“A PLACE OF A HUNDRED THINGS”: THE PLURALITY OF LITERACIES IN COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Gerald C. Maraia

A DISSERTATION

in

Educational Leadership

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

2019

Supervisor of Dissertation:

____________________________
Krystal S. Strong, Assistant Professor of Education

Dean, Graduate School of Education:

____________________________
Pamela L. Grossman, Dean and Professor

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Krystal S. Strong, Assistant Professor of Education

Dr. H. Gerald Campano, Associate Professor of Education

Dr. Sharon M. Ravitch, Professor of Practice in Education
For the Agace community
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest appreciation goes to the members of the Agace community who welcomed me into their village with warmth and generosity. My experiences in Agace were some of the most important in my personal and professional life, and I continue to be inspired by the stories they shared during the research process. I am indebted to Ed, the founder and director of GROW, who introduced me to this incredible community and supported me during many long, insightful phone conversations over the last three years. Additionally, I am so grateful to Mungu, the Rwanda-based GROW Project Manager and Sefu, the research assistant and translator of this project. Sefu, my brother, it was truly an honor to get to know you during my field research last summer. We spent countless hours walking and talking and laughing together, and you helped me develop a unique understanding of the Agace community.

Thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. Krystal Strong, who was a thoughtful mentor throughout this process. I appreciated your willingness to guide and challenge me, critically examine my language, and for always grounding our conversations in practical feedback. Thank you to Dr. Sharon Ravitch and Dr. Gerald Campano, the other members of my dissertation committee. Dr. Ravitch, you inspired me to conduct qualitative research from day one, with an emphasis on utilizing ethnographic approaches and participatory action research methodologies. I am grateful for your mentorship and feedback during my time at Penn. Dr. Campano, thank you for your scholarship and feedback during the research design stage of this study, specifically in shaping the research questions, narrowing the site and participant selection, and expanding possibilities for data collection methods.

My professional community has been an enormous source of support throughout my doctorate. I am grateful for my experiences and colleagues in the Mid-Career Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Penn. The members of team e-Merge, Chelsea, Crystal, Jeff, and Nikole, thank you for being thought partners, teammates, and most importantly, incredible friends. I have learned so much from each one of you over the last three years and I feel so lucky to have you in my life.

Lastly, thank you to my family and friends. To my mother, Margaret, thank you for your endless support and encouragement. Your strength and determination have significantly impacted me in ways you will never know. To Sal and Morgan, thank you for believing in me and cheering me on throughout this journey. To my friends, thank you for your patience and continuing to send texts even when I did not always respond. And to Tony, thank you for reminding me to take a break from work and return to our world. I am forever grateful for your unwavering support during many long nights and weekends of writing.

---

1 People and places, including participants’ names, the village, and the local school, are pseudonyms unless otherwise stated.
This study investigates literacy practices and events, including orality and storytelling, within the social and cultural context of a rural village in Rwanda, referred to as Agace. The study employs ethnographic principles and methods to explore participants’ experiences and perspectives related to literacy practices in the local public school and homes within the village, and how multiple literacies, specifically orality and storytelling, influence school and community practices. The theoretical framework for this study considers The New Literacy Studies (NLS) theory of literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Collins & Blot, 2003; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984/1995), research on the plurality of literacies (Gee, 1996; Street 1995), conceptions of illiteracy and deficit discourse theories on literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux 1987), and orality and oral literature in Africa (Finnegan, 1988; Ong, 1982; Street, 1995). There is limited qualitative research that seeks to understand literacy practices in rural Africa, and other non-Western, non-urban contexts. Furthermore, though a deficit orientation is commonly applied to research in African communities, this study conversely employs an asset-based orientation (Scribner & Cole, 1973; Green & Haines, 2008), intentionally emphasizing strengths, resources, and capacities of literacy practices...
and orality. For these reasons, this study utilizes ethnographic, participatory methodologies to directly engage with the local community to explore the plurality of literacy practices and perspectives, including the ways in which people engage with diverse practices that are rooted in oral and other non-technical forms of literacy that are commonly overlooked.

This study details the connections and disconnections, including curricula, pedagogical practices, and teacher-parent relationships, between the school and home specifically centralizing language, literacy, and culture. Though reading and writing literacies are central at the local public school, orality and storytelling are the dominant literacies practiced in homes and elsewhere outside the school environment. The findings of this study demonstrate the value of considering multiple literacies beyond the dominant functionality and technicality of reading and writing. The study concludes with implications for further research on studying the plurality of literacies in community context and developing culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012) that are inclusive of community-based literacies.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Study and Research Questions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background and Context</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale and Significance of the Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local People and Community</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Agendas: Global and Local Implications</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orality as Literacy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Overview</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy as a Social Practice</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptions of ‘illiteracy’: Deficit Discourse on Literacy</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy and Orality</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Methods</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal and Informal Interviews</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory Action Research</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Documents and Photographs</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequencing of Data Collection Methods</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation and Issues of Validity</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Translation Considerations</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Role and Positionality</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4: SOCIAL CONTEXT AND LITERACY PRACTICES ................. 45

The Agace Community ................................................................................................................... 45
Conceptions of Community from the Inside.............................................................................. 55

The Ibhumbi School ...................................................................................................................... 56
Competence-Based Curriculum: The Implications of a National Curriculum.............................. 58
Classroom Environment ............................................................................................................. 61

Pedagogical Practices .................................................................................................................. 62
Learning to Copy or Copying to Learn........................................................................................ 62
Operating in Unison: A Model of Call and Response ................................................................ 64
The Rhythm and Beat of Classroom Management ..................................................................... 66
Language of Instruction: French to English in a Kinyerwanda Village ...................................... 66

Summary ....................................................................................................................................... 68

CHAPTER 5: THE PLURALITY OF LITERACY PRACTICES ............... 69

Literacy as a Reading and Writing Practice ............................................................................... 69
Time and Domestic Activities ....................................................................................................... 70
Parental Engagement with School-Based Reading and Writing Practices .................................. 72
Access to Written Texts ............................................................................................................... 74
Written Texts and Power Relationships ...................................................................................... 77
Writing Surfaces and Resources .................................................................................................. 81

Home-School Literacy Connections ............................................................................................. 86
Parent Perceptions About the Ibhumbi School .......................................................................... 87
Teacher Perceptions About Parent Engagement at School .......................................................... 89
The Impact of Home-School Partnerships ................................................................................... 92

Moving Beyond the Dominant Discourse: Challenging Assumptions About Literacy ................. 93
“Reading the World” .................................................................................................................... 94
(Re)Defining Literacy in Community Context ............................................................................ 95
The Literacy and Illiteracy Binary ............................................................................................... 97
Literacy as Knowledge: Multiplicity of Literacies and Domains ................................................ 99

Summary ....................................................................................................................................... 100

CHAPTER 6: ORALITY AND THE ART OF STORYTELLING ............ 102

“Under the Moonlight”: Storytelling in the Past ....................................................................... 102
Morals in Oral Literature .......................................................................................................... 105
Storytelling Today ....................................................................................................................... 108
Building Relational Trust Through Oral Storytelling .................................................................. 112

Beyond Storytelling: Other Forms of Orality ............................................................................ 115
Communicating Through “Gossip” ............................................................................................. 115
The Thin Line Between Quarrelling and Debating ..................................................................... 119
Literacy and Orality Connections..................................................................................121
Classroom Implications: Storytelling Pedagogy and Student Writing..........................124
Summary ..................................................................................................................127

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS..................................................128
Context and Connection Matter .................................................................................129
Expanding Global Markers of Literacy........................................................................131
Storytelling as Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy...........................................................133
The Second Classroom: School-Home Literacy Partnerships .......................................136
Building on Local Knowledge: Community Center Programming .........................138

APPENDICES .........................................................................................................143

Appendix A ...............................................................................................................143
Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Education, Rwamagana District.................................143

Appendix B ...............................................................................................................144
Classroom Observation Guide .....................................................................................144

Appendix C ...............................................................................................................145
Interview Protocol ......................................................................................................145

Appendix D ...............................................................................................................147
Participant Consent Form .........................................................................................147
Kwemera kugira uruhare mu bushakashatsi ..............................................................147

Appendix E ...............................................................................................................151
Data Coding Display ..................................................................................................151

Appendix F ...............................................................................................................155
Example of a Researcher Data Analysis Memo ...........................................................155

BIBLIOGRAPHY .....................................................................................................157
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Transect Map Diagram (2018) .........................................................46
Figure 2: A House in Agace (2018) .................................................................48
Figure 3: A Shop in Agace (2018) .................................................................52
Figure 4: Street Signs in Agace (2018) ...........................................................53
Figure 5: Grinding Machine Sign in Agace (2018) ..........................................54
Figure 6: Classroom at Ibihumbi (2018) .........................................................61
Figure 7: Classroom Blackboard and Student Notebook (2018) ..................63
Figure 8: Wall Surfaces (2018) .................................................................82
Figure 9: Participatory Mapping (2018) .........................................................84
Figure 10: Community Television Gathering (2018) .................................110
Figure 11: “Write a Story” Homework Assignment (2018) .......................126
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

From the dominant perspective, literacy is commonly defined as the ability to read and write. However, scholars and practitioners have broadened definitions of literacy as a social practice that considers cross-cultural and context-specific perspectives (Janks, 2010; Street, 1995). This definition recognizes that different communities and contexts practice literacies differently. Literacy has also been widely debated in relationship to its impact on social and cognitive skills and community development (Post, 2016; UN, 2015). Maddox (2008) states, “literacy has consistently been presented as a key determinant of wellbeing, an important social entitlement, and a goal of human development” (p. 186). Since 1946, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have placed literacy as a top priority on its education and human rights agenda, and they have consistently monitored literacy rates through varying methods of evaluation (Wagner, 2014). In 2015, the United Nations exhibited a continued commitment to education and literacy as one of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Though raising literacy rates is a significant global initiative perpetuated by political and social organizations, there are complex cultural and social realities embedded in these large-scale efforts that require consideration and further research. From decades of scholarship, various definitions and theories have evolved regarding the meaning of literacy and ways in which literacies are enacted individually and within communities. As international initiatives, federal governments, and local communities attempt to increase literacy rates, it is imperative to understand the range and variation of literacy practices that exist in specific communities that are not commonly researched or have representation in the development of literacy agendas.
More specifically, communities rooted in oral traditions and storytelling are critical literacy practices and perspectives that must be acknowledged when labeling literate and illiterate individuals and entire communities.

**The Study and Research Questions**

The focus of this study is on the literacy practices that exist in Agace\(^2\), a rural village in the Eastern province of Rwanda. Inspired by the work of Street (1995) and Barton and Hamilton (1998), this research utilizes ethnographic principles and methods to explore notions of literacy as a social practice within school and home contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Collins & Blot, 2003; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984/1995), and how the use of multiple literacies, specifically orality and storytelling, influence literacy practices and events within the school and community (Finnegan, 1988; Street, 1995).

This study explores the following overarching research questions:

- What literacy practices and events currently exist in the local school and participants’ homes in Agace, a rural village in Rwanda?
- What are participants’ perceptions and experiences with negotiating literacy practices between home and school in Agace?
- How do multiple literacies, specifically orality and storytelling, influence literacy practices and events in the school and community?

These research questions derive from an asset-based orientation as opposed to a deficit orientation (Scribner & Cole, 1973; Green & Haines, 2008). That is, the questions intentionally emphasize the strengths, resources, and capacities of literacy practices and

---

\(^2\) People and places, including participants’ names, the village, and the local school, are pseudonyms unless otherwise stated.
orality in Agace and its people, including but not limited to the community’s history, culture, and traditions. In some scholarly work and the media, a deficit orientation is commonly applied to research in Sub-Saharan African communities. As Scribner and Cole (1973) state, “searching for specific ‘incapacities’ and ‘deficiencies’ are socially mischievous detours” (p. 558). This research study intentionally focuses on identifying and valuing the literacy practices that currently exist and are embedded in the school and home rather than working from a deficit orientation (Volk & Long, 2005). Throughout this dissertation, I position literacy practices as enacted and perceived in many ways based on the social context in which they occur, and that orality, or oral and spoken communication, is a significant mode of literacy that must be acknowledged. By utilizing ethnographic principles and methods, these questions seek to articulate people’s real experiences with literacy practices and orality in school and home, including an understanding of their perceptions and beliefs about negotiating literacy practices between these two contexts.

**Background and Context**

Considering “literacy events are located in time and space,” (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, p. 23), it is important to situate the village in this study within the larger context of Rwandan history and the country’s relationship with literacy and orality. Before the European colonization of Rwanda in 1885, orality was the primary means of communicating and establishing social, political, and spiritual structures (Gunner, 2000), including passing down history, moral values, and entertainment (King, 2007). Gunner (2000) states:
Orality needs to be seen in the African context as the means by which societies of varying complexity regulated themselves, organized their present and their pasts, made formal spaces for philosophical reflection, pronounced on power, questioned and in some cases contested power, and generally paid homage to “the word,” language, as the means by which humanity was made and constantly refashioned (p. 1).

Oral traditions and storytelling are Rwanda’s initial forms of literacy (Ruterana, 2014). During the colonial era, writing was introduced predominately in French which limited young people’s exposure to Kinyarwanda, the native language of Rwanda. Among many cultural consequences of colonialism, another significant impact on the people of Rwanda was the creation of the Hutu and Tutsi divide after the Belgians pronounced the Tutsi’s more powerful and superior.

As a result of colonialism producing the conditions for conflict, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda devastated the lives of people across the country as members of the Hutu majority murdered over 800,000 people, mostly of the Tutsi minority (Kigali Genocide Memorial, 2006). The genocide caused destructive violence, disease, and death among neighbors, family, and friends within and across communities. After this humanitarian crisis, the education system was almost completely destroyed, and subsequently played a central role in the reconstruction of the country in creating a new identity for citizens as ‘Rwandan’ to replace the former division between Tutsi and Hutu (Hodgkin 2006; Wedin, 2008). As part of Rwanda’s reconciliation process, the government espoused “a message of unity, one national group – banyarwanda— sharing a common language, culture, ancestral history and land” (Hodgkin, 2006, p. 202).

Consequently, this belief called for a dramatic reform of the Rwandan education system

---

3 “Banyarwanda” refers to the people of Rwanda, an inclusive word that identifies all Rwandans regardless of cultural subgroup.
to promote “the cultivation of peace, democracy, tolerance, and the rebuilding of social relations” (Hodgkin, 2006, p. 202). For example, at the time, the government attempted to improve the education system by making it illegal to identify students and teachers according to ethnic groups and banning the teaching of Rwandan history in schools. According to the recently released Ministry of Education Curriculum Framework (2015), which Chapter 4 further discusses, the Rwandan government now recognizes the importance of teaching genocide history by strongly encouraging teachers to discuss the concepts of genocide and its development. This educational reform background provides an important context for understanding the literacy and pedagogical practices that currently exist in Ibihumbi, the local school in the community.

Oral tradition and storytelling, as previously stated, not only has precolonial roots, but it is commonly practiced today as a way for people to share their experiences about the genocide. In 2006, the Kigali Genocide Memorial published *We Survived Genocide in Rwanda*, an anthology that includes 28 oral testimonials and stories from genocide survivors. Each story provides a glimpse into the destruction and devastation that individual Rwandans experienced during the three months of the genocide and its aftermath. Though each story is deeply personal and distinct, Emmanuel Gasana provides insight into his post-genocide experience, echoing many of the other testimonials included in the anthology. Gasana (2006) states:

Life after the genocide wasn’t easy at all. It had nothing in common with our life before the genocide. We were confronted with many problems – we had lost parents and relatives, we were poor…life was so tough and different (p. 39).
Story after story mirrored these reflections. Considering the trauma and hardship inflicted on the people of Rwanda post-genocide, the conditions described in Gasana’s account are significant in further developing an understanding of literacy practices and orality in context. Additionally, from a sociolinguistic perspective, after the genocide, the English language became increasingly more valued in schools, and by 2008, it was declared by the Rwandan government as the target language of instruction at all grade levels (Ruterana, 2014). The ways in which language is used in the school and local community have implications not only for understanding literacy teaching and learning, but also for the existence of storytelling practices in these spaces as well. Though this study does not explore the period of colonization, post-colonial nation building, and the genocide directly, the consequences of these events on people’s lives, the social organization of society in Rwanda, and the subsequent global, state, and local policies that were developed impact the study of literacy practices and orality in this context.

Agace, the specific site of this study, is a village in the Rwamagana district, an Eastern province approximately 30 miles from Kigali, the capital of Rwanda (see Appendix A). As of 2017, there were approximately 21,145 people in Agace with 52.1% female and 47.9% male. The resident population under 25 years old is 65%, reflecting a recent high level of fertility and low life expectancy of older people⁴, with residents that are 60 years of age and above representing 5% of the total population (Rwamagana District Census Report, 2017). The main languages in Agace are Kinyerwanda, French, and Swahili, and English is the official language of the country and target language of

⁴ This reflects a large youth population in the village which also mirrors patterns around the rest of the African continent.
instruction (LOI) in all government schools (SOS Children, 2018). Considering the absence of statistical data for the Agace residents’ literacy rates as defined by UNESCO, I will focus on data generated for the entire country of Rwanda. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics in 2012, statistics that are produced every ten years, 68% of the Rwandan population (72% males and 65% females) that are 15 years of age and above “can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life” (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012). Nyirimanzi (2012) states, “improvement of literacy is a result of increasing number of persons who attend various levels of education in Rwanda, from primary to university” (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2012). As discussed, though UNESCO defines literacy in narrow and limiting ways, these statistics provide one perspective into the current state of literacy and education in Rwanda. Chapter 4, “Social Context and Literacy Practices,” provides further information and details related to the village of Agace and the Ibihumbi School, the two main sites of this study.

As a researcher, I chose to situate this study in Agace for a variety of personal and professional reasons. For the last three summers, I worked in the village through a voluntary partnership with GROW, an American-based nonprofit organization that is dedicated to working in the local public school as well as the surrounding community in an effort “to help provide a path to a better future through education.” GROW has worked in the village for the last thirteen years providing a range of support to the local school, specifically in developing programs related to girls’ empowerment, school feeding, student clubs, sports, library enhancements, and scholarships. Additionally, the organization supports student learning and literacy development through a range of
programs and teacher trainings. During my previous visits, I developed and facilitated professional development workshops to the Rwandan-based GROW teachers, specifically in the areas of teaching reading and writing. During these workshops, various instructional strategies for increasing teachers and students reading and writing skills were presented, predominately utilizing a “balanced literacy” framework that incorporates instructional methods like word study, read aloud, independent reading, and explicit comprehension strategies. Upon reflection of my practices and close examination of the scholarly research, the professional development was grounded in my own western-oriented assumptions of what literacy is, “a model based upon the particular uses and associations of literacy in recent European and North American history” (Street, 1995, p. 14). As a voluntary teacher-trainer, I naively overlooked the literacy practices that existed in the village and imposed my own assumptions and biases about the teaching of reading and writing onto the teachers with whom I was working. Similar to many western-based humanitarian organizations, I was perpetuating a colonialist approach by imposing my ideas and beliefs as opposed to listening and building on the local knowledge of the community (Geertz, 1983). This research acknowledges and works diligently to center this consciousness in an effort to authentically share the people of Agace’s lived experiences and support future ethnographic studies.

---

5 The major principles underlying a “balanced literacy” framework include: “phonics is foundational to comprehension and higher order thinking needs to be taught systematically and explicitly; and instruction is composed of regular but separate periods of explicit skills instruction and literature-based experiences” (Asselin, 1999, p. 69).
Rationale and Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the research on literacy and international education, specifically expanding the field’s growing knowledge of the plurality of literacy practices that exist in rural contexts in Africa. By utilizing ethnographic, participatory methodologies, this study directly engages with local community members that are affected by, and often do not have representation in, the formation of global and local literacy agendas and educational programs. Additionally, this study recognizes the influences of scholarship and political literacy agendas that represent literacy and illiteracy binaries, thus it acknowledges the existence of orality and storytelling as a form of literacy in this context. These three areas are addressed in further detail below.

Local People and Community

The people of Agace are affected by global and local literacy agendas, and their perspectives and experiences are often invalidated and not represented in the creation of these agendas. This study centers the people of Agace’s experiences at the heart of the research and provides spaces for their stories to be shared. From a global perspective, though there have been quantitative reports published by UNESCO over the last fifty years that provide literacy statistics, there has been limited qualitative research to understand the literacy practices and events that exist in rural African villages, specifically Agace, and this research centers the importance of bringing attention to those experiences. UNESCO’s Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2006) states, “People’s notions of what it means to be literate or illiterate are influenced by academic research, institutional agendas, national context, cultural values and personal experiences” (p. 147). Despite the varied and disparate academic definitions, I attempt to
share the people of Agace’s perceptions and lived experiences as it relates to literacy practices and contribute these findings to the existing academic discourse on literacy.

**Literacy Agendas: Global and Local Implications**

Though the priority of this research is to center the experiences and perspectives of the people of Agace, it also considers the existence of global and local literacy agendas and ways this research could inform those initiatives. In September 2015, on the international stage, members of the United Nations Heads of State and Government and High Representatives adopted the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that build upon the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) from 2000 to 2015 (Sachs, 2012; UN, 2015). The SDG Agenda (2015) includes 17 goals and 169 targets that are “committed to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social, and environment – in a balanced and integrated manner” (p. 6). The mission of the Sustainable Development Goals is to eradicate poverty worldwide by 2030, and the goals and targets are intended to achieve this mission. Though literacy is not a goal specifically, the fourth goal is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UN, 2015). Within this goal, there are ten targets with one focused on literacy. It states, “By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy” (UN, 2015). This study explores the multiplicity of literacy practices in a country that historically does not meet the international goals that are established and defined by external, disconnected global organizations. Street (1995) describes, “the rhetoric of public campaigns reinforces rather than challenges these [‘illiteracy’] images” (p. 14). Throughout this study, I challenge these notions of literacy/illiteracy in relationship to
global and local literacy agendas that fail to see individual people and communities
having distinct literacies that are specific to their social context.

On a local, community-based level, another goal of this study is to support the
development and programming of the newly established GROW Community Center in
Agace. After over a decade partnership, GROW recently demonstrated their continued
commitment by developing a Community Center in the village. The Community Center
was built in summer 2018 and consists of four spacious rooms serving different purposes,
including an open classroom, a computer lab, a small administrative office, and a library.
The GROW’s American-based Executive Director articulated his desire to support the
development of a community space that extended the organization’s mission beyond
working with the local school to all members of the Agace community. The findings of
this study provide implications for ways GROW can use and build on the collective
knowledge, experiences, and perceptions of the community as a source for creating
meaningful programs, events, and resources for the community.

**Orality as Literacy**

There are multiple types of literacies beyond the dominant definition and
technicality of reading and writing. This study highlights orality, or oral communication
and the oral transmission of information, as another form of literacy (Finnegan, 2014).
Considering Africa’s historic and cultural traditions are rooted in orality, Agace provides
a unique perspective to seek a deeper understanding of orality as literacy in social context
(Bhola, 1990; Finnegant 2014). African scholar Ruterana (2014) states, “the most
common form of literacy practice in most homes and in the community at large that
children are exposed to during their childhood days in Rwanda is storytelling” (p. 173).
Though Ruterana (2014) acknowledges oral storytelling as a form of literacy, the debate between orality and literacy continues to influence scholars and international literacy agendas. That is, since orality does not often map onto international markers of literacy, it is discredited and devalued. This research study explores the uses of orality in context and its connections to literacy as defined by international standards. With orality and storytelling at the heart of Rwanda’s culture, this study develops a more complex understanding of literacy as a social practice that situates oral communication as an asset and strength-based orientation.

According to a study released by UNESCO in 2017, “reaching universal adult literacy in sub-Saharan Africa may be considered the greatest development challenge of the twenty-first century” (p. 35). In order to address such a significant challenge, it is important for scholars and policymakers to develop a greater understanding of the literacy practices that exist in Sub-Sahara Africa as opposed to focusing solely on the challenges. The guiding asset-based research questions in this study provide guidance in understanding the villagers’ perceptions and experiences about literacy practices in Agace and explore the connections between orality and literacy practices. This study supports new insights into how literacy is enacted in one rural village in Rwanda, and how these findings might support the development of global and local literacy agendas, and the field of literacy studies in the future.

**Dissertation Overview**

This dissertation is organized in 7 chapters. In Chapter 2, “**Theoretical Framework,**” I provide scholarship and literature that guides the study, more specifically the New Literacy Studies (NLS) theory of literacy as a social practice (Barton &
Hamilton, 1998; Collins & Blot, 2003; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984/1995), research on the plurality of literacies (Gee, 1996; Street 1995), conceptions of illiteracy and deficit discourse theories on literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux 1987), and orality and oral literature in Africa (Finnegan, 1988; Ong, 1982; Street, 1995). Chapter 3, “Research Design and Methodology,” discusses the overall research design and methodological practices used in this study, including the site and participant selection criteria, data collection methods and analysis, and my researcher role and positionality. The following three chapters consist of findings where I focus on analyzing the participants’ perceptions and experiences with negotiating literacy practices, including orality and storytelling, between home and school. Chapter 4, “Social Context and Literacy Practices,” provides geographic and social context, specifically focusing on participants’ perceptions about the community, the existing national curricula and pedagogical practices at the school, followed by the literacy practices in participants’ homes and perspectives on how those practices have changed over time. In Chapter 5, “The Plurality of Literacy Practices,” I analyze connections and disconnections between school and home by highlighting the ways in which students navigate literacy practices in these spaces and how classroom teachers make connections with students’ lives and families outside the context of school. With an asset-based analysis of literacy beyond the dominant discourse on reading and writing, this chapter emphasizes the range and variation of literacy events and practices that exist in community members’ lived experiences and explores these literacies through the lens of knowledge and power. Chapter 6, “Orality and the Art of Storytelling,” examines participants’ perceptions and beliefs related to orality, specifically oral literature, storytelling, and other forms of oral communication.
This chapter traces storytelling across time, highlighting the ways in which storytelling has changed, how participants describe the rationale for this change, and finally, how storytelling is a way to teach and build connections with others. This chapter expands beyond storytelling and examines other forms of orality, and how these forms of oral communication show up in the community today. Chapter 7, “Conclusions and Implications,” offers reflections and recommendations based on the overall research process and findings articulated in the proceeding chapters. This chapter acknowledges the implications of context and relational trust in research, the importance of expanding global markers of literacy beyond the dominant discourse, considers ways to develop a pedagogy of storytelling as a culturally sustaining practice, explores the school-home literacy partnership by acknowledging hybrid literacy practices, and the importance of practitioners adopting an inquiry stance as a way to build on local knowledge and understand how community members envision the purpose and function of the local Community Center.
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The New Literacy Studies (NLS) theory of literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Collins & Blot, 2003; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984/1995), research on the plurality of literacies (Gee, 1996; Street 1995), conceptions of illiteracy and deficit discourse theories on literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux 1987), and orality and oral literature in Africa (Finnegan, 1988; Ong, 1982) serve as the theoretical framework for this study. These theories woven together provide the core conceptual constructs that frame this study and represent the thought communities that have researched and written widely about this topic. In the sections that follow, I describe the evolving definitions of literacy across time, particularly with an emphasis on the distinction between the autonomous and ideological models of literacy. These distinctions provide a framework for discussing the dominant perspective of literacy and the development of literacy as a social practice theory. Then I describe conceptions of illiteracy and the impact of deficit discourse with an emphasis on the ‘great divide’ theory between literacy and illiteracy. Finally, I describe the scholarly research on the distinction between orality and literacy, specifically focused on the arguments related to cognitive abilities associated with both oral and written forms of communication and oral literature in Africa.

Literacy as a Social Practice

Scholars, politicians, and social, political, and cultural organizations have debated definitions of literacy with significant nuance and limited consensus. Over the last 50 years, UNESCO has developed multiple definitions of literacy, most notably in 1958, 1978, and 2005 (UNESCO, 2017). In 1958 and 1978, the definitions focused on “the capacity to read and write a simple sentence, whereas by 2005 UNESCO had moved to a
broader understanding of literacy, recognizing that the complexity of the phenomenon meant that any definition could not claim to be universal” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 14). This historical timeline highlights the dominant definition of literacy driven by the functions and technicalities of reading and writing, more specifically a person’s ability to read and write. Street (1995) refers to this as an autonomous model of literacy, viewing literacy as a technical and neutral skill that is acquired. There is an assumption that this model of literacy makes written language superior to spoken, and it has direct effects on cognition and social change. That is, by acquiring literacy, it leads to higher, more sophisticated cognitive skills and has the ability to improve economic performance comparative to the western world. The model assumes “a single direction in which literacy development can be traced and associates it with ‘progress’, ‘civilization’, individual liberty, and social mobility” (Street, 1995, p. 29). This dominant model, or what Street refers to as ‘colonial literacy’, offers a limited and narrow focus of literacy that is reduced to the technicalities of reading and writing separated from the social contexts in which these practices occur. Relevant to this study, the autonomous view assumes there is a distinction between literacy and orality, and positions literacy as defined and enacted by the West as superior or incomparable to other literacies around the world (Collins and Blot, 2003).

In the early 1980s, the New Literacy Studies (NLS) field introduced theories of literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Collins & Blot, 2003; Heath, 1983; Street, 1995), and these sociocultural models serve as the theoretical underpinnings of this research study. The New Literacy Studies (NLS) “represents a shift in perspective on the study and acquisition of literacy, from the dominant cognitive model, with its emphasis on technical skills, to a broader understanding of literacy practices in their
social and cultural contexts” (Street, 2005, p. 417). Street (1995), as an alternative to the autonomous model, introduced the ideological model of literacy that focuses on the social practices of literacy, offering a more culturally conscious view as it relates to the context in which literacy practices occur. The ideological model recognizes that literacy practices are understood as existing in the relations between people and groups, and their relationships with institutions and communities, including contexts beyond educational spaces. Also, the model “emphasizes the primacy of social context, power and ideology in determining the nature and impact of literacy practices and the meanings attributed to them” (Maddox, 2007, p. 254). That is, the foundation of the ideological model centers literacy practices within their social and cultural contexts and its relationship to power structures (Street, 1995; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Barton and Hamilton (1998) offer six useful propositions about the theory of literacy as a social practice, including:

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- Literacy is historically situated.
- Literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making (p. 7).

These six assertions served as a guiding framework in the development of the research design and methodology, construction of research instruments and protocols, and data analysis in this study. For example, the second assertion, “There are different literacies associated with different domains of life,” was discussed during a collaborative inquiry group and participants identified the various domains in their lives and the associated
literacies connected to those domains. The data and analysis are presented and discussed in Chapter 5.

Rooted in the abovementioned ideological, or sociocultural model of literacy, this research study also employs distinctions between literacy events and literacy practices in its examination of literacy as a social practice in Agace. Literacy events are associated with an observable occasion in which people interact directly with written texts (Hamilton, 2000). An example of a literacy event in the context of this study is when I observed community members in Agace reading the Bible in church. Not only were people interacting with written text, reading silently or reading aloud in unison with others, the literacy event used a physical artifact (the Bible) and occurred in a physical setting (the Church). Literacy events typically arise from and are shaped by literacy practices. Literacy practices, as defined by Barton and Hamilton (1998), are “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives” (p. 6). Unlike literacy events, literacy practices are not observable as it refers to people’s behaviors and their social and cultural conceptualizations of using reading and/or writing, also involving people’s values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1995). Barton and Hamilton (1998) refer to literacy practices not only being internal to the individual, but also “the social processes which connect people with one another, including shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities” (p. 7). The focus of this study highlights the plurality of literacy practices, as opposed to a singular literacy practice. Street (1995) states, “we have to be able to indicate that the notion of a single literacy with a big ‘L’ and a single ‘y’ is only one subculture’s view and there are varieties of literacy practices” (p. 134). This
ethnographic study seeks to explore literacy events, whether mediated by written or
unwritten texts, in school and participants’ homes in an effort to theorize literacy
practices among the members of the Agace community.

**Conceptions of ‘Illiteracy’: Deficit Discourse on Literacy**

Within an autonomous model of literacy perpetuating a singular, dominant
perspective, the ‘great divide theory’ emerged and questioned the role of literacy in
society, and the distinction between literate and illiterate individuals and entire
communities. This binary suggests that if literacy is the ability to read and write, then
illiteracy is in direct opposition. Collins and Blot (2003) state, “if we view literacy and
illiteracy as complementary terms, then literacy has been equated with order, progress,
and social potential, and illiteracy with disorder, backwardness, and futility” (p. 93). This
dichotomy, which is consistently challenged throughout this study, presents a limiting
and harmful view on the ways in which literacy impacts people and communities.
Illiteracy, as Giroux (1987) notes, is a cultural marker for labeling difference and is an
eexample of cultural deprivation theory. This theory is rooted in deficit thinking which
views people or communities failing as a result of internal deficits as opposed to the
external attributes of historic and political systems (Gutiérrez, Morales, Martinez, 2009).
The notion of difference is commonly equated to deficiency, suggesting people are at a
deficit when their literacy practices are different from those of dominant groups,
including dominant cultural norms, values, and practices (Giroux, 1987). The dominant
perspective presumes that people who are literate have stronger cognitive abilities,
abstract thinking, and higher order mental operations, whereas people who are illiterate
are presumed to lack these qualities and think less critically, less abstractly, and are less
reflective (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1995). Street (1995) challenges this assumption by stating “differences in individual cognitive skills are more likely to stem from differences in social and cultural experience than from the presence or absence of literacy” (p. 23). This study centers individuals’ social and cultural experiences within the context of their local community.

In addition to the great divide theories of literacy as described above, government and political organizations like Ministries of Education, UNICEF, and UNESCO, often label illiteracy as a deficit or problem that needs to be solved or fixed (MINEDUC, 2016). That is, from the dominant view, there is belief that illiterate people have an undeveloped mind and are unsuited for modern life and society (Collins & Blot, 2003). Literacy campaigns, government agencies, and politicians consistently portray illiteracy as a ‘cultural problem’ that requires eradication and that people that are literate are fundamentally different from people that are illiterate. Holding resolute to these beliefs about illiteracy, global organizations propagate literacy reform agendas on communities that entirely ignore the local literacies that are specific to their contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). This study acknowledges these oppressive, colonialist approaches of imposing western ideals about literacy on entire populations that differ from the dominant perspective.

In addition to global organizations’ effort and determination to eliminate illiteracy, a further review of the literature suggests that the Rwandan government is also invested in this discourse. The mission of the Ministry of Education in Rwanda is “to transform the Rwandan citizen into skilled human capital for socio-economic development of the country by ensuring equitable access to quality education focusing on
combating illiteracy, promotion of science and technology, critical thinking and positive values” (Ministry of Education in Rwanda, 2016). As evidenced by this mission, the Rwandan government highlights their priority in ‘combating’ illiteracy which further perpetuates a deficit-based orientation and assumes that reading and writing are essential skills for people’s development. When a deficit perspective is applied to individuals or communities, it prevents an examination of alternative literacy practices that are developed in specific cultures and contexts (Whitehouse & Colvin, 2001). To that end, this study is guided by an asset-based as opposed to deficit-based orientation (Scribner & Cole, 1973; Green & Haines, 2008), intentionally emphasizing the strengths, resources, and capacities of literacy practices and orality in Agace and its people. According to Whitehouse and Colvin (2001), “a strength orientation has been seen as a positive, culturally sensitive alternative to a one-side emphasis on ‘fixing’” (p. 213). That is, this study explores the literacy practices that are present, as opposed to absent, in the local school and participants’ homes in the Agace community.

**Literacy and Orality**

To that end, from a non-deficit perspective, this study centers oral traditions and orality in Africa, highlighting the presence, rather than absence, of these literacy practices in the Agace community. African philosopher Kwasi Wiredu (2009) defines oral tradition as “a transmission of thought over generations by the spoken word and techniques of communication other than writing” (p. 8). Analogous to the abovementioned literate and illiterate binaries, literacy and orality have been presented in the dichotomous ‘great divide’ theory as well, including, “writing versus orality, modern versus traditional, and educated versus uneducated” (Gutierrez, Morales, & Martinez,
2009, p. 212). This perspective equates writing to modernity and education, whereas orality to being traditional and uneducated. In examining these binaries within a dominant literacy framework, the autonomous perspective assumes there is a clear distinction between literacy and orality (Collins & Blot, 2003), more specifically Western literacy and African orality. For decades, there has been significant debate about the relationship between spoken and written language in fields such as sociology, anthropology and education (Ong, 1982; Street, 1995). Street (1995) states, “the structured relationships of spoken and written language must be explained in terms of the social context of orality and literacy in different literacy traditions, rather than the cognitive demands of language production or isolated structural features of the spoken and written modes” (p. 7). This study examines relationships, including similarities and differences, between orality and literacy as situated in a social context. This approach challenges the traditional notion of the orality and literacy ‘great divide’.

Additionally, scholars have theorized the differences between orality and literacy from a cognitive ability and skills perspective. Ong (1982) argues that critical thinking, interpretation, and analysis are only possible if an oral person learns to write. Ong’s view adopts a deficit approach in that it perpetuates the notion that people unable to read and write are incapable of abstract and critical thinking. On the other hand, Freire and Macedo (1987) offer the following perspective on orality and literacy:

When a teacher and a learner pick up an object in their hands, they both feel the object, perceive the felt object, and are capable of expressing verbally what the felt and perceived object is. The illiterate person can feel the pen, perceive the pen, and say pen. I can, however, not only feel the pen, perceive the pen, and say pen, but also write pen and consequently, read pen. Learning to read and write means creating and assembling a written expression for what can be said orally (p. 35).
This example highlights that verbal expression is the precursor to writing, and that there are connections between a person’s ability to speak, think, and feel and their ability to read and write. It provides a framework for considering new ways of thinking about literacy that move beyond the dominant, autonomous model of literacy that reading and writing must exist first in order to think and feel.

Furthermore, Finnegan’s (1988) scholarship provides a clear counterargument to Ong’s assumption that nonliterate people are simple, concrete, and unreflective (Collins & Blot, 2003). Finnegan (1988) conducted ethnographic research with the Limba people in Sierra Leone over a fifteen-month period of time. In her research, she discussed how the Limba people use multiple languages to communicate with each other and how they possess elaborate philosophies of language and life through oral communication (Finnegan, 1988). Collins and Blot (2003) state, “As Finnegan notes, even a casual observer of social life would note significant differences between everyday life among the Limba and life in any contemporary industrial or postindustrial society – and such an observer might ‘put down many of such differences to the crucial distinction between literate and non-literate cultures’” (pp. 48-49). In moving beyond a deficit-oriented approach, Finnegan’s (1988) research assumes a strength orientation (Whitehouse & Colvin, 2001), as she focuses on “not a question of ‘literate’ or ‘nonliterate’ but rather attending closely to what people actually know and the reasons they know what they do” (Collins & Blot, 2003, p. 49). This positionality and perspective serve as inspiration and foundation for this study.
Ruterana (2014), an African scholar and researcher, states “before the colonization of Africa, the oral tradition was Africa’s initial form of literacy wherein people’s wisdom, norms, values, and language basically transmitted by word of mouth, and thus traditional practices were learned by the young as they observed what their elders were doing and saying” (p. 173). In this excerpt, Ruterana (2014) explicitly connects orality and literacy by acknowledging Africa’s initial form of literacy was the oral tradition. Ruterana also views orality as literacy, which is contrary to the dominant discourse regarding orality and literacy as binaries. Gunner (2000) counters the work of Ong (1982) in her belief that oral language is not synonymous with critical and abstract thinkers, and she supports Finnegan’s (1988) anthropological evidence that “demonstrates self-reflection and critical thought are to be found in supposedly non-literate societies and contexts” (p. 22). This research study seeks to observe orality from a strength orientation, including the ways in which people reflect and think within the social context of Agace (Whitehouse and Colvin, 2001), and it explores the relationships between orality and literacy practices within the village.

Furthermore, Finnegan (2012) discusses unwritten traditions in Africa as a form of oral literature. Oral literature relies on a performer who conveys the literary piece in words to an audience at a specific occasion. It is different from a written piece of literature as the performer uses “expressiveness of tone, gesture, facial expression, dramatic use of pause and rhythm, the interplay of passion, dignity, or humor, and the receptivity to the reactions of the audience” (Finnegan, 2012, p. 6). Throughout this study, the performative aspect of orality and storytelling are considered in the findings and analysis as ways in which people in Agace communicate their thoughts and ideas
with each other. Another important characteristic of oral literature in Africa is the composition of oral pieces, including the creation of original pieces as opposed to pieces that are memorized and passed down from generation to generation. The distinction between improvisation and memory are important considerations as participants shared their experiences and perspectives with storytelling and how it has changed over time. Lastly, the audience is another essential factor that is critical in an oral literacy event with the orator engaging with their audience face-to-face. In further considering differences between unwritten and written literary traditions, the interaction between people inherent in oral literature is different from the solitary, isolated act of reading written text.

Finnegan’s (2012) research on oral literature in Africa as an art form was criticized by Walter Ong in his seminal text *Orality and Literacy* (1982). Though Ong (1982) acknowledges that oral cultures “produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth,” he believes that “without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials” (p. 14). This perspective assumes that writing traditions are in some way more powerful and impactful on people’s lives than non-writing traditions. This study not only centers oral traditions and orality as literacy practices in Agace, but it also traces participants’ experiences and perspectives with oral literature as an art form and pedagogical tool.

**Summary**

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in conceptual constructs that have been researched and written widely by a range of scholars both in the west and Africa. The New Literacy Studies (NLS) theory of literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Collins & Blot, 2003; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984/1995) and research on
the plurality of literacies (Gee, 1996; Street 1995) provides important insights and implications for understanding conceptions of illiteracy and deficit discourse theories on literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux 1987). More specifically, from an asset-based orientation, these theories provide ways in which people engage with diverse literacy practices that are rooted in oral and other non-technical forms of literacy that are commonly overlooked from the dominant perspective (Finnegan, 1988; Ong, 1982). This ethnographic study investigates literacy practices and events, including orality and storytelling, within the social and cultural context of Agace, a rural village in Rwanda. As described in the next chapter, I utilize ethnographic principles and methods to explore participants’ experiences and perspectives related to literacy practices in the local public school and homes within the village, and how multiple literacies, specifically orality and storytelling, influence school and community practices.
CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology and Design

With a theory of literacy as a social practice guiding this study, the research design utilizes methods that “examine in detail the role of literacy in people’s contemporary lives and in the histories and traditions of which these are a part” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 57). Methodologically, this qualitative research study uses ethnographic and participatory action research methods as a basis for understanding the literacies of the community at the heart of this study, since ethnography “uses immersion, through participant observation, in a setting to decipher cultural meaning and generate rich, descriptive data” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 21). To seek answers to the research questions and to further understand literacy in social context, I spent three weeks in the Agace community, collecting qualitative data through participant observation, formal and informal interviews, archival research, and researcher digital images and photographs. This chapter describes the research design and methodology in more detail below.

Site and Participant Selection Criteria

This study was conducted in Agace, a rural village in the Rware district of Rwanda. The primary research sites to explore literacy practices and events (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) were at the Ibihumbi School, the local public school, and selected participants’ homes in the village. These sites are the primary places where the negotiation of literacy practices occurs and provided opportunities to explore relationships, connections and disconnections, between the school and home. These places are also the spaces where people in the village socially interact and spend significant portions of their time. The Ibihumbi School is a public school that enrolls approximately 3,814 students from nursery through secondary school (Fieldnotes, 2018).
The Ibihumbi School is one of three local schools in the Agace sector within the Rwamagana district, and its students all live in the village and are required to pay school fees for uniforms and school supplies. Though my observations of pedagogical practices occurred widely across varying grades and classrooms at the school, I focused on three different Primary 6 classrooms, English, Science, and Kinyerwanda. The students enrolled in Primary 6 are approximately 11-14 years old, and it is their last year of Primary School before entering Secondary School. I spent a significant amount of formal and informal time with the teachers of these three classrooms, Rashad (English), Zaki (Science) and Mtume (Kinyerwanda). I chose these three Primary 6 teachers because of their willingness to participate in the study and my own professional experience teaching middle school students.

During a three-year period, I have developed personal and professional relationships with the Rwanda-based team from the GROW organization located in the Agace village. The members of the team, Mungu, Zuri, Gene, and Fatima played a significant role in this research study by serving as participants, supporting the recruitment of other members from the community to participate, and providing translation during observations and interviews. The selection of additional participants included current members of the Agace community, who were selected through purposeful and snowball participant sampling approaches (Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Of the over 30 formal and informal interviews conducted, all 23 participants lived in Agace, and they were either parents of a child that previously attended or

---

6 People and places, including participants’ names, the village, and the local school, are pseudonyms unless otherwise stated.
currently attends the Ibihumbi School, teachers at the school, former students of the
group that are now over 18 years old, or, in some cases, parents of children that
attend(ed) the school and are teachers there as well. For example, Fatima was a
participant with intersecting selection criteria as she is a GROW team member, teacher at
the Ibihumbi School, and mother of four children that attend the school (Interview,
7/6/18). In other cases, snowball sampling was utilized (Ravich & Carl, 2016). One
example of this was when I attended a church service in the beginning of my fieldwork, I
sat next to Daniel, a man born and raised in Agace and a husband and father of four
children that attend the Ibihumbi School (Fieldnotes 7/1/18; Interview 7/2/18). After
Daniel learned about my research, he invited me to his home to meet his family and
engage with the interview questions. Whenever possible, the formal interviews with
parents and teachers occurred in their homes or classrooms respectively.

Data Collection Methods

I collected data utilizing a variety of qualitative methodological approaches,
including participant observation, interviews, participatory action research, and the
collection of documents and photographs. Each data collection method will be described
in detail below, followed by a section on sequencing, triangulation, and issues of validity.

Participant Observation

Though observations and fieldnotes were engaged in various settings and contexts
in Agace during my three-week fieldwork, I focused on two primary domains: the school
and the home. I maintained fieldnotes that captured and preserved insights and evolving
understandings that were generated from my observations (Emerson et al., 2011). These
fieldnotes included descriptions about the physical locations in the village and
participants, including details of conversations, description of people, sketches of settings, and specific vignettes (Emerson et al., 2011). For classroom observations, I developed an observation guide informed by my theoretical framework and research questions (See Appendix B), which focused on reading and writing practices, pedagogical practices, and oral communication observed in the classroom during instructional periods. Some other social contexts where observations occurred in the village included the church, market, local bar/restaurant, and the street. Throughout all of my observations and fieldnotes, I attempted to focus on moments where people were interacting with written or oral texts in some capacity, whether reading, writing, speaking, or listening. Additionally, I observed formal and informal literacy practices as unplanned events developed within the village during my fieldwork, including observations where people were engaged with storytelling and oral communication together. All of my observations were conducted at various durations and times of the day. In an attempt to seek balance between active participation in community life and capturing specific details, I dedicated time at the end of each day to write fieldnotes and memos that documented my observations, reflections, and emerging understandings of literacy as a social practice in the Agace community.

**Formal and Informal Interviews**

This study used in-depth formal and informal interviews to reflect “vernacular interpretations and theories of literacy in a more direct way than is possible from research which does not involve asking questions but relies on the interpretations of an outside participant observer” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 64). These in-depth qualitative
interviews provided opportunities to learn about the opinions, perspectives, and experiences of the Agace people while seeking new understanding of my research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). From these interviews, I explored how participants interpret experiences and events, and how the information relates to the lived experiences and events that were gathered during my observations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Most of the interviews were semistructured and guided by an interview protocol that remained flexible in order to explore emerging themes or topics from the conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I developed an in-depth interview protocol that included questions specifically connected to the theoretical framework and research questions of the study (See Appendix C). During the interviews, I utilized a responsive interview style that permitted informal follow-up questions to emerge between the participant and me, and these moments provided opportunities to seek clarity regarding a participant’s response or further explore questions specifically related to a participant’s experience.

In addition to the semistructured interviews, unstructured interviews or informal conversations, were also relied on throughout my fieldwork. This approach became a daily routine with Sefu, the research assistant and translator of this study. Sefu is a native of Agace and attended the Ibihumbi School as a student. We spent a lot of time together in the field, walking from one site to another in the village, attending local events, and eating meals together in between interviews and transcribing. It was during these times that we engaged in unstructured, informal conversations with each other. Considering our daily walk to the school took approximately an hour each way, there were many opportunities for lengthy conversations that were often generated from questions that
arose during formal interviews or observations in the field. The advantage of utilizing semistructured and unstructured interviews was that is provided specific information related to the research questions that was not necessarily observable in the setting (Creswell, 2014).

Semistructured and unstructured interview participants lived in Agace and were either parents of a child that previously attended or currently attends the Ibihumbi School, teachers at the school, former students of the school that are now over 18 years old, or in some cases, parents of children that attend(ed) the school and are teachers there as well. Additionally, members of the GROW team were informally interviewed at various times throughout the study. I conducted approximately 15 semistructured or formal interviews, and over 20 unstructured or informal interviews that were all audio recorded by using a digital recorder followed by listening to and transcribing each one with translation support.

**Participatory Action Research**

In an effort to increase insight into participants’ perceptions and experiences, and to build upon the qualitative data collection methods described above, I used aspects of participatory action research (PAR) methods, which invited participants to more deeply share their lived experiences as it relates to school, literacy, and community in Agace, while engaging them in collaborative inquiry that generated additional data for this study. The two types of participatory action research approaches that I used included transect walks with members of the Agace community and collaborative inquiry groups with members of the Rwanda-based GROW team.
During transect walks, “local community members serve as guides and orient the researcher or team to the geographic area by walking them to various places that they deem relevant and important and narrating to the researcher(s) as they guide the walk” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, pp. 177-178). I engaged in two extended transect walks with Muhoza, a member of the Agace community and former student at the Ibihumbi School, and Sefu, the research assistant and translator, that lasted approximately six hours each day. Muhoza determined the route of the transect walk in advance, followed by not only guiding Sefu and me during the walk but also narrating significant settings along the way. During these walks throughout the village, I asked unstructured, responsive questions related to community life, audio and video recorded the narrations and settings, and took photographs of significant locations or artifacts that portray, or refer to, literacy practices and events in context. Additionally, after each walk, Muhoza, Sefu, and I created a transect map of the village that included significant points of interest that were discussed during the walk and related to the research questions of the study.

Additionally, I conducted a two-day collaborative inquiry group session with four members of the Rwanda-based GROW team. The focus of these inquiry groups was to generate new knowledge and understanding related to notions of community, literacy practices in Agace, and to consider possibilities for literacy program development at the recently established GROW Community Center. This research method invited the local GROW team to explore pertinent questions, engage with inquiry-based activities collaboratively, and reflect on their experiences related to topics relevant to their own lives. These collaborative inquiry group sessions were approximately eight hours each day and were held in a classroom at the Community Center. Though the group engaged
in a range of activities throughout the two days, one example was that each participant visually created images of their experiences with literacy and storytelling as a child. Then, in partnerships, the participants visually and orally shared their literacy histories with each other, followed by asking each other responsive questions. This tool provided a visual approach for gathering insights from the participants without heavily relying on language translation from Kinyarwanda to English. These images were used as the foundation for a whole-group conversation about their lived experiences with literacy and storytelling. The collaborative inquiry group sessions were all semistructured with a clear protocol aligned with my research questions, yet open to themes or topics that emerged from partnership or whole-group conversations. The sessions were audio recorded and transcribed.

**Archival Documents and Photographs**

Lastly, I collected relevant, contextual documents that were connected to my research questions. The documents, preserved in the form of digital images, included governmental records from the Rwamagana district, community fliers, posters, announcements, and school-based artifacts. Considering follow-up research was conducted remotely, emails were collected and archived as well. I also used photography in literacy research as a method of data collection (Hodge & Jones, 1996; Wand & Burris, 1997). Specifically, I captured photographs of the visual environment and literacy events in action, including members of the community interacting with literacy and photographs of written text and signs in context (Hodge & Jones, 1996; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). For example, during an interview with Bishara at her home, she referenced the writing and etchings on the walls of her sitting room (Fieldnotes, 7/2/18).
With her permission, I took pictures of these images and subsequently used them as the foundation for conversations about the ways in which people learn how to write and the varying writing surfaces that people use in the community.

**Sequencing of Data Collection Methods**

During summer 2017, I maintained informal fieldnotes and a reflective journal during my volunteer experiences in Agace that informed some of the sequencing decisions for data collection during summer 2018. Considering data collection required international travel from New York to Rwanda, the sequencing of methods was strategically planned and balanced between a structured and unstructured approach. During spring 2018, I spent significant time on Skype with Mungu, the Rwandan-based GROW coordinator, discussing my research questions, methodology and design. These Skype conversations ranged from organizing logistical details about travel and accommodations to revising my interview questions and translating participant consent forms (Appendix D) from English to Kinyerwanda. This dialogic engagement provided the groundwork for rigorous data collection upon my arrival (Ravitch and Carl, 2016).

Throughout this study, I was committed to a relational approach to research by developing critical and trusting relationships with participants and becoming reflexively engaged with others (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). To that end, I spent significant time building relationships with members of Agace by attending public community events, spending time at local business establishments, visiting people’s homes, and playing games with the children. My accommodations were at the Orphanage in the center of Agace, which allowed me to be immersed in village life for the entire duration of my three-week fieldwork. That is, the observations and fieldnotes, interviews, and
participatory action research methods occurred with one method influencing the next and so on. For example, during a classroom observation at the school, the teacher might make a recommendation to visit another classroom or interview another teacher, and this would lead to new data collection possibilities. With immersion as a priority, the sequencing of methods evolved simultaneously throughout my fieldwork.

**Data Analysis**

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) offer a clear framework for data analysis, including “three concurrent flows of activity: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification” (p. 12). This framework connects with Ravitch and Carl’s (2016) three-pronged data analysis process consisting of data organization and management, immersive engagement, and writing and representation. Considering the quantity of data accumulated during the pre-fieldwork, post-fieldwork and the three-week fieldwork itself existed in many forms - whether audio recordings from interviews on my computer to jottings or pictures from observations on my iPhone to charts or drawings from collaborative inquiry groups – an articulated plan for managing and organizing it was necessary. First, I labeled the audio recordings and transcripts, followed by creating a data management display that included all of the audio recordings and transcripts; photographs, videos, and documents; and charts, images and drawings generated from participants. During this data organization process, I further engaged with it analytically and interpretively. For example, as I reviewed and documented over 150 videos and photographs, I included a “Description” column in the data management display that provided an opportunity for me to not only describe what each video and photograph included, but also the initial themes or patterns that I began to notice across the full
corpus of videos and photographs collected. As I employed a three-pronged approach to data analysis, I organized and managed data while being fully immersed and engaged in studying and representing it in writing as well (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Another example of this process was systemically transcribing my field jottings into field notes from my classroom observations. Considering that “observations are not data, but merely memories if they are not written down,” I reread my field jottings in my field notebook and transcribed them to field notes in my computer (Carl, Lecture, 7/16/18). From this transcription process, I was not only writing and fleshing out descriptions, but I was also analyzing the jottings and developing interpretations of my classroom observations.

In addition to analyzing videos, photographs, and transcribing field jottings into field notes, I listened to audio recordings from one-on-one interviews and collaborative inquiry groups to ensure transcription accuracy. Depending on the language spoken during the interviews, there were two types of transcriptions generated. For interviews conducted in Kinyarwanda, the native language of Agace, I worked with Sefu, the translator on this project, to collaboratively transcribe each interview together. This was a significant experience in relationship to data analysis because during the process of transcribing with Sefu, meaningful conversations emerged between us about participants’ responses, and I attempted to capture these insights and interpretations into brackets on each transcript. For interviews conducted solely in English, transcripts were generated using a transcript service (Transcribeme.com), and when each transcript returned, I listened to the accompanying audio recording to ensure the text was accurate. Listening to each interview again provided me an opportunity to more deeply engage with the data and track for emerging trends and themes that led to the development of my initial codes.
After multiple data readings and dialogic engagement with local and Rwandan colleagues, I created a list of codes (Appendix E), or “labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information complied during the study” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2013, p. 71). First, I developed deductive codes that derived from my theoretical framework, including the autonomous model of literacy, literacy as a social practice, multiple literacies, deficit discourse, and orality. Then, I developed inductive codes that derived from repetitions, strong language, agreements/disagreements, and surprises in the data (Carl, Lecture, 7/16/18). As I developed initial deductive and inductive codes, I also created definitions for each one as a guide for when the code could be applied to label the data. Once the entire list was created, I grouped each code into larger themes including Literacy and Texts, Orality/Oral Communication, Teaching and Learning, Community/Village Life, Social Spaces in Agace, and Governmental Programs. From the generated list of codes and definitions, I coded interview transcripts and fieldnotes, piloting the codes and refining them as necessary. This experience prompted me to question the quantity of codes, the ease of using all the codes across the data set, and the ways in which some of the codes overlap. After initial coding, I wrote a researcher memo to further deepen my interpretations of the trends noticed across the data set. This memo7 was an opportunity for me to isolate one theme and expand my thinking on that theme using evidence from an interview (Researcher Memo, 8/26/18). From multiple readings of the data coupled with defining and redefining codes and themes, writing analytic memos, and engaging in

---

7 An example of a researcher memo focused on the early stages of data analysis is included in Appendix F.
reflective conversations with colleagues, I developed the story of the data, including the findings and implications as discussed in the proceeding chapters.

**Triangulation and Issues of Validity**

Throughout the data collection and analysis of this study, I used methodological and data triangulation to appropriately address issues of validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) describe triangulation as “having different sources or methods challenge and/or confirm a point or set of interpretations” (p. 194-195). I triangulated data, including fieldnotes, transcripts, documents, photographs, and videos, by collecting across a range and variation of “time, space, and/or person” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 195). For example, the observation of literacy events occurred across a three-week period of time, and the semistructured formal interviews occurred at various intervals with different people during that period. In addition to analyzing the observation and interview transcripts, I synthesized and drew connections between this data and the collected archival documents and photographs.

Another method I employed to address issues of validity was participant member checks and validation strategies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I formally and informally “checked in” with participants at various stages of the research process to ensure transcripts were accurate and discuss my evolving understandings and interpretations.

Sefu, the research assistant and translator for this project, played a significant role in this process. At the end of each day in the field, Sefu and I listened to the recordings, and as he translated the oral text from Kinyerwanda to English, I typed the transcription on my laptop computer. During these “transcription times,” as they became commonly referenced by Sefu and me, we also engaged in conversations about the participants’
responses, and at times, Sefu offered his own insights, perspectives, and experiences related to what participants said. During these times, I often turned to Sefu and asked, “What does he or she mean?” and he would offer his interpretations or insights that I captured in brackets on the transcript.

Additionally, during collaborative inquiry groups with members of the Rwanda-based GROW team, I presented data collected and engaged in conversations with team members about my initial interpretations. I also consulted with the Executive Director of GROW, an American-based colleague with over 15 years of experience working in Agace and collaborating with members of this community.

**Language Translation Considerations**

Though English is one of the three official languages in Rwanda, Kinyarwanda is the language most commonly used by the people in Agace. During my pre-fieldwork planning, I worked with Mungu, the GROW Project Manager, to identify a translator that would be interested and available to work on this short-term research project with me. After Mungu reviewed his professional network, he identified Sefu, a 29-year old man, born and raised in Agace. Sefu graduated from Secondary School at Ibihumbi School, and subsequently graduated from the University of Rwanda with a bachelor’s degree in business administration. Since graduating from university, Sefu lives in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, and is pursuing his professional interests in finance and banking. During Sefu’s formal and extensive educational experiences, he developed a high-level of English language proficiency that positioned him well to support the volume of language translation needed throughout this study. Additionally, Sefu has social capital in Agace, including personal connections with many members of the community. These
relationships influenced the recruitment of participants and supported the development of relational trust during observations and interviews. Considering the intensity of the data collection period and short-term nature of this project, Sefu stayed at the Orphanage, the same accommodations as me, and this geographic proximity supported us working closely together for long hours each day.

Sefu was provided with the research questions and interview protocol in advance of our first interview, and we had extensive conversations about my intended meaning of certain words and how they translated to Kinyerwanda. Participants had an option of what language they were most comfortable with having the interview, either Kinyerwanda or English. If they chose Kinyerwanda, I asked the interview questions in English and Sefu translated into Kinyerwanda, then he would translate the participants’ responses to English. At times, since Sefu understood the research focus over the period that we collaborated together, he asked follow-up or clarifying questions to participants in Kinyerwanda before translating it to English, and other times, I asked follow-up questions. This interviewing approach was strategically chosen to provide opportunities for me to engage in responsive dialogue with the participants. I was acutely aware of the possibility of translation fatigue and therefore scheduled interviews appropriately with regular “check-ins” with Sefu. Another example of addressing issues of validity relates to the use of member checks for language translation accuracy. As described above, Sefu provided translation during interviews and observations, and we worked together to transcribe them at the end of each day. At various times throughout the data collection period, Mungu, the GROW Project Manager, listened to the audio recordings and read the transcripts focused on Sefu’s translation accuracy. During these member check
meetings, Sefu and Mungu engaged in dialogue about any perceived misunderstandings and offered clarifications. These conversations occurred in both English and Kinyerwanda and often provided new insights and perspectives on the data collected.

**Researcher Role and Positionality**

As an outsider of the Agace community, I was acutely aware of my role as a researcher and the social identities that I brought to the study. The aspects of my social identity that are relevant include being a white middle-class American male. These identity markers in relationship to the participants are important because the community members of Agace are black, predominately low socio-economic status, and African. I was conscious of being an outsider, specifically being white, throughout my fieldwork. As I spent time in the village and public events, it was common for people, usually children and young people, to call out “umuzungu,” or “white person,” when they saw me (Fieldnotes, 7/1/18). During my final interview with Sefu, when reflecting on new learning about the community as a result of engaging in this study, he stated:

One thing that I learned was that when they [members of the community] see someone who seems to be rich or seeing a white man coming around, they don't care of-- I mean, they have only one thought, they think that he is just coming to support us, to give us money, to help us in our life, in the day-to-day life. They normally think of money. I have an example, when we reached a church, one person said, "Oh, thank you for bringing this man, this white man here because you see we are now in the project of building the church, he might be a good sponsor for the church. So thank you, you brought a very important visitor." They expect something, that's one of the things that I learned, is that people in the village and mostly in my community, if they see a person who is a bit well off or a different level or a white man like you, they just expect something tangible that is money support, nothing less, nothing more. (Interview, 7/12/18)

I recognize that my presence as a white westerner could have impacted the ways in which people interacted with me and answered interview questions. As Sefu describes,
members of the community could have perceived me as someone to provide them with financial support, and at times, I wondered if that influenced participants’ desire to engage with the study. I wrote researcher identity memos (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) as a way to continuously reflect on my social identity in relationship to the site and participants and used this reflective tool as a way to uncover any biases that I brought to the study.

Throughout the research process, I was aware of the existence of hegemonic structures or “the social, cultural, ideological, and economic influence imposed by dominant groups in society” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 12). As a researcher from a western context studying literacy practices in an African community, it is important to acknowledge the dominant, autonomous view of literacy imposed on other cultures and communities (Street, 1995). This construct has been addressed in the theoretical framework, but it is important to mention within the context of my positionality as a researcher as well. As a former middle school English teacher, literacy staff developer, and current elementary school administrator, I was aware of my own beliefs about the teaching of reading and writing within a school-based context. That is, I believe that reading and writing has the power to transform lives and provides people with mirrors and windows to understand their own and others’ experiences and identities (Style, 1988). Schools and teachers have a responsibility to provide students with access to a range of written texts and opportunities to interact with texts and each other using a variety of pedagogical strategies. Throughout my classroom observations at the Ibihumbi School, I was consistently aware of my positionality as a literacy educator in New York City. My social identity coupled with a critical understanding of hegemony served as the
foundation for inquiry and “generative tension” throughout all phases of this research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 11).
CHAPTER 4: SOCIAL CONTEXT AND LITERACY PRACTICES

In this chapter, I provide geographic and social context related to the village of Agace and the Ibihumbi School, the local government school in the community. This section is informed by primary source documents, and firsthand information shared in the course of transect walks, interviews, and collaborative inquiry groups with parents, teachers, and administrators in the community and at the school. I explore participants’ ideas about community, including what community means to them, qualities and characteristics of the Agace and Ibihumbi communities, and topics and issues that participants seek to understand related to their community. To provide context for the school community, I describe the existing national curricula that is expected at the school and use observations and fieldnotes to analyze pedagogical practices in the classroom. I also describe literacy practices in participants’ homes, and perspectives on how literacy practices have changed over time. This chapter also traces the role of reading and writing, in particular, in other social spaces in the community such as the church and marketplace.

The Agace Community

Agace is a village in the Rwamagona district, an Eastern province approximately 30 miles from Kigali, the capital of Rwanda (see Appendix A). Rwamagona is comprised of 14 other sectors, and it means ‘a place of a hundred things’ in Kinyarwanda, the local language (Mudingu, n.d.). The main languages in Rwanda are Kinyarwanda, French, and Swahili, with the official language of the country and target language of instruction (LOI) in governmental schools being English (SOS Children, 2018). According to The New Times, Rwanda’s leading English newspaper, “the number of students in primary
schools in Rwamagana district has increased from 62,747 in 2010 to 75,156 in 2017” (Mudingu, n.d.). As of 2017, there are approximately 21,145 people in Agace with 52.1% female and 47.9% male. The resident population under 25 years of age is 65%, demonstrating high fertility and low life expectancy rates, and residents that are 60 years of age and above representing 5% of the total population (Rwamagana District Census Report, 2017). This reflects a large youth population in the district, which mirrors the population trends across the continent.

During a transect walk with Muhoza and Sefu, two members of the community, I learned about the village of Agace, including key landmarks, areas of interest, and aspects of community life. Muhoza created the following map to guide the walk and narration:

Figure 1: Transect Map Diagram (2018)
Photo: J. Maraia
At the initial meeting with Muhoza in preparation for the walk, I described the goals of the study and asked if he would be interested in walking around the village and discussing locations of interest with me, particularly with an emphasis on understanding village life, locations where people might interact with written text and where people might engage with oral communication or storytelling. When he arrived at the Orphanage to pick me up the next day, he shared a map of the village that he sketched using color pencils. As we started walking, Muhoza and Sefu narrated locations in the village, specifically highlighting the Genocide Memorial site, police department, bars, schools, hospital, mining locations\(^8\), sector office, churches, and centers. The lake and forest that surround the village were identified as important landmarks because of the natural resources they provide the people in the community. At one point, we stopped in front of the house pictured below and Sefu described it as “one that is commonly found in the village.” He states:

They normally build them without using sand, they use other materials different from sand. Houses seem to be two or three rooms and a salon\(^9\). It doesn’t have a kitchen or a bathroom inside. It is just a cheap house with no electricity. It is mostly afforded by the less privileged people…this is their capacity. (Transect Walk, 7/1/18)

---

\(^8\) There is an international mining company that resides on the outskirts of the village which is known for producing tin, providing employment opportunities to members of the community.

\(^9\) In this context, a salon means a room in the house where people gather, like a living room or sitting room.
As I explored how literacy practices are negotiated between school and home, I was particularly interested in the physical layout of homes and the conditions for people to engage with written and oral texts in these spaces. Though homes typically consisted of three to five children with two to four adults, many people use the inside efficiently to store essential items such as mosquito nets, clothing, pots for cooking, bowls for eating, and sometimes a mattress for sleeping. As a result of limited, if any, electricity, it was common for children and families to convene outside, either in the front or back of their home. The time for young people to engage with written text outside the context of school was limited because after they returned home, they completed domestic activities. Many parents discussed that when their children get home from school, they are expected to work on “domestic activities like fetching water and searching for food to eat”
(Interview, 7/2/18). By the time these domestic activities are completed, the sun is down, and with limited access to electricity in the home, it is challenging for people to see in order to read or write text. Another use of the open land in the front or back of houses is where families and neighbors come together to eat meals and share stories. Mungu stated, “When I was young, like every night you would sit on a mat under the moonlight, and our grandmother would tell us stories” (Interview 6/29/18). During my fieldwork, I noticed that people still convened in the front and back of their houses to talk with each other, but I did not observe storytelling enacted between members of the community.

Religious places of worship, including churches and mosques, were important landmarks discussed during the transect walk as well. Muhoza and Sefu pointed out three main locations, including the Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic churches. Though religion is beyond the scope of this study, it is central to the culture and customs of the Agace people and has shaped the ways in which the social landscape has changed in the community. Adekunle (2007) states:

With the coming of Christianity and colonization, Rwanda went through rapid and intensive social change. Roman Catholicism gradually replaced indigenous religions for many, but others blend Christianity with traditional beliefs and practices. Protestant churches, and in more recent times evangelical churches, have overshadowed but have not completely displaced indigenous religions (p. 42).

Notions of replacement as a result of colonization have significant impact when understanding orality and storytelling within this context. One repeated trend in the data showed that storytelling was becoming more and more uncommon with parents and young people because survival needs were replacing these traditional practices. This will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 6. Religion and places of worship are also
important because written texts are found in these spaces, including the Bible, Quran, and other religious materials like prayer books and hymnals. During three different church observations, most people in attendance brought their own Bible from home, written in Kinyerwanda and bound with a protective leather case covering. These were often the only books that were found in people’s homes. During the transect walk, Muhoza stated, “People learn information about the community when they are at church: they learn the word of the God and how to live with different people peacefully” (Transect Walk, 7/1/18). The church serves as an important location in this study because it is a space where members of the community gather regularly to socialize, read from a variety of written texts both independently and collectively, and engage with oral communication and storytelling. Additionally, as stated in this excerpt, the church served as another space for people in Agace to learn about living in peace and unity as a way of rebuilding social relationships after the genocide (Hodgkin, 2006, p. 202). Bishara offers her perspective on utilizing reading and writing in social context:

J: Do you read now?\(^\text{10}\)
B: Because I am a farmer and nothing else, I only read the bible when I go to church.
J: What about writing?
B: I know how to write in Kinyarwanda, only that and nothing else.
J: Do you ever use writing at all?
B: I am the secretary of my church, so I write everything when we are at church, especially when we have a meeting.
J: What kinds of things do you write at church as the secretary?
B: The meeting resolutions, the contributions that people have given, the date of the action, what they have talked about in the meeting, the updates, what actions are ahead. (Transcript, 6/30/18)

\(^{10}\) This interview with Bishara was conducted in Kinyerwanda. Sefu, the translator of this study, translated my questions from English.
Bishara provides insight into the functionality and purposes of reading and writing in her life. That is, like many members of the Agace community, religion is important and reading the Bible takes a central role. From observations, I noticed that people are not likely to read the Bible at home, but they read it when they are in church. It was common for people to read text along with the church leader as he or she was reading the Bible during a sermon, and it was uncommon for people to read the Bible outside of the church and independently at home (Fieldnotes, 7/1/18). Additionally, Bishara offers important insight about her experiences with writing. She uses writing to perform a function, in this case writing the notes from church meetings and for the purposes of sharing it with other parishioners of the church. For Bishara, reading and writing was another way for her to connect with her religion and other members of the church community.

Considering literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Collins & Blot, 2003; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984/1995) is a core conceptual framework for this study, I explored notions of social locality, or spaces in the community where individuals spend time interacting with each other. According to Muhoza, people from Agace meet when they “fetch water from the lake, pray at the church, and buy things from the market.” Other places where kids meet include when they “study at the school and play football at the field” (Transect Walk, 7/1/18). The centers, or “places where different roads meet,” throughout the village are also used for people to sell goods at an organized market. There are also locally-owned and run shops in these centers that are usually operated from the salon, or front room, of people’s homes.
This picture is an example of a typical local shop in the village that sells mostly functional items for cooking, eating, and cleaning. Newspapers, magazines, or books are not sold at these shops nor are they sold anywhere else in the village. Sefu stated, “There is not a place where people come to read together, except at school and it is only used by the student. Adults do not have someplace to read books, and they do not read because there is no place they can go and read” (Transect Walk, 7/1/18). When asked about reading, participants mostly considered it an activity done in relationship to books acquired from the local school with little mention of other forms of written text.

Considering the absence of statistical data for the people of Agace’s literacy rates as defined by UNESCO, I studied the data generated for the entire country of Rwanda. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics in 2012, the most recent data available, 68% of the Rwandan population (72% males and 65% females) that are 15 years of age
and above “can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life” (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012). This is an increase from 64.2% in 2002. Nyirimanzi (2012) states, “improvement of literacy is a result of increasing number of persons who attend various levels of education in Rwanda, from primary to university” (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2012). Though UNESCO defines literacy in narrow and limiting ways, these statistics provide one perspective into the current state of literacy and education in Rwanda.

Another place where written text appears is on various types of signs in the village, whether street signs directing people to specific locations, names of establishments on the front of buildings (schools, churches, bars), or signs that explain or provide information. There was one location that had street signs placed at the outskirt of the village just before entering.

![Street Signs in Agace (2018)](image)

*Figure 4: Street Signs in Agace (2018)*

Photo: J. Maraia
It was clear that the functionality of these signs was to provide driving directions to travelers from outside the village, including the Orphanage and the mining company, two common destinations for visitors. Muhoza and Sefu explained that these signs were created and placed by outsiders of the community, and that they are not needed or used by the residents of the village. Beyond this, I explored the signs that were created by the people of the village. During the transect walk, we stopped at one of two grinding machines, a place for people in the village to grind sorghum. Sorghum is a grain and one of the most important crops in Agace. In order for the grain to be used as an ingredient for food, it must get processed in a grinding machine which turns it into flour. Above the grinding machine was the following written sign:

![Grinding Machine Sign in Agace (2018)](image)

*Figure 5: Grinding Machine Sign in Agace (2018)*

Photo: J. Maraia
Sefu explained that the sign was created by the owner of the grinding machine, and it included the list of things that people could grind (maize, sorghum, peanuts, etc.) and the cost of each item. Though not common, this sign demonstrated one way in which written text was used in social context. It was an example of how a local shopkeeper used writing to convey information to potential customers and used literacy purposefully within broader social goals and cultural practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

**Conceptions of Community from the Inside**

Considering this study examines the plurality of literacies in community context, it was important to develop a working definition of community from the perspective of members inside the village. Barton and Hamilton (1998) suggest that understanding community is useful for dealing with “local social relations which mediate between the private sphere of family and household and the public sphere of impersonal, formal organizations” (p. 15). The literacy practices discussed in this study navigate between private households, the public school, and the local community. During a collaborative inquiry group with five members of the community, Mungu, Zuri, Gene, Fatima, and Sefu, participants were asked to develop words or phrases that defined or represented the Agace ‘community’. The group was composed of men, women, parents, teachers, and former students of Ibihumbi that all reside in Agace. After these words and phrases were generated, the group analyzed them for recurring themes and developed four main categories that included: Geographic Location; Working Together; Living in Harmony; and Sharing. Geographic Location consisted of “same area of living,” “neighborhood,” “a group of people living in the same area.” For some, it was clear that notions of community were directly correlated to the physical proximity of members to each other.
The theme of Working Together included phrases like, “people working together with same mission, vision, and values,” “togetherness,” and “people with the same culture and vision.” Throughout observations and interviews, people discussed spending a lot of time in the village working and playing together, engaging in domestic activities, buying and selling goods at the market, or attending church. People are dependent on each other to accomplish tasks and often engage frequently in social interaction. The third theme, Living in Harmony, consisted of the following words and phrases, “being each other’s brother’s keeper,” “unity and love,” and “sharing good times together.” Within this theme, participants discussed the notion of love and caring for each other as being an integral component of their community. Lastly, the theme of Sharing comprised of “coming together for a common purpose,” “a group of people with a shared interest,” and “advice.” Participants stated that members of their community are more likely to share verbal advice with each other before consulting written texts. Geographic location, working together, living in harmony, and sharing are the conceptions of community from some members of Agace (Inquiry Group; Fieldnotes, 7/4/18). As participants explored these qualities and characteristics of their community together, it provided additional context for the ways in which literacy practices and events show up in the village and at school.

The Ibihumbi School

The Ibihumbi School is large government school operated by the federal Ministry of Education, including pre-primary (nursery), primary, and secondary levels of education. The school is situated off a main road that leads into the center of Rwamanga district, providing access for teachers and students in the Agace sector. Pre-primary, or
nursery, consists of three years for students between the ages of 3 and 6. Historically, the pre-primary level was not a governmental obligation and it was the responsibility of parents and the private sector, but new government policies provide nursery schools and resources at the village level. Primary education is free and compulsory for six years and students are from 6-12 years old. At the end of the primary level, students take a national examination to be selected for secondary level. Secondary education is for six years, including three years of lower secondary or ordinary level (O-level) and three years of upper secondary or advanced level (A-level), and students are 13-18 years old. Lower secondary education is free and compulsory, though upper secondary is not yet, and the government is working with individual communities to provide access to this level of education. At the Ibihumbi Center, there are limited upper secondary level options, and if students in the community want to continue their studies, they often seek either another government school with this option or a private school setting.

During an interview with the headmaster at the Ibihumbi School, there were 56 students enrolled in the pre-primary or nursery program, 3009 in primary, and 749 in secondary, totaling approximately 3814 students enrolled (Interview, 7/3/18). As a result of high enrollment numbers, the school operates on a morning and afternoon schedule. That is, half the students attend classes in the morning, then go home after lunch, followed by another group of students attend in the afternoon. When students are not at school, they are often engaged with domestic activities at home and in the village like fetching water, taking care of the animals, farming, or fishing. Typically, these activities occur in the company of other children or their parents. The school schedule is challenging for teachers as it requires teaching large groups of students throughout the
day with a range of class sizes depending on the level. For the purposes of this study, I focused on Primary Six that ranged from 46-52 students and one teacher in each classroom.

**Competence-Based Curriculum: The Implications of a National Curriculum**

In 2015, the Rwandan Ministry of Education released the new Curriculum Framework which serves as the official guide to competence-based teaching and learning across the country from pre-primary to the end of secondary. As stated by Minister of Education Silas Lwakabamba\(^\text{11}\), the document was designed to “ensure that there is consistency and coherence in the delivery of the curriculum across all levels of general education in Rwandan schools” (p. iv). The Framework includes overviews for each subject and maps the overall trajectory for each subject area across grade levels. For specific descriptions of content, learning outcomes and objectives for each subject, individual subject curricula and syllabi were developed in a separate document created by the Ministry and provided to schools on the local level.

The new Curriculum Framework is rooted in a competence-based curriculum paradigm, highlighting a shift from a more knowledge-based curriculum, and attempts to respond to the Ministry’s identified concern in a lack of vocational skills and competences in students who graduate from Rwandan schools. Competence-based education and training (CBET) has roots in the United States and has expanded to other parts of the world in recent decades. In Africa, specifically Tanzania, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana, The Seychelles, and Kenya have all implemented competence-based curricula

in government schools. Sturgis (2017) presents the following characteristics of a
competence-based education that include students advancing to the next level based on
demonstrated mastery; competences that include explicit, measurable, and transferable
learning objectives; and learning outcomes emphasizing competencies that include
application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills
and dispositions. These descriptors are closely aligned with the Ministry of Education
of Rwanda as well. The Curriculum Framework (2015) defines a competence-based
education as:

…an approach where teaching and learning is based on discrete skills rather than
dwelling on only knowledge or the cognitive domain of learning. Learners work
on one competence at a time in the form of concrete units with specific learning
outcomes broken down into knowledge, skills and attitudes. The student is
evaluated against the set standards to achieve before moving on to other
competences. The learning activities should be learner centered rather than the
traditional didactic approach (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, Curriculum
Framework, p. 20).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has identified the following basic competencies
that are relevant to Rwanda based on its history and context, including literacy;
numeracy; ICT; citizenship and national identity; entrepreneurship and business
development; science and technology; and communication in the official languages (p.
26). The generic competencies include critical thinking; creativity and innovation;
research and problem solving; communication; co-operation, interpersonal relations and
life skills; and life-long learning (p. 27). For the purposes of this research study, the
Rwandan national curriculum competency description for literacy is defined as:

education/
• Reading a variety of texts accurately and fast.
• Expressing ideas, messages and events through writing legible texts in good hand-writing with correctly spelt words.
• Communicating ideas effectively through speaking using correct phonetics of words.
• Listening carefully for understanding and seeking clarification when necessary

(Ministry of Education of Rwanda, Curriculum Framework, p. p. 29)

Though the first two descriptions heavily rely upon reading and writing written text, the second two definitions recognize that literacy includes communicating through speaking and listening, an important consideration throughout the analysis of the data gathered in this study. Though these tenants above are intended to drive teaching and learning in Rwandan schools, at Ibihumbi School, there was more evidence of explicit teaching on the technicalities of reading and writing, and less on the development of students’ communicating ideas through speaking and listening (Fieldnotes 7/2/18).

Teachers at the Ibihumbi School are provided with the national curriculum and they are expected to teach the content as prescribed. From interviews, teachers discussed not deviating from the syllabi and textbook because “those are the expectations from the government” (Fieldnotes 7/2/18). On the other hand, Zaki, the Primary Six Science teacher, expressed interest in seeking information beyond what was dictated by stating:

Like in physics, they [students] don’t need to go page by page because I’m not preparing national exams. There are some things which I brought out of this book [points to the national textbook], out of the curriculum. When I see they are important to them [students], then I bring them in [to the classroom]. So that’s why I don’t go page by page. But I see the topic, then I search for some more arguments [information] which I can give to students. (Interview, 7/9/18)

This teacher recognized the importance of attempting to address what students in the classroom were interested in learning more about as opposed to solely relying on the curricula material as prescribed. Though later in the conversation, he discussed that this
practice is particularly challenging because of limited access to content-specific books outside the context of the government textbooks and lack of internet capabilities at the school. Though a school library was created by the GROW organization and consists of children’s picture books and young adult chapter books, there was no evidence of these books being used in the classroom setting during my observations. These books were donated by volunteers from the United States or Europe, portraying predominantly western characters, locations, and experiences, and they were all written in English.

**Classroom Environment**

The Ibihumbi School is situated on a large compound with classrooms on the perimeter of an open campus that is square and sectioned off by each division, pre-primary/nursery, primary, and secondary levels of education. The classroom doors all open toward the center of the compound and face the large field in the center.

![Classroom at Ibihumbi](image)

*Figure 6: Classroom at Ibihumbi (2018)*

Photo: J. Maraiä
Each classroom was set up similarly with approximately eighteen long desks with benches attached. The desks often faced the front or center of the classroom which consisted of a large chalkboard filled with chalk dust, making it challenging at times to read the written text on it. Though there was no electricity or overhead lighting in the classrooms, there were large windows that provided light for students to see the board and their textbooks. The concrete classroom walls were sparsely adorned, though at times, there were occasional instructional charts with content relevant to the subject area written in English. In terms of instructional materials, there was often one bookcase that contained stacks of government textbooks for each respective subject area provided by the Ministry of Education and some dictionaries written in English.

**Pedagogical Practices**

**Learning to Copy or Copying to Learn**

In most classrooms observed, students spent significant time copying written text from the blackboard to their notebooks (Fieldnotes). The text on the board was written by the classroom teacher and the content was copied directly from the Ministry of Education textbooks. When I asked Zaki, the Primary Six Science teacher, about the practice of teachers writing the exact content from the textbook onto the chalkboard, he expressed having only 20 copies of the textbook for 292 students (Interview, 7/9/18). Therefore, in order for students to have access to the information contained in the textbook, they had to write it out in their notebooks. In most instances, it took students a significant amount of time to copy all the content from the chalkboard into their notebooks resulting in less time for students to engage with each other or develop a
deeper understanding of the information they were copying. Below is an example from Zaki’s Primary Six Science classroom, focusing on the health and wellness unit of study.

![Image of blackboard and student notebook]

**Figure 7: Classroom Blackboard and Student Notebook (2018)**
Photo: J. Maraia

In this image, the left side represents the teacher writing on the chalkboard and the right side is from a student’s notebook. In the notebook, there was no evidence of written text other than the content directly copied from the blackboard. Throughout most of my classroom observations, it appeared as though there was limited time or instruction on interpretative writing, where students make sense of the information they were copying or further exploring these topics through writing. The limited quantity of textbooks is the primary reason why Zaki writes the information on the blackboard so that students can have the information for their “revisions,” the time when they reread their notebooks and memorize the content for future tests. With large quantities of written text that students are expected to copy in a short period of time, there appears to be limited time for students to make meaning of the material. It raised an important consideration regarding
the differences between students learning how to copy written text or learning the material that they were copying. Additionally, if there were more copies of the textbooks at the school, there would be less students copying content into their notebooks and more opportunities to make meaning of the material being presented.

**Operating in Unison: A Model of Call and Response**

In the beginning of each lesson, the teacher starts by saying, “Good afternoon, students,” followed by the students standing up and responding in unison, “Good afternoon, teacher.” The theme of students speaking in unison in response to their teachers existed across my observations. Students demonstrated respect for their teacher by standing when they spoke and greeting their teacher in the beginning of each class. Another example of students responding in unison is when students wanted to answer a question that teachers posed, they would call out, “Me Teacher, me teacher” while snapping their finger to get the teacher’s attention. As evidenced in the vignette below from Rashad’s Primary Six Creative Arts class, teachers would often ask direct questions for students to answer and groups of students would attempt to get the teacher’s attention in order to respond.

Teacher: What did we start last time?
Students (in unison): Me teacher, me teacher
*Teacher calls on a student.*
Student #1: Making a goat in the clay.
Teacher: Clap for him.
*Students clap a rhythm in unison.*
Teacher: Today we are going to learn how to make a pot in the clay. Do you use a pot at home?
Students (in unison): Yes.
*Teacher writes “Making a pot in the clay” on the board.*
T: What is the use of pot in daily life?
Students (in unison): Me teacher, me teacher.
Teacher starts calling on individual students. When student is called on, they stand.
Student #2: Cooking meat
Student #3: Cooking fish
Student #4: Cooking meat
Teacher: What is the main purpose?
Students (in unison): Me teacher, me teacher
(Fieldnotes, 7/3/18)

This excerpt represents a larger trend of a call-and-response relationship between the teachers and students in the classroom. It was common for teachers to pose questions to their students during lessons, followed by the students competing to get their teachers’ attention to answer. There was limited verbal interaction between students related to academics, whether in one-on-one or small group configurations. In one classroom, the teacher attempted to get students to interact by stating, “Discuss in your groups,” though the room remained silent. The teacher often stood at the front of the room and read directly from the board or out of the textbook, posed questions to the whole class, or provided directions for an activity for students to work on independently. The Ministry of Education of Rwanda Curriculum Framework (2015) document suggests that “the learning activities should be learner centered rather than the traditional didactic approach.” Though that is the government expectation, this was not observed in practice. Additionally, the level of questioning often yielded either simple sentences or one-word responses. This could be related to the expectation that all teachers and students use English in the classroom and English language proficiency is limited.

---

13 Based on the Rwandan Ministry of Education Curriculum Framework (2015), a learner-centered curriculum is defined as “creating an environment where learning activities are organized in a way that encourages learners to construct knowledge either individually or in groups in an active way” (p. 19). From this excerpt, I interpret that a traditional didactic teaching approach refers to learning activities that are not learner-centered or active.
The Rhythm and Beat of Classroom Management

With large class sizes of 45 students or more in each classroom, developing management structures for student expectations and behavior is an important consideration. In the beginning of each lesson, students entered the classroom and sat at wooden benches that were attached to each desk. Often, since there were not assigned seats for students, they sat with their friends, neighbors or relatives for the duration of the lesson. There were often approximately 4-6 students on one bench resulting in students sitting in close proximity, occasionally on each other’s lap. At times, it was challenging for students to get full range of motion when writing in their notebooks because they were sitting so closely with other students on either side. According to one teacher, Rashad, it is difficult to learn all his students’ names and it takes a few months before he remembers everyone (Interview, 7/3/18). In the beginning of each lesson, the teacher takes attendance by calling out individual students’ names. This practice often takes approximately ten minutes causing a decrease in instructional time. Many teachers developed nonverbal management strategies in the classroom. For example, after a student responded to their teacher, regardless of what the student said, the teacher would instruct the rest of the class to “Clap for him,” and the students would all clap in unison to a rhythmic beat. There were many moments throughout the lesson where teachers would nonverbally acknowledge the contributions of students which contributed to an environment of support and respect for each other.

Language of Instruction: French to English in a Kinyerwanda Village

Though Kinyarwanda, French, and English are all the official languages of Rwanda, in 2008, the Rwandan government declared English as the language of
instruction (LOI) in all public schools after over 60 years of French. Simpson and Muvunyi (2012/13) state, “the three languages are complementary and interrelated: Kinyarwanda is the bedrock of initial literacy and learning, English is the new medium of instruction and French is the language of wider communication” (p. 154). At the Ibihumbi School, students spend the school day taking all academic subjects in English with one class in Kinyerwanda. During classroom observations, it was clear that teachers were not always confident teaching in English as they would often speak in Kinyerwanda when explaining complex concepts, and other times, when teachers attempted to describe a concept in English, students would struggle to understand what they were saying.

According to Zaki, the government mandate for the language of instruction from French to English was a difficult transition for classroom teachers. He recalls teaching primary students at the Ibihumbi School in French for many years, and then, he was expected to teach entirely in English without any support or training (Interview, 7/9/19). Simpson and Muvunyi (2012/13) further posit, “Given the high costs of providing residential training to such large numbers [more than 50,000 school teachers], the Ministry of Education’s preferred option is a sector-based approach to training, supported by self-directed study and school-based mentoring” (p. 156). This approach is not effective because the teachers believe their English has not improved from learning the language from non-native English speakers. Therefore, though English is the mandated language of instruction throughout the country, teachers at the Ibihumbi School often speak in Kinyerwanda, their native language, during their instructional practice.
Summary

Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork, the people of Agace and the Ibihumbi School were eager to share their experiences and traditions regarding their community and literacy practices. Participants expressed passion for the Agace community and perceive it as a place where people deeply care about and support each other. Considering this study seeks to observe literacy practices and events in school and participants’ homes in order to examine literacy practices among the villagers of Agace, this chapter provided context for a variety of social spaces in the village, including the home, places of worship, the local market, and the school. Additionally, this chapter provided an overview of the Ministry of Education’s implementation of competence-based curriculum in Rwanda and the ways in which it serves as a foundation for educational expectations in governmental schools, coupled with an analysis of the pedagogical practices observed in the classrooms at the Ibihumbi School. These practices included a culture of manually copying written text, direct instruction with an emphasis on call-and-response exchange between teacher and student, creative ways for managing classrooms with large quantities of students, and English as the language of instruction. Next, I continue to discuss the plurality of literacies that exist in Agace and the Ibihumbi School from an asset-based orientation, in Chapter 5, followed by an analysis of the existence of orality and storytelling traditions in Chapter 6.
CHAPTER 5: THE PLURALITY OF LITERACY PRACTICES

This chapter examines participants’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs about literacy, specifically with an emphasis on reading and writing, in various social contexts throughout the village of Agace. I analyze connections and disconnections between school and home by highlighting the ways in which students navigate literacy practices in these spaces. Additionally, this chapter explores how classroom teachers connect and communicate with parents of their students, and to what extent the parents of the village are engaged with their child’s school experiences. This chapter continues with an asset-based analysis of literacy beyond the dominant discourse on reading and writing. That is, I emphasize the range and variation of literacy events and practices that exist in community members’ lived experiences and explore these literacies through the lens of knowledge and power. Finally, I present and discuss the perspectives of community members as they share definitions of literacy and frame these definitions considering the existing literature on literacy and illiteracy binaries.

Literacy as a Reading and Writing Practice

As with many languages around the world, the word literacy does not directly translate in Kinyerwanda, the native language in Agace. Janks (2010) asserts that the most common usage of the word literacy is “understood to be the ability to read and write and was ‘formed as an antithesis to illiteracy in 1883”’ (p. 2). In Kinyerwanda, ‘kujijuka’ means to know how to read and write and “have some fair knowledge of life and the world around you” (Personal communication, 2/16/19) or “to be informed and

---

knowledgeable” (Personal communication, 3/18/19). It is important to highlight that the local idiom already consists of an expansive definition that is deeply contextual and socially situated. Considering the complexity inherent in the word literacy as it relates to different languages and cultures, during interviews conducted throughout this study, explicit questions were generated regarding participants’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs with reading and writing. There were many consistent themes that existed in the data, including participants’ ability to read and write, lack of time to read and write, parental engagement with their children’s reading and writing, access to written texts, and a variation of writing implements, surfaces, and resources.

**Time and Domestic Activities**

The people of Agace spend a significant amount of time each day engaged with domestic activities necessary for survival. Some domestic activities include getting water in jerrycans from the lake, caring for livestock (cows, pigs, goats, and chickens), and harvesting crops in the field. Considering many of the domestic activities require physical labor, time is filled completing these tasks that result in limited time for leisure and functional reading and writing. For example, Albert, the father of four children, stated, “It’s not simple to get the time to read because I have a big family, so I am always concentrating on searching for food for the family” (Interview, 6/30/18). Additionally, parents often discussed the need for children to fetch water or search for food as soon as they come home from school before they engage with their revisions\(^{15}\) or reading and

\[^{15}\text{In this context, the word ‘revision’ refers to students reviewing their notebooks from their daily lessons at school, mostly in the form of content copied from the chalkboard and memorizing the information. This word is often used synonymously with homework.}\]
writing. Daniel, a 35-year old father of four children and native resident of Agace, shared:

When a child is coming home from school, they do not have time for books. You can’t work when you have not eaten. They first have to search for what to eat. If they get it, then they can eat and read books.” (Interview, 7/2/18)

In *A Theory of Human Motivation* (1943), psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed five ‘hierarchy of needs’ that must be fulfilled for human beings to be healthy and satisfied. The hierarchy is often presented as a pyramid consisting of the following levels: physical, security, social, ego, and self-actualization. Physiological needs serve as the most basic, fundamental level which includes air, water, food, rest, and health (Burton, 2012). Albert reinforces this notion by stating, “Food comes first; if you are hungry, you can’t do anything. If food is provided, then the kid can read, but before the food, the kid can’t read” (Interview, 6/30/18). As identified by most participants, physiological needs must be met before people can engage with reading and writing activities. In this context, reading and writing includes people interacting with written text in some capacity in their daily life, whether reading a book, label or sign, or writing a letter, budget, or notes from a community or church meeting. Considering the amount of time required for domestic activities directly related to survival, reading and writing was not a central part of participants’ daily life aside from students reading magazines or class materials that they received from school or adults reading religious texts.

Furthermore, participants consistently discussed how they learned to conduct their daily domestic activities from observing either an older relative or neighbor, and most often, from observing and talking with parents and grandparents or getting advice from other members of the community. That is, people do not rely on manuals, informational
books, or websites for learning new skills, but from each other through word-of-mouth. Lee, an 18-year old man who dropped out of school after Primary 5, discussed how he learned to care for his goats from speaking with an “expert.” He stated, “There is a veterinarian that sometimes comes to give me advice on how to take care of them.” He further explains that “If I have a sick goat, I normally call him [the veterinarian], and he doesn’t come with a book, the veterinarian just speaks with me” (Interview, 6/30/18). That is, as opposed to Lee receiving written information from the veterinarian or reading further information about how to care for his goats, he relied on the verbal advice from the local expert. Lee’s experience connects with Ong’s (1982) assertion that there are not how-to manuals for trades in oral cultures and “trades were learned by apprenticeship, which means from observation and practice” (p. 43). Another example is from Daniel who stated, “I learned farming from seeing my parents; I only learned from them. That’s the kind of life I live in” (Interview, 7/2/18). People in the village mostly rely on observation and oral communication as the primary ways for learning about their daily domestic activities and consequently problem-solving any challenges that might arise.

**Parental Engagement with School-Based Reading and Writing Practices**

In addition to the amount of time that parents spend on daily domestic activities needed for survival, parents rarely spend time with their children on school-based reading and writing practices at home. In most instances, the parent participants in this study either did not attend formal school or only attended for a short period of time when they were children. As Daniel shared, “I didn’t go to school because my parents were very poor, and I was not able to attend” (Interview 7/2/18). Many parents in the village did not attend school when they were younger because they had to work for their families...
during the day conducting domestic activities, or their families could not afford the school fees that were required for uniforms and other school materials. Additionally, many parents in the village were school-aged before and during the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, and during that period and after, many students stopped attending school because of the unsafe conditions in the country. During my interviews, parents often believed that they could not help their children with reading and writing at home because they did not attend school, and therefore did not have the necessary skills to support them. Bishara stated that her children “read what they know, but that which they don’t know, they don’t read because I am not able to help them” (Interview, 6/30). Despite a range and variation of times that I visited participants’ homes, it was rare to observe students engaged with reading and writing practices either after school or during the weekends. As discussed in the previous section, the people of Agace, whether students or adults, spend a significant amount of time each day engaged with domestic activities necessary for survival. Additionally, as observed throughout my fieldwork and confirmed from interviews, parents rarely, if ever, engaged their children with reading and writing outside the context of reading the Bible at home or in church.

Though parents were not involved in children’s reading and writing at home, they often expressed the importance of their children attending school and learning how to read and write. Daniel stated that the most important thing for his children to learn at school is “to get knowledge, and to learn how to read and write because I know how disadvantaged it is when you don’t know how to read and write; that is why I always encourage them to do that” (Interview 7/2/18). From this example, it is clear that some people believe that knowing how to read and write provides more advantage and
opportunities. Daniel further elaborates on his perspective regarding the benefits of his children knowing how to read and write by stating:

D: If you don’t know how to read and write, you might get lost. If you are going to Rwamagana…for example, if you went passed the place because you couldn’t read the billboard. It’s hard for me to read. Reading and writing is very hard for me that is why I will encourage my children to go to school.

J: What are some other reasons you would like your children to learn to read?

D: Self-development…to achieve something. Also, so the kids can enter somewhere and know how to ask for a job. If you can read, you can know your history. That’s why I always encourage them because reading and writing is so good. (Interview, 7/2/18)

For Daniel, it is clear that reading and writing has purposes beyond the functionality of navigating one’s environment, but it also serves as an important skill necessary for self-development. The notion of personal development and its connection to reading and writing was a recurring theme across the data. The need for literacy, the importance of literacy for personal development, and the belief that “when people acquire it they will somehow ‘get better’” is a common dominant perspective, and I was intrigued by how Daniel and others in the community came to adopt this notion (Street, 1995).

Additionally, Daniel mentioned that reading and writing is “so good,” introducing a binary that not being able to read and write could be ‘so bad.’ When considering what might inform this perspective, Daniel and others might believe that not being able to read and write has constrained their life options and opportunities.

**Access to Written Texts**

Other than at the Ibihumbi School and the local churches, written texts like books, newspapers, and magazines, were not common in the home or other social spaces in the village. As Gbenga, a 33-year old male and university graduate shared, “In past years, we didn’t have enough to read and that’s probably the reason why we don’t have a
reading culture” (Interview, 7/5/19). Most parents expressed that if they ever read or look at written text, it is when their child brings a book or magazine home from school. Albert stated, “nsoma ibitabo umwana avana kwishuri,” which directly translates to “I read books that my kids bring from school” (Interview, 6/30/18). Bishara discussed how her “first born normally reads the English books from school, and the second one tries to read some Kinyarwanda books” (Interview, 6/30/18). It is clear that the local public school serves as the primary source for people in the community to have access to written texts. As described in the previous chapter, Muhoza mentioned that there are not places for adults to get books or read in the village, and this is why he believes that there is not a culture of reading in the village as well (Fieldnotes, 7/1/18).

When walking down the street one day, Sefu and I encountered a group of three students on the side of the road gathered around a magazine. When we approached them, Sefu asked the students questions in Kinyarwanda about the magazine they were holding and why they were not at school. The students were directed to go back home because their hair was too long. They said, “The teacher asked us to go first shave, and then we can come back when we have shaved ourselves” (Fieldnotes, 7/3/18). Sefu explained that schools expect all students to shave their heads for hygiene purposes, though when students are sent away for these types of reasons, not only do they lose instructional time in the classroom, but they also rarely go back because the walk from home to school is so long. These three students were reading a magazine published by the government and written in Kinyarwanda. According to the students, this magazine was not part of the curriculum, but a supplemental text that was provided at the school that they were allowed to take home. The page of the magazine they were looking at was a cartoon
filled with colorful drawings and some written text. Some other sections of the magazine included an article about a popular African soccer player, national strategies for clean water, and a picture-phrase matching children’s activity. According to Sefu, “when the kids are holding that magazine, the first thing they do is not – they’re not interested in reading much, but interested in watching the pictures” (Fieldnotes, 7/3/18). Despite not being in school for the day, these students appeared to be engaged with looking through the pages of this magazine on their own. When parents shared that they only read material that their children bring home from school, this magazine was a great example of these types of written texts that are going home.

Since newspapers do not get delivered to Agace, members of the village access information about what is happening in the country or world by listening to the radio or watching the news on television (Interview, 2/29/18). There are two newspapers that are most commonly accessible in the Rwamagana District, Invaho and The New Times. Invaho is a national daily newspaper that began in 1994, written in Kinyarwanda, and operated by the Rwandan government\textsuperscript{16}. Whereas, The New Times\textsuperscript{17} is a national daily newspaper that began in 1995, written in English, and is privately owned. According to Mungu, “the newspapers that have news that people like most were banned because of political reasons” (Interview, 6/29/18). One theme that consistently emerged from the data was participants’ skepticism or lack of trust in written texts, like newspapers and books, because they are written by unknown authors. When discussing oral storytelling, which will be discussed at length in the next chapter, Gbenga states, “It is possible that I

\textsuperscript{16}Library of Congress https://www.loc.gov/item/sn97021270/  
\textsuperscript{17}The New Times, https://www.newtimes.co.rw/
can read things but when I don’t know the reason of the author to write it, I don’t understand it. He [the author] might write according to his feelings, but for the parents, you as a child have trust in them” (Interview, 7/5/18). This calls into question the origin of written texts and perceptions about authors’ intentionality. Gbenga also introduces the notion of ‘feelings’ as the impetus for the content that authors mostly write about. There was a recognition that not knowing the author of the text raises concerns about trust. Additionally, Mungu discussed that the national newspapers often perpetuate a positive tone about the country and rarely report on anything negative. The consistent positivity prompts people to question the authenticity of the information, and therefore, even if newspapers are accessible, they are not driven to read them as a result. I conclude that even though there is not significant access to written texts in the form of newspapers and books outside the context of school, many people in the community remain suspicious about authors’ intentionality and authenticity of written texts. Considering the texts described are produced by government institutions and Rwanda’s political context as described in Chapter 1, it is clear why people in Agace might be skeptical of public information conveyed in written form.

**Written Texts and Power Relationships**

According to the data, as previously described, the people in Agace have access to written texts predominately from the local school in the community; and therefore, the school and the texts at the school have significant power. The written texts at the school are what Jang (2010) describes as dominant school genres which consists of recounts, instructions, narratives, reports, explanations, and arguments. In the case of the Ibihumbi School, most of the written texts are provided by the Rwandan Ministry of Education and
in the form of textbook informational writing that is written and censored by the government. Another type of written text at the school is in the form of children’s picture books that have been donated by western volunteers. These dominant school genres, either the governmental textbooks or the American and European children’s picture books, do not represent students’ lived experiences or multiplicity of literacies in the village. Jang (2010) asserts, “If we provide students with access to dominant forms, this contributes to maintaining the dominance of these forms. If, on the other hand, we deny students access, we perpetuate their marginalization in a society that continues to recognize the value and importance of these forms” (p. 24). Students at the Ibihumbi School and thus their families are provided access to dominant school genres, typically in the form of informational writing in textbooks and workbooks. These forms further the notion that literacy is solely an act of reading and writing, not inclusive of students’ diverse languages and literacies.

The English Primary Five textbook is designed with the same template or pattern for all lessons in each unit of study throughout the book. The flow of a typical lesson includes: (1) an activity for students to discuss questions about the lesson topic by working together, (2) reading written text, (3) an activity for students to write answers to questions about the reading, and (4) an activity for students to work together in an effort to apply their learning from the reading (Fieldnotes, 7/9/18). Though the textbook prescribes activities for students to engage in discourse with each other and work together, there were two consistent themes in my classroom observations. First, when students worked together, their conversations were driven by the written text that they were required to read, and the questions were usually explicitly dictated by the book.
That is, students were asked literal questions that expected them to recall information directly from the text with very little opportunity, if any, for inferential thinking about the information they were reading. Though this is often how textbooks are utilized, I noticed that the types of questions that students were expected to answer were factually-based as opposed to encouraging students to think critically and independently. The opportunities for students to develop their own ideas about the text were restricted by the questions raised in the textbook. The textbook writers, or the Rwandan government in this context, held power and control over the types of thinking that students were doing based on the questions that were posed. Second, though the textbook explicitly directs students to “work together” and answer questions about the text, it was not common for students to work in partnerships or small groups. During my observations, these activities were often led by the teacher utilizing a call-and-response instructional approach with the textbook directing the teacher on the questions to ask students. Teachers appeared to be apprehensive or unsure about establishing structures for the ways in which students might engage in collaborative conversations with each other. Not only did the government, as the producers of the textbook, have power over the types of questions they expected students to answer, but they also held power in terms of the pedagogical approaches that teachers utilized in their classroom instruction. The values and beliefs of the Rwandan government were being transmitted to students through accessing the one and only school resource, the government-produced textbook.

Furthermore, not only did the textbook dictate types of questions and pedagogical approaches, but it also dictated the content of the curriculum as well. For example, in the
English Primary Five textbook, the units of study contained some broad topics and others that were specific to the country of Rwanda. The ten units included:

Unit 1: Past and Future Events  
Unit 2: The Language of Study Subjects  
Unit 3: Reading  
Unit 4: The Environment  
Unit 5: Measurement  
Unit 6: Transport  
Unit 7: Hygiene and Health  
Unit 8: Crafts in Rwanda  
Unit 9: Traditional and Modern Agriculture in Rwanda  
Unit 10: Geography of the World  
(Fieldnotes, 7/9/18)

The Rwandan Ministry of Education dictates, or has the power over, the topics that students have access to in the classroom. From these seemingly disparate units of study mentioned above, it is clear that some topics are specific to the culture and customs of Rwanda, while others expose students to broader interests that are not culturally specific. Additionally, in many units, there were often lessons dedicated to learning about the country’s history in relationship to the specified topic. For example, when students were studying the crafts in Rwanda, they read about what people made in the past, or when students were studying the agriculture in Rwanda, they read about tools and farming in the past. The written texts not only acknowledged the history of Rwanda, but they also considered the future by addressing notions of change and societal development in relationship to these topics. From reviewing the contents of the textbook, although there was Rwanda-specific information included, people’s lived experiences based on different cities, districts, and villages in the country were not addressed. The experiences of people in Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda, and the experiences of people in Agace, a rural village, are different and unique to each respective context. This raises important
questions about developing curricula that addresses both national identity and specific topics of interests for individual students. The government has the power over the creation of curriculum and consequently written texts in public schools, and therefore the access that students and families of Agace have to these types of school-based texts is controlled and limited. After reviewing the existing written texts at the school coupled with classroom observations and interviews, it was clear that students’ different “ways with words” (Heath, 1983) and experiences were not represented in the classroom.

**Writing Surfaces and Resources**

After interviewing Bishara, a mother of two children that attend the Ibihumbi School and staff member at the orphanage, she invited me to visit her home to meet her mother and children. As I sat in the salon, or living room, for a follow-up conversation from our first interview, I noticed that there were engravings or etchings on the walls. In traditional Agace homes, the walls are made of a mixture of soil, cement, and water, and occasionally there is a light coat of paint. Below are two examples of the etchings on the walls of her salon:
The excerpt below is from my conversation with the family about these etchings:

J: What are these? *(Pointing to the etchings on the wall.)*
B: The kids drew them.
Mother: The kids sometimes do that to have fun and play.
B: The kids were learning how to draw.
J: Do they ever use paper?
B: No paper to use when they are drawing. Even now, they don’t have papers.
J: This over here – can you explain this one? *(Pointing to the wall with the addition symbol and tally marks.)*
Child: We were learning how to add. At school, we started to learn the addition.
J: How about this one over here? *(Pointing to the one by the door?)*
B: That is a statue in the form of a person from the church. They saw a statue in the church so they tried to imitate how to draw it.
J: What about this one?
Child: I was trying to write my name!
J: And this picture over here, can you explain this one?
Child: It is a pot. I was trying to learn how to draw a ceramics pot. Also, I was trying to learn how to draw a person. *(Interview, 7/2/18).*
The children in this home used nails to etch letters, drawings, and other markings onto the walls. As the mother shared in the above excerpt, the surface of the walls in this context served a variety of purposes. For example, the children used the wall space “to have fun and play” by learning to draw. It is important to note that all of the drawings consisted of objects that the children use regularly or have a connection with in their lives in some capacity, like the statue they saw at church or a clay pot they use for cooking and eating. Additionally, children used the surface of the walls to practice writing the letters of their name and symbols they were learning in mathematics at school. The walls became a surface for the children to not only experiment and have fun, but also for them to practice what they were learning in various social contexts within the community as well. It conveys literacy in different modes and contexts, including mathematic skills, church, and artistic drawing. When the mother asked her children to explain the etchings on the wall, they smiled and enthusiastically responded with pride and a willingness to share. The children, within the context of their home environment, used writing and drawing as a tool for expression, creativity, and meaning-making.

During a collaborative inquiry group session with five members of the Agace community, including parents and teachers, we further explored notions of writing surfaces. The participants were asked to draw an image of their home and or compound as a child and identify the places in which literacy practices occurred, specifically where people engaged with reading, writing, speaking, or listening. The goal of this activity was to use images and drawings to stimulate memories from the past, and to generate conversations among the participants about their experiences with and perceptions of literacy practices then and now. Below is an example of Mungu’s drawing of his
compound growing up. He used brown asterisks to identify locations where literacy practices occurred with descriptions of each location in green.

![Participatory Mapping](image)

**Figure 9: Participatory Mapping (2018)**

Photo: J. Maraia

This image sparked an engaged discussion with all the participants about writing on banana leaves as a common writing surface for people to use in the village. That is, some participants explained that when they were children, they would use charcoal or small sticks of wood to write on the banana leaves that they would gather from the bush. Some examples of what they would write included listing out the names of their family and friends, practicing mathematics that they were learning at school, and drawing objects and people from their lives. When considering the similarities and differences between writing at home on banana leaves and writing at school, Mungu described:

> I think writing on the banana leaf was just something fun that nobody's pushing you to do. You are doing it from yourself, and you are writing what you want to write, what is interesting to you. And so you have a freedom. I think you have a
freedom to write anything you want, write everywhere you want, not just a rule that you need to write in a notebook with a pen with—so you have choices. You have your own choice -- and so you are free to do anything you want and from your heart, not from anyone else. And at school, in the school, there are rules and big lesson. They say, ‘You need to have a notebook, and an English notebook, math notebook. You need to have a pen. You need to—’ so there are rules and big lessons that you need to follow. (Fieldnotes, 7/4/18)

There are a few points presented in this excerpt that are important to highlight when considering the distinction between home and school literacy practices. First, the writing that takes place at home is often referenced as fun and playful whereas school is not. Additionally, there is freedom and choice to write whatever you want at home whereas school-based writing was dictated by the teacher with limited student autonomy. Finally, there is an understanding that there are multiple creative options for writing surfaces at home whereas the expectation at school is for students to utilize the dominant writing implements and surfaces like pen and paper.

Similar to the vignette described above from my visit to Bishara’s house, in addition to the walls of people’s homes, another common location where children write is on the doors in their home. Fatima stated:

I used the door of the kitchen where I would write down names and my favorite food. For example, if they were cooking banana, if they were cooking potatoes, I would write down the name of the food that they were preparing inside. (Fieldnotes, 7/4/18)

Fatima mentioned that she would use charcoal from the fire to write on the door, and then she would wash it off with a leaf and repeat it again each night. Nuru, another participant, discussed taking small pieces of chalk that the teacher threw on the floor at school and bring it home and write on the door as well. As demonstrated in these examples, and previously discussed, writing is often used playfully in the home and
functions as a tool to communicate messages specific to the people in that context.

Lastly, another common writing surface is the dust on the ground. When I was visiting Justice’s house, a father of two children, we discussed the cost of individual piglets and the total cost of an entire family of pigs. While he was explaining, he used his finger to write the cost of each pig in the dust on the ground, then added the individual amounts together to determine the total cost (Fieldnotes, 7/12/18). This example of adding numbers together written in the dust highlights how writing is used for functional purposes as well. Whether using charcoal, sticks of wood, chalk, or fingers as the writing implements and walls, doors, banana leaves, or the dusty ground as the writing surface, the members of the Agace community have creative ways to communicate in writing that responds to the material realities of their context, including limited paper, pencils, pens, typewriters, or computers.

**Home-School Literacy Connections**

When further analyzing the ways in which participants of this study negotiate literacy practices between home and school, I explored the relational connections that existed between parents and teachers. As discussed in previous sections, it is evident that many literacy practices at the Ibihumbi School are not connected with the literacy practices that exist in children’s home lives and their community. The literacy practices at the school perpetuate a set of decontextualized skills that focus predominately on the technicalities of reading and writing (Janks 2010). With the disconnect between the literacies that exist at home and school in mind, I discuss parent perceptions and beliefs about the teaching and learning at the Ibihumbi School, followed by teacher perceptions about parent engagement with their child’s schooling and literacy experiences. From
analyzing the home-school connection, I argue that the kind of literacy that shows up at school is considerably different from the literacy practices that are grounded in children’s lives and their communities outside of school.

**Parent Perceptions About the Ibihumi School**

Parents that participated in this study expressed a range of experiences with the school, specifically regarding curriculum, pedagogical practices used in the classroom, and student life. Many parents shared that they do not visit their child’s school because they do not have the time to attend, while other parents mentioned that they might attend once, sometimes twice a year (Fieldnotes, 6/30/18). Bishara, a mother of four children who visits the school twice a year, reflects on her experience:

> The teachers are careless because they don’t take care of the kids, and they are not well-qualified. For example, there are 60 students in a class...too many, the system of changing teachers every 45 minutes. I found it hard when the students have to change from one teacher to another...one is Kinyerwanda, the other is math, the other is English, because in the end, the kids catch nothing. It is hard for the kid to deeply understand the lesson or ask questions to the teacher. (Interview 6/30/18)

Based on this excerpt, Bishara believes that the large class sizes impact learning for her children, and since the schedule is filled with many different classes and teachers coupled with the short class periods, there are limited opportunities for her children to deeply understand the lessons and ask follow-up questions. The number of students in each class could affect the ways in which teachers build relationships with individual students. Though some teachers live in the village and have relationships with students and families outside of school, the large class sizes make it challenging to implement curricular connections based on individual interests and differentiated learning opportunities.
Bishara also shared that “the teacher does not normally come to parents” to communicate how their children are doing in school, though she believes that “it is the responsibility of the teacher to follow-up with the kid – and that the teacher is also responsible for the poor performance” of students (Interview, 6/30/18). She expressed concern about teachers not communicating with parents and taking responsibility or ownership for ensuring that all students are engaged with learning. Students’ academic progress might be communicated from the school to the parents in a variety of ways, including: (1) a written report card that consists of all the final grades for each class in the semester is given to the child to bring home; (2) a written letter is given to the child to bring home to their parent; (3) a one-on-one in-person meeting between the teacher and the parent; and (4) if the parent has a mobile phone, the teacher might attempt to call the parent (Fieldnotes; Interview, 7/4/18, 7/9/18). Though these approaches were mentioned at various times throughout my fieldwork, they are not all practiced by every teacher with every student. Additionally, there are a few factors that impact communication of students’ academic progress to families. For example, students do not always give the report cards or written notes to their parents when they get home, parents cannot read the report card or written note once they are received, there is no postal service so written communication to parents must be hand delivered by children, elderly parents cannot walk the long distance from their home to school, and not all parents have mobile or landline phones (Fieldnotes). In many instances, the most effective way to communicate students’ academic development is either the teacher visiting the home or the parent visiting the school.
According to the Rwandan Ministry of Education’s new mandated Curriculum Framework (2015) which serves as the official guide to competence-based teaching and learning across the country, there is a section regarding the country’s expectation for schools reporting student progress to families:

The new direction of learning in the curriculum means that it is necessary to think again about how to share learners’ progress with parents. A single mark is not sufficient to convey the different expectations of learning which are in the learning objectives. The most helpful reporting is to share what students are doing well and where they need to improve. A simple scale of meeting expectations very well, meeting expectations, and not meeting expectations for each of knowledge/understanding, subject skills and competencies in a subject will convey more than a single mark. For school-based assessments these scores do not need to be added up (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, Curriculum Framework, p. 20).

This approach centers on the importance of public schools in the country communicating students’ progress with parents, and it highlights teachers providing more specific feedback to parents about students’ strengths and areas of improvement. Though this effort attempts to improve school-parent partnerships, it does not address the more systemic challenges regarding school-parent communications raised earlier in this section.

**Teacher Perceptions About Parent Engagement at School**

There was a range of teacher perceptions and beliefs about parent engagement with their children’s education at school. Some teachers believed that parents are not interested in their children’s education while others believed that when teachers make the effort to build a relationship with parents, a partnership is more likely to develop.

Fatima, a teacher at the Ibihumbi School and mother of four children, explains that since
most parents in the village did not go to school themselves, their children face “many problems” because they do not get the support at home. She states:

B: Teachers, they do what they have to do. But parents don't care. They buy school uniforms and school materials, and they send their kids to school. They wait for their report. They don't know if something was wrong or not. They don't take a stand to come to visit their kids at the school. In general, they don't come. Only a few number of parents come.
J: And when they come, what do they typically come for?
B: A parent can come and talk to the teacher, and the teacher tells the parents the weakness of the students and the strengths. And then, it encourages the students to be strong, to work hard if they see teachers and parents are taking care of him or her and are interested. Parents who take time to come to school, to see how their students are at the school, those children are intelligent because there is a connection between parents and teacher. (Interview, 7/6/18)

From Fatima’s perspective, parents generally do not care about their child’s progress at school and this is often related to parents’ lack of knowledge about school curriculum and expectations. Considering the asset-based orientation of this study, I was interested in why some parents might visit the school and what might prevent others from doing so. As I analyzed responses from both parents and teachers, it was clear that many parents cared deeply about their children attending school; however, they were unable to physically visit the school to meet their children’s teachers for a variety of reasons as previously discussed. The teachers’ perception is that parents do not care, and this is mostly based on parents not having a presence at the school.

On the other hand, Zaki, a Primary 6 science teacher at the Ibihumbi School, discusses the ways in which he and his colleagues are working on collaborating more with parents. For example, he discussed collecting the names of students’ parents and their phone numbers at the beginning of each school year. He calls parents and invites them to visit the school because “they have to know me, and I know them, in order to
collaborate well” and “if they don’t know me, and I don’t know them, if a student got a problem, I can’t handle it myself” (Interview, 7/9/18). Zaki discussed that when he makes the effort to build a relationship with his students’ parents, the parents are more likely to come to him directly when there is an issue. He further explains that, “there are some students that got problems at home, and the parents can come and say, ‘Please, teacher, I have a problem with my kid. Can you help me?’” (Interview, 7/9/18). When parents feel that their child’s teacher cares about their well-being, they might be more inclined to share their concerns with the teacher and seek advice on how to better support their child at home. In this case, the teacher at the school provides emotional and psychological support not only to their students but to the parents as well.

Additionally, Zaki presents a strong argument for the importance of teachers collaborating at school as a way to more effectively build relationships with students and their parents. That is, he shared a story about attending a Primary 6 teacher-team meeting, and the teachers discussed the students that had been repeatedly absent. He encouraged his colleagues to reach out and call the students’ parents to get more information about why they have been absent from school. He advises his colleagues to “take time and talk to the student and get to know their problems” and “call their parents if the student has problems” (Interview, 7/9/18). Though Zaki believes it is his responsibility to build relationships with parents, he discussed that not every teacher feels the same way. He further highlighted the challenges inherent with large class sizes preventing him and his colleagues from building relationships with all students and their parents.
The Impact of Home-School Partnerships

Throughout my fieldwork, many parents and teachers shared that when there is a connection between home and school, students are more likely to engage with learning and develop the skills necessary for reading and writing. Fatima states:

The connection is important because, first of all, there's a background of the student. When the teacher knows the background of the students, it helps him or her to teach the students important skills like reading and writing, and to take care of them. For example, a student can come every day to school late because he's run away from home or lives alone without parents. If the teacher knows the background of the student and how the parents live, the teacher can take care of the kids better. Another example is if the kid comes from very far, the teacher can add five minutes for her to arrive. (Interview, 7/6/18)

In this excerpt, Fatima acknowledges that when teachers know individual students’ backgrounds, they can more effectively support not only their social-emotional development, but their academic growth as well. Though the role of the teacher is to deliver the prescribed national curriculum, some teachers also believe that it is their responsibility to support students through challenges they might encounter outside of school. Additionally, the more that teachers know about their students, the more they can bring this knowledge into their classroom instruction. The more teachers know, the more they can locate the curriculum in students’ lives and create school experiences that are relevant and meaningful to students (Christensen, 2009).

Most parents believe that teachers should initiate the partnership while most teachers believe that parents should initiate it. One day, during a walk through the village, I asked Sefu, the translator on this project and member of the Agace community, about his perceptions of the school-home partnership debate. He shared:

It starts from their [students] parents and how they grew up. They didn't go to school, so they don't know how to support their kids with their education. And
that's very common to almost everyone. The biggest percentage of the parents in Agace, they're in that category. It starts from home. It starts from their families. It starts from their parents. (Interview, 7/4/18)

Sefu explains that if parents did not attend school when they were younger, they do not have the skills to support their own children with their education, including providing help with homework that is predominately in the form of reading and writing. When prompted to elaborate on ways this concern should be addressed, he discussed educating parents about the importance of their children attending school and explaining the ways they can support their children at home. Furthermore, he suggested that adult literacy programs, which currently do not exist in the village to my knowledge at the time of this study, should be implemented so that parents could read and be “more involved with their children’s revisions” (Interview, 7/4/18). This positionality assumes that reading, writing, and ‘doing school’ is necessary for an individual’s well-being and future success.

**Moving Beyond the Dominant Discourse: Challenging Assumptions About Literacy**

The dominant discourse of literacy is often equated to the act of reading texts that are written. In this section, I challenge the notion that reading is solely connected to written texts, but that it also includes reading people, places, and lived experiences. If reading is receiving information and making meaning, the people of Agace have multiple ways of enacting this process through observing, or “reading,” their social context and each other. Throughout my fieldwork, I was acutely aware of the instances when members of the community were reading their environment and the people around them.
“Reading the World”

In Literacy: Reading the Word, and the World, Freire and Macedo (1987) offer an alternative view of literacy beyond the mechanics of letters and words and see it as the relationship of readers to the world. During many walks in the village, I would often encounter people engaged with their daily activities either on the street, in front of their homes, at the lake, or at the field. People would play and work, discuss and debate, all the while engaged with other people and their environment. They exhibited creativity and ingenuity by using a combination of natural resources and found materials to create games and conduct their daily domestic activities. For example, one day I spent time at the open field watching a group of children playing a game of soccer with a homemade ball. The 28 children, mostly boys, ranging from 8-16 years old gathered at the field, organized themselves into two teams, and engaged in the game independent of adults. When I asked one child how he learned to play, he mentioned that he learned by watching his older brother. He came to the field when he was younger and watched from the sidelines until one day the older children asked if he wanted to join. He has been playing ever since. Another student mentioned “I have been playing with this kind of ball all my life,” and went on to describe how to make a soccer ball with used plastic bags and masking tape to ensure an accurate size, weight, and bounce. When asked how he learned how to do this, he emphatically exclaimed, “by watching!” (Fieldnotes, 6/30/18). This response was repeated over and over throughout my observations.

Another example was when I met a group of three girls sitting close to the street in front of a house. One of the girls had two thin branches that she was using as knitting needles and a long piece of multicolor yarn that she unraveled from an old piece of clothing. She
explained that she was knitting a scarf and that she learned how to knit by watching her grandmother (Fieldnotes, 7/1/18). From these examples, among many, it was clear that these children were “reading” other people’s words, actions, and behaviors. I argue that spoken words and actions become a form of text that people read and interpret, and thus, written text is not the only form of text that exists.

(Re)Defining Literacy in Community Context

Considering Kinyerwanda, the native language of Rwanda, does not contain words for literacy, I was interested in the ways that members of the Agace community conceptualized this western-oriented social construction. For many people in the village, they would say, “Oh, literacy? That’s knowing how to read and write!” exclaims Mungu, a resident of the Rwamagana District and the GROW Project Manager (Interview, 6/29/18). Mungu offers a perspective of literacy that provides an alternative to this common definition. He states:

I think literacy is beyond just knowing how to read and write and do some numeracy. I think it’s also about anything that you do, intentionally, that ends up developing your knowledge, your knowledge of the larger world. Not just knowing how to read and write. That’s how I define literacy. (Interview, 6/29/18)

Mungu’s description of literacy centers on the process of doing something intentionally that increases one’s knowledge, not solely as a result of reading and writing. This ideology connects with the Kinyerwanda word ‘kujijuka,’ meaning to “have some fair knowledge of life and the world around you” (Personal communication, 2/16/19). Mungu does not address literacy in relationship to written language or text, but to people building or developing knowledge through actions and experiences. For some members of the Agace community, literacy or ‘being literate,’ does not include the negotiation of
written texts, but the accumulation of lived experiences and interactions with others as the medium for building knowledge and meaning.

These perceptions of literacy were further explored during a collaborative inquiry group when members of the Agace community discussed literacy events and practices that were specific to their village. Some scholars suggest that literacy events are associated with an observable occasion in which people interact directly with written texts (Hamilton, 2000), and literacy practices refer to people’s behaviors, values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships with written texts (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1995). The participants expanded these definitions beyond the notion of written texts during this inquiry session. Each participant was provided a marker, and they wrote words and phrases on chart paper that reflected their perceptions and experiences with literacy events and practices in the community. The following list was generated:

**Types of Literacy Events and Practices:**
Conversations between parents and their children; sector or cell meetings; discussing social conflict resolutions; funerals; women gathering in the evening; taking notes from a meeting; reading the bible, drawing pictures on a house or building; umuganda program every last week of the month; community policing; reading road signs; singing lyrics from songs; watching television; listening to the radio (news, soap operas, government functions); community service and meetings afterwards; preaching in church; telling riddles to each other; learning and singing songs in church; greetings in different forms; memorizing a poem; debating; writing an announcement and saying it through a megaphone (Inquiry Group, 7/4/18)

From my analysis, this data provides meaningful insight on the range and variation of the expansive definition of literacy events and practices in the community. In some cases, the literacy events and practices identified are directly connected to people’s interactions with written language like reading road signs, song lyrics, and the Bible. Whereas, there were many examples that did not include the mediation of written language at all but
relied on the spoken word. For example, participants described conversations between parents and their children, sector\(^{18}\) meetings, discussing social conflict resolutions, women gatherings in the evening (ikimina), telling riddles to each other, and debating. From observations and interviews, it was not common for these events and practices to include written language, but it was clear that spoken language was the dominant form of literacy enacted. These oral forms of literacy will be addressed at length in Chapter 6. The everyday literacy practices that were highlighted during this reflective inquiry are distinctly juxtaposed from the school-based literacy practices as previously discussed.

**The Literacy and Illiteracy Binary**

In the dominant model, literacy is equated to one’s ability to read and write, whereas illiteracy is one’s inability to read and write. This deficit-based binary opposition, as explored in the conceptual framework, prevents an examination of different views of literacy and alternative literacy practices to surface based on cultural differences (Whitehouse and Colvin, 2001). Building off the collaborative inquiry session that explored literacy events and practices in Agace, participants introduced the literate and illiterate binary during their conversation as a way to further explore their perceptions and beliefs about literacy. Through discussion and questioning, participants collaborated to develop the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literate</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Someone has enough general/basic knowledge about something</td>
<td>Someone who does not have enough knowledge about something</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

\(^{18}\)Agace is a sector in the Rwamagana district. Within each sector, there is a governance structure, and these leaders facilitate monthly meetings for members of the community. The purpose of these meetings is to provide information about important personal, social, and political topics and news.
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To have knowledge in a field</td>
<td>No knowledge at all about a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at a satisfactory level</td>
<td>field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive judgement</td>
<td>Not receptive at all about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>constructive feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone who is skilled</td>
<td>Someone not skilled enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(knows little)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inquiry Group, 7/4/18

Though ‘literate’ and ‘illiterate’ are terms often referenced within the context of reading and writing, this chart presents an alternative perspective of these words that align to the findings in this study. Linguistically, ‘kujijuka,’ the closest word to ‘literacy’ in Kinyerwanda, means to “have some fair knowledge of life and the world around you” (personal communication, 2/16/19), and therefore knowledge and skills are centered in this discussion. Some participants articulated that people having basic knowledge in a field are literate in that field, whereas people that do not have any knowledge in a field are not literate in that field. The emphasis on specific and distinct fields beyond reading and writing highlights how literacy encapsulates more than a singular domain. The data suggests that being illiterate is contextual: if someone is not literate in one area of life, it does not mean they are not literate in other areas. Additionally, some participants equated being literate to having positive judgement, whereas people that are illiterate not being receptive to constructive feedback. This connects with the larger body of research in the field of social-emotional literacy.

Sefu, the translator of this study and also a member of the collaborative inquiry group, expressed his belief about the ways in which people learn new information. He states:
When you don’t read, you don’t learn any new information. Because through reading, it’s one of the ways you can know the information concerning the country, information concerning the world. I mean what is taking place around the world. When you don’t read, you don’t know about that. Reading is very important, though we don’t always do that here. (Interview, 7/3/18)

Though at first Sefu describes reading as a tool for learning new information, he further articulates that it is “one of the ways you can know information” suggesting that there are alternative ways beyond reading. Additionally, this excerpt highlights the value that Sefu places on reading and his belief in the importance of reading as way of knowing information about the country and the world.

**Literacy as Knowledge: Multiplicity of Literacies and Domains**

Barton and Hamilton (1998) assert “There are different literacies associated with different domains of life” (p. 7). They define domains in terms of places like home, school, and workplace, and suggest that literacy practices are specific to different contexts. During the collaborative inquiry session, as a follow-up to the assertion that being literate means “to have knowledge in a field at a satisfactory level (survival level),” participants further explored different literacies related to different domains for people in Agace. Participants shared the following literacies:

- Community literacy\(^\text{19}\)
- Computer literacy
- Religious literacy
- Mining literacy
- Farming literacy
- Fishing literacy
- Parenting literacy
- Health literacy
- Civic literacy

\(^{19}\) In this context, “community literacy” refers to people who are knowledgeable about the community, including its culture, history, traditions, and daily life practices. Community literacy was also referenced as “people having the skills to live in the village with others” (Fieldnotes, 7/4/18).
These eight literacies reflect the domains or fields that participants believe members of Agace have knowledge about at a satisfactory level, and they are not based on whether written language is utilized in these fields. There were a few literacies that participants further explored in greater detail. For example, when people have civic literacy, “they have an understanding of the country and politics,” and it is “someone who is really knowledgeable about the government and understands when there are elections” (Inquiry Group, 7/4/18). All of the literacies listed above connect with people having knowledge about those specific fields, and that knowledge is often developed from observations or conversations with others. Collins and Blot (2003) suggest that this diversity of possible literacies “refers loosely to any body of systematic useful knowledge” (p. 3).

Additionally, participants shared approximate percentages of people in Agace that are literate in specific domains based on their own experiences. The ranges of literacy rates they collectively determined for a few domains included approximately less than 5% for civic literacy, 3% for computer literacy, 40% for parenting literacy, and 90% for farming literacy (Inquiry Group, 7/4/18). Throughout the collaborative inquiry group, participants examined their own differing perceptions and views of literacy and explored alternative literacies based on their experiences.

**Summary**

New Literacy Studies (NLS) introduced the theory of literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Street, 1995) which highlighted a shift from the acquisition of literacy with an emphasis on reading and writing, to a broader understanding of literacy practices in their social and cultural contexts (Street
2005). This chapter began by understanding literacy as a reading and writing practice in Agace, specifically addressing themes related to time and domestic activities, parental engagement with reading and writing activities, access to written texts and its relationship to power, and the diversity of writing spaces and resources. Next, home and school connections were explored, specifically related to parent and teacher perceptions and the impact that home-school partnerships have on students’ experiences negotiating literacy in these two contexts. Finally, in an attempt to understand literacy as a social practice, I challenged the dominant discourse of literacy by examining literacies that exist in Agace beyond the technicalities of reading and writing. Members of the community articulated alternative definitions of literacy, identified new understandings as it relates to the literacy and illiteracy binary, and explored the plurality of literacies that exist in different domains of people’s lives in the village. In Chapter 6, I continue to discuss the plurality of literacies that exist in Agace, specifically with an analysis of orality and storytelling traditions in the village.
CHAPTER 6: ORALITY AND THE ART OF STORYTELLING

This chapter examines participants’ perceptions and beliefs related to orality, specifically oral literature, storytelling, and other forms of oral communication. It begins with a brief background on oral traditions in Agace, followed by specific examples of participants’ experiences with storytelling in the village, the ways in which storytelling has changed over time, and how participants describe the rationale for these changes. This chapter also addresses how storytelling is a way of teaching and connecting with others and how information is passed on and shared through observation and demonstration, specifically examining the relational aspect of orality and the ways that storytelling builds trust and connection between adults and children. Then, this chapter expands beyond storytelling to examine other forms of orality, and how these forms of oral communication show up in the community today. Finally, I present findings and analysis regarding connections made between written and unwritten forms, specifically the similarities and differences between writing and orality.

“Under the Moonlight”: Storytelling in the Past

Historically, the people of Agace practiced unwritten oral traditions, or oral literature, which is defined as “any form of verbal art which is transmitted orally or delivered by word of mouth.” Oral literature relies on a performer, or orator, to formulate stories using words during a specific time and place in the presence of an audience (Finnegan, 2012). Most participants in this study experienced oral literature, or

20University of Cambridge. World Oral Literature Project: www.oralliterature.org/about/oralliterature.html

102
storytelling\textsuperscript{21}, in their homes during childhood. As Mungu recalls, storytelling would occur each evening after dinner, and “we would sit on a mat under the moonlight and our grandmother would tell us stories” (Transcript, 6/29/18). The orator was often an older family relative, either parent, grandparent or elder in the community, and the audience members were the younger children in the family and community. The stories that were shared were mostly memorized and passed down or at times created in the moment. In addition to both fiction and nonfiction narrative structures, elders might orally share proverbs, riddles, and advice to the children. The orator and audience often gathered outside because they could see each other from the light of the moon or around the fire that would remain burning from cooking dinner. On the rare occasion, participants discussed telling stories in the salon, or sitting room of their homes. Gbenga, a former graduate of the Ibihumbi School shared, “writing was not common in the past so Rwandans used oral style; you could tell someone a story, then he would tell it to someone else to keep the history going” (Interview, 7/5/18). The people of Agace believed in the importance of passing history down from one generation to another through using the spoken word. Fatima, a mother of four children and teacher at the school, shared her memories of storytelling as a child:

When I was young, my mother and my father liked to tell us stories, especially at night. When the moon comes outside, there is light. My mother and my father, but especially my mother, after eating dinner and before going to sleep, we would stay outside on the ground and then my mother told us different stories. And I still remember all the stories. And it was very interesting because we picked out some moral lessons for those stories that can help us to change our mindset, our behavior. My mother told us many stories even riddles and later told us to repeat

\textsuperscript{21} Throughout this dissertation, the word ‘storytelling’ is used to describe telling stories orally, not in written form, unless otherwise specified.
the same stories and riddles, and it was very good because I feel I see my mother is a mother, a teacher, and a friend. (Transcript, 7/6/18)

This excerpt reinforces the notion that storytelling was a significant part of the daily ritual in many children’s lives in the past. In addition to Fatima recalling the time, place, and people from her storytelling experiences as a child, she also remembers specific stories that her parents shared as well. This is as a result of the repetition of stories, and children memorizing the stories based on hearing them over and over. In this passage, Fatima begins to explain that both her mother and father told stories, but then she further emphasizes that it was especially her mother. Mungu and Fatima both referenced women in their lives, either their grandmother or mother respectively, that were the primary orators and storytellers in their family. Lastly, Fatima highlighted that the stories often included moral lessons that were intended for her and her siblings to learn from and change their mindset. She builds on this concept by discussing the relational aspect of storytelling, specifically the ways in which she positively perceived her mother as a result of spending time with her during storytelling experiences. It was evident that storytelling practices can support the development of building trusting relationships between people, specifically between parents and children, elders and youth. Moral lessons and the relationships that are developed as a result of storytelling will be addressed in greater detail in the following sections.

Though most participants experienced storytelling in some capacity at an early age, some participants also shared that storytelling was not a significant part of their childhood. Some of the reasons included participants’ parents or grandparents were no longer alive as a result of illness or death from the genocide, they lived in another village
further away, or they were unable to spend time with their children because of domestic activities necessary for survival. Albert, a night watchman and father of four children, believed that children who experienced storytelling were more likely to attend and be successful at school. He did not remember his parents telling him stories while he was growing up and believed that “if they had done that [tell stories], I would have gone beyond Primary 2” (Transcript, 6/30/18). This perspective centers storytelling as an important component in the ways in which children engage in and with formal schooling experiences, and it suggests that community members do not perceive oral and written literacy as binary or oppositional. Additionally, this perspective lends insight into how one person conceptualizes the impact that storytelling has on young people because of the messages that are conveyed in stories and the relationships that are built between people during the storytelling experience.

**Morals in Oral Literature**

There is a common assumption that African stories are created to convey morals, but there are “plenty of evidence that many African tales contain neither direct nor indirect moralizing” (Finnegan, 2012, p. 366). Though some stories do end with a moral or proverb, others might be told to educate or reprimand children (Finnegan, 2012). To further understand storytelling in Agace from the past, specifically the intentionality and purpose of telling stories, participants shared examples of stories that they remember being told as a child. At times, participants shared the moral or lesson they believed was intended to be conveyed in the story. Mungu remembered the following story that his grandmother told him when he was younger:
I remember this story about a brother and a sister whose parents died when they were too little, but the parents, before they died, they had told them several ways of survival. And one particular day, after the parents had died, a beast came to this family’s house where only the brother and the sister lived and knocked on the door. The beast was trying to trick them and eat them. The beast had distorted his voice to sound like a neighbor, but then they kept asking the beast different questions to try to know if it was really their neighbor. It was in a song. It went like, "[sang in Kinyerwanda]." So that's like, "Can you tell me if your name is [inaudible] or what your name is?" And then, "Can you tell me the name of your eldest son?" So, they were asking some questions to see if that's really their neighbor, and in the end, the beast could not answer the questions. And then they said, "Oh, we know you're not the neighbor. You are the beast trying to eat us, so go away [laughter]." (Transcript, 6/29/18)

According to Mungu, the morals in this story include: people should never assume that everything is going to be alright, expect that some hardships might occur, and learn the necessary skills for survival. Some other lessons he discussed included asking the right questions and “not getting tricked by outer appearance, but to dig deep and understand more” (Transcript, 6/29/18). In this example, as an adult, Mungu quickly remembered a story from his childhood and retold it with fluency and ease. Since the same stories were often repeated over and over, it was common for people to easily access these stories from memory. Though Mungu described the moral of the story, he also reinforced the purpose of his grandmother telling stories was not always to learn a lesson, but sometimes solely to have a good time together. He stated that an older family relative might just want children to “know things from the past” and that “it is not necessary that you have to draw a moral out of every story” (Transcript, 6/29/18).

Mungu confirmed Finnegan’s (2012) assertion that not all stories are created to convey morals. The notion of children spending time with older relatives for the purposes of connection, entertainment, and fun is an essential component embedded in storytelling traditions.

106
Bishara, the mother of two primary school-aged children, explained that she still tells her children traditional stories and proverbs of the culture. She shared an example of a traditional Rwandan proverb:

A boy had a sister and the boy would hide the sister under a rock. The boy and the sister were orphans, and when the boy would go searching for food, he would hide the sister under a rock. Then, he would sing a song which the sister knew...he would say, if I come and sing the song, ‘The child to my mom, open I have come, I have killed the dove, it’s mine and yours. I have killed a rabbit, it’s mine and yours. And we will share the biggest of those I have killed.’ (Transcript, 6/30/18)

As evidenced in both examples, many of the oral stories were centered on morals about survival and family, in this case siblings taking care of each other. Throughout my observations, there appeared to be strong relationships among and within families and this was often confirmed during interviews. The stories and proverbs that people heard as children, specifically the morals and lessons that the characters learned in the stories, seemed to connect to participants’ lived experiences as adults as well. Daniel recounted, “My mom would gather us around and encourage us to be kind and be in peace with others, and I used to obey my parents” (Interview 7/2/18). From my observations, the people of Agace exemplified the encouragement that Daniel’s mother gave him as a child. I argue that the stories and proverbs people heard when they were children might influence how they interact with others as adults.

Though the intent of this dissertation is not to analyze oral literature for its content and form, there were a few similarities that existed in the examples above that are consistent with the research on oral literature in Africa (Finnegan, 2012). For instance, as often found in African stories, there is an emphasis on a trickster who outdoes someone else, often to “deceive them into killing themselves or their own relations, gobble up their...
opponents’ food in pretended innocence, divert the punishment for their own misdeeds on to innocent parties, and perform a host of other ingenious tricks’” (p. 335). In Mungu’s story, the beast was trying to trick the children by distorting his voice to sound like a neighbor so that he could eat them, but the children outsmarted him. Though it is most common for African stories to contain characters that are animals, there are also many stories about people, including legendary heroes, ancestors, and supernatural beings (Finnegan, 2012). Another similarity in both Mungu and Bishara’s stories was the use of music and song by the orator, specifically the singing from the perspective of the main characters of the stories. As I listened to participants tell their stories, the singing provided a performative aspect to the oration, and in most cases, joy and laughter to the storytelling experience.

**Storytelling Today**

According to participants in this study, the culture of storytelling has significantly changed over the last twenty years, and there is a perception that “storytelling is not the common thing that people do anymore” (Interview, 6/29/18). Some parents mentioned that they do not have time to tell stories to their children because they are too busy with domestic activities or working to support their family. For example, parents might have a long day cultivating in the farm, then they go home, eat dinner, and go directly to sleep (Fieldnotes, 6/29/18), or parents might get home from work and find their children have gone to sleep already (Interview, 7/5/18). To that end, Gbenga asserts, “It’s not that parents don’t love their children, but it is because time is scarce” (Interview, 7/5/18).

From these examples, it appears as though parents had more time to engage their children with stories in the past as opposed to many parents having a scarcity of time today.
Conversely, other parents discussed still gathering their children together, though not necessarily to tell stories, but to share advice and encouragement. Some types of advice included completing their school revisions, listening to the teacher during class, and being a respectful member of the community. Daniel, a father of two, discussed his current storytelling practices by stating, “they [his children] gather around, and I tell them that they should obey their teachers” (Transcript, 7/2/18). The traditional approach to storytelling, specifically stories with characters, settings, and plot structures, as addressed above were less practiced in Agace. There were more observations of families talking about their day or gossiping with each other as opposed to traditional storytelling as participants described when they were younger.

Another reason that storytelling has changed in the Agace community is because of the development and use of technology and its impact on people. When participants were younger, televisions and mobile phones were either uncommon or nonexistent. Though not all members of the Agace community have a television presently, there are a few homes and bars where people gather to watch it together. For example, my fieldwork in Agace was during the 2018 World Cup, and adults and children in the village would come from near and far to watch the soccer game together. Here is an example of villagers convening around a television at the local bar:
Historically, families and children would gather under the moonlight\textsuperscript{22} or around the fire to tell stories, but now, families and children are more likely to gather around a television. Arguably, there was less distraction from technology in the past and therefore families were provided more time to convene for storytelling, whereas people are more likely to be distracted today because of technological devices, taking them away from engaging with each other. Mungu presents a counterargument to the rise of technology in the community and how it affects storytelling. He discusses ways to balance storytelling traditions from the past while using new technologies in the present:

One way we can do that is not to totally go back in time and bring back what's gone, but to see how we can have a little bit of mix. For instance, if we are talking about kids liking movies more than just sitting around under the moonlight and telling stories, how can you do that as a family together, and make sure that the movie you watch brings you together and you can have a talk. So it's not just for kid's fun, but also it's to bring people together. It's not just about the kids. The

\textsuperscript{22} The moonlight was often referenced when participants discussed storytelling, and this could be related to nighttime being a time for leisure and community activities. On a more practical level, the moonlight provides light for members of the community with no electricity.
whole family has a time, maybe after dinner, and they watch a movie together. And they select a movie, and maybe they have some little talk about the movie. It has some aspect of the past, which is the family coming together after dinner. And then, of course, the new technology. I don't think you can have one thing. You cannot just jump into the new technology, but also cannot go back in time. (Transcript, 6/29/18)

In this excerpt, Mungu explored ways that storytelling and technology can co-exist by recognizing the importance of maintaining the cultural traditions of oral storytelling while acknowledging the development and increased use of technology. When families gather to watch movies on television, followed by conversations about the movie, Mungu believes this could help restore traditional practices of families gathering together to engage in conversations. Though this example attempts to seek solutions to the perceived challenge of maintaining storytelling practices today, there are notable similarities and differences between the stories that were passed down from generations and the common western-oriented movies that are accessible in the village today.

Marshee, a 51-year-old woman who works at the orphanage in Agace and raised in a different village in the southern province of Rwanda, also believed that youth in Agace are too busy engaged with technology, more specifically television and phones. From her experience, though not many people still practice traditional storytelling, she noticed that “in villages where there is no television and phones, they are still telling stories” (Transcript, 7/8/18). She works diligently at the orphanage to continue oral traditions by telling stories to the girls every Friday evening. She tells them about the values that characterize a Rwandan girl, how girls behaved during her youth and the challenges they faced, and ways the girls can maintain strong values (Transcript, 7/8/18). She further articulates her perspective on what values should continue by stating, “In
Rwandan culture, a girl should not come home late in the night. If someone sees you in the bar late at the night, he disqualifies you and says you would not be a good mom or wife for the family” (Transcript, 7/8/18). Marshee conceptualizes storytelling within the context of giving advice to the young girls within her care. Though there are elements of storytelling, Marshee’s examples center more on orally sharing her opinions and beliefs with children as opposed to the traditional storytelling forms as previously explored.

This section traces how storytelling practices have changed in the Agace community as a result of people’s increased engagement with domestic activities and work for survival. Additionally, it is clear that the development, access and use of technology has shifted the ways in which storytelling exists in people’s homes in the village. While parents might not have time to tell stories to their children, in turn, young people are more interested in engaging with technological devices like televisions and mobile phones. In the next section, I discuss how the shift in oral storytelling culture has impacted the ways participants articulated their perceptions and experiences in building relationships with others.

**Building Relational Trust Through Oral Storytelling**

An essential component of oral literature is the interaction between human beings, more specifically the face-to-face and in-the-moment interaction between the orator and audience (Finnegan, 2012). At times, the orator might actively engage the audience with the narration by having them recite sections of a story, add sound affects during certain parts, and sing phrases or choruses. This is different from other literacies like reading and writing because they are often practiced alone or in isolation whereas storytelling relies on interactions between people. Fatima discussed her perception about why
storytelling is important and the impact it has on children’s relationships with their parents:

It is important because first of all, when you stay with your parents for storytelling, it helps the relationship between parents and their kids. It is good because kids don’t be afraid of their parents. So, they stay like friends, like parents, like advisor. So, it is better to-- it is good and helpful for the family and the kids because even if he made mistakes, he can immediately tell his story and find out something related to his behavior, it can change through the story. (Transcript, 7/6/18)

In this excerpt, Fatima asserts that when parents tell stories to their children, it supports the development of positive relationships, one where children are not afraid of their parents. She draws connections to parents assuming the role of friend or advisor when they are telling stories to their children, highlighting how storytelling is humanizing and grounded in human connection. That is, through face-to-face and in-the-moment interactions coupled with the content of the story itself, children not only learn valuable life lessons, but also develop positive family relationships.

During many interviews, when comparing past and present storytelling practices, participants discussed either extended families not living together as often or the difficulty of getting family and friends together anymore. For example, a grandmother could be living in Agace, and the sons either live in the city [Kigali] or are scattered around in other provinces. Historically, most families lived in the same house or compound, but now there is a perception that “the togetherness of the family is not as strong anymore” (Transcript, 6/29/18). The reason for families to geographically spread out more than in the past is because of people seeking opportunities outside of the village. Even when families are in close geographic proximity to each other, it was repeatedly shared that since everyone is busy, it is not simple to get everyone together. Bishara
further explores the rationale for why family and friends are not gathering as often for storytelling in the village now as opposed to the past. She states:

Everyone is busy. The friendship is reduced. If you don’t love someone it’s always hard to tell a story. In my time, when it was in the summer season, people could make sorghum beer, and they call the people in the community to sit together and share beer, share food…and tell stories. There was a relationship, people would get time for each other, which is no longer practiced. But now, after someone has harvested his sorghum, he keeps it in his house. He keeps it to himself. (Transcript, 6/30/18)

In this excerpt, Bishara addresses important characteristics of storytelling as it relates to human connection and relationships with others. That is, she introduces the notion of ‘friendship’ and ‘love’ being fundamental traits for storytelling to exist. If people are either too busy or too focused on their own needs, friendships might not be strong which in turn makes storytelling more challenging. During the translation session with Sefu, we discussed this finding at length. He confirmed that when he was a child, he remembered people coming together more frequently, sharing sorghum beer while conversing and telling stories to each other late into the night, but today it does not exist like that anymore. Gbenga further supported the notion of storytelling traditions being a way to build trust and connection among people in the village. He states, “one of the ways to continue storytelling in the village is that people should approach older people with experience in life, and those people can tell you how they lived in their time, and you would trust what they tell you because it is the original information from the person that faced those experiences” (Transcript, 7/5/18). Historically, as previously discussed, storytelling practices were transmitted from elders to youth. However, Gbenga offers an alternative perspective to continuing traditional storytelling practices today by calling upon young people to seek out their elders to hear stories and learn about their histories.
This shift in approach from the elders calling young people together to the young people approaching their elders is an important finding to be explored in further research.

**Beyond Storytelling: Other Forms of Orality**

This study considers literacy as a way of communicating thoughts and beliefs utilizing a multiplicity of forms. In the previous chapter, I examined dominant literacies that included reading and writing, then explored storytelling in the above section as another form of literacy practice. To further advance the conversation regarding the plurality of literacies, or ways in which members of Agace communicate thoughts and beliefs, I analyze other forms of orality that were practiced in the village. From observations and interviews throughout my fieldwork, it was clear that *gossiping*, *quarrelling, and debating* were forms of verbal expression and thought that many participants discussed as a way of orally communicating and building relationships with others.

**Communicating Through “Gossip”**

When describing the ways in which people socialize with each other in Agace, many participants discussed how *gossip*\(^{23}\) was a common type of communication or topic of conversation. One consistent question I asked participants during my interviews was, “How do you learn new information in the community?” The goal of this question was to further explore ways that participants learn new information either from written text and/or unwritten, verbal communication. Almost all participants in the study described how people in the community talk with and about each other often, and never rely on written communication to learn new information. Mungu describes:

\(^{23}\) In some African studies scholarship, this is conceptualized as “rumor.”
As a rural area, people talk, people gossip very much. And most of the time, it’s about getting the news out, spreading the news very quickly. And the focus, there was a saying that goes, ‘The negative story goes faster than the positive’ (Transcript, 6/29/18)

Considering the conceptual framework of this study is located in understanding literacy as a social practice, this excerpt highlights the notion that context is a critical component in understanding the practices that exist within it. That is, since Agace is a rural village, gossip is considered more common than urban locations around the country. As discussed, the geographic location and population size\(^{24}\) results in many members of the village knowing each other in some capacity, therefore increasing the possibilities for people to talk with and about each other. Additionally, Mungu discusses the intentionality of gossiping with each other is to spread information to others quickly. Some examples of topics that people gossip about include when someone: gets a new job, gets more land either for living or farming, and gets more livestock. Also, another common topic that people talk a lot about is related to family issues (e.g.: if the family is getting along, if a married couple stays in the same room) (Interview, 6/29/18; Fieldnotes). Bishara further supports the concept of gossiping as a common practice in the village when she responded to the question, “Do people tell stories to each other in the community?” The intentionality of this question was to further examine oral storytelling in the present day, though Bishara responded by stating, “People tell me about what happened in the community, like the fighting that has happened in the community, the quarrels, those that have fault at home” (Interview, 6/30/18). Examining gossip connects with this study because it is perceived by participants as a form of

\(^{24}\) According to the most recent population census, Agace has 21,145 people, including 10,122 males and 11,023 females (Personal communication, 3/18/19).
storytelling. Though not in the traditional ways that were previously discussed, one of 
the purposes of gossiping, like storytelling, is to tell stories that communicate 
information, thoughts, and beliefs from one person to another.

During a long walk in the village with Sefu one morning, approximately a week 
after the initial transect walk described in Chapter 4, we discussed the various social 
locations where people might engage with talking and gossiping with others. Below is a 
table that includes all of the social locations in the village that Sefu identified, and a brief 
description of the types of oral conversations that might occur in each location. I 
maintained the order in which they were originally shared during our conversation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Location</th>
<th>Types of Oral Conversations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbershop</td>
<td>When people are waiting to be shaved, they start conversations about different shaving styles. Sometimes they discuss the pictures/posters on the wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>In the evening after work, before going home, people have a drink (either beer or soda) and talk about their day. Sometimes the television is on and they discuss movies or music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector Meeting</td>
<td>The local leader calls a meeting once a month to communicate what is happening in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>There are limited conversations during the service because people are listening to one person, though before the service begins and after it is over, people convene to have conversation with each other. People also use the church space outside of the service for church meetings and choir rehearsal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>The conversation is related to the football match, including strategies the team should use to win, and the strong and weak points of the teams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Before and after class, children gather to have conversations often about class, the lessons, and strategies they can use to pass difficult lessons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The conversation is often related to trading activities, including the prices of the goods, bargaining over prices, buying and selling, and cheating one another. When not trading, people have conversations (“gossiping”) about others or what is happening in the community.

Social Locations and Types of Oral Conversations
Fieldnotes, 7/8/18

This conversation with Sefu was prompted at our first stop of the morning while he was getting a haircut at the barbershop. According to Sefu, when people are waiting for and during their haircut, they talk with the other people that are in the shop. It would be considered disrespectful or rude if people did not talk with each other while waiting. After we left, I asked him to share with me other locations where people might have conversations or gossip with each other. Sefu discussed the bar in the evening after work to “refresh the mind” (Interview, 7/8/18). Typically, the conversations at the bar start by asking questions about each other’s day, what went well in the day and what did not. Considering most people do not have televisions in their home, they might go to the bar to watch a sporting event or the news. Another common meeting place for members of the community is when the local leader calls for a sector meeting to communicate information about what is happening in the community and members of the community ask questions. As discussed in Chapter 4, the church is also a common place where people commune and talk, mostly before and after the service. Lastly, the playground and school are common locations for children to gather and connect, while it is common for adults to meet and engage with conversations at the market. All of these social locations are centered on oral communication as the dominant form of expressing
thoughts and ideas. Other than in the school and church, there was no evidence of reading and writing in the other locations.

The Thin Line Between Quarrelling and Debating

As previously discussed, people spend time talking, sharing information, and gossiping with each other in the village, and at times, these social encounters are in the form of quarrelling or debating. According to Sefu, “quarrelling happens between two people, and in most cases, there are misunderstandings, or someone has done the wrong thing against the other” (Interview, 7/2/18). One afternoon, as we walked home from a day of observations at the school, we encountered two women on the street yelling at each other in Kinyerwanda. Sefu explained that one woman was yelling at the mother of a child that allegedly stole sorghum from her field. Sefu believes that quarrelling is common because people in the village spend a lot of time at home and do not have jobs. Additionally, he stated that “when people are always together, they have a lot to quarrel over” (Interview, 7/2/18). This further supports the notion of social context influencing the types of oral communication practices that exist in this village. Bishara also suggested that fighting, or quarrelling, is common in the village, and she discussed ways she would like it to change:

In the normal life here, people are always in a conflict. I can start by teaching the married couples…the way the whole family should live together in peace…the kids…the parents. Because children today, they learn from us parents and you find that if parents don’t have love, then the kids don’t have love. They copy what we have. If a family spends the whole night fighting, what do you think the kids will learn? Do you think the family will have peace? We need teachings related to families and the married couple. Because everything that is bad starts with the family. Families are the best for society. (Interview, 6/30/18)
In this excerpt, Bishara acknowledged that quarrelling exists in the village, specifically highlighting that it often begins in the home, and that young people learn quarrelling by watching their parents. This supports another common theme that emerged from the data that people in Agace learn from observing other people engaged with activities and cultural practices. Thus, Bishara believes that in order to improve quarrelling between people, it must start with teaching the family, more specifically the parents, how to work through conflict without fighting. Quarrelling is another form of orality, communicating thoughts and ideas using verbal expression.

Many participants also referenced debating as a common oral tradition that occurs in the village between members of the community. At times, a debate might appear as a quarrel, but it is typically more social and might involve people drinking beer around a fire or in a bar together. Mungu defines debate as “a discussion between two or more people around a topic with one side opposing and another side supporting a particular point.” He goes on to describe that “sometimes debates are just to debate, just to make sure that I convince you that I am right” (Interview, 6/29/18). There is a range and variation of debate topics that participants discussed, including current events like the decision for Senegal, the last African football team, to leave the 2018 World Cup. Other examples of common “hot” topics that people might debate include conflict between married couples, “religion turning into a business,” the genocide, drinking versus non-drinking religions, and politics that people are hearing from news stations on the radio (Interview, 6/29/18). Though a deep analysis of debate practices is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to draw connections between debating and oral traditions in Agace. Gossiping, quarrelling, and debating connects to the ways in which members of
this community orally communicate their thoughts and ideas utilizing a multiplicity of structures. Though storytelling is a traditional oral tradition in Agace, this section introduced other oral traditions that people in the community practice today.

**Literacy and Orality Connections**

As discussed at length in the theoretical framework of this dissertation, literacy and orality have been presented in the dichotomous ‘great divide’ theory as a way to categorize literate and illiterate communities, specifically writing versus orality (Gutierrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009). The common assumption is that literate communities can write and speak while illiterate communities can speak and not write. I argue that writing is not the sole defining characteristic that comprises literate communities. If *kujijuka*, the word for literacy in Kinyerwanda means to “have some fair knowledge of life and the world around you,” then members of the Agace community, a community grounded in orality and oral tradition, display multiple kinds of literacy within their own social context. When comparing reading and writing practices with traditional storytelling, Gbenga states:

> Storytelling is better than reading and writing. In my view, a child trusts their parents more than anyone else. It is possible that I can read things but when I don’t know the reason of the author to write it, I don’t understand it. I might even not know the reasons why he/she wrote the book. He might write according to his feelings, but for the parents, you as a child have trust in them. I always tell myself that even if reading is good but if you are lucky to get parents’ guidance through telling you their experiences that can help you a lot, sometimes more (Interview, 7/5/18).

In this excerpt, Gbenga explores the similarities and differences between reading, writing, and storytelling by acknowledging the inherent relational aspect in storytelling that might not exist for him with reading and writing. He is consciously aware of his own meaning-
making process with the information being transmitted – whether through written or oral communication. That is, Gbenga questions the validity of information from books as he does not know the author, whereas he believes that learning information through oral transmission from your parents is more reliable and beneficial. Gbenga’s perspective connects with Ong’s (1982) assertion that in an oral culture “learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known” whereas writing “separates the knower from the known” and increases personal disengagement and distancing (p. 45).

Another example of the differences between unwritten and written language is the use of performance and dramatization that occurs during orality and traditional storytelling. That is, as participants described their storytelling experiences, they discussed their parents or grandparents using a variety of verbal and nonverbal cues to assist in conveying the meaning of their stories. Finnegan (2012) posits:

The artist is typically face to face with his public and can take advantage of this to enhance the impact and even sometimes the content of his words. In many stories, for example, the characterization of both leading and secondary figures may appear slight; but when in literate cultures must be written, explicitly or implicitly, into the text can in orally delivered forms be conveyed by more visible means – by speaker’s gestures, expression, and mimicry (p. 7).

Storytelling requires listeners, or the audience, to receive various forms of information that is being conveyed simultaneously, and then they are called upon to synthesize all the verbal and nonverbal cues that are transmitted in order to make meaning of the story. For example, if the speaker is using a combination of spoken language, songs, gestures, and expressions, the listener has to ‘read’ all of these verbal and nonverbal cues to understand what is happening. Arguably, this is more nuanced and complex than solely reading
written words. The actual performance does not come through in written texts, making storytelling, both for the orator and listener, a unique and intellectually literate experience.

Fatima offers another perspective on storytelling, more specifically how storytelling impacts memory and cognitive development. She states:

If you tell stories, I think that your brain works better because you tell a story that is coming from your mind without reading anything. When you are telling a story, you have many things memorized in your brain. And your brain works better because you have many things you are able to memorize and not forget them (Interview, 7/6/18).

In this excerpt, Fatima conceptualizes the notion of oral memorization, a topic that is often addressed within the study of orality. In oral cultures, it is considered a valued asset to have verbal memory skills (Ong, 1982). For the purposes of this discussion, it is important to identify the distinction between verbatim memorization that is commonly done from a written text versus memorization from the recitation of unwritten texts that have been repeated over time. For Fatima and other participants in Agace, they memorized stories, proverbs, and riddles as a result of consistent recitation and repetition by their elders, not from written texts. Therefore, as is common in most oral cultures, the reproduction of stories ranges from attention to accuracy and authenticity to verbal variability and improvisation (Finnegan, 2012). In the excerpt above, Fatima also discussed having many things memorized in your brain. As the literature on orality suggests, people in oral cultures are not solely focused on memorizing the words as transmitted during recitation, but also on the nonverbal components as well, including intonation, volume, facial expressions, and body language. When participants shared their stories with me, these memorized nonverbal characteristics were also evident during
their recitation. Lastly, Fatima mentioned that *your brain works better* as a result of memorization, suggesting that there is a correlation between one’s ability to memorize and their cognitive abilities.

**Classroom Implications: Storytelling Pedagogy and Student Writing**

As discussed in previous chapters, reading and writing in the English language are the dominant literacies taught and practiced at the Ibihumbi School. Though orality and storytelling in Kinyerwanda are significant to the history and culture of Agace, it was not common for teachers to use these practices in the classroom. From my observations, teachers focused on the delivery of the national curriculum, and it was often presented utilizing a scripted approach as prescribed by the textbook. That is, teachers would ask explicit questions directly from the textbook to students using a call-and-response approach, followed by the students raising their hand to answer the questions. There were limited observable deviations from this practice across multiple teacher and classroom observations in Primary 6. However, Zaki, the Primary 6 science teacher, discussed the ways in which he attempts to incorporate aspects of storytelling into the classroom. He compared storytelling practices to “case studies” in his teaching by sharing the following hypothetical example:

I can say something like, one day, there was a young man called Sam. Sam caught a cough. They brought him to the hospital. At the hospital, they treated him, and then he got better. He’s now at home. I can ask the students, ‘Can you explain how Sam was feeling when he got sick?’ Then the students can start saying Sam was feeling bad because he was coughing and had bad respiration. So, it’s like a case study. (Interview, 7/9/18)

In this excerpt, it is clear that Zaki is utilizing story elements, like the incorporation of characters, setting, and plot structure, to further enhance students’ understanding of the
respiratory system in the biology unit. Additionally, he is attempting to increase student engagement by making relatable and relevant connections to the content he is teaching. Of particular note is the way in which Zaki conceptualized storytelling in this context. Though storytelling practices are grounded in passing traditional stories from one generation to another, it was clear that Zaki perceived storytelling as another tool to convey the information presented in the curriculum.

Though oral storytelling was not a common pedagogical framework or instructional strategy that was observed in the classroom, Rashad, the Primary 6 English teacher, assigned students the following writing task for homework at the end of class one day: “Write a short story which talks about the resources in Rwanda” (Fieldnotes, 7/5/18). In preparation for this homework assignment, Rashad used the textbook to teach students about the various natural and artificial resources in Rwanda. I returned to the same classroom on the following day to read and hear the stories that students wrote. Rashad started the lesson by explaining to students that they were going to “present” their written story, which 28 out of 58 students completed, to the entire class (Fieldnotes, 7/6/18). At first, the students timidly raised their hands to participate, but then one-by-one students went up to the front of the room to read their stories. Pictured below is an example of a notebook page with a story that one student wrote:
Figure 11: “Write a Story” Homework Assignment (2018)
Photo: J. Maraia

This example is representative of the stories that most students wrote. That is, the writing includes a list of natural and artificial resources that are common in Rwanda and the importance of these resources, all the topics that were presented and written down during the lesson the day before. The student writing appears to be using non-narrative structures that do not include dominant characteristics of narrative, like character, setting, and plot. Though participants described these types of narrative structures when discussing oral storytelling in the past and present, I noticed that they were not used in the students’ writing for this particular assignment. Additionally, the ways in which students presented their story in the classroom was unlike storytelling traditions as well. That is, as described in the sections above, orators or elders did not read their stories to
their audience but recited stories from memory. In this particular classroom, students read their stories aloud to their peers from their notebooks. The students’ composition and presentation of their written stories as observed within this school-based context appeared in opposition to how participants described their experiences of orality and storytelling in the village.

**Summary**

The people of Agace, like most of Rwanda and Africa at-large, are rooted in a history of oral tradition and storytelling. This chapter began with examining participants’ experiences and perceptions with storytelling in the past, including the intentionality of storytelling and the existence of morals in oral literature. Then, I explored how storytelling exists in the village today, particularly with a focus on the impact that storytelling has on the development of relational trust between adults and children. From an asset-based orientation, in light of the ways that storytelling has changed in the village, I analyzed other forms of orality that are practiced in the community, including gossiping, quarrelling, and debating. This chapter concluded with an analysis of the perceptions of literacy and orality, specifically the similarities and differences between written and unwritten forms of communication. It was clear that members of the Agace community did not perceive written and oral literacies as dichotomous in the ways that some scholars have theorized these concepts in the literature. Lastly, I examined literacy and orality within the context of classrooms at the local school by exploring storytelling as a pedagogical practice and the influence of oral traditions on student writing.
CHAPTER 7: Conclusions and Implications

This ethnographic study investigated literacy events and practices, including orality and storytelling, within the social and cultural context of Agace, a rural village in the Eastern province of Rwanda. Considering the limited qualitative research on understanding literacy practices in this context, this study intentionally engaged with and centered the experiences and perspectives of the local people directly in the community. I begin this concluding chapter by discussing my development as a researcher and acknowledge the importance of context and relational trust when working in communities that are unfamiliar. Then, I describe implications of the research findings articulated in the proceeding chapters, including the need to continue expanding global definitions and markers of literacy beyond the dominant discourse by acknowledging the multiplicity of literacy practices that show up in culturally diverse contexts around the world. The findings also suggest the value of developing a pedagogy of storytelling as a culturally sustaining practice through the use of cultural traditions and community strengths in instructional approaches. I then consider the school-home literacy partnership and the notion of hybrid literacy practices leading to productive contexts for teaching and learning both at school and in the Agace community. Finally, I close with implications for practitioners to adopt an inquiry stance as a way to build on local knowledge and understand the ways in which people of the Agace community envision the purpose and functionality of the new GROW Community Center, and specific ways the Rwanda-based GROW team might develop practitioner inquiry communities to inspire Community Center programming decisions that are inclusive of community-based literacy practices and resources.
Context and Connection Matter

In this section, I discuss the following points of reflection: (1) a critical reexamination of my own beliefs, (2) the importance of context, and (3) the importance of developing relationships and authentic engagement with participants. Though initially apprehensive about conducting research in a remote location over 7,000 miles away from home that is culturally and geographically different from my own, my experiences in Agace were some of the most important in my personal and professional life. During my fieldwork, I was no longer grounded in my own context, a place that is familiar and comfortable, but I was immersed in a new setting where I was an outsider of the community. The notion of being an ‘outsider’ challenged me to remain open and confront my assumptions in order to develop new understandings of my perceptions and biases. Considering that Agace is significantly different from my own context, my experiences there expanded my understanding and definition of literacy and education. Scholars have noted that conducting inquiry-based research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) in unfamiliar contexts and communities can significantly impact a researcher’s work and life. My experiences in Agace compelled me to critically examine my own perceptions and beliefs, gaining a deeper understanding of my own context.

The importance of historical, social, and political context was another valuable lesson I learned during my fieldwork in Agace. Literacy and orality are contextual, situational and unique to individuals and communities across the world. The ways that researchers and participants interpret experiences and perspectives is directly connected to their understanding of the context in which it occurs (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), and interpretations of context has significant impact on how data is collected, analyzed,
and represented in writing. In order to seek understanding of the various meanings assigned to these constructs, researchers must develop firsthand knowledge of the contexts in which these lived social practices are enacted. When studying literacy and orality, Delpit (1995) reminds us of contextual factors such as “the relationship of the individuals talking, where the interaction is taking place, what prior knowledge and/or understanding the participants bring to the communication encounter, the gestures used, the speaker’s ability to adjust the message if the audience doesn’t understand, intonation, facial expressions, and so forth” (p. 96). These considerations were not only critical for this study, but they also have implications for other educational researchers and practitioners as well. Often in educational research and reform, scholars, researchers, and politicians are posing solutions to perceived problems without having a deep understanding or awareness of the context, which can have a damaging impact on communities, especially those that are historically marginalized. More research that recognizes the importance of context when understanding literacy practices, and that also specifically examines literacy and orality in other (rural) African communities could help mitigate these realities.

In addition to the significance of context, this qualitative study taught me the importance of relationships and authentic engagement with others. Throughout my fieldwork, building meaningful, respectful, and reflective relationships with participants in the village was my priority. I spent significant time visiting participants’ homes and engaging with conversations and activities as a way to build relational trust. Going beyond building “rapport” to developing authentic and honest relationships with participants was a critical component to intentionally learning about the Agace
community (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Though I was an outsider, the people of Agace welcomed me into their community with warmth and generosity, being open and willing to share their stories about literacy and orality. In my training as an educational researcher, I learned to practice being receptive and connected during my fieldwork while assuming a relational stance, meaning to receive other people’s stories and perceptions while consistently reflecting on my own assumptions. When conducting research, especially within a context other than the researcher’s own, taking a reflexive stance is not only critical, but absolutely necessary. Reflexivity is when researchers are reflective on how their personal background, culture, and experiences influence their interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2014). There are scholarly implications related to further understanding the relational stance of researchers and reflexivity, specifically from the perspective of being an outsider to a community.

**Expanding Global Markers of Literacy**

Historically, the dominant definition of literacy is determined by the functionality and technicality of reading and writing, or the *autonomous model of literacy* (Street 1995). As a result of this limited definition, individuals and entire populations have become branded as illiterate if they cannot read and write. Throughout this dissertation, I argued that literacy is broader and more inclusive than this hegemonic definition that perpetuates a deficit perspective on communities. ‘Literacy’ in English does not directly translate in Kinyerwanda, the local language in Agace. *Kujjuka*, or a word similar to literacy according to participants in the study, translates to having knowledge or skill in a particular topic, trade or activity. Though literacy events are often mediated by written texts (Barton and Hamilton, 1998), in the Agace context, literacy practices are a way of
using knowledge, experience, and perspective to communicate ideas, make meaning, or accomplish an activity. This was evidenced in the data gathered throughout my fieldwork as participants articulated a range and variation of literacies beyond the dominant discourse on reading and writing. For example, participants often discussed farming literacy and fishing literacy as dominant literacies in the community because these are practices that are accomplished with knowledge and proficiency. That is, people in Agace have knowledge, or literacy, in other activities that are learned and exercised with fluency that are not connected to written text. What the western world views as literate does not correlate to what the people in Agace view as literate. Specific definitions are not useful and potentially harmful when local and social contexts are not considered.

Throughout this study, I position literacy practices as enacted and perceived in many ways based on the social context in which they occur, and that orality and storytelling are significant modes of literacy that must be acknowledged. As the data describes, teaching the technicalities of reading and writing is central at the Ibihumbi School. These literacies are not commonly practiced in students’ homes in the village, creating a disconnect between the types of literacies students engage with in both school and home contexts. As discussed in Chapter 6, this research highlights the dominant form of literacy practiced in participants’ homes is orality and storytelling and acknowledges that these practices do not appear in the curricula or instructional practices at the school. A way to make school more meaningful for students is to enact pedagogies that are centered on the multifaceted and innovative literate and cultural practices that exist in the village of Agace and its people.


**Storytelling as Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

Beginning in the 1990’s, asset-based pedagogies began to take form, specifically Ladson-Billings’s (1995) *culturally relevant pedagogy* (CRP) which highlighted the importance of making teaching and learning relevant to the languages, literacies, and cultural practices of students from their respective communities (Paris & Alim, 2017). Ladson-Billings (1995) provided the groundwork for Paris’s (2012) scholarship on *culturally sustaining pedagogy* which “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism” in schools (p. 93). The difference between relevant and sustaining are particularly important in this discussion because as the research suggests, storytelling is a cultural tradition in Agace that is becoming less practiced in the community and individual families. A *pedagogy of storytelling* as a culturally sustaining practice would utilize the cultural traditions and strengths of the community as an instructional approach to delivering curricula at school. The existing instructional approaches at the Ibihumbi School, as Chapter 4 discusses, heavily relies on students copying written text from the blackboard to their notebook and a call-and-response question-and-answer interplay between teacher and student. A pedagogy of storytelling has the potential to bridge the linguistic and cultural resources of students to the teaching of the prescribed curricula, inclusive of the government-mandated content and skills, as dictated by the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry’s Curriculum Framework (2015) serves as the mandated guide to competence-based teaching and learning expected in all schools across the country from pre-primary to the end of secondary. As Chapter 4 describes, this framework not only maps the curriculum expectations for each subject across grades, but it also articulates the
instructional strategies that are expected for teachers to use in the classroom. It is important to note that throughout the 341-page framework, there is not a single reference to storytelling as a curricular topic or pedagogical approach. Additionally, as the data shows in Chapter 6, storytelling often, though not always, included a moral in the story, and interestingly, there are 43 instances when the word ‘moral’ appears in the national curriculum, usually stated in the objectives for various subjects. There seems to be a disconnect between the ways in which people learn morals at home as opposed to the ways in which people are expected to learn morals at school. Despite one of the East African Community (EAC) regional goals for education to “promote culture, traditions, and customs,” I argue that the mandated curricula and pedagogical practices that are enacted in the local school are disconnected from the community and culture.

Storytelling as a teaching methodology centers students’ experiences as the sources of knowledge and learning. As this research highlights, storytelling exists anytime people are together, whether in the form of traditional storytelling, gossiping, quarrelling, or debating, and thus the classroom is an ideal environment for teaching with this approach. In addition to storytelling in the classroom sustaining the oral traditions of Agace and reflecting community literacy practices, Kuyvenhoven (2009) articulates other benefits of using these practices in the classroom by describing that storytelling:

- Crosses cultures, ages, abilities, and interests;
- Creates understandable explanations of abstract ideas;
- Develops oral fluency, vocabulary, and a love of language;
- Stimulates classroom talk and listening abilities;
- Offers models for writing and helps children structure thought;
- Is highly motivational and develops social skills; and
- Nourishes self-esteem when children tell their own stories to listeners (p. 23).
Based on these assertions, there are many benefits to using storytelling as a pedagogical tool for teaching and learning in the classroom. Though, with the expectations prescribed in the Rwandan Ministry of Education’s Curriculum Framework, teachers reported feeling overwhelmed with the amount of content they must deliver to large classes of students. There are implications for teachers shifting their instructional approach, more specifically addressing the inherent tension between fulfilling government mandated curricula and using storytelling as a culturally sustaining pedagogy. This study suggests future research, specifically addressing the impact of storytelling on student motivation and engagement with school, the ways that storytelling in school sustains cultural traditions in the community, and effective teacher training and professional development related to storytelling as a pedagogical approach in the classroom.

Another important consideration, as discussed in Chapter 5, is the disconnect between the teaching style in the classroom and the ways in which students learn new information and skills in the community. Teachers at the Ibihumbi School spend most of their instructional time either reading from the textbook or chalkboard and asking students questions directly from the book. From my observations, teachers did not model or demonstrate the activities or tasks they were expecting students to accomplish (e.g.: modeling reading aloud, composing a piece of writing, or demonstrating oral presentation skills). For students outside of school in the context of their community and homes, they learned new information and skills by observing and listening to others. Human beings in oral cultures often learn by apprenticeship – like farming with experienced farmers or cooking with experienced cooks (Ong, 1982). Young people grow up observing the
actions of their elders closely, listening and repeating what they hear as a way to learn new skills with agency and independence. In addition to storytelling as a pedagogical practice in the classroom, teachers might consider incorporating instructional strategies that include demonstration and modeling as another way to enhance the learning experience for students. In an effort to envision new pedagogical practices that recover community-rooted forms of teaching and learning, demonstration and observation are approaches to teaching and learning that center Agace’s social and cultural practices of the past and present.

The Second Classroom: School-Home Literacy Partnerships

As the data suggests, parents in Agace believe it is important for their children to attend school, though it is not common for them to visit the school grounds or have interactions with their children’s teachers or administrators. There is a growing body of research that identifies the benefits of parent involvement in their children’s education at school, specifically the perception that parents should be active partners in their children’s schooling experience (Okeke, 2014). As opposed to schools placing the sole responsibility on parents in Agace to be involved in their children’s education, teachers and administrators should consider alternative strategies for engaging with parents as well. When teachers and administrators engage with parents and the community, they will have a deeper understanding of the plurality of literacies that exist outside the context of school and mandated curricula, and they can use these community-based literacies in their teaching practices. For these reasons, I propose two recommendations for supporting school and parent partnerships, including identifying alternative forms of communication with parents and teachers conducting home-based visits.
Parents that participated in this study shared concerns about teachers not communicating student academic or behavior issues with them. Most of the ways that teachers described communicating with parents was either in the form of writing a letter to the parent or calling their mobile phone to request an in-person meeting. These approaches assume that parents can read the letters or have mobile phones which was often not the case. It is important for teachers and administrators to consider alternative ways of communicating with families. For example, there could be a school-community liaison from the school focused on developing relationships with parents or teachers could directly visit homes to share information firsthand. Considering the oral traditions of the community, communication from the school should be oral and inclusive. Additionally, the data shows that the focus of the communication was mostly to convey negative information about the student as opposed to conveying positive information. My findings suggest the value of teachers building a non-deficient oriented relationship with parents by increasing dialogic engagement about the strengths of the student as well as the areas of improvement.

Additionally, it is important for teachers at the Ibihumbi School to acknowledge the existence of the “third space” (Gutiérrez, Barquedano-López, Tejeda, 1999) and “second classroom” (Campano, 2001) by extending their attention beyond the immediate classroom context and into students’ homes and other Agace community spaces. As Chapter 4 discusses, the mandated curricula and pedagogical practices currently utilized do not consider students’ literacies and identities outside of the classroom and school setting. It is crucial for teachers to learn from students and families beyond the school space and use these identities in the development of their curriculum and instruction. As
this research suggests, in order for meaningful and culturally sustaining learning to occur, classroom spaces must consist of hybrid literacy experiences and activities that link home and school practices (Gutiérrez, Barquedano-López, Tejeda, 1999). Hybridity exists when multiple literacies are acknowledged and used across contexts whether school literacies in the home and community, or home and community literacies in the school. Thus, hybrid literacy practices evolve from a culture of intentional collaboration and partnership between teachers, students, and parents. One way to systematically develop this collaboration in Agace is through teacher home visits so that “teachers can establish a deeper understanding and healthy relationship not only with the parents of the child, but also with every member of a particular family” (Okeke, 2014, p. 6). These partnerships can lead teachers to incorporating home and community literacies into the classroom. Some further research might include an analysis of the teacher’s role in this community context and their relationship with other members of the community; the types of hybrid literacy practices that emerge from the ‘second classroom’ and how they are incorporated into new learning experiences for students; and ways in which local teacher preparation or professional development programs support teachers in developing the skills for using multiple literacies that exist in the ‘second classroom’ to effectively bring them into the classroom setting.

**Building on Local Knowledge: Community Center Programming**

My work in Rwanda began three years ago as a volunteer with an American-based non-profit organization, referred to as GROW, that is committed to bringing American volunteers to work in the local public school and teach English classes to students, support teachers with new instructional practices, and donate resources like
books and school supplies to teachers and students. When I began, my volunteer experience focused on working with five literacy teachers in an effort to offer new curriculum and instruction ideas and methods in teaching reading and writing. At the time, I naively overlooked the literacy practices that existed in Agace and imposed my own assumptions and biases about the teaching of reading and writing onto the teachers with whom I was working. Throughout the process of this research study coupled with an extensive review of the scholarly literature, I have come to realize that this practice commonly occurs: outside western-based organizations with seemingly good intentions impose their ideas and beliefs on communities without listening to and building on local knowledge (Geertz, 1983).

After over a decade, GROW continues to demonstrate a passion and commitment to the Agace community, and this was evidenced by the organization raising significant money to build a Community Center in the village. The Community Center consists of four spacious rooms all serving different purposes, including an open classroom, a computer lab, a small administrative office, and a library. The actual building is on a large plot of land with an abundance of outdoor space for people to gather in the front and back. The GROW Director articulated that it was becoming increasingly more challenging to partner with the school because of administrative turnover and other governmental demands, and he wanted to support the development of a community space that extended the organization’s mission beyond working with the school to all the members of the Agace community including parents. From my conversation with participants in this study, members of the village are excited for the possibilities that the community center could bring to the people in the community. As my findings suggest,
participants articulated the desire to have a space to meet and share information, practice speaking English, and learn new technical skills like using computers and farming techniques. I recommend that the GROW Community Center’s programming is grounded in the local knowledge (Geertz, 1983) and experience of the community. That is, it is important that GROW remain committed to using and building off the collective knowledge, experiences, and perceptions of the community as a source for creating meaningful programs, events, and resources for the community.

The GROW organization is comprised of American and Rwandan-based teams of practitioners that include members of the Agace community. This is unique because NGOs or non-profit organizations are often outsiders of the communities in which they work. The five Rwandan practitioners of GROW, also participants in this study, are members of the Agace community and are responsible for the daily operations and programming of the community center. As opposed to the American or Rwandan practitioners imposing their ideas and determining top-down programmatic decisions in isolation of the community, I suggest that they develop an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) that seeks to understand the ways in which the people of the Agace community envision the purpose and functionality of the center. That is, the Rwandan team could develop practitioner inquiry communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) that work collaboratively in using the local and collective knowledge of the community as the foreground for programmatic development. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) suggest, the purpose of a practitioner inquiry community is to “identify levers for needed change in people, institutions, and systems, and to act in ways that respect and honor the participation of various constituencies whose lives are implicated in the educational
practices and polices under consideration” (p. 142). In order for the GROW Community Center to meet the needs of the people in the community, the GROW team must engage with members of the community and support them in posing critical questions and seek collaborative ways to further understand and solve individual and collective concerns together. For example, during the collaborative inquiry group I conducted with the GROW team for this study, the participants identified the following questions they were interested in further exploring: “What are the main educational challenges you find in the community?” “What are some of the educational programs that might help the community?” “What are your expectations of the community learning center?” and “What are the serious problems that you have in your community that you would like the community center to help?” (Fieldnotes, 7/4/18). I pose these questions in the conclusion section as a way to consider extended implications for further research, specifically as the GROW team considers launching practitioner inquiry communities in Agace.

Lastly, as a result of the collaborative inquiry group initiated during the participatory action research methods utilized in this study, GROW began exploring various programmatic ideas at the community center that were grounded in local knowledge and community-based resources. More specially, as the data shows in Chapter 6, storytelling traditions have changed over time as a result of factors that impacted this literacy practice. To that end, GROW developed a storytelling evening for members of the community to meet one night a week and engage with storytelling practices together. Each member in attendance has an opportunity to share a traditional story that they remember and want to pass on to others. Some participants discussed the idea of capturing these stories either on audio or video recording devices as way to
preserve and build an archive of these stories in the community center library. Another example of programming developed by members of the village is a local agronomist in the community committed to leading a small group of community members in learning more about modern farming techniques. Not only were the goals of these community center activities initiated by villagers from the inside, but they were also led and facilitated by the members of the community as well. By using collaborative inquiry groups, members of the community influenced shaping the culture and climate of the GROW Community Center in ways that reflected their knowledge, experience, and most importantly, the plurality of literacies that exist within their homes and community.
APPENDICES

Appendix A

Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Education, Rwamagana District
Appendix B

Classroom Observation Guide

1. Field Observation Template

Date: _______________ Start Time: __________ End Time: __________

Teacher Name: ___________________ Number of Students: __________

Focus/Topic of Lesson: ______________

Location: ______________
Description of Physical Setting:

What to look for during observation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus/Topic</th>
<th>Descriptive</th>
<th>Reflective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Text being used</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Text being generated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher Modeling New Reading/ Writing Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Debate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself.
   a. How old are you?
   b. Tell me about our family structure
      i. How many children do you have?
   c. How long have you lived in Agace?
   d. What do you do for work?
   e. Did you go to school? How long did you go to school?
   f. Do you go to church or a mosque? If yes, do you read the Bible or Koran?
2. How would you describe Agace to someone who has never visited?
   a. How has the village changed from when you grew up to now? (house structures, farms, etc.)
3. What languages do you speak?
   a. How did you learn these languages?
   b. Can you read and write in these languages? (to their standards)
4. School Experiences
   a. Did you go to school?
   b. What schools did you go to?
   c. How many years did you go school?
   d. Talk about how you learn new skill.
   e. How do you learn about things in the community?
   f. What subjects did you enjoy? Not enjoy?
   g. Describe a memorable teacher. Why? What were they doing to help them learn well?
5. Was reading part of your life at home growing up?
   a. (If yes), what are some of your earliest memories?
   b. What books did you read?
   c. Were books read aloud or to yourself?
   d. Can you read now?
   e. Do you read now? How often?
   f. What kinds of reading materials do you read?
6. Was writing part of your life at home growing up?
   a. (If yes), what are some of your earliest memories?
   b. Can you write now? Do you write now? If yes, what do you write? How often?
   c. What do you write? And for what purposes?
7. Was storytelling part of your life at home growing up? (If yes), what are some of your earliest memories?
8. Do you think reading, writing, and storytelling have taught you life lessons that you use now? (Do one at a time) Why or why not?
9. How important is education?
10. How often do you visit your child’s school?
a. Why do you go to your child’s school?
b. What have you observed at your child’s school?
c. Have you seen any similarities between school and home?
d. If you could change anything about your child’s school experience, what would it be? Why?
e. If you do not visit your child’s school, would you like to visit more?

11. After your child gets home, do they talk about their day at school?
   a. If so, what do they talk about?
   b. If they do not, do you ask them?
   c. Does your child do school work/homework at home?

12. When your child comes home from school, do they read?
   a. Textbooks?
   b. Other books?

13. When your child comes home from school, do they write?
   a. Is it for homework?
   b. Or for fun?

14. Do you tell stories at home now?
   a. What kind of stories do you tell at home now? (imigani?)
   b. When you were a kid, did you hear more or less stories?
   c. Why do you think?

15. What else would you like me to know?
Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

_Kwemera kugira uruhare mu bushakashatsi_

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**
**University of Pennsylvania • Philadelphia, PA**

**Title of the Research Study:** “The Place of a Hundred Things:” The Plurality of Literacies in Community Context

**Protocol Number:** 1

**Primary Researcher:** Jerry Maraia, jerrymaraia@gmail.com

**Principal Investigator/Emergency Contact:** Dr. Krystal Strong, kstrong@upenn.edu

You are being asked to take part in a voluntary research study, which means you can choose whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate or not to participate there will be no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Before you make a decision, you will need to know the purpose of the study and what you will have to do if you decide to participate. The researcher is going to talk with you about the study and give you this consent document to read.

If you do not understand what you are reading, do not sign it. Please ask the researcher to explain anything you do not understand, including any language contained in this form. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a copy will be given to you.

_Turagusaba kuba wagira uruhare muri ubu bushakashatsi, ni uburanganzira bwawe kwemera cyangwa guhakana. Kwemera cyangwa guhakana ntibabuza inyungu zindi ugenewe. Mbere yo gufata umwanzuro wo kwemera cg guhakana, ni ngombwa ko usobanukiwa icyo ubushakashatsi bugami ye n’uruhare uzabugiramo uramutse wemeye. UAgacekashatsi azabanza agusobanurire ubushakashatsi hanyuma aguhe n’uru rupapuro urusome._

_Nudasobanukiwa ibiri muri uru rupapuro, ntuzasinye. Uzabaze uAgacekashatsi ikintu cyose usasobanukiwe kuri ubu bushakashatsi cg andi magamba yose utumva kuri uru rupapuro. Niwemera kugira uruhare muri ubu bushakashatsi, urasinya uru rupapuro hanyuma usigarane kopi yarwo._

**What is the purpose of the study?**
The purpose of this study is to understand parents’ perceptions and beliefs about literacy practices between school and home contexts in Agace, a rural village in Rwanda, and to better understand local literacies that are not commonly recognized in the dominant discourses on literacy, including global literacy agendas and campaigns. Finally, the
purpose of this study is to reflect on how multiple literacies, including orality and storytelling, are used to better understand individuals’ experiences in the village.

_Ubu bushakashatsi bugamije iki?_
Ubu bushakashatsi bugamije kumenya uko ababyeyi bafata kandi babona ibijanye no kujijuka mu mashuri ndetshe no mu ngo mu Murenge wa Agace ho mu Rwanda. Ikindi ubu bushakashatsi bugamije ni ukumva neza ibikorwa byo kujijuka bibera mu giturage ariko ntibimenyekane mu ruhando mpuzamahanga rwo kujijuka. Hanyuma rero, ikindi ubu bushashatsi bugamije ni ukungurana ibitekerezo k’untu ibikorwa byo kujijuka bitandukanye birimo no guca imigani no gusakuza bishobora gufasha mu kumva uburyo abantu babaho muri aka gace.

_Why was I asked to participate in the study?_
You are being asked to join this study because you are a parent of a student that attends the local community school in Agace, a village in the Rwanagana District in Rwanda. Also, you currently live in the village and are above the age of 18 years old.

_Kuki nasabwe kugira uruhare muri ubu bushakashatsi?_
Wasabwe kugira uruhare muri ubu bushakashatsi kuko ufite umwana wiga ku ishuri rya Ibihumbi, muri Agace, mu Karere ka Rwanagana ho mu Rwanda. Ikindi kandi utuye muri aka gace kandi ufite byibura imyaka 18 y’amavuko.

_How long will I be in the study?_
During the first two weeks of July 2018. You might be asked to spend 1-2 hours for an interview or participate in a 1-2 hour focus group session. You have the right to drop out of the research study at any time during your participation.

_Nzamara igihe kingana iki muri ubu bushakashatsi?_

_Where will the study take place?_
This study will take place in Agace, a village in the Rwanagana District in Rwanda. Most interviews will occur in participants’ homes and focus group sessions will occur in the Community Center.

_Ubushakashatsi buzabera he?_
Ubushakashatsi buzabera I Agace, agace ko mu Karere ka Rwanagana ho mu Rwanda. Ibiganiro bizajya bibera mu ngo z’abaturage naho amatsinda abre mu myubako nshya ya RIPU iri ku Kabare.

_What are the risks?_
The study has been designed to minimize the possibility of any potential risks. Some of the questions may prompt personal reflection. All individual names of participants will be
removed. All interviews and focus groups will remain confidential and all recordings will be filed under a pseudo name and on electronic files that are password protected.

**Ni izihe ngaruka nshobora guhura nazo?**
Ubu bushakashatsi bwateguranwe ubuhanga kugirango burinde ababugiramo uruhare ingaruka zitandukane. Ibibazo bimwe uzabazwa bishobora gutuma witekerezaho. Amazina y’abagize uruhare mu bushakashatsi ntago azandikwa. Ibisubizo byose bizavugirwa mu biganiro n’amatsinda bizagirwa ibanga ku buryo ntwa menya uwabishubije.

**How will I benefit from the study?**
There is no monetary benefit to you by participating in this study. However, your participation can help us better understand the literacy experiences of members of the community both in school and at home. This information can influence the program development of the newly established Community Center in the village. Additionally, this is an opportunity for you to share your stories about literacy and reflect on your own experiences. In the future, this study could help people better understand the literacy practices and experiences, both the connections and disconnections between school and home, in a small rural village in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Mfite nyungu ki muri ubu bushakashatsi?**
Nta mafaranga uzahabwa kuberako wagize uruhare muri ubu bushakashatsi. Uruhare rwawe mu bushakashatsi ruzadufasha kumva neza ibikorwa bigamije kujijuka bibera mu ngo nu mu mashuri. Amakuru azava mu bushakashatsi azafasha RIPU gitegura neza imishinga izajya ikorerwa mu nyubakoayo nshya, ku Kabare. Ikindi kandi, uzabasha kwitekerezaho mu bijyanje no kujijuka ndetse n’ibyo wanyuzemo. Mu bihe biri imbire, ibizava muri ubu bushakashatsi bizafrica abantu kumva neza ibikorerwa mu ngo no mu mashuri bigamije kujijuka n’uburyo bihura cyangwa se bigatandukana muri iki cyaro cyo muri Afrika yo munsy y’Ubutayu bwa Sahara.

How will my confidentiality be maintained, and my privacy protected during the study? Your responses to interview questions and during the focus group sessions will be kept confidential. At no time will your actual identity be revealed and a pseudo name will be created for you. The data you provide through interviews and focus groups will be used for your dissertation and may be used as the basis for articles or presentations in the future. I will never use your name or information that would identify you in any publications or presentations.

Ese ni gute amakuru yanjye azagirwa ibanga muri ubu bushakashatsi?
Ibisubizo uzatanga mu biganiro ndetse no mu matsinda bizabikwa mu ibanga rikomeye. Ntago tuzigera tubiha umuntu wundi uwo ari we se kandi aho bizabikwa tuzashyiraho kode tuyiguhe. Amakuru azava muri ubu bushakashatsi azamfasha kwandika igitabo cyimfasha kurangiza amashuri yanjye kandi ashobora kuzakoresha handikwa ibindi bitabo mu bihe bizaza. Ntago nzigera nkoresa izina ryawye cg indi myirondoro yawe mu kwandika ibindi bitabo cg gukora izindi mbirwaruhame.
To Contact the Researcher: If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact the researcher, Jerry Maraia at jerrymaraia@gmail.com. You may also contact the faculty member from the University of Pennsylvania who is supervising this work: Dr. Krystal Strong at kstrong@upenn.edu.

Ushaka kwandikira nyir’ubushakashatsi: Ufite ikibazo icyo ari icyo cyose kuri ubu bushakashatsi wakwandikira Jerry Maraia kuri jerrymaraia@gmail.com. Ushobora no kwandikira umwe mu barium ba iniverisite ya Pennsylvania uhagarariye ubu bushakashatsi: Dr. Krystal Strong kuri kstrong@upenn.edu.

**Agreement:**
The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

When you sign this document, you are agreeing to take part in this research study. If you have any questions or there is something you do not understand, please ask. You will receive a copy of this consent document.

**Kubyemera**
Ndemera ko nasobanuriwe ubu bushakashatsi ndetse n’icyo bugamije nka kandi nemera kubugiramo uruhare. Namenye ko kandi nshobora kuzava mu bushakashatsi igihe nshakiye nta nkurikizi.


Signature of subject: __________________________________________
Umukono wawe

Name of subject (print): _______________________________________
Izina ryawe (ryandike n’intoki)

Date: _________________________________________________________
Italiiki
### Appendix E

Data Coding Display

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy, Reading, Writing, and Texts</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1 | Literacy Practices | Involves the values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships with literacy (reading and writing).  
{Deductive} |
| 2 | Literacy Events | Observable/empirical events, actions, and activities with literacy (reading and writing).  
{Deductive} |
| 3 | Autonomous Model of Literacy | The technicalities and functions of reading and writing separated from the social contexts in which they occur. Literacy as a technical and neutral skill that is acquired.  
{Deductive} |
| 4 | Literacy as a Social Practice/Ideological Model of Literacy | Literacy as it relates to the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs. Literacy is a social practice and connected to power structures.  
{Deductive} |
| 5 | Multiple Literacies | Different literacies associated with different domains of life, including other forms of literacy beyond reading and writing.  
{Deductive} |
| 6 | Deficit Discourse | Literacy practices that are different from the dominant discourse are labeled as deficit and often equated to illiteracy.  
{Deductive} |
<p>| 7 | Reading | Literacy events that entail people reading written text. |
| 8 | Impact of Reading | The perceived impact of reading on cognitive development. |
| 9 | Writing | Literacy events that entail people composing and writing text. |
| 10 | Impact of Writing | The perceived impact of writing on cognitive development. |
| 11 | Writing Surfaces | Writing texts and drawing images exist on a variety of surfaces: the walls, in the dirt, banana leaves, side of houses/buildings, etc. That is, writing texts and drawing images were not restricted to solely paper and pen/pencil. |
| 12 | Written Texts | The existence of written texts in the community, including street signs, newspapers/magazines, governmental materials/pamphlets, books, etc. |
| 13 | Student Textbooks | The government published student textbooks that are used in the classroom at the Ibihumbi School. |
| 14 | Student Notebooks | Students using notebooks in school for writing notes from the chalkboard, doing activities/answering |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>questions. Students using notebooks for studying “revising” their notes at home in preparation for exams.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orality/Oral Communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching and Learning: Ibihumbi School</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Orality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Social Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Gossip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Quarreling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Learning Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Teaching/Instructional Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Curriculum Development/Lesson Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>English: Language of Instruction (LOI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Teacher-Parent Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>School Attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Parent Perceptions of Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Importance of School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#:</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Agace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Genocide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Time: Physical/Manual Labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Umuganda (Community Work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Drinking Alcohol/Alcoholism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>GROW Community Center Programming Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Social Spaces in Agace</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>41</strong> Ibihumbi School</td>
<td>The only government school located in the village of Agace, including 3,458 students, 57 teachers, average class size 55 students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>42</strong> Church</td>
<td>The Pentecostal Church in Agace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>43</strong> GROW Community Center</td>
<td>A non-profit US-based organization. Since 2009, GROW has worked with the Ibihumbi School and the local community on educational programming. In July 2018, GROW opened the Community Center in Agace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>44</strong> Orphanage</td>
<td>Opened in 1979 and by 1994 there were over 150 children. Since the Genocide, this has become a self-sufficient orphanage growing in population and importance in Agace.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Governmental Programs</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>45</strong> Governmental Programs</td>
<td>Programs that are created for the community either nationally or locally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>46</strong> Ministry of Education (MINEDUC)</td>
<td>The government agency that oversees public education in Rwanda, including the development of curriculum, textbooks, and national examinations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>47</strong> East African Community (EAC)</td>
<td>A regional intergovernmental organization of six countries: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>48</strong> <em>Umuganda</em> (Community Work)</td>
<td>On the last Saturday of each month, all Rwandans are expected to engage in community service/community work day. This was a national government initiative. <em>Umuganda</em> translates to “coming together in common purpose to achieve an outcome.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Example of a Researcher Data Analysis Memo

Researcher Memo: The Partnership Between Home and School, The Village of Agace and the Ibihumbi School

As I entered my second week of interviews and observations in the village, I looked forward to my interview with Fatima, a member of the community, parent of four children that all attended Ibihumbi School, and a full-time teacher at the school as well. Unlike most of my interviews up to this point, Fatima’s interview was in English without the presence of Sef, my local translator on the project. Before the interview began, Fatima expressed excitement to me in sharing her thoughts about the community, school, and literacy. It was a perspective that felt missing as all the other interviews in the study were either of parents of children that attend the school or teachers that work at the school. Fatima brought her experiences as both parent and teacher.

I was perplexed by the relationship between the school and home as most of my interviews with parents and teachers expressed little connection. It seemed as though the parents expected the teachers to initiate the relationship, and the teachers expected the parents. This connects to my research question, “What are participants’ perceptions and beliefs about negotiating literacy practices between home and school in Agace?” I was curious of how literacy practices could be negotiated between these two spaces when the relationship between the teacher and parent was not fully developed and there was blame seemingly placed on each other for why it did not exist.

During the middle of my interview with Fatima, after discussing her personal school and literacy experiences growing up, I moved the conversation to her thoughts and experiences regarding the current teaching and learning practices at Ibihumbi School. Below, Fatima responds to the question, “What do you think about the teaching at Ibihumbi?” Fatima states:

Ibihumbi teachers are smart. Even they try their best to teach the kids. But the problem is that parents don't take time to visit their student, their kids at the school, and talk to their teachers, and see how they can join their hand and prepare the future of the kids. Yeah. But teachers, they do what they have to do. But parents don't care. What parents do, they buy school uniforms, school materials. And they send kids at the school. They wait for their report. They don't know if something was wrong at the school. They don't take a stand to come to visit kids at the school. In general, they don't come. A few number of parents come. (Fatima, Interview, 7/6/18)

From this interview excerpt, I was struck by Fatima’s reference to parents in response to a question about her perspective of teaching at the school. She begins her response with a recognition that the teachers are smart, and then quickly articulates that the problem
rests with parents’ lack of involvement or care about their child’s education. It appears as though she is drawing a parallel between the quality of teaching at the school and parents’ involvement. This seemingly deficit perspective does not account for the experiences that parents encounter daily or their prior experiences with formal school contexts. Additionally, there is little attention to the role of teacher in the child’s schooling, and the responsibility of every adult in the child’s life, including the teacher, to support learning.

My interview with Fatima further advanced what I had been noticing in the trends across my interviews and observations. Teachers, unless they live in the village, do not have a strong presence in the community, and parents do not typically have a strong presence at the school. I believe the negotiation of literacy between school and home is impacted by the relationship between teacher and parent. As I further analyzed the data, I continued to explore this complicated relationship to seek a deeper understanding about literacy practices at school and home.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


