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From Dr Seuss to Pokemon:
A case study of three ten-year old boys' alternate literacy interests

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Since the mid nineties escalating media attention has placed boys on centre stage for under achieving, focusing on their comparatively low results vis-à-vis girls. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training routinely reports statistics to support the perception that boys’ are not achieving as well as they should. This problem is not unique to Australia. Most western democracies report similar concerns.

While there is evidence of a gendered literacy gap, there seems to be a paucity of research pertaining to boys’ interests and motivations. Especially with respect to the multiplicity of literacies. At a time when both boys and girls need to become highly, critically literate individuals it seems that their interest in effective use of traditional book-based literacy and media are declining.

This paper explores the nature of boys’ out-of-school literacy engagements and motivations. Ultimately, the study aimed to analyse the degree of congruence between boys' out-of-school engagement(s) with alternate literacies, and the in school literacy curriculum they experienced.

Specifically, this paper explores the alternate literacy interests of three 10-year old boys. While small in scope, it provides insights, into these boys’ literacy practices and interests, their families’ contribution to these practices and the school literacy curriculum they experience.

Introduction
This study aimed to explore the nature of boys’ out-of-school literacy engagements and motivations and compare these to the in-school literacy curriculum experience. While small in scope, it was hoped that the study would provide insights into these boys’ literacy practices and interests, their families’ contribution to these practices and the in-school literacy curriculum experience, all of which were an integral part of the day-to-day literacy world of these boys. The study provided information pertaining to their lack of engagement in school-based literacies, and further informed and provided discussion points for teachers and educational policy makers. This study culminated in a proposal for an alternate basis for curriculum development.
Given the range of research possibilities inherent in this particular field of literacy research, the following specific research question was generated:

*What degree of congruence is there between (some) Grade 4 boys' out-of-school engagement(s) with alternate literacies and the in-school literacy curriculum they experience?*

This broad question involved addressing two specific sub-questions:

1. What is the range and nature of the ‘literacies’ a purposive sample of Grade 4 boys from Cray Bay Public School engaged with in the out-of-school settings?
2. What degree of congruence existed between such alternate literacies and the kinds and range of literacies, which are privileged in their classroom?

**Background to Study**

A recurring finding from research is that many boys who are not interested in literacy at school engage deeply in different forms of ‘alternative literacy’ (Martino, 2003, p. 23) in the out-of-school settings. Typical examples are reports, both anecdotal and evidence-based, of boys who either will not read or reluctantly read at school, however, are prepared to engage with texts such as their father’s volunteer fire fighter newsletter, the rules and procedures of Pokemon games, computer games, and so on. ‘Common sense’ views of motivation would support the notion that the use of such forms of ‘alternative literacy’ as a class resource should have the potential to help uninterested boys make the decision to engage with literacy related lessons in the school setting.

I was intrigued by the term ‘alternative’ literacies (Martino, 2003, p. 23) and as I read more in this field I wondered why ‘alternatives’ were not a common feature of primary school classrooms. In the current ‘digital-information’ age, technology is continually creating and forcing the use of new forms of literacy. Teachers should be intent on motivating and helping boys develop literacy skills to use throughout their lives. Are we, in fact, alienating them from using and learning these new forms of literacy by adhering only to established traditional print-based literature within the curriculum?

In the mid-nineties the issue came to the surface, mainly through media attention and headlines. Since this time there has been a growing interest in this area and questions are being asked.

- Why are boys under achieving?
- What factors are influencing this?
- How has this happened?
- What can we do to amend this problem?

It is important to articulate that the gender divide is not simply that all girls are achieving better than all boys. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training (Accessed 2004) reports that within each socio-economic bracket, girls are generally out-performing boys. Therefore, boys in a higher socio-economic bracket will generally achieve higher literacy results than girls in a lower socio-economic bracket and ‘an interaction between gender, race, class, and geographical region was found’ (Young & Brozo, 2001, p. 319). Based on these findings, researchers are now trying to ascertain why girls are performing better than boys within each socio-economic bracket.
One of my major concerns is that, while there is evidence of a gendered literacy gap, which most would class as an issue for major concern, there seems to be a paucity of research pertaining to boys’ interests and motivations regarding literacy (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002). At a time when both boys and girls need to become highly, critically literate individuals, it seems that effective use of and interest in school-based literacy and media are declining (Department of Education and Training N.S.W., Accessed 2004; Blackburn, 2003; Young & Brozo, 2001; Asselin, 2003; Cox, 2003; Weaver-Hightower, 2003).

The Department of Education and Training in New South Wales is aware of the gender divide in literacy and while it seems to be narrowing (Department of Education and Training N.S.W., Accessed 2004), the New South Wales Department of Education is also aware that the problem needs to be further understood. The Federal Government has attempted to do this in their most recent initiative, the Lighthouse Schools Programme. The funding provided by the Federal Government is used to further the programme and educate other schools in boys’ education, through recording schools’ approaches in a report that is then sent to all schools to provide information and ideas as to how they can support boys’ within their school programmes.

Methodology
The research is located in the qualitative paradigm of naturalistic inquiry, employing a case-study methodology. Descriptive in nature, the study examined and analysed a small sample of case-study boys’ literacy engagements in their formal-school setting and any alternate literacy engagements in out-of-school settings. A purposive sample of 3 Grade 4 boys (Harry, Josh and Aaron) from Cray Bay Public School was identified after negotiation with their class teacher. The three boys were chosen because they represented a range of reading abilities and the number facilitated a cross case analysis that would allow the possibility for informative patterns to emerge. The three boys’ parents, the classroom teacher and teacher librarian also acted as informants in the study. Their data aided in the triangulation process and provided deeper insight into the boys in- and out-of-school literate lives.

Five methods of data collection were employed:

- Structured/semi-structured interviews, which were transcribed for repeat analysis;
- Unobtrusive classroom observations recorded as field notes;
- Case study students’ reflections on the range and kinds of in-school and out-of-school literacies with which they engaged;
- Literacy related work samples (in-school and out-of-school products);
- Classroom teacher documents and/or other school documents related to the literacy curriculum being experienced by case study children.

Literacy and Being a Boy
When asked to describe girls’ books, Harry commented: ‘they always have pink on the cover or a picture of girls on the cover’ (Interview: 2/7/04). He thought that boys didn’t want to read girls’ books because:
... the boys were more proud of being a boy, if a girl read a boys’ book, well if the girl was famous for being this really girly girl person and they read a boys’ book, then they would get paid out bad. Except if a normal girl read a boys’ book they wouldn’t get paid out. And if you were a boy and read a book with pink on the cover, suddenly there would be all these people around you rolling on the floor in laughter. (Harry: Interview, 2/7/04).

Because of this Harry admitted that he wouldn’t read or pick up girls’ books, especially if there was a girl on the cover. Although, he then confessed, he would possibly read it, ‘only if it suggests in the title or it suggests in the cover or the blurb that it’s not one of those smushy love stories’ (Harry: Interview, 2/7/04). Aaron described girls’ books as ‘weird and that boys hated them’. Furthermore, he explained:

Well girls’ books and women’s books are different. What I know of women’s books is a mystery. Except girls’ books are like Saddle Club, Mary-Kate and Ashleigh. (Aaron: Interview, 2/7/02).

He explained that girls’ books were different to boys’ books because they, ‘usually have pink on the cover somewhere… if a boy started reading them, the boy would think they were really stupid and wonder how girls would like them’ (Aaron: Interview, 2/7/02). He described the reasons why he didn’t like girls’ books is because they usually contained ‘kissing, love, stuff like that’ (Aaron: Interview, 2/7/02), whereas, Aaron explained, in boys’ books:

... it’s more war, pranks and girls were usually slow pacing and usually it isn’t something really big, like trying to get into a play, stuff like that. But in boys’ books it’s more like saving the world, blowing up the enemy and they were usually more action packed. And in girls’ books on the picture its usually got all bright colour and no blood. (Aaron: Interview, 2/7/02).

Aaron explained that boys prefer adventure books because they were fast-paced and have a lot of action. In discussion Aaron agreed with the statement ‘boys shouldn’t read girls’ books’, believing only if a boy was ‘weird’ would he read it. However, Aaron also believed only ‘weird girls’ would read boys’ books and if they did, ‘all the girls would tease them probably and then all the boys would tease them’ (Interview, 2/7/04). Aaron exempts Harry Potter as a girls’ or boys’ book; either could read it even though it was fast paced and contained adventure. He explained that this was because:

... girls like fantasy and fairy tales and stuff like that and in that it’s written by a woman and it’s got a girl in it, they probably like that. Except the boys would like it because there were the fights, especially in the fifth book. (Aaron: Interview, 2/7/04).

**Out-of-School Literacy Practices**

When Josh was questioned about what literacy practices he did outside of school; he replied, ‘well I’ve got some Billabong, Quicksilver posters in my room about surfing and skating. I like to read signs when I’m out, anything like that’ (Josh: Interview, 9/6/04). George and Amy, (Josh’s parents) when asked about his out-of-school literacy practices listed:

He will read at night... go to the library... reads the internet, the soccer ladder, anything to do with skateboarding, surfing, cookbooks if they interest him. He made George make scones on the weekend. He reads his music manuscript book he writes lists when he’s busy. He reads the instructions for things... Over the years Connectex and Lego... He certainly
doesn’t write creatively, I haven’t seen him write instructionally either. Doesn’t like his
d hand writing either, very conscious of that, thinks it’s all ugly and horrible… He’ll write
e-mails to my sister-in-law. (George and Amy: Interview, 8/7/04).

Josh explained that he likes reading at home, especially in bed, however, he doesn’t, ‘like
starting a book and then not finishing it. I have to read it in the morning to finish it off’
(Interview, 9/6/04). Furthermore, he explained that he doesn’t like reading big books: ‘…
that takes forever, cause I like to do other things, I like to play sport’ (Interview, 9/6/04).
When questioned about the types of books he liked he listed sports books, narratives and
information books. Josh said that when choosing books he likes to choose, ‘different things
that are good, something different, something weird’ that he doesn’t know anything about
(Interview, 9/6/04).

Harry listed his out-of-school literacy practices as reading, watching television, playing
computer games and ‘lots of writing’ (Harry: Interview 24/6/04). His parents added to the
list the ‘kids and television section’ of the newspaper, instructions of how to put things
together and how to play games (Tim and Gai: Interview, 22/7/04).

When questioned about his interests Harry explained he liked to draw a lot, especially
comics, as well as playing computer games and reading. He chooses books to do with his
interests, in particular comic books and how-to-draw books (Harry: Interview, 8/6/04). He
also liked to ‘play games outside based on characters made up’ (Harry: Interview, 24/6/04).
Harry liked using the computer because ‘you can just do so much different stuff on them’
(Harry: Interview, 24/6/04) and estimated spending three hours per week on one, contrary
to his parents’ estimation of ten hours per week (Tim and Gai: Interview, 22/7/04).

When asked about his out-of-school literacy, Aaron explained that he was currently doing a
lot of reading and drawing Aaron had a big interest in strategy games, he also liked Lego,
Connectex and reading, ‘because it gets really boring cause it takes me ages to get to sleep
so I read during the night and sometimes in the morning if I wake up early’ (Aaron:
Interview, 17/6/04). Aaron added that as well as borrowing puzzle books he would also
borrow Selby, Garfield and Deltora Quest books.

**Literacy in the Classroom**

Renee (the year 4 classroom teacher) thought her Year Four class was not typical in
relation to the achievement of the boys and listed more boys than girls as good readers.
Likewise when Josh, Harry and Aaron were asked to list the good readers in Year Four
they all named more boys than girls. In contrast to results from the Basic Skills test in
N.S.W. (O’Doherty, 1994) and similar tests in other states and countries that have found
girls are generally outperforming boys in literacy assessments, this is not the case in the
Year Four class at Cray Bay Public School. Alloway and Gilbert’s work (1997) suggests
that not all girls are outperforming all boys. They suggest that in order to begin dealing
with this issue, further research needs to be conducted, examining which boys and which
girls are not achieving their potential. Students’ backgrounds have been found to play a
major role in their literacy achievement (Alloway and Gilbert, 1997 and Maher, 2002). If
we look at the backgrounds of Josh, Harry and Aaron they are very similar. Each came
from a University educated, middle to upper socio-economic income families, each lived in
a good area, and each had been immersed in a family culture which encouraged
engagement in enjoyable literature. This seems to support Alloway and Gilbert (2002) who
found that such social and economic resources will impact significantly on literacy achievement.

Reading Practices
Dutro’s (2002) findings suggested that boys were rejecting reading because it was perceived as a feminine practice which was in opposition to masculine practices and how the boys believe they should act as boys. The boys in Dutro’s (2002) study performed their masculinity as they talked about ‘girl’ books and then described boys’ books as, ‘adventurous, scary and sports-centred’ (Dutro, 2002, p. 285).

The findings from this study seem to support Dutro’s (2002) work and suggest that Josh, Harry and Aaron also performed their masculinity as they talked with me about boys’ and girls’ books. The boys all referred to girls’ books in negative terms, claiming that they are about ‘sensible things’ (Aaron: Interview, 2/7/02) and because they have pink and girls on the cover. They referred to boys’ books as adventurous, fast paced and action packed where the main character is a boy who does something big like saving the world (Aaron: Interview, 2/7/02), which Harry and Josh pointed out was what boys do, being adventurous and pretending to be fighting in the playground (Interview; Harry, 2/7/04). Josh, Harry and Aaron unanimously agreed that boys shouldn’t read girls’ books and girls shouldn’t read boys’ books, however they agreed there were some overlapping books such as J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series. The findings suggest that even though the boys are wide and confident readers and offered various reasons for not reading girls’ books, the reasons they provide for not reading them perhaps only relate to the need to perform and ensure their masculinity through reading practices. If they were aware of the existence of multiple masculinities through such strategies as critical literacy activities they may be more willing to engage with and admit non-stereotypical behaviour.

Dutro’s (2002) study suggests that boys who held more ‘social capital’ were allowed further freedom in the choices they made and were also free, to a degree, from the ridicule to which boys with less dominant discourses of masculinity were susceptible. The findings from my study suggest that both Josh and Harry possess high levels of social capital, however, it seems they were still not afforded the freedom to engage in dominant discourses of masculinity. Perhaps this indicates that even if boys were allowed the freedom to read girls’ books, they wouldn’t want to because such books don’t hold their interests. As previously shown each of the boys here referred to girls’ books as boring, and preferred to read adventurous stories. For example, Harry commented that he would not pick up a girls’ book but then qualifies this claim by that saying that if it had an interesting cover, title or blurb that suggests it is not a ‘smushy love story’ he may try reading it.

While findings from my study suggest that these boys did enjoy reading adventure books, this is contrary to Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli’s (2003) finding that boys don’t want to read just action-packed books.

My data pointed to an interesting link between “Adventure” books and narrative writing. Typically, “Adventure” books are narratives, and narrative writing was identified by Josh’s parents and teacher as an area in which he experienced problems. When interviewed Josh confirmed this. Barr’s (2000) research supports this link; she found that lack of engagement with narrative text has a definite impact on boys’ imagination, especially in the area of creative writing. This is possibly why Harry, who is such a good reader, wants more time allocated in school hours to writing narratives. My findings suggest generally that these
boys had a higher interest in information literature. If they were typical of most boys this would help explain why boys aren’t performing as well on some literacy assessments as girls. These findings also suggest that these boys’ preferences for information literature possibly disadvantaged them, as it afforded them fewer opportunities to empathise with characters and engage with creative literature and narrative.

Researchers (Cox, 2003, Asselin, 2003, Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, Alloway & Gilbert, 1998) have suggested that while many boys are rejecting school literacy they are engaging in many different forms of literacy in out-of-school settings. The findings from this study suggested that this might also be the case with Aaron. While Cox’s work states that boys generally find in-school literacy tasks “too long and too hard”, (Cox 2003) this is not the case with Aaron who claimed his in-school literacy work was “too short and simple”, and this is why he didn’t engage too deeply with his class’ literacy curriculum. However, Josh and Harry did engage regularly in the school literacy programme.

It was previously shown that Josh, Harry and Aaron engaged in a variety of literacy practices out of school. These findings seem to suggest that the three boys’ prime purpose for leisure-time reading was enjoyment. This seems to support Millard (1997) who found that good readers read for enjoyment and boys who read will mainly read books in a particular series or by a particular author, such as Tim Woods’ The Horrible History series.

Whilst Asselin’s (2003) study found that boys were more idiosyncratic in their choice of reading than girls, this was not evident in my study. Although the limitations of this study meant girls were excluded and thus comparisons couldn’t be made, the results propose that the boys in this study were not idiosyncratic in their choices as they all seemed to list similar interests in literature and would borrow books their friends were borrowing. Renee, in an attempt to cater for the boys’ interests, tried to choose texts that she thought would interest the boys, however they bore little resemblance to literature boys choose for leisure time reading.

In addition, Young and Brozo’s (2001) finding that students who had access to a wide range of reading material were more likely to improve their reading skills and attitudes, was consistent with my findings. Josh, Harry and Aaron were similarly surrounded by a wide range of reading material in their home, school and community contexts. Josh, Harry and Aaron were also classified by their teacher as good readers who read for enjoyment. The boys’ enjoyment of literature seemed to have led them to a commitment to reading which in turn improved their skills and general knowledge, especially in the case of Harry and Aaron.

The Influence of Sport
Dutro (2002) suggests that sport plays a large role in marking and maintaining boys’ status of hegemonic masculinity in various settings, for example, the school context where sport is usually highly valued. This contrasts with the findings from this study which suggest that whilst sport is valued in the Year Four classroom at Cray Bay Public School, it is not the only valued discourse. The findings also suggest that the school librarian, is aware of sport’s status at Cray Bay Public School, referring to the “Cray Bay Reading Team” and using a sporting metaphor to motivate students to read and participate in the Premier’s Reading Challenge. Like many Australian schools, Cray Bay places importance on sport in school and community life. This is similar to Martino and Chiarolli’s (2003) finding that definitions of sport only included the traditional competitive, hegemonic masculine sports,
rather than less traditional sports. My findings show that Harry and Aaron thought along the same lines. Although they knew it was a sport they seemed to hold the perception that they needed to be competing as part of a team to do ‘proper’ Tae Kwon Doe. This comment suggests that my three subjects held the common belief that playing sport is more about being part of team and not about being an individual competitor.

For example, when discussing his soccer team Josh talked more about seeing friends and meeting people from other schools rather than sport per se. This suggests that Josh is aware of the benefits and social status associated with being part of a team. On the other hand Harry also alluded to these benefits when he discussed the advantage of participating in a competitive sport and being part of a team even though he hadn’t personally had the experience. This suggests that my three boys were aware of the benefits of team membership and the high associated status that went with it whether they were part of a sporting team or not. They were also similar to the boys in Martino’s (2001) study who rejected reading because they defined it as “sitting down”, claiming they would rather be outside playing sport or with their friends. By stating that they were ‘active people’ and would rather be outside, both Josh and a boy in Martino's (2001) study were, ‘framing reading in oppositional terms to sport'(Martino, 2001, p. 65). While Martino’s (2001) findings suggest that boys would simply prefer to be doing anything than reading, for Josh, who showed a similar preference for ‘being active’, it was not at the expense of reading. On the other hand Aaron said he would rather watch a good television show than take part in sport. Josh, however, did not frame sport and reading in oppositional terms. Rather he organised his life to incorporate both.

These boys engaged in a variety of forms of literacy to investigate sport and sporting teams. For example, Josh used the internet on a frequent basis to check the soccer ladder and read articles in the newspaper about surfing. Harry also reported using the internet to research the Australian Olympic team and Aaron watched television for sports results. Such behaviour indicates that for these three subjects activities associated with investigating sports encourage the use of alternate literacies. This in turn suggests that even though on the surface Josh, Harry and Aaron have set sport in opposition to reading, the reality is quite different.

**Home and School Partnership**

My findings showed that Josh, Harry and Aaron began learning to read before they entered school. Millard (1997) is one of many who have highlighted the importance of home-school partnerships. She suggests that, if school-based literacy activities resemble the forms of literacy children are familiar with in their homes, their learning will be supported. This was certainly the case for my subjects who were immersed in models of the use, purpose and relevance of literacy in the out-of-school context. My findings suggest that if what happened in school had similar degrees of relevance, engagement with literacy in the classroom would be increased. My findings also show that, like the parents in Alloway and Gilbert’s study (2002), both the boys’ parents and their classroom teacher placed a high importance and value on the teacher’s approachability because it made two-way communication both possible and easy.

The teacher was also proactive in approaching parents when she needed information about students. In this she was quite different from the teachers in Shopen and Liddicoat’s (2000) study, which claimed that many parents had information to offer about their children to teachers, and were rarely approached. As well as a proactive teacher, my findings also
indicated that parents’ education and confidence might also play a role in promoting successful school-home partnerships. I suspect that Josh’s parents might not have approached Renee with their concerns if they had lacked confidence or if Renee had not been so proactive. However as Diaz et al’s (2000) study shows, when teachers like Renee value the information parents share about home literacy practices, genuine collaboration results. Renee used information about home literacy practices and students’ interests in organising her in-school literacy programme, which helped make it relevant and purposeful.

**Literacy in the Home**

Although my findings show that Josh, Harry and Aaron were capable of completing most homework by themselves, it is important to note that their mothers ensured that they were available to assist with any hard questions and ensured that homework was completed. In this respect they are not unlike the families in Millard’s (1997) study, who also shared their personal reading with family members and who also had more positive attitudes towards reading. Despite these similarities, my results differ from Millard’s in one significant way: my findings indicated that these boys perceived their fathers to be the most prolific readers in their homes. This contrasts with the findings from Millard’s (1997) study which found most boys named their mother as the person who read most in their families. This may have contributed to Josh, Harry and Aaron being ‘good readers’. Harry’s and Aaron’s father had a home office so they saw him working on a daily basis, and, while Josh’s father does not work from home, he brought many documents home from work which Josh saw him reading at nights and on weekends.

These boys’ fathers also regularly took them to the local library and actively showed an interest in their leisure-reading practices. Blackburn’s (2003) work seems to agree that fathers who actively modelled reading generally motivated their sons to engage in literacy practices by portraying it as a masculine activity. Furthermore, my findings indicate that my participants’ parents allowed them freedom of choice in their reading material, encouraging them to follow their interests through books; for example, when Josh borrowed books about soccer. This too is supported by Blackburn’s (2003) work which suggests that there is a relationship between boys’ motivation to read and freedom of choice in what they read. While Hamston & Love’s study (2003) found, my study suggests that it really doesn’t matter which parent provides the models and support for literacy acquisition. All that matters is that one, though preferably both, parents make this investment of time and knowledge. Nevertheless it should be kept in mind that Martin’s study (1991, cited in Webb, accessed 2004) found that a father’s involvement in his son’s literate life did impact more significantly on the boy’s literacy development.

**School Literacy Practices**

It’s not just the home where freedom and confidence are important. My findings suggested it was also important in the classroom setting. For example, Josh could be described as the ‘whole package’; he was good looking, intelligent, good at sport and generally good friends with everyone. Thus it could be argued that Josh’s social status within the class allowed him greater freedom and confidence in his actions. My findings suggested that it was this combination of freedom and confidence which allowed Josh to ask to join the extended reading group. It also helps him ‘play down’ his intelligence in order to be normal and ‘fit in’ with his peers. In contrast, Aaron doesn’t have the same self-confidence or social standing and therefore feels less free to push himself forward and, as a consequence, sits quietly and tries to blend into the background. Harry, however, is the opposite of his twin
brother. Harry’s social status in the class, his ‘bubbly’ and friendly personality, (similar to Josh’s), allows him greater freedom and confidence in his actions which spills over to his classroom literacy engagements. This sense of freedom and confidence needs to be supported in the classroom setting. There are many ways of providing this support. Doiron’s (2003) work, for example, suggests that teachers can discover students’ reading interests by simply keeping track of the books students borrow from the library. Whilst Renee did not use this specific strategy to discover students’ interests she used other methods, such as listening to students’ conversations and talking with parents. Renee also believes that students’ interests could be used as a motivational strategy, hence her decision to include the Garfield comic series in her curriculum in order to motivate Aaron and bridge the gap between in- and out-of-school literacies. Like Millard (1997) who found popular culture may be used to harness boys’ interests in the classroom, Renee seemed to be aware of the many different forms of literacy available and tries to use as many as possible in her classroom.

Martin’s (2003) findings showed that the teacher’s role is crucial in the classroom because a positive teacher-student relationship has been shown to have a large influence in motivating students. Josh’s change in motivation during term two occurred because of the positive relationship he’d established with Renee. This in turn motivated him to engage with the lessons she had prepared. Josh confirmed this, referring to his enjoyment of school this year, specifically identifying Renee’s teaching style which he attributed to his improved assessment results and enjoyment of school work. Like teachers in Martin’s (2003) study Renee believes that motivation and interest are closely related, as evidenced by her constant striving to make lessons interesting and relevant through designing literacy activities on topics of student interest. Renee also believes in providing multiple opportunities for her students to discuss and share their reading interests and activities.

**The Range of Alternate Literacies Encountered**

Unlike Cox (2003) and Hall and Cole (1997), who found many teachers were not incorporating a wide range of alternate literacies in their classrooms, my findings showed that Renee not only was aware of the range of alternate literacies available, but actively tried to use them in her classroom. The diagram below attempts to capture the degree of congruence between alternate literacies in a visual representation. The top circle contains literacies engaged in the out-of-school setting. The bottom circle contains literacies engaged in the in-school setting. The degree of congruence is shown in the overlap of the two circles.
The Degree of Congruence Between the In- and Out-of-School Literacy Practices

Figure 1 shows that whilst there is a degree of congruence, it is not as high as it could be. As the top circle in figure 1 shows, there were many forms of literacy with which my subjects engaged in the out-of-school context. Furthermore, my findings show that while the boys engaged heavily in community and media forms of literacy in the out-of-school setting, few of these were privileged in the in-school literacy curriculum. This is not a unique finding. There are a number of studies which have confirmed that many boys who are not interested in literacy at school, engage deeply in different forms of ‘alternative literacy’ (Asselin, 2003, Cox, 2003, Blackburn, 2003, Martino & Chiarolli, 2003, Weaver-
Hightower, 2003 Martino, 2003). This strongly suggests that if we are to interest and engage boys in the in-school literacy curriculum there needs to be a much higher degree of congruence between out-of-school and in-school literacies. In other words most of those literacies in the “out-of-school” circle in figure 1 should be placed in the overlapping area.

An Ideal Model for Boy’s Engagement in the Literacy Classroom
The integration of students’ out-of-school alternate literacy interests into the school literacy curriculum, using the motivating power of purpose and interest in the classroom, is not new. Martino (2003) reminds us, that the motivating power of this integration has been recognised as an ‘important element of an emerging literacy pedagogy’ (p. 18) which may be used not only in assisting ‘at risk’ boys, but all students in achieving their full potential. Both Hall and Coles (1997) and Millard (1997) advocate the need to recognise pupils’ interests and integrate them in the classroom.

… it is of prime importance that teachers take steps to draw boys into the classroom community of story books, readers and writers in a proactive way, by making provision in their resources for difference in tastes and by planning classroom activities for the difference in their interests.


Millard’s (1997) statement captures the urgent need to integrate students’ interests into the classroom literacy curriculum. Whilst no substantial basis has been found to explain boys’ relatively declining literacy results vis-a-vis girls, some research has clearly shown that using out of school interests will motivate boys to engage in the literacy curriculum, which in turn should ultimately improve their literacy results (The Boys in Schools Bulletin, 2002; Rowan et al, 2002). A synthesis of the findings of this study together with the literature reviewed could provide an opportunity to develop an hypothetical “ideal” model of how schools, teachers and parents can work together to motivate boys’ engagement in the literacy curriculum. Figure 2 below is a first attempt to develop such a model.

Figure 2 should be read from top to bottom and indicates three overlapping domains of concern.
An Ideal Model for Engaging Boys in the Literacy Classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality teaching &amp; positive Student-teacher relationships</th>
<th>Provide positive male role models in school</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of a partnership with parents</td>
<td>Take an interest in students &amp; their interests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whole School Activities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognise Students’ Achievements</td>
<td>Promote literacy through sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cater for different learning styles</td>
<td>Collect information about students’ interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicate time to silent reading</td>
<td>Recognise gender differences &amp; challenge stereotypes through critical literacy activities</td>
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<td>Use alternate forms of literacy in the classroom</td>
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Classroom Activities

- Assist students to find literature which interests & challenges
- Recognise skills & competence in alternate literacies
- Provide opportunities & encourage students to share & recommend books to peers
- Bring popular culture into the classroom
- Set realistic goals & high expectations
- Allow creative writing
- Focus on strengths

Literacy Activities

- Students should experience competence
- Challenging
- Interesting
- Relevant

Figure 2- An Ideal Model for Engaging Boys in the Literacy Classroom
• Whole-School Activities- this section involves the whole school staff working together to improve boys’ education, although a team may be designated to guide and direct this process. A whole-school approach is important because not only does it provide consistency but it also supports staff.

• Teacher Activities- it is important that these activities be used across the whole curriculum, not just in literacy lessons, to facilitate spill-over to other areas of the curriculum.

• Literacy Activities- the activities listed in this section are particularly relevant and it’s important that they are implemented specifically in literacy lessons. However, they would also be helpful in other curriculum areas.

Conclusion
This study explored the degree of congruence between three ten-year old boys’ alternate literacy interests and the in-school literacy curriculum they experienced. This study found that the integration of students’ interests into the school literacy curriculum had the power to engage and motivate students and thus caused a ‘flow-on’ effect into other areas of the curriculum. The study also found that the family’s role was central in modelling purpose and supporting and encouraging boys in their out-of-school literacy practices. It also highlighted the need for a whole-school approach to be developed, staff to be supported and the importance of using, particularly for ‘at risk’ boys’ - their out-of-school interests in the classroom to motivate and engage them. Ultimately, the educators’ aim should be to bring these ‘at-risk’ boys with respect to the school literacy curriculum to an enjoyment of and engagement in literacy activities with which their prime purpose for leisure time reading is enjoyment.

References


Young, J. and Brozo, W. (Jul-Sept 2001). Boys will be boys, or will they? Literacy and masculinities. Reading Research Quarterly, 36(3), 316-325.