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**THE EXPERIENCE OF PLACE IN CHILDHOOD LITERACY LIFE-WORLDS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF READERS AS PLACE-MAKERS**

A Dissertation in

Curriculum and Instruction

by

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ABSTRACT

Current educational policy in the United States supports the standardization of school curricula and promotes a high-stakes testing culture that reinforces the ideologies of market fundamentalism. This accountability movement has resulted in school curriculum that aims to transcend children's diverse lived experiences and the local contexts in which those experiences are made meaningful. In elementary schools in particular, these policies have also led to the decrease of aesthetic activities that nurture children's social, emotional, spiritual and physical wellbeing, such as music education, art education, physical education, the social studies, unstructured playtime and pleasure reading.

Place-based educators have pushed back against these trends by advocating for curricula that promotes permeability between the physical and conceptual boundaries of children's school, home and community contexts and emphasizes project-based instructional design that meaningfully connects to children's everyday lived experiences. While research in children's literature and literacy education recognizes the important role that reading can play in rooting children in the world they are coming to know, place-based educators have not thoroughly explored the relationship between children's identities as readers and their identities as place-makers.

Designed as a phenomenological inquiry, this study explored five adults' experiences of place within their childhood literacy life-world, or reading landscape. By studying adults, this project aimed to describe and interpret the role children's literature and childhood reader identity might play in one's development as a place-maker in middle childhood (approximately ages six to thirteen), as well as the meaning these experiences hold in adulthood. The findings have significant implications for place-based curricula, suggesting

that children engage in dynamic transactions with out-of-school places as they enact their emerging identity as independent readers and that these experiences contribute to how they see the world and themselves into adulthood.

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Nothing
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because you
are
everything,
all of it-
sprinkles, quarks, giant
donuts, eggs sunny-side up-
you
are the ever-expanding
universe
to me.

(DiCamillo, 2013, p. 233)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The question is not what you look at, but what you see.

—Henry David Thoreau, 1851

Wendy McClure's memories of growing up in a suburb of Chicago in the 1970s may be recalled a bit differently than those of the other children who lived in her neighborhood. Four decades later and with lively emotion, she describes the first time her family set out from their home and rode into Indian Territory in their covered wagon. With the most vivid multisensory detail, she recalls what it felt like to have the head of a needle poke through a thimble and jab her in the finger as she mended a dress in her family's prairie cabin. Though Wendy's father may remember regularly taking her to a popular restaurant near their hometown, the walls of which were adorned with rusty antiques and oil lanterns, Wendy recollects these instances as eating "pan-fried potatoes" in De Smet, South Dakota in 1879 (McClure, 2011, p. 3).

While these first-hand accounts of frontier life make up a vast portion of McClure's remembered suburban childhood landscape, she admits in her memoir, *The Wilder Life: My Adventures in the Lost World of Little House on the Prairie* (2011), that they originated, not from her personal lived experiences, but out of the experiences and environmental imagination of famed early-twentieth century author Laura Ingalls Wilder. Nonetheless, to McClure, the things she had seen, heard, tasted, touched, smelled, thought and felt while reading Wilder's books as a child were memories that belonged to her as much as they belonged to Laura. She speaks of these experiences engaging in literary landscapes, not as if

they were confined to solitary cognitive processes, but as though they permeated the physical and conceptual boundaries of her everyday observable lived experiences; in part, making up her *literacy life-world*. They validated and refueled her developing independence and increasing autonomy as a place-maker as she sought proprietorship of the world she was exploring with the “firstness” (Meek, 2003) of childhood. As a place-maker taking up dual residency in “real” and fictional landscapes, these experiences also gave Wendy the liberty to creatively position and reposition herself within the systems constituting the places she dwelled.

As an ardent child reader, I, too, possess vivid memories as a newly independent reader that enlivened my acumen as a self-aware place-maker. After being inspired by my beloved third grade teacher to read Lynne Reid Banks’ *The Indian in the Cupboard*, I removed the small curio cabinet off of my bedroom wall, positioned my Disney Pocahontas figurine (most likely acquired from a McDonalds Happy Meal) on one of the tiny shelves, closed the cabinet door and waited for her to come to life. After a few moments, when I began to hear her calling out to me from inside, I unlocked the door and asked her to quiet down as I slid her into my pocket. I recall convincing myself that I had to sneak outside without being spotted by any of my family members who might exploit the tiny life; an enormous responsibility that, to me, meant I shared a sacred camaraderie with Omri, the book’s main character. I cannot remember much more about the experience except that that curio cabinet, still in the basement of my childhood home, added another dimension or layer to my world; a realm of possibility for the object beyond functionality that still inspires and excites me when I open it’s door from time to time as an adult. I suspect that specific touchstone experiences like this in my history as a reader, memories when the boundaries

between real and fictional landscapes were nonexistent, significantly contributed to my development as a place-maker and perhaps even influenced the ways I seek meaning in the places I dwell in adulthood.

Considering my personal experiences as a young independent reader along with McClure's memoir and countless other popular memoirs of literary childhoods published within the last five years, these identity narratives collectively portray childhood reading experiences that starkly contrast the reality of reading curricula that can be observed in many public elementary schools in the United States. Only mentioning formal school settings peripherally (if at all), these memoirists highlight childhood reading experiences that can be described as being meaningfully and purposefully rooted in important social relationships, evolving personal interests, a need for imaginative play and their increasing self-governing accessibility of the physical world in which they lived.

Background and Context

Children's Literature in the Classroom

Amidst the Whole Language movement of the late 1980s in the United States, literacy educators and researchers were actively engaging in discussions (and debates) over the quantifiable benefits of using "real" books in elementary reading instruction. Until this time, the use of basal readers, or reading textbooks, had generally been regarded as the primary method of early literacy instruction in public elementary schools. Proponents of basal readers claimed that textbook programs allowed for a consistent developmental approach to literacy that could be reliably measured.

On the other hand, researchers were beginning to see that using trade books to teach reading comprehension and phonics skills in the context of "real" reading resulted in the

same or greater achievement on standardized measurements for all children, including those described as special needs or limited English speaking (Tunnell & Jacobs, 1989). Addressing these ongoing debates and research trends, Tunnell and Jacobs concluded (1989) that the success of literature based programs was in the pleasure and purpose of the process of learning to read, writing “Early experiences with the richness and variety of ‘real’ reading materials seems to give children reason to read, teaching them, as Trelease (1985, p. 6) explains, not only ‘how to read, but to want to read’ ” (p. 477).

While literacy educators were drawing on research from the field of children’s literature to establish literature-based curricula, children’s literature scholars were working to legitimize the study of books for children within the broader field of literary studies (Hunt, 2011). Writing at this time, Charlotte Huck (1982), children’s literature scholar and teacher educator, captured the social and emotional advantages of children’s aesthetic engagements with authentic literature in elementary classrooms when she wrote,

Literature records the depths and heights of the human experience. It develops compassion by educating the heart as well as the mind. It helps children entertain new ideas, and develop insights they never had before. It can stretch the imagination, creating new experiences, and enriching old ones. Literature can develop a sense of what is true and just and beautiful. (p. 317)

This era resulted in the promotion of what might be considered a classroom *culture* of readers, rather than “skill and drill” literacy instruction. However, the standards-based reforms and accountability movement that followed have had a significant impact on the way literature is positioned and reading experiences are framed in elementary classrooms, moving them away from the aesthetic and the social and emotional aims toward a market

fundamentalist preoccupation with easily measured outputs (Denzin & Giardina, 2015; Gruenewald, 2003; Gruner, 2011; Reutzel & Larson, 1995; Shannon, 2011; Smith, 2002).

Current Policy and Contemporary Reading Curricula

Contrasting the dynamic transactions between identity, story and “place” described in the introduction to this chapter, contemporary school policy and its curricular byproducts threaten to narrow contemporary children’s perceptions of reading experiences by focusing on the mastery of isolated reading strategies and skills, often for use on standardized reading assessments. Unlike the textbook-based reading curricula era prior to the 1980s, children now have little, if any, unstructured time for play and self-governed reading throughout the school day. Rather than to value authentic reading experiences for their rootedness in children’s developmental needs for imaginative play and social and emotional well-being (which we began to see in the late 1980s), current curricular goals aim to provide reading instruction that transcends place (Noddings, 2003) and eliminates the complexity of children’s personal aesthetic engagement with literature as art.

The trajectory of state and federal policy impacting public education over the last half a century—most notably the promotion of the corporate-supported Common Core State Standards in recent years — has severely narrowed the scope of the pedagogical landscapes we recognize and value. The standardization of curricula and the high-stakes testing culture that have come about have also resulted in the loss of vernacular knowledge. David Orr (2004) writes, “What can be said truthfully is that some knowledge is increasing while other kinds of knowledge are being lost,” (p. 9) the knowledge that people have of their places. Some critics of current educational policy go a step further and argue that not only is this knowledge being lost, but that our schools are failing to nurture the habits of mind necessary

to even recognize our role in the natural and socioculturally constructed systems that make up our environments (Noddings, 1992; 2003). Rather than preparing students to take part in their communities large and small as caring and engaged citizens, we promote an individualistic mindset that defines success in economic terms and neglects “ways of knowing” beyond cognitive processes (Noddings, 1992; Orr, 2004).

A “Place-Conscious” Reform Movement

Among the ideological perspectives at odds with the current trends in educational policy in the United States, is the movement for *place-conscious education*, also referred to as *place-based education*. A place-conscious philosophy of education directly challenges the standardization of curricula and pushes back against instructional models that deliver content through isolated learning activities which have, at best, arbitrary connections to the school, home and community contexts in which children live. As its name suggests, place-conscious approaches to education are grounded in the belief that individual and collective identity are complexly tied to the perceptual, sociological, ideological, political, and ecological dimensions of the places we dwell (Gruenewald, 2003, pp. 623- 636). In a recent issue of the Bank Street Occasional Paper Series devoted to “Claiming the Promise of Place-Based Education,” the editors, Altman, Stires and Weseen (2015), introduce the issue, noting,

Place-based education is resonant with all the wonderful examples of progressive education that precede it, but there is an urgency about this enterprise that is unique to our time. In a culture that is anything but mindful and present, place has never been so important...In classrooms particularly, teachers and students are distracted by the dictates of data-driven instruction, high stakes assessment, and standardized curriculum. The pressing need to attend to our disconnection from place leads

Greenwood to frame place-based education as a teachers' and students' rights issue, essential to "survival, peace, and well-being." (pp. 1-2)

This assumption has significant pedagogical consequences; place-based educators acknowledge all children as place-makers and view children's home and community experiences as, not only legitimate, but central to the classroom curriculum. Academic goals are most often met through project-based learning models, in which children, teachers and community members work to solve real-world problems or questions that emerge from their lived experiences. From the time children are born, they enact a desire and a need to understand the functionality of the physical environment around them, the social and cultural meanings ascribed to objects and places, as well as to create their own associations and validate their personal experiences through autonomy and proprietorship (Chawla, 1992; Tuan, 2002). As children's autonomy and accessibility of immediate environments expand from the home in early childhood to larger geographic areas in middle childhood (e.g. the backyard or neighborhood), place-conscious curricula aim to be responsive to those experiences (Hart, 1979).

While all of children's lived experiences are essentially rooted in place (Vanclay, 2008), Louise Chawla (1992) has noted children "need to be brought from rootedness to a sense of place through education, which creates enough separation between the self and its surroundings to allow conscious appreciation" (p. 83). Research in this area has supported the conclusion that an appreciation for place developed in childhood influences the way we care for and engage with the places we dwell into adulthood (Sobel, 1993, p. 78).

In her foreword to David Sobel's book, *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities*, Laurie Lane-Zucker (2005) points out the importance of

narrative in this process. This belief in the power of story to connect children to their places can take on new meaning when we consider the role of children's literature in connecting children's experiences of place to their identity and vice versa. In home and community contexts, exploring the interdependency of place and stories, both those we create through direct experience and the narratives we acquire through literary experiences, has important implications for formal literacy instruction, particularly formal literacy instruction that seeks to operate within a multi-disciplinary framework for place-conscious education. If Charlotte Huck is right (and I suspect she is) that authentic experiences with literature in childhood educate the heart as well as the mind, then there is a lot at stake in the current educational climate, especially for place-based educators who believe a love for place precedes any kind of personal investment or stewardship (Sobel, 2005). This proposition—that children's engagement in literary experiences nurtures their development as self-aware place-makers — is the antecedent for this study.

Problem Statement

Research in place-based education indicates that our perspectives on and expectations of the natural and built environments we engage with in childhood influence the ways we engage with and care for our local landscapes into adulthood, as well as contribute to feelings of belonging and overall well-being. Research in the field of children's literature, particularly reader response, supports the notion that aesthetic reading experiences in childhood can influence children's worldview, as well as their developing sense of self and well-being. Narrative as a way of knowing has been valued within the discourses of place-conscious educational philosophy, but the role of children's literature, particularly imaginative literature, in a child's development as place-maker has not yet been explored.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore, through a phenomenological approach, five adults' experiences of place within their childhood literacy life-worlds, which includes "the acts of reading or literary affinity...that one takes for granted as one does them," (Robison, 2011, p. 2) the ways children enact and engage with their reading identity. By studying adults, this project aimed to describe and interpret the role children's literature and childhood reader identity might play in one's development as a place-maker in middle childhood (approximately ages six to thirteen), as well as the meaning those experiences hold in adulthood. The following research questions guided this study:

- In what ways have participants' childhood reading experiences functioned as pedagogical landscapes of place-consciousness?
- In what ways do the experiences participants perceive as significant "touchstone memories" in their histories as readers transact with theoretical constructs of place making in childhood?
- How do participants perceive the relationship between childhood reading identity and special childhood places?
- How do participants perceive childhood reading experiences in relation to adult identity, including place identity?
- What role did participants perceive formal and informal pedagogical "places" played in their reading identity?

Overview of Methodology

In this qualitative investigation, I explored the childhood experiences of five adult participants, two male and three female, all identifying themselves as ardent readers when

they were children. My primary method of data collection was phenomenological interviewing guided by the three-interview series model developed by Dolbeare and Schuman (Seidman, 2013). Each participant was interviewed on three separate occasions and each interview lasted approximately one hour. In addition, participants were encouraged to bring personal childhood artifacts to share during interviews, such as photographs, books, toys and juvenilia and were invited to draw or sketch during interviews. Participants were also provided with art supplies prior to the third interview and invited to create an interpretive artwork or artifact as a personal response to a prompt that would be discussed in our final meeting. These digital and physical artifacts were also collected as data and analyzed.

Guided by the study's conceptual framework and research questions, the data was analyzed using phenomenological methods of "explication," a form of thematic analysis described by Groenewald (2004). This form of analysis allowed me to analyze interviews and participant-generated artifacts for emerging meanings and interpretations of the phenomena addressed in the data rather than establishing pre-defined codes. While aiming to describe the phenomenon I was exploring, this method also allowed me to look closely at the meaning these experiences held for participants, both individually and across cases.

The Researcher

Within the field of education, I see myself as an advocate for place-conscious approaches to teaching and learning. This philosophy values curricula that is not isolated from children's everyday lived experiences, but rather seeks to nurture a conscious appreciation for and personal investment in the many dimensions of the local landscape through learning experiences that are meaningfully situated within community processes.

As a former upper elementary classroom teacher in a public school district in southwestern Pennsylvania, I have firsthand experiences of how disconnected children's lives in their homes, in the community and in the world beyond can be from formal classroom instruction. Trying to establish a child-centered, developmentally appropriate learning landscape for my students that would connect them meaningfully to the world beyond the school building, instill in them a love of learning and nurture compassion, I faced many obstacles derived from federal and state policies. This was particularly true with regard to the integration of authentic reading experiences into the culture of my classroom, which was challenged daily by district-mandated nightly "self-selected reading" homework for my students, rigid administrator-created daily schedules, and required participation in school-wide points-based reading contests that were sponsored by textbook publishers. From my perspective, pressure for my students to achieve proficiency on standardized assessments translated into strictly monitored curricula and instructional models built on isolated skill practice, a decrease in disciplines aimed at physical, spiritual, emotional and social well-being (i.e. art, music, physical education, social studies) and a reinforcement of disciplinary boundaries that ignores the fluidity of children's perceived landscapes across contexts.

Rationale and Significance

The significance of this study is both theoretical and practical. In the field of children's literature, it is understood that aesthetic engagement with book content and with books as artifacts of lived experiences must be considered alongside a child reader's psychological development and life experiences. By exploring the ways children construct meaning of places through transactions with this form of art, we can extend the theoretical frameworks employed by place-based educators to further consider the developmental

necessity of imagination and aesthetic experience in the way children come to know the world. Looking at this phenomenon through an adult perspective allows us to see what residual influences these literary experiences leave over time on identity and sense of place.

Within the current high-stakes testing culture shaping school curricula, the disciplines of literacy and mathematics, narrowly defined, have priority above all other disciplines in terms of accountability measures, time devoted to content and available resources. This is true even in many place-based classrooms that emphasize project-based learning models. Many schools, in their efforts to reconcile top-down mandates with a desire to create a child-centered culture of learning, promote reading outside of school through a wide range of contrived programs and campaigns. Insight gained from this study could have a significant impact on how formal literacy instruction is conceptualized in place-based classrooms to meaningfully nurture connections between children and their communities, while also meeting curricular goals and validating the role of imagination in the way children come to know the world.

Additionally, because a place-conscious philosophy of education emphasizes the deconstruction of boundaries between home, school and community, it is essential that we better understand children's authentic reading experiences in all contexts, especially those that are self-governed, in order to continue to advocate for pedagogies that consider the "whole child." By studying adults' conceptualizations of the physical "rootedness" of their own experiences as child readers, this research project does not narrow pedagogical sites to formal school settings, but highlights the arbitrariness of adult-imposed conceptual boundaries on children's sense of place.

Summary of Chapters

In Chapter 1, I provided the background context for this study, noting that educational policy in recent years has resulted in the standardization of curricular goals that attempt to operate independently of the contexts and lived experiences of child learners. I outlined the purpose of this study, which was to explore and describe adults' childhood experiences as readers and place-makers and the meaning those experiences carry, concluding that this project could contribute significantly to more meaningful literacy curricula that values children's developing place identity. Chapter 1 also provided an overview of the methodology used in this study, as well as my personal perspective coming to the topic as an educator and researcher.

Chapter 2 provides the rationale for my ongoing review of the literature related to the study of this topic and a summary and synthesis of those works. Extending on the background information provided in Chapter 1 to incorporate the perspectives I gained from the literature review, this chapter also presents the conceptual framework that guided this study.

The research methodology and methods employed in this study are described in Chapter 3. I give a rationale for positioning this project as a qualitative phenomenological study within a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm and also provide an overview and justification for the methods of both data collection and data analysis. This chapter includes a description of my use of "snowball sampling" and a brief description of each of the five participants recruited for this study.

In Chapter 4, I present my findings. Told through participants' eyes, I begin with a profile of each of my participants as place-makers and a reconstruction of the literacy life-worlds, or reading landscapes, they inhabited in middle childhood. In this chapter, I also

present the themes that emerged from an analysis of the data and each of these themes are described using examples from the data. I propose that these four themes—Repositioning, Transportation, Nesting and Layering—characterize the types of place experiences my participants engaged in within their reading landscapes in middle childhood.

Finally, Chapter 5 begins with participants' own interpretations of the meaning of these reader place experiences in adulthood. Participants conclude that the books they read in childhood had a significant influence on how they saw the world as a developing place-maker and how they see the world now as an adult/parent/teacher. They also maintain intimate connections to the unique qualities of many of the places that made up their reading landscape. In this chapter, I also consider the findings of this study in light of the research questions I aimed to answer, situating this discussion within the scope of literature reviewed throughout the previous chapters. I conclude with the implications of this study for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The book exists for us perchance which will explain our miracles and reveal new ones. The at present unutterable things we may find somewhere uttered. These same questions that disturb and puzzle and confound us have in their turn occurred to all the wise men; not one has been omitted; and each has answered them, according to his ability, by his words and his life.

–Henry David Thoreau, 1854

Introduction and Overview

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to explore, through a phenomenological approach, five adults' experiences of place within their childhood literacy life-worlds, the conceptual landscape of reading experiences or literary affinity that are taken for granted as children participate in them. By studying adults, this project aimed to describe and interpret the role children's literature and childhood reader identity might play in one's development as a place-maker in middle childhood (approximately ages six to thirteen), as well as the meaning those experiences hold in adulthood. In order to carry out this study, it was pertinent to survey the work that has already been done on related topics and to critically synthesize this body of scholarship for major themes and underlying theoretical assumptions, as well as important gaps and omissions in the literature. Sources for this literature review were accessed through ProQuest and ERIC, as well as local university library catalogues. A wide variety of materials were reviewed throughout all phases of the research process, including professional journal articles, books, dissertations, conference proceedings and Internet resources.

To construct a historical context of work in the fields related to my topic of study, as well as to position this specific project within and alongside current thinking, there were two practical goals of this review. The first goal was to explore the current body of scholarship for references, with varying degrees of explicitness, to the intersections of children's literature and/or children's reading experiences with theoretical concepts of place. The second goal of this review was to explore the meanings of childhood experience in regard to adult identity with a particular focus on childhood reading experiences and childhood place experiences. For the purposes of this review, "childhood" was loosely defined as birth through preteen, so that the period of middle childhood that is the focus of this study might be conceptualized within the broader timescale of childhood. With these goals in mind, three primary areas of literature were reviewed (1) place-based education (2) children's literature and children's cultural studies, and (3) literacy education.

Although work in these three areas often overlaps and cuts across disciplines, I have organized this review into themes according to the field or tradition from which they originated. This chapter is divided into two primary sections that correspond to the two major goals of this review, "Intersections of Reading Experience and 'Place'" and "The Meaning of Childhood Experience," and is further organized by themes and subthemes within each section. At the conclusion of this chapter, I present the conceptual framework that guided this study.

Intersections of Reading Experience and "Place"

"Place" in Children's Literature and Literacy Education

Accessing literary landscapes. Scholars in the field of children's literature have approached the topic of literary landscapes, the multi-dimensional "place" evoked for a

reader by a text (such as C.S. Lewis's *Narnia*), as both a representation of place (e.g. analyzing author craft) and place itself (e.g. deconstructing the ideological social structures of fictional worlds) (Carrol, 2011; Dewan, 2010; Slater, 2015). Writing about the significance of literary landscapes in the study of children's literature, Carroll (2011) concludes,

Landscape is a vital aspect of almost every text; action cannot take place in a void and so all texts contain some elements of landscape, be these elements urban or rural, public or domestic, artificial or organic, realistic or fantastic, positive or negative. Landscape shapes literature both contextually and textually and the same geographical, cultural, and socio-political concerns which affect real territories also form the contextual substrata which underlie any work of fiction...Landscape, then, provides not just the background against which the narrative is played out 'but the very stuff with which the story will be woven. (p.1)

A large body of this work comes from the study of the genre of fantasy in literature, because of its prominence in childhood and also because of the necessity of "world-building" as a literary device; fantasy authors have a role as place-makers. Fantasy has been described as "a literature of possibilities" (Pierce, 1996, p. 180) that invites a reader to re-envision or reposition herself within her place in the world. Fantasy authors employ literary strategies intended to distance readers from their own world just enough as to reflect and appreciate the landscape. By offering a literary landscape that evokes the multi-dimensionality of places through language and form, fantasy writers construct other worlds that starkly contrast readers' lived experiences, forcing them to reference their own world for comparison, even at a subconscious level.

Norton (1999) writes of fantasy as place-based educators have written of place-conscious “habits of mind” when she says, “Fantasy writing helps children expand their curiosity, become observers of life, learn to be sensitive to rules and variations within rules, and open their minds to new possibilities” (p. 352). By creating an alternate world governed by its own set of rules, fantasy writers incorporate ideological and social commentary into their literary landscapes. The genre presents seemingly unimportant characters as vital players in the plot and often uses magic to empower the powerless (Pierce, 1996, p. 181). While inviting the reader to question what it means to be human, fantasy “roots us in universals,” but also “speaks to us of our place in the world” (Egoff, 1988, p. 18).

Blackford’s (2004) work not only examines children’s transactions with the literary landscapes of works of fiction, but with many types of narrative text. In her research with female child readers, she describes the fluidity with which her participants moved between real and fictional environments in their transactions with literature by suggesting readers have both a textual self and a referential self (pp. 26-27). This multiplicity separates child readers from the milieu and can evoke a hyperawareness to the perceptual dimensions of place. This approach to thinking about child readers and the experience of place is grounded in Rosenblatt’s characterization of aesthetic reading within her reader-response theory. Rosenblatt (1994) writes, “In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (p. 25). In instances like this where children’s minds are preoccupied with the story, with viewing a scene as an observer in their imagination, they are learning to see the world differently and to “be” in the world differently (Meek, 2003).

Work in ecocriticism, also from the tradition of reader response, conceptualizes the role of literary landscapes in the lives of child readers from a more direct, functional perspective. Cheryll Glotfelty, credited as being one of the leading voices in establishment of ecocriticism, described the discipline as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective,...ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (as cited in Dobrin & Kidd, 2004, p. 3). Dobrin and Kidd’s (2004) edited collection of essays, *Wild Things: Children’s Culture and Ecocriticism*, was influential in bridging the establishment of ecocriticism in literary studies to the study of children’s literature. Their work is based on the assumption that texts are socioculturally constructed artifacts, and therefore, carry particular ideologies that influenced their creation, which in turn, could influence the actions of the reader. By “reading against” (West, 1994) children’s texts, critics can highlight these ideological assumptions (in this case, ideologies supporting or challenging the goals of environmental pedagogies). The volume assumes the child reader as place-maker in a very explicit way and is focused on the discussion of natural places and the promotion of environmental stewardship and conservation in children’s everyday lives.

The majority of the authors in this collection foreground the text, rather than the child reader or place maker (Adkins, 2004; Byrd, 2004; Holton & Rogers, 2004), while others discuss the environmental imagination of particular children’s authors (Copeland, 2004; DuPlessis, 2004; Overholt Wake, 2004) or instructional uses for what are determined to be environmental children’s texts (Henderson, Kennedy & Chamberlin, 2004). While ecocriticism directly takes up the idea of child as place-maker by assuming a child reader could be influenced by particular literary landscapes to care for (or not care for) the

environment, this discipline rarely involves the thoughts and perspectives of actual child readers. Instead, they are concerned with highlighting the ideal reader implied within a text structure.

While reader-response theorists study the construction of literary landscapes through language, others study children's texts through a lens of immersion theory (related to gaming theory). This approach considers how readers construct literary landscapes virtually, the ways aesthetic responses to texts elicit a kind of virtual immersion that mimics affect and perception in the "real" world (Esrock, 1994; Ryan, 2001). Both reader-response theorists and immersion theorists, though, acknowledge that children bring their prior experiences to the reading of a text and that each reading of a text will be unique.

Nelson (2006) and Bhadury's (2013) analysis of metafictional texts for children, or intrusion fantasies, highlight specific texts that make no direct connection between children's place identity and book setting, but nonetheless, promote a distinct way for children to see the places they live through a lens of fiction. Through language and/or illustrations, they argue that these texts invite children to immerse themselves in a fictional landscape and at the same time, the texts imply that the fictional world has the potential to spill into children's real world lived experiences. Nelson, using Chris Van Allsburg's *Bad Day at Riverbend* and David Wiesner's *The Three Pigs* as examples, writes,

Because these works assume that the book-loving child is also the book-*living* child, the dweller-in-books, they base their appeal to the reader on the premise that for the talented reader, fictional characters have agency beyond what the original author or illustrator may have intended. (p. 224)

Kendra Magnusson (2012) also considers the role of language in creating myths that extend children's experiences of literary worlds into their "real" lived experiences. In her paper "Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*: Daniel Handler and Marketing the Author," Magnusson explores how author Daniel Handler's self-representation as the fictional Lemony Snicket is integral to the success of his books. Through fictional paratexts, such as cover matter and interviews provided by "Snicket", Handler emphasizes the existence of fictional worlds in our real-life environments. Magnusson notes,

Though often overlooked in textual analysis, paratexts structure a work's presentation and reception. Gérard Genette describes the paratext as a "threshold" or "fringe of a printed text" which controls the reading experience: a "zone not only of transition" between text and off-text, "but also of transaction" between text and audience (2). (p. 87)

In this way, Lemony Snicket serves as somewhat of a personal tour guide for the reader within the real and fictional landscapes that encompass the world of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, an authorial device in which the literary world of the author/fictional character can intersect with the literacy life-world of a child reader in a physical space.

Similarly in his analysis of *The Neverending Story* and the Inkworld Trilogy, Bhadury (2013) writes, "these literary works display a highly philosophical stance about the webbed, intertextual, contingent nature of reality or life itself" (p. 302). Jones (1996) noted that objects in picture book illustrations can serve as "transitional objects," especially for very young readers, that connect their inner and outer worlds in a similar way. It is theorized that these intertextual references thread together real and imaginative experiences through narrative (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2005).

A number of educators have considered children's engagement with literary landscapes more practically. Charlotte Huck (1982) notes that those who select books for and read with children, whether practitioners, parents or researchers, should be able to recognize the many different ways children give us insight into their responses to literature during formal literacy events, as well as in the context of their broader lived experiences (pp. 74-85). Watching and listening to children's free play can provide valuable information on their process of reading and their aesthetic responses to text (Leander & Boldt, 2012). Adults may find children acting out their favorite scenes from a book through embodied imaginary play or doll play. Like visual and artistic responses to literature before children have mastered conventional communication, play is also a developmental tool children use to explore the world, and thus stories (Wohlwend, 2011). From the child's perspective, the experience of drawing in response to literature is perhaps not "reading" or "drawing" in the sense that we conceive of it at all, but yet another mode of imaginative play within a fictional landscape (Wilson & Wilson, 2010).

In early childhood education, the work of Lindqvist follows this same premise. Her work builds on the theories of Vygotsky and she calls her approach "creative pedagogy of play" and "playworlds." Her creative pedagogy of play is a specific kind of activity designed for early childhood education centers, which requires adults and children to "participate in a jointly created and shared world of fiction—a playworld" (Nilsson, 2009, p. 15). Nilsson (2009) describes the centrality of literature to this approach, "The idea is not to take a book and then perform it, but to let the book inspire creation of a playworld where children and adults can play together" (p. 18-19). Lindqvist believes that recreating a well-loved literary

landscape in the classroom encourages children to take on new personas by taking over and extending the particular social constructions established by authors as world-builders.

Books as objects. The work of children's book historians intersects with concepts of place in unique ways as they aim to study books as representational objects of place, artifacts documenting children's lived experiences in places. In *The Child Reader, 1700-1840*, Matthew Grenby quotes Roger Chartier's remark that "Reading is not just an abstract operation of intellect, it is an engagement of the body, an inscription in space, a relation of oneself and others." Grenby (2011) goes on to extend Chartier's thought,

This reminder of the materiality of reading, its embeddedness in its location and occasion, and its social functions, seems especially germane to children's reading.

After all, children's 'book use' - a more inclusive, and frequently more accurate, term than 'reading' - has very often been more physical and interactive than cerebral and solitary." (p. 194)

This work provides historical evidence of the many ways children use, or "misuse," books outside of school in their artifactual play. Children's marginalia, for instance, their writing and drawing in the margins of books, has been well documented by book historians as occurring for centuries (Grenby 2011; Jackson, 2001; Lerer, 2012). Some of these inscriptions annotate the text. Some are seemingly extra-textual and have more to tell us about the social dimension of the place in which the child was reading than their actual experience of reading (Grenby, 2011, pp. 25-26). Other examples of book markings suggest the book being used over and over by the same child or within the same family over time and support the notion that the object served as an important artifact within a child's material landscape.

In the study of children's contemporary popular culture, books are studied as artifacts of children's lived experiences, as well, but much of this work has expanded the notion of what counts as texts and examines a wider range of "literacy events" than traditionally conceived. The landscape of transmediated childhood texts, such as A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*, into an array of commercial products (e.g. toys, clothing, games, bedroom décor) has been explored as a site of tension where adult consumerist ideals permeate the private spaces of agentic children (Alvermann & Xu, 2003; Hade, 2001; Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002; Wilson & Thompson, 2007).

Reading in places. Literacy educators have long been aware that an intimate love of books is deeply connected to children's concept of home and the early familial experiences with books that can occur there (Chambers, 1996b). Educators have been encouraged to immerse students in *shared reading experiences* during instructional reading programs that mimic reading in the home environment by using books for which children already have an affection, books that when shared with the whole class "have comparable visual impact" to a book a child might sit on his or her knee and read (Holdaway, 1982). Teachers manipulate the classroom library space to create cozy reading nooks aglow with lamplight and accessorize with plush pillows that attempt to emulate the essence of home.

However, in the last decade, as Soja (2011) writes in the preface to the edited book *Spatializing Literacy Research and Practice*, "attention to the spatial aspects of human life and social relations have spread in unprecedented ways into nearly every academic discourse" (p. ix). He summarizes the aim of the book noting,

Seen through this dynamic spatial perspective, all the spaces and places in which we live, from the home and the schoolroom to the city and the global economy, are

socially constructed; and as real and imagined geographies they shape our lives in various ways, at times enabling and enhancing, at other times constraining and oppressing. This recognition alone opens up new ways of looking at literacy and learning, building on the interplay of spatial and literary practices as social constructs, real and imagined forms, and dynamic processes. (p. x)

The essays in this collection challenge previous research that, it is suggested, has “over-materialized” space by describing literacy contexts with a “seemingly natural interpretation of material setting or place” (Leander & Sheehy, 2011, p. 3). They also push back against the opposite end of the spatial spectrum in regard to literacy practices, which “in its focus upon discursive practices, dispenses with the material world through a Cartesian separation of mind or world from matter” (p. 3). As a whole, the collection, along with other work on the place politics of literacy (Kendall, 2008; Robison, 2011), gives priority to the construction of place and individuals’ sense of place through language and the politics of negotiating identity within the existing social systems of particular places.

A special issue of the *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* called “Researching Early Childhood Literacy in Place” also enters this discussion of place politics, approaching children’s experiences with literature from a geosemiotics perspective. Geosemiotics is the study of the social meanings of signs, discourses and actions in our material world (p. 108). The editors view the aim of the issue to “examine the changing landscape of literacy in the early years and consider how the diverse spaces and places in which early literacy learning is promoted and takes place can be conceptualized and researched” (Nichols, Nixon & Rowsell, 2011, p. 107). Articles in this issue address topics, such as the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of public libraries, commercial spaces as sights of negotiation for parents

concerned about their children's literacy development, the influence of early intervention discourse on parents' design of home literacy nooks and online websites for children as "places" within children's literacy life-worlds.

Children's Literature in Place-based Education

Choosing "place-conscious" books. The significant focus on literacy instruction as a target for high-stakes testing has prompted a number of place-minded scholars and educators to explore ways to integrate academic standards with place-conscious goals for education. Much of this work seeks to establish standards for how literature is selected and can be used in elementary classrooms to increase children's knowledge of various facets of their local environment within the established curricular expectations. In some instances, this is explicitly referred to as the integration of science or social studies curricula with reading instruction (Murphey, 2002; Wells & Zeece, 2007). Other scholarship focusing on the acquisition of place knowledge originates from the field of place-based education. The majority of this work assumes direct, predictable connections between the explicit content of books and children's responses to those texts. They focus on the "child as student" and primarily address cognitive reasoning as the connection between literature and place.

Other work is framed similarly around book content and the cognitive transfer of knowledge literature can facilitate. Bigger and Webb (2010) express their concern for the absence of environmental content in schools' literature-based reading programs, so they analyze and promote the work of four authors whom they believe to represent environmental agency in their works of fiction. They write of another aim of their research, "Because we view stories as potentially empowering for young people, we also consider the extent to

which the reading of stories stimulates attitude formation, behaviour change and personal agency in young readers with regard to social and environmental responsibility” (p. 402).

Taking a slightly different perspective on the use of literature to increase place knowledge, James Cahalan (2008) proposed an approach to teaching literature based on authors’ hometowns rather than selecting literature based on environmental ideology. Cahalan assigned literature to students in which the authors shared the hometown of the reader. Although his article draws from this practice in his university classroom, Cahalan believes it is a relevant pedagogy for all institutional levels to consider. His “hometown pedagogy” approach resulted from his experience teaching college English classes and brings together theories from regionalism, bioregionalism, ecocriticism and place studies. His work intersects with place-conscious educators at the K-12 levels, incorporating author maps into his students’ research including the one sponsored and maintained by the Pennsylvania Center for the Book (p. 264). He writes that a hometown pedagogy of literature studies is important, because

studying well-known authors by focusing on the many connections between their hometowns and their writings helps students understand how social contexts affect the production of literature. Teaching hometown literature also helps students better understand their own identities because part of who we are is determined by where we are from and where we are now. It deepens students’ knowledge of their hometowns—those areas’ histories, geographies, strengths and weaknesses, and connections to other places. (p. 250)

Cahalan’s approach to a pedagogy of place for literature classrooms is different in focus, but similar in assumptions to much of the reading instruction already in place and promoted in

place-based classrooms. While Cahalan is still concerned primarily with “place knowledge,” the study of literature as a representation of readers’ familiar places aims to draw from students’ lived experiences.

Wason-Ellam (2010) describes her ethnographic study with a third-grade classroom, in which she attempted to mediate their engagement with “place-based” picture books by supplementing their book transactions with embodied learning activities at the conclusion of the readings. Contrasting the appreciation of place developed in reading literature to playing video games, she writes,

As stories unfold in settings of pristine arboreal forests, high bluffs, marshy bottomlands, or in the prairie grasslands, the young reader/viewer connects both aesthetically and cognitively (aligning their ideas, attitudes, and experiences) to be socially aware, reflective, and transformational as this is a ‘place to be’. (p. 282)

Wason-Ellam’s project demonstrates the way embodied learning experiences, such as art and immersion in nature, can facilitate intrinsic motivation and thus the acquisition of place-knowledge and appreciation. Her goal in this project was to secure readers’ lasting cognitive knowledge and appreciation of place after the lessons rather than exploring their experiences of place within the embodied learning experiences.

Like Wason-Ellam, other scholars and educators have focused their attention on the means by which place knowledge is transferred from literature to a reader. Considering the developmental necessity of imagination and wonder in childhood, which often characterizes child place-makers, Heard and McDonough (2009) have offered teachers a guide to connecting early childhood standards to exploration of their places through literature. Their

belief in connecting children to their local places is grounded in the work of Rachel Carson, Richard Louv and David Sobel. They frame their work, concluding,

As we read a myriad of state standards, we noticed a discordance between what tests measure and what standards recommend. We discovered that although most tests measure finite skills, many primary-grade standards encourage teaching for understanding, critical thinking, creativity, and question asking, and promote the development of children who have the attributes of inventiveness, curiosity, engagement, imagination, and creativity. (p. 4)

The authors work from the assumption that children connect in direct and obvious ways to content, but they take an interesting approach by selecting texts that not only connect children's place experiences to content, but are stories that also present place knowledge through a perspective of wonderment. In this way, Heard and McDonough not only practice a kind of ecocriticism, but consider what the field of children's literature and studies of implied reader might suggest appeal to children at a more affective level, as well.

Like Heard and McDonough, Sobel advocates for choosing texts that connect in direct ways to students' place experiences, but that also evoke themes of "secrecy, intrigue, and adventure" (p. 92). He believes that one way teachers can use literature in place-based classrooms to appeal to children's intrigue and encourage spatial awareness is to expose children to books that include maps of literary worlds or to have children create maps of the worlds described in the books they read (Sobel, 1998, pp. 123-140).

Others advocate for embodied multimodal experiences with literature that call attention to the context in which we read (Burke & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2010; Payne, 2010). Payne's work in environmental education has exalted the role of play and imagination in the

experience of place through story in a similar way. He describes his work with author and illustrator Robert Ingpen's gnome stories and their potential for embodying literary landscapes when they are actually told out-of-doors in "nature's classroom." Payne (2010) argues that children's experiences with imaginative literature in school are primarily cognitive and neglect the role of the body in absorbing and engaging with story.

In education, we are too often confronted with the teaching and telling of a particular state-sanctioned curriculum story, or document. Children's literature, potentially, and the arts, potentially, retain the possibility of being different, other or wild... That opportunity, potentially, is the source of a revitalized means of promoting the sensual, perceptual and conceptual dimensions of an aesthetic education, in this instance an ecoaesthetic opening in 'experiencing', 'living', *being* the story and *becoming* other than what we currently are. Their confluence might well be the remarkable. (pp. 305-306)

Bai, Elza, Kovacs, and Romanycia (2010) challenge the assertion that transactions between book and reader are directly and obviously mediated by content. Positioning themselves as equal parts *bibliophiles* (those who love books) and *biophiles* (those who love life/nature), they take issue with the notion "that there was a direct and straightforward, almost a causal connection, between the two" (p. 352), a conclusion I have drawn in previous work, as well (Fischer, 2015). In their autoethnographic work, they found that the biophilia–bibliophilia connection is "much more complex, ambiguous, surprising and even tenuous" (p. 352). The authors, although working from the discipline of environmental education, propose that we should be asking the question "what kinds of children's literature would develop new sensibilities and sensitivities that support and promote biophilia?" (p.

355) They acknowledge that the field of children's literature has much to offer in this regard, including scholarship on the way fantasy literature can influence the way children experience the world.

Places to read. An important subset of literature in the consideration of place-conscious education is that focused on school and classroom design from an integrated architectural and pedagogical perspective. The goal of this work has largely been to explore the ways physical spaces encourage or inhibit the kinds of learning activities and school cultures parents and educators value (Clark, 2010; Curtis & Carter, 2003; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012; Hille, 2011; O'Donnell, Wicklund, Pigozzi, Peterson, & Mau, 2010; Tarr, 2004). The priority of promoting a school reading culture has been increasingly integrated into school design over the last four or five decades.

Desiring to make reading areas a central focus of the school space, some elementary schools have elected to design open space libraries in the center of the school. Others have included numerous north-facing windows in their libraries for natural light for reading or libraries that open up to an outdoor courtyard, implying a connection between nature and aesthetic activities like reading. Highlighting the sociocultural meanings ascribed to these spaces, Hille (2011) describes one of these schools, "On the upper floor of the central wing, the library occupies a prominent position that places it, and the traditional academic values it represents, at the center of students' daily activities" (p. 205). School architects have also been responsive to children's developmental needs in their designs; many include child-size furniture, soft textures and spaces for imaginative play in reading areas (Curtis & Carter; O'Donnell, Wicklund, Pigozzi, Peterson, & Mau, 2010). Working from a Reggio Emilia approach, Tarr (2004) concludes that, in addition to considering classroom design and

physical layout to promote positive reading experiences, teachers must also be critical about the materials they bring into the space and avoid cluttering the walls with commercialized literacy materials that carry little meaning to children.

Like Curtis & Carter (2003), Clark (2010) argues that children should play a role in the design of meaningful learning environments. In observing and talking with preschool-aged children, she found that they had many ideas about the purpose a reading corner could serve in the primary classroom. Many students felt that the reading corner was a place to go for solitude or rest. Others saw it as an imaginative space, which held the potential for play.

The Meaning of Childhood Experience

Childhood Reading Experiences

In recent years, numerous memoirs have been published which focus on the transformative role of childhood reading experiences in the formation of adult identity. Often described much differently than “learning to read,” childhood reading experiences are conceptualized more like a form of imaginative play or participation in a culture that permeates beyond the restrictive boundaries of formal literacy instruction (Chambers, 1996a; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003; Sutton & Parravano, 2010). A number of memoirists credit the books they read in childhood as having allowed them to overcome victimization and various forms of oppression; what has been referred to by some literature scholars as a kind of “self-fashioning” (Barnett, 2013).

Still, beyond the implied assumption in the traditions of literary theory that books influence individual and collective identity, a number of projects have specifically documented the perceived influence of childhood reading experiences on identity development (Cassidy, 2008; Cohen & Mackeith, 1991; Goodenough, 2006; McCabe, 2014;

Tatar, 2009). Interviewing hundreds of participants over a decade, Tatar (2009) inquired into whether or not children's books can "change us." She concluded that like the traveler who returns from a trip with an artifact to memorialize the experience, readers return from their reading with "words and images that resonate in mysterious ways with real-life experiences," (p. 205) creating opportunities for a shift in the way readers see themselves and interact in the world (p. 90).

Literacy educators have explored the impact of childhood reading experiences on parents' evaluation and selection of books for their own children to read. Parents often choose to read books to their children that they enjoyed themselves as children (Nodelman, 2008; Wilkinson, 2003). Children's book publishers have recognized the power of these nostalgic connections and have used this as a powerful marketing tool (Cassidy, 2008). Like Tatar, Cassidy (2008) suggests adults keep souvenirs of childhood reading experiences, but she sees the books themselves as a kind of memorialization, reminding adults of the joy they experienced reading as children.

Special Childhood Places

Much of the current work on children as place-makers stems from the work of place-attachment theorists, namely Louise Chawla, who began to extend the developmental concept of "place as mother" to think about children's agency and independent meaning making processes in their physical environments. In early childhood, "places provide three types of satisfaction: security, social affiliation, and creative expression and exploration" (Chawla, 1992, p. 68). Chawla (1992) writes,

According to Lynch (1981), emotional as well as physical claims to a place depend upon the following set of spatial rights: the right of presence, of being in a place; of

use and action; of appropriation; of modification; and of disposition. Lynch has noted that young people's enjoyment of these rights extends only as far as adults' toleration, or ignorance, of their activities. (p. 69)

Geographer Roger Hart set many precedents in studying children's experiences of place and development as place-makers in middle childhood (approximately ages six to thirteen), a time when children often gain independence in an expanding geographical range (away from monitored spaces within the home and out into the neighborhood). His foundational work included an inquiry into the significance of children's "special places." Bringing together the phenomenological perspective of Merleau-Ponty, the developmental theories of Piaget and Erikson and the work being done in what was then termed behavioral geography, his ethnographic study, "Children's Experience of Place" (1979) opens with the conclusion,

Any attempts to design successful environments with children should be preceded by an understanding of children's activities in and experience of the physical environment. At the inception of this study, there were to my knowledge no descriptive studies of the behavior of children in relation to the everyday physical environment beyond the simple mapping of play by the design profession. (p. 3)

Considering the child's and observer's perspectives, Hart observed a group of twenty children living in the same area of a small, urbanizing town for a year and a half in order to describe children's "phenomenal landscapes" (p. 13). His inclusion of child-participants into an ethnographic study of place served as a model for a number of other researchers who followed Hart.

Hart found that, although their preferred activities in their environment differ by age, gender and familial influence, children place significant value on knowing how to get to places, the “discovery” of paths and the social phenomena of sharing “short-cut” secrets with friends (p. 73). Hart also found that children had little knowledge of or interest in the world beyond what they had experienced directly and “named” personally significant places based on their functionality and narrative connotations, such as “the house with the dog that bites” (p.150). Children’s feelings toward places were formed from their use in play, the social value attached to them, as well as their aesthetic qualities.

Liina Unt (2010), scenographer and scholar, has written similarly about young children’s outward expression of internal engagements with real and fictional environments during play in *Playing with Places: The Aesthetic Engagement of Place in a Play Situation*. She concludes that, “Playing makes aesthetic engagement in places as processes possible” (p. 381). She reinforces the idea that objects and landmarks in a child’s physical environment are often taken up, manipulated and transformed in the service of bringing forth a fictional environment. She concludes that even into adulthood, the “places” where special childhood activities occurred are viewed through this lens of constructed meaning.

Building off of Hart’s seminal work, Sobel’s *Children’s Special Places: Exploring the Role of Forts, Dens, and Bush Houses in Middle Childhood* (1993), explores children’s special places in towns located in England, the West Indies and the United States. In visiting children’s special places, with the child-participants serving as narrators, Sobel found that inside children’s secret hideouts the children relished the opportunity to control the space independently and make their own decisions about the activities that took place there. He concluded that “place-making” is a universal phenomenon with children across cultures.

Cohen and MacKeith (1991), Langhout (2001), Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein (2006) and Green (2013) follow in the tradition of Hart and Sobel in studying children's special places and the activities that occur there. Langhout and Green looked at children's special place activities: the former in school settings and the latter in home settings. Langhout (2001) finds that when the third through fifth-grade children in her study were given choice, independence, autonomy, and leadership in regard to the activities within their school microsettings, they developed affection towards those places. Green (2013) drew similar conclusions in her inquiry into preschoolers' special places at home.

Cohen and MacKeith and Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein studied children's creation of imaginary worlds, special places that were enacted and given shape by the affordances and limitations of their physical environments. Cohen and MacKeith (1991) documented sixty-four paracosms, or imaginary worlds from adults' memories of childhood. They were also given access to a number of primary artifacts from adults' childhood play including creative writing pieces and maps. They found that many adults connect their imaginary worlds, their special places, to the literature they read and loved as children.

Like Edith Cobb's (1977) project that looked at the transcendental experiences of place in the memoirs of creative "geniuses," Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein (2006), also surveying adults, attempted to connect children's "worldplay" with creativity in adulthood. One of the characteristics of these special places that the authors were looking for was described:

However, whether they play in an imaginary land with several intimates or by themselves, the make-believe does not wisp away at the end of the day. The imagined world organically builds over months, sometimes years; it accumulates behind-the-

scenes narratives, geographies, cultures, social and political institutions, and even ecosystems. (p. 406)

Elizabeth Goodenough (2003) also explored the phenomenon of children's special places through adult participants, but her inquiry focused on academics that were asked to reflect back on their childhoods linking the "secret" places they inhabited as children to their storied identities as adults. She concludes through these authoethnographic accounts that children's place-making is a critical part of their psychological development. Goodenough (2003) writes,

...controlling access is critical, for it allows children to show off or share private spaces on their own terms. Insisting on the logic of an area that is 'all for me,' children script what they look for and become. Like narratives that put a structure onto life, getting into this 'child-sized cave' made everything right...In the practice of such handshaping and story-making, children hone the two survival skills of their species. (p. 9)

Contributors believe that playing in secret spaces allowed them to practice social roles and new identities, provided them a sense of belonging and continuity and, as one participant commented, to "savor the pleasure of my own company" (p. 32). The over sixty contributors conclude through their reflections that not only have these special childhood places shaped their developing identities, but that they return to memories of these places often for pleasure and comfort, particularly in their dissatisfaction of their present world. Many shared that they keep artifactual mementos of these special childhood places nearby in their adult spaces as reminders of who they had the courage to be in those places and who they had dreamed of becoming.

Conceptual Framework

Children as Place-Makers

Both socioculturally and biologically influenced, children are actively engaged in *place-making* from the time they are born: a process of constructing functional, cultural and personal meaning of the physical and conceptual landscapes that are part of their lived experiences (Chawla, 1992; Tuan, 2002; Vanclay, 2008). Seamon (2014) defines place as “any environmental locus in and through which individual or group actions, experiences, intentions, and meanings are drawn together spatially” (p. 11). These places are multi-dimensional and can be conceptualized perceptually, sociologically, ideologically, politically, and/or ecologically (Gruenewald, 2003). Often times, the centrality of place in everyday lived experiences is taken for granted. However, children’s embodied engagement with the environment, as well as engagement with place through narrative or some form of education (Findlay, 2008), develops what can be referred to as a *sense of place*, the perception or awareness of living in a distinctive place (Ryden, 1993).

Purposeful education and new experiences, whether formal or informal, are critical to supporting children’s self-awareness and reflectivity as place-makers. Having autonomy and proprietorship over spaces in the home are an important part of children’s psychosocial development in early childhood, such as a toy corner or bedroom (Chawla, 1992; Green, 2013). As children enter middle childhood, caregivers often grant them greater independent geographic accessibility that extends beyond the home into the neighborhood (Chawla, 1992; Hart, 1979; Sobel, 2008).

During these periods of exploration, children are often observed as constructors of special places, such as carving out personal nooks behind furniture in early childhood

(Green, 2013) or building forts and bush houses in middle childhood (Sobel, 1993). Many of these places are created as sites for imaginative play. Adults often interpret these place-making experiences in childhood as having a significant impact on adult identity and perspective and are memories they fondly return to on a regular basis (Chawla, 1990; Cobb, 1977; Goodenough, 2003; Sobel, 1993).

Reader Identity

By the time children receive formal reading instruction, they have already begun to develop their own identity as readers. Reading experiences, such as being read aloud to by loved ones and having opportunities to explore books independently (Doake, 1985; Holdaway, 1982; Meek, 1988; Owocki & Goodman, 2002), lead to the formation of a child's positive expectations for books as aesthetic and social objects. Often, positive early reading experiences lead to children's desire to master conventional reading later in childhood, can help shape reading identity into adulthood and can even influence choices they make when they become parents themselves (Cassidy, 2008; Nodelman, 2008; Wilkinson, 2003).

As children become more independent readers in middle childhood, those who consider themselves to be "ardent readers" outside of school often develop a separate reading identity to assume in formal literacy settings in order to "succeed" (Alvermann & Xu, 2003). Out-of-school reading experiences look much different than reading done in school. Even when teachers use imaginative literature in elementary classrooms, it is often to promote a prescriptive instructional message, theme, or skill and children can begin to see "reading" as a narrowly defined, frustrating undertaking rather than as a way to nurture their social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing (Greene, 1978; Lewis, 2015; Nodelman and Reimer, 2003).

By contrast, in home and community contexts, as well as the informal spaces in school settings, reading identity is shaped by the cultures in which a child participates and identifies with, the accessibility and autonomy afforded by their material landscapes and the interests sparked by their lived experiences. From a phenomenological perspective, reading identity often fluidly traverses literary landscapes and fictional ones and is experienced through many different modes of understanding (Esrock, 1994; Ryan, 2001). Children's self-awareness and reflectivity as readers often involves the process of the reading experience, as well as the physical and social contexts in which this engagement occurs (Bhadury, 2013; Clark, 2010; Curtis & Carter, 2003; Grenby, 2011; Magnusson, 2012; Nelson, 2006).

The Role of Play

Play is one of the primary, most sophisticated, modes of learning in childhood. Imaginative play “provides the nourishing habit for the growth of cognitive, narrative, and social connectivity” (Paley, 2004, p. 8) and it serves a critical role in children's experiences as readers and place-makers, as well. Handler Spitz (2006) concludes,

Normally, we conceive of imagination as an inner, mental activity...quite separable from perception, which we take to be directed toward outward stimuli...; yet, in early childhood, these modes work in close harmony. Children's wishes, dreams, and fantasies feed into their immediate sensory perceptions, and their aesthetic lives in turn shape the contours of their fantasies. (p. 4)

Engagement in imaginative play can temporarily alter a child's perception of the physical environment and provides opportunities to interact with that place in new ways. Imagined landscapes can be experienced, not as representations of place, but as physical places with which children can engage (Unt, 2010). “Play worlds” are often inhabited

through narrative, “not only the storyline evoked but also those elements that support the story: play space, art, components, and scenic elements” (Chappell, 2010, p. 2). In a play world, artifacts from a child’s physical environment can serve as powerful prompters for intentional or spontaneous imaginative play. Literature or art production can serve as a prompter for embodied fantasy play, too, but can also be experienced as a form of virtual play (Esrock, 1994; Ryan, 2001; Walton, 1990). In this way, children’s imaginative play can permeate the boundaries between fictional landscapes as conceptual places and fictional landscapes as physical places.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the various ways that concepts of place and reading experience intersect in current literature. Scholarship in the field of children’s literature and literacy education positions children as meaning makers who do not just consume place knowledge through cognitive processes, but are awakened to the sensitivities of place through aesthetic readings that are felt and experienced. Others have looked at the permeable boundaries between real and fictional landscapes from the perspective of the reader. These fields have also approached the topic of place by looking at the politics of literacy within specific place contexts, concluding that reading identity is influenced by social structures, and with critical awareness, can also alter social structures. Within these different foci, books are considered, not just as intellectual objects, but as cultural artifacts, as well.

While place-based educators’ discussions of children’s literature in the classroom is most often characterized by a discourse of rational thought and logic by assuming the influence of children’s literature on a reader’s appreciation of place is direct and predictable, others have acknowledged the significant role wonder and imagination must play in

children's learning experiences. Stepping back from the internal transactions between reader, literature and sense of place, some work examines the role of the body in nurturing positive reading experience.

This chapter also explored the meanings of childhood experience in regard to adult identity with a particular focus on reading and place-making. The literature suggests that these childhood experiences hold meaning to many adults in abstract and practical ways. Often integrated into the same touchstone memories, regular recollections of childhood reading and place-making reinforce adults' ideals of who they want to be and how they want to engage with the world. The literature also concludes that many adults draw from their own childhood experiences of reading and place-making, whether positive or negative, to construct experiences for their own children.

Finally, this chapter presented the conceptual framework that guided this study, which brings together the concepts of children as place-makers, reader identity and the notion of play as a common thread in those experiences.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

I think that no experience which I have today comes up to, or is comparable with, the experiences of my boyhood.

–Henry David Thoreau, 1851

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore five adults' experiences of place within their childhood literacy life-worlds. By studying adults, this project aimed to describe and interpret the role children's literature and childhood reader identity might play in one's development as a place-maker in middle childhood (approximately ages six to thirteen), as well as the meaning those experiences hold in adulthood. With a better understanding of this phenomenon, educators working within a place-conscious philosophy of education can extend current thinking about the use of literature in elementary classrooms and design more authentic literacy curricula that has the potential to connect children to the places they dwell in meaningful ways and encourage them to be lifelong readers.

This study addressed five research questions: (1) In what ways have participants' childhood reading experiences functioned as pedagogical landscapes of place-consciousness? (2) In what ways do the experiences participants perceive as "touchstone memories" in their histories as readers transact with theoretical constructs of place making in childhood? (3) How do participants perceive the relationship between childhood reading identity and special childhood places? (4) How do participants perceive childhood reading experiences in relation

to adult identity, including place identity? (5) What role did participants perceive formal and informal pedagogical “places” playing in their reading identity?

In this chapter, I begin with an overview of my research methodology and design and a rationale for orienting the project as a qualitative phenomenological study. Following this rationale, I describe my methods for the recruitment and selection of research participants, outline the information I needed to gather in order begin to answer my research questions, as well as provide an overview of my research design, data collection methods and approach to data analysis. This chapter will conclude with a discussion in which I consider the ethics, trustworthiness and limitations of the study.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative Inquiry

Addressing concerns regarding the current neoliberal political forces shaping institutions of higher education and research—those characterized by a positivist rationale driven by consumerism and “market fundamentalism”—Denzin and Giardina (2015) support qualitative inquiry as means to promote social justice within a current political climate that can often be dehumanizing (pp. 9-25). Quoting Judith Butler, they argue that advancing qualitative inquiry can help “shake off what we think we know in order to lend our imaginations to vibrant and sometimes agonistic spectrums of experience” (Butler as cited in Denzin & Giardina, 2015, p. 17). With tensions between children’s lived experiences in and out of school at the heart of my inquiry, Denzin and Giardina’s proposition is consistent with the goals of this project.

Their reasoning is supported by a tradition of qualitative inquiry characterized by a focus on “the nature of interaction, the importance of context and the need to understand interaction as a process rather than a product” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 4). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) see the goals of qualitative research as attempting to understand, interpret, and explain social phenomena. Snape and Spencer (2003) conclude that the study of social phenomena require methods that assume the subjectivity of human experience, while traditional methods of the natural sciences are incongruent with these efforts. They point out that the “social world is not governed by law-like regularities but is mediated through meaning and human agency” (Snape & Spencer, 2003). While this subjectivity has been criticized by proponents of the scientific method, Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) defend the rigor of qualitative approaches explaining, “Qualitative research may be more descriptive or more explanatory, but it always aims to demonstrate the complexity, texture, and nuance involved in how individuals and groups experience themselves and their worlds” (p. 17).

Operating within these assumptions, I was able to approach my research topic asking “how” and “why” questions that would allow me to explore the complexity of my participants’ experiences as child readers and place-makers, as well as the context that enabled them to attach meaning to those experiences. Whereas quantitative studies primarily rely on numerical data, a qualitative approach privileges word-based and visual data in order to answer questions related to human experience, such as participant observation field notes, informal interviews, conversations and cultural artifacts. Lichtman (2009) describes this approach as dynamic in nature and holistic in aim (pp. 13-15). A qualitative study is dynamic in the sense that within this approach researchers have the liberty to modify methods and procedures as the project unfolds and the research context begins to be understood in new

ways. This affordance was especially critical for me during the interview phase of this study, in which participants were able to guide the location and the format of the interviews. In a few instances, these locations and formats changed mid-interview as the need to transition to a different location emerged from interview discussions. The ability to modify my plans for data collection was also important in a number of instances between interviews when participants reached out to me through face-to-face meetings or email with artifacts or additional thoughts they wanted to share before our next scheduled meeting (i.e. Sam locating a special clipping he had saved from *Grit* newspaper, which he sold and read often as a child).

Differing from quantitative studies that often focus on a few variables of a phenomenon, a qualitative approach is holistic. Pushing back against the positivist notion that researchers should strive to document an objective reality, qualitative inquiry explores the whole of a phenomenon with the understanding that there could be multiple legitimate interpretations of the same phenomenon. While not all qualitative researchers approach a research question from the perspective that knowledge is socially constructed (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005), this study is aligned with an interpretivist, or constructivist, paradigm.

By exploring the nature and the meaning of childhood experiences with literature and reader identity in the process of place-making, this study aims to contribute to the efforts of place-conscious education. The political landscape and current instructional practices that served as the impetus for the formulation of this study's research questions (i.e. the high-stakes testing culture brought about by current educational policy and positivist methods of accountability) also indicates the need for a qualitative methodology. A qualitative inquiry

allowed me to describe the human experience in unique ways based on participants' context and personal histories, as well as construct the meaning of those experiences in relation to identity.

The Role of the Qualitative Researcher

Approaching this topic as a qualitative study allowed me as the researcher to situate myself in the work and acknowledge the subjectivity of my findings (Lichtman, 2009). While the role of the qualitative researcher is to immerse herself in the research context in order to describe in detail the phenomenon being studied. The "perceived facts" are intimately tied to her own perspective within the research context (Patton, 2001). Throughout all phases of the research process, I felt it was crucial for me to explicitly seek to understand and make known my own biases and assumptions and to critically consider my influence on the nature of the data collected as well as the presentation and interpretation of the data.

My relationships with the participants of this study were also shaped by the nature of a qualitative investigation (Butler-Kisber, 2010). I approached my research questions with the understanding that I was "attempting to make sense or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (2011:3)" (Denzin & Lincoln as cited in Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 3). In order to do this, it was important that I break down the conceptual boundaries between researcher and participant so that participants would see themselves as co-constructors of understanding and as having a powerful voice in the narration of their personal experiences. This required me to build rapport and a relationship of trust with the participants with whom I did not know prior to the study and to negotiate researcher-participant roles with those participants whom I did have a prior relationship.

Rationale for Phenomenology as Method

Phenomenology

Before determining the method and research design for this study, I first formulated my research questions. Described in Chapter 1, these questions emerged from my personal experiences as an elementary teacher and former child reader through which I observed the ways current educational policy creates barriers to children's aesthetic engagement with literature and local place in schools. These research questions, all pertaining to the nature and meaning of particular kinds of lived experiences, align with the aims and affordances of phenomenological research.

As first proposed by Heidegger, the goal of a hermeneutic phenomenological study is to describe, as accurately as possible, a given phenomenon as experienced by participants—the *essence* of a phenomenon—and to understand and interpret the meaning of those lived experiences (Dowling, 2007). Husserl's foundational work on the method in the early 20th century was based on the notion that while objects in the external world cannot exist independently, "people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness" (Groenewald, 2004). Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) point out, though, that *intentionality* is the *essence* of consciousness, not just awareness, and "it means that consciousness is always directed toward some world or other (the real world, an imaginary world, a dream world, etc.)" (p. 32). Therefore, these personal realities, while acknowledged to be inherently subjective, are the phenomena to be studied as well as their potential meanings. Out of this line of thought have come the concepts of *lived experience* and *life-world*: the former understood as the pre-reflective dimensions of everyday experiences

(Cresswell, 2007) and the latter as “the way a phenomenon appears in everyday life” (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008).

While phenomenology was first characterized as a philosophical perspective, its application as a research method has also been developed and refined. Presuming the temporality of human experience (Polkinghorne, 1988), phenomenology relies primarily on narrative data, most often collected through one-on-one unstructured or semi-structured interviews that aim for participants to “rediscover first experience” (Dowling, 2007) as Merleau-Ponty proposed or to “search again for the essence of their lived experience” (Seidman, 2013). These methods will be described in more detail in the “Research Design” section below.

The experience of place. One facet of the phenomenon explored in this study is the experience of place or the experience of being a place-maker. Phenomenology has been used as a method of studying human beings’ experiences of place, from some of its earliest iterations in the twentieth century. Merleau-Ponty’s foundational work in phenomenology significantly contributed to the initiation of discussions concerning the perceptual body and place (Seamon, 2014). Drawing from this heritage and from the work of phenomenologist and philosopher of place, Edward Casey, Seamon (2014) provides a phenomenological definition of place, writing “any environmental locus in and through which individual or group actions, experiences, intentions, and meanings are drawn together spatially” (p. 11).

In addition to one-on-one interviewing, there have been various other kinds of narrative data used to study the experience of place as defined above. The work of Cobb (1977) and later Chawla (1990) used phenomenological methods when they analyzed the narrative production of “ecstatic” place experiences using adult memoirs as narrative data.

Casey (2000a; 2000b) and Donohoe (2014) use phenomenology to study the relationship between memory and the concept of place; both employ systematic methods of narrative remembering, then reflecting on the remembering of their own experiences of place. Participant observation can be integrated into the phenomenological study of place, especially considering a phenomenon like the flow of movement and rest in a space or the experience of place through play (Seamon, 2014; Unt, 2010). As a final example, the visual arts have been used both as narrative data (Cormack, Green & Reid, 2008) and as a jumping off point to engage participants in narrative production (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010).

Reader experience. Another facet of experience in this study is the experience of the act of reading or the experience of being a “reader.” The application of reader-response theory as a method has approached the topic of “reader experience” from similar philosophical perspectives as phenomenology. Michael Benton (2009), writing of the heritage of reader-response in the study of child readers, notes,

As Laurence Lerner (1983: 6) has pointed out, perhaps the most important division in contemporary literary studies is between those who see literature as a more or less self-contained system, and those who see it as interacting with real, extra-literary experience (that of the author, or of the reader or the social reality of the author’s or the reader’s world). Reader-response critics clearly fall within this second category.
(p. 87)

Despite differing perspectives and foci among reader-response critics, there is a consensus that the reader brings her experiences to the reading of a text and carries the reading of that text to her subsequent experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994). Rosenblatt describes the phenomenon:

Through the medium of words, the text brings into the reader's consciousness certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, scenes. The special meanings and, more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to *him*. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text. [pp. 30-31] (Rosenblatt as cited in Pressley, El-Dinary, Gaskins, Schuder, Bergman, Almasi, & Brown, 1992, p. 525)

The idea that a text brings "certain sensuous experiences" and that a reader contributes a "particular physical condition" to the reading experience has provided an opportunity for many literary scholars to expand the study of children's literacy practices to consider reading from an explicit phenomenological perspective. Drawing from Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reader-response and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Robison (2011) concludes, "All actions and perceptions are inextricably bound up within the body, which is inextricably bound up in the world" (p. 3), including the experience of reading and of being a reader.

While much of reader-response research has focused on analyzing the text for *implied* readers rather than actual readers (Blackford, 2004), and studies that have included readers focus primarily on the cognitive processes that take place during a formal literacy event, Robison argues that studying literacy practices through a phenomenological lens can help construct a more comprehensive view of literacy (p. 2). She asserts that researchers should be

asking more research questions regarding how readers make meaning of their reading experiences, how they perceive themselves as reader and how reflection functions at the level of experience.

This broader view of literacy extends the study of children's responses to literature into the child's literacy life-world (Kendall, 2008), which "includes the acts of reading or literary affinity (such as referencing a story or using a certain style of speaking or writing that is reminiscent of literary prose or fiction) that one takes for granted as one does them" (Robison, 2011, p. 2). By studying children's literacy life-worlds, Pahl and Rowsell (2010) have taken this perspective on the use of children's personal artifacts in literacy classrooms. In their recent work, artifacts are seen a bridge to of out-of-school places that connect children's place identities meaningfully to content through oral and written narratives.

The Role of the Phenomenologist

Within a phenomenological qualitative study, I as the researcher had certain unique responsibilities to ensure that participant involvement, data collection and analysis, and the presentation of findings were methodologically consistent and to eliminate obvious obstacles to describing the experiences of my participants at the level of consciousness. The first of these requirements was that I make a conscious effort to engage in certain attitudinal modifications during the process of data collection, namely "bracketing" and "phenomenological reduction" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Groenewald, 2004). Bracketing refers to the researcher's need to choose not to engage her own knowledge of the phenomenon being studied in order to be immersed in the description and interpretation of the phenomenon from the perspective of participants, bracketing these experiences from consideration. The second attitudinal shift, phenomenological reduction, acknowledges the

temporality and subjectivity of experiences. Phenomenological reduction requires the researcher to acknowledge “the objects or states of affairs being considered are taken to be presences, not realities (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008, p. 33).

Another responsibility I acknowledged as a phenomenological researcher was the need to be sensitive to the “meaningfulness” of having participants reconstruct experiences. Phenomenology assumes that calling attention to a particular phenomenon, usually instances taken for granted in everyday lived experiences, changes the way we carry out or find meaning in that phenomenon in the future (Findlay, 2008; Lewicka, 2014). Seidman (2013) points out, “Schutz argues that meaningfulness does not reside in the lived experience itself, but is the ‘act of attention’ which brings experiences that would otherwise be simply lived through into our ‘intentional gaze’ and opens the pathway to meaningfulness” (p. 18).

It is not just an issue of research ethics, but is also an important consideration for the use of research methods, particularly the kind of in-depth interviews often used in phenomenological studies like this one. This became apparent when in the second and third interviews, a number of my participants shared ways the prior interviews had made them think and conduct themselves differently in the intermittent time between meetings (e.g. Virginia encouraging her son’s interest in a mysterious nook in their neighborhood). This realization made it especially important for me to understand the contexts in which my participants were reflecting on their experiences and constructing/reconstructing meaning.

Recruitment and Selection of Adult Participants

Recruitment

By studying adults, this project aimed to describe and interpret the role children’s literature and childhood reader identity might play in the process of one’s lifelong

development as a place-maker. Because the goals of place-based education in which the rationale for this project is situated are long term and future-oriented—meaning, they aim to nurture lifelong place-conscious habits of mind—it was important to explore, not just the nature of these childhood experiences, but the meaning attached to them in adulthood. I established only two requirements for my research participants: (1) Participants must be over 21 years of age. (2) Participants would have identified themselves as avid readers in childhood.

By requiring participants to be over 21 years of age to be involved with this study, I hoped to recruit adults who were at the end of or beyond college age. In my experiences as an instructor at the university level, I have found that the four years most undergraduates spend getting their bachelor's degrees are very formative years in regard to how they begin to characterize their adult identity as literate members of society. Therefore, I felt that including participants who were beyond this stage of education could add an interesting layer to a retrospective reconstruction of reader identity and reading experience.

It was also important that participants identified themselves as avid readers in childhood. The perceived relationship between reading experiences and place-making is a central component to the phenomenon being studied. While one of the theoretical assumptions framing this study is that, as children, all adults were involved in a continual process of constructing meaning of the multiple dimensions of the places they dwelled, it cannot be assumed that all adults were engaged in reading experiences (again, often, but not always, a distinct phenomenon from “learning to read.”). As avid child readers, the participants recruited for this study were likely to have a wide variety of reading experiences and experiences of “being a reader” from which to draw. However, I did not stipulate that

these adult participants must identify themselves as avid readers in adulthood to be included in this project.

To recruit participants who satisfied the criteria for inclusion in this study, I used a method of purposeful sampling known as *snowball sampling* to identify potentially “information-rich” cases for in-depth study (Groenewald, 2004; Patton, 2001). Snowball sampling, sometimes referred to as *chain sampling*, is an approach for identifying potential participants through inquiries to personal acquaintances or people who might be considered “key informants” and would be able to recommend others as participants (Morgan, 2008; Patton, 2001). Through this process, I informally sought to recruit as diverse a sample of participants as possible in terms of age, gender, career, location and relationship to me as the researcher.

Once potential participants were identified, each was given a “Participant Overview” information sheet to review before deciding whether or not they would want to be part of the study. This information sheet provided them with background on myself as the researcher, the purpose of the study as well as a general overview of what would be expected of them throughout the project (see Appendix A). This search process resulted in the recruitment of five participants, a sufficient sample size for a phenomenological study (Groenewald, 2004). Three of the five participants were people with whom I had a pre-established close relationship prior to this project, which in many ways contributed to the richness of the data (Laura, 2013). Before we began interviews, each participant signed a “Consent for Research” form approved by my institution’s Institutional Review Board and the Office for Research Protections.

Participants

In the brief descriptions that follow, participants have been assigned pseudonyms that will be used hereafter in order to keep their identities anonymous. While the concept of place is a crucial aspect of this study, the names of some locations have also been changed. Though all descriptive detail remains as accurate as possible, in these instances, I felt that providing actual place names would reveal the identity of participants and therefore breach the standards for maintaining confidentiality that were agreed upon by myself and the participants of this study prior to the first interview. However, throughout this work, I have indicated where these name changes have occurred.

Sam. Sam is in his late-sixties and lives in Pinevale (fictitious name), a town in southwestern Pennsylvania located at the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains, a region known as the Laurel Highlands. He is a retired elementary school teacher and very well known in the community for starting an Outdoor School (which is still in existence) in the early 1970s for all fifth-grade students enrolled in the district where he taught for thirty-five years (and where I was also a teacher for four years). I have known Sam, his wife, and their three grown children for ten years. All three of my interviews with Sam were done in his home sitting at the dining room table or in the family room.

Violet. Violet is a university librarian in central Pennsylvania, though at the beginning of her career she was a children's librarian and also taught at a school for girls in New York City for a time. She is in her mid-forties and lives in State College, Pennsylvania with her husband and children. Violet and I had met on one occasion a year before our first interview, but I did not know her personally prior to this project. My interviews with Violet were all conducted in her office in the university library.

Maddie. Maddie and I have been colleagues for three years. She is a doctoral student in her early-forties studying education and children’s literature and has an undergraduate degree in creative writing. While she currently lives in central Pennsylvania, Maddie considers her home to be in northeastern Ohio in Brunswick, the town where she spent her entire childhood and has also lived intermittently as an adult. Before beginning a doctoral program, Maddie worked as a paralegal, as well as a Senior Business Information Analyst at Nationwide Insurance. Maddie and I met at Perkins Family Restaurant & Bakery for each of our interviews.

Cliff. Cliff is in his early-thirties and lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, but spent most of his life living in Taborville (fictitious name), Pennsylvania, a small mountain village that he still considers “home” in the Laurel Highlands region of the Allegheny Mountains. Cliff and I have been friends for approximately twenty-five years. He has a bachelor’s degree in English journalism and works as a Senior Captioner for a media captioning company. My first interview with Cliff was conducted as he gave me a driving tour around Greensburg, Pennsylvania, the town where he lived until he was eight-years-old and our second interview was done while we walked around various locations in Taborville. I met with Cliff for our final interview at a Panera Bread restaurant.

Virginia. Virginia lives just north of the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with her husband and young children. After completing a graduate degree in Women’s Studies at the University of Oxford, she worked as a librarian for a few years. Now, in her late-thirties, she is a full-time photographer and mixed media artist. I became aware of Virginia’s work as an artist, much of it inspired by the books she read as a child, through her website. I did not know Virginia prior to the recruitment phase of this research project. Virginia and I met for

all three interviews at a Così restaurant within walking distance from her house, where she was considered a “regular” and the café workers had her favorite drink memorized.

Information Needed

Before taking the beginning steps to carry out my study, I had to outline the kinds of information I would need to answer my research questions. In most qualitative studies, there are four kinds of information required to adequately carry out the project, including demographic, contextual, perceptual and theoretical (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). It was essential to this phenomenological study that I gather demographic information related to my participants—general characteristics, such as age, career, where they live, etc.— and also that I work towards an understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which they are situated. In the instances of Sam, Maddie and Cliff with whom I shared a relationship prior to this project, much of this demographic and contextual information was already known to me, but I was careful to have this information clarified or elaborated in participants’ own words during informal discussions leading up to the first interview, as well as throughout the interview process. Similarly, my informal conversations with Violet and Virginia during the recruitment phase of the study allowed me to gather some of the demographic and contextual information I needed and the rest of the information was attained throughout the interview process.

Because it was crucial that I understand participants’ perceptions related to the topic of this study, this was one of the aims of my interview prompts and questions. When initially recruited, many participants enthusiastically expressed their personal perspectives on the political landscape that serves as the backdrop for this project, as well as the significance of

their childhood reading experiences outside of school. In order to answer my research questions, my primary goals throughout data collection were to be able to, through the eyes of my participants, (a) understand who participants were as child place-makers and (b) reconstruct the childhood literacy life-worlds in which participants carried out their roles as place-makers. Participants were given interview prompts and topics in advance of each interview so that they had time to reflect and re-reflect and they had many opportunities throughout the interview process to clarify, elaborate and rethink their perceptions.

The theoretical information I needed to conduct this study evolved throughout all phases of the project. My initial review of literature took place as I built understanding and background knowledge on the research questions that were emerging from my own experiences as a teacher and as a reader. After establishing the purpose of the study, as well as my five guiding research questions, I went back to the scholarly literature to situate my project within the field and to establish the theoretical basis for my research design and methods. This process continued through the process of conducting the analysis of my data and preparing to present my research findings and conclusions.

Research Design

Timeline

The proposal for this research study was approved by my doctoral dissertation committee in early-November 2014 and then by my university's Institutional Review Board at the beginning of December 2014. The recruitment of participants for this project took place during the months of January and February 2015. Shortly after, the first of the three interviews was scheduled. All interviews were conducted throughout March and April of 2015 and interviews were transcribed throughout the month of May.

Data-Collection Methods

Interviews. Interviews served as the primary method of data collection for this project and the three-interview series model of phenomenological interviewing guided this approach with my own slight modifications. Finding “one-interview” models limiting and, to some degree, superficial, this approach was intended to allow “both the interviewer and the participant to explore the participant’s experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning” (Seidman, 2013, p. 20). As developed by Dolbeare and Schuman, the first interview in the series is intended for participants to have the opportunity to share their life history as a context for the phenomenon being studied. They point out that this history should be a “focused life history” that is relevant and meaningful to the phenomenon being studied. The second interview is intended to focus on the details of the experience being studied, while the third interview is designated for participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences within the context provided in the first interview. It is also recommended that the three interviews be spaced out between three days to a week apart, so that enough time passes that the researcher and the participant can reflect on the previous interview and mentally prepare for the next. In my review of this method, I felt that it would also be important to avoid letting too much time pass between the interviews for concern that the lapse might disrupt the mental flow of the model’s scaffolding.

For this project, the overall goal of interviews one and two was for participants to reconstruct their childhood literacy life-world. While I chose to use the term “reading landscape” with my participants rather than “life-world” (which I use synonymously in this study), my interview prompts and questions were intentionally aimed at eliciting the reconstruction of participants’ conceptual worlds as child readers. This retrospective

approach, inherently subjective, allowed me (as well as my participants) to consider childhood reading experiences that were taken for granted as they happened, but have stayed with them into adulthood as significant or meaningful memories. These literacy life-worlds were then the context on which we reflected on participants' "experience of place" explicitly in the third interview. However, some of this reflection of place experience was done simultaneously alongside participants' reconstruction of the literacy life-world during the first two interviews.

In this project, I interviewed each of my five participants on three separate occasions, using a digital audio recorder to document our meetings. Based on participants' schedules, we were able to schedule interviews between six and eight days apart. I had proposed an estimated time commitment for interviews to be between 60 and 90 minutes depending on the nature of the discussions, but participants were informed that they could stop the interviews at any time. The first round of interviews lasted around one hour and in general, the second and third interviews got progressively shorter by about 10 minutes. After analyzing the interview transcripts, I believe this was due to the participants' ability to build off of the background information shared in the first interview instead of having to build this context during each topic discussed in the last two interviews. The shorter second and third interviews could also have been a result of the mental space we were in by the third interview together; we had been discussing and reflecting on the same phenomenon for three weeks by the final interview, so it became easier to mentally situate ourselves later in the process.

The interviews themselves could be characterized as informal conversational interviews, sometimes referred to as unstructured interviews (Lichtman, 2009; Patton, 2002). This allowed me to use my own judgment and intuition to respond in meaningful ways to

participants' comments and dig deeper into the nuances of their individual experiences, being careful not to ask leading questions (Patton, 2002). Through the information gathered in the interviews, I intended to be able to narratively reconstruct participants' identities as child place-makers, the childhood reading landscapes in which they enacted their role as place-makers and consider the meaning those childhood experiences held for participants in adulthood. Keeping my research goals in mind, I prepared discussion prompts before each interview in case participants had little to say, but for the most part my questions emerged organically from participants' comments (see Appendix B). Because the nature of phenomenological interviewing requires participants to reconstruct experiences, I also prepared myself to be a sensitive and responsive interviewer by drawing from methods regarding the elicitation of memories (Casey, 2000b; Donohoe, 2014; Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002). This allowed me to be more intentional than haphazard in my follow-up questions, moving participants from possible "unselfconsciously mediated remembering to working back in a systematic way" (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002, p. 63).

In the first interview (focused life history), the participant was asked to share his or her "place biography:" a biography told through the narration of the places that have held some significance in his or her life. By considering the primacy of "place" to their significant childhood memories, participants were narrating the landscape in which they were coming to know the world and understanding their position within it, as well as reconstructing their interests and preoccupations as a child place-maker. Before the participant began to share their place biography, I clarified the prompt as needed, noting that I would encourage them to define "place" however it made sense to them, but supported their initial thinking by prefacing with "Places, generally thought of as geographic locations, might be as broad as the

East Coast or as specific as a tree house in the back yard of a childhood home or a nook under a bed.”

The goal of the second interview (details of experience) was for participants to narrate their history as child readers, focusing on favorite texts, reading experiences in various contexts (such as home, school and community) and memories that represent significant touchstone events. Interview Two served as the primary source of data for our reconstruction of participants’ childhood reading landscapes and childhood reader identity. At the end of this second interview, participants were given four prompts to consider in preparation for the final interview (see Appendix C) as well as a box of art supplies (i.e. a variety of paper, glue, scissors, tape, markers, maps, paint and paint brushes, pencils, transparency film, clothes pins, a collection of clipart photograph images and a children’s book). Participants were invited (but not required) to select one of the prompts that personally resonated with them and create an artwork or artifact of some kind to express their response to that prompt. Anticipating some reluctance by a few of my participants, I also suggested a possible alternative, which was to collect a few artifacts that represented their response to one of the prompts and display and curate these objects during the final interview. Three of my participants, Violet, Maddie and Virginia, created an artifact between the second and third interviews, while Sam and Cliff did not.

My final interviews (reflection on meaning) with my three female participants, therefore, began by having them share which prompt they chose to represent visually, describe why they chose the prompt that they did, and then narrate the thought process that led to the artifact’s creation. After discussing the artifacts, I asked Violet, Maddie and Virginia to consider the prompts they had not chosen. In my final interviews with Sam and

Cliff, we talked through their responses to each of the four prompts. All five of these final interviews concluded with a discussion of what meaning participants saw their reading experiences having to their sense of place.

To meet the needs of this research project, I planned for the integration of a number of ethnographic and arts-based research methods into the interview process. The multimodality of drawing and mapping makes them meaningful methods of representing experiences and expressing the meaning of those experiences in a qualitative research project (Cormack, et. al., 2008; Powell, 2010). The ways we connect maps and drawings to narrative (Styles & Bearne, 2003) means that the act of creating a map or a drawing can prompt remembering in unique ways. The participants in my study were invited to draw or map during discussions if they found it meaningful. I brought a sketchpad, markers, pencils and pens to each interview and had them available to participants at all times. Violet and Maddie were the only participants who used these materials and both of them chose to draw maps as they shared their “place biography” in the first interview. Both of them also revisited these maps when discussing their history as a reader in the second interview, adding multiple layers to these artifacts.

It was important to me that participants have the opportunity to choose the location for the interviews as indicated above. Interviews conducted with young children regarding their “special places,” as well as those looking at children’s experience of place as political, have often been conducted with the researcher visiting the places of interest with the participants (Green, 2013; Hart, 1979; Kendall, 2008; Moje, 2011; Sobel, 1993). By inviting my participants to select interview locations that were personally meaningful for them, it gave me the opportunity to try to understand the context in which they lived and worked

through various modes of knowing. It also provided us with a landscape of artifacts that were personally meaningful to participants and could be used as prompters for discussion, as well as for artifactual data. Finally, meeting participants in a place that was personally significant to them helped reinforce the trusting relationship I sought to build with each of them and to deconstruct the researcher-participant dichotomy that can position participants as subordinates in traditional positivist research environments.

It was also important to me that participants be able to choose the format of the interviews. Again, borrowing from arts-based and ethnographic methods, I gave participants the option of having a more traditional sit-down, face-to-face interview in the location of their choice, or to conduct the interviews during a tour (walking or driving) of the location of their choice. Walking during interviews has been found to make participants feel more relaxed and open, to allow for deeper personal connections, and again, to break down the researcher-participant power relations (Brandt, 2006; Pink, 2009; Powell, 2010). While Maddie took me on a driving/walking tour of the town where she grew up following our third interview, Cliff was the only participant who elected to conduct the interviews in motion. (My first interview with Cliff was conducted as we drove around the town where he lived until he was eight years old and the second interview was conducted walking around various locations in Taborville, the village where he spent the rest of his childhood and where we became friends.)

Once the final round of interviews concluded, audio recordings were transcribed using participants' pseudonyms.

Artifactual data. Visual and artifactual data were also collected in addition to the verbal data collected during interviews and can be characterized in three different ways: (1)

participants' personal artifacts, (2) participants' arts-based prompt responses, and (3) researcher's "place" documentation. By inviting participants to share any personal artifacts they felt were significant to include and to create an arts-based prompt response, it allowed me as the researcher to better understand participants' experiences in ways that are not possible through verbal communication alone. Like verbal language, physical three-dimensional objects and visual images can be expressive of personal experience (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010; Reid-Walsh, 2013; Styles & Bearne, 2003). Evidence of use, age and value, for example, suggest something about an owner's transactions with that object and the place that contextualized those experiences. Seeing books, not just as intellectual objects, but as physical objects, too, can give us insights into the permeable boundaries between a reader's real and fictional landscapes during reading experiences (Grenby, 2011; Lerer, 2012). As a kind of memorialization of experience (Goodenough, 2006; Tatar, 2009), inviting participants to bring personal artifacts to interviews and to interpret the meaning of their own experiences through the creation of an artifact, provided a multisensory and layered means for them to reconstruct the essence and the meaning of their childhood experiences and for me, as the researcher, to know their experiences differently.

Each of the five participants elected to share personal artifacts during the data collection process. Maddie and Cliff chose to share some important books that they had kept since childhood. Violet took out many books from the library that were important to her as a child and that she wanted to share during our interviews, as well as her Pinterest page. Sam shared the many newspaper clippings he had preserved from his childhood, as well as many photographs. Virginia emailed me current photographs of the bookshelves in her home. All

of these artifacts were documented and included in the data analysis in addition to participants' narration of these objects.

As stated above, Violet, Maddie and Virginia participated in doing an arts-based response to the prompts for the third interview and these created artifacts were included in my data analysis, too. Violet created a series of small collages bound together with a map and a small clothespin. She also made a digital version of this to share with me. Maddie created a three-dimensional landscape diorama inside of her art supply box, and Virginia incorporated her supply box, as well, by creating a three dimensional sculpture.

During my driving/walking tours with Maddie and Cliff, I documented various landmarks pointed out by the participants by taking photographs. While I had originally intended to include these photos as data, I realized before I began data analysis that these photographs represented my own experiences of place rather than a representation of the experiences participants were working to reconstruct as we visited each location. Therefore, these photographs were not included in the data analysis for this project, but did serve a significant role in my ongoing critical reflection of the consistency of my methods and the “bracketing” of my own experiences of the phenomenon. This was especially critical in my time visiting places with Cliff, because many of the places that made up an important part of his childhood were also personally significant to me. In a few instances in the next few chapters, though, these photographs do serve as a common visual point of reference for the points being discussed.

Data Analysis

To maintain the philosophical foundations of phenomenology, it was important for me to use an emergent, thematic method of data analysis in this project, rather than a method

that required me to create pre-defined codes. Groenewald (2004) points out that even using the term “data analysis” could have “dangerous connotations” for phenomenological research (p. 17). Referencing Hyener, he writes that the “term [analysis] usually means a ‘breaking into parts’ and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon...[whereas ‘explication’ implies an]...investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole” (Hyener, 1999, p. 161 as cited in Groenewald, 2004). Groenewald suggests, then, five phases of data explication for the phenomenologist: (1) Bracketing and phenomenological reduction, (2) Delineating units of meaning (3) Clustering of units of meaning to find themes, (4) Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it and (5) Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary. These five phases served as the primary framework for my own data analysis throughout this project.

I began the process of data analysis aware that I must approach the data with a *phenomenological attitude* (Patton, 2002). By taking on the perspective of epoche, “the researcher looks inside to become aware of personal bias” and seeks to “gain clarity about, preconceptions” (Patton, 2002, p. 485). Through research journaling, I determined that my biases included my experiences as an educator and my positioning as an advocate for place-conscious education. I also had had my own personal experiences in places that were significant to each of my participants at some point in their lives and could bias my analysis (i.e. Pinevale, the university library, Taborville, Philadelphia, etc.). My experiences as a former child reader and child place-maker, in which I often moved fluidly between real and fictional environments through play, were essential for me to consider as biases. My goal in taking on a phenomenological attitudinal shift was to lesson the influences of these biases in

order to better see the phenomenon through the eyes of my participants rather than through my own experiential lens as a child reader, place-maker, teacher, scholar, etc. I found that this was especially important in considering the role of intentionality in my own childhood experiences in relation to thinking about intentionality in the phenomenological study of the experience of others. Giorgi (1997) points out that phenomenology seeks to move beyond the taken for granted and consider the role of individual intentionality in perception, noting “Phenomenology doesn't automatically want to say that something ‘is,’ but it wants to understand what motivates a conscious creature to say that something ‘is’ ” (n.p.). This is one reason member checking and data triangulation were important aspects of the analysis process for this study, in particular.

After transcribing interviews, I began the process of formal data analysis by reading through all of my interview transcripts one time to get a general sense of the data overall. Then I initiated a process of *phenomenological reduction*, in which the researcher “brackets out” the world and

...The researcher holds the phenomenon up for serious inspection. It is taken out of the world where it occurs. It is taken apart and dissected. Its elements and essential structures are uncovered, defined, and analyzed. It is treated as a text or a document; that is, as an instance of the phenomenon that is being studied. It is not interpreted in terms of the standard meanings given to it by the existing literature. Those preconceptions...are suspended and put aside during bracketing. (Denzin, 1998, pp. 55-56 as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 485)

In practical terms, this required me to read through all of the interviews a second time and isolate all of the participants’ words or statements that spoke directly to the phenomenon

under study (i.e. the experience of place within participants' literacy life-worlds in middle childhood) (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Boyatzis, 1998; Saldaña, 2013). These key parts of the text were underlined and given tentative descriptors or units of meaning, such as "social dimension of place," "play" and "literary landscape." Artifactual data was integrated into interview data in the sense that artifacts were discussed with participants during interviews (i.e. arts-based responses, photographs, books, etc.), but descriptors or units of meaning were ascribed to these artifacts in isolation, as well, and were integrated into the construction of themes.

After this initial process of isolating key data was complete, I read the transcripts again. This time, I read only the excerpts that were underlined while being conscious of my continuous need to bracket my own preconceptions. The goal of this third read-through was to combine descriptors and eliminate redundancy within the data from each individual participant. Groenewald (2004) describes this process, noting,

To do this, the researcher considers the literal content, the number (the significance) of times a meaning was mentioned and also how (non-verbal or para-linguistic cues) it was stated. The actual meaning of two seemingly similar units of meaning might be different in terms of weight or chronology of events. (p. 19)

Once this process of *delineating units of meaning* was finished (Phillips-Pula, Strunk & Pickler, 2011), I grouped these descriptors together into emerging themes: "Reader as Place-Maker," "Important Childhood Places," "Reader Identity," "Reading Landscape" and "Meaning in Adulthood."

To summarize each participants' three-interview series, I wove these developed themes into participant profiles (Seidman, 2013, pp. 121-127) that sought to narratively

reconstruct and represent participants' experience of the phenomenon (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). Each profile was sent to participants to be checked for inaccuracies or gaps with missing information that distorted or misrepresented participants' experience of the phenomenon being studied. Following this process of member checking, profiles were refined and modified as needed.

Finally, these profiles were analyzed for common themes and structural relationships between these emerging themes. This process led to the development of four types of transactions that characterize participants' experience of place within their literacy life-worlds in middle childhood: Repositioning, Transportation, Nesting and Layering. These themes, characterizing the essence of the phenomenon being studied, are presented in Chapter 4 with illustrations from across participant data.

Further Considerations

Research Ethics

From the beginning planning stages of this study and throughout all phases of research that followed, I acknowledged that as a researcher conducting human subjects research I had a moral obligation to minimize the risk of any potential harm that could come to my participants as a result of contributing to this project. My primary concerns associated specifically with this study were the risk of the loss of confidentiality and the risk of experiencing negative emotions brought about by the personal nature of qualitative interview methods. These risks were made known to the participants during the recruitment stage of this project, as well as more formally in the Institutional Review Board approved "Consent for Research" form (see Appendix D) signed by participants prior to the first interview.

To minimize these risks, I took a number of precautions. In order to protect participants' confidentiality, all digital data was stored in password-protected files on my university computer and all hard copies of data were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities beginning at the interview transcription phase and were used consistently throughout the rest of data analysis and presentation. To minimize the risk of participants' experiencing uncomfortable or negative emotions during the interviews, each participant was informed prior to the first interview that interviews could be stopped at any time with no consequences and that transcript material could be rendered "unusable" at their request. The interviewing method I chose, informal conversational (Patton, 2002) also allowed me to ask intentional, but open-ended questions that gave participants the space to respond however they felt comfortable responding (Lichtman, 2009; Seidman, 2013). In formulating my follow-up questions, I tried to be sensitive to the emotions participants were expressing and intuit their comfort levels.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Due to the nature of qualitative inquiry, the trustworthiness of this research project must be evaluated in different terms than it would be in quantitative methodological traditions that define validity and reliability in positivist terms. Many qualitative researchers have opted to evaluate the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiries by considering the study's (a) *credibility*, or the congruity of the researcher's interpretations with the participants' perceptions, (b) *dependability*, or the transparency of the research process and procedures undertaken, and (c) *transferability*, or usefulness of the project to other contexts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The most obvious concerns related to the trustworthiness of a phenomenological study, such as the reliance on participants' subjective perception and

memory, the dependency on the researcher's subjectivity, and the potential for participant deceit (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008) are addressed below in a discussion of this study's credibility, dependability and transferability.

The concern of ensuring participants' perceptions of phenomena were consistent with my portrayal of their perceptions was rigorously addressed in this project. Through all phases of the study I maintained a research journal containing field notes and personal reflections, in which I sought to explicitly reflect on my biases and consider how my ontological perspective might be influencing the praxis of my methods or limiting the way I interpreted participants' perceptions. Triangulation of data was also used to critically test and corroborate my developing understanding and interpretation of the phenomena across multiple data sources: interviews, participant-created maps, artifactual data, and field notes (Groenewald, 2004; Patton, 2002). Once data was collected and I began to narratively reconstruct participants' experiences, I went through a process of "member checking" (Lichtman, 2009), in which I had participants read through my narrative drafts and check for any inaccuracies, misrepresentations or incorrect inferences, as well as to note any important details that may have been overlooked. It was also important to the credibility of this study that I remain thorough in documenting and presenting discrepant findings.

Designing a project that would meet the standards and criteria for dependability meant that my methods and processes remain transparent and meticulously documented throughout all phases of research. Each step that I took to carry out this project was documented in my research journal. In addition to this documentation, it was critical that I keep all of my raw data organized and methodically catalogued in both the digital and hard copy formats in case future researchers would want to review this information.

Finally, the transferability of this study was considered beginning from the planning phases of the project. An important undertaking in this regard was my rigorous review of literature, in which I was able to identify the kinds of research that might be able to fill in gaps of understanding in the way educators are currently conceptualizing the use of literature in place-conscious classrooms. In this process, it became clear that while many educators and educational researchers are beginning to consider place-conscious philosophies as an alternative to current political ideologies (Altman, Stires & Weseen, 2015), there is an even broader interest in the field in looking at the incongruity between children's experiences out-of-school and their in-school experiences. By using "thick description" in the presentation of my findings, my goal was that other researchers and educators might be able to consider my findings in light of how it might relate to their own contexts (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).

Limitations of the Study

Situating this project as a qualitative inquiry openly acknowledges the subjective nature of my findings and recognizes that the phenomenon being studied could be approached in multiple valid ways. However, there are some specific limitations of this study that are important to mention here. Broadly speaking, some of the limitations of this study are inherent in the methodology. While one of the major goals of phenomenological inquiry is to describe the essence of a phenomenon through the perspective of participants, it will never be possible to perfectly understand another person's consciousness (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). Seidman (2013) was referencing the challenges of phenomenological inquiry when he noted, "Lived experience is what we experience as it happens, but we can only get at what we experience after it happens through a reconstruction of that experience" (p. 18). To work

against this challenge, it was important that I conduct a thorough literature review to get a sense of the existing scholarship on similar phenomena: literature that employs a wide range of methods. This also made triangulation an essential part of the data collection and analysis process.

While analysis of phenomenological interview data requires the researcher to look for similarities and nuances across multiple cases, conversational interviewing can make it difficult to pull data together to analyze (Patton, 2002, p. 343). Even though the purpose of my three interviews was thoroughly outlined prior to my first meeting with participants, and I used discussion prompts that were prepared ahead of time, using the informal conversational interviewing method meant that different topics and lines of discussion emerged differently with each participant. The use of multiple data sources was an important way to combat this issue, as well as the time spent immersed in the interview data.

There are also a number of limitations that arose from the specifics of this project. I noted above that although the only requirements for participants to be included in this study were to be 21-years-old or older and to have been avid child readers, I made an effort to recruit a diverse sample of participants. While I was able to recruit participants of various ages, different genders and location, four of my five participants were Caucasian and all five of them had careers or college degrees in fields explicitly related to books or reading (i.e. library sciences, children's literature and creative writing, elementary education and journalism). This required me to be consciously aware of the role self-prophetic remembering might play in participants' reconstruction of experiences and to prompt participants to deconstruct and re-remember experiences in some instances or refer to artifactual data for corroboration.

Another limitation of this study arises from the recruitment of adult participants rather than child participants. While the retrospective approach to considering middle childhood reading landscapes affords me the opportunity to consider what memories have stayed with participants over time and what these experiences might mean in adulthood, there are also certain generational gaps that must be reconciled when implications of this study are considered. First, the high-stakes testing culture that now shapes public school curricula was either nonexistent or at its genesis at the time participants were going through elementary school. Secondly, the nature of text has evolved and changed tremendously in the last twenty years both in schools and in children's lives outside of school. The ready accessibility of an ever-increasing number of digital texts redefines reading landscapes in contemporary childhood, as well as children's experiences of place (Gustafson, 2014). To some degree, this limitation will be discussed in Chapter 5, as I consider participants' reflections on their own childhood reading landscapes compared to the experiences of their own children and students.

Art-based responses were a critical component of my final interviews with participants. Because the prompts and boxes of art supplies for this activity had to be prepared before the second interview, prior to our discussions of participants' reading histories, these prompts were perhaps not as responsive to the emerging data as I had intended them to be. The pre-prepared prompts, derived from what I learned about the phenomenon through the literature review process, touched on the intersections of reading experience and concepts of place generally. Whereas, if I had prepared the prompts after learning about how participants' reading experiences mapped onto their place biographies in the second interview, our discussions in the third interview may have been able to get at the

meaning of experiences more quickly and we would have had more time to deeply discuss these perceptions.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided a rationale for situating this research project as a qualitative phenomenological inquiry. This framework justified my engagement in the field, interviewing participants in their own contexts and coming to understand their experiences through different ways of knowing. Because the research questions guiding this study are concerned with individuals' subjective lived experiences of place in reading landscapes, phenomenology allowed me to explore the phenomenon through individuals' perceptions. I provided an overview of the kinds of phenomenological methods that have been used to study phenomena related to reading experiences and situated my own methods within that work.

This chapter also outlined the way I conceptualize my role as a qualitative researcher and as a phenomenologist. I highlighted the need for a qualitative researcher to negotiate relationships with participants, to reflect critically on personal bias and to be responsive to the emergent nature of the data collection process. From a phenomenological perspective, I noted the importance of "attitudinal shifts" on the part of the researcher: explicit self-reflective strategies that help to maximize participants' perceptions and minimize researcher bias.

In this chapter, I explained my methods for recruiting participants, as well as provided details of my research design. My use of the three-interview series model of phenomenological interviewing was described. Participants were first asked to share their "place biography," then narrated their detailed experiences as readers within those contexts,

and finally, were challenged to consider the meaning of their reading experiences in the context of their place-making. Following the description of interview procedures, I included justification for the additional collection of artifactual data as a means of expressing experience through different modes of knowing. The procedures for the analysis of the interview and artifactual data were presented, as well.

Finally, this chapter critically examined the ethical dimensions of this study and the limitations of the research design I chose to adopt. I called attention to some of the biggest concerns related to the trustworthiness of a phenomenological study, such as the reliance on participants' perception and memory, the dependency on the researcher's subjectivity, and the potential for participant deceit and addressed these concerns in a discussion of this study's credibility, dependability and transferability.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

A truly good book attracts very little favor to itself. It is so true that it teaches me better than to read it. I must soon lay it down and commence living on its hint.

–Henry David Thoreau, 1841

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore five adults' experiences of place within their childhood literacy life-worlds. By studying adults, this project aimed to describe and interpret the role children's literature and childhood reader identity might play in one's development as a place-maker in middle childhood. It was also an aim of this study to be able to describe the meaning those experiences hold in adulthood. In order to answer my research questions, my primary goals throughout data collection were to be able to, through the eyes of my participants, (a) understand who participants were as child place-makers and (b) reconstruct the childhood literacy life-worlds in which participants carried out their roles as place-makers. Being able to gather this information and focus specifically on experiences from middle childhood provided the essential context in which I could highlight the primacy of the concept of place and study the nature of readers' place experiences.

In the participant profiles (Seidman, 2013) that are presented in the first part of this chapter, I have sought to narratively represent participants' reconstructions of both themselves as child place-makers and their literacy life-worlds in middle childhood. As a unit for phenomenological study, the life-world is described as "the world as immediately or directly experienced in the subjectivity of everyday life" and "includes individual, social,

perceptual, and practical experiences” (life-world, 2015). *Literacy life-world*, a more narrowly defined conceptual landscape of lived experiences, can include the study of the construction of individual reading identity, social influences on attitudes and experiences, the perceptual and artifactual dimensions of reading experiences, and the practicality of reading as a communicative tool. Of course, a construction of the literacy life-world overlaps with and bleeds into a child’s lived experiences that might not be conceptualized as having to do with enacting reader identity. This is evident in the relationship between children as place-makers and children as readers that can be seen in the profiles below. However, the layered subjectivity inherent in this form of representation, particularly participants’ reliance on memory, will be an important consideration in Chapter 5 when I discuss what meaning these kinds of childhood experiences carry with us into adulthood.

While a researcher’s own subjectivity and bias will always influence the collection and interpretation of data, I was meticulous in the process of data analysis to think explicitly about my prior assumptions and experiences through journaling, so that themes emerging from the data would not be overlooked or misrepresented. To construct the participant profiles that follow, I have used participants’ own voices wherever possible. Because our interview discussions spanned, in some cases, participants’ life stories from birth through adulthood, it was necessary for me to isolate the narratives that focused on the period of middle childhood. In some instances, I had to use my own judgment in including information from other periods of participants’ lives in order to provide the context a reader would need to better see the experience through the eyes of the participant.

In the second section of this chapter, I present the five themes that emerged from the isolated data. Together, these themes—Repositioning, Transportation, Nesting and

Layering—characterize the nature of my participants’ experiences of place in the reading landscapes of middle childhood. *Repositioning* refers to instances in which participants saw themselves differently in relation to their physical or conceptual environments.

Transportation refers to participants’ sense of being imaginatively transported to a place that was different from their own, a literary landscape where they could engage in new experiences. *Nesting* describes the way participants manipulated their physical environment in preparation for the act of reading. *Layering* describes the means by which participants attempted to embody, in a very physical sense, a literary world by layering it on top of their immediate environment. In Chapter 5, I will consider the meaning of these findings in relation to my research questions.

Participants’ Literacy Life-Worlds: Middle Childhood

Sam

Sam as place-maker. Sam is sixty-nine years old and although he spent many memorable summers working at his grandparents’ farm in Friendsville, Maryland, he has lived his entire life in Pinevale, Pennsylvania, a town in southwestern Pennsylvania located at the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains in a region known as the Laurel Highlands. His childhood home was shared with his mother, an elementary school teacher, his father, a truck driver, one older sister and one younger sister, and his fraternal twin brother, Paul, whom Sam describes as having interests that were vastly different from his own. From an early age, Sam had an interest in studying history and science, but he also spent much of his middle childhood exploring and playing in the neighborhood with his next-door “playmates,” participating in the church basketball league, attending Sunday School, taking photographs, collecting things, reading and building models. While he remembers spending a lot of time

outside, he was also content to spend time alone in the bedroom he shared with his brother when he had the chance. He recalls,

It wasn't super big, but the way we arranged the furniture... Uh, the beds were kind of closer to the door, but it kind of made a, almost like a wall that we could, you know, go on beyond the beds. Between that and the front of the house, the windows, it was kind of an area and we often times had a table. I built models there and ships and airplanes and so forth. It was kind of like a separate little area for us. (Sam, *Interview One Transcript*)

The two constructs of place that Sam deems most important and contextualize his most significant memories from middle childhood were the neighborhood in which he grew up and his grandparents' farm in Friendsville, Maryland. While he no longer lives in the neighborhood where his childhood home is located and his family has since sold the farm in Maryland, he has saved a number of artifacts from his childhood and has collected additional memorabilia throughout his life that are representative of these places (i.e. bricks from the old school buildings, photographs, newspaper clippings, etc.). Sam directly attributes some aspects of his adult values to his positive engagement with these two childhood places.

In middle childhood, the conceptual boundaries of Sam's neighborhood landscape were made up of landmarks that were thought of in relation to his home on Conner Street, including places to play and explore with his neighbor friends, especially Danny, Butch and J.D., who were close in age to Sam.



Figure 1. Aerial view of Sam's childhood home and neighborhood collected by Sam as an adult

He recalls some of the landmarks they would often explore together,

I walked a block to school my whole twelve years...I grew up near the school, so of course, that was part of my growing up even in play. You know, often times we went up near the school or in the playground or in the ball field, whatever... I can remember even in the wintertime we'd go up and clear off the snow and play basketball...Even hide-and-go-seek in the close neighborhood, in the streets of Conner Street, in the alley and so forth. And I remember, where we grew up, there were two old... They were called reservoirs for the water... How they gathered water and used water for the neighborhood... And they had been abandoned...They had been shut down probably in the 40s, but in the 50s, they were still there physically.

And for us kids, that was a playground. (Sam, *Interview One Transcript*)

Other important landmarks in the neighborhood were also connected to Sam's developing understanding of local history and culture.

Down over the hill, was an old coalmine. And tippie and so forth and so on and we used to play around there. And not that it was that safe... But, uh, across Dicey Boulevard, straight across from Conner, there was an old ash dump where they had deposited ashes from the old coke ovens. There was an old coke oven up, coming up Dicey Boulevard. When I was growing up in the early 50s, there were times when you couldn't see the highway, the smoke was so thick... And, of course, on the slate dumps themselves, you just do different things. Run and jump and climb and so forth. (Sam, *Interview One Transcript*)

Beginning when they were around ten years old, Paul and Sam spent their summers working on their grandparents' farm in Friendsville, Maryland that was once called Penn Elm Farm. Describing his time there, he says,

Well, you didn't think of it as work...But we were there and we tended, got to feed the animals and tend to the animals. I can still remember being afraid to help my grandmother collect eggs. I didn't want to stick my hand underneath that chicken. I was afraid I was gonna get pecked, you know? (Sam, *Interview One Transcript*)

When they were not working, Sam recalls that some of the people who lived nearby would drop their children off at the barn to play in the hayloft with him and Paul. He also recalls the way his eyes itched from hay fever.



Figure 2. Sam (far right) with his brother (middle) and cousin (left)
at Penn Elm Farm in the early 1950s

Reconstructing his time there, Sam describes important community landmarks that expanded his conceptual boundaries of that place beyond the farm itself. These included a nearby park that hosted an annual summer jubilee and special fishing spots.

They tried to give us some time to goof off... We'd go out, my brother and I and play, pass baseball and things like that. Often times on Sundays, my grandfather would get our... He didn't work on Sundays except to feed the stock. We'd go fishing... There was one stream we had to walk, I'd say, a mile to get back to it from the road. We'd park the car and that's where, you know, we'd try to find a spot near the bank and toss your rod, line in. (Sam, *Interview One Transcript*)

Another important landmark at Penn Elm Farm was the local country store where his grandmother sold her eggs and the farmers in the community would gather to "shoot the breeze" (Sam, *Interview One Transcript*) and exchange information about their crops.

Sometimes we'd go to a, we called it... There was a country store. And often times in the evening, that was kind of the hangout... I can still remember the owner of the general store, their son... Of course, this was 1960 and he had just gotten a 1960 Chevrolet. He was in college... I don't know where, but wherever he was working for the summer, he was like the bellhop at the hotel, motel, whatever... And he got to carry the luggage for Pat Boone. I remember him telling that story. But, there were rocking chairs and benches on the front porch and you know, just people chewing the fat... At that time, the pop machine they had... I think it was a nickel for a Coke. I can't remember whether you'd put the money in the machine or gave it to the clerk. I can't remember that, but you had to take and get the bottle of pop out of the ice water

that you wanted and bring it over to this slot and pull it up. You know, it was just...

The water was cold! (Sam, *Interview One Transcript*)

Looking back on the farm as a significant place in his childhood, Sam says “I attribute the farm life to a strong foundation for me... You know, just the way that people were and the way that people were helpful, you know... There was a problem, you know, the community responded.”

Literacy life-world. To some degree, Sam’s reading landscape in middle childhood could be mapped in a literal sense onto the places he felt were the most important in his childhood (i.e. the neighborhood surrounding his childhood home and Penn Elm Farm), but in other ways, it extended beyond those places. He began reconstructing his childhood reading landscape by mentioning the influence of his mother who encouraged him to see the educational value of reading. He says, “Of course, my mom being a teacher, she always had books around.” (Sam, *Interview Two Transcript*) At holidays, he would often receive books as gifts and his mother would sometimes bring home books for him from her own classroom and he had an old corner cupboard in his bedroom where he would keep magazines, comics and copies of “the classics” alongside some of his other belongings. He remembers using some of these reading materials to try to teach his younger sister how to recognize letters and begin to read words. Displayed in a prominent place on the built-in bookshelf in the family living room, Sam’s mother had a set of World Book Encyclopedias that he enjoyed reading, as well as volumes of *Childcraft* that had the color orange somewhere on the covers. He recalls the way the encyclopedic volumes permeated the physical and conceptual boundaries between home and school,

I can't tell you how frequently, but quite often I would take a volume out and just start reading. Just cause the many different topics I enjoyed, too. You, no matter, you picked out the letter M, whatever was under M, you know. But, often times we had then, where a lot of other students did not have them at home. And often times, the teacher... You know, "Oh, I can look that up" or whatever. Bring that book, the World Book in on that particular topic or whatever it might have been. So, we did that... Kind of a resource, too. (Sam, *Interview Two Transcript*)

While the neighborhood elementary school he attended did not have an official library, many of Sam's teachers maintained a bookshelf or table of books that was mostly made up of their own personal copies of classic titles and biographies. Sam considers his lifelong desire to travel to the American West when he recalls, "I used to like to, even early on when I was able to read... I don't know, probably third grade, fourth grade, historical characters. Kit Carson, Daniel Boone, Davy Crocket, Bill Cody, Buffalo Bill..." (Sam, *Interview Two Transcript*) Sam especially remembers his sixth grade teacher who made time once a week for the class to read books on their own and exposed him to classics he enjoyed reading, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. He points out, "She had classic comic books, the classics, plus other books that she had available. But, she'd try to get us all to be reading something." (Sam, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Sam read many comic books on his own outside of school, as well as with friends. He sometimes enjoyed reading alone at the table in his bedroom under the lamplight or in the backyard in an especially lush patch of grass where an overgrown bush provided adequate shade. Or, he would visit his cousin, Donald, who had stacks of comic books in his bedroom

and they would read together. He would also purchase comic books on his own when he had the opportunity to visit the five and dime store in town. He recalls,

On Saturdays, my mother would sometimes drop us off, there was a movie special.

You know, give us money to go to the movie and often times we'd have time to go to the G.C. Murphey's and often times we'd go into the comic book rack and look and find something. But, most... I think they were a dime back then. And I think the classics were a quarter. (Sam, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Donald was not the only friend who spent time reading with Sam. His neighborhood playmate, Danny, was a major influence in introducing him to the genre of science fiction, especially works by the twentieth century author, Jules Verne, including *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. Sam's enjoyment of Jules Verne was an extension of his interest in science. He points out,

I had an early interest in science and I'd watch for magazines on... I don't mean science fiction, but more scientific. The science. But, of course, back in the early 50s, early 60s when the satellites and space travel got going, you know...In fact, I think I still have some newspaper clippings from, I think, the first United States satellite.

Selling the rural newspaper, *Grit*, around his neighborhood provided Sam with regular new reading material on his topics of interest and he saved many of these articles to reread.



Figure 3. A 1958 newspaper clipping from Sam's childhood collection

Similarly, Sam's interest in history overlapped with his evolving landscape as an independent reader. He recalls a number of family trips to historical sites, in which he collected free informational brochures and pamphlets or purchased reading materials from the gift shops, some of which he still has. He credits his mother being an educator for the way she valued taking her children to various historical and cultural sites. He says,

My mother's one sister lived near Antietam. So, we actually went there and that was before they commercialized it the way it is now. I mean, people had these little, like a fruit stand type thing, on their properties around Antietam, selling things that they had dug up themselves... One summer we went to Georgia. Okay, my mother's one brother lived near Andersonville and we went there one day. Of course, it's much more elaborate now. They made it a big deal, but back then it was left almost like it was when the prison camp shut down... And, of course, Fort Necessity we went to several times since it was someplace close... Most of the time I tried to find, whether they be pamphlets or something from the gift shop type thing. Something that I could take back home and read more about it. It wasn't just buying the metal cannon or something. It was something to take back with me. (Sam, *Interview Two Transcript*)

When Sam made his summer trip to Penn Elm Farm, he would take a stack of literature with him, including magazines about space, comic books and some of his Jules Verne titles. His grandfather had many farming magazines that Sam would read throughout the summer and his grandmother, "in the evening, would always get the Bible out." (Sam, *Interview Two Transcript*) For two weeks during the summer, the community would host a multi-denominational Bible School. Like his Sunday School teacher in Pinevale, his Bible

School teachers in Friendsville would encourage the children to memorize particular Bible verses, so Sam would spend time reading passages from his Bible, too.

Violet

Violet as place-maker. When asked to share her place biography, Violet began by pointing out that her father was in textbook publishing, so the family moved “at least once every three years the whole time I was growing up.” (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*)

Violet was born in Texas and lived there until she was five, the longest length of time she had lived in one place during her childhood. From Texas, the family moved “up to” Londonderry, New Hampshire where they lived for a few years before moving to Iowa when Violet was around seven years old. As she sketched out a map of her two moves to Iowa, she says,

We moved to Iowa, and that is where I spent the bulk of my time growing up. We actually moved there twice, and we moved to the same house twice, too... We moved away, lived... So, we lived here in Iowa, we lived in a little town called Dubuque, which is right on the Mississippi River, and then we moved to Cape Cod,... After a few years,... That’s going to be a bad Massachusetts. So we moved to Cape Cod for like, a year. That was, Massachusetts. And then, he was like, “No, I want my old job back” and our house was back on the market again so we moved back there, and so, I lived there twice. And then finally, when I was in high school,... Let’s see if I can actually do it... We moved to New Jersey. (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*)

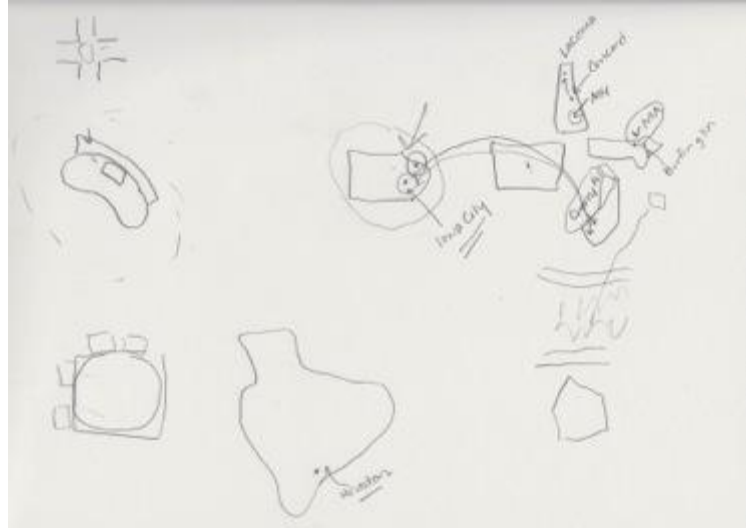


Figure 4. Violet's map of the places she has lived

While Violet spent many years throughout her childhood living in the Northeastern United States, Iowa was where she spent most of her middle childhood and it was also the place she considered to be her home. She notes,

Iowa was my home. And so when we moved, we moved to New Jersey when I was in tenth grade. And then after I graduated from high school I went to college in New Jersey, too, for two years and then I decided "I have to go somewhere else," and the only other place I could really think of to go was Iowa. So...and I wanted to go to a big place so I went back to Iowa even though I didn't know anyone there. (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*)

As an adult, Violet says she has dreams of her house in Dubuque, but that she does not dream of any of the other houses she lived in throughout her childhood. The house was a "traditional split-level" (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*) and her bedroom looked out over the driveway and a part of the neighborhood. She recalls,

And so our neighborhood...Dubuque is a town of like 50,000 and so it's just like a really, you know, traditional neighborhood, but surrounded by... Now it's not, but at

the time, it had a lot of undeveloped forest all around it, so we were always walking through all of the different woods areas and I even walked to school. My house was right here and there was... You had to cross a really busy street, but then there was this giant woods, huge woods, with a creek running through it. Beautiful. And we would walk, just me and my friends, no adults... We would walk all the way through there and then the school was right up there on the hill. And so I have a lot of memories of the woods. You know of taking off our shoes and being in the creek and playing outside every day. (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*)

Violet's neighborhood also had block parties where they would do "very Mid-Western things" (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*) like fry smelt from the nearby Mississippi River or have pig roasts. Sometimes, Violet would walk from her neighborhood to Mays, a drugstore about a mile and a half away where she would buy candy.

While Violet loved living in Dubuque, she points out that having never been to New York City, she desired to go there. From the books she read, she imagined it to be so much different than the life she knew in Iowa. She says,

I loved New York when I was growing up. I think part of it was being in the middle of the country... You know, it being so different from anything like New York and so that was just like a far off, amazing land to me. And also Iowa at that time, it's not so much anymore, but Iowa was really, you know, homogeneous. It was not diverse at all. And even, I grew up as a Jew in Iowa, and the town I lived in was like 95% Catholic. (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*)

Another place that was a special part of Violet's life in Dubuque was the Jewish synagogue she attended with her family. Located in a region with only 25 Jewish families,

people would drive long distances from the tri-state area to attend services. Violet's family spent a lot of time at the social events held in the main room in the downstairs of the synagogue and they became very close to the community of people there. Violet says,

We had a synagogue there that was really important to me...That, you know, I can still remember every nook and cranny of it and how it smelled and all those things... I was somewhere, I can't think of where it was, it was a couple weeks ago, and it was the same smell again... It was just like the synagogue. So, we spent a lot of time there when I was growing up and then the other place I have a lot of place memory for, and I actually, I hate to like admit this, but I spent a lot of time on Pinterest almost trying to recapture it, is the mall. (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*)

Violet would visit the mall often and remembers where every store was located. She spent a lot of time "wandering around" (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*) the mall and especially enjoyed visiting the Hallmark store, which was right next to Spencer's.

But, besides her synagogue, the most special place in Dubuque to Violet was the local library. She describes the building,

It's a, you know like many libraries in the Midwest, it's a Carnegie Library. And so, it really had some neat architecture, it had the stacks floors were glass floors, really cool. With like these iron staircases that led up to the stacks, and seriously, I think if I have to think about like, place memory, the mall is probably one for me. But the other place is the public library. (Violet, *Interview Two Transcript*)

The children's room was located in a new section of the library that had a lot of windows and looked out over the downtown area of Dubuque. Violet's first job was volunteering at this

library when she was twelve years old and she still has the nametag issued to her during that time.

Literacy life-world. The Waldenbooks at the mall in Dubuque had a small children's section in the back of the store, but the selection was minimal and new releases lagged behind what had been available to purchase when Violet lived in New Hampshire. Violet's mother purchased some of the classics for her to read, such as Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* series, which she enjoyed. Her mother also belonged to a book club through Parent's Press Magazine, which would send a new children's book to their house every month or so, but Violet found most of the books she read at the Carnegie Library in Dubuque.

Violet was only interested in reading realistic fiction, but growing up in a small Midwestern town with a very homogenous population, most of what she chose to read were books that included life experiences "you couldn't get there" (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*) in Dubuque. Violet spent much of her time at the library "trolling" (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*) the fiction section in the children's room, looking for new titles. While the library did not designate a shelf for new children's fiction, Violet would read the children's fall forecast in her father's Publisher's Weekly to find out what books she might be able to locate in the stacks. Violet especially enjoyed new titles by her favorite authors (i.e. Paul Zindel, Paula Danziger, Judy Blume, Carolyn Haywood, Louise Fitzhugh, James Lincoln Collier) and would often choose to read the books she loved over and over again rather than branch out to try new authors, series or titles.

You know like I can, I just, like I said I can remember, I can, I could still map out where all of my favorite authors, books were... And then even, there was... You

know how sometimes you read a book and you're like, "I can't remember what it was but I will find it again." I had a book like that. I was convinced that... Actually, did I find it maybe? I'm thinking maybe I did, but I thought, I remember very well *The Peterkin Papers* were here and I thought that this book was right by *The Peterkin Papers*... (Violet, *Interview Two Transcript*)



Figure 5. Violet's sketch of the Dubuque library's children's fiction section

Sometimes, Violet would leave the library with a stack of books and walk downtown to one of the old restaurants where she could sit and read by herself for a while.

One of Violet's favorite authors was Paul Zindel, who usually depicted the lives of the poor in New York City. Violet remembers the first time she read his book, *The Pigman*, as a significant moment in her history as a reader,

I still have a really, really intense memory of the first time that I read this book, which was, I was hmm...maybe like 12 or 13 and my grandmother lived in Houston, Texas and it was while I was visiting her in Houston. I must have gone to the public library there. But I still remember like, being on, you know... She had two twin beds

in her bedroom... being on one of the twin beds, having this whole stack of books next to me and reading this and just being like totally just taken with it, yes. You know, those moments just crystallize in your head? (Violet, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Violet saw reading as an “escape” (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*) and gravitated toward books about characters in very rural and very urban settings. However, she found herself primarily reading books about characters that were either very wealthy or very poor residents of New York City, where she eventually moved for a short time with her husband later in life. Through her reading, Violet spent a lot of time fantasizing about urban life. She remembers one scene in particular that she enjoyed revisiting in one of Zindel’s books,

But this is the one where they go into New York and they go to the basement of Macy’s, which, I think it still is actually... But, for a long time it was like the basement of Macy’s... was like this gourmet food place and they go and Mr. Pignati loves gourmet food and so it’s this really vivid scene where they go and they’re picking all these different types of products off the shelves. Things that like the two high schoolers have never tried before, and he buys all of it for them and they go back to his house and it’s just...(Violet, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Through her personalized “neighborhood of books” (Violet, *Interview Three Transcript*), Violet was building her “construction of what New York City and the surrounding area was.” (Violet, *Interview Two Transcript*) These areas included Central Park (James Lincoln Collier and E.B. White), the Upper West Side and the Hamptons (Louise Fitzhugh), Manhattan, Staten Island and northern New Jersey (Paul Zindel). Reflecting on

her fascination with New York City as a child reader and then the time she spent living there as an adult, she says,

And that was really... The whole time that I was growing up in Iowa that was what I was fantasizing about. Reading *Harriet the Spy*, reading other Louise Fitzhugh books, too... Even like picture books about, you know... I mean like, *The House on East 88th Street* by Bernard Waber. You know what I mean? But, basically, any series that was set in New York. Eloise- obsessed with it and always my dream to live there... I always had in my head the New York of *Harriet the Spy* and what that was like and it was really was very similar. You know what I mean? It was those two worlds were the one that I lived in and Harriet's world were, it ended up being almost exactly alike except that I didn't have as much money as she had, but very similar. (Violet, *Interview One Transcript*)

When asked about the role of school in her reading landscape, Violet shared that she attended an elementary school in Iowa that was designed as a pod school. The library was located in the middle of the classrooms. Violet felt that "the library was not really a place of sanctuary," but a "mad house." (Violet, *Interview Two Transcript*) She remembers her second grade teacher read Charlotte's Web aloud to the class, but other than that, school was not an important part of Violet's reading landscape in middle childhood. Her elementary school followed a Science Research Associates, or SRA, reading program that was made up of "just big boxes of stuff" and required students to navigate through reading levels. Violet spent long periods of time listening to read-alouds through headphones in school and remembers, "Everything was on cards. So it was like pieces of literature were taken out of

books, but you weren't actually reading the books themselves." (Violet, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Maddie

Maddie as place-maker. Maddie spent her entire childhood in Brunswick, Ohio, and although she has not lived there for a number of years, it is still the place she considers to be her home. From the time she was born until she was twelve years old, she lived in ranch-style house on Morlee Drive with her parents, her older sister, and her younger brother who was born when she was seven years old. While Maddie spent the later part of her childhood in the Brunswick home where her parents still live and she has moved nearly twenty times in her adult life, Maddie points out a unique relationship to the Morlee House,

I love that house. I have dreams about that house going up for sale and me going back home and being able to buy it. And in some of the dreams, I can't afford it and in some, I can afford it, but I go inside and I'm upset because they've changed it. But, I dream about that house. I did love that house. (Maddie, *Interview One Transcript*)

The Morlee House was the focal point of Maddie's landscape in middle childhood, and like Sam, the conceptual boundaries of her neighborhood were constructed by landmarks that held personal significance. As she mapped out her neighborhood during our first interview, she described the location of her own house on the block,

There was kind of a courtyard in the middle and there were... There as a path on either side through from the street into this area and there was actually, in the center, a playground that had kind of the wood and metal platform style playground. So, we were on the corner... And then... Actually, our yard kind of wrapped the corner. We had an odd-shaped backyard... And we had this sloping, sloping driveway that we

would take full speed on the Big Wheel or on roller skates and just make this hard left to go down the block and my mom used to flip out thinking we were gonna, you know, wreck and hurt ourselves. (Maddie, *Interview One Transcript*)



Figure 6. Maddie's neighborhood map

There were a number of children who lived in close proximity to Maddie and were similar in age: Amy, Stu, Ellen, Kelly, Ethan, Mark, Jeff and Kyle, a bully, whom Maddie tried to avoid. Maddie and the other children on the block would sometimes play in each others' homes and yards and the children's parents would collectively monitor their activities as they moved around the neighborhood. They rarely ever ventured to the playground, but Maddie once sought shelter at the playground when she ran away from home. Caleb and Amanda's house served as one of the boundaries marking the outer edge of the neighborhood. Caleb, like Maddie, was a fan of the animated television series, *Voltron*, and his older sister Amanda was a friend of Maddie's older sister. Maddie did not often travel alone as far as Caleb and Amanda's house, but was once persuaded by her sister to ride her bike down the street and deliver a letter to Amanda when they were mad at one another.

Other important landmarks that helped define the outer edge of her neighborhood were unknown or mysterious places that evoked fear. One of them was Lawson's, a local convenience store where she and her sister would go to buy candy. She recalls,

It's not there anymore, but there used to be a farm and this used to be cornfields and then up on the main road, there was a store that was called Lawson's...So, my sister and I would ride our bikes through here, cut across the corn field to go to Lawson's. However, my sister told me that there was a farmer who didn't like kids cutting through the cornfield and that farmer had a shotgun. And so we had to ride really quickly and get through there, so that he wouldn't come out and shoot us. I'm assuming this was just my sister's way of getting me to move along quickly...In my mind, he always had a hat on. I don't know why. But, yeah, I used to be terrified that this farmer would come out and shoot us while we were riding our bikes. (Maddie,

Interview One Transcript)

The other outer territory of the neighborhood that scared Maddie was the cul-de-sac down the hill from her house, behind Ethan, Mark and Jeff's house. It was a place her mother had told her never to go. Because she was not explicitly told why that area of the neighborhood should be avoided, it was always a place that evoked fear for Maddie.

Outside of her neighborhood, there were a number of places in Brunswick and the surrounding towns that were important to Maddie during this period of her life. In Brunswick, Maddie always looked forward to visiting her cousins, Jason and Daniel, where she could play things "like sword fighting and dragons and just anything that boys would play." (Maddie, *Interview One Transcript*) For recreation, Maddie's family would go to Skate Station to roller skate and she recalls,

Another place in Brunswick, was called Courtrooms and it's where my dad would go to play racquetball. And in there, they had a room I had to go into with his friend Bill's son, Bill, Jr. But, in that, they had taken a closet and painted it black inside and put glow-in-the-dark stars and planets. I would travel to outer space when I was there. (Maddie, *Interview One Transcript*)

Every Friday, the family drove to Medina where Maddie and her brother could sit at the grocery store bakery and have a donut, while their mother shopped for groceries. On the way home, they would always stop and rent a movie. On the other side of Brunswick, in Strongsville, was the public library. It was a very special place to Maddie and her mother took her there often.



Figure 7. Maddie's sketch of Brunswick, Ohio and the surrounding towns

Beyond Maddie's "fairly small world," (Maddie, *Interview One Transcript*) one of her favorite places to visit, and a place that still holds a great deal of significance for her now as an adult, was her aunt and uncle's farm "out in the country." She describes it saying,

And they had fences in the back and a barn in the back... Just a small, like maybe four stalls. Um... But, this is kind of what my sister and I... We've talked about this before... It's like this idyllic place we used to go to when we were kids. Cause, out in the country... Growing up in a suburb, I mean, you have a yard, but you don't really have open space and I love horses. And they had two horses at one point and a cow named Big Mac. And it wasn't until much later that I understood that Big Mac didn't run away. Big Mac was the big barbeque we had that year. [laughs] So, that's probably one of the most memorable places in my childhood and a place I still... I still love going there and it hasn't changed in reality or in my mind. (Maddie, *Interview One Transcript*)

Literacy life-world. From an early age, Maddie had a distinct awareness that, like her mother, she loved reading and that she also loved to write stories. She concludes, "I think if I had to summarize my entire identity as a reader, it's one of emotion. Emotional connections to books." (Maddie, *Interview Two Transcript*) As a reader in middle childhood, she already saw herself as having a longstanding history with books. Personalized inscriptions and hand-written notes from loved ones in years past could be found on the inside cover of many of her books. She also notes,

A lot of my earliest memories aren't really my own memories. They're stories that have been told to me about myself... The one that stands out the strongest is *The Giving Tree*. When I was in nursery school, Mrs. Robinson, our teacher, read the story to us. Now, this is all story from the people involved, nothing that I actually remember. But, apparently, I burst into tears. I had a very strong emotional reaction to the book. So much so, that my teacher called my mom and explained to her, "You

know, this is the story that I read. This is how Maddie reacted to it. You need to get her that book.” So, my mom gave it to my aunt as a gift idea for me. So, I have my first copy of *The Giving Tree* and my aunt signed the inside of it and wrote a little bit about the story. You know, “Your teacher said...” But, to this day, I cry every time I read it... (Maddie, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Maddie gravitated toward the fantasy genre, as well as series books and she would read everything in a series before trying a new title or author. Two of her favorite series of books were *The Berenstain Bears* and *Serendipity*. She recounts,

Those were paperbacks that we would buy, you know, at Mark’s or at the grocery store. So, those were pretty much, whenever a new one came out, my mom would buy those for us. They were always on a lower shelf. You know, so kids could get access to them. Or, on those turnstiles, those metal turnstiles. And, yeah. I just remember saying, “Mom! There’s a new *Serendipity* book. Can we get it? Can we get it?” She very rarely said no, which still amazes me, because we didn’t have a lot of money. (Maddie, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Maddie would often put her unicorn nameplates in the front of her books, but could never bring herself to write her name on them. She would also track which volumes in the series she owned if there was a list included at the end of the book.

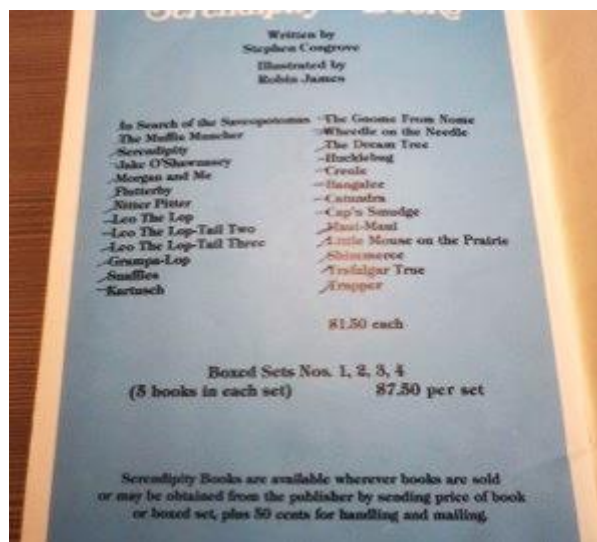


Figure 8. Maddie's inventory of *Serendipity* books

Many of the books that she had available to read at home were ones she had checked out from the Strongsville Library. Maddie participated in summer reading competitions that were tracked on “Candy Land-type boards” and could result in toy prizes. (Maddie, *Interview Two Transcript*) In the layout of the library, there was a recessed reading pit in the floor near the children's section and when they would visit the library, Maddie would run down one side of the pit and up the other to see if her favorite book was available to be checked out. She remembers,

They had a holiday section...So, in my memory it was this vast collection, but now I acknowledge that it was, like, this one metal bookshelf where they would put out kids' books for Christmas, all books relating to Christmas. And I happened across this one book called *Katie and the Sad Noise*. It may be the only book the author every published. I've never really researched it, but it was this book about a little girl who hears a sad noise. And everybody dismisses her...And they end up finding a dog who's had puppies and needs help. So, the puppies are rescued and everybody's like, “Oh, Katie's the hero!...” So, we would go to the library like once a week and I

would check that book out every time... And we'd have to return it and then I'd renew it... I just remember that I would run down one side of the pit and up the other to make sure that book was there... Maybe ten years ago,... my mom ended up going out to Strongsville Library and went to the librarian's desk and told this one woman the whole story. And she said, "By any chance, do you still have that book in circulation?"... And the librarian retired it on the spot and gave it to my mom. And so, my mom gave it to me for Christmas one year and there's a really beautiful letter that she wrote to me inside of it.

When Maddie took her books home, she liked to be by herself to read and did not like interruptions. Having to share a bedroom with her younger brother, she would sometimes put a blanket over her bed to "insulate herself" or would find a quiet, comfortable place elsewhere in the house. Sometimes, she would read in the finished basement at the Morlee House by the bookshelves that held the *World Book Encyclopedias*, near where she kept her *My Little Pony* toys. She pointed out, "I wanted to get lost in the story and for me, as I was reading, the only place I was aware of was the setting of the book. But, I would carve that out anywhere I could." (Maddie, *Interview Two Transcript*) For Maddie, reading was about "transport" and she comments, "There would be things I would do in reality to try to recreate that." (Maddie, *Interview Two Transcript*) As one example, she recounts,

So, when we were at the second Brunswick house. I remember when I first read *A Wrinkle in Time*, the main character Meg Murry, her bedroom was up in the attic... I had my own room at this house. And the first bed that I had at this house was a daybed... It was white with the kind of metal... It was a white metal frame. And in the book, her bed, it talks about brass... The brass rails on the headboard or

something like that. And so I remember pretending that my daybed... that my room was an attic room and that I was in the same type of place she was reading. And then I would look out to my backyard and pretend that the Star Watching Rock would be out in my backyard... There's this hybridity... Not hybridity, but there was this blending of real place and the place of the book. But, it wasn't with everything that I did that. (Maddie, *Interview Two Transcript*)

When she moved to the house on Salem Lane and had her own bedroom, Maddie also remembers using a stuffed unicorn she had received from her cousin to recreate worlds from her fantasy books, as well as worlds from other types of narrative media she that enjoyed and were part of her reading landscape, like television.

So, one of my cousins, Dylan (He would have been in high school at the time and I would have been twelve) used to go to Cedar Point and win all the giant stuffed animals that they had and one of them was like a three-foot-tall unicorn with like a purple mane and tail. [laughs] And he gave it to me. I must have whined or maybe he won it with me in mind. I don't remember, but he did give it to me. So, [laughs] this is embarrassing given how old I was. So, anyway, the unicorn got mounted, straddled on the side of the daybed, so that I could actually ride the unicorn. [laughs] So, that lent itself to playing... There was the Dungeons and Dragons cartoon with Uni, the unicorn and anything else involving horses. Any other book that I read...So, yeah. All of this done upstairs in my bedroom with the door shut, so nobody knew. So I had an awareness that this is not how people my age played or this was somehow embarrassing or something somebody would judge as weird. But, I didn't care. It was what I loved to do. (Maddie, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Because Maddie's sister was five years older than her, she also had a number of hand-me-down books to read at home that her sister no longer wanted. One of those books, *The Boxcar Children* by Gertrude Chandler Warner, was the inspiration for imaginative play, a phenomenon that occurred often. When she was around nine or ten years old, Maddie took everything out of her bedroom closet and pretended it was a boxcar. She propped open the sliding wooden doors to vent the smoke from the cooking pot she had hung from the clothing rod (a small plastic Easter basket). Maddie connects this memory to another fantasy that never made it to reality,

So, that's one of my earliest memories of building play around a text, a reading. But, I also remember... So, I read, I think, everything in *The Berenstain Bears* series. And the one that stands out in my mind the most is the one *The Berenstain Bears and the Messy Room* and its because the closet when they clean their room had everything in labeled containers and was so organized and I wanted a room like that. But, I didn't want to do the work to get it there. [laughs] That never happened... That was probably the start of the OCD there. (Maddie, *Interview Two Transcript*)

While she saw herself as a reader wherever she went, Maddie engaged with reading at school differently than she did at home. Whereas reading at home was for pleasure, a leisure activity, she says, "Reading was for enjoyment and what we did in school, I didn't enjoy, so I didn't call that reading. It was just homework or school work." (Maddie, *Interview Two Transcript*) Maddie attended Catholic school and was discouraged from bringing her own books from home to read due to censorship concerns.

Maddie's elementary teachers used textbooks to teach reading and much of the trade book reading they did do was linked to competition. In first grade, her teacher held a reading

competition, in which she kept track of how many books students read outside of school on paper French fries. Each student had their name written on a McDonald's fry container that hung on the classroom wall. The child with the most French fries in their container at the end of the competition won a trip to McDonald's to have lunch with the teacher. Numerous times throughout the competition, Maddie's mother took her to the Strongsville library where she would check out the maximum number of books to read. She tied the competition with another student. This same competitive spirit was part of reading instruction and Maddie recalls,

We had books and I remember that they divided us into different reading groups by level. And again, being competitive about reading, I was always in the higher... And I remember anxiety over not being part of that group. Like, I never wanted to be in the lower group. And I think it's a big part of why identity-wise as a reader, I never liked history, but always loved literature. Because the two are so closely connected, but my only exposure to history was textbooks. (Maddie, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Because of those experiences, reading anywhere that "looks like a classroom" feels like work to Maddie. (Maddie, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Cliff

Cliff as place-maker. Cliff grew up as the oldest of five adopted children. Until he was eight years old, he lived in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, part of the Pittsburgh Metro Area. His father worked thirty miles north of their home for U.S. Steel and his mother was a math teacher at Ridgeview Junior High (fictitious name), located about twenty miles to the south. Ridgeview Junior High is situated at the bottom of a mountain ridge and at the very top of the mountain is the village of Taborville, where Cliff's maternal grandparents have lived their

entire lives and where his grandmother is very well known in the church community.

Because Cliff's grandparents babysat he and his siblings everyday, he spent a large portion of his childhood traveling. He describes the routine,

We would get up when my mother had to leave in the morning, like 6 or so, before she had to be at school. She would drive to Ridgeview (fictitious name), to the junior high, and my grandfather would come over to the junior high and pick us up and then take us... It was always timed, cause he always went to breakfast at like 6:15 in the morning anyway... He would pick us up and then he would take us up to Taborville. And then when we were younger, Nanny would watch us, feed us lunch, and that was our babysitting and then when school time was over, Pappy would drive us back down to the junior high. And then, whenever mom was done at the junior high, we'd drive back to Greensburg. (Cliff, *Interview One Transcript*)

Even when Cliff reached school age, he attended a private Christian school near Taborville and would follow the same routine.

At the time Cliff lived in Greensburg, he had one younger sister and one younger brother. In the small front yard, where they sometimes played together, there were two big cherry trees that had nets hanging from them to catch the cherries and dummy birds perched on their branches to keep the real birds from eating the fruit. They would ride their bikes, avoiding the steep hill that ran along the side of their neighborhood, because their mother told them to stay away. They also avoided the backyard; it was very steep, overgrown and swampy until Cliff's dad cleared it out to have a place to practice shooting his bow. The houses on their street were very close together, but there were hardly any other children

living nearby, so they played inside the house a lot of the time. While the upstairs family room was just “for show,” there was a downstairs family room where they played. He says,

The family room was also the playroom. Like that house that we have that’s falling apart that sits in the kiddy room at church, that used to be down there. The reason there’s so many dents on it is we used to climb on it, all over the top of it, and sit on the roof... We used to sit on top of it and watch TV... (Cliff, *Interview One*

Transcript)

In addition to their home, the other important landmarks in Greensburg were the church their family attended and was very involved with, the local mall and Twin Lakes Park where they would attend picnics through their adoption agency.

In the weekday treks between Greensburg, Ridgeview and Taborville, a memorable landmark for Cliff was Ridgeview Junior High (the school he later attended). Between the time his grandfather would drop him off at the school and the time his mother was finished grading papers and preparing lessons, Cliff and his siblings would play in the hallways and talk with the other teachers. He says,

This is partially why I never took a tour of Ridgeview Junior High, why every teacher at Ridgeview Junior High that my mom taught with knew us, because we used to be running around those halls and killing time... It was because we spent probably hours upon hours on end every day [there] until my mother was ready to leave and then we’d get in her van and come back home. (Cliff, *Interview One Transcript*)

When Cliff was eight years old, his family moved into his grandparents’ house in Taborville and his grandparents built a smaller house for themselves on the back of the property. In the small mountain village of Taborville, Cliff had access to a wider physical

landscape than he had had in Greensburg. The village's Baptist Church that his family attended was an important part of his weekly routines, but around the locus of his home, he exercised his autonomy by traveling between various personally significant landmarks.

Cliff would often take a shortcut through the woods behind his grandparents' house, down the hill and onto "the bottom road" where he could ride his bike to the baseball field in less than ten minutes.



Figure 9. "The bottom road" behind Cliff's childhood home

Because the baseball outfield is located behind the village's Volunteer Fire Department where the township always maintains a pile of ashes, Cliff recalls the rules of his games had to be modified noting, "The ash pile was always an automatic in-the-park homerun, because it took so long to go and retrieve the ball from up there and it was technically in play." (Cliff, *Interview Two Transcript*) The baseball field is also bordered on one side by the village's Methodist Church where his paternal grandfather had served as minister at one time and which was also incorporated into Cliff's construction of the ball field as a place. He pointed out that everyone had to park their cars on the opposite side of the church building to avoid having foul balls break their windows during practices or games.

Besides serving as a throughway and a conceptual boundary in Cliff's accessible childhood landscape, the bottom road was also dotted with other landmarks. In a region that has a demographic of nearly ninety-nine percent white and predominantly Conservative Protestant, Cliff describes an intriguing and mysterious point of interest on the bottom road,

We used to just walk around in the woods. There used to be a group of nuns that lived down there. They didn't wear habits or anything. I think it was just a retreat. Nobody knew they were nuns. They were just down there. I can't remember what Order they were... Interesting things that you find... We found out nuns lived there and it was kind of weird. (Cliff, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Another important place in Cliff's landscape in middle childhood was the private Christian school he attended in a nearby village. The school had a small student body and more loosely defined grade levels. A van would pick him up in the morning and drive the eleven miles to school, picking up a few other students along the route and passing the principal's house before arriving at the school building. Attached to the side of the school was a storage shed that his father helped to build. Describing the close proximity of the school to where the principal lived, Cliff says, "They built that house while we were in school, cause they used to actually live in the upper section of [the school]." (Cliff, *Interview Two Transcript*) He points out that there was an apartment space in the top of the school because it was once a funeral home, a fact he knew while attending the school. He points out,

It was kind of shaped like one. It's kind of shaped like one, cause there's a room...

When you walk in this door, cause that was the front door... There are two rooms.

One here and there's one over there. And they're really long and big. (Cliff, *Interview One Transcript*)

Cliff spent a lot of time outside when he attended elementary school. His teachers would take his class on walks around the village and they would often walk up the road to a nearby church to use their gymnasium. He had a lot of room in the schoolyard to run, play and engage in sports during recess. He describes the landscape,

It goes down and there's like a little culvert down there. So, you used to, if you were say, playing kickball that direction... You either would have to hit cars and chase it across the road or you'd have to climb down the ditch and go get the ball. And it was always deemed the safer option to let us climb down the ditch than have to chase the ball that way. Yeah. Especially, because that person that used to live in that house was rather cranky, so if a ball ended up in their yard, they didn't get very... They weren't very happy... (Cliff, *Interview Two Transcript*)



Figure 10. The private Christian elementary school Cliff attended

Literacy life-world. Cliff's maternal grandmother read to him every weekday while his mother was at work and before he started school. Not only well known in the local community for her role as a church leader, she also had a reputation for being a voracious

reader and memorizer of poetry and was a prominent figure in Cliff's reading landscape in middle childhood.

Like, she read to us a lot, but the other thing is, and you probably got this, too, a bit, she passes on books that she thinks will teach you something... My grandmother throughout had us read things, like would hand us tracts and articles and whatever else. But, I do think that the books that she gave me to read tended to reinforce what I had learned at home and the traditional values that I got there. And I think until I left and had to think on my own, without that reinforcement, I kind of ended up having my vision colored towards what was there in literature. (Cliff, *Interview Three Transcript*)

When Cliff became an independent reader, he did not engage with books to learn something or to have his perspective changed, but rather, "for fun." (Cliff, *Interview Three Transcript*)



Figure 11. A pile of Cliff's childhood books, including some from his grandmother

Like Maddie, Cliff's reading identity in middle childhood was influenced by a personal history of reading experiences that were recounted to him by family members and teachers. He was an early reader. When he was four years old, he enjoyed reading atlases and

could help his family navigate their way to the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball stadium when they would go to see a game. By the time he was five years old, he was reading *The Giving Tree*, books by Dr. Seuss and *The Berenstain Bears* independently. He recalls,

I know when I was in kindergarten, they used to make us sit on these little floor mats and read books, cause it was like reading time. And I remember I used to read a pile of them, because by the time I was in kindergarten, I was able to read full storybooks.
(Cliff, *Interview Two Transcript*)

His school participated in the Pizza Hut Book It! Program, in which he would earn holographic buttons and free Pizza Hut personal pan pizzas for reading a certain number of books independently. He did not enjoy doing the book reports his teachers would sometimes assign, but pleasure reading was a part of the school culture and he had a lot of unstructured reading time throughout the school week to enjoy books and develop his taste in books. Cliff did not know anybody in his class that did not enjoy reading. He says, “I remember when I got into elementary I started reading *Goosebumps*... *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*... So, I think it might have been like nine or ten when I started reading them.” (Cliff, *Interview Two Transcript*) Because Cliff read so much, “certain things in life, like school, became so easy. Considering, how much, the volume of books read.” (Cliff, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Cliff’s parents limited his television and video game time, so he read “anything.” (Cliff, *Interview Two Transcript*) He spent a lot of time lingering in *Where’s Waldo* books and had his own method for locating Waldo quickly in the illustrations. He did read nonfiction and historical fiction, but primarily preferred reading fantasy to realism. He says,

I remember reading things that I liked that had different worlds. Hence, it’s probably why I loved *Star Trek* so much and still do. Oh, heck! We used to act it out in school,

in elementary school... When I grew up, apparently I watched a lot of Reading Rainbow, cause I seem to remember LeVar Burton and I remember drawing the connection between him being Geordi La Forge. But, uh, nonetheless. Um, but I did read some of the *Star Trek* novels. (Cliff, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Toward the end of elementary school, Cliff began to recognize the “crossovers” (Cliff, *Interview Two Transcript*) between what he was reading and the theatrical and film adaptations. Some he found favorable, such as *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Star Trek* and some he critiqued, such as television movie adaptations of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

On the playground, Cliff acted out both texts that he had read in books and texts that he had seen on television. He describes this kind of play,

You didn’t necessarily see it has real, but something that you could kind of bring alive. I guess you could also say that... It might also lead to why I ended up getting into plays and musicals. Because it is something you can read, but also it’s something that physically you can bring to something, to real life. Even though you understand that it’s not real, but it is in a way... When you’re a kid you don’t see it this way, but there’s a way of departing from what... Doing something different, basically, which is probably the best way... You’re not playing. You’re in recess, but you’re not playing a sport... When you’re a kid, sometimes that fantasy world does bleed in, because it is something to do. Like, you play house or whatever else, but there’s some... It comes from somewhere. (Cliff, *Interview Three Transcript*)

At home, Cliff's bedroom bookshelf housed a number of books about baseball. Some of them were sizeable and took up a lot of space on the shelf. As we looked through his personal artifacts during the interview he pointed out,

I have a bunch of baseball almanacs and a bunch of baseball card books. We didn't bring them up cause they're huge. But, I have a huge thing that's like the *20th Century Baseball Chronicle*... I don't even think I've opened it. It's just there. I used to read up about... There is a baseball book, though, that I learned all the rules about, about it, that's in the pile in the family room. I think mom bought it for me. I don't know. See the other thing, too, is if you look in the inside cover with those books, you'll see who bought them for me. (Cliff, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Cliff received many of his books as gifts from family and his mother's teacher colleagues. Cliff's mother documented when and from whom he received the books inside the front cover of most of them. He also received books as gifts for special holidays, such as his "Adoption Day" and "Airplane Day," the day he arrived in the United States from Korea. Though he was not interested in reading about his cultural heritage, his mother made sure he had the opportunity to do so. He comments,

I do remember *Chinese Eyes*. I remember that's one of those ones that Mom used to get us, got us when we were younger and she was trying to tell us about our heritage. So, at least we knew where we came from. (Cliff, *Interview Two Transcript*)

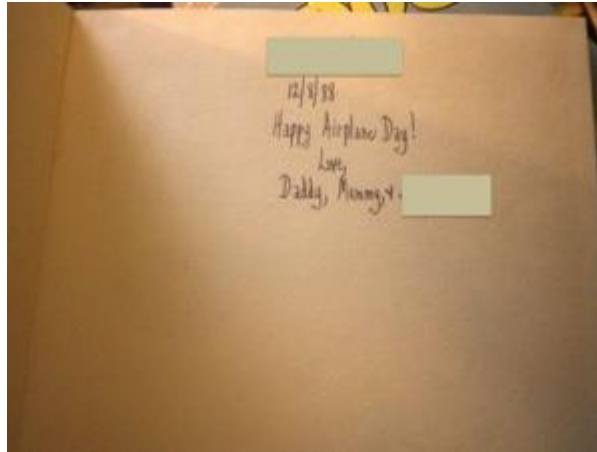


Figure 12. Cliff's "Airplane Day" book inscription, 1988

Virginia

Virginia as place-maker. Like Violet, Virginia moved around quite a bit as a child. Her mother and father, a veteran of the Vietnam War, lived various places before Virginia was born in Kansas while her father was stationed at Fort Riley. She recounts,

...then we moved to Fort Leavenworth after that. So, there were two Kansas moves and then we moved to Virginia. But, there was a stopover, because my dad did an unaccompanied tour in Germany, so my mom and I did live in Newtown Square [near Philadelphia] for a bit with my grandmother and her sisters while he did that. So, then we came back here, just for a few months and then we moved to, um... He was stationed at the Pentagon, so we moved to northern Virginia. We lived in Springfield, Virginia. We then lived in Burke, Virginia and he got stationed then at Fort Belvoir, which is also in Virginia. So, [laughs] then we lived... So, now they live in Fairfax Station, Virginia, which is where he retired, so I went to high school there. So, they're still there in that same house. And they've not reordered different address labels...

(Virginia, *Interview One Transcript*)

For most of middle childhood, from the time she was five until she was around eleven or twelve years old, she lived with her parents in Springfield, Virginia. Because her father was getting promoted each time they moved, their living quarters got bigger, as well. At their new house in Springfield, Virginia's parents built her a playhouse in the basement.

So, it wasn't so much stuff, but they would make spaces for me to play. Because I liked to crawl under the table. I was always making forts, and... Like the dining room table. And I was always dragging pillows out and making blanket forts and stuff and they were like, "Ahhh..." So, to save their sanity, probably, with the furniture constantly getting moved, they made me this little house... (Virginia, *Interview One Transcript*)

It was framed with two-by-fours and finished with Sheetrock from her grandfather's construction business and her mother painted the outside to look like siding. The carpeting inside her playhouse was the area rug that had laid on the floor of her nursery in Kansas and her mother often said to her, "That little house is the size of your room!" (Virginia, *Interview One Transcript*)

Virginia's childhood was very "unstructured" (Virginia, *Interview One Transcript*) in the sense that she had very little of her time scheduled for her and her parents encouraged her to go outside and play. She continues describing some of the other places her parents created for her,

And then, um... I had a swing set out in the back, but it was up the hill and was this really leafy little... It was almost like a little room, out... Like, they cleared out some trees in the back, so it was like this little thing. I just, I loved being off somewhere. That was totally, totally my thing. And then when we moved to the house that they

live in now, they actually had... My dad built window seats and a bookshelf to hold all of the books. Then, a window seat in front of this one window.

Virginia's grandmother's house in Newtown Square was one of the most important places in her entire childhood landscape. She attended many family parties in the house and regular Sunday night dinners. She says,

And it was that one that we stayed in for that brief layover time, but then also it was every, every holiday... And we're Christian, we're Catholic, so it was always anything that involved a holiday of some sort was there. And the church at the top of the street... It's actually where my husband and I got married... But, that was the church that we always went to for Easter and Christmas and stuff. Yeah, or whenever we went to visit. So, it was really her house that, um... and it was my great-grandparents' house. It was, you know... Everybody had grown up there. Like, my older cousins, my aunts and uncles... Everybody has a memory of that house. It was really, kind of the thing. (Virginia, *Interview One Transcript*)

The house, a traditional New England saltbox design, had post-WWII updates like a tiny pink and green bathroom on the second floor and "cute little" dormered rooms that mirrored each other. Throughout her childhood, Virginia always considered the Philadelphia area to be "home," the place she now lives with her husband and children. She says, "Like every holiday, we would come back here. Every Christmas, Easter, that kind of thing. It was the one place out of all of those places that I had felt was home." (Virginia, *Interview One Transcript*)

Because she did not have any siblings, Virginia was often the only child in the house when she would visit her grandmother and her grandmother's sisters who also lived there.

To “get away from all of the old people” (Virginia, *Interview One Transcript*) she would lie under the table in the dining room and color or read. She describes a special clock in the space that she always thought might somehow be connected to Narnia,

So, I would be under the table and we have... There was a cuckoo clock in the dining room and it would always... Like this gently ticking sound and I loved that. It was just, it was really peaceful and I was totally convinced that... You know in the *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* when they have the picture of the Dawn Treader and then the ship comes to life? Like, they go in through the picture? I was totally convinced that cuckoo clock was gonna like... Yeah, it never happened! [laughs]
(Virginia, *Interview One Transcript*)

The house in Newtown Square also had a stone wall outside that generations of children in Virginia’s family had longed to climb on. She recalls,

And then there was this pretty stonewall that we were never allowed to climb on, because I don’t know. I don’t know. “Cause it’ll fall apart!” We always got yelled at for it and we would sneak out there and be like, “La la la la la...” And you would hear somebody knocking on the window and it was always my grandmother and she’d be like, “Get off the wall! Get off the wall!” And gesturing... And then there was a little patio that had a little swinging rod iron gate and you also were not allowed to swing on the gate. I always swung on the gate. And it was the perfect size, because you would stand on it and it was like an inch off the ground and you could just like “Reee Ree Ree.” It was perfect. Yeah, you could put your feet right on either side and... So, actually, it was really funny... When we sold it, when my grandmother passed away, um, we sold the house and the last thing my mom and I

did was run on the wall and swing on the gate. Yeah. We totally handed the keys...Yeah. So, she was like, “Wait a minute! We gotta do this!” Cause she was like, “I always had to tell you to stop doing it, because I was never allowed to do it, but I don’t know why I wasn’t allowed to do it.” And my... It was her grandmother that was yelling at her to get off the gate and get off the wall. (Virginia, *Interview One Transcript*)

Literacy life-world. Early on as an independent reader, Virginia was cognizant of her love of books and a desire to expand her reading experiences. Books, not toys, were rewards to Virginia and if she did something well, her parents would take her to buy a new book. She was a dynamic reader, reading the works of Shakespeare as well as *Sweet Valley High*. Because few people in her family were readers, Virginia was almost like “an anomaly” and would sometimes be teased for “having her nose in a book.” (Virginia, *Interview Two Transcript*) Her mother would frequently drive her twenty-five minutes to the public library where she would check out stacks of books and pile them up in the order she wanted to read them. She would often save the synopsis on the back of the book, the acknowledgements and the information about the author to read after she finished the book. She recollects about the library,

For me, it was small, because I read everything in it. Like, there’s not any more. There wasn’t enough there and I remember having that feeling of, um, being... Just... I always wanted something else to read, something more to read and being very happy to do that. I loved it. It was the thing that made me happiest. Like, I read the Encyclopedia. My parents had the Grolier 1968... I sat down and read that, because, I had just gone through every book. Um, and they had Shakespeare’s collected works

and they had these beautiful plates of the plays. Black and white. Again, I'm sure it came with the set of encyclopedias. So then, there was that and there was, um, this anthology of poetry. And I remember reading that and I was just amazed at the rhythms when you would read. Especially Tennyson. And then I would read that out loud and walk around to the beat as I was reading it. (Virginia, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Like Maddie and Cliff, Virginia's identity as a developing independent reader was partially constructed from experiences conveyed to her by her family. When Virginia's mother was pregnant with her, Virginia would constantly move about until her mother would start reading. As soon as her mother began to read, Virginia would quiet down in the womb. After she was born, her mother would read to her all the time, even in the middle of the night. She points out, "If you're up in the middle of the night," she's like, "If I wanted to read a magazine or something," she's like, "I just read it out loud, because that stopped you from fussing." (Virginia, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Virginia saw her mother reading often, mostly realistic and historical fiction. She exposed Virginia to a wide variety of literature and read aloud to her, sometimes omitting portions of texts that portrayed female characters as inferior to male protagonists. But, Virginia points out how she did not discover her love of fantasy and speculative fiction until she was a more experienced independent reader,

When it was like Laura Ingalls Wilder and I did read Nancy Drew. I didn't love those, but, um, like it was definitely... She never read me C.S. Lewis, because he really wasn't even writing... When she was young, he was still writing. So, she hadn't grown up with that. So, um, and anything with elves, she was like, "No, no!" So, I

had a really wide exposure except for this missing... Well, now I know it was a missing piece of the pie. (Virginia, *Interview Two Transcript*)

In third grade, Virginia was introduced to the work of C.S. Lewis by a boy in her class. She recalls,

He was like the new kid at school, in elementary school, and he was cute. Nobody else thought so. I did. Probably because he had his nose in a book...His name was Pat something or other and he was the one... He was reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*... and I was like, “What’s that?”...And he goes, “Seriously?” And I was like, “Yeah, seriously. What’s that?” He was like, “C.S. Lewis?” I immediately went to the school library and got it...I was a little old to, like, have found Narnia. Which is why, probably, I was still eleven, you know, looking for ways in. Um, but, before that, my aunt had given me *The Hobbit*. (Virginia, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Reading the *Lord of the Rings* series and the *Chronicles of Narnia* was a major “turning point” for Virginia as a reader. From that point onward, her reading landscape in middle childhood was often characterized by her desire to “be transported somewhere.” (Virginia, *Interview Two Transcript*) She comments,

Being taken out of one place and down into another, is my absolute favorite thing. Like to be lost and then the kind of thing that you think about later, and like the scenery... Like, it has to be good writing, but I just... I absolutely love to be transported somewhere. (Virginia, *Interview Two Transcript*)

After reading C.S. Lewis, Virginia began looking in the backs of closets and cupboards for access to Narnia. She remembers,

Most books all started off in a fantasy world if I had read them already, like, “It was a long time ago in a kingdom far away.” None of them I had read had been modern...

You know, a modern-ish setting moving into something else. And that blew me away.

(Virginia, *Interview Two Transcript*)

In addition to her mother, Virginia’s aunt, her father’s youngest sister, was a prominent figure in her reading landscape in middle childhood and one of the only other members of the family who was a reader. When she would come home after being stationed in Germany with the army, she would bring Virginia copies of the darker traditional fairy tales collected by the Grimm Brothers and written by Andersen. She reflects on the connection she shared with her aunt,

We really had a connection and I think... I think that’s it. That’s always been her thing is to give books and to see... Like if the kids don’t respond... She only ever gave books to my kids. Other kids, they were like, “Meh... Alright, I’d rather play a video game,” so she was like, “Well, then, I’m not going to give you a book...” You know what I mean? I think she would just seize a... And so it was too funny, because she was like, “Have you ever read that?” And I say, “No! What’s that?” And she would say, “Oh! Take it with you! You have to read this.” (Virginia, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Besides reading in her blanket forts, in her window seat, outside, and under her grandmother’s dining room table, Virginia created other kinds of spaces in which she could read out-of-view and uninterrupted, something she had been doing since she was a toddler. She says,

I used to clear out all the stuff from my toybox and I would get...I would throw my toys out of the toybox and I would get in the toybox and read a book. So, they had to hook the top open, because they were afraid that I would get closed in it! (Virginia, *Interview Two Transcript*)

Her parents also had two egg-shaped, avocado-colored crushed-pile swivel chairs where she could sink down in and sit cross-legged to read.



Figure 13. Virginia reading in her toy box

Virginia generally did not enjoy reading in school. She attended a private Catholic elementary school and was often bored, so she would get into trouble, sometimes getting into fights on the playground. An important turning point for her came when her school developed the Great Books Program when Virginia was in fourth grade. She describes the program,

They pulled kids out and it was run by a mom. It was like Anne Meadow's mom. Or, Larry Hogan's mom would come read with us...Not advanced, but you know, short stories and things that were just not what we were reading... You know, like the standard stuff. And that was so so cool. And there was this little room. It was called The Upper Room, because it was a Catholic school, so right? I remember all the

Pentecostal flames on the thing and you would go up and the nuns were like, “You can go up there and have that space.” And I loved The Upper Room, because it was just what it sounded like. It was a treehouse kind of thing where you walked up and it was above the school... It was this little slopy dormered room... And it was like, “Oh! This is what’s up there!” You would pass by the stairs for it... It was right next to the bookstore and I remember that. Like, “What are those stairs?” I wanted to see where the stairs led. Because, right? There could be something... Narnia could be there! In fact, my mom still has all of the books that we read... I would say that that, the Great Books Program, was like, “Finally!” And then, we could talk. We would sit around in a circle. No line, no staring at the person’s head... You know what I mean? (Virginia, *Interview One Transcript*)

Literacy Life-Worlds and the Experience of Place in Middle Childhood

After isolating the interview data that focused on participants’ reading landscapes in middle childhood specifically, four themes emerged from my analysis. These include: Repositioning, Transportation, Nesting and Layering. Each of these themes represents a particular type of place interaction that can be thought about in terms of a child’s disposition and intentionality (his or her actions toward achieving particular goal or desire), cognizance (the degree to which the child is aware of the goal), and context (the foregrounding and backgrounding of the various dimensions of the place(s) in which the child is situated).

There is a temptation to reduce these themes into sub-themes. For example, there is enough data here to support breaking each of these emerging themes into dispositional categories, such as “Transportation-Book as Object” and “Transportation-Book as Place.” While these nuances are important to keep in mind and I have considered many of them

below, I feel that to further categorize would risk reducing and distorting the dynamism and fluidity that characterizes the essence of children's experience of place within their reading landscape.

Collectively, these themes characterize the nature of children's engagement with "place" within their everyday lived experiences as increasingly independent readers and place-makers. It is evident from participants' accounts of these experiences that the relationship between these types of interactions are fluid and dynamic. Place experiences overlap with one another and are not isolated to one instance of time and location; they can occur over extended periods of time off and on and often involve movement from one "place" to another, including the movement between inner and outer worlds. In other words, the nature of children's experiences of place within their reading landscape is that they are unbound by physical borders or the passing of time as we might traditionally conceptualize formal literacy events.

Repositioning

One type of place experience described by participants was a conceptual *repositioning* of themselves within the unique social and cultural dimensions of the inner and outer places they dwelled; instances in which they saw themselves differently in relation to their environment. *Repositioning*, as opposed to the term *positioning*, connotes some level of intention or awareness that a change in position has occurred (e.g. "I was *there*, but now I am *here*" or "I thought of myself like *that*, but now I think of myself like *this*").

There were instances of repositioning within participants' reading landscapes in which books functioned as artifacts or memorials of the child's lived experiences, as well as instances in which books functioned as intellectual objects. Encountering new ideas and

ways of being through reading was one way children engaged with place through repositioning. Sam's reading of speculative fiction, particularly Jules Verne, reoriented him toward the world beyond his neighborhood. For Violet, her desire to read about the lives of very wealthy and very poor children, as well as urban life, was always juxtaposed with her own life and was teaching her what it meant to live in a Mid-western suburb. Even Maddie's envy of the Berenstain Bears' organized closet reflected a conscious comparison to her own environment and priorities. When Virginia read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* for the first time and was introduced to the idea that fantastical worlds might exist within reach, she began to see herself as an explorer on the verge of a discovery.

This conceptual repositioning was also expressed in the form of resistance to reading, often in formal school settings. Cliff expressed this in describing his dislike of book reports. Maddie discussed her need to reposition herself as a reader when she moved between home and school. She also went through a process of repositioning herself within her familiar reading landscape and alongside her peers, conceptually and physically, when she was introduced to the idea of reading competitions.

Participants described a cultural awareness of books as a source of knowledge and power in middle childhood. Participants engaged in this discourse in the instances in which they highlighted the physical size, volume or physical proximity of books in relation to themselves. Sam described that his childhood landscape was filled with books, because of his mother being an educator and saw his newly independent relationship to books as having the authority to teach his younger sister how to read. Sam, Maddie and Virginia mentioned the prominence of a set of encyclopedias in their physical landscape and the exhilaration of the sheer volume of reading material it presented. Cliff reasoned the vast number of books on

his bookshelf with his identity as an avid reader and saw the size of the books he was reading in relation to his relatively expansive history as a young reader.

Participants also described seeing books as artifacts that served as a source of identity reinforcement and proprietorship. Cliff, Maddie and Virginia saw the collection of books in their environment as memorializing prior transportative reading experiences and their rootedness in a reading culture, which reinforced their identity as readers. Virginia's awareness that the books her aunt gave her as gifts were picked out especially for her also reinforced that she inhabited a unique place within a broader culture of readers. Both Cliff and Maddie saw the inscriptions written on the inside covers of their books as also reinforcing their identities aside from reading, such as their familial and cultural identities.

Finally, participants engaged in a repositioning in relation to the physical environment in the sense that locations or landmarks within their everyday lived experiences took on new meaning when considered within their reading landscape. Some of these landmarks were unique to the participants' reading landscapes and were not included in participants' place biography, such as Cliff's elementary school library. Other landmarks overlapped with participants' broader landscape of lived experiences, but were foregrounded in particular reading experiences, such as Virginia's grandmother's house. In some cases, adults were instrumental in bringing particular aspects of the physical environment into the foreground of participants' reading landscapes.

Transportation

Participants expressed that their desire to read often came from their desire to be imaginatively *transported* to a place that was different from their own, a literary landscape where they could engage in new experiences. While this was most often discussed in terms of

fiction—both picture books and chapter books satisfied participants’ desire for transportation. The discourse surrounding Cliff’s engagement with *Where’s Waldo* and Maddie’s engagement with *The Berenstain Bears* and *The Messy Room* exemplify the transportive qualities of picture book illustrations. Violet’s chapter books transported her into various areas of New York City and Sam’s historical biographies transported him into the Western frontier.

Most often, the transportation occurred while participants were reading. In other ways, the experience of existing in a fictional landscape preceded or lingered beyond the act of reading through the child’s fantasies. The spatial and visual construction of New York City that Violet composed while reading in her “neighborhood of books” was the imagery incorporated into her fantasies of living there when she was not reading. When participants felt as if they had been transported to another place during the process of engaging with a text, they were left with memories of experiencing events in those literary landscapes in a similar way that they could remember experiences in “real places.” As adults, participants were still able to recount scenes from their favorite childhood books with vivid imagery and sensory detail of the fictional landscape in which the scenes occurred.

Nesting

Within their reading landscapes, participants often went through a process of *nesting*, in which they manipulated their physical environment in preparation for the act of reading. Participants often reorganized their existing environment to suit their needs or would create new “places” within their places in which to read. Maddie would sometimes drape a blanket over her four-poster bed to “insulate herself.” Virginia would build blanket forts where she could read.

This reorganization was sometimes unobservable and would happen in the children's imagination. In her mind's eye, Maddie would transform her bedroom into the attic bedroom where Meg Murry would sit and read in *A Wrinkle in Time*. This was also the case when Virginia imagined The Upper Room in her elementary school to be a place out of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

In some cases, the children engaged in a seeking process to find a pre-existing place to read that would provide the environmental conditions they needed. The process of seeking is imaginative in the sense that participants had to look at the everyday, taken-for-granted places in their environment as potential places to read. Sam sometimes went to the spot in his yard where the grass was especially soft and lush to read his comic books. Virginia would read under her grandmother's dining room table where she could be alone, but the ticking of the cuckoo clock could still be heard. She would also slide down into the egg-shaped swivel chair and read out of sight.

Sometimes participants' preparation to read was ritualistic and would span over hours or days. During Virginia's visits to the library with her mother, she would find the books she wanted to check out, sit down on the floor to wait for mother, stack her books up in the order she wanted to read them and keep them in this order when she got home. Virginia never read the synopsis on the back cover of the book, the "About the Author" or the acknowledgements until after she finished reading the main body of text. Violet would "troll" the fiction stacks at the library, visiting the sections that housed her favorite authors and looking for new titles. Maddie would run down one side of the pit in the library floor and up the other to get to her favorite bookshelf.

Layering

Another type of place experience within participants' reading landscapes was *layering*, in which participants attempted to embody, in a very physical sense, a literary world by layering it on top of their immediate environment. Whereas transportation was the primarily cognitive process of a child entering into a fictional landscape, usually during the act of reading a text, layering involves a child's employment of various senses in an attempt to bring the inner world of a book outward. Transportation is the process of *going there*, while layering is the process of bringing "there" *here*.

Participants engaged in the process of layering through imaginative play and through transactions with physical artifacts in their environment. Cliff brought the world of Star Trek to life on the playground at recess with his friends primarily through verbal and body language. The cuckoo clock on the wall of Virginia's grandmother's dining room served as a tangible access point to Narnia. Maddie imagined that her bedroom was the attic bedroom of Meg Murray and moved about inside of it as if it were. Maddie also used the stuffed unicorn she had been given as an artifact, not just in the process of transitioning between her physical environment and her literary landscapes, but as an artifact that could integrate other narrative media into her world building, too. Similarly, Sam's interest in model building and photography overlapped in many ways with the fictional landscapes he read about.

The layering of fictional worlds over the immediate physical environment can also be arts-based or aesthetic. One way this can be achieved is through the physical embodiment of language and rhythm. Virginia was inspired by the rhythm of Tennyson's poetry to march around her house in meter as she recited his works.

An engagement with place through layering can also take the form of physical relocation. This is illustrated by Sam's many family trips to historic locations. A number of

the places Sam visited were places he had read about in nonfiction texts, historical fiction novels and biographies. He believed that reading inspired him to want to visit “real places” and that visiting “real places” encouraged him to read more about them.

Chapter Summary

My process of collecting interview data had two primary goals that would allow me to gather the information I needed to answer my research questions. These goals were to, through the eyes of my participants, (a) understand who participants were as child place-makers and (b) reconstruct the childhood literacy life-worlds in which participants carried out their roles as place-makers. In this chapter, I presented a profile of each of my participants as place-makers and reconstructed the reading landscapes they inhabited in middle childhood as a phenomenological unit of study.

In this chapter, I also presented the themes that emerged from an analysis of the data. Each of these themes were described using examples from the data. I proposed that these four themes—Repositioning, Transportation, Nesting and Layering—characterize the types of place experiences my participants engaged in within their reading landscapes in middle childhood. *Repositioning* refers to instances in which participants saw themselves differently in relation to their physical or conceptual environments. *Transportation* refers to participants’ sense of being imaginatively transported to a place that was different from their own, a literary landscape where they could engage in new experiences. *Nesting* describes the way participants manipulated their physical environment in preparation for the act of reading. *Layering* describes the means by which participants attempted to embody, in a very physical sense, a literary world by layering it on top of their immediate environment.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book.

—Henry David Thoreau, 1854

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore five adults' experiences of place within their childhood literacy life-worlds. By studying adults, this project aimed to describe and interpret the role children's literature and childhood reader identity might play in one's development as a place-maker in middle childhood, as well as the meaning those experiences hold in adulthood. The findings presented in Chapter 4 outlined four themes that characterize participants' place experiences in the reading landscapes of middle childhood—Repositioning, Transportation, Nesting and Layering. These types of reader-place transactions are not isolated phenomenal events, but move fluidly between one another, often overlapping within children's lived experiences in their reading landscapes.

This chapter begins with participants' own interpretations of the meaning these childhood reader-place experiences carry into adulthood, directly taking up the fourth research question addressed in this study. I then consider the findings of this study in light of the research questions I set out to explore through this inquiry. This discussion is situated within the scope of literature reviewed in Chapter 2, as well as the literature referenced in subsequent chapters. I conclude with the implications of this study for practice and future research with particular emphasis on the implications for place-based elementary classrooms.

The Meaning of Experience: Participant Interpretations

Through a number of the prompts I prepared for the end of my third interview with participants, I invited them to step out of their roles as re-constructors of childhood experience and reflect on how they saw the experience of place (however they wanted to define it) intersecting with childhood reading landscapes, both personally and generally, as well as to consider what those experiences might mean in adulthood. Many portions of these interview transcripts provided insight into participants' experiences in middle childhood and were integrated into the data that was formally analyzed. In the example of Goodenough's (2006) and Tatar's (2009) explorations of the meaning of childhood experiences, I have reframed some of this data and have integrated portions of the interview transcripts that were not included in formal data analysis for the purpose of reflecting explicitly on what personal significance these particular childhood experiences might hold in adulthood. This discussion directly takes up the fourth research question addressed in this study, "How do participants perceive childhood reading experiences in relation to adult identity, including place identity?"

Sam

During our final interview, Sam posited that the trips his family took to historical sites when he was a child, some trips that were inspired by his reading and some that preceded his reading, were influential in perpetuating his childhood interests in particular topics into adulthood. He describes this process as being cyclical in nature; since he was a child, he enjoyed visiting locations he had read about and reading about places that he had visited. As an adult reader, Sam still enjoys reading nonfiction texts related to the Western landscape. He commented that both the books he read and the television shows he watched as a child about the American frontier constructed a kind of "Western lore" (Sam, *Interview*

Three Transcript) with very specific imagery that he has longed to experience firsthand since his initial exposures in childhood.

When Sam began teaching fifth grade, he found himself drawing on many of the experiences he had had as a child reader, particularly the agency he had within his reading landscape to access texts that interested him and the artifactual nature of some of his experiences. Noting his own love of reading and collecting comic books when he was a child, he expressed his desire to get all of his students reading “something.” (Sam, *Interview Three Transcript*) He would keep a list of the books his students checked out from the school library each week and he explains, “Not keeping tabs on them, but sometimes you see an interest area start to show up.” (Sam, *Interview Three Transcript*) Much to his principal’s dismay, Sam’s classroom was filled with teaching “props” that he would use to engage his students in the necessary textbook reading in a more sensorial way (e.g. wasps’ nests, praying mantis larvae, reproduction historical documents, etc.).

During this final interview, Sam pulled out of his wallet a clipping from *Grit* that he has carried with him since he sold the newspaper around his neighborhood in middle childhood. The text of this clipping reinforces the ideal character and integrity he wishes to exemplify and he refers to it from time to time as both an intellectual text and an artifactual memento of childhood.



Figure 14. Sam's "Bits of Wisdom" *Grit* newspaper clipping

He concludes that some of the texts that made up his childhood reading landscape are still artifacts of his reading landscape as an adult.

Violet

Through her arts-based response to the interview discussion prompts, Violet created a collage that makes a direct connection between her childhood reading landscape and her adult place perspective. The prompt she chose to consider was "Throughout your life, how have books functioned as a lens through which you see the world?"

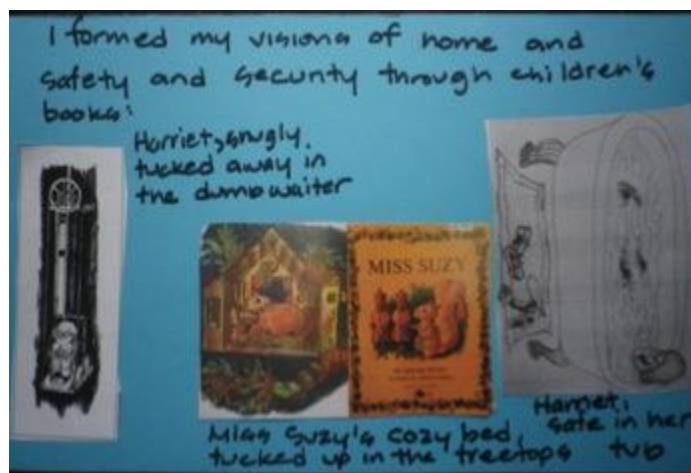


Figure 15. Violet's collage of "home and safety and security"

Reading the text on her collages, she explains,

My conception of a city was formed and reformed throughout my life by books... And then, Books formed the basis for how I lived my own life, and so I say like, I became a librarian and there's a picture I took of some of my favorites, including some other New York books. I love that picture. And I formed my vision of home and safety and security through children's books. So there's "Harriet and the Dumbwaiter." This is my favorite book and also my daughter's favorite book, where Miss Suzy is a squirrel and she lives in the treetops... I really think this formed my conception of how, you know, of how I sort of view the terrain of the United States in some ways, and how I even figured out where I want to live... So this is my final conclusion, is that I created my life as a mirror of the books that I love, and here are some, even down to like where I live, but I have a black cat named Jenny, she's named after the little black kitten, Jenny. (Violet, Interview Three Transcript)



Figure 16. Violet's collage of "life as a mirror"

While, in some ways, Violet acknowledges this as a curatorial representation of the influence of books in her life, she asserts that she has certainly "engineered" (Violet, *Interview Three Transcript*) many memorable experiences in her adult life to model aspects of her favorite children's books. She says, "I don't know how it is for you, but for me, the

books are always so present in my mind that I think I naturally gravitate toward experiences... and toward different things, different settings... that remind me of that book.”

(Violet, *Interview Three Transcript*)

As a parent, Violet indicates her desire to preserve the artifacts of her children’s reading landscapes. Considering the influence of digital texts and eBooks on their experiences, she questions what kinds of memories they will retain of their childhood reading landscapes. Whereas many of her cherished memories are multisensory, she wonders if her children will remember the texts they read in a more linear, plot-based fashion. She reflects on an artifact of her own childhood reading landscape, one of the few books her parents preserved,

It’s Betty MacDonald and they’re these stories, they’re kind of like crazy morals for kids. And we had it in my fifth grade classroom and it’s just a wrecked book that I read over and over in that classroom and the teacher told me at the end of the year that I could keep it. (Violet, *Interview Three Transcript*)

With multisensory memories to draw on, Violet says she spends a lot of time on Pinterest “being nostalgic,” trying to recapture the essence of many of the books she read as a child.

Maddie

Like Violet, Maddie has also tried to recreate her childhood book collection throughout her adult life. Throughout her many moves as an adult, she has managed to save a number of books from childhood. She reflected on what it means to know these books are physical artifacts of her reading history. Specifically considering *Katie and the Sad Noise*, the book given to her mother by the Strongsville Library, she says,

It connects me back to that time and place. Of what it was like to go to that library and, um... I mean, around the holidays, my mom was always really into Christmas. So, it was always a... I don't want to say a magical time, but a special time, anyway. And so, when the library would put out this section of books, it was just exciting and happy and you knew that, you know, Christmas was coming and you would get to see all of the family and... It's just... It's all... I mean, the illustrations are red and green, for heaven's sake! [laughs] (Maddie, *Interview Three Transcript*)

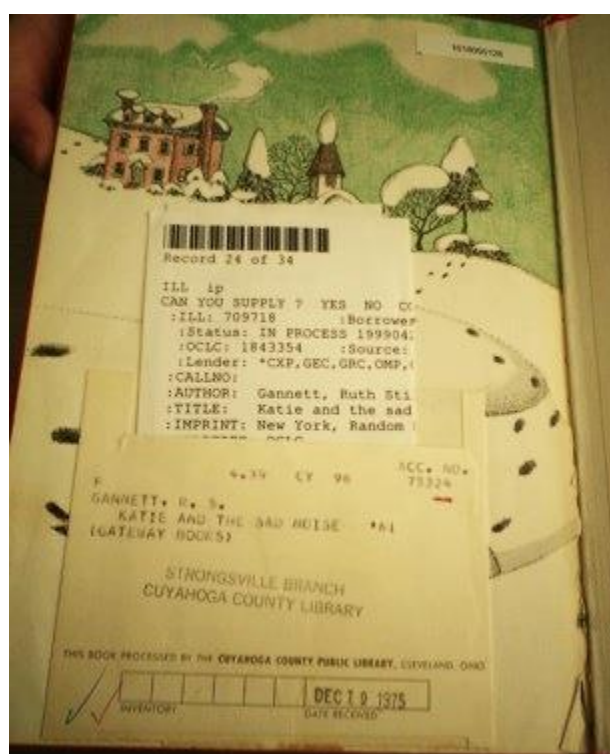


Figure 17. Maddie's copy of *Katie and the Sad Noise*

Maddie's arts-based prompt response, a three-dimensional diorama, represented her belief that the places she experienced in the books she read as a child, the literary landscapes into which she was *transported* during reading, elicit the same kinds of vivid, multisensory, emotional memories she has of "real" childhood places. These are memories she returns to often. Her diorama represented her responses to two of the prompts: "Bring to life a

significant childhood memory in your history as a reader, in which the sensory affordances of place seem inseparable from the reading experience” and “In the context of your personal narrative, what do the boundaries between real and literary landscapes look like?” She describes her thinking,

Yeah, I just tried to kind of capture that it’s a transportation into another world. Similar to the Narnia thing with the wardrobe. That’s why I chose that as the entranceway... Again, there’s that transformation. That property, where for me as a reader, just the memory of changing to an imaginary place was very vivid. Or, for some reason, I just connected really strong... How do you represent the fact that I liked enclosed dark places, because it allowed me to... I don’t want to say it triggered, but it facilitated that transportation. So, it was almost like it was removing... Sensory deprivation. It was removing distraction and allowed me to focus strictly on the imaginary place. (Maddie, *Interview Three Transcript*)



Figure 18. Maddie’s diorama

Maddie believes that the memories she has of the books she loved in childhood are still a distinct part of the way she sees the world and the types of places and experiences she gravitates toward. She points out the connection she makes between her childhood identification as a reader of fantasy and her faith in God as an adult. She explains,

I think it paved the way for me to have faith as an adult. So, I went through a period of time as a younger adult when I didn't have faith or I pushed away from that. But, I think by connecting with books that created that possibility in my mind for magic or for the unexplained to be real... I don't know if it was causative or it was early signs of that predisposition to have faith. But, it created the possibility that I could look at the world and think that there's something more and to accept that even if it wasn't manifesting. (Maddie, *Interview Three Transcript*)

In this discussion, Maddie specifically noted the influence of *A Wrinkle in Time* on her experience of faith through the natural world. Referencing the feeling she got when she read about the main character, Meg Murry, looking up at the night sky from her star-watching rock, she concludes about herself,

The time I find myself most thinking about faith and God are times when I'm pondering the universe or our place in it. You know, all of that. So, any place where I'm able to access that state of mind and, um, basically any place where you can go to see the sky clearly... So, when I'm out in nature, when I'm away from people and distractions... It's just to go back... Not only to observe it as an adult, but to try to recapture that sense of awestruck wonder that always accompanies realizing how, you know, insignificant yet loved you are in the universe. (Maddie, *Interview Three Transcript*)

Cliff

Cliff was the only one of the five participants who does not still consider himself to a reader as an adult. In our second interview together, he explained that his attitude toward reading changed when he went to college and began to feel like his upbringing had kept his exposure to and interpretation of literature narrow. He noted that this “culture shock,” coupled with incessant critiques of literature demanded by his English literature courses, left him with little desire to read for pleasure. In our third interview, he revisited this experience of separating from his childhood reading landscape saying, “It’s almost like the stages of grief. But, you can kind of look... But, it kind of reflects the, I guess, the aging process. Because now, at some point, I’ll probably end up going back to reading things for fun.”

(Cliff, *Interview Three Transcript*)

Cliff says that he cannot make a direct connection between what he read as a child and how he sees the world now as an adult, but he ponders the relationship,

I think the whole process of reading and the way that my mind works is probably related in why I never carry a camera anywhere. In a sense. Because, I don’t take pictures, because I don’t need something tangible to remember it. I can tell you, like, for instance I can describe to you via words, what the mall that sat on this complex looked like...even though it doesn’t exist, so maybe that whole concept of reading is why... Actually, it might be why I went back to writing after hating math and failing miserably at engineering. [laughs] Is, I used to hate writing when I was in school. I would... In high school, I would despise it. That senior project I despised. But now, you go and ask me to write a five-page paper and I wonder how I can squeeze it into five pages. But, I wonder if that’s kind of brought it full circle. Kind of in a way.

Maybe not in terms of place, in terms of the physical... tangible, concrete place...

Maybe as an abstract, where I am personally... (Cliff, *Interview Three Transcript*)

In our final discussion, Cliff spent a great deal of time considering what his childhood reading experiences meant in regard to his relationship with his grandmother over the years. She had been a significant figure in his childhood and in his reading landscape, as well. Noting that she still gives him books all the time, he says, “She wants you to read books, but the problem is, as I’ve gotten older, I’ve realized it’s teaching things that she wants, thinks are important. And not necessarily what you do.” (Cliff, *Interview Three Transcript*) He went on to reflect, though, that he would be very concerned if she did start giving him books that reflected more liberal ideologies, because “she’s so set... She has so much conviction of what she believes and everything that if it was to somehow go the other way, I’d start to worry. And not because of the book, but because of the [symbolism].” (Cliff, *Interview Three Transcript*) When I asked what he does with all of the books his grandmother gives him that he does not read, he said that he keeps them visible around his apartment in case she comes to visit.

Virginia

I recruited Virginia to be part of this study after reading her biography on her website. As a photographer and mixed-media artist, she acknowledges that the books she read as a child inspire a lot of her work. In our final interview, she shared that this strand of her work became more refined after she had children and was better able to reconstruct the emotions of those experiences. She describes this work as representing the fluid boundaries between real and fictional landscapes,

Like in *The Subtle Knife*... So, they cut into another world and it's just right there. It's like, you could just reach right through. And, so, um, I really love that kind of idea. It might be completely normal what you're looking at, but you know, I'll do something that's not anachronistic, but just something that's completely different behind it. Like, the sky is totally different or something. Or, like, it's a cut out... It's a very stylized kind of thing. Um, but yet, it's all stuff that you find... Because I don't illustrate it, I photograph it. (Virginia, *Interview Three Transcript*)

Virginia believes that the books she read as a child and the artwork she creates now as an adult are threaded together by her active role as a storyteller. Like Cliff, she ponders whether or not her disposition correlates to her desire to read, "I don't know what it was that came first- the chicken or the egg? Did [books] make me a storyteller or did I seek them out, because, that's how I see things, too? I don't know." (Virginia, *Interview Three Transcript*) She also commented that her childhood was continuously enriched by books and that children who choose not to read are "really missing out." (Virginia, *Interview Three Transcript*) She notes, "Um, I really don't know what I would have done... If I had had all the ideas that you could go places, too. Like, traveling and whatnot. I don't know if that would have occurred to me." (Virginia, *Interview Three Transcript*) To support her own children's desire to read, she ensures that they have a lot of unstructured playtime away from technology, as she did in middle childhood.

Virginia also pointed out that she has maintained many of the same reading routines she ritualized in childhood. Not only does she still pile her books in the order she wants to read them, but she now color-codes them on her bookshelves, as well, because she can locate

them quicker by the look of their spines than if they were in alphabetical order by title or author.



Figure 19. Virginia's color-coded bookshelves

Virginia's arts-based response was a paper sculpture of a beanstalk, modeled after the folktale *Jack and the Beanstalk*, which includes pages from a copy of C.S. Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, a three-dimensional door and a paper pathway. She describes her thinking in answering the prompt, "In the context of your personal narrative, what do the boundaries between real and literary landscapes look like?"



Figure 20. Virginia's paper sculpture

She says,

I just feel like, there's not one way that literature creeps up on you or that you find yourself back there. So, I feel like you... Sometimes it's by climbing, sometimes it's opening a door, sometimes it's like going across a path. There's all these different ways... It's always around you and it brings you places, and um, I just had the little stars, which I stink at cutting. The same way that I just knew there had to be a beanstalk growing in this thing, I just was like, "Oh! That completely speaks to me." I just feel like that so represents what stories are in my world. You know, I'm always like remembering something or picturing something... Or, you know, when I'm writing ideas down for my art, it's usually... But um, just that gift of being able to just go somewhere... and to just be like poof! Right in the story. To have those pictures that you pictured in your head when you were reading them. To sort of go right... It's like a smell. Like if you smell someone's perfume or something and all of a sudden, you're right there... I feel like that's kind of the same, the same thing.

(Virginia, *Interview Three Transcript*)

Discussion of Research Questions

In this section, I situate my findings within the scholarly literature reviewed in previous chapters while discussing the conclusions I have drawn in regard to my research questions. This study addressed five research questions: (1) In what ways have participants' childhood reading experiences functioned as pedagogical landscapes of place-consciousness? (2) In what ways do the experiences participants perceive as "touchstone memories" in their histories as readers transact with theoretical constructs of place making in childhood? (3) How do participants perceive the relationship between childhood reading identity and special

childhood places? (4) How do participants perceive childhood reading experiences in relation to adult identity, including place identity? (which was addressed in the section above) (5) What role did participants perceive formal and informal pedagogical “places” playing in their reading identity?

The Place-Conscious Pedagogy of Reading Landscapes

An underlying assumption of the conceptual framework of this study is that all lived experiences are rooted in place, but as Chawla (1992) concludes, children “need to be brought from rootedness to a sense of place through education, which creates enough separation between the self and its surroundings to allow conscious appreciation” (p. 83). The goal of place-based education is to facilitate these kinds of interactions between children and their local places, so that children are not just acting as place-makers, but that they are also, to some degree, self-aware. The findings of this study suggest a number of ways that the nature of children’s reading experiences, significantly shaped by their active place-making, bring the unique characteristics of place into the foreground of reader perception in middle childhood, evoke a sense of place, and nurture conscious appreciation of both inner and outer worlds; serving as an effective pedagogical landscape of place-consciousness.

I began this discussion in the final section of Chapter 4, when I introduced the four themes that, collectively, characterize children’s dynamic experience of place within their reading landscapes in middle childhood: Repositioning, Transportation, Nesting and Layering. These themes emphasize the way child readers come to know and appreciate their environment through multiple “ways of knowing,” not just cognitive ones (Noddings, 1992; Orr, 2004). Here, it is especially important to consider, perhaps, the most obvious way that reading experiences function as pedagogical landscapes of place-consciousness, is by

encountering new ideas through reading books by way of *repositioning*. Most of the scholarship regarding children's literature in place-based classrooms has been grounded in this premise (Bigger & Webb, 2010; Heard & McDonough, 2009; Murphey, 2002; Wells and Zeece, 2007). However, the findings of this study give us new ways to think about this notion from a phenomenological perspective that considers children's intersecting roles as readers and place-makers.

As newly independent readers in middle childhood, the participants in this study often carved out their reading landscape by seeking texts that allow them to engage in new experiences that differed from their everyday lives. Through aesthetic transactions with books, often books that were self-selected and read at the child's leisure, children encountered new ideas that prompted them to conceptually *reposition* themselves within the unique dimensions of their inner and outer worlds and begin to see themselves differently in relation to their environment. Blackford's (2004) work in literacy research has demonstrated how the process of entering a fictional world through reading (*transportation*) requires child readers to reflect on their world "outside of the book" for comparison. Her research concludes what was also true of my participants: that children often want to read books that enable them to take on positions they cannot take on in their everyday lives. Polkinghorne (1998) highlights the unique affordances of literary forms of narrative to prompt children to consider their conceptual positioning within a place, writing, "...the stability of the written word makes it a separate form of communication, something beyond mere record of the spoken word. Written literature functions as a communication not of presence but of distance" (p. 74).

Reflecting the importance of imaginative play in middle childhood, this desire to encounter new ideas through books and to be transported to fantastical literary landscapes reinforces the work of Bai, Elza, Kovacs, and Romanycia (2010) who challenge the notion that transactions between book and reader are mediated by content in very direct ways. As Carroll (2011) concludes, fictional landscapes contain most of the same “textures,” such as “geographical, cultural, and socio-political concerns” (p. 1). Therefore, books that are explicitly place-conscious have the potential to reorient child readers toward their local landscapes, but so can other books with which they aesthetically engage.

Studying children’s literacy life-worlds in middle childhood, rather than what might be traditionally considered “isolated literacy events,” extends the possible pedagogical landscape beyond cognitive transactions with books and into the wider range of children’s lived experiences as readers and place-makers. Often in middle childhood, participants’ aesthetic engagement with books inspired and scaffolded narrative forms of imaginative play that foregrounded their role as place-makers; a method of *layering*. Unt (2010) concludes that an aesthetic experience of place accompanies imaginative play as children’s bodies move about in a space and make use of artifacts of their environment. She posits that these “games” of imaginative play have a residual impact on the way children see that place and assign meaning to it after the play has ended. While imaginative play is not unique to children’s reading landscapes, participants in this study posited that play inspired by the books they loved as children was often intended to recapture the affect they experienced while reading, in many cases, a feeling of “firstness,” (Meek, 2003) and further perpetuated their desire to read.

The Rootedness of Reader History

Participants' "touchstone memories" in their histories as readers, those that they saw as formative moments or ones they reflect on often in adulthood, included many different kinds of memories. Unt (2010) describes the way children's dynamic engagement with place through play fluidly and continuously foregrounds and backgrounds various aspects of the physical environment in which they are situated. This concept was illustrated in participants' narration of important memories in their histories as readers. Depending on the meaning the experiences held for them, they elected to include or leave out descriptions of the physical context in which the memories occurred to varying degrees.

One kind of memory participants described was memories of reading with someone else (i.e. Sam with his friends, Maddie with her teacher, Cliff with his grandmother, Virginia with her mother). In these memories, the physical environmental context in which these interpersonal reading experiences occurred were barely mentioned at all. Instead, interactions with people who were key figures in their childhood reading landscape were foregrounded. From a phenomenological perspective of place, these memories emphasize participants' perceived position within the social and cultural systems that characterize their place (Gruenewald, 2003).

Participants also recalled instances in which they found a special book through their own means or a book was given to them as a gift. In these memories, sometimes books are foregrounded as artifacts of place that carry personal, interpersonal and cultural meanings (Grenby, 2011; Lerer, 2012; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010; Reid-Walsh, 2013) and can be known by readers in a perceptual, embodied way (Wason-Ellam, 2010) (i.e. Maddie's copy of *Katie and the Sad Noise*). Participants have preserved some of the books that were important artifacts of their childhood and in some cases, have set out to acquire copies of books they

loved as children, but no longer own. In this way, books function as a tangible memento or souvenir of past reading experiences (Tatar, 2009).

In other instances, these kinds of memories foreground the characteristics of the physical location in which the book was found or the reader's engagement with place in the process of acquiring the book, such as Sam's memories of surveying the racks of comic books at the local five and dime store and Violet's memories of "trolling" the library stacks. Rather than emphasizing the artifact, these memories highlight the child-readers' evolving autonomy as readers and place-makers and the meaning they are making of landmarks in their reading landscapes through the movement of their bodies. This reflects the orientation toward exploration and discovery that is often characteristic of place-makers in middle childhood (Hart, 1979; Sobel, 2008).

Most often, participants recalled memorable scenes from their favorite childhood books as touchstone memories in their history as a reader. The idea of imagined experiences in childhood constituting vivid and tangible adult memories is a powerful one. To some degree, this notion has been considered by scholars working in immersion theory and the affective, sensorial nature of reading experiences that transport readers (Esrock, 1994; Ryan, 2001). Some of participants' memories of the fictional landscapes they engaged with during aesthetic reading (such as Maddie's memory of being in Meg Murry's attic bedroom) blurred with instances in which participants' layered this remembered visual imagery onto their physical environment through instances of imaginative play or artifactual prompting. These memories foregrounded the child-place interaction and emphasized the role of story in reinforcing children's personal investment in their immediate environment (Unt, 2010; Walton, 1990).

Readers' Special Places

In regard to the relationship between childhood reader identity and special childhood places, the findings of this study build upon the existing scholarship of children's special places. The increase in geographic accessibility and autonomy that children often experience in middle childhood can promote a disposition of exploration that children express through the identification or creation of secretive places, such as forts or bush houses (Hart, 1979; Sobel, 2008). Within these places, children can exercise control over the environment and their activities therein, which, like imaginative play, can play an important role in psychological development (Chawla, 1992).

As children, the participants in this study had a number of "special places" in middle childhood, such as playhouses and closets, where they could exercise control over a space. Sometimes, by conceiving of a place differently or reorganizing it spatially, these special places would suit participants' needs as a context for reading. Virginia's special place underneath her grandmother's dining room table and Maddie's reconceptualization of her bedroom as Meg Murry's attic bedroom were examples of this. Some of the participants indicated that sometimes the physical environment in which they chose to read shared some narrative thread of intertextuality with the kind of book they were preparing to read. An example of this is Virginia's desired proximity to the cuckoo clock in her grandmother's dining room as she read her fantasy novels. To her, the clock represented the possibility of entering a portal to another world and validated, in a very tangible way, the legitimacy of the books she was reading under the table (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2005). On rare occasions, a reader's awareness of this intertextuality occurs by chance rather than orchestration, such as when Virginia found reading in *The Upper Room* to be enchanting.

Other times, in preparation for engagement with a special book, participants found or created *different* special places that were specifically intended to facilitate particular kinds of reading experiences. Maddie would cover her bed with a blanket to insulate herself from the outside world. Sam would go to the spot in his yard where the grass was extra lush. The distinct embodied and imaginative properties of reading experiences required the reader/place-makers to consider the affordances and limitations of particular spaces as contexts for reading (Grenby, 2011; Leander & Sheehy, 2011).

Formal and Informal Pedagogical Places

Handler Spitz (2006) points out the artificiality of the conceptual boundaries we often impose on young children's perceptions of experience. She writes,

Children's wishes, dreams, and fantasies feed into their immediate sensory perceptions, and their aesthetic lives in turn shape the contours of their fantasies. This interdependence is so pronounced in early childhood because during those brief years the aggressively occupying armies of compartmentalization have not yet fully colonized our mental landscape. (p. 4)

The findings of this study suggest that by middle childhood, the "armies of compartmentalization" are beginning to creep into children's awareness of space politics. While Violet, Maddie, Cliff and Virginia all acknowledged the consistency of their reader identity at home and in the informal spaces of school (their interactions outside the constraints of formal literacy curricula), they all also experienced disruptions in their reading landscape as they moved physically between these two contexts.

Within participants' informal home and community pedagogical spaces, their engagement in their reading landscapes were unbound by time and narrowly defined modes

of learning. In these contexts, their reader identity was constructed through extended periods of unstructured time, engagement with artifacts of place, the ability to physically move their body and meaningful interactions with other readers. The rootedness of their reader histories in the many textures of their immediate physical environment also reinforced reader identity and scaffolded the expansion of their reading landscapes.

By contrast, the formal structures of school reading curriculum felt like a foreign landscape to these readers. Maddie's school reading experiences have left her with a distaste for reading in any space that remotely resembles a traditional classroom. In order to protect their reading landscapes, participants constructed conceptual boundaries between "school reading" and "real reading," and had to negotiate when they could engage their reader identity within the liminal spaces of the school building (Kendall, 2008; Leander & Sheehy, 2011; Nichols, Nixon & Rowsell, 2011).

Implications

The meaningful experience of place within the reading landscapes of middle childhood, by way of *repositioning*, *transportation*, *nesting* and *layering*, have been recounted by the participants of this study as primarily occurring outside the context of school. It was a primary aim of this study to be able to describe and interpret this phenomenon, so that place-conscious curricula could be more responsive to the nature of these experiences, and therefore, design reading instruction that nurtures children's sense of place, and at the same time, promote an authentic desire to read and to be a reader. The findings of this study extend the ideas that have previously been put forth by scholars in various fields, as well as provide new insights with curricular implications.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that an elementary place-conscious literacy curricula should validate and promote aesthetic engagement with a wide variety of literary genres, especially works of imaginative literature. Including imaginative literature in a place-based classroom (not because of the place-conscious ideologies that might be superficially extracted, but because of their aesthetic qualities), nurtures the desire for exploration and alterity that characterize much of children's place-making activities in middle childhood. Activities already well established in literature-based classrooms, such as book clubs, guided reading groups and unstructured reading time could be integrated into the kind of project-based instructional design that we often see in place-based classrooms. The work of Burke & Cutter-Mackenzie (2010), Heard and McDonough (2009), Payne (2010) and Sobel (2008) present a number of imaginative projects that could integrate an immersion in local place with an immersion in imaginative literature.

This project found that as self-motivated, independent readers, children conceive of "reading experiences" much more broadly than isolated reading events. Their reading landscapes are marked by places that carry specific meaning in regard to their reader identity, social and cultural relationships that govern interest and accessibility, reading rituals steeped in the unique textures of their immediate environment and so on. Rather than narrowly conceiving of children's identity as readers and place-makers by the texts they read and observable isolated reading events in the classroom, a place-conscious elementary reading curriculum should support a *culture* of readers as place-makers, where children's histories as readers are honored in instructional design and the unique textures of their reading landscapes are seen as valid pedagogical landscapes of place-consciousness beyond the school building. Instead of pushing "school reading" outward into children's lived

experiences, we should be bringing the rootedness of “real reading” into our classroom practices.

One way literacy educators have achieved more authentic cultures of reading in all age-levels of classrooms, albeit not from the perspective of place-consciousness, has been through the use of visual literacy narratives throughout the school year (Kajder, 2006). A visual literacy narrative invites the child to represent and reflect on her history as a reader through the visual arts (e.g. film, photography, painting, etc.). In a place-conscious literacy classroom, this could be re-envisioned in a way similar to how I conceptualized my participants’ experiences as readers through their “place biographies.” Children could keep visual journals that reflect on the unique textures of local and imaginative places they engage with as readers and the meaning those places hold for them personally.

Finally, place-conscious elementary reading classrooms must also acknowledge the role the body plays in children’s reading landscapes. The findings of this study highlight that participants’ memorable experiences of place within their reading landscapes in middle childhood often included a literal search for or construction of a special place to read a particular text (*nesting*), the movement of the body in *layering* textual landscapes onto their immediate physical environment and the manipulation of artifacts as intertextual objects, souvenirs of reading experiences or access points to fictional landscapes. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) have written extensively about the use of artifacts in place-conscious classrooms and Payne’s (2010) work considering reading in “nature’s classroom” is a good place to start in thinking about extending the geographic accessibility of in-school reading time. Scholarship in the area of child-centered school and classroom design also has a lot to offer in thinking about how we might integrate children’s nesting practices into our classroom space (Curtis &

Carter, 2003; Tarr, 2004; Clark, 2010; O'Donnell, Wicklund, Pigozzi, Peterson, & Mau, 2010; Hille, 2011; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012).

Conclusion

Shortly after the death of her mother, Wendy McClure came across the collection of *Little House on the Prairie* books she had owned in childhood. Dealing with the emotional turmoil of losing her mother and longing to recapture the enchantment of the literary landscape she inhabited in middle childhood, “Laura World,” she set out on a westward journey to visit all of the Laura Ingalls Wilder historical sites in existence, hoping to again feel the hope and wonderment of her childhood. Near the end of her quest, after many disappointments, she waded into the water at Plum Creek. She recounts trying to experience the place that was so tangible to her in reading the book,

I was going to wade in the creek. Others were doing it—both adults and kids were seeking out clear spots along the bank where it was easy to step into the water. I found a place where the dirt was smooth from the feet of other visitors. I took off my flip-flops and stepped awkwardly down from the slope of the bank. The water felt nice. A little cloud of silt rose up with each step, just like *On the Banks of Plum Creek* had described. Or it was just like each step I’d taken in the creek at the campground where my family spent weekends when I was a kid. I don’t know which had come first, my own experience or the book, but either way, that smokelike swirl that wavered in the water was how I knew the book was true.

I stopped wading and stood still. I had to forgive the awkwardness, the feetfirst unwieldiness of trying to enter the world of the book this way, standing in the water with my shoulder bag and my cameras. It helped a bit to listen to the water and

all the summer noises, birds and things rasping away and making clattering calls to each other; somehow it was quiet enough to hear them.

I looked up. A little girl about seven years old was standing on the bank. She'd stopped short when she saw me, and I could tell she was trying to reconcile her sense of Laura World with the strangely crowded reality: here was Plum Creek, but here was this *lady*, too. (McClure, 2011, p. 233)

At the end of her journey, McClure concludes that her ability to transport into Laura World and to be able to layer elements of Laura World onto her own immediate environment in childhood could not be recaptured in adulthood. Through this conclusion, she implies that experiencing place through fictional landscapes is a gift unique to middle childhood. While I believe some of my participants would disagree, she provides an interesting interpretation about what it meant to her to *try* to recapture Laura World,

Ever since I'd come back from the trip west, I'd been having moments where I'd tell myself to look around, to *look at this*, as if I'd needed to be apprised of my own life.

It reminded me of what I used to do when I was little, when Laura was in my head.

Now, though, it was just me, and that was all right. (McClure, 2011, p. 300)

Being reawakened to this childhood phenomenon repositioned her within her immediate environment and in the spirit of phenomenological inquiry, made her everyday, taken-for-granted, lived experiences more meaningful.

To support place-conscious educators' efforts to be responsive to the nature of this phenomenon and to develop curricula that nurtures children's sense of place along with a passion for reading, further inquiries should extend the findings of this study. An important next step in this line of inquiry would be to conduct a similar study exploring the experience

of place in the literacy life-worlds of middle childhood using child participants. While there has been important work done in the last few years to consider preschoolers' experience of place, there is still a lack of research looking at the relationships between reading practices and sense of place in the early years. Finally, there is work to be done in looking at the experience of place in the reading landscapes of nonreaders, which could extend on the inquiries of Leander and Sheehy (2011) and provide us with important insight into creating place-conscious reading curricula that is meaningful for all students.

As explorers of physical and conceptual places with budding autonomy and independence, children actively construct functional, cultural and personal meanings of the landscapes that weave together their dynamic lived experiences as readers in place. The findings of this study challenge us as educators, not to simply acknowledge this phenomenon as tangential to our curricular and instructional design, but to see it as a central and crucial component of a culture of education that values long-term outcomes over short-term and privileges the holistic well-being of children over upward economic mobility. While placeless curricula loom large in our schools and classrooms, threatening to overshadow the rootedness of experience, in the literacy life-worlds of middle childhood, readers are place-makers.

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Appendix A

Participant Overview

Within the field of education, I see myself as an advocate for place-conscious approaches to teaching and learning. This philosophy values curricula that is not isolated from children's everyday lived experiences, but rather seeks to nurture a conscious appreciation for and personal investment in the many dimensions of the local landscape through learning experiences that are meaningfully situated within community processes.

Currently, little is understood about the ways children's authentic experiences with literature might play into these efforts and engage them in powerful ways to the world they are coming to know and position themselves within. Even less is known about how these experiences might contribute to our sense of identity as adults. The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of childhood literary experiences within a person's developing sense of place from childhood into adulthood.

Participants will take part in a series of three 60-90 minute informal interviews and are invited to bring along personal artifacts that might support or extend the sharing of personal experiences, such as photographs, children's books, childhood writing, etc.

- The first interview will be a chance for the participant to share his or her "place biography:" a narration of the places that have held some significance in his or her life. Places, generally thought of as geographic locations, might be as broad as the East Coast or as specific as a tree house in the back yard of a childhood home or a nook under a bed.
- The second interview will consider participants' childhood reading identity, focusing on favorite texts, reading experiences in various contexts (such as home, school and community) and memories that represent significant touchstone events. At the end of this second interview, participants will be given a choice of prompts to consider in preparation for the final interview. Each of the prompts invites participants to interpret their own connections between childhood reading experiences and sense of place through art. (Participants need not consider themselves to be "artistic" to engage with the prompts.)
- The third and final interview will unfold from a discussion of the prompt in which participants interpreted their own connections between childhood reading experiences and their sense of place through an artwork.

Appendix B

Interview Discussion Prompts

Interview One

- Could you please describe your “place” history?
- What kinds of places were special to you as a child?
- What kind of sense of place did you have at school?
- Were there any places where you used your imagination?
- Were there any places you had control over?
- Are there any places from your childhood to which you still feel a strong connection?
- What places are important to you now?

Interview Two

- Could you please describe your history as a reader beginning with your earliest childhood memories?
- What was reading like in school?
- What was reading like at home?
- Describe any touchstone texts in your history as a reader.
- Describe any touchstone memories in your history as a reader.

Interview Three

- How do you conceptualize the relationship between your childhood reading identity and your adult place identity?
- Bring to life a significant childhood memory in your history as a reader, in which the sensory affordances of a place seem inseparable from the reading experience.
- In the context of your personal narrative, what do the boundaries between real and literary landscapes look like?
- Throughout your life, how have books functioned as a lens through which you see the world?

Appendix C

Arts-Based Response Prompts

In preparation for our third and final interview, please choose at least one of the following prompts that most interests you.

- How do you conceptualize the relationship between your childhood reading identity and your adult place identity?
- Bring to life a significant childhood memory in your history as a reader, in which the sensory affordances of a place seem inseparable from the reading experience.
- In the context of your personal narrative, what do the boundaries between real and literary landscapes look like?
- Throughout your life, how have books functioned as a lens through which you see the world?

Then, I invite you to either *create* an artistic response (e.g. a drawing, a painting, a photograph, a collage, a diorama, an altered book, etc.) or you may choose to *curate* a small collection of objects that serve as an artifactual response to the prompt.

Appendix D

CONSENT FOR RESEARCH The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Adults' Reader History and Sense of Place

Principal Investigator: *Sarah Fischer*

Address: *258 Chambers Building, University Park, PA, 16802*

Telephone Number: *724-880-7763*

Advisor: *Dr. Daniel Hade*

Advisor Telephone Number: *814-865-2215*

Subject's Printed Name: _____

We are asking you to be in a research study. This form gives you information about the research.

Whether or not you take part is up to you. You can choose not to take part. You can agree to take part and later change your mind. Your decision will not be held against you.

Please ask questions about anything that is unclear to you and take your time to make your choice.

1. Why is this research study being done?

We are asking you to be in this research because are 21 years of age or older and characterize yourself as an avid reader when you were between the ages of 8 and 12 years old.

This research is being done to find out how children's experiences with books in middle childhood contribute to their lasting connections to places.

Approximately 15 people will take part in this research study.

2. What will happen in this research study?

This is a qualitative study that will involve a series of three semi-structured and task-based interviews with approximately 15 adult participants. The three interviews will

take place at a time and location designated by the participants, will last no more than 90 minutes each and will be recorded with an audio recorder. Interviews will be transcribed and if text or arts-based artifacts are created as part of the interview process, these will be photographed and/or scanned and returned to the participant. If participants bring along any personal artifacts to the interview, such as favorite childhood books, photographs, etc., these will also be photographed and returned to the participant.

3. What are the risks and possible discomforts from being in this research study?

There is a risk of loss of confidentiality if your information or your identity is obtained by someone other than the investigators, but precautions will be taken to prevent this from happening.

4. What are the possible benefits from being in this research study?

4a. What are the possible benefits to you?

The benefit to participants in this study is to have the opportunity to share his or her experiences with an interested person. He or she will also have the opportunity to better understand his or her connections to places and the influences literature has had on his or her identity.

4b. What are the possible benefits to others?

The benefit to society of this study is that the better we understand adults' lingering sense of place from childhood experiences with literature, the better we can plan and implement place-conscious curriculum in elementary schools, as well as in informal learning contexts that will connect children to their communities.

5. What other options are available instead of being in this research study?

You may decide not to participate in this research.

6. How long will you take part in this research study?

If you agree to take part, you will be required to meet the primary investigator for 3 interviews that will take no longer than 90 minutes each and will take place at a time and location of your choosing to complete this research study. Between the second and third interviews, participants will also be asked to create a piece of art that reflects his or her own interpretation of the interview topics. This task will take as long as the participants chooses it to take. Materials will be provided.

7. How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you decide to take part in this research study?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and sharing of your personal research information to people who have a need to review this information. Pseudonyms will be used for names and places from audio transcription through the rest of the study.

In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

We will do our best to keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, it is possible that other people may find out about your participation in this research study. For example, the following people/groups may check and copy records about this research.

- The Office for Human Research Protections in the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
- The Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) and
- The Office for Research Protections.

Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you. Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private. However, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

8. What are the costs of taking part in this research study?

8a. What will you have to pay for if you take part in this research study?

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

11. What are your rights if you take part in this research study?

Taking part in this research study is voluntary.

- You do not have to be in this research.
- If you choose to be in this research, you have the right to stop at any time.
- If you decide not to be in this research or if you decide to stop at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

12. If you have questions or concerns about this research study, whom should you call?

Please call the head of the research study (principal investigator), Sarah Fischer at 724-880-7763 if you:

- Have questions, complaints or concerns about the research.

- Believe you may have been harmed by being in the research study.

You may also contact the Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775, ORProtections@psu.edu if you:

- Have questions regarding your rights as a person in a research study.
- Have concerns or general questions about the research.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else about any concerns related to the research.

INFORMED CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Your signature below means that you have explained the research to the subject or subject representative and have answered any questions he/she has about the research.

Signature of person who explained this research Date Printed Name
(Only approved investigators for this research may explain the research and obtain informed consent.)

Signature of Person Giving Informed Consent

Before making the decision about being in this research you should have:

- Discussed this research study with an investigator,
- Read the information in this form, and
- Had the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Your signature below means that you have received this information, have asked the questions you currently have about the research and those questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated form to keep for future reference.

Signature of Subject

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you voluntarily choose to be in this research and agree to allow your information to be used and shared as described above.

Signature of Subject Date Printed Name

VITA

Sarah B. Fischer

Education

2015 Ph.D., Curriculum & Instruction, The Pennsylvania State University

2012 M.Ed., Curriculum & Instruction, The Pennsylvania State University

2008 B.S., Elementary and Kindergarten Education, The Pennsylvania State University

Awards

2014-2015 Miriam E. Gray Scholarship

Publications

Fischer, S. (2015). Playing in literary landscapes: Considering children's need for imaginative literature in place-based education. *Bank Street Occasional Papers Series, 33*.

Retrieved from <http://www.bankstreet.edu/occasional-paper-series/33/playing-in-literary-landscapes/>.

Fischer, S. (2015). Re-storying "progress" through familial curriculum making: Toward a husbandry of rooted lives. In P. L. Thomas, P. Carr, J. Gorlewski, & B. Porfilio (Eds.), *Pedagogies of kindness and respect: On the lives and education of children*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Fischer, S. (2015). The hidden curriculum in room 10: School mythology and professional identity negotiation in the *Miss Malarkey* series. In *Saviors, Scapegoats, and Schoolmarms: Examining the Classroom Teacher in Fiction and Film for Teacher Education*. Manuscript in preparation.

Contributor to Children and Childhood Studies Area of the Mid-Atlantic Popular and American Culture Association's online collection "American Childhood in 25 Artifacts" (2014, October)

Curated Artifact: Little Golden Books

Presentations

Fischer, S. (2014, October). Literacy in the place-conscious classroom. Professional development presentation for in-service teachers sponsored through Penn State's EdLion.

Fischer, S. (2015, May). Pre-conventional marginalia: Young children as annotators of reading experience. Eleventh International Conference of Qualitative Inquiry to be held at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.