>I love the color red. I think may-may</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kiou [know] you DonD [don’t]</td>
<td>baby [Renee] and fancy [Dorothy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>agre withe me</td>
<td>fight too much. Please tell them to stop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am vare [very] inpotit [important]...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These texts capture moments of our meetings and are material representations of the ways the children interacted during our time together. While they were engaging in meaningful dialogues and creating imaginary worlds of play, they also appear to be ascribing to the heterosexual matrix and defining roles according to gender. Aside from

50 Possibly because she expressed on multiple occasions that she did not like Stephen.
Dorothy’s betrothal to Stephen’s, the storylines did not overlap very much. Other cross-gender interactions were largely descriptive; the children would introduce their Wild Things and describe different characteristics. None of the girls strove to create characters in whole-group leadership roles, yet Stephen and Richard did. Jane’s Crazy-Ning-a-Thing built on the theme of king and soldiers but in a role that is greatly subordinated to either position. She envisions her Crazy Ning-a-Thing as “like a Jester” who would “always joke in catles [castles]” (Club Reports, p. 9). The children’s play and the self-assigned roles reveal that heteronormativity was deeply rooted in their play, and went unquestioned by everyone in the group, myself included. But this perspective relies too heavily on a gender differences approach (e.g., Gilligan, 1982) and ignores the complicated layering of power and performance.

Although the lack of challenge to this kind of play in everyday moments is an example of ways that heteronormativity dominates routine interactions (e.g. Blaise et al., 2012), pausing to analyze these moments using queer time revealed that their gendered play at the material level (e.g., the Wild Things) did not carry through to the interpersonal level. Both girls and boys wore “director” hats, instructing and guiding others to enact certain roles. This is most obvious when Dorothy declares Stephen her husband and he does not resist the role. By participating in and analyzing children’s play in our afterschool reading club, I was able to observe intragroup interactions and specifically ways their pretend play appears to reinforce Butler’s (1990/2008) heterosexual matrix, which positions straight males as the most dominant, and heteronormative ideologies about imaginary characters (e.g., the Wild Things).
This type of play, though, was isolated or specialized because they were engaging in role-playing, or adopting specific characters, and then giving these characters traits that did not mirror their own. Reflecting on other types of interaction and play that I had observed them enact, I realized that the children themselves were not always performing gender according to the heterosexual matrix. Yet the unquestioned acceptance of these dominant gender narratives in this role-playing may suggest that the collective (or hermeneutical) resources informing their play were literary chronotopes. These literary chronotopes reflected a social order that limited the scope of play and thus preventing them from creating roles that more closely mirrored their own interpersonal interactions or diverged into new territories.

_The Wild Things become Ning-a-Things_

When Jane introduces her bear as a “Crazy Ning-a-Thing” she created a movement that shifted the direction of play with the group. Like Stephen’s announcement that his Wild Thing was a Battle Bear, Jane renames her character and others follow suit. Unlike Stephen, who in inspired by an intertextual reference to the book _Battle Bunny_, Jane creates her own offshoot of Wild Things. As Figure 5.5 shows, Jane wrote “Crazy Ning-a-Thing” on the face of her Wild Thing. None of the other children wrote anything on their Wild Things but Jane’s inscription on the face is a stark declaration that her Wild Thing is not wild (see Excerpt 5.9, above). Jane dresses her bear in a skirt and shirt. At first the other children do not respond to her declaration but when they are creating biographies of their “Wild Things” for the collective book project in weeks 12 and 13, they refer to them as Ning-a-Things.
As part of the collective book project, the children each wrote a biography of their Wild Things, and some children referred to the group as Ning-a-Things. For example, Dorothy differentiates her Ning-a-Thing from the others by saying hers is “fancy” while the others are “crazy” (p. 5, Club Reports) and Richard declares himself the king of the “migathings” (p. 17, Club Reports). This layering of stories and play across children and weeks suggests how engrossed the children were in our time together. The Wild Things have morphed into Battle Bears and Ning-a-Things in these biographies, and most of the children (except Jane and Renee) refer to each other’s in their biographies. In addition to Dorothy and Richard’s comments, Brendan writes, “I fit [fight] the other Batl Bare and I have a sord [sword]” (p. 4). Erin introduces hers as Stella and adds, “I think may-may baby [Renee’s] and fancy [Dorothy’s] fight too much” (p. 11). Stephen declares, “I fite in battle. I am a leader in my team of thing. their names are crazy-ning-a-thing, king of migathing, Stella, cra cra bay bay [Renee’s], other-battle-bear and fancy” (p. 15).

While they were creating these pages, the children circulated, asking one another for the names of the other Wild Things. In Stephen’s case, he even asked them to write

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51 See above to read Dorothy’s, Renee’s, and Erin’s. See Appendix G for the others.
their names on his page as a mark of their loyalty to him. When Brendan and Richard realized what they had done, they resisted and verbally declared superiority to Stephen’s Battle Bear. These artifacts represent the rich community and dialogues that emerged in the children’s play. Their narratives build upon storybooks and our interactions as well as draw from other experiences and materials, creating a rich tapestry. By exploring these layers, I uncovered sites of heteronormative play and also moments when normativity was disrupted. Although disruptions were least evident in this activity, my analysis in the previous section suggests that these narrow gendered roles may be due to the lack of available scripts for children to enact more diverse roles. In order for the children to create narratives that made sense to them, they had to draw from collective resources (i.e., hermeneutical) of literary or narrative scripts. This may suggest that chronotopes in children’s play - like literary understanding – must connect to chronotopes that are available to them. If this is true, then there is a powerful argument for giving children access to more diverse resources. Despite the fact that I had created this activity to get them to talk about their families, the children took control of this activity and develop complex fictional worlds that may have revealed more about heteronormativity’s grip on childhood than if they had incorporated talk about their families or other interpersonal connections. Literary chronotopes do not just reflect ideologies of an era but serve as a source of information for their imaginary play.

A note on Sipe’s model of literary understanding

Before moving onto the final section, I wish step back to the readaloud in order to analyze how the children were making literary meaning since this offers insight into how
they were engaging in literacy practices. Throughout the readaloud of *Where the Wild Things Are* the children interacted with different features of the literary event, attending to temporal and literary aspects of the story as well as the event in context of our time together. On occasion, they responded to one another, building on one another’s responses and questioning the text. Drawing on Sipe’s (2008) model of literary understanding, it is possible to identify each of his five aspects of literary: analytical, intertextual, personal, transparent, and performative. First, the children, as Richard demonstrates best in Excerpt 5.7, construct narrative meaning through analysis of the whole story (text and images), particularly “the relationship between fiction and reality” (Sipe, 2008, p. 85). The children are able to critically analyze elements within the story to determine, for example, if it is a “true story” (Jane, line 24, Excerpt 5.5).

One way they do this is through personal connections, the third type of response. The children responded to the texts and made connections that related to their lives especially when the story diverged from their own experiences. Jane simply says “To me it doesn’t sound like a true story” and then, “Because there is no such thing ... Because it does not sound like these Wild Things are real” (lines 24 and 26, Excerpt 5.5). While Jane does not articulate why they are not real, Jane recognizes the divide between the storybook world and her life. At another point, in response to when I read the text, “Be still and tamed them with the magic trick of staring into all their yellow eyes at once,” Richard exclaims, “That’s starting to creep me out now” (lines 47 & 48, Excerpt 5.6) This was both a personal response and an intertextual response (i.e., Sipe’s second aspect of understanding) because Richard had a mild (performative) phobia of monsters,
including teddy bears, koala bears, the Elf on the Shelf®, and characters from the video game *Five Nights at Freddy’s*. Richard and I often spoke about his reaction to characters whose eyes appear to watch him, and he often went out of his way to share this reaction with me. These personal or life-to-text as well as text-to-life – responses are what Sipe refers to as personalizing impulse, or drawing connections between the elements of the story and “the reader’s own psychic world” (p. 190). Personal connections indicate the reader’s “imaginative participation” (White, 1994, p. 376, as quoted by Sipe, 2008, p. 190). Richard’s questioning the likelihood of the story demonstrates his own engagement with the text and his efforts to imagine possible explanations. The reader draws from lived experiences to construct narrative meaning, thus the personalizing impulse.

According to Sipe (2008), more frequent methods for textual meaning making are analytical and intertextual responses, when the reader/audience draw from information within the text and other texts/media, respectively. Sipe refers to these responses as hermeneutic impulses. By making these active connections, readers are building literary understanding. This includes noticing details in the book, such as Dorothy’s observation of claws as one feature of the Wild Things (line 9, Excerpt 5.4) or when Jane understands why I brought googly eyes (line 39, Excerpt 5.6). The children are making connections that help them understand the text. In this case, they are specifically attending to what a Wild Thing is.

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52 It is only because of my research methods that I could have known that Richard was making these connections. This is one of the benefits of ethnographic research. I was aware that Richard had this love-hate relationship with monsters and knew that the Wild Things would get his attention. Rather than adhering to a predetermined curriculum, I purposefully modified each week’s activities in order to appeal to and engage my co-participants.
The final two categories of response – transparent and performative – are examples of the aesthetic impulse, which was described earlier. The aesthetic impulse represents a break in chronological time. Sipe (2008) acknowledges the difficulty in describing transparent moments because they often are uttered or performed subconsciously. Unlike performative responses, which are an outward expressing seeking an audience, transparent responses are an intensely personal and inward reception to the story, a connection to Benton’s (1992) “secondary world” and Rosenblatt’s (1978/1994) “lived-through experiences” (see Sipe, 2008, p. 169). They “did not seem to have a communicative intent” (p. 169), but represented an embodiment of the text. By capturing these responses on audio and video, I am able to see how these are mediated actions or events. A mediated action is “a physical action [the readaloud] by a social actor [members of the club] that alters and makes surrounding environment [e.g., the storybook world] more accessible” (Wohlwend, 2014, p. 8).

When I analyzed the children’s responses to Where the Wild Things Are using Sipe’s five categories, their responses were equally likely to be analytical or a personal (1/3rd of the time), performative (1/6th of all responses) and equally likely to make an intertextual or transparent responses. This microanalysis is too small to draw any significant inferences, but for comparison consider how they compare to Sipe’s (2008) findings of 101 readalouds across two classrooms (p. 252). Sipe recorded analytical responses were the most frequent (73%), then intertextual and personal (10% each), then performative (5%) and transparent (2%). These marked differences suggest that the

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53 See Appendix I for an excerpt of the readaloud coded using Sipe’s (2008) model.
children’s interactions with the text and the readaloud differed from Sipe’s observations of classroom readalouds. Moreover, because we met regularly over four months and my interactions with the children extended beyond discrete literary events, I was able to understand how book talk extended into other interactions. The small size of the group made it easy to develop personal relationships with the children. Our shared literary events plus time in the classroom created a relationship that created openings for deeper conversations. Each child shared something unique about his/her perspectives and offered new insights into childhood more broadly.

Reflecting on ways the children’s responses varied from Sipe’s findings was an opportunity to reconsider how children’s interactions and understandings of literature are adult-centered. In the final section of the chapter, I hope to disrupt the child → adult trajectory that is an integral to straight time. Examining adult-child relationships, and disrupting it, is part of queering time in the reading club. By shifting to a (somewhat) child-centered orientation, the children were able to enact different roles and make contributions they otherwise may not have been able to do. The impact of this non-normative structure was evident when I spoke to some of the children using the shoulder-to-shoulder interview method. Once that was particularly revealing was Renee’s.

If this was a study on children’s responses to readalouds, then there may be a benefit to analyzing in their entirety my 13 readalouds plus three the children did. Sipe’s categories were easily observable and coding them was an interesting exercise in thinking about how I understood children’s responses to literature. But since I cannot access Sipe’s transcripts or to do a cross-study coding analysis (i.e., does my coding fidelity align with his), this is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It is possible to believe that these different responses were the result of the informal setting and unofficial time, my relationship to the children, the size of our group, and other factors that could explain away these differences. Or, perhaps, if my analysis revealed a similar distribution, then I could affirm his findings; however, this is not the purpose of this study.
Case Study: Renee

Before concluding this chapter, I return to “Teacher Renee”. In the opening vignette, Stephen anointed Renee with this title during her readaloud of *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963). Renee is a vibrant and energetic girl. Her petite stature contains a dynamic personality. In club she generally got along well with others. Renee spoke confidently on many subjects. Recall that in the previous chapter, she was insistent that Richard had a “real mom” because “the mom has the baby, it comes out of her” (2015/02/05). In the opening vignette of this chapter, she assures Stephen that it is okay to read *Everyone Poops* (Gomi, 1993): “That author only made that book to say everyone poops. It's not gross; it's what you do; it's natural” (2015/04/30). Renee could be described as expressive, confident, outgoing, and persuasive. Like others, she was excited to be in the club and enjoyed her status as a member of Mrs. Lo’s Reading Club55. Through my observations and our conversations Renee taught me about her experiences with reading, her community, and about being a child more generally. Renee’s participation in the club created moments that disrupted the clubs; her movement challenged developmental (straight) time and revealed the importance of reimagining “official” time in the classroom.

During our pre interview, Susan, Renee’s mom, said she signed Renee up for the club because she thought it would be good for her to have more exposure to reading and to give Renee something that was hers, “I think it feels special. Just she is doing it [without her siblings]. I think that that's been a really awesome thing” (2015/02/09). She describes Renee as a late reader, “I know that kids grow at different levels,” and she

55 As referred to by the children.
believes school should be a place to learn to be curious about the world. Susan describes herself as a reader and values reading, “If you're not a reader, you're missing out on a whole slice of life, and I just feel like it's opening the world, opening the door, exposing you to things you know nothing about.” She hopes that all of her children will come to love reading as much as she does.

Despite her worries that Renee is a late reader, she also acknowledges the importance of reading for pleasure. She is cautious about reading programs or tools like flashcards because she wants Renee to enjoy reading, “I just want her come by it in a way that makes her feel excited about it” (2015/02/09). Susan echoed these sentiments in the post interview and described the club as a good fit for Renee, “She wants to read out loud, even if no one is in the room. She always preferred picture books to non-picture books. She strikes me as like the perfect candidate for what you actually did” (2015/06/12). Perhaps it was because of this “fit” with the club that Renee lived up to her role as “Teacher Renee”.

*Queered time, hermeneutical resources, and literacy learning*

Renee’s contributions to my understanding of children’s literacy practices can be defined into two broad categories. First, she provided insight to ways that hermeneutical injustice is enacted and persists in communities. There were several ways her behavior and talk revealed this, and the most telling was when she could not understand Richard’s family model (see previous chapter) and her insistence that he has a “real mom”. Renee did not have access to hermeneutical resources to make sense of Richard’s family model nor did she have resources that allowed her to be open to other ways of knowing. Renee
did not suffer testimonial injustice or a lack of confidence despite lacking these resources. This suggests that her resources may align with dominant beliefs and she was not aware of other ways of being. Richard, comparatively, demonstrated his navigational skills when he talked about his family and same-sex relationships, and he often provided additional context to explain his comments. In many of our group conversations, Renee’s contributions steered the conversation, and if her points were not adequately addressed or understood, she would persist, exhibiting testimonial confidence. This extended beyond group conversations to my one-on-one conversations with her.

For example, Renee was excited to be in this club, but she repeatedly questioned how this was a reading club. She questioned how we were reading books and what made it a book club. This doubt that we were a real book club is clearly articulated in week 6, and continues throughout. She is resistant to the club as a book club. In the transcript excerpt below, I am trying to cajole them into looking at books I brought to club.

*Excerpt 5.11: Renee tells me about book clubs (2015/03/26)*

1  Mrs. Lo You know, why are we here? Are we here as a picture club?
2  Girl No…
3  Boy Picture club!
4  Mrs. Lo Are we an eating club?
5  Girl Yes.
6  Renee But you never give us a book for us to read together [4:00].
7  Mrs. Lo Well I read you a book every time and then we talk about what we read together, instead of each of us reading a book alone. Don’t you guys like doing that?
8  Boy Yeah.
9  …
10 Renee I would think – I would think every time we-.
11 …
12 Renee I think we should read a chapter and then we should talk about it.
13 …
14 Renee We can, could have sticky notes and then we would put our notes down in the book.
15 Mrs. Lo Well, you know what? Today I actually brought you all different books…
In this exchange, Renee explains book clubs and reading as solitary activities. Her resistance to calling the club a reading club reveals her knowledge of reading as practice. During our time together, Renee experienced several challenges to her beliefs and understanding of the world. These encounters – and her dissonance – are windows into her worldview. By talking to her directly, I was able to insight into her thinking. By time I interviewed her in week 10, she is reconsidering what a reading club is:

Excerpt 5.12: Renee explains why we aren’t a “real book club” (2015/04/30)

1  Mrs. Lo  Okay. Do you have ... Do you like coming to the reading club?
2  Renee  Uh-huh.(affirmative)
3  Mrs. Lo  What do you like about it?
4  Renee  I like that we all read a book together and then we all talk about it. Instead of us getting one book, but we all get a book but it’s all separate.
5  Mrs. Lo  We read ... books together.
6  Renee  In real book club we read separate books but they're the same. But I like how that we read one book together and we can actually talk together and read together. So in the middle of the story we can comment on how we feel because we're always on the same page.
7  Mrs. Lo  Right. Do you think we talk a lot about the books we read?
8  Renee  Not really.
9  Mrs. Lo  Not really, right?
10  Erin  Kind of.
11  Mrs. Lo  You kind of think we do...
12  Erin  I do.

Here Renee describes what she likes about the reading club (line 4) and she values sharing responses to the literature during the reading process (line 6). Renee was the only participant to show awareness of how we are disrupting norms and to name specific events that do this. Unfortunately, Renee and I are unable to continue this conversation because Erin joins us (line 10), ending our talk. Comparing Renee’s comments from weeks 6 and 10 (Excerpts 5.11 and 5.12, respectively) indicate her definition of (social) reading is changing as a result of being in this club. While this does not have a direct
connection to her beliefs about reading as related to gender/sex/uality, this club has disrupted literacy routines and created potentialities – or new horizons – for Renee.

This evolving definition of reading continues and Renee offers more insight during a final group conversation in week 14. She shares that our group readings were something she really enjoyed and stood out in the club, “Reading changed for me because I think that reading as a group makes it more [an] experience and acting out with friends” (2015/06/04). When she says “experience”, Renee stands up and starts dancing and sounding out a rhythm between finishing with “and acting out with friends.” Renee’s initial narrow definition of what counted a social reading clubs (or book clubs) may suggest that current classroom practices and vernacular around reading with peers are narrow, most closely matching “official” time in the classroom and developmental models of literacy. Despite observing a wide range of literary events in her classroom and knowing that her mother believes reading is more than a skill or competency, Renee’s definitions – be it about what counts as a book club or what makes a family – suggest that she is gleaning information about them somewhere and these sources are definitive for her. Her contributions reinforce the importance of creating space for children to enact a range of (reading) practices and to ensure children’s voices are heard, to recognize their testimonies, and to include children as co-constructors in knowledge production. Positioning children as knowers and giving them more opportunities to break from the developmental trajectory to (heterosexual) adulthood is a form of queering time and disrupting heteronormativity. It creates uncertainty and expands hermeneutical resources we can draw from to make sense of our encounters in the world (literary and real).
Turning to an epistemic justice framework, Renee’s hermeneutical resources about reading events were not expansive enough initially for her to feel comfortable with the club being called a book club. While I never called the club a book club – I always referred to it as a reading club because I wanted to focus on the activity (reading) rather than the object (book) – Renee uses the terms interchangeably. By the end of the club, Renee’s definition of book clubs aligns with how we have spent our time together. At our final meeting, after I have given the children copies of *Club Reports* and their field notebooks, there is a rush of excitement. Everyone is shouting, cheering, and sharing. Renee can be heard, “I wanna feel like I'm at book club. I wanna feel it” (2015/06/04, 56:35). Returning to Sipe’s (2008) reader response model, Renee’s reaction is transparent; she is enraptured by the moment, transporting herself out of this book club to a feeling of book club. This was an intensely personal response and inward reception to receiving her reading club materials. Her vocal outburst, “I wanna feel like I’m at book club,” is a marked departure from her statement in week 6, “But you never give us a book for us to read together” (2015/03/26, 4:00). Renee has a different understanding of book clubs, one that she has embodied, and one that has disrupted her from the present moment to another, indistinct, and deeply private time.

This is one way that time was queered in this club. Renee, through our shared experiences, disrupted her own understanding of social reading (e.g., in book clubs) and this departure from the expected revealed potentialities previously not on her horizon.

When Renee came to the reading club, she saw possibilities for our engagement that were

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56 This would be an interesting place to think about materiality and embodiment but is beyond the scope of this dissertation.
bound by her expectations. As she shares her definition of a book club, she is also revealing her understanding of the possibilities or “logical real” of the present (Muñoz, 2009, p. 99). Working collectively we were able to change the rules of what it means to read in a “book club”57. This marks a shift from possibilities toward potentialities because Renee now has a wider conception of (social) reading.

*Queer time as movement*

Renee’s second contribution to my understanding of literacy practices has to do with engagement. She has a metacognitive understanding of reading as a social function and a tremendous knowledge of her comprehension processes, which she described in week 10 (2015/04/30). Renee is often active during readalouds, dancing and moving around the tables. Figure 5.7 shows four screenshots taken over 4 seconds. In this series, Renee, on far left in white shirt, is moving backwards from the table. She uses large swinging motions of her arms and legs to propel her backwards. As she often did, she sang “ooh-ya, ooh-ya” while she moved. Her movement is rhythmic and continues for brief periods (10-15 seconds). I often asked Renee to join the group but I tried to respect her desire for movement.

*Figure 5.7: Renee’s movement during a readaloud (2015/04/16)*

57 And possibly what it meant to be a family, although, we never talked about Richard’s family – or family diversity – as frankly as we did in the first club.
I had interpreted her dancing as boredom or disinterest in the books. She frequently told me that she knew the books and had read them in preschool. In my fieldnotes, I noted a need to respect the various reasons the children had for joining the club and to make space for a range of responses, even if when they not align with the desired task. By judging children’s responses as disinterest or engagement, I was applying assumptions of what it means to be an active participant. Through an open-ended interview with Renee my assumptions are disrupted. She helps me understand how bias prevented me from understanding her (and possibly others).

When I ask Renee about her interest in the books – which I assume she did not like based on my comment, “I notice you don’t pay attention” (line 3, below) – her answers amaze me.

*Excerpt 5.13: Renee the actress (2015/04/30)*

1 Mrs. Lo  Do you every wish I picked different books? That's my next question to you. Or do you like the books I bring in?
2 Renee  I like the books that you bring.
3 Mrs. Lo  Because I noticed you don't pay attention. Or are you always listening, it just look like you're not paying attention?
4 Renee  I am listening.
5 Mrs. Lo  Okay.
6 Renee  It's just that I like to act it out in my head.
7 Mrs. Lo  Oh. I never knew that. See, this is why I have to talk to you guys, so then I learn new things.
8 Renee  I like acting it out. I'm talking about something different but I'm always listening and thinking to myself, "What should I act out next?" And I'm imagining the story in my head.
9 Mrs. Lo  So the story ... And it looks nice. So you're actually acting out what I'm reading out loud in your head?
10 Renee  I might actually look a little crazy, but that's how I act it out.
11 Mrs. Lo  Do you think it's hard to listen to stories in Mrs. Jessica Michaels' classroom, because you always have to sit down? Do you find it hard to sit down in classroom? But you're really good in her class. You don't get into stuff...
In response to my critique of her behavior during readalouds, Renee corrects me and tells me she is listening (line 4) and proceeds to explain that she acts it out to imagine the story in her head (line 6). Renee is aware that she processes text kinesthetically and she finds space to move during our readalouds. She is even aware that this is a non-normative response to literature, “I might look a little crazy, but that’s how I act it out” (line 10). Unfortunately, our conversation is cut off when the other children start talking to me. I never learn how Renee feels about the rules of the classroom readaloud, which requires children to sit still and follow the teacher’s lead.

When I shared this with Renee’s mom, Susan was surprised, “Really!?” and added that Renee movement was not allowed in the classroom, “She gets in trouble. She does. Frequently.” (2015/06/12). Susan and I (and the other adults in her life) were making assumptions about the reasons for Renee’s behavior, but my conversations with Renee and her mother revealed these to be mistaken assumptions by adults that Renee never tried to correct.

Renee’s explanation leads to two important findings. In the immediate moment after she shares this with me, I realized how poorly I had interpreted her movement during readalouds, mistaking it for disinterest instead of engagement. I am grateful that I had not forced her to sit with us. Even though I misread the reasons for her behavior, I had honored her autonomy in the club, a goal of my study. This finding suggests that even when I consciously worked to construct child-centered and child-governed play, I experienced “hearer’s bias” (Murris, 2015) and imposed epistemic bias on Renee, interpreting her movement as meaning one thing, disengagement, without asking her. I
was not alone in this bias; her mother’s testimony revealed that no one else was aware that Renee’s movement was a comprehension strategy. This club, then, created openings to learn about Renee and break from developmental norms.

A second important finding was that Renee was not just responding to the reading event, she was actively preparing her body-mind to engage in it. Initially, I had analyzed Renee’s declaration of dancing to understand the story as a form of performative or transparent response. I misread it as an aesthetic impulse, the surrendering to the power of the text (Sipe, 2008). After observing the video data of Renee’s movement during readalouds, this is more than a response to the text. The consistency of her dancing, the repetitive singing “ooh-ya”, and her words lead me to believe that Renee is preparing to engage with the story. She is doing work to help comprehend the story, which comes before the responses to it. While her movement may be a response to a readaloud event, it is not a response to the book. The movement prepares her to respond to it. Renee’s insight has the potential to be an exciting direction for literacy research to explore young children’s metacognitive awareness and preparation for reading encounters. By giving Renee space to “respond” to these literary events in her own way (i.e., dancing) and by making time to talk with her about her experiences in the club, Renee was able to talk about how she engages with literature and literary events. In doing so, I experienced potentialities, or the opening of my horizon beyond my own unconscious developmental biases. My initial guess for the possible reasons for Renee’s movement followed a “real logic” based on my knowledge of literacy practices of young children, yet I was able to

58 It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to analyze young children’s preparation for reading events but it is a finding and one that is a promising focus for future studies.
see “how something different came to matter” (Davies, 2014, p. 3)\textsuperscript{59}. My conversations with Renee affirmed that despite her outspoken nature, her self-knowledge, which was profound, was often silenced.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I drew on various data to explore how the club was a site of queered time, defining the term as a way to push against the definition that queer theory is about “sexual object choice” (Muñoz, 2009) or queerness as identity. Drawing on Halberstam’s (2005) and Muñoz’s (2009) definition of queer time as a way to resist straight – or linear – time, this chapter questioned developmental logic that places individuals on a child to (heterosexual) adult trajectory. By connecting different consideration of time in literacy research, literary research, queer theory, and postdevelopmental theory, I was able to question time scales and their impact on our interactions with literature and literary events. By using the readaloud as a unit of analysis, I identified heteronormative moments as well as moments that disrupted heteronormativity. In the Wild Things activity that followed the readaloud, I discovered that apparent gendered play was more complicated, noting that perhaps children’s imaginary play is bounded by heteronormative chronotopes even if their interpersonal interactions are not. Finally, I considered how Renee’s explanation for her movement during readaloud – which I dismissed as disengagement – was a form of self-knowledge that shifted our understanding of the ways children actively engage in literary events.

\textsuperscript{59} This also happened with Stephen, which I discussed at the end of Chapter 3.
During the club meetings and throughout this analysis, I attended to children’s voices in an effort to remove “hearer’s prejudice,” when a person misses out on “knowledge offered by a child” because it isn’t heard by the adult listener (Murris, 2013, p. 245). Renee, and all the children, individually and collectively participated in ways that gave me new insight into everyday practices of young children. Each of them taught me the importance of letting go of preconceived notions, which is especially important for a researcher.

It also informs my understanding of using an epistemic justice framework, because of the interconnectedness between our encounters. Despite my desire to privilege and honor children’s voices, I influenced the voices through my position within the club. As Murris (2013) writes, “When thinking with children, adults need to ‘give’ their mind to what there is to think about, which is only possible when adults are ‘open-minded’, have ‘epistemic modesty’, ‘epistemic trust’, and are committed to ‘epistemic equality’” (p. 258, her emphasis). In my case, I was and am aware of our age differential, the power differential (e.g., I was the ‘teacher’), and our different reasons for coming together. As well, I recognized the different responsibilities we had to others in our lives, especially the children’s families and the people in their community. As an outsider who was there temporarily and given the sensitivity of my focal topic (gay families) I needed to use methods that respected the (growing) bonds of this community of young people to ensure that I neither disenfranchised them nor oppressed them with my research goals. By using an epistemic justice framework, I worked to resist “essentializing and normalizing discourses about child” (Murris, 2013, p. 257) in an effort to hear the child who speaks.
This is essential in studies that consider queered time, because queered time resists developmental logics of human experiences. In the next chapter, I continue to think about how the reading club queered time and space, but I shift from this semi-structured event, the readaloud, to a closer examination of their self-directed play.
Chapter 6
Writing Myself into Children’s Play

All writing emerges from particular experiences, relations, and selections from the world.
Sumara, 1996, p. 238, emphasis in original

In this chapter, I continue an exploration of social organization, specifically how children’s play queered time and space. Here I consider how the relations between gender/sex/uality and time/space “provide insight into the flows of power and subversion” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 13) noting when play adhered to and resisted heteronormativity. This chapter explores different practices I used to make sense of their play, to “open up new meanings of childhood” (Blaise, 2015, p. 2). By focusing on play, I build on the previous chapter, which explored how time and space were queered during readalouds, specific literary events that I led. I share three multimodal vignettes of the children’s self-directed interactions. Because I was on the periphery of their play, these vignettes are a way to write myself into their child-led and child-centered interactions.

Inspired by ethnopoetry (Anzaldúa, 2007; Huuki & Renold, 2015; Richardson, 1997; Somerville, 2013), audit trails (Vasquez, 2004), and graphica in scholarship (Galman, 2007; Jones & Woglom, 2013; Sousanis, 2015), I created these vignettes to prioritize the children’s voices and actions. This approach is an alternative path to attend to the children and their directives and allows room for speculation to their play and the varied ways they participated. I am mindful that I curate the vignettes, arranging their voices and perspectives. These efforts are intended to scaffold between the world of our reading club and the academic, adult-centered world of education research.
What follows are three multimodal vignettes I created: The first is a gallery walk of popular themes with the children. I present a series of images and excerpts about bananas and poop. The second vignette, inspired by found poems, is an assemblage of the children’s romantic talk. The last vignette is an extended conversation about the origin of life. Each multimodal vignette offers insight into the nature of our interactions and topics of interest. An in-depth analysis follows the vignettes. At the end of the chapter, I discuss how these vignettes – and the reading club – informed my understanding of space and time as social-historically constructions of dominant heterosexual ideologies.

**Vignette #1: Popular**

“Popular” is a collection of illustrations and excerpts of two frequent themes. They are arranged as a gallery walk, a teaching strategy designed that shares multiple images and texts to encourage questions and reflection on a theme or idea. This series of artifacts were selected to rouse reflection on the children’s self-directed talk and creations, and how they worked together to interweave multiple and mutual interests (Dyson, 2010). Data is arranged chronologically and each style of frame represents a specific child. While bananas and poop seem incongruous with this study on families, these subjects were frequent and popular topics of conversation. Starting in week 1, the children found moments to bring both into our interactions. At first I paid no attention to bananas and I actively resisted their potty talk. After several weeks, I realized my resistance to their potty talk was creating a power asymmetry that did not honor their desires and interests. Reflecting on interactional dialogue was a window to their social worlds including how they listened to, negotiated with, and resisted one another.
I drew a banana.

**Figure 6.1: Popular**
Jane: Raise you hand if you want to say potty words.
Renee: Raise your hand if you do not want to say it.
Jane: Raise your hand if the answer is no potty words.
Child: I don’t want to say it.
Mrs. Lo: You don’t want to say it?
Erin: I don’t want to say it, but it’s actually funny.
Jane: It’s not funny at all.
Jane: Raise your hand if this is getting ridiculous and we want this to stop.

Jane: I got this idea from Stephen. When he did the bunny ears and the rotten banana.
Stephen: It’s not a rotten banana.
Jane: It’s a poop. He thought it was a banana. Looks like a banana.
Stephen: It’s definitely not a banana.
Jane: So when we were talking about the poop and the pee and the vomit and all... We were sick and were farting. We were thinking about making a rotten banana.
Mrs. Lo: What is it saying?
Jane: I do not care. I am doing out, I’m doing out outside. I don’t care that I stink.
Mrs. Lo: Why would that stink?
Jane: Well, this rotten banana is very stinkable. It loves to be stinky, so everybody can get away from him.
Stephen: It’s not a banana.
Mrs. Lo: So, what’s this green part?
Jane: The vomit. At least it’s not the banana.
Mrs. Lo: And what’s this part right here?
Jane: That one is the smell.
Mrs. Lo: The smell. Oh, the stinky smell. What’s this right here?
Jane: And that’s the pee, the yellow stuff.
Mrs. Lo: Oh, nice. Poop and pee there. So you really didn’t like talking about poop and pee but you drew a picture to remember what you talked about it?
Jane: Yeah.
Mrs. Lo: Did you think it was funny once you started to draw it?
Jane: Yeah. And actually I’m going to write farts and the brown one...
Erin: Now she’s really into it.
Stephen: Now she’s into it. What? But you too, but you too.
Jane: I’m not really into it. I just drew something to remember about it. I’m not really into it.
Dorothy: Now I'm going to draw – the whole house inside.
Dorothy: Renee, the whole room – so look, this is the house. Look, this is the house, you open it up and go inside the house and you see a giant burd.

Children laughing
Stephen: Ha ha ha ha ha ha
Giggling continues
Stephen: The whole house, and when you go inside the house there is a giant person pooping on the toilet.

Children laughing
Rachel: Shh...
Stephen: It's so funny, I can't stop. Beep, baap.

Dorothy: This is a elephant putting up his tail, so he's ready to poop.
Mrs. Lo: That's nasty.
Erin: Make it brown. Do diarrhea
Dorothy: Guys, I'm sorry, this guy just went to the bathroom.

Dorothy: I wish nobody talked about poop in the book club.
Analyzing bananas and poop

When I realized that their interest in poop and scatological humor was persistent, I chose to engage in a more productive way. I brought in two books, *Everyone Poops* (Gomi, 1993) and *De la petite taupe qui voulait savoir qui lui avait fait sur la tête* [The mole who wanted to know who pooped on her head] (Holzwarth & Erlbruch, 1993). The latter was in French, so I translated the book and we discussed the images. My acceptance of the topic led to a new form of engagement, perhaps because my participation shifted the topic from one that was transgressing group norms to a legitimate one. Children who were more resistant to the topic at the beginning, namely Jane, became full participants, and children who initially were extremely eager to engage in “potty talk” (e.g., Stephen) participated in the discussions reduced their participation. By week 8, only Erin remained an advocate for frequent discussions about poop. Yet, in the last week, when I asked about the children’s favorite moments in the club, only Dorothy said that she wished we had talked about poop less; others expressed that this was a special, enjoyable part of the club.

Excerpt 6.1: Dorothy says “No poop” (2015/06/04)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mrs. Lo</th>
<th>Why do you like to come to the club every week? What makes you want to come back to club every week?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>Do not say poop. That is out of the question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>I thought you said it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Because it’s a secret.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>He didn't. It's a secret club a little bit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>No, it's not. I tell everyone knows this club.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>They see us together, right? Erin, your hand's up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>The wild rumpus and poop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>All right. Okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>I said no poop.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this excerpt, Dorothy asks the others to not say poop (line 2), but Erin does anyway (line 8). When I asked the children what about their favorite books, Stephen and Erin say *Everyone Poops* (Gomi, 1993) is one of their favorites. As I discussed in the previous chapter, this fascination with and desire to discuss poop was popular. Bananas, as a topic, are not as contested; they are talked about a lot because they were a popular snack. I chose to present these themes in a single collection because they merge in week five when Stephen, Jane, and Erin each draw a “rotten banana” (2015/04/30). As can be seen in Figures 6.2a-c, each drew a curved shape with wavy lines emanating from it. Stephen’s curved shape is in pencil, and the small square shape added to the top left may be interpreted as a banana stem, as Jane and Erin interpreted it.

![Figure 6.2a, 6.2b, & 6.2c: Bunny ears and rotten bananas by Stephen, Jane, and Renee](image)

When I interviewed Jane in week 10 we discussed this drawing (Figure 6.2b). I was interested in this picture because she initially was a vocal opponent to potty talk. In week 2, she created a ballot and asked everyone to vote in favor or against potty talk. She was concerned about propriety of public talk and tried to enforce a policing of potty talk, “If you say potty words you get kicked out of the building and you go to the bathroom” (2015/02/19). This is taken up by other children who also were uncomfortable with the
subject. For example, Renee says, “If you want to say something inappropriate, don’t say it.” Jane and Renee’s rules are not taken up and Renee drops her support the third time Jane repeats her rule, “That’s your rule, not Mrs. Lo’s rule.” The girls had beliefs about appropriate talk but have different parameters to support their beliefs.

![Figure 6.3: Renee's poop card](image)

Both girls exhibited resistance and desire for potty talk. Renee only draws one picture with poop in it (Figure 6.3) but it is in a note to her Dorothy, and is notable because this is a newly formed friendship. She also participates and initiates “poop talk” in future weeks (i.e., discussion on origin of humans). Jane, as discussed above, becomes deeply engrossed talk about a rotten banana. In the following excerpts she tells me more about her picture of a rotten banana (Fig. 6.2b) and her reasons for drawing it. During this conversation, Stephen is invited to join the conversation and Erin also adds commentary.

As you will read, Jane, and I learn that the rotten banana may not have been a banana.

**Excerpt 6.2: We talk about rotten bananas (2015/04/30)**

1. Mrs. Lo  You do whatever you want. Okay. ... So you've shown me a whole bunch of pages here, but I'm really curious about this page. Can you tell me about this page?
2. Jane  Okay. I got this idea from Stephen.
Okay.
When he did the bunny ears and the rotten banana.
Yeah. And what's the rotten banana doing?
Stephen, you talk about it. Because Stephen thought of that.
I know, but you drew it, right?
It's not a rotten banana.
It's a poop.
Is it a poop?
He thought it was a banana. Looks like a banana.
It's definitely not a banana.
So when we were talking about the poop and the pee and the vomit and all...
Yeah.
We were sick and were farting.
Yes.
We were thinking about making a rotten banana.
Ah.
No. It was P O P. Oh, yeah. P...
P O P. Pop?
It's P O O P ...
Oh, yeah.
That would be pop.
That would be pop. All right. So tell me some more. You said I do not care. I am...
I do not care. I am doing out; I’m doing it out outside.
What are you reading?
Right. Right.
I don't care that I stink.
Why would that stink?
Well, this rotten banana is very stinkable. It loves to be stinky, so everybody can get away from him.
It's not a banana.
The vomit.
The vomit. That's what I thought.
At least it's not the banana.
I know. The stinky banana. It wasn't vomiting though. And what's this part right here?
That one is the smell.
The smell. Oh, the stinky smell. What's this right here?
And that's the pee, the yellow stuff.
Oh, nice. Poop and pee there.
Yeah.
So you really didn't like talking about poop and pee but you drew a
picture to remember we talked about it?

43 Jane Yeah.
44 Mrs. Lo Did you think it was funny once you started to draw it a little bit?
45 Jane Yeah.
46 Mrs. Lo I know...
47 Jane And actually I'm going to write farts and the brown one...
48 Erin Now she's really into it.
49 Stephen Now she's into it. What? But you too, but you too--.
50 Mrs. Lo I know. But she's using her field guide to remember what we did as a group.
51 Jane Yeah. I'm not really into it. I just drew something to remember about it.

In line 6, Jane invites Stephen to talk about the rotten banana, and he immediately says, “It’s not a rotten banana” (line 8). Jane builds on this, “It’s a poop” (line 9) adding, “He [Stephen] thought it was a banana, looks like a banana” (line 11). Stephen insists it is not a banana (line 12). Unlike Stephen’s drawing, which is a simple line figure, Jane and Erin’s drawings are extremely detailed. Jane even uses text to help close the gaps in the illustration. The speech bubble says, “I don’t care that I stink.”

These words mark a shift in Jane’s stance toward the subject, which she actively resisted in the first weeks, and they also reflect her engagement in the role as research participant. Jane admits that it was funny once she started to draw it a little bit and decides to annotate her picture. She uses pencil to write “Farts” right on the drawing (see Figure 6.4b, upper right corner (circled)). Jane transgressions were careful negotiations between self-perceived childish play (e.g., potty talk) and adult-researcher, (i.e., “I just drew something to remember it” (line 51)). Jane has used her field journal as a site of record keeping, unlike the others who most frequently used the journals primarily for creative activities (solitary or group).
This conversation is symbolic of several important events that occurred. The children were free to collaborate, working together to design and create in dialogue with one another. The children were “selectively attending to, resisting, and transforming the world as they interpret it” (Dyson, 2010, p. 9). This interest in others and what others were doing was “interweaving” individuals into social composing events (Dyson, 2010). Stephen, Erin, and Jane’s “stinky banana” represents a merging of sanctioned talk (i.e., bananas) and transgressive talk (i.e., poop), which emerged through dialogic interactions.

Through these collaborative projects, they negotiated roles and rules and created a participatory community. As they shifted positions and gained new perspectives, the children adapted their composing to become dialogic, building off of one another and responding in a way that their products reveal a synthesis of their peer practices. Both Erin and Stephen acknowledge that Jane got “into” the rotten banana theme, as is evidenced by Jane’s drawing and her extensive description of her memory of event. Although Jane resists this label, “I’m not really into it. I just drew something to remember
about it. I'm not really into it” (line 52), her engagement with the topic reflects a significant shift from her initial efforts to enforce rules on appropriate talk.

Jane’s shift mirrored my own, which moved from resistance and efforts to distract the children away from their desired subjects. I remember believing that their talk was disruptive and preventing us from achieving the goals of the club. In a field note from week 4, I discuss this:

Unfortunately, they're still going with the poop, they're still really attracted to the talk of poop and they find it funny. Which is fine I just get a little tired of Stephen writing poop everywhere, he really does dominate the group in a way that is, doesn't work for everybody, people kind of tolerate him but then after a while, Jane’s trying to get a vote to get people to stop talking about poop, but this is part of the community they're building so I have to just let this happen and I do. (2015/03/12)

In subsequent weeks, I created different strategies for gaining and keeping the kids attention, including making talking sticks, which were decorated popsicle sticks that served much like a microphone (Roche, 2015). Whoever had the talking stick had the floor, and everyone else was supposed to listen. By making talking sticks with the children, I hoped to create more purposeful talk, especially as a whole group. This effort was not very successful and the rules of the talking stick are rarely enforced. While I am initially very frustrated by the poop talk and Stephen’s behavior more generally, once I let go of my desire to control the conversations and Stephen’s responses to my directions, the children collectively spend less time talking about poop. In fact, after week 7, only Erin draws more pictures of poop (see last two pictures of “Popular” gallery) even though poop does return to our conversations regularly.
By choosing to accept the children’s desire to talk about poop and other “off-topic” subjects, I was able to engage in a dialogue with them that removed the tension I was experiencing. The dynamics of the space shifted once I relinquished this adult-oriented role to correct the children’s thematic talk. It also relieved tension among the group members, especially Jane and Stephen, perhaps because the topic became less taboo within our group. Stephen enjoyed transgressing norms, so by mainstreaming the topic, the thrill of rule-breaking may have diminished. Jane, who showed signs of being a rule enforcer, is able to accept the topic and feel less distress when it is part of our conversations. In fact, by the end of the club, Jane perceives this open format for the club as one of her favorite things about the club.

Excerpt 6.3: Jane explains the rules
1 Mrs. Lo Are there lots of rules in the book club?
2 Jane No. Doesn't look like there is.
3 Mrs. Lo Doesn't look like it at all, does it? Do you like that?
4 Jane Love it.
5 Mrs. Lo You love no rules?
6 Jane I love being independent.
7 Mrs. Lo You think this is a space...
8 Jane We can have a wild rumpus!

In this excerpt Jane has come to see the club as a place where there are no rules, which she defines as a place to be independent (line 6). For Jane, the reading club is a place she loves to spend time, and it a place where she can engage in ways that are different from other places. When she says, “We can have a wild rumpus” (line 8), she is referring to an ongoing conversation that followed our reading of *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) in week 8. The “wild rumpus” is a metaphor for the freedom participants have to pursue their interests and “break” rules. Unlike the rule-oriented
space of their classroom, the reading club is an opportunity to play with friends outside of school. All of the girls expressed that this was one of their favorite parts of the club.60

My analysis of their field journals reveal a geneology of ideas that move from child to child and across the weeks, sometimes being incorporated into whole group interactions, and sometimes as silent, individual acts. Our weekly interactions served as an iterative process for me to reflect on how my adult- and researcher-centered perspectives were impacting our interactions. By becoming aware of and relinquishing some of my expectations I was able to denaturalize the adult-child power asymmetries that guided most of our intergenerational actions. This club became a site where they had freedom to be “independent”, to collaborate, and to transgress normative practices that I had observed in their classroom. The reward for this was a foray into their social practices, including conversations that far exceeded my expectations, which I discuss further in the next sections.

Vignette #2: Crushes
In this second vignette, I created a display of “conversation hearts” to mimic Valentine’s Day candies. These hearts list key phrases and exchanges between the children, all of which were captured on recording devices. Watching and listening to the footage revealed a world of interactions that I was only partially privy to during our meetings: the romantic world of first graders. This topic is perhaps the most difficult to address since the concept of the child as having any sexuality is taboo. Bruhm and Hurley (2004) note the “dominant narrative about children: children are (and should stay)

60 This was echoed by the girls’ parents who reported that their children often talked about the fun they were having with the other children. This was less of a factor for the boys and their parents.
innocent of sexual desires and intentions…children are also officially, tacitly, assumed to be heterosexual” (p. ix). These children were engaging in interactions that suggested a curiosity and desire to explore romantic relationships, which was a topic of discussion in at least nine meetings. Children’s sexuality should not be dismissed nor should we make assumptions that children’s notions of sexuality are equivalent to adult sexuality. Discomfort adults feel about this should not prevail over the right for children to explore these emotions and ideas, and discussing it here is one way to queer the heterosexual matrix because it disrupts developmental logic about children, notably that they are asexual until the emerge as heterosexual adults (Bruhm et al, 2004). Blaise and Taylor (2012) suggest that enacted romantic heterosexual play is form of gender regulation that reinforces hegemonic masculinity, which privileges white, upper class, heterosexual cisgender males. Turning back to Dorothy and Stephen’s married Wild Things (see Excerpt 5.10) and the imaginary community created with the Wild Things community, the children’s play did appear to be gendered and reinforce heteronormative roles. This gendered play does extend almost completely to their interpersonal romantic play, of which there was a lot.
Figure 6.5: Crushes

- Some of them wrote Kiss me, hug me, & one wrote kick me.
- I was the one that wrote Kick me on purpose.
- Who wants to be under the kissletoe?
- If you’re not under the no-kissletoe then you won’t be kissed.
- He has a crush on me & wants to marry me. I’m not kidding.
- Raise your hand if you don’t want to kiss somebody.
- No, I might want to kiss somebody one day.
- No kissing friends in 1st grade.
- Dorothy, if u kiss her, u will get electrified.
- 2009 Spiderman is kissing me.
- Somebody already has a crush on me so please nobody.
- You’re under the mistletoe. You’ve got to kiss a girl!
- I needed to kiss her ‘cause I was under the mistletoe.
- I made the mistletoe so you can kiss Dorothy or Renee.
- R: J told me she has a crush on you. J: I did not! R: She actually did. J: I did not!
- I’m just playin’ around.
- J: He has a crush on me. R: No, I don’t.
- J: Ewww! Richard kissed me! Whhhy?!
Analysis of the children’s romantic play

I remember clearly being surprised by their talk about having crushes and how they created mistletoe to sanction kissing within the group, *yet I did not mention this in any of my fieldnotes*. This reflects my own discomfort with the topic. There are a few moments when I acknowledge in my fieldnotes what they are doing, especially later in the club. Part of my reason for not saying anything was the tension I felt between wanted to follow the children’s lead and considering how the parents would react if they knew what was happening. Mrs. Michaels, their teacher, had told me earlier in the year that a girl’s parents had expressed concern about a boy having a crush on the girl (neither children is in this study), and I remember Mrs. Michaels’ response to “crush talk” in her classroom from the previous year. She refused to engage in it, telling students that no one in first grade has crushes. Yet, week after week, these children had different ways of talking about crushes and kissing, innovating pipe cleaners into mistletoe: “kissletoe”, and “no-kissletoe”. My initial denial of these interactions in my fieldnotes are a reflection of my own discomfort with the children’s behavior, but my close reading, listening, and watching of their behavior reveals the excitement and pleasure the children got from negotiating these romantic moments within our club.

I have chosen to use “romantic” to describe these interactions between the children rather than “sexuality” because I am more comfortable using it, although some would argue that my preference continues to deny the child sexual agency, locking them into a Roussean ideal of the “romantic” child, the “innocence”, and even at risk of

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61 It also is evidence that the researcher’s gaze is influenced by social norms. My discomfort with their play prevented me for attending to it.
eroticizing them (Kincaid, 2004). Foucault (1990a) discusses infantile sexuality and its eradication in tandem to “persecution of peripheral sexualities” (p. 43), so my acknowledging the children’s romantic play is part of the queering project that this study undertakes. How does their behavior in this coffee shop, the freedom they feel to explore and discuss romantic dalliances, help disrupt fixed categories and open our awareness to new possibilities (Muñoz, 2009; Somerville, 2016)? Ignoring these moments may permit heteronormativity to perpetuate and lead to epistemic injustice because I am not adding to our collective knowledge resources (hermeneutical injustice) or listening to the children (testimonial injustice).

This vignette, “Crushes” is a multimodal found poem; it relies on the power of the children’s words interacting with the heart-shapes that I chose to reinforce that the children were engaging in discussions about romance. Laurel Richardson (1997) discusses her own desired to use narrative poetry to address “illegitimacies”, namely the illegitimacies of her research participant’s child born out of wedlock and her own feelings of illegitimacy of being female researcher in a male dominated field (p. 136). Including the vignette on the pages of an academic dissertation is intended to disrupt developmental perspectives of children. It is an application of queer methodology that informs this study in hopes that it troubles naturalized discourses about children.

Creating “Crushes” required multiple layers of coding that started when we first met in Mrs. Michaels’ classroom. Through my observations over two years, I noticed routines and points of tension in the classroom; I also read extensively and taught graduate courses on literacy and children’s literature. When we finally came together as a
research group (i.e., the afterschool reading club) I had expectations of what we would discuss, and while I believed I was open to conversations that strayed from my desired topics, my lack of recordkeeping for these romantic moments reveals a dissonance with the topic. It is only after multiple reviews of the events and the construction of this document that I understand how my own discomfort with the topic was limiting the importance of this data on my own understanding of heteronormativity as a way of organizing time and space (Halberstam, 2004; Muñoz, 2009). By avoiding it, I risked reinforcing the idea that children are asexual – the developmental logic of heteronormativity.

A closer examination of these moments reveals obvious perpetuation of heterosexuality in all but one interaction. Heterosexuality was expected. When Richard finds himself under the mistletoe, he is told, “You have to kiss somebody” by a girl (unidentified), and reinforced by Erin, “You’re under the mistletoe, you’ve got to kiss a girl” (2015/04/16). This insistence that Richard kiss a girl is one way the heterosexual matrix was reinforced; the informant was acting as a regulator. When reflecting on it a week later, Richard says, “I needed to kiss her [Renee], because I was under the mistletoe” (2015/04/23). Two weeks later, Erin reminds him, “I made the mistletoe so you can kiss Dorothy or Renee” (2015/05/07, my emphasis). These interactions and conversations may be interpreted as “cute boy-girl romance [read] as evidence for the mature sexuality that awaits them” (Bruhm et al., 2004, p. ix), yet it should also be recognized as social conditioning (Blaise et al., 2012). The mistletoe was used to get a boy to kiss a girl; in fact, it was used to control who Richard could kiss. That no one
contested these rules suggests that the children may not have conceived of non-heterosexual ways to enact the rules of mistletoe.

The constructions of heteronormativity are also evident in Jane’s repeated declarations that boys have crushes on her. She gleefully recounts how a kindergarten friend “has a crush on me and he wants to marry me” (2015/03/19) and “Somebody already has a crush on me” (2015/04/16), yet when Richard reverses the direction of the crush, Jane stops giggling and denies any such emotion.

Excerpt 6.4: Richard announces that Jane has a crush on a boy (2015/05/28).

Richard  Jane actually told me that she really did have a crush on you.
...  
Girl  I didn’t [laughs].
Richard  She actually told me.
Jane  I did not, I really did not.
Richard  She did.
Mrs. Lo  Shh.
Jane  I did not.
Richard  Yeah, you did.
Jane  I did not!
Boy  She actually did.
Jane  No, I did not!
Mrs. Lo  Hey, hey, hey.
Jane  No, I did not!
Mrs. Lo  Nobody has crushes on anybody.
Jane  I know, but, but they think I have.
Erin  I don’t think that.
Richard  Yeah, I’m just, I’m just playing around.

This was one of the few times I intervened in their crush talk because Jane was getting visibly upset. When I say, “Nobody has crushes on anybody” (line 18), Jane acknowledges this but notes that it is what the boys think. When Erin supports Jane (line

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62 I would intervene if they were trying to kiss each other because of my understanding that parents would not be happy to learn that kissing was occurring. I also spoke to several parents about the crushes and mistletoe so they would know that I was paying attention to their children.
Richard concedes he is “just playing around” (line 21). This was the only time that it was implied that a girl had a crush on a boy, although there were many instances when Richard was accused of having crushes on all the girls. Richard never got upset and none of the girls ever considered that accusing him of having crushes was unfair or mean. This interaction may affirm hegemonic masculinity and the heterosexual matrix, notably that there is a “right” direction for crushes. Jane’s reaction positions males as having the authority to have crushes and females as being receivers of crushes, which may limit options for children to enact or consider different relationships.

These examples support a constructivist understanding of sexuality. The children sanctioned kinds of romantic play and talk that was consistently heteronormative. This extended into other imaginative play, including Dorothy and Stephen’s role-playing described in the previous chapter. When she called Stephen’s Battle Bear “Husband” she was reinforcing heterosexual relationships, including roles within the relationships. First she situates Stephen’s Battle Bear as her protector, “Kill him husband” and later she chides, “Husband, be careful” adding “I am getting my hair done” (2015/04/16).

Collectively, these interactions reinforce normatives about gender roles and may imply that children’s hermeneutical resources about relationships and the nature of relationships are limited and do not reflect the true breadth of options. Eve Sedgwick (2004) notes a troubling asymmetry between heterosexual and homosexual educational resources. The resources available to help children “turn out gay” is virtually invisible yet there are a plethora of resources to “prevent the development of gay people”, thus persistent violence perpetuates in this “desire for a non-gay outcome” (p. 145). Sedgwick’s hard
stance about heteronormativity parallels my analysis of interactions in the reading club.

The children seem unable to envision romantic relationships beyond boy-girl interactions, and this may be a form of epistemic injustice. In the single same-sex romantic interaction, only Brendan, Richard, and Jane are involved. Jane’s responses reveal a curiosity about same-sex sexuality but also fixity about gender and sexual identities.

Excerpt 6.5: Brendan and Richard don’t kiss (2015/05/28)

1 Richard Oh no, not going to kiss on the lips Brendan.
2 [In video: Brendan and Richard’s heads bob back and forth dodging kisses from the other]
3 Richard I am not.
4 Jane [laughs]. Kiss, kiss, kiss. Richard and Brendan kiss. [00:26:29]
5 Jane Please kiss.
6 Richard I’m scared, I don’t want to marry him.
7 Jane Kiss. Are you going to marry a girl? [giggling]
8 Richard Maybe I want to not marry.
9 Jane Well who wants to marry you?
10 Richard [exaggerated] No one. I’m a little old lady who doesn’t know anything.
11 Jane Well, actually, not an old lady [serious tone, stops giggling]
12 Richard I am an old lady

There are several telling things in this excerpt including the fact that I did not know about it until after the club ended (because it was only audible on a secondary recorder that I used as backup)\(^63\). The video revealed that before Richard spoke, Brendan leaned into toward him, possibly saying something. Then, the boys did physically move back and forth, as if contemplating a kiss, but Brendan is silent for the entire excerpt. Brendan is often silent, so this is not unusual. Another telling thing is that this is the only instance where the placement of a kiss is discussed, “Oh no, not going to kiss on the lips

\(^{63}\) Unfortunately, no devices picked up what precipitated Richard’s first statement. The video captures the boys’ movement as they bob back and forth, but the angles of their bodies to the camera are too poor quality to include. The video did not pick up any audio.
Brendan” (line 1). Richard’s announcement raises awareness that I never considered where the children were kissing one another (if they were kissing) and may reveal a consciousness that kissing across sexes is different than kissing someone of the same sex, especially intriguing since both boys have gay parents. Jane’s response, especially her pleading, “Please kiss” (line 5) is also a break from other kissing interactions in the club, which were excited but not pleading. The other children’s silence also struck me as unusual since Erin and Renee often chimed into kissing events. After watching the video repeatedly, I believe their silence is due to deep engagement in other activities rather than a disinterest in the event (e.g., no one gazes up at them during this excerpt).

Richard’s hesitation, “I’m scared, I don’t want to marry him” (line 6) and Jane’s response, “Kiss. Are you going to marry a girl?” (line 7) reveal may suggest that Jane believes Richard will replicate his family model or the romantic play she has seen him engaged in with his Spiderman dolls. She seems to have forgotten the kisses (or attempted kisses) he gave when he was under the “kissletoe”64. It also suggests that while Jane may be open to male-male romance, she sees sexual identity as fixed: you are either attracted to males or females. This non-kiss event, then, suggests that there was room for the children to experience different kinds of romantic relationships but only in fleeting, private moments that are questioned and resisted in ways heterosexual romantic play was not. Finally, Jane’s change in tone and contestation of Richard declaration of being an old lady (line 10) may indicate that, for Jane, gender identity is fixed. She resists Richard’s fluidity, possibly constructing his identity of Richard as a (inevitably) gay male.

64 This may explain why Richard kisses Jane at the last meeting, as noted in the last conversation heart (bottom right).
This vignette and my analysis suggest that heterosexuality and the heterosexual matrix permeated this space with few transgressions. Whether this was romantic play where relationships were practiced or interactions that were gendered, the children and I rarely contested male-female organization of the world with the exception of the books I shared. The final vignette, an extended conversation about how the first human came to earth is an example of how the children engaged in prolonged talk that wove their different interests, knowledge, beliefs, and perspectives together.

**Vignette #3: On the Origin of Life**

During week nine, Stephen struggled to get everyone’s attention. When he did, he asked a “trick question” (2015/04/23). We were discussing Atlantis and mermaids, which had appeared in several books (*Home* (Ellis, 2015), *Looking for Atlantis* (Thompson, 1993), *Flotsam* (Wiesner, 2006)). Stephen asked, “How did the first human get on Earth?” This led to a conversation that lasted over 15 minutes, a notably long period of time. All children participated, moving in and out of activities and side conversations, but each paid enough attention to step back into the conversation intermittently. The length of the conversation, its initiation, that all participated, and the focus of the talk is a revealing example of children are knowers. I have reproduced it here in its entirety because of the richness of the conversation, but I have played with the format to make it easier to identify the themes and strands of talk. It reveals how the reading club was a place to share hermeneutical resources, thus share (and possibly) expand collective resources.
On the Origin of Life in 7 Chapters
Plus an interlude

Setting: The Café
April 23, 2015
Introducing the Cast

Richard
“Spiderman”

Stephen
“Flash”

Renee
“Catwoman”

Mrs Lo
“Storm”

Dorothy
“Superwoman”

Erin
“Wonder Woman”

Jane
“Bat Girl”

Brendan
“Batman”

Scene
Eight people are sitting together around a large table. A boy, Stephen, takes the talking stick and asks everyone to listen to him. When no one listens, Richard says, “Stephen’s trying to speak.” Everyone listens and a conversation ensues.

Chapter 1: I have a trick question

Stephen: How did the first human get on earth?

Jane: God made him.
Renee: No
Stephen: No. You only have one chance.

Stephen: That might be wrong

Brendan: Suddenly there was an alien out of space.
Stephen: Erk! [buzzer sound] Wrong!

Renee: And he turned into a human. Not everyone believes that.

Brendan: I think aliens – people think aliens aren’t real but actually they, I’m thinking that they really are because I, I, I have a reason. ... I forget it.

Stephen: I bet it was a monkey that evolved into a human.
Richard: A monkey?

Jane: The best reason is God made him.

Figure 6.6: On the Origin of Life in 7 Chapters
Chapter 2: I have a question that I know.

Brendan: Who made God?

Renee: I know who made God.
Jane: Jesus
Renee: No, no.
Erin: No – God made Jesus, I think.
Renee: No, I know who made God
Mrs. Lo: Who made God?
Renee: Air.

Renee: Suddenly air came to one place and God arrived. No, he just...
Mrs. Lo: Renee?
Renee: God lives in the air and then you, then you call the air, and then the air appears again.
Renee: God made God who God made God who made God who made God and the first God pooped [crosstalk, 00:17:00-02]
Jane laughs

Erin: No, dinosaurs.

Brendan: I actually know… He was an evil person, the person who made God [24 second pass, the others are talking about a different subject]
Okay, I’ll tell you a story of how God was made.
Mrs. Lo: Jane are you listening? Brendan has a story about how God was made.
Brendan: A person in a black hole, a black hole was formed, then he was the evil person and then he made God. And then.
Mrs. Lo: So someone made God? Something made God?
Brendan: Something evil. Because he wanted God to make people so he could put them in jail. And then that’s what happened.
**Chapter 3: The first guy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Erin</th>
<th>But who made the guy that was the first guy?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>The first guy was Adam and Eve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Brendan: God made Adam and Eze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Jane: No, it not Eze, it’s Eve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Renee: I say God made God who God made God...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Jane: Oh, and maybe Norse [North?] made God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Norse God made God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Yes, they were Adam and Eve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>But who made Adam and Eve?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Renee: But who made Adam and Eve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Jane: God [crosstalk 00:19:44-47]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendan</td>
<td>...formed a person and the male became [unintelligible 00:20:01]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Jane: I have an idea who made God. Norse God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo: A Norse God made God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Jane: Norse God made God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>This is how it works. God made God, God made God...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Jane: No North God made God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North God</td>
<td>North God made God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>Dorothy: North God?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Lo</td>
<td>Mrs Lo: Norse God?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Jane: North God. But what’s Norse God?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>Dorothy: Yeah, who is North God?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Interlude: Polytheism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mrs. Lo</th>
<th>Some people believe there are many Gods.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Yeah, there are. You are one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>I’m a God?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>The Reading God!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>Oh the Reading God, thanks Stephen!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>You made the book club!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2: Richard and Stephen declare Mrs. Lo the Reading God.*
Chapter 4: God made God and the first God was poop

Renee: Yeah, but who made the poop?
Richard: Yeah, but God’s still alive.

Brendan: Maybe a black hole.
Richard: Oh my god I could see the black hole. There’s a black hole in the world.
Mrs. Lo: Uh oh, I hope not. We’ll get sucked in.

Chapter 5: The chicken or the egg

Mrs. Lo: Have you guys heard the expression what came first, the chicken or the egg?

Girl: The egg
Mrs. Lo: You think the egg came first?
Erin: Oh, the egg.
Mrs. Lo: Who agrees it’s the egg?
Richard: What?
Mrs. Lo: What came first the chicken or the egg?

Renee: No, the chicken, because who made the egg? No one, so it had to be the chicken.
Mrs. Lo: But where do chickens come from?
Jane: Chickens...

Stephen: The eggs
Stephen: From the egg.

Girl: It was a chicken egg.

Renee: It was a dinosaur. A dinosaur made like an egg and it grew as a chicken.
Mrs Lo: So a dinosaur laid an egg and it evolved into a chicken?
Erin: Yes
Brendan: And then the dinosaurs... And then the chicken survived, then more chickens came and more and more and more and more.
Erin: And then the chicken had an egg that was a person
Chapter 6: They just appeared out of nowhere

Dorothy: What about the first person on earth?

Brendan: The first person was a boy. It was Eve.
Jane: Adam and Eve
Mrs. Lo: It the Bible it says Adam came first.
Brendan: A rib
Mrs. Lo: And then God took a rib from Adam to make Eve.
Dorothy: A rib... A rib.
Jane: My dad believes Adam was the first person and I believe too.
Mrs. Lo: You believe that? That’s your faith, right?
Jane: Well, I believe with my dad.
Brendan: Well the boy was the first one.
Mrs. Lo: Adam came first.
Brendan: That’s why God is a boy.
Mrs. Lo: You think that’s why?
Jane: Actually God has a life in the sky.

Dorothy: But Passover is when God dies.

Renee: Uh uh uhn. If the first God is poop, he must live in the toilet.
Mrs. Lo: Oh my god Renee.
Richard: Yeah, so God lives in the toilet.
Mrs. Lo: Wait, I want to say something really important because I really like that you are questioning these things, but I think that sometimes you have to be careful that maybe what you believe isn’t what others believe.
Renee: I know.
Mrs. Lo: That doesn’t mean you’re right or wrong.
Erin: God lives in a toilet. I’m sure God lives in a toilet.
Mrs. Lo: And so maybe some people listen, but some people may not want to hear that God is poop. Because God could be really important to them... You think that’s really important for Christians?
Renee: I’m both. I’m Jewish and Christian, but I’m mostly Jewish.
Passover for? Big monster ninka poop. You're a ninka poop. Jane: Let me tell you the story...

Conclusion

Jane proceeds to tell the story of Passover. At the beginning, Renee accurately corrects Jane on a detail, but later she interjects with incorrect information. This creates additional side conversations. Renee is done listening. Taking this as a cue, Erin asks Jane for clarification if the Pharaoh who enslaved the Jewish people was King Tut, which draws Richard into the conversation. The conversation splinters and ends.

Figure 4: Hey, what’s the secret?

Figure 5: No more talk of Passover!
Analysis of collective resources on the origins of humans

In this analysis, I analyze segments of the vignette, drawn from the children’s talk in week 9 (2015/04/23); I used multiple columns to tease out the main strands of the conversation. I added images to provide context and illustrate nonverbal interactions, such as gestures and other positions. The talk started when Stephen asked, “How did the first humans get on Earth?” The children proposed God, aliens, and evolution. This led to questions about what came before God. To this query, the children suggested God came from air, dinosaurs, and evil person, and the Norse/North God. The conversation diverges with Renee pursuing a narrative that included poop. The others continued to explore possible explanations, including a black hole, although the conversation starts to become circular. The children continue question who preceded the first person, and I asked them if they knew about the dilemma of the chicken and the egg. This shifted our discussion away from God, which Jane continued to insist was the answer to the question. While the others were not as devout in their faith (everyone was Christian or Jewish), several drew on their religious knowledge to support or build onto Jane’s responses. For example, Brendan initially proposed aliens, black holes, and an evil guys as the source of humans and God, but then says “God made Adam & Eve”. During the chicken and egg discussion, though, Erin drew from evolutionary theory, “A dinosaur made like an egg and it grew as a chicken…And then the chicken had an egg that was a person…And then that was the first person on earth, that’s what happened.” Brendan and Jane re-invoke God, and Biblical stories became the focus of conversation. Renee continues to insist that God was poop.
During the conversation, children offered varied opinions often simultaneously. They were mostly respectful of one another and drew from a range of resources to collaborate and create shared meaning. They did not argue or contest opinions that contradicted their own, although they denied others by omission. I was surprised by the depth of knowledge and range of responses they had. This was a moment to participate in their philosophical dialogue and to listen to what kids know (Murris, 2013). Through the video and audio recordings, as well as a close analysis of the transcripts, it is possible to identify how heteronormativity, and particularly the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990/2008) shaped the conversation. Below, I consider three excerpts from conversation.

These excerpts are the only time gender is invoked. With one exception, the children accept God as male and the first humans as Adam and Eve. This lack of questioning gender reveals something about the breadth of hermeneutical resources, or collective knowledge resources, that the children and I had about God, religion, and human origin.

*Excerpt 6.6. Jane identifies the first human as a male*

27 Stephen How did the first human get on Earth?
28 Girl What?
29 Jane God made **him**.
30 Renee No.
31 Stephen No.
32 Mrs. Lo That’s what you believe.
33 Stephen You only have one chance, it’s Renee.
34 Mrs. Lo What do you think?
35 Renee I think that-. 
37 Renee Suddenly there was an alien out of space,
38 Stephen Erk [buzzer sound], wrong! [00:15:31]
41 Jane God made **him**. God made **him**. God made **him**. God made **him**.
42 Stephen That might be wrong.
43 Mrs. Lo The first alien?
44 Stephen Turned into-. 
45 Jane Stephen, God made **him**.
46 Renee And **he** turned into a human. Not everyone believes that.
I bet it was a monkey that evolved into a human.

A monkey?

I think aliens – people think aliens aren’t real but actually they, I’m thinking that they really are because I, I, I have a reason.

What’s the reason, Brendan?

I forget it.

Oh, okay well if you remember tell me, okay? I would love to hear it.

The best reason is God made him.

In this excerpt, Jane suggests that the first human was male (line 29, my emphasis), which she repeats four more times (lines 41, 45). Renee, who proposed extraterrestrial origins, also describes the first human and male, “And he turned into a human” (line 46). Jane listens to other suggestions – evolution from a monkey by Stephen (line 47) and Brendan building on the alien theory (line 49), but she closes the excerpt with “The best reason is God made him” (line 55). This shifts the conversation to who made God, which did not include any references to gender. This lack of questioning about God’s gender may indicate that the children shared resources about God and these resources aligned with dominant western canons about God as male. This lack of resistance to the first human being male continues in this next excerpt on Adam and Eve.

The first person was Adam and Eve

I say God made God who God made God who God made God and the first God was poop except poop, who made the poop? No one knows, because there was never a first person there were also no people because God made Earth.

The first person was Adam and Eve.

But who made Adam and Eve?

Yes. They were Adam and Eve.

But who made Adam and Eve?

God. [Crosstalk 00:19:44-47]

Yeah, because he’s hum…

- formed a person.

Okay.

And the male became [unintelligible 00:20:01]
Brendan suggests that God formed a person (line 134) and “the male became…” (line 137). The general acceptance of God as well as Adam and Eve reveal the pervasiveness of Western religion on the children’s origin stories. In Excerpt 6.8, the children continue to talk, and there is a moment when Renee responds to Erin’s idea that humans evolved from chickens, “Of course, because I’m that girl” (line 258).

Excerpt 6.8: Even God is a boy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>238</td>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>And then the chicken had an egg that was a person,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>239</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>To-to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>240</td>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>And then that was the first person on earth which the first person on earth, that’s what happened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>241</td>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>Stop it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>245</td>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>What about the first person who,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>249</td>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>Yeah, they just appeared out of nowhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>258</td>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>Of course I am because I’m that girl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>259</td>
<td>Brendan</td>
<td>The first person was a boy, it was Eve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>263</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Adam and Eve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>264</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>Uh-huh. In the Bible it says Adam came first,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>265</td>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Nobody’s going to know who you are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>266</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>And then God took a rib from Adam to make Eve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>272</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>My dad believes Adam was the first person and I believe too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>274</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>You believe that? That’s your faith right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>275</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Well I believe with my dad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>276</td>
<td>Brendan</td>
<td>Well the boy was the first one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>278</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo</td>
<td>Adam came first.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>279</td>
<td>Brendan</td>
<td>That’s why God is a boy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brendan’s responds to Renee’s declaration that she was the first person by stating, “The first person was a boy, it was Eve” (line 259). Although he mixes up the names, he is certain that the first person was a boy. Jane and I support his use of religious material to affirm his argument. Jane invokes her father’s beliefs to support her belief that Adam came first (line 272) and I agree, “Adam came first” (line 278). Brendan deduces from this that “God is a boy” (line 279). This is uncontested and, except from Renee’s earlier suggestion that she was “that girl” (line 258), the children did not resist the patriarchal
structure of human origin or the heteronormativity of Adam and Eve as the first people. I also did not resist these Biblical stories and never questioned the possibility that the first humans were not gendered or labeled with binary sexes.

This is an example of how deeply rooted beliefs are accepted and persistent. While the children proposed a range of possibilities none of us challenged the heterosexual matrix that positions males as the dominant – or original – group. Even Renee, whose insistence that God was poop, accepted that he was male. This analysis, which focused only on how gender was used in the conversation, is a reminder of the small moments that reinforce normative beliefs. By using a queer lens to reconsider how we answered Stephen’s “trick question” and the ensuing conversations, it is possible to see how easily we fall into patterns of sharing information and tropes that may privilege one group over another. These heteronormative patterns continued – almost completely – in the children’s interactions and non-heteronormative relationships were rarely topics in the literature and in their play and conversations.

Queer Methodology as a Lens to Analyze Play

This chapter focused on the children’s play during the reading club. My role during this time was principally as observer, so I created vignettes as way to reflect upon the children’s play, especially ways that their play reveals or reflects heteronormativity. My methodological framework draws on queer theory, a sociopolitical framing, and cultural constructivism to analyze ways that social infrastructures are naturalized in favor of heterosexuality. In Chapter 4, I considered how divergences from heterosexuality as identity were brought into and taken up in the club. This chapter extends on work of the
previous chapter, which explored how the readalouds and specific literary events were queered in time and space, and analyzes the children’s play was heteronormative. In what way is play heteronormative and where are opportunities to denaturalize this heteronormativity?

From the start of my dissertation research, I have striven to capture children’s worldviews to honor them as co-participants. The multimodal vignettes on the previous pages were designed to reveal topics and themes initiated by the children. These four subjects – bananas, poop, crushes, and an extended discussion on the human origin – represent the children’s voices, intentions, and desires. Our meetings created opportunities for queer(ed) identities; we queered reading in ways that affected how we saw identities, how we managed our time, and how we used space. By using a queering method to present data (i.e., multimodal vignettes), I hope to “trouble early childhood education’s straight and narrow fixation upon the natural, normative, and becoming-rational-and-autonomous individual child” (Taylor et al., 2014).

By reconceptualizing how my research findings are presented, as vignettes, I am exploring literacy and literacy research as a social practice. This process of presenting the children’s talk and play in multimodal vignettes is an opportunity to “listen well” to the children, to gain insight into their priorities, interests, concerns, and sense of self, which can “provide unexpected insights into their capabilities” (Pascal & Bertram, 2009, p. 255). I was inspired by Murris’ (2013, 2015) emphasis on developing symmetrical relationships with children in the context of classroom learning. While there may be reasons for power asymmetry between adults and children – for example, providing food
and shelter – seeing children as intellectual equals creates new opportunities to listen to and learn from children (Murris, 2015)

Presenting data through these the lenses of the vignette and academic analysis is a way to consider multiple perspectives. This is less a form of deconstruction (or poststructural critique that all interactions are subjective and therefore have no objective or singular meaning\(^{65}\)) and more a way to question the resources we have to make sense of these events. I perceive this as the goal of the epistemic justice framework: to consider how we collectively are able to make sense of the world given the knowledge resources available to us (Frank, 2013; Fricker, 2007). As I discussed in previous chapters, the children brought different hermeneutical resources together in the club and my analysis of their interactions revealed how variations led to conflict, dissonance, and shifting understanding. Each of these vignettes is a lens to look for disruptions to normative practices within the children’s play and talk as well as in my own interpretation and analysis. While these disruptions may not explicitly challenge heteronormativity, I discuss how each reveals an aspect of social organization that may affirm reproductive or developmental logics, both foundational to heteronormativity (Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009). They represent inquiries of the children’s mostly self-directed talk and actions during the club. The following table is an overview of the relationship between the theme/event, the vignette, the analytic method, and the connection between this analysis and the bigger project of the dissertation.

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\(^{65}\) For example, Derrida’s poststructuralism.
Table 6.1: Overview of analytic methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Event</th>
<th>Vignette Style</th>
<th>Analytic Method</th>
<th>Purpose of Method</th>
<th>Bigger picture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s interactions with each other and with themes, persistence of themes</td>
<td>Gallery walk: Image and text representations of bananas and poop, chronologically, reveal interactions of themes and network of talk</td>
<td>Qualitative inquiry of gallery walk with additional context</td>
<td>Examine how talk and participation changed over weeks</td>
<td>Chronological analysis reveals how interactions in physical space evolved and were location specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same as above</td>
<td>Multimodal “found poem” to represent ways romantic talk was integrated into our club meetings</td>
<td>Qualitative inquiry of found poem with additional context</td>
<td>Examine nature of romantic talk and interactions</td>
<td>Romantic talk queers developmental and heteronormative ideals of childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged talk of children; children as philosophers</td>
<td>Multimodal and multicolumn presentation of extended philosophical conversation</td>
<td>Gendered analysis of their talk</td>
<td>To draw attention to unquestioned assumptions about dominant ideologies.</td>
<td>Heteronormativity extends to our understanding of ideological beliefs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each vignette reflects a unique lens to analyze the data and reflects a material presentation of my coding scheme (Hammer et al., 2013). The table describes how each vignette offered a different perspective and was created for a different reason. Employing a range of methods is itself an act of queering time and space intended to disrupt normalize routines and beliefs (Ryan et al., 2013; Somerville, 2016). Creating vignettes was a way for me to rethink my role as a researcher and to explore different ways to illuminate how heteronormativity is embedded in space and location. It also was a way for me to write myself into the children’s play because most of the material used to create the vignettes was drawn from their self-directed play. Despite efforts to create spaces that would disrupt heterosexuality as the norm, this chapter reveals how heteronormativity bounded much of our play even when we transgressed other normative practices.
Conclusion

At the start, I proffered this chapter as an opportunity to think about the children’s play and interactions using a queer lens. The predominance of heteronormativity extended beyond talk of family, romantic play, and imaginary play, to the way our time and space was organized. The unquestioned tropes that informed our interactions, such as God is male and kissing is a heterosexual activity, suggest the pervasiveness of heteronormativity. Recall, Jane’s distress that she could have a crush on someone; crushes were something done to girls not something girls do (also see Huuki et al., 2015). Our lack of resistance coupled with dissonance during any transgressions (e.g., when Richard announced he had two dads) affirms that in this community heterosexuality, and particular ways of being heterosexual, was normed (e.g., heterosexual matrix and hegemonic masculinity). This chapter built on previous chapters and attempted to tease out explicit ways that the location of the club was a queering of literacy and social literacy events. While there were no definitive moments that marked our interactions as site-specific, shifting the reading club to a location that merged “official” and “unofficial” worlds of childhood (e.g., classroom and peer-based environments) created moments for the children to interact differently. In these different interactions, it became possible to see how heteronormativity was embedded in interactions.

Old Falvey Café, perhaps itself a marker of heteronormativity, was a site where I was somewhat successful in questioning and disrupting the adult-child power asymmetry that underlies developmental logic, one of the hallmarks of heteronormativity (Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009), but since I was the adult-in-charge in this space, I
needed to reinforce the asymmetry when the children risked hurting themselves (e.g.,
when Stephen was playing with the banana peel) or when their transgressions would
cause discomfort to fellow patrons or their parents. The children frequently policed one
another, either children to behave in certain ways (e.g., Erin’s coaching when Richard is
caught under the “kissletoe”) or noting when transgressions were too egregious or caused
too much dissonance (e.g., when Jane was pleading for Richard and Brendan to kiss).
Each of these reveals how heteronormativity was reinforced without question despite
mixed efforts to encourage disruptions.
Chapter 7
Implications and Concluding Remarks

In this concluding chapter, I offer a summary of my findings and consider implications of this study on literacy and education research. I return to my overarching question: what happens in an afterschool reading club when young children have opportunities to explore stories about diverse families? Through an iterative approach to the study design, including a process of self-reflection on the ways we were influencing each other, and drawing from epistemic justice and queer theory, I observed ways children’s play and engagement in the reading club resisted and reinforced heteronormativity. The reading club was a site to explore queerness as identity and spatiotemporal constructs. This is reflected in the design, including curriculum and organization (i.e., storybooks, activities, child-centered structure) and analysis, which attended to gender/sex/uality, families, and relationships. Epistemic justice was a lens to analyze how individuals participated and how participation influenced collective resources about family variation and relationships. Throughout the study, I was aware of my position as adult researcher and worked to understand how this affected the club and the study outcomes.

Identifying Researcher Bias
My desire to follow the children’s leads created challenging moments but these moments revealed normative practices in adult-child relationships. I was bound by the expectations of other adults including parents, fellow patrons, and the café owners. I was also aware that my identity as a straight, cisgender, white middle class mother and
literacy scholar affected my interactions with participants and their families. As I wrote earlier, being a mother connected me to the families. Our similar family structure was common ground that created bonds with the parents and children. I also found common ground with Jane’s mom, whose parents lived near my in-laws in Canada. Now that the study is over, I wonder how other aspects of my identity shaped relations with parents. Would Stephen’s dad, who had Latino heritage and was working class, have spoken to me differently if I shared a cultural and/or class background? What would Michael, Richard’s dad, have shared with me if I were a gay man?

I was also bound by my wish to explore specific topics with the children, yet I wanted to give children freedom to lead our time together and pursue their own interests. I hoped the reading club would be a liminal space between the “official” world of the children’s classroom and the “unofficial” world of their private, peer interactions (Genishi et al., 2009). Reading Karen Murris’ (2015) piece on epistemic equality offered a lens to make sense of this tension between my responsibilities as authority figure and my wish to do research that repositioned children is more active, subject positions:

When thinking alongside children... have epistemic modesty and epistemic trust. If what children say is not heard (but laughed at) – epistemic equality is absent. Epistemic equality is different from political equality or symmetry, in that adults clearly have more power over children. Teachers have the capacity to control the actions of children actively (e.g. administer punishments), but also passively, that is, there is always the possibility that teachers might use their capacity to regulate the children’s behaviour [sic] and even their thinking. Similarly, in the case of epistemic equality, teachers have the power to actively and passively use epistemic trust and modesty in their classrooms. These intellectual virtues are about openness to the possibility that when a child speaks she might contribute to the pool of knowledge, a possibility that should not be prejudged. (p. 334)
Epistemic equality is recognizing that children are intellectually competent and have something to add a community of knowers. To practice epistemic equality with children, adults must have epistemic modesty and trust. Epistemic modesty is acknowledging that our adult-perspective and self-knowledge does not supersede children’s contributions. It is a stance one can take, one that is open to the unknown, or more specifically that I, as a person who knows things, accept that my knowledge (or way of knowing the world) is not totalizing and universal; I can learn from my experiences with others. Epistemic trust is confidence that the speaker (i.e., a child) is capable to make contributions to the collective resources. Epistemic trust speaks in many ways to testimonial justice, or the idea that when a person speaks her/his voice will be heard and understood by the listeners. Epistemic trust is assurance that speakers will be recognized as having knowledge and be able to contribute to the community. Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to work toward epistemic equality, and I have used the term epistemic justice framework to describe the analytic process for considering the different ways the children knew and expressed their knowledge about the world.

**Epistemic Justice as a Way to Expand our Understanding of the World**

The division between hermeneutical justice and testimonial justice was a helpful analytical tool. This division served as a mapping tool to consider the different ways children engaged as speakers and listeners. The starkest example was when Richard told the group that he has “two dads, no mom”. Renee’s reaction, in particular, revealed that she was lacking hermeneutical resources to make sense of what Richard was saying. Repeatedly she insisted on biological determinism to “help” him understand why he must
have a mom. Even Richard’s helpers, Erin and Dorothy, struggled to find resources that would help them support Richard’s story of his family. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the children experienced a form of epistemic injustice because of a lack of hermeneutical resources to help them make sense of the information Richard was sharing. Richard’s experience should not surprise, as my critical content analysis of award-winning children’s literature revealed that literature – a source of knowledge for children – lacked diverse families, especially gay families.

This juxtaposition of Richard’s lived experiences with those portrayed in “the best” international English language children’s literature suggests that this shortage of diversity (Crisp et al., 2011; Kidd, 2009). By conducting a parallel analysis of this body of literature with Richard’s experiences in the club, I defined contours of idealized norms about families as found in literature against the lived experiences of this diverse group of children. This disconnect suggests that children’s literature did not offer these children an adequate range of resources that reflect the world in which they live. It may not be enough to conduct queered readings of heteronormative texts so that children from gay families can read themselves into the stories. We need to actively share literature that portrays diverse families, so that when children encounter and interact with families that

I recognize that literature is one of many sources of information for children, but as I have written earlier, given its high status, the world as it is portrayed in children’s literature may be a utopic or idealized version of the world, a world that is created by adults as they would like it to be (Bruhm et al., 2004).
are different from the perceived norm, they are able to understand and acknowledged the members of these families.  

The starting point for my use of queer theory considered queerness as a form of identity or identification. Thinking about queerness solely as a form of gendered or sexual identity overlooks inherent social organization emerging from heteronormativity. Moreover, to identify as queer (i.e., non normative gender or sexuality) does not necessary equate queerness. Queerness includes the rejection of heteronormativity including disrupting the safety and safeness in order to live “a life unscripted by the conventions of family inheritance, and child rearing” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 2). It is a recognition of and resistance to these conventions, a break from heteronormativity, including organization of time and space (Butler, 2008, Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009). By attending to ways that space and time are organized, it may be possible to identify heteronormativity as a form of public and create a counter public that resists the time and space constraints of the heteronormative. For Halberstam and Muñoz, this involved rejecting reproductive time and family time, including developmental logic of human

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67 I acknowledge that Brandon, a child with lesbian moms, rarely spoke up and experienced social disconnect from the rest of the group. I tried to find storybooks with two moms in an effort to bring his family into the club; however, the quality of literature with lesbian moms is poor and frequently focuses on having two moms as a problem that needs to be overcome. That there are fewer books about lesbian parents than gay parents may warrant closer examination, especially because lesbian couples head the majority of gay families (Kosciw et al., 2008).

68 Halberstam and Muñoz overlook queerness in children and childhood more generally, but also specifically to children being raised by one or more gay parents. While homonormativity, which is defined as gay people blindly accepting heterosexual ideals and reproducing it in same-sex relationships, is a valid and interesting issue regarding social organization, I believe this oversight of children limits arguments of queer scholars who delimit it as a counter public resisting family and reproductive time. As Ryan (2010) notes, queer children exist within the liminal space of dominant culture and their own private worlds. They learn at a young age to navigate and negotiate their identities based on location and movement through social circumstances.
growth. In this study, I considered how time and space, which are logically represented as movement and location, was disrupted for us in this club. While my first pass of the data (e.g., Chapter 4) considers queerness as identity and focused on the ways Richard interacted with the club, the remaining chapters (e.g., Chapters 5 and 6) focused on time/movement and space/location.

**Moving Beyond Queered Identity to Queered Time and Space**

By considering how time – and our time together – broke from normative encounters with literature, I identified encounters that disrupted my understanding of social reading practices and children’s engagement with literature. By analyzing the readaloud as a literary event, and drawing from Sipe’s model of reader response, I coded different kinds of responses and analyzed them through queer and epistemic justice lenses. By following Renee’s lead, this study offers another important finding: it is not enough to analyze reading interactions through a reader response model. I observed Renee’s behavior during readalouds and then talked to her about them, and through this I discovered that Renee was aware of her own comprehension practices and prepared herself to engage with literature. Her kinesthetic movement, though, was not tolerated in her classroom and neither the teacher nor her parents were aware that her dancing during storytimes was a form of engagement and meaning making for her. While this finding is not related to gender/sex/uality, our time together disrupted the routine and gave Renee a place to comfortably engage with literature and to talk about her process of engagement.

Engagement practices of young readers is an area that warrants further study and may be

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Considering children of gay parents as queered recognizes their co-existence in both straight and gay worlds.
taken up by this author or others in the future. Renee’s behavior attends to queer time and epistemic justice in the starkness of her statement – and her mother’s – that normative classroom behavior during reading time is very difficult for her because it constrains her desire and need to move in order to comprehend the content. Renee’s testimony reveals normative practices place her at a disadvantage and only by attending this afterschool reading club is she able to articulate her difference to the dominant group. Through this club, I learned that Renee’s reading practices veered from developmental norms and thus her behavior put her at a disadvantage in the classroom because she was expelled from the group activity and because her learning needs were not being met.

**Responding with Flexibility**
Initially, this study was designed to be a classroom observation study; however, institutional challenges made it impossible to conduct in the classroom. By moving the reading club to an offsite location, the study became an opportunity to think differently about literature, literary events, and also children and child participants. By picking a space that was not bound by school discourses, we were able to bend rules and create alternative practices. Initially, the children were excited but uncertain about the rules of our interactions. I observed those who tried to transgress rules and those who worked hard to enforce them. Our weekly interactions became a site of dialogic inquiry where transgressors responded to enforcers and vice versa. Over time, those who were the most likely to enforce the rules (e.g., Jane and Erin) became most likely to ignore me and club routines. Those who were most eager to transgress (i.e., my reflective memos on Stephen’s behavior in Chapter 3) became my sidekicks and were goal-oriented to our
group’s intentions. The space – and our interactions – gave us an opportunity to try different roles and identities. We were impacted by the non-normative space for a reading club for first graders. While we initially felt discomfort, by working together and through discomfort we learned about literacy practices, about each other, and about ourselves.

Through my analysis, I also consider how gender and sexuality controlled and guided interactions. For example, “Crushes”, the second multimodal vignette in Chapter 6, speaks to the curiosity some children had for romantic interactions, belying the ideal of childhood innocence or asexuality. These children were actively creating and narrating sexualized encounters that included crushes, kissing, and mistletoe. In all but one instance, they enacted heterosexual notions of relationship, often enforcing strict rules of engagement, “You must kiss a girl!” In this space the children had the freedom to explore these thoughts, feelings, and energies in ways that were not permitted in the classroom and which would have been difficult to observe in other peer encounters such as the playground or at playdates. I found the way they enacted sexuality – and heteronormativity – affirmed Blaise and Taylor’s (2012) observation that children’s romantic play reinforces heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity as the norm.

Looking Ahead
This study revealed, for me, the complexity of heteronormativity and its impact on society. I encourage others to ask: What happens when we use queer theory and epistemic justice framework to establish and conduct literary events and to analyze participants’ literacy practices during these events?
Queer theory, in this application, encourages us to reconsider the organization of space and time, to question ideas and practices that seem natural. By expanding my understanding of queerness beyond sexual object choice, I was able to identify important ways that assumptions about society – particularly spatial-temporal organization – are naturalized. By reconsidering our relationship with time/movement and space/location, this study identifies openings – or Muñoz’s (2009) potentialities – to see the world differently. Ryan (2010) notes the liminal space of children from gay families and the importance of creating spaces for them to discuss their families. I would add that it is also essential to talk about gay families with all children. Epistemic justice framework provided an opportunity to consider the flow of information and the carriers (e.g., speakers) of this information. Who had the right to speak? Who had the right to be heard? How was incongruent information integrated into interactions? Considering these questions during our time together helped to make visible the ways particular normalized practices privilege some at the expense of others.

To close, I return to key findings to outline how they can guide future research:

(1) Queer readings of heteronormative texts may not be enough to expand children’s conceptions of family beyond the heterosexual norm. We must advocate for inclusive texts that provide positive examples of a greater range of families so that children have the knowledge resources to understand new family variations. If not, children from gay families will face challenges when trying to share their families’ stories and histories with others.
This heteronormativity extends beyond our engagement with literature but to the ways children imagine the world. As the children’s play with their wild things revealed, they were drawing on storylines that reinforced the hierarchy of the heterosexual matrix even when the children “real life” interactions did not conform to this matrix. A wider range of depictions of families and romantic relationships may provide more varied scripts for imaginary play.

Young children, when asked, are able to share a great deal about how they engage in reading events. Rather than focus on reader response or narrower definitions of literacy skills, understanding how children are preparing themselves to engage literacy and literary events may offer insight for educators. Literary events that include epistemic equality may provide researchers with valuable opportunities to gain new insight of children, child cultures, and childhood more broadly.

Locating this reading club in a space that was unconventional helped to create a dialogic environment that disrupted routines encouraged new ways of being for readers, peers, and humans. The children and I were fortunate to deeply engage in literature and with each other in this setting, and through these encounters we were all able to test new ideas about the social practices of literacy. By reflecting on and analyzing these interactions, I discovered evidence of heteronormativity embedded in spatial and temporal dimensions of routine play and literary events. Lastly, I wish to offer one shortcoming of this study. The perspectives of childhood and children adhered to in this chapter reflect a western perspective and make assumptions about the values and beliefs of the families who participated in the study.
While there were differences among the families, each parent generally agreed with
western conventions of children and child rearing. Based on interview data, all parents
adhered to a developmental model of childhood and they saw this club as an opportunity
to enhance their children’s ability as readers and social actors. Even though this study
pushes against a developmental model of childhood and sought perspectives that
extended beyond this model, it is limited by my understanding and knowledge. I am
committed to continue to this trajectory of research.

My participants and my own experiences as a parent inform these final words.
Everyday we make choices. These choices may lead to sacrifices, rewards, or both. This
dissertation study represents a series of choices that led to an intense study on normative
conceptions of the family despite often feeling like I was neglecting my own. Through
discomfort I discovered euphoria, and I came to value waiting for rewards, and I learned
how letting go of things, such as a classroom study, may lead to richer outcomes. As the
girls in my study defined our last club, writing this paragraph is “twitterbeet”69, both
joyful and poignant all wrapped up in one, since it marks the end of a six-year journey
and the start of a new adventure.

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69 I explained that the happy-sad feeling that they were feeling about the club was called
“bittersweet” and they played with it.
APPENDIX A: Notes on Terminology & Conventions

This appendix provides definitions and descriptive information of terms and practices used throughout the document: definitions relating for *family and sexual diversity*; descriptions of key events or terms relating to the *reading club*, *transcript conventions*, and *file-naming conventions*. This appendix is a glossary of sorts, intended to provide readers with additional information about word choice and research practices.

**Family, Gender, and Sexual Diversity Terminology**

*Ally* – An individual who does not identify as LGBT but supports LGBT individuals and believe they should be treated with “fairness and equality” (GLAAD et al., 2012).

*Family models* – A term use to denote combinations of people who form families. Synonymous terms include family forms, family structures, and family constellations (Kosciw et al., 2008).

*Blended families* – Families that include one or more children from previous relationships from either partner.

*Gay families* – Families headed by parents who identify as gay or lesbian.

*Gay parents* – Parents who identify as gay or lesbian.

*Gender expression* – “How a person outwardly expresses… gender” (GLAAD et al., 2012)

*Gender identity* – “One’s internal sense of gender” (GLAAD et al., 2012)

*Gender vs. sexual orientation* – Sexual orientation refers to physical attraction to others; gender refers to one’s own identity.

*Gender/sex/uality* – “used to indicate the complex and shifting relationships that exist between gender, sex, and sexuality” (Blaise, 2014, p. 115)

*Heteronormative* – The assumption that romantic and/or sexual relationships are between a female and a male.

*Heterosexism* – An explicit assumption that biases romantic or sexual relationships between a man and a woman.

*LGBT* – Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered. I purposefully did not include more identities in this dissertation because I do not feel I could do justice to the complex identities, especially because only two families self-identified as gay.

*Openly gay* – Preferred term (vs. “out of the closet”) for lesbian and gay individuals whose sexual orientation is widely known (GLAAD et al., 2012)

*Romantic relationships* – I have chosen the term romantic relationships rather than sexual relationships because sexual relationships risks focusing the nature of the relationship on sexual interactions and intercourse; however, for most children the relationship of two parents living together is asexual. Furthermore, since LGBT relationships often are
sexualized in a way that heterosexual relationships are not (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010), choosing “romantic” rather than “sexual” is a political decision to disconnect this focus on LGBT relationships.

**Same-sex parents** – Parents who identify as in either male-male or female-female relationship. In this study, two sets of parents self-identified as being in same-sex relationships. While there is some debate between same-sex and same-gender, I chose the term same-sex because of their self-identification. I am not sure if these couples would or did identify as same-gender (i.e., cisgendered male with transgender male). It is possible that other parents were in same-sex relationships (i.e., a cisgendered female and a transgender male), but this information was not shared with me and thus is beyond the scope of the study.

**Sexual orientation** – How an individual identifies when discussing sexual relationships (e.g., a gay man, lesbian, bisexual)

**File Naming Conventions**
All data files were dated using YYYY-MM-DD format as recommended by Nancy Hornberger. This allows files to be sorted chronologically by filename. Club audio files begin with “A-“, video files begin with “V-“, Interviews begin with “Int-“, etc. All files were catalogued in a workbook of spreadsheets and updated weekly.

**Table A.1: File naming conventions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Convention</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Club Video</td>
<td>V-[YYYYMMDD]file#</td>
<td>V-[20150303]2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club Audio (main)</td>
<td>A-[YYYYMMDD]file#</td>
<td>A-[20150412]1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club Audio (secondary)</td>
<td>A-[YYYYMMDD]pr.file#</td>
<td>A-[20150412]pr.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>INT-[YYYYMMDD]int#</td>
<td>Int-John[131012]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldnote</td>
<td>A-[YYYYMMDD]fn.file#</td>
<td>A-[20150512]fn.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript</td>
<td>T-INT-[Name][YYYYMMDD]int#</td>
<td>T-INT-John[131012]1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log of club</td>
<td>Log_Club#</td>
<td>Log_Club#4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reading Club Terminology

Cumulative, collaborative, or final book project – Also known as Club Reports (Appendix I). As part of the artifact collection, I worked with the children to design a project that would serve as a physical artifact of our time together. Throughout the dissertation, I refer to it as the cumulative, collaborative, or final book project. Each of these terms reflect the nature of the project: cumulative because we worked together over multiple weeks to consider, design, and create the project; collaborative because each member of the club contributed to the project; and final because it was finished at the end of the club and I distributed copies of it to the children during our final club meeting.

Field journals – Each child received a 5.5” x 8” blank notebook to record ideas during the club. These books were similar to my field journal. Like mine, the pages were unlined to minimize the impulse to write for writing’s sake. I gave them field journals to encourage them to feel like co-researchers.

Overview of curriculum (described in Chapter 3): Weeks 1 to 4 were designed to “roam around the known”, Marie Clay’s idea that to create effective learning spaces teachers and students need to understand “each other’s goals, resources, and ways of acting” (McNaughton, 2014, p. 89). From week 5 to week 9, we read texts that were selected for their diverse representations of family, ones that mirrored the diversity of the group; activities were structured to prompt discussions of this diversity. In the last weeks of our meetings (weeks 10-13), we worked collaboratively on a cumulative project. In the final week (week 14), we held a celebration to mark the end of our time together. I presented each child with a copy of Club Reports at this celebration.

Picturebooks – Following practices of other children’s literature scholars, I use this term as a compound noun to describe children’s storybooks whose form affords equal weight to illustrations and text in order to tell the story (Sipe, 2008, p. 14).

Readaloud – A whole group activity led by one person (typically me) reading a book to the rest of the group. I have chosen to use a compound noun “readaloud” following the convention of Sipe (2008) rather than a two-word term “read aloud.”

Transcription Conventions

… – talk not related to subject, often parallel talk with a different subgroup of participants
[ ] – indicate actions, events, and/or timestamp
# – Line number. With the exceptions of short excerpts, transcripts in this dissertation have numbered lines. These lines are used to make it easy for the reader to refer between the description, analysis, and original excerpt. As such, the starting number is arbitrary and for reference purposes only.
APPENDIX B: Recruitment, Consent, Permission, & Assent Forms

This appendix includes copies of all forms used in the study. The University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board approved all forms before I distributed them. The school principal and the classroom teacher approved the recruitment forms before being sent home with students in Mrs. Michaels’ classroom. All identifying information has been changed to reflect pseudonyms used for this study.
Recruitment For Study on Afterschool Reading Clubs

Dear Guardian or Parent,

I would like to invite your family to participate in a study on children’s interactions with children’s literature and understandings of family diversity. Children gather information about families from many different sources, including day-to-day interactions with others as well exposure through the media – including film, television, radio, digital, and print forms. **The purpose of this study is to consider how literature depicting a variety families may influence ways children think and talk about families outside of school spaces.** Through this study I hope to understand how children can inform us about normalized social practices around family members and roles.

This study is informed by my experiences as a classroom volunteer in your child’s first grade classroom. **It is designed as an out-of-school reading club to create a neutral site for children to engage in literature and discuss literature with little or no concern about curriculum or school rules.** The study uses ethnographic methods to gather information about beliefs and routines. No interventions or testing materials will be used nor will I draw on any events in your child’s classroom. This out-of-school study is designed to give voice to children’s experiences as they negotiate family identities in literature in order to gain a better understanding of children’s engagement with books on diverse families.

This **dissertation research study** is a required component of my doctoral degree (Ph.D.) in Reading/Writing/Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education. This project, entitled “**Exploring Family Diversity in an Afterschool Reading Club**”, will investigate ways children are talking, writing, and drawing about issues relating to families and family member’s roles through reading, discussion, and creation of text and images. I will audio and/or video record visits and collect or photograph samples of the students’ writing and drawing done during the club. Funding for this research has been provided through a research fellowship from the University of Pennsylvania in support of my doctoral dissertation research.

**Participation in this research study is completely voluntary.** This **recruitment letter** is an invitation for you and your child to participate in this study. If you agree, please register your child for the reading club, then I will send you a separate letter with more details and to get your consent and permission for your family to participate in the study. If you do not want to be a part of this research study, then do not complete the registration form on the other side of this page.

If you have any questions about this study and the afterschool reading club, please let me know.

Rachel Skrlac Lo

Doctoral Candidate in Reading/Writing/Literacy, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania
Conversations about Families: A Reading Club

Your child is invited to join an afterschool reading club!

Who: Students in Mrs. [MICHAELS’] first grade class
What: A book club to read and interact with international books about families
Where: [OLD FALVEY CAFÉ]
When: 3:30 - 4:30 on Thursdays, Feb. 5 – May 28 (except spring break)
Why: To read, discuss, and respond to a great collection of stories!
How much? No cost.

Students will meet in Mrs. [MICHAELS’] room at school dismissal and we will walk to [OLD FALVEY CAFÉ] together. Parents and/or guardians will pick children up at 4:30. All materials and books are provided by Rachel Skrlac Lo, the instructor. [OLD FALVEY CAFÉ] has been selected as the meeting place due to the proximity to [ARCHIBALD] Elementary. I will provide a snack for your child. More details about this club are on the other side of the page.

About the instructor:
Rachel Skrlac Lo is a doctoral candidate in Reading/Writing/Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education. Since 2013, Rachel has volunteered in Mrs. [MICHAELS’] classroom once a week. While in the classroom, she assists with small-group and individual instruction. She frequently shares books from her extensive collection of international children’s literature. Rachel has run afterschool book clubs since 2011 and she has received numerous awards and grants for her research on children’s literature and for her work with book clubs.

☐ Yes. Please sign up my child and send me more information on the afterschool reading club.

Name of child: __________________________________________________________
Name of parent(s): ______________________________________________________
Phone: ___________________________ Email: ________________________________

Best way to reach me: ☐ Phone ☐ Email
January 5, 2015

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am seeking families to participate in a research study that I am conducting to complete my doctoral studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

What is the study?
The title of the project is “Exploring Family Diversity in an Afterschool Reading Club”, and it is designed to explore how children learn about and understand family diversity in literature and in their own lives. I have formed an afterschool club that will meet for an hour once a week from February to May 2015.

When and where will the study take place?
The study will take place during the 2014-15 academic year and it will be held at [OLD FALVEY CAFÉ], the coffee shop next to [ARCHIBALD] Elementary School. Starting in February, we will meet once per week for one hour. Your child’s teacher, Mrs. [MICHAELS], recommended this location as it is conveniently located near the school for easy transportation to the club setting. I will provide your child with a snack each week courtesy of the owners of [OLD FALVEY CAFÉ]. You or an authorized guardian can pick your child up at [OLD FALVEY CAFÉ] at 4:30 after each club meetings.

Who am I and why am I doing this study?
I am a doctoral candidate in Reading/Writing/Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education. My dissertation research explores intersections of social literacy practices with literary events. How do young, emergent readers interact with different kinds of literature and how do they draw on their own experiences to make meaning of texts? I have chosen to focus on issues around family diversity because other research I have conducted revealed that families in literature tend to be depicted in a very narrow way. I would like to know what happens when children are given opportunities to read and engage with more diverse representations of families.

In addition to my scholarly interests, I have coordinated and run afterschool reading clubs in a suburban district for the last three years. My research is greatly informed by my own family and our experiences. Since September 2013, I have volunteered in Mrs. [JESSICA MICHAELS’] classroom as a classroom aide. I enjoy my work in Mrs. [MICHAELS’] classroom and learn so much by participating in the daily routines of a first-grade classroom. I have chosen the [ARCHIBALD] catchment as the site for my research study because it is such a rich and diverse community. I believe your child will bring valuable insight into general discussions about family members and roles, among other important issues in how children develop their views. I would like to record his/her experiences and opinions, which I will later analyze and write about as a component of my doctoral dissertation.
What will happen during the reading club?
At each club meeting, I will share several picturebooks that include diverse representations of families. These books will be selected for a variety of reasons including quality of writing and illustration, age appropriateness, and potential interest to the children. Also, each book will include characters that have families. The family often will not be the focus of the story but will provide contextual information that supports the story setting and narrative. Each week, I will read at least one story to club members and then provide opportunities for the children to respond to the books. I have designed a small curriculum to engage the children and I am happy to share this with you at any point. During our club meetings I will observe your child’s interaction and I may ask your child a series of open-ended questions that will be audio- and video-recorded. I may also take photos of artwork, creative play, and other elements of our interactions. The purpose for recording our visits in such a way is to allow me the opportunity to review the work and to deepen my understanding and provide context for thinking about your child’s experiences.

What are the risks and benefits?
I have been careful to design a study that poses little risk to your child. Any books or toys that I bring to share with your child will be to create a bridge or prompt to connect to your child. These items should not be considered interventions or testing devices. There will be no tests or evaluations of your child at any point during the club; this is an informal reading environment designed to allow me to observe and record your child’s interactions with literature and other children. None of my observations will be shared with any instructors or people who are in a position to assess your child’s abilities. While Mrs. [MICHAEL’S] and staff at [ARCHIBALD] Elementary will know that your child is participating in the study, I will not share what we are doing or how any child participates in the club. There is a small risk that your child or another participant will share our experiences in a school or social setting, but this should not negatively affect your child.

To maintain privacy when my study is published later, I will not use your child’s real name, your name or the names of any other participants, and the name of the school. All audio recordings will be kept secure and then destroyed when the research is completed. Transcripts from the audio files (with names and identifying information removed) and any of your child’s work (also with names removed) will be used in my study, in presentations, and for teaching other teachers issues around family diversity. When information is shared, all identifiers will be anonymized with pseudonyms and the information will be decontextualized, drawing on certain features of our interactions rather than whole events. While I will make every effort to keep your child’s personal information private, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

The study is not designed to have any positive benefit to participants. There is a small possibility that this reading club will have a positive impact on your child, since studies have found that additional exposure to literature can increase student’s reading performances. Moreover, by providing texts and activities that may better reflect their own experiences, participants may feel more engaged and able to identify with books. While this is not the intention of the reading group, it is a potential small benefit to participation.

What do I need parents and guardians to do?
In order for me to proceed with this study, I ask you to do two things:
1. Throughout the study I hope to have opportunities to discuss this research project and club activities with you. I will be available to talk each week if you should wish, and you do not need to sign a consent form to participate in these informal conversations. They will not be a part of the study unless you give me your consent to include them. As a parent you understand your child best. Your interpretations and observations are an important part of this study. I invite you to participate in this study. Participation will consist of a 30-minute semi-structured interview at the beginning and end of the study. I have created separate consent forms for you and other members of the household who may wish to participate in this study.

2. As your child’s legal guardian I need you to give your child permission to participate in this study.
I have attached a research agreement that requires your signature to indicate that you give your permission for your child’s and your own participation in the study. By signing you give me permission to record (audio and video) the club meeting and any interviews with you or your child, and I can take photographic images of any materials participants create or share in the club. I will explain the consent forms to your child and will answer any questions he or she may have. I am also available by phone, email, or in person to answer any questions you may have.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There will be no loss of privileges for you or your child if you do not want your child to participate. He or she will have no loss of benefits to which he or she would otherwise be entitled. If you do not want your child to participate, select the 2nd option on the next page.

If you have any questions, please contact me, Rachel Skrlac Lo, at [DELETED] or via email at [DELETED]. You may also contact my supervising professor, Dr. Vivian Gadsden, at [DELETED]

If you have any questions about your child’s rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board, [DELETED]. You may phone them at [DELETED]or [DELETED], or email them at [DELETED].

Sincerely,
Rachel Skrlac Lo
Doctoral Candidate in Reading/ Writing/Literacy
University of Pennsylvania
Parent/Guardian Permission Form

Parent Permission:

Please choose from the following statements and sign below:

_____ YES: I give my permission for my child’s participation in the “Exploring Family Diversity in an Afterschool Reading Club” study

_____ YES: I give my permission for my child to be audio- and/or video-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for the purposes of this study, for his or her artwork and other creative documents to be analyzed.

_____ NO: I do NOT want any recognizable visual or audio representation of my child or my child’s work to be used for the purposes of this study.

_____ NO: I do not give permission for my child to participate in the “Exploring Family Diversity in an Afterschool Reading Club” study

Parent/Guardian Signature: ________________________________ Date: ______________

Printed name: ____________________ Phone number: _____________________

Student’s Name: ________________________________

Additional information
This information is for your child’s safety and will not be included in the study.

Who will pick your child up from the club?

Name: ________________________________ Contact Information: ________________________________

Does your child have any allergies or medical conditions about which I should know? If yes, please provide details below:

____________________________________________________________________________________

Comments/Questions:
Parent/Guardian Consent Form

When you sign and return this document Rachel Skrlac Lo you are agreeing to participate in this research study. Participation involves a 30-minute interview at the beginning and the end of the study. Additionally, I may record or take notes of any or our conversations for the duration of the research study including during the reading club and in follow-up interactions regarding the reading club.

If you have any questions or there is something you do not understand, please ask. If you are under 18 years of age, you will need to have your parent or guardian consent to your participation as well. They will need to sign the document below.

Signature ofParticipant: ______________________________

Print Name of Participant: __________________________________

Date: ______________________________

Comments/Questions:
Child Assent Document

January 5, 2015

Dear Child of Interest;

You are invited to be part of my research study called “Exploring Family Diversity in an Afterschool Reading Club”.

What is a research study?
A research study is the work someone does to try to answer a question that she is curious about. Research studies come in many different shapes and sizes, but all involve researchers gathering information to answer the question.

What is my study?
I want to learn what you think about families and different kinds of families. I want to know:
- What do you think about different kinds of families?
- Do you think that families in books are like families you know?
- How do our families shape how we learn, play, and interact with others?

What will I do to answer these questions?
I have created an afterschool club where we will read different books from around the world and talk about these books. I may ask you some questions. I’ll take notes or record what is happening in the club. I want to get to know you better and work with you as you participate in the club. My research study will:
- Study what you do when we are in the reading club together, and
- Explore the ways you talk about families, including those in books and the ones you know.

**Where and when will the study take place?**
It will take place at the coffee shop [*OLD FALVEY CAFÉ*] after school one day per week from February to May.

**Why am I doing this study?**
This research will help me write my dissertation, a very long paper that I need to write so that I can graduate from university.

**Why do you need to agree to be in the study?**
This study is official business and needs to be approved by my school, the University of Pennsylvania. The University wants to know that you have agreed to be in the study before I can get permission to start the club.

**What do you need to do to be in the study?**
If you agree to be in this study, please sign your name on the next page. This tells me that you will be a part of this study.

I will not tell anyone who you are. Even though I will write your name down, I will not use your real name when I show my work to other people. All information that I collect will be kept private and locked up.

*Your choice to be in this project is voluntary, which means you can decide if you want to be in it. If you choose to not participate, nothing bad will happen.*

If you do not want to be in this study, choose the 2nd option on the next page or do not return the form.
Even after you agree, you can change your mind at any time.

**Do you want to learn more about my study?**
I can answer any questions you may have about this project at any time. You can call me, email me, or ask me questions when I am in your classroom. I can answer any questions your parents or guardians have.

I can be reached by phone, [DELETED], or by email, [DELETED].

Thank you very much,

Ms. Rachel Skrlac Lo  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of Pennsylvania
Student Assent Form

Student Assent:

Please choose from one answer and sign below:

_______ I agree to be in the study.

_______ I do NOT want to be in the study.

Student Signature: ____________________________________________

Date: _________________

Printed name: ___________________________________________________

Comments/Questions:
APPENDIX C: Research Questions and Conceptual Figure

Overarching Research Question:
What happens in an afterschool book club when young readers have opportunities to explore stories about diverse families?

Secondary Questions:
RQ1: How are families represented in literature?
RQ2: How do students talk about books, reading, and engage in literacy practices in which variations of families are included?
RQ3: How do I honor the students’ voices, intentions, expertise, and desires when their objectives don’t align with mine?

Figure C.1: Flow of participant engagement during club meetings
APPENDIX D: Interview Protocols

These protocols identify topics for **semi-structured interviews** with research participants and their parents. The goal of the semi-structured interviews is to gather information to answer the overarching questions (column 3). Since the interviews are semi-structured, representative questions (column 4) displays a range of questions that will be used to start conversations, especially with child participants. I also used physical prompts, such as images or material objects to elicit responses. For example, I may use “evocative stimuli” (Lit, 2003) to aide students articulate their ideas and opinions. These stimuli may include a storybook that I ask students to respond to or images that I ask the child to interpret. For the child participants, these protocols will be used throughout the study; for the parent participants, these will be used in pre- and post-interviews.

**Table D.1: Interview protocols**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant group</th>
<th>Topic of discussion</th>
<th>Overarching question</th>
<th>Representative questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Children          | Background          | What parts of his/her background does the child feel are significant enough to share? What do I need to know to frame future questions (e.g., divorced parents) | - Think back to what you would call a good day. Tell me a little about that day. Can you tell me about a bad day? What made it a bad day?  
- What are some of your favorite things to do? (read, play, go to school, play a sport, etc.) |
| **Families** | **How does the child talk about families, including her/his own?** | - Can you tell me about your family? How would you describe your family?  
- What are some of your favorite things to with your family? Who is there?  
- Can you tell me about some different families you know?  
- Do you spend time with other family members? What do you do?  
- Do you usually tell your parent(s) about the things that happen to you during the day? What do they say when you tell them?  
- Who does your family remind you of? Can you think of any characters in books, movies, or television programs that remind you of your family? |
| **Social interactions** | **How does the child make sense of social interactions?** | - Can you tell me about some of your friends?  
  - Do you visit their homes?  
  - Do they visit your home? Follow-up: Why is that?  
  - What do you like to do together?  
  - How are their homes like yours? Different?  
  - What do you like to do together?  
  - Does anyone ever tell you to play with or not to play with certain friends? Why do you think that is? |
| Reading beliefs & practices | What are the child’s attitudes towards and practices around reading? | - Why did you join this reading club?  
- Who’s a good reader? Why do you think so?  
- How much time do you spend reading everyday?  
- What is one of your favorite things to read?  
- Can you describe a time when you read at home? At school? Elsewhere?  

How does literature inform the child’s interactions with the world? | - Can you tell me how this story made you feel? Point to a point in the story you liked, disliked, shared with someone.  
- Do you think the story could really happen? Why?  
- Which characters remind you of others? Who do they remind you of?  

Parents | Background/family dynamics | What parts of his/her background does the parent feel are significant enough to share? | - Can you tell me about your family?  
- Are you the sole caregivers to your child? If not, who else is involved?  
- What kind of schooling/child care did your child have before starting at [ARCHIBALD] this year? (prompts: kindergarten, day care, family help, babysitter/nanny, etc.)  
- How would you describe your child’s reading abilities and interest in reading? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspectives on literacy and literature</th>
<th>How do school experiences shape exposure to literature and literacy events?</th>
<th>How do home literacy practices shape exposure to literature and literacy events?</th>
<th>How does an afterschool reading club like this one “fit” into the parents’ understanding of literacy?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Can you tell me briefly why you decided to send your child to this school?</td>
<td>- Can you describe a typical reading event for your child at home?</td>
<td>- Why did you sign your child up for the club?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What role do you think books play in the classroom?</td>
<td>- Do you read to your child? Does someone else?</td>
<td>- How does an afterschool-club compare to other interactions your child has with texts?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do you have any thoughts or ideas about the kind of literature this is used (or should be used) in schools?</td>
<td>- Who chooses the books your child reads? What factors influence book selection?</td>
<td>- Does your child talk about the club? (POST-)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does Mrs. Michaels describe your child?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Describe a typical conversation you have with your child about the club? With your partner/spouse? How do you talk about the club together?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This appendix is a chronological list of the readalouds, including date of reading, length of readaloud, audio and video timestamps, and any significant information.
Table E.1: Readaloud schedule and data log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Total Time</th>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 02.05</td>
<td>Everywhere Babies By Susan Meyers &amp; Marla Frazee (2001)</td>
<td>9 m 20 s</td>
<td>V3 11:15 – V4 3:00</td>
<td>53:00</td>
<td>Prompt to discuss own family and other models of families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 02.19</td>
<td>Home By Carson Ellis (2015)</td>
<td>17 m 00 s</td>
<td>V2 10:00 – V3 9:25</td>
<td>21:49</td>
<td>Prompt to discuss own family and other models of families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 02.26</td>
<td>Stuck by Oliver Jeffers (2011)</td>
<td>12 m 52 s</td>
<td>V1 12:30 – V2 7:47</td>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Erin away; Prompt to discuss own family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 03.12</td>
<td>Lily Takes a Walk By Satoshi Kitamura (1987)</td>
<td>20 m 14 s</td>
<td>V2 8:20 – V3 9:25</td>
<td>26:00</td>
<td>Dorothy away; Prompt to discuss own family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 03.19</td>
<td>Chato and the Party Animals (part 1) By Gary Soto &amp; Susan Guevara (2000)</td>
<td>20 m 51 s</td>
<td>V4 0:00 – V5 3:16</td>
<td>30:00</td>
<td>Prompt to discuss family variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 03.26</td>
<td>Chato and the Party Animal (part 2)</td>
<td>No video</td>
<td>No video</td>
<td>31:00</td>
<td>Video camera not charged; Prompt to discuss variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 04.09</td>
<td>Christian the Hugging Lion By Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell, &amp; Amy June Bates (2010)</td>
<td>13 m 31 s</td>
<td>V2 2:30 – 16:01</td>
<td>19:00</td>
<td>Prompt to discuss variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where the Wild Things Are By Maurice Sendak (1963)</td>
<td>11 m 08 s</td>
<td>V2 16:07 – V3 9:40</td>
<td>34:00</td>
<td>Prompt to discuss own family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 04.23</td>
<td>No book</td>
<td>We review books and discuss final project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 04.30</td>
<td>Everyone Poops* By Taro Gomi (1993)</td>
<td>5 m 41 s</td>
<td>V1 13:55</td>
<td>Richard away; Spontaneous readalouds * = Stephen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lily Takes a Walk** By Satoshi Kitamura</td>
<td>5 m 42 s</td>
<td>V2 2:00</td>
<td>** = Jane</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where the Wild Things Are*** By Maurice Sendak</td>
<td>15 m 5 s</td>
<td>V2 12:00</td>
<td>27:00</td>
<td>*** = Renee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 05.07</td>
<td>I Don’t Like Koala By Sean Ferrell &amp; Charles Santoso (2015)</td>
<td>6 m 35 s</td>
<td>V4 4:25 – 11:00</td>
<td>Jane &amp; Brendan; Prompt to discuss own family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 05.21</td>
<td>The Purim Superhero By Elisabeth Kushner &amp; Mike Byrne (2013)</td>
<td>8 m 03 s</td>
<td>V4 7:55 – 10:58</td>
<td>53:00</td>
<td>I rush because it is at the end of club; Prompt to discuss own family and family variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 05.28</td>
<td>I Don’t Like Koala (rereading)</td>
<td>5 m 36 s</td>
<td>V5 1:00 – 6:36</td>
<td>Reading to Brendan &amp; Richard; others play</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 06/04</td>
<td>King &amp; King By Linda de Haan &amp; Stern Nijland (2000)</td>
<td>6 m 00 s</td>
<td>No video</td>
<td>48:00</td>
<td>Video camera not charged; Prompt to discuss variation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F: Samples of Club Materials

This appendix includes materials that I prepared for each club (e.g., lesson plans and parent letters) as well as a selection of images from children’s field notebooks.
CONVERSATIONS ABOUT FAMILIES
AN AFTERSCHOOL READING CLUB
Feb. 5 – May 28, 2015 – Thursdays, 3:15 – 4:30 pm – [OLD FALVEY CAFÉ]

Instructor/Researcher: Rachel Skrlac Lo

Club planning schedule

**Essential question:** How are families represented in literature?
**Essential question:** How do students talk about books, reading, and engage in literacy practices in which family variations are included?
**Essential question:** How do I honor the students’ voices, intentions, expertise, and desires when their objectives don’t align with mine?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Materials/prep:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>- Blank books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 8.5 x 11 paper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Pencils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Coloring pencils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- picturebooks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would we include in a picturebook about families?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect consent forms and emergency contact information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss why we are meeting:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To spend time reading and talking about books, ideas in books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I want to hear what you have to say and learn from how you think about stories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hand out sketchbooks, put out crayons and pencils</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Roam around the known”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 1-2 picturebooks aloud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <em>All the World; Everywhere Babies</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Make our own picturebook using 8.5 x 11 sheet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conversations about Families Reading Club
Parent Page – March 12, 2015

**Book of the week:**

*Lily Takes a Walk* tells two stories at the same time. Lily, a young schoolgirl, recounts her story in the text.

Her dog's story is told through the pictures. The illustrations provide humorous twists to Lily's story and the dog's expressions help the reader navigate through the “mean” streets of a friendly city neighborhood. Dual perspectives offer readers new ways of seeing the world as well as build understanding of text and image relationships in books.

**Meeting Recap:**

Last week, the manager at *OLD FALVEY CAFÉ*, shared her observations: “They are having so much fun and they have so much energy!” This is so true! One challenge is to find ways to get everyone's attention at the same time. Recognizing their varied interests, each week I share a range of books and activities that the children can choose from after I've read the book-of-the-week aloud.

One discussion last week was whether our club was a book or reading club. While a few members hotly contested our group's identity, I would emphasize that we are a reading club. During our time together, we read a book and I offer members an opportunity to participate in an activity related to the book. I also bring in a few other books that are related to the week's theme or that may interest the children. For me, this group is heavily engaged in literacy events even when it looks like chaotic. I have overheard conversations about different books, what it means to be a reader, and critiques of book vs. movie adaptations. I observe & participate in collaborations for storytelling and story writing, and I've refereed disputes over what it means to be a reader in our community. Each child brings different perspectives and skills to our small community. It's a thrill to work with them as we navigate this space together.

---

**Did you know?**

*If you are worried about double parking during the pick-up, you are always welcome to park in the [ARCHIBALD] lot. It is open until after 5 pm*

Our next meeting will be next **Thursday, March 12th**. Like this week, I will meet the students in Mrs. [MICHAELS'] classroom and walk them to *OLD FALVEY CAFÉ*.

Our other meeting dates are:

- Mar. 19, 26
- Apr. 9, 16, 23, 30

**Questions or comments?**

Please do not hesitate to contact me!
Book of the week:

The Purim Superhero by Elisabeth Kushner and Mike Byrne. Several weeks ago this book arrived in the mail. Before I could read it, my kids stole it off my desk and disappeared. I finally recovered it and hope it will be equally loved by our group. It’s the story of a little boy who can’t decide what to be for the Purim celebration. With guidance from his sister and dads, he finds a way to fit in with his friends without abandoning his own love of aliens!

Club update:

I write this update with a sobering realization that our time together is coming to an end. After this week, we have only two more clubs. It’s hard to believe that when this group first met there was snow on the ground and our short walk from school necessitated bundling up in all our winter gear! I am so grateful for this time with your children. They have taught me so much. A few weeks ago, one child asked me if I loved them. Before I could respond, another replied: “Of course she does but not as much as her own children!” Another added, “But that’s only because you haven’t known us as long!” This energy and enthusiasm is so exciting and my affection for your children grows each week. It also reflects the playful nature of our meetings!

As we work and play together, I reflect on my research goals and purpose for forming the group. One theme that I continue to think about is the relationship between adults and children, particularly with regards to power dynamics. This week, I’m thinking about the different ways we can listen to each other. Bronwyn Davies (2014) writes about emergent listening and the importance of paying attention to factors that are influencing how we listen. Emergent listening is being open to the not-yet-known rather than judging against an ideal. Often we engage in conversations with children in a position of “knower” or expert. When we only listen for a particular response, we risk being disengaged and getting stuck in a cycle of repeating only the known. Our reading club, set in a non-traditional learning space for first graders, has created multiple opportunities to reconsider what it means to be an engaged listener for your children and especially for me.

Reminders

Worried about double parking during pick-up? Use [ARCHIBALD] lot until 5 pm.

Our next meeting will be Thursday, May 28th. I will meet the students in Mrs. [MICHAELS’] classroom and walk them to [OLD FALVEY CAFÉ].

Our LAST meeting will be on June 4th, 2015

Questions or comments? Please do not hesitate to contact me!
A selection of images from Dorothy’s field notebook, week 12
A selection of images from Richard’s Field Notebook, Week 12
APPENDIX G: Club Reports, Our Final Book Project

This appendix includes a reproduction of the final book project, Club Reports. The original pages were created on 9”x12” sheets. These were scanned and reduced to 8.5”x11” pages, which were then copied and bound with coil binding. Each participant received a copy.

As part of data collection, I worked with the children to design a project that would serve as a physical artifact of our time together. Throughout the dissertation, I refer to it as the cumulative, collaborative, or final book project. Each of these terms reflect the nature of the project: cumulative because we worked together over multiple weeks to consider, design, and create the project; collaborative because each member of the club contributed to the project; and final because it was finished at the end of the club and I distributed copies of it to the children during our final club meeting.

All identifying information has been blinded. Unfortunately, the blinding process obscured the final two pages.
Club reports

by: Renee, Brendan, Jane, Stephen, Dorothy, Richard, Erin

Mrs. Lo
CLUB REPORTS
by
members of the
AFTERSCHOOL READING CLUB

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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
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</thead>
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<td>About this book</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuck</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ning-a-thing, parts 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily Takes a Walk</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ning-a-thing, part 3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian, the Hugging Lion</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ning-a-thing, part 4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where the Wild Things Are</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ning-a-thing, part 5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone Poops</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ning-a-thing, part 6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Don’t Like Koala</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ning-a-thing, part 7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the authors</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABOUT THIS BOOK

Each page in this book was done by a club member. Working with others, we exchanged ideas on ways to create something that would remind us of our time together. We decided that a book would be a perfect object to remember a reading club. Members picked books to write about, and we added the wild things to remember that sometimes the club felt like a wild rumpus!

This book was lovingly created and shows how we came together as a community to share ideas & books. Each person got to choose what they wanted to do and we should be very proud of our final book!

LET THE WILD RUMPUS START!
Floyd's kite got stuck. It became stuck in a tree. He tossed things in the tree to get the kite out.
I love the monkey page because it's funny.

by Dorothy
My name is Batl-Bare and I am 34 years old. I fit the other Batl Bare and I have a sord. By Brendan I have a army to.
my ning-a-Thing is fancy the other ning-a-Things are crazy. I love me. I have a dress that is fancy.
One day Lily went on a walk with her dog Nicky. Lilly likes to walk hours and hours on the hill. And she walked buy the
Shops and then she went to bed. I really liked this book because I like the monsters.
Once in a world
of ning-a-things
There was a...
Crazy-ning-a-thing
The crazy ning-a-
thing was like a
Jester he would always
...
Take in castles
Christian the Hugging Lion

Do you think a lion could really hug you without biting you?
Read Christian the hugging lion.

One day two men named Ace and John bought a lion. His name was Christian. Christian loved to hug. Ace and John took Christian everywhere they went.

by Erin
My wild thing

A Stella

My name is Stella and I'm 2 years old. I live in New York. I love to go to the pool. I love the color red. I think may-may baby and family fight too much. Please tell them to stop.

From Stella
I like the last page because he is brave at home and his supper was nothing for him. I think the book is made wild. It's soft, sad, and funny.

-Hoho Hottory

By Renee
I am the blue bear.

You do not know me.

I am your friend.

No that is not true.

I am very smart.

You should not have said that.

I said no to you.

I am ready for bed.

Bay bay.
I love this book because it is funny.
Also it is cool.
Also it is amazing.

By Stephen!
Hi, I'm Battle Bear.

I fit in battle, I am a leader in my team. Their names are Crazy-Hing-A Thing, King of Mind Things, Kung Fu, and Other Stellar Battle-Bear.
It was a thunderous night but Adam didn't like it. It was a storm and Adam took Koala to sleep through the night.

Richard
I am
I was the king
born of migotings
in england and my
I am home
50 years is bob.
Old. Richard
About the authors

The Afterschool Reading Club started in February 2015 and met nearly every week until June 4, 2015. Each week we would read and talk about different books that were picked out by Mrs Lo, the group leader. Sometimes we would do activities related to the books & sometimes we would do our own things. Our favorite themes were superheroes, Shopkins, bunny ears, and poop!

Our club members include Dorothy, Stephen, Jane, Erin, Brendan, and Richard, all fabulous first graders in Mrs Michaels' classroom. Mrs Lo is a doctoral student from U. Penn.
we love bookclub!
Are you a book lover?
APPENDIX H: Expanded Analysis of Richard’s Announcement

Using an epistemic justice framework to analyze the conversation that followed Richard’s declaration (shared in Chapter 4) suggests that Richard experienced epistemic injustice when he shared information about his family model. Below are four excerpts from this conversation that highlight moments of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice.

Excerpt H.1: Renee and Dorothy respond to Richard’s declaration
1 Richard: I’ve got two dads no mom.
2 ...  
4 Renee: You’ve got a, wait, and how were you ever born if you don’t mom?  
5 Dorothy: You got adopted  
6 Renee: You shouldn’t be alive if you don’t have a mom.  
7 Mrs. Lo: Why not?  
8 Renee: Because that’s how it all happens  
9 ...  
10 Erin: I know the story, I know the story.  
11 Dorothy: Because the moms have the babies.  

In this excerpt, Richard’s testimony “I’ve got two dads” (line 1) is acknowledged by Renee and Dorothy and subsequently denied by Renee (line 6). After Dorothy offers an explanation (line 5), she then supports Renee’s assertion, “Because the moms have the babies” (line 11). Renee and Dorothy do not accept Richard’s testimony about his family because they lack the hermeneutical – or collective knowledge resources – to understand it.

Excerpt H.2: Richard tries to explain, with “help” from Erin.  
20 Richard: They met at a coffee shop [crosstalk 00:31:37].  
21 Erin: One of his dad’s girlfriends.  
22 Richard: No, friend. Friends  
23-24 ...  
25 Erin: One of his dads’ friends  
26 Richard: Were at a coffee shop  
27 Erin: Were at a coffee shop and  
28 Renee: ...they fell in love  

Here, both Erin and Renee interrupt Richard to inscribe heterosexual romance on his family origin story. Richard eventually responds, “No. They never get married, they did not have a baby. They [his dads] adopted me and my brother.” (line 31, not shown). Heteronormative models of relationships bind Renee and Erin’s expectations. This is an example of the single story metaphor about families that dominates in the classroom and children’s media (Hermann-Wilmarth et al., 2013).
Excerpt H.3: Renee’s quest to identify Richard’s “real” mom

33 Renee: So who’s your real mom [sounds a bit like ‘grandma’]? Do you not know your real mom?
34 Richard: I have a grandma, two.[I think Richard hears Renee’s first “real mom” above as grandma]
35 Dorothy: You don’t have a mom?
36 Richard: I don’t have a mom but I have a…
37 Renee: You don’t know your real mom?
38 Dorothy: He doesn’t have a mom, he never had a mom.
39 Richard: I never had a mom.

Renee’s persistence about Richard having a mother continues despite his insistence that he doesn’t have a mom. At the end of the exchange Dorothy appears to understand that Richard does not have a mom (line 38), which Richard affirms (line 39), but her understanding is tenuous and falls apart as soon as Richard tells us that his parents are going to get married. Dorothy lacks the hermeneutical resources to understand that marriage can be between people who are the same sex. This confirms the single story metaphor is more than the dominant narrative about marriage; it is the only available narrative for Dorothy.

Excerpt H.4: Richard abandons the conversation

41 Richard: My dad and daddy are getting married next week. It might not be next week, but soon.
42 Dorothy: Awesome.
43- …
48 Dorothy: That is so exciting. Now they [Richard and his brother] have two dads and two moms because your dads like …
50 Richard: No. No. They’re not going to get married, they’re not going to come apart they are this. [Holds hands apart]

Richard’s initiative to share his family, and even to align his family with the heterosexual practice of marriage, was unsuccessful because Renee and Dorothy could not accept that Richard had no conception of a mother in his life. At the end of the conversation even Dorothy, who had shown an understanding that he had no mom (lines 5 and 38), now declares that he will have two moms and two dads. This biological determinism, which helps to normalize heteronormativity, has prevented Richard’s audience from understanding his family model. He abandons his efforts to explain his family story. Richard’s testimony, even when he was confident enough to persist, is never fully understood by his peers suggesting he experienced testimonial injustice. The injustice rests in the inability of his peers to see his description of his family as credible. Both he and the others experienced hermeneutical injustice, because of the lack of resources on family variations made available to the children.
Alternatively, this excerpt can be broken down using a multicolumn table allows non-verbal contextual information to be included in the three columns on the left. The three columns on the right are analytical and reflect coding for family talk (column 4), literacy practices (column 5), and epistemic codes (column 6).
### Table H.1: Multicolumn Analysis of Richard’s Explanation of his Family Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event, context</th>
<th>Talk &amp; Speaker</th>
<th>Actions, Gestures, Materials</th>
<th>Family talk</th>
<th>Literacy Practices</th>
<th>Epistemic Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior to this comment, I am explaining that I doing this study to become a doctor of education. Richard tells us that his dad is a doctor. He then tells us about his family model.</td>
<td>Richard: I’ve got two dads, no mom. (line 1)</td>
<td>We are all sitting around the tables.</td>
<td>Self-description to clarify his parents.</td>
<td>Declarative statement</td>
<td>Testimonial: Richard feels confident that he can talk about his family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children respond to Richard’s declaration</td>
<td>Renee: “How were you ever born if you don’t have a mom?” Dorothy: “You got adopted” Renee: “You shouldn’t be alive if you don’t have a mom” Female: “Because the moms have the babies” Renee: “No because the mom has baby come out of [inaudible]” (lines 3-8)</td>
<td>Children begin to move around, stand up, and turn to face one another. The girls and Richard a paying attention. Stephen and Brendan do not appear to be participating. Renee gestures to her vagina to mimic birthing of baby</td>
<td>Biological determinism to families, and to human creation</td>
<td>Collaboratio n to make meaning of information Richard shared</td>
<td>Hermeneutic injustice (but not discriminatory) to children who cannot understand how children can be in families if they aren’t results of biological unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I offer adoption as a way to become a member of a family</td>
<td>“...some kids are adopted. There’s all different ways to have babies” (line 9)</td>
<td>Children continue moving around.</td>
<td>Questioning naturalization of ways adults become parents.</td>
<td>Adult authority: instructional material?</td>
<td>Attempt to draw on other hermeneutic resources, or expand resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Erin offers to be informer and Richard allows Erin to explain</strong></td>
<td><strong>Female: “You were adopted.” (line 12)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Attention shifts to Erin</strong></td>
<td><strong>Storytelling</strong></td>
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<td>Erin: “No, Richard told me the story so…” (line 10) Erin: “I think I remember” (line 14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Erin is drawing on collective resources of family formations (which we see in the next line) and her own memory of a conversation with Richard. By giving permission to Erin, Richard is acknowledging his previous testimony on the subject and affirms Erin’s testimonial authority.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I interject and suggest that perhaps Richard doesn’t want to share his family history and/or that Erin doesn’t have the right to share the history</strong></th>
<th><strong>Me: “No, I don’t know (if we should ask these questions). You know what, sometimes we don’t want to ask those questions (about family history). That’s Richard’s story.” (line 13)</strong></th>
<th><strong>The children ignore me and continue talking.</strong></th>
<th><strong>Social codes of conduct.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I am questioning Erin’s right to testimonial authority and affirming Richard’s right to testimony.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Richard begins to tell the story, Erin attempts to provide contextual information but is corrected by Richard and me</strong></th>
<th><strong>Richard: “They met at a coffee shop…” Erin: “One of his dad’s girlfriends.” Richard: “No, friend.” Me: “Female friends.” (lines 14-19)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Renee, Dorothy, and Jane are listening to the story. Richard is emphatic in his clarification that the woman was not a</strong></th>
<th><strong>Context, contestation, and clarification</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Erin attempts to create a romantic association with the implied female in the coffee shop: biological determinism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Context, contestation, and clarification</strong></th>
<th><strong>Erin lacks the hermeneutic resources to tell Richard’s story without apply heteronormative discourse to the story. Richard’s testimonial authority is challenged by</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renee continues to build on Erin’s moldification of the story. Richard continues to explain details of his adoption, and Renee interjects for clarification, which Richard does.</td>
<td>Renee: “Were at a coffee shop and they fell in love.” Richard: “...told that the girl know Al [his daddy][crosstalk] Renee: “They had a baby but never got married?” Richard: “No, they never got married, they did not have a baby. They adopted me and my brother.” (lines 20-23)</td>
<td>Richard is beginning to get frustrated. He emphasizes “No” and “not”. Renee returns to heteronormative romantic love to make sense of Richard’s story. Richard skips to the end and explains that he and his brother are adopted. Renee also draws on other family models (unmarried parents)</td>
<td>Renee draws on normative scripts of romance and family models (schema theory). Richard shifts from narrative mode to factual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee continues to press Richard for a mother. Richard offers a maternal alternative. Dorothy adds to Renee’s questioning</td>
<td>Renee: “So who’s your real mom? Do you not know your real mom?” Richard: “I have a grandma, two.” Dorothy: “You don’t have a mom?” Richard: “I don’t have a mom but I have a...” Renee: “You don’t know your real mom?” (lines 25-29)</td>
<td>The other children continue to move around in the background. Renee, Dorothy, and Richard remain engaged in the conversation. Renee cannot understand how Richard doesn’t have a mom (heteronormative constructions of the family)</td>
<td>Questioning and answering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy seems to understand</td>
<td>Dorothy: “He doesn’t have a</td>
<td>Families can be diverse</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Richard’s family model. Richard confirms this and I remind them that Richard has two dads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Richard announces that his parents are getting married next week. This leads to excitement and then confusion.</th>
<th>Richard: “My dads are getting married next week.” Dorothy: “Awesome”... “That is so exciting. Now they (Richard and his brother) have two dads and two moms.” (lines 33-40)</th>
<th>Richard is showing signs of frustration. Marriage is an important marker of a family, but marriage involves men and women.</th>
<th>Declaration, response and clarification</th>
<th>Richard draws on hermeneutic resources about families and marriage but Dorothy lacks hermeneutic resources to understand marriage as anything but a heterosexual union.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard responds to Dorothy’s interpretation and, realizing the unintended outcome (two moms and two dads), he takes back his announcement.</td>
<td>Richard: “No, they’re not going to get married, they’re not going to come apart, they are this” [holds hands apart] Girl: “They’re not getting married?” Jane: “They’re this, they’re in love. How, like you said, they’re like this?” [holds hands apart] Me: “…Erin had a good point. She said, “of course they’re in love, why would they get married if they weren’t in love?”(lines 41-46)</td>
<td>Richard is standing, body tense. He uses hand gestures to demonstrate, which Jane mimics. Marriage isn’t an option for two men who are dads. Parents feel love for one another</td>
<td>Loss of vocabulary, gesturing</td>
<td>Richard has run out of resources to explain his family. He gives up, thus surrendering testimonial authority. Others turn to hermeneutic resources on love to understand Richard’s change in story.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I: Readaloud Analysis Using Sipe’s Model of Literary Understanding

This is partial analysis of the readaloud of *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), excerpt 5.6, to model literary understanding using Sipe’s (2008) five response categories and three types of impulse. By using a multicolumn approach, I am able to describe actions and contextual information (Kuby et al., 2015).

Table I.1: Analysis of Excerpt 5.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Talk</th>
<th>Actions/context/materials</th>
<th>Response category</th>
<th>Type of impulse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo: No, okay so when he came – come on you guys, what happened when he came to the place where the Wild Things are?</td>
<td>First prompt: I ask the children to predict what will happen in the text</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Jane: Only my daddy and my sister that’s all.</td>
<td>Unconnected to question</td>
<td>Personal – resistance to reengaging with the story</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo: “They roared with all their force and they gnashed their terrible teeth – come on you need to study the Wild Things because you are going to make one and Dorothy noticed the claws.</td>
<td>Text reading and second prompt: I make a connection to something Dorothy said earlier</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Jane: Study. Okay, I’m going to make big teeth.</td>
<td>Jane responds to my instructions</td>
<td>Analytical response: she is studying details in the story</td>
<td>Hermeneutic: she is gathering information to prepare her for the next task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo: “They gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and they showed their terrible-.</td>
<td>Text reading, interrupted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Jane: Study, okay, I’m going to make big teeth</td>
<td>Jane repeats what she said in line 25</td>
<td>Text-to-life: she is creating a connection between the storybook and her own world</td>
<td>Personalizing: she is drawing from the book to prepare for the next task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Hermeneutics</td>
<td></td>
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<td>------</td>
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<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Dorothy: Claws.</td>
<td>Dorothy assumes a stage voice, deepening and emphasizing “claws”</td>
<td>Transparent: Dorothy is absorbed in the text and ignoring other aspects around her.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aesthetic: She is immersed in the storybook world and temporarily disconnected to chronological time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Jane: Oh yeah, rolled their terrible eyes, that’s why you got the googly eyes.</td>
<td>Jane makes a connection to my earlier statement about supplies to make the “wild things”</td>
<td>Analytic: analysis of details in the text</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Text-to-life: connection to (future) play</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hermeneutic: interpreting information in text for future use</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personalizing: connecting herself to the text</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo: “Until Max said” – what did Max say?</td>
<td>Text reading and third prompt: prediction (text is on page)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>...</td>
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<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Boy: I came to the jungle.</td>
<td>Prediction of what Max would say</td>
<td>Analytic: taking information from text and images to make prediction</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hermeneutic: drawing information from within the book</td>
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<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo: He didn’t quite say that, what did he say to them?</td>
<td>Correction, re-prompt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Stephen: Be still.</td>
<td>Actual text</td>
<td>Analytical: reads text</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hermeneutic: draws on literacy skills to read text</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>...</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo: “Be still and tamed them with the magic trick of staring into all their yellow eyes at once,”</td>
<td>Reading text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Richard: That's starting to creep me out now.</td>
<td>Interruption by Richard</td>
<td>Personal: Richard vocalizes his feelings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intertextual: The Wild Things have characteristics that map onto other creatures he doesn't like</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personalizing: Richard connects to his personal preferences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo: “Without blinking and they were frightened and called him the most Wild Thing of all.”</td>
<td>Reading text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Girl: [Laughs]</td>
<td>Response to Richard’s comment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Stephen: The most Wild Thing of death.</td>
<td>Response to Richard’s comment</td>
<td>Performative: Stephen integrates Richard’s comment into his interpretation of events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Mrs. Lo: “And made him king of all Wild Things.”</td>
<td>Reading text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Girl: King of the Wild Things.</td>
<td>Repeating text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References

Scholarly Texts
NOTE: Following Patti Lather’s (1992) lead, I have listed the full names of the authors in order to recognize their identities.


Blackburn, Mollie V, & Smith, Jill M. (2010). Moving Beyond the Inclusion of LGBT-Theme Literature in English Language Arts Classrooms: Interrogating


Children’s Literature

NOTE: Recognizing the equal contributions made by authors and illustrators of picturebooks, I have listed author and illustrator together.


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