SOCIOCULTURAL LITERACY PRACTICES OF A SUDANESE MOTHER AND SON IN CANADA

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Abstract

Students learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) within Canada often need extra supports. However, the further needs of students who lack first language print literacy skills are, more often than not, neglected. The purpose of this thesis is to look at the social and cultural practices of literacy of EAL learners who are illiterate or have a low level of literacy in their first language (L1), since it takes these learners significantly longer to develop Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in comparison to EAL learners who have first language print literacy skills.

This thesis begins by recognizing the issue of illiteracy throughout the world and defining what literacy is from both cognitive and social theory perspectives. This study is influenced by The Cultural Practices of Literacy Study (CPLS) and draws on ethnographic methods as well as narrative inquiry in the study design. Data is collected, primarily, through interviews with the participants (a mother and her teenage son from South Sudan). The discussion chapters examine the life histories, cultures and specific literacy practices of the participants. Results demonstrate that the changes within the participants' life histories and cultures through coming to Canada affect their sociocultural practices of literacy. Furthermore, the participants' specific social and cultural practices of literacy include semilingualism and literacy brokering as major themes. The literature review shows that very little information exists in regard to the sociocultural practices of literacy of first language illiterate learners. Therefore, this thesis has much relevance in regard to how to better support these learners.

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Dedication

Thank you to my family. To my dad for always instilling in me the importance of education, to my mom for always believing in me, to my husband for supporting me and helping me along the way, and to my daughter (and any future children we may have) for inspiring me to always want to better myself. I love you all!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"This my Arabic name," I could hear Sahal saying to his fellow classmates as they oohed and awed. I stretched upward so that I could get a glimpse of the paper that Sahal was so proudly displaying and could see nothing more than wavy scribbles on a torn piece of looseleaf.

Although I cannot read Arabic, I could clearly see that Sahal had simply drawn nonsensical, squiggly lines on the piece of looseleaf. Sahal, it turned out, was illiterate in his first language of Arabic. His desire to show the other students that he could write his name in his first language broke my heart, especially since he was still learning to write his name in English. Sahal wanted his classmates to know that he could write. Having only been in Canada for a few months, the importance that is placed on print literacy in western society – something that he lacked - was already clear to Sahal.

I first met Sahal and his mother Aheu (pseudonyms) when I became Sahals' Grade Four teacher. Sahal, Aheu and five of Sahal's siblings moved to Canada in March of that year. They were originally from what is now South Sudan and spent a number of years in a refugee camp in Egypt before coming to Canada. After spending a few months before the summer holidays in a school near the one where I taught, Aheu moved Sahal and his brother to my school for religious reasons. At that time, I had been an elementary school teacher for six years. I remember how difficult it was for Sahal in the beginning to adjust to a new school, language and culture. I imagine that Aheu was dealing with culture shock as well, as she struggled to adapt to a new

environment and learn a new language. Although I only met Aheu a handful of times when Sahal was in my class, and with the aid of an interpreter, I got to know her more throughout the years as I continued to watch out for Sahal as he got older and moved from grade to grade. For instance, I remember picking Sahal up on my way to coach cross-country running practice before school because he would sleep in and forget to come, even though he enjoyed the practices and was our star athlete. One year our school applied to a nearby summer camp which gave Sahal a grant to spend a couple of weeks at the camp that summer. I drove Sahal to the camp and picked him up afterward. Besides these two examples, there were a number of other ways that I continued to look out for Sahal throughout my time at the school he attended. Years later, Sahal still has that amazing smile and easy-going attitude that I remembered when he was in my Grade Four classroom.

Throughout my teaching career, I have taught a number of students who, like Sahal, were illiterate in their first language. All of the students who lacked L1 print literacy happened to be refugees, however, it is important to note that not all refugees are illiterate. These students were placed in my mainstream classroom with the rest of my Canadian-born students. Some of the students had been in Canada for a year or two before they were in my class and a couple were brand new. I have also had a number of other English as an Additional Language (EAL) students in my class who were literate in their first languages, and I struggled with the fact that the refugee students that I taught continued to lag behind all of the others. Even though it was apparent that they were bright children, their literacy skills were not developing as quickly as those of the rest of the class. Although the students were only in Grade Three and Four, even at such a young age, I could see a significant difference between

the refugee students and the other EAL and Canadian-born students. This difference made me wonder how much their lack of print literacy in their first language affected their language learning in their second language of English and eventually led me to the research question for this thesis.

Before divulging my research question, however, it is important to note that when beginning my research, I knew that I wanted to learn about EAL learners who do not have print literacy skills in their first language, but I was yet unsure exactly how to study this topic and from what angle to approach it. After much reading and learning about what exactly literacy is, I chose to research about first language illiterate EAL learners through looking at their social and cultural practices of literacy, as opposed to through cognitive theories of literacy (both of which I discuss later in this chapter). I chose to look at the sociocultural literacy practices of my participants because I did not want to impose a deficit view of my participants, since cognitive theory practices look at only print literacy and not at other types of literacies that individuals may use in order to go about their daily lives. Therefore, my research question emerged as follows: What are the social and cultural practices of literacy of EAL students who are illiterate in their first language?

To begin to answer this question, it is first important to understand the issue of illiteracy worldwide. One fifth of the world's population (approximately 774 million people) is illiterate. They are unable to read and write or have a very low level of print literacy (though I will discuss how complex the term illiteracy is later in this chapter). Most of this population can be found in South and West Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and East Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO, 2008). Furthermore, "indigenous groups, linguistic minorities, migrants and people with disabilities are among

populations with lower literacy rates, reflecting exclusion of these groups from mainstream society and reduced access to formal education and literacy programs" (UNESCO, 2008, p. 9). Literacy rates, however, have been increasing in youth and women, primarily due to more availability of formal schooling. However, there is still a greater literacy rate in men than in women worldwide (UNESCO, 2008). With the number of refugees and people with no or low-level literacy skills relocating to Canada, EAL teachers are faced with a challenge of how to support these students in their learning, just as I was faced with the challenge of how to support Sahal within my very diverse classroom. For example, in 2011 the Government of Canada expanded its "refugee resettlement programs by 20% over three years" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Moreover, many such learners have gaps in their education and schooling, and have experienced some trauma in their lives (Brown, Miller & Mitchell, 2006).

1.1 What is Literacy?

Since this thesis explores literacy practices, it is necessary to begin by understanding what literacy is. With the challenges of illiteracy throughout the world and the aim of understanding the social and cultural practices of literacy of EAL learners who are illiterate in their first language, it is helpful to define what literacy is in order to have a clear understanding of what it means for learners to acquire literacy or literacy skills. Earlier, I described illiteracy (according to UNESCO) as being unable to read or write, which may seem to be a universal understanding of what illiteracy is. In fact, the Oxford dictionary defines illiteracy as such (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011). On the surface, the concept of illiteracy seems quite straightforward as illustrated by the similarities between UNESCO and the Oxford

English Dictionary, making the construct of illiteracy seem quite straightforward. So, in an effort to understand what illiteracy is, I examine literacy, what literacy is and what skills are needed to be literate (specifically in an alphabetic language for our purposes). Literacy is most commonly defined as the opposite of illiteracy, being the ability to read and write in a language (Roberts, 1994). These basic definitions make the two terms appear binary, leaving no room for anything in between. Roberts (1994) describes this simple definition of literacy as restricted and advocates that "limiting oneself to a single definition has the effect of denying the complexity of the concept and failing to recognize the conflicts that result from literacy as it functions at individual, group, and societal levels" (para. 31). Basically, by restricting ourselves to simple definitions of literacy, we neglect to recognize just how complex it really is, and ignore the issues that literacy creates within different groups and individuals. I agree with Roberts that we too often simplify what literacy is because, through my experiences as a teacher, I have seen and come to realize that literacy is much more than just reading and writing (and reading and writing themselves are also quite complex). I try to look at each of my students as the individuals that they are and realize that they all learn in different ways and are all unique. So, limiting literacy to a simple definition leaves out, not only the complexities of what literacy is, but also the complexities of classrooms full of students with many different learning styles who are trying to develop literacy practices.

Today, literacy is often defined in multiple ways, ranging from skills needed for reading and writing (decoding, encoding, and comprehension of written symbols and text), to literacy as being socially situated (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004). For the purposes of this research, it is important to understand these multiple

definitions of literacy. UNESCO (2008) states that "there are different literacy practices in different domains of social life, such as education, religion, workplaces, public services, families and community activities. They change over time, and these different literacies are supported and shaped by different institutions and social relationships" (p. 11). In fact, Barton and Hamilton (1998) describe literacy in detail, describing it as a social practice:

> Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analysed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. (p. 3).

UNESCO (2008) similarly states that literacy is social and much more than just text on paper, but embodies all human activity and how people interact and communicate with each other, just as Barton and Hamilton (1998) maintain that there is more to literacy than thought and text. Furthermore, they argue that literacy practices are constantly changing, are culturally constructed and affected by our life histories. This position aligns with my experiences because I have experienced, first hand, the different types of literacy practices that I use in my life, from the types of practices I use as a classroom teacher, to how I relate to my family and friends, to the literacy practices I use as a volunteer within my community. Just as we use different literacy practices in different domains of our lives, so too do we participate in many cultures (Handwerker, 2001) and are affected by our life histories. So if we are all a part of many different cultures and use a number of different literacy practices within the various domains of our lives, why do we, more often than not, expect children

to be taught in school only the literacy practices that relate to school and not those that they use in other domains of their lives?

Minarik (2000) also views literacy as culturally constructed, describing literacy as "extensive knowledge, experience or culture", but also states that "literacy is ultimately about power" (p. 285). Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener (2004) also see literacy as affected by power to the extent that "success and failure in developing literacy is – and always has been – marked by social status, income, race, ethnicity, and language" (p. 1). The authors also discuss how people and social groups attribute different values to different literacy practices, placing more importance on some practices and less on others (p. 25). In western society, my experiences as both a teacher and a student, for example, have ingrained in me an importance that is placed on print literacy, with less value being attributed to other types of literacies.

The meaning of "literacy" can extend beyond just written texts to oral texts as well (Ravid & Tolchinsky, 2002). The reality of oral texts is especially important to this research when considering EAL learners who lack print literacy skills in their first language, as they may rely on other modes of literacy, such as oral literacy. According to Roberts (1994), literacy includes shared knowledge and traditions, including oral literacy. There are also other types of literacies beyond these that include communicative, cultural and technological practices such as media, computer, emotional, speaking, listening viewing, art (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004), television (Perry & Moses, 2011) and even texting. For example, Perry and Moses (2011) look at television as a resource for learning in a Sudanese refugee family, making connections between television viewing practices, English language abilities development and the development of real-world literacy practices. They observed the

family's television viewing practices, as well as the events and activities occurring around these practices, noticing that content makes all the difference (such as educational programs), as opposed to how much television is watched. To put it another way, in this particular case, it was the content that determined the value of viewing, rather than the time spent watching television that better assisted the family in learning English. The family used television programs for different purposes, both entertainment and learning. The parents of the family that Perry and Moses observed were worried about the possibility of adverse effects of television, but this particular family studied used television "as a medium for learning about the English language" (p. 294) and their particular television practices "reflected beliefs, values, and attitudes they held about religion, heritage and culture" (p. 292). Perry and Moses found that watching television gave the family the opportunity to develop some print literacy skills and engage in meaningful literacy practices, many of which supported the development of real-world literacy practices and seemed to enhance their learning. The family's adults "believed that television helped them to learn English and maintain a connection to their heritage and religion" (p. 279). Ultimately, Perry and Moses discovered that "multiple exposures to literacy content and messages on television, in books, and in other media can enhance children's overall literacy development…" (p. 279). So, we can see from Perry and Moses's example that television is a type of literacy practice, and lends itself to the improvement of literacy development in general

Morris and Tchudi (1996) also see the importance of other literacies. They discuss the "New Literacy" and the importance of viewing literacy in a broader context, which they see as "encompassing an individual's ability to interpret and

create texts, to function capably in a vast array of settings, and to operate effectively in society" (p. 12). They sorted literacy into three interconnecting categories: basic, critical and traditional. Basic literacy refers to the development of cognitive skills, such as decoding, encoding and comprehension; critical literacy moves beyond literal meanings, interprets text, and uses writing for more than simply recording facts, including interpreting, analyzing and explaining; and dynamic literacy goes beyond the text and words using literacy in practical situations. However, "most literacy learners seldom consciously acknowledge the broader communicative activities of literacy – speaking, listening, and viewing. For most learners literacy means reading and writing print, and schooling is seen as the vehicle for achieving it" (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004, p. 24). Most learners, according to Purcell-Gates et al. (2004), see reading and writing skills as having the purpose of allowing them to "lead full and rewarding lives" (p. 24), even though reading and writing are used in a number of different ways in a number of different situations such as Morris and Tchudi (1996) described in regard to dynamic literacy which goes beyond the text using literacy in a variety of different situations.

With so many different literacies that have meaning within particular contexts, it seems that defining literacy is actually quite complex. It is no wonder that developing print literacy is such a difficult task for newcomers to Canada, especially those who are "illiterate" in their first language and, therefore, do not have the ability to transfer knowledge of written text from one language to another.

1.1.1 Cognitive Theory vs. Social Theory

For the purposes of this thesis, in order to understand literacy as fully as possible it is important to understand all that literacy entails, including both cognitive

and social theories of literacy, keeping in mind that social theory is the focus of this thesis. Having looked at a number of different definitions as to what literacy is, we can see that there are differing viewpoints and perspectives. In fact, when attempting to define literacy, there have been many debates between cognitive psychologists and social theorists. Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener (2004) discuss this topic in detail. To begin this discussion, I briefly look at cognitive theory in order to attempt to understand literacy in its entirety. Cognitive theory (according to Purcell-Gates et al., 2004) is based on the belief that in order to be considered a science, data has to be observable. The authors state that cognitive theory works under the belief that students must first learn to decode words and develop phonemic awareness before they can begin to comprehend what they have read, learn from what they read and read for a purpose. Not all reading theorists accept this premise.

Social theory, on the other hand, "focuses on literacy as constructed by and woven throughout social and cultural practices, shaped by historical, status, and power relationships" (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004, p. 63). Perry (2008) notes that "the types of things people do with languages and literacies are patterned by social relationships as well as cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and identities" (p. 4). She also states that "literacy looks different among different people, in different places, and in different historical times" (Perry, 2007b, p. 5). The reason that literacy looks different is because context plays an important role in determining the shape of literacy in a particular community, and "communities – and the individuals that inhabit them – have multiple purposes and uses for literacies in their daily lives" (Perry, 2007b, p. 5). Furthermore, "literacy is always 'local,' imbued with local meanings and practices" (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004, p. 63), whereas from a purely

cognitive theory standpoint, literacy is viewed as developed through some form of schooling and refers to literacy taught in schools as being separate from the social world, teaching different children in the same ways. Academic literacy, which is created by a dominant mainstream sociocultural group, is valued within western society. Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener (2004) believe that the very fact that dominant groups control the teaching of literacy, and that literacy is taught in a way valued by that group, shows just how much power shapes literacy instruction. In addition, other literacies (such as local literacies) are ignored resulting in hegemonic teachings of literacy. Therefore, research that does not consider sociopolitical conditions is not helping to create a solution to issues surrounding literacy development, but rather is adding to the problem. Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener (2004) state that "to study reading and writing as if they exist separately from larger, socially related and constructed discourses is, at best, foolish and, at worst hegemonic" (p. 66).

Walsh (1991) reaffirms this belief stating:

> …perspectives of and approaches to literacy are shaped by theoretical and ideological concerns which extend beyond the classroom walls. These concerns are related to beliefs and assumptions about the nature of knowledge, of people (i.e., teachers and students), of experiences, and to the relations of power and of social and cultural control which these beliefs and assumptions both construct and incorporate. (p. 8)

To put it succinctly, a number of factors affect literacy learning including relations of power, people and experiences. Gallego and Hollingsworth (2000) suggest that those students who perform poorly in school-based literacies, may very well flourish or be fully literate in community, social, personal or political literacies. I agree with Gallego and Hollingsworth because I have seen, first hand, how some students who

do poorly in structured school-based literacy settings thrive when given the opportunity to learn in context.

Having introduced both cognitive and social theories of literacy, I now briefly discuss their respective limitations in order to understand both the necessities and limitation of both theories of literacy, with the focus of this research being on social theories of literacy. According to Purcell-Gates et al. (2004), cognitive theories of literacy are not conducive to all learners and learning styles and, as a result, foster deficit views of learners and communities. Social theory limitations, on the other hand, (according to Purcell-Gates et al., 2004) include focusing purely on social theories of literacy results in a failure to develop basic reading skills, ignoring learners who have difficulty with these skills and need to practice them, and omitting in school contexts while focusing too much on out of school contexts alone.

Because of these limitations, throughout the years, literacy development has changed from the use of cognitive theories to social theories, and somewhere in between. One common example is the shift from phonics instruction to "learn how to read" to whole language instruction (which was considered a "new literacy"). However, it has now been recognized that both views of literacy development are important and necessary. Social and cognitive theories and practices should be integrated, not used separately from each other in teaching practices (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). Roberts (1994) suggests the value in recognizing "multiple views of literacy" (p. 209), including the ability to decode written symbols and the ability to "interpret events and experiences in a social and political context" (p. 209). She also mentions that since literacy is affected by social and political contexts, therefore transference of literacy skills from one language to another might be difficult.

Keeping in mind the importance of using and valuing both cognitive and social theories of literacy development, it is important to be aware that reading and writing require both bottom-up and top-down strategies, as these are the strategies necessary for print acquisition in English (Birch, 2002). Bottom-up strategies refer to language processing strategies, including chunking words into phrases**,** accessing word meaning**,** letter recognition and word identification, as well as language knowledge such as sentences, phrases, words, letters and sounds – all of which are skills important to cognitive theories. Top-down strategies, in comparison, involve different cognitive processing strategies, including inferencing, predicting, problem-solving and constructing meaning, combined with world knowledge (Birch, 2002) – skills that are often developed through social and cultural practice and life experiences. According to Thomkins & Binder (2003), "Illiterate" adults lack bottom-up reading strategies that need to be explicitly taught, but do have some top-down strategies, as they have life experience, possibly exposure to print through various media (advertisements, television, etc.), and some higher level cognitive functions (Thompkins & Binder, 2003). Therefore, these top-down strategies should be utilized and recognized by teachers in teaching literacy skills to these learners, bearing in mind that they may come from very different social environments than the one they now belong to. Both bottom-up and top-down strategies are necessary to be able to read, comprehend what is read and make connections to one's own life.

Returning to what it means to be illiterate since, just as it is important to understand literacy for the purposes of this research, it is equally important to understand what illiteracy is. Loureiro, Braga, Souza, Filho, Queiroz and Dellatolas (2003) state that there are problems with the basic definition of illiteracy (being the

inability to read and write) since accounts of illiteracy have been either self-reported, based on gaps in education or lack of schooling, and/or developed in the absence of objective methods to assess reading abilities. In fact, Loureiro, Braga, Souza, Filho, Queiroz and Dellatolas (2003), mention that many "completely unschooled and/or self-referred illiterates could be able to recognize capital letters or even read some simple familiar words" (p. 500). Escamilla (2006) also considers another type of learner known as semilingualism or bi-illiteracy, which refers to learners who are not proficient in either their first language or their second language. She states that "bi-illiteracy is a socially constructed concept that implies low levels of literacy in both English and Spanish" (Escamilla, 2003, p. 2330). Wright, Macarthur and Taylor (2000) discuss "Subtractive Bilingualism", which is an idea similar to semilingualism where due to a number of factors, including the emphasis on becoming a part of the dominant culture, an individual's heritage language is lost. The difference between semilingualism and subtractive bilingualism is the idea that an individual's heritage language may eventually be replaced by their second or additional language, which is unfortunate because the loss of one's heritage language can cause cognitive and emotional risks (Wright & Taylor, 1995; Wright, Macarthur & Taylor, 2000), as well as low self-esteem (Wright & Taylor, 1995).

In light of all the different definitions and levels of literacy skills, I considered other possible definitions of the types of first language print literacies (as discussed by Burt, Peyton & Schaetzel, 2008). However, for the purposes of this research, I refer to adults who are unable to read and write or have very low reading and writing skills in their first language and are learning a second language as "illiterate" or "lacking first language print literacy". Yet, I have attempted to explain

in this section that it is important to keep in mind that the term “illiteracy” is just as complex as “literacy” and should not be thought of in binary terms.

1.2 Other Possible Reasons for Problems in Second Language Learning

After delving into literacy, and social practices of literacy, , it is important to take note of other factors that can affect second language acquisition in illiterate learners. Much research in this area looks, specifically, at refugees since, due to war and other issues within their home countries, refugees often have significant gaps in their schooling and may be illiterate or have a low level of print literacy in their first language (Brown et al., 2006). However, it is necessary to realize that “not all refugees fit the ‘refugee’ stereotype” and “educators should realize that varying degrees of education, social status, religiousness, and so on exist within the refugee community” (Loewen, 2004, pp. 48-49).

Freire (1990) verifies the varying levels of literacy of refugees, stating:

> Many refugees have a degree of literacy that has allowed them basic satisfactory functioning in their own language, but in facing more sophisticated written tasks, they may be classified as functionally illiterate (less than grade 8 education) in their native language. Other refugees are coming from societies where there are no written forms of their languages (or dialects). Others have a written language but have not been exposed to the Roman alphabet. (p. 3)

Freire states that refugees are not necessarily without literacy skills, but their need for those skills within their home countries may differ from their need for print literacy skills in the country of their relocation, including the fact that a learner’s first language may not have a written form or may not use the Roman alphabet (bearing in mind that Friere is most likely referring to refugees relocating to a western country that uses the Roman alphabet).

Two major themes common throughout the research literature that can affect second language acquisition in these learners are: (1) the need to adapt to a very different culture and society (this is where social practices of literacy come into play), and (2) trauma that was experienced pre-migration, during and post-migration. Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, and Greenslade (2008) look at the difficulties and coping strategies of 23 Sudanese refugees in Australia throughout all phases of migration. Postmigration difficulties included environmental mastery, financial difficulties, social isolation and the impact of perceived racism (Khawaja et al., 2008, p. 19). Part of environmental mastery included, "adaptational demands such as learning a new language, becoming familiar with a new set of cultural values and practices and learning how to access a range of available resources" (Khawaja et al., 2008, p. 19). Lack of a knowledge of the English language also added to social isolation since the refugees were unable to access new networks within their new society. However, the refugees saw learning English as a possibility for a better future (Khawaja et al., 2008).

Similarly, Freire (1990) notes that the emotional memory of a language can also affect refugees when they are relocated to a new culture and are attempting to learn a new language and become familiarized with their new surroundings. Freire states the following, which provides an example of how trauma experienced can affect a learner's ability to develop second language acquisition:

> The emotional memory of a language may be one additional factor that may initially complicate the acquisition of the second language in a refugee. Refugees have been deprived abruptly and often quite violently of what was most meaningful in their lives starting with their motherland (p. 6).

Students experiencing such atrocities may also suffer physically and mentally (Brown et al., 2006), being "withdrawn, aggressive, unable to concentrate, anxious or hyperactive (Coelho, 1998)" (Brown et al., 2006, p. 152). Additionally, cultural differences can create misunderstandings and cause language barriers (Bates, Baird, Johnson, Lee, Luster & Rehagen, 2005, p. 640), as well as cause stress in learners who are trying to belong to two cultures, but fear belonging to none (Fantino & Colak, 2001).

1.3 Reflection

Years later, after I first taught Sahal, I can't help but wonder how severely trauma and interrupted (or lack of) schooling affected Sahal and the other refugee students I teach. Throughout the years, I remember being told that one of my new students had had little or no schooling and was illiterate in his first language. All the same, these students were placed into my classroom with the rest of the Grade Three and Four students to fend for themselves within this new country, culture and language, and I was faced with the challenge of how best to support their learning needs. At first, the students were provided little to virtually no extra supports by the school system. The staff at the school where I taught and I did the best that we could for them within our school, trying to come up with new and innovative ways of teaching the students what they needed to know while tending to the rest of our very needy students within a community school. I remember creating plastic bins labeled with the titles "Reading", "Drama", "Creating", and "Games" filled with different things that one of the refugee students in my classroom could do with a fellow student in order to help him learn to speak English. I remember searching for any resources to teach my refugee students reading, writing and math. Sadly, at the time, there

weren't any resources specifically for EAL students within our school, so I had to adapt English language arts instruction designed for speakers of English to meet the needs of all of my EAL students, and especially my first language illiterate students. Since first working with these refugee students, not much has changed in regard to the extra support that they receive for their specific language learning needs, which differ from those EAL learners who have first language print literacy skills.

It is unfortunate that first language illiterate EAL students still do not receive support for their specific needs because it can take 7 to 10 years for these learners to acquire language acquisition in English (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Brown et al, 2006; Dooley, 2009) in comparison to the 5 to 7 years it takes for immigrants who are literate in their first language (Cummins, 1981; Brown et a., 2006). These students find themselves within a new country, culture and educational system, and are faced with the challenge to "acquire social communication skills, and also academic writing and speaking skills, while attempting to catch up to native speaking peers" (Brown et al., 2006). Therefore, there is a definite need to consider second language learners who are illiterate in their first language as having additional needs that teachers need to be aware of in order to support them in their learning.

As a classroom teacher, I saw this need to better support my refugee students in their learning, including the need for improvements in the programs available to these students, but I was not explicitly aware of their learning needs until I began to work on my thesis. Furthermore, my genuine care and concern for my former students has sparked my interest in wanting to find out more about the best known practices for teaching students who are illiterate in their first language and trying to learn English. When working with Sahal, I found myself frustrated and upset at the lack of

support and resources available to him. I had an urge to fight for his education and do the best that I could for him as his classroom teacher, but felt that I could never support his learning needs as much as I wanted to and as much as he needed me to due to the many demands of my job as a classroom teacher, the many other needy students in my classroom, the lack of supports and resources available to me, and because most of my attempts to ask for something more were either dismissed or remedied with poor quality supports and answers. Perhaps one of the reasons why more supports were not given was due to an all around lack of knowledge within the school system for supporting EAL first language illiterate learners. For example, according to DeCapua and Marshall (2009), students with limited or no prior education who are learning English require more than English language instruction, but specific programs to meet their needs. Since, at the time Sahal was in my classroom, there were not very many EAL students within the city where Sahal lives, it is possible that the school system simply lacked the knowledge in regard to EAL education in general, let alone how to support EAL learners who lacked first language print literacy.

It has been six years since I taught Sahal in Grade Four, and of the many wonderful students I taught, something about Sahal stayed with me. As I began working with Sahal as one of the participants for my thesis I could see how far he still needs to go in regard to his English language learning – and I feel disheartened. With the number of new immigrants moving to our city, there are now more supports in place for EAL learners, but the specific needs of EAL learners, like Sahal, who lack first language print literacy skills, are still a mystery – or rather, the further needs of these students are not yet recognized. I want to change that.

Therefore, this thesis involves my exploration of the needs of students who struggle to develop second language print literacy as a result of illiteracy in their first language through examining their social and cultural practices of literacy. Chapter Two is a literature review which explores: (1) what print literacy is, (2) oral language development (3) possible teaching methods, and (4) social and cultural practices of literacy. Chapter Three describes my participants and the methodology that informs my research, while Chapters Four and Five discuss my research findings. Chapter Six provides my recommendations for supporting first language illiterate learners, as well as possibilities for future research in this area, and summarizes this thesis.

To reiterate, through this thesis, I want to learn what are the social and cultural practices of literacy of EAL learners who lack first language print literacy? As I explored this question, I couldn't help but think back to a nine year-old Sahal sitting at the back of my Grade Four classroom with his hood pulled over his head, trying to hide from the world, grasping the piece of looseleaf where he wrote his Arabic name.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced the issue of illiteracy and the necessity for supports for EAL learners who lack first language print literacy skills. Chapter One also delved into the big question of "What is literacy"? and described and compared cognitive theories of literacy and social and cultural practices of literacy, as well as other possible reasons for problems in second language learning, such as adapting to new environments and trauma. This chapter, which is the literature review portion of my thesis, explores (1) print literacy; (2) oral language development; (3) possible teaching methods to support the literacy instruction of EAL learners who lack first language print literacy skills, including the development of first language print acquisition, utilizing authentic literacy practices, and adopting teaching methods from learners' own cultures; and (4) what research has to say about social and cultural practices of literacy. Each of these sections of the literature review relate to my research question of what are the social and cultural practices of literacy of EAL learners who are illiterate in their first language.

2.2 Print Literacy

To review, literacy is a complex term that involves much more than simply reading and writing, but rather there are many different literacy practices that are used in various domains of social life (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004). With the idea that literacy should include and value both cognitive and social theories in mind (as discussed in Chapter One), it is also important for the purposes of this thesis in learning about the sociocultural practices of literacy of second language learners

who lack first language print literacy to define what print literacy is. Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener (2004) developed the following definitions in regard to print literacy and print literacy development:

> Print literacy is reading and writing of some form of print for communicative purposes inherent in people's lives. Thus, it involves decoding and encoding of a linguistically based symbol system and is driven by social processes that rely upon communication and meaning. Because it is social, its practice reflects sociocultural patterns and purposes as well as power relationships and political forces. (p. 26)
>
> Print literacy development is the acquisition, improvement, elaboration, and extension of the abilities and strategies necessary to comprehend and produce written language for communicative purposes within sociocultural contexts. This includes understanding the social meanings of literate activity and mastering the pragmatics and semiotics of literacy activity. (p. 26)

These definitions combine elements from both cognitive and social theory perspectives to define print literacy and how it is developed. Not only does literacy involve the "bottom-up" strategies (Birch, 2002) and language knowledge of decoding and encoding, but also "top-down" strategies (Birch, 2002) that require world knowledge and sociocultural practices.

2.3 Oral Language Development

In this section, I examine oral language from a social theory point of view for the purposes of this thesis, though it is important to realize that there are also cognitive theories that deal specifically with the oral language processing skills of illiterate learners. Briefly, these skills include focusing on phonological sensitivity and rhyming, as well as on the oral processing weaknesses of illiterate learners such as phonemic discrimination and working with linguistic segments, comparing oral and written text (according to Bigelow and Tarone, 2005). Furthermore, it is suggested that more teaching strategies should be explored in regard to building "oral and

contextual support for development of grapheme/phoneme and other linguistic segmentation skills" (Bigelow & Tarone, 2005, para. 33)..

> In social theories of oral language development, oral language or oral text (as discussed earlier) is also a type of literacy. It is important to have an understanding of this type of literacy because a number of cultures throughout the world have strong oral traditions. Some of these cultures function well without a writing system (Roberts, 1994). In fact, people who are part of oral traditions develop other methods and strategies for learning subject matter without the support of written materials (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). Bigelow and Tarone state that "although the tools of literacy certainly may help learners to remember aspects of the second language, it is also possible that without them they would use other means of remembering – and the tools of literacy may also limit them in certain ways" (p. 693). For example,Ong (2002) describes the use of mnemonic patterns as a tool for remembering language without the use of written material:In a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulary expressions, in standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero's 'helper', and so on), in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form. Serious thought is intertwined with memory systems. (p. 34)

From this excerpt, we can conclude that there are many other ways for remembering that don't include writing down information, but instead rely upon different mental tricks and memorization skills that allow one to remember what is necessary. Cultures with strong oral language traditions may use such skills, which are not common in western society. Perry (2008) discusses how one of her Sudanese participants talked about how important memory is within his culture. "In Africa, when an old man or woman needs to die, he can mention all the things for his entire life since he was very young" (p. 20). He remembers these only in his mind, nothing is written down.

Perry (2007a) and Wright (2001) both study African cultures with strong oral traditions. Perry (2007a) describes, for example, the importance of preserving the Dinka language to Sudanese refugees. There is very little print material available in Dinka so those who speak it do not have print literacy skills in the language. According to Perry, refugees who have come to the United States have noted that it no longer seems possible to preserve their traditions with storytelling within their new society and realities, since in Sudan storytelling was passed down from elders within communities who encouraged youth to learn these stories by memory so that one day they could pass them down as well. However, in the refugees' new location of the United States, there are no Sudanese elders to pass down these stories. Therefore, they believe that their Dinka culture may become extinct without written text.

Perry also points out that some literacies are more dominant than others (such as print literacies) and are patterned by those in power. Perry (2008) discusses orphaned Sudanese refugees living in the U.S. in order to study "literacy and narrative as a social practice, reflecting participants' social, cultural, and political contexts" (p. 2), as well as the fact that "storytelling represents a purposeful practice shaped by and closely linked to a community's beliefs, values, and attitudes" (p. 4) – a practice that is not as valued as print literacy within western society. However, storytelling can be either print or oral-based and differ across cultures. Perry's Sudanese participants, as mentioned earlier, come from a highly oral culture, but within their new environment of the United States, see the value and importance in transforming their storytelling practices to fit into the new society in which they now find themselves in an effort to preserve their culture and their Dinka identity, as they believe that otherwise it may be lost.

Within the Dinka culture, traditional storytelling is viewed as "an important avenue for learning about family and community, as well as gender roles and other important cultural information" (Perry, 2008, p. 23). Without access to Sudanese elders, this role will now need to be filled by Sudanese youth (Perry, 2008, p. 30). As the storytelling practices of these Sudanese youth shift within their new location of the U.S., they continue to use some oral forms of storytelling, but also use print media to keep their tradition alive within their new society (Perry, 2008, p. 31). One of the participants talks about the importance of keeping their Dinka cultural identity and, not only identifying their cultural background, but behaving like Dinka as well. He also believes that it is important to learn about and appreciate other cultures within their new society, while keeping their own identity (Perry, 2008 p. 32).

It seems obvious that the literacy practices of the Dinka culture are an important part of their identity and how they view the world. They also serve as a tool or a starting point for introducing these Sudanese youth into new forms of literacy, while not losing their own, but rather adapting and transforming their literacy practices. Perry (2008) notes that it seems as though:

> While traditional storytelling may no longer appear in the same forms as in years past, print literacy and the information age have contributed to storytelling's evolution, rather than to its death. The case of Sudanese refugees' transformation of storytelling represents a powerful example of how individuals and communities negotiate the differences between, appropriate from, and transform cultural practices (p. 35).

Wright also discusses her experiences in working with an African culture with strong oral traditions through her work with teachers and children in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in Eritrea. Eritreans also have strong oral traditions and use teaching tools such as chanting, echoing and singing in their lessons. Wright admitted to being unsure of these methods upon first arriving in the

classroom, but began to understand the importance of using educational methods that reflect the literacy of the people.

Similar to Wright, Molosiwa (2007) investigates language and literacy issues in Botswana, including specifically looking at oral language traditions. A number of different languages and language varieties are spoken in Botswana, but 80% of people speak Setswana, which is taught as a secondary language in schools, with English declared as the official language and the language of instruction in all school subjects, with the exception of some Setswana classes (Molosiwa, 2007). Pre-colonial education in Botswana, however, was based on traditional forms of education and religion, including adolescent initiations, hunting and agricultural skills, and even vocational education teaching specific trades such as medicine, mining and smelting (Molosiwa, 2007). Education in pre-colonial times was oral, and print literacy was instituted with the arrival of British missionaries. Among those interviewed by Molosiwa, it was clear that English was viewed as the higher status language, through their decision to speak English rather than Setswana (even though the interviewer could speak both languages fluently), with the occasional code-switching between languages. "The language in education policy has elevated the status of English such that being literate in English is seen as a form of empowerment" (Moloswia, 2007, p. 12). Therefore, print literacy is also associated with power, as opposed to local oral language traditions.

Moloswia (2007) points out the following:

> Traditionally, Batswana children used to learn folktales, riddles, proverbs and idioms at home from their elders. While stories considered as passed along by elders were previously told orally, they are now conveyed in school through books written in Setswana. (p. 18)

The point that Moloswia (2007) makes is that Batswana children traditionally learned stories, riddles, proverbs and idioms orally and remembered them as such, but since the arrival of British Missionaries, these traditional forms of literacy are now read in books in school. However, most children are exposed to a variety of oral literacy practices before they start school, while very few are exposed to print literacy materials within their homes. One of Moloswia's participants believes that "oral literature taught mental development and critical thinking skills" (Molosiwa, 2007, p. 52).

Similarily, Dyer & Choksi (2001) studied, what they referred to as, a "nomadic group" from west India called the Rabaris of Kachchh. The Rabaris continue to live within their ancestral environment, but their way of life is being challenged by modern developments, including their lack of print literacy skills in a modernized society where reading and writing are highly used and valued. Due to their illiteracy, they face many challenges within this changing environment, including their nomadic lifestyle within their own country and their cultural practices of literacy being challenged by a dominant, modernized society. The Rabaris have come to realize that "their indigenous, apprenticeship model of education is no longer sufficient to help them flourish in contemporary, modernising society" (p. 28), just as Molosiwa (2007) describes how pre-colonial Botswanan education was not valued as times changed within the country and British missionaries took over.

It is important for teachers to keep in mind that illiterate students in their classrooms may come from strong oral traditions which have given them different skills for remembering language; therefore, there may be strengths and weaknesses

when transferring those oral language skills from their first language to their second language (Bigelow & Tarone, 2005).

2.4 Teaching Methods

Having contemplated the complexities of defining literacy, cognitive and social theories of second language acquisition, other factors that hinder second language learning (such as trauma and new environments), and oral language development, this section of the literature review considers possible teaching methods – keeping in mind both cognitive and social theories – to support first language illiterate learners with second language acquisition. Although research is lacking in the area of the development of second language acquisition in regard to individuals who are illiterate in their first language, there are, nevertheless, some suggestions for teachers working with these students. Earlier, I considered the fact that individuals who come from predominantly oral cultures and have little to no experience with written text in their first language may have other strategies for remembering language. Roberts (1994) also provides a number of suggestions for teachers, including: bringing a variety of relevant print materials into the classroom that students may encounter in their daily activities; giving students plenty of opportunities for reading and writing; modelling literate behaviour and enjoyment of it; discussing readings; encouraging students to relate concepts or ideas in readings to their lives; creating a welcoming classroom atmosphere; and using a task-based approach. Brown, Miller and Mitchell, (2006) suggest that many EAL students have difficulty with language demands in mainstream curriculum, especially those who have second language acquisition difficulties due to illiteracy in their first language.

Dooley (2009) details an ethnographic study which involved interviewing African students in an intensive English language school in Australia, who are transitioning into high school, to determine, from the students' points of view, many of whom had gaps in their educations and were illiterate or had a low level of print literacy in their first language, what is causing them difficulty in school. The study found English to be the biggest obstacle in understanding in high school, including the fast pace that the teachers talk, the large amounts of technical vocabulary, and the poor explanations given to them. These findings are also things that, from the point of view of students, teachers can incorporate. Lastly, it is important that students feel a sense of connectedness and belonging in order to take risks in their language learning (Brown et al., 2006).

Although there are a number of different teaching ideas suggested in this section, much research suggests that the best methods for teaching second language literacy is to develop first language print literacy, and teach authentic, real-world literacy practices taking into consideration the literacy practices of students' countries of origin. These two methods are informed by both cognitive and social practices of literacy.

2.4.1 Developing First Language Print Acquisition.

The first method involves developing first language print literacy. Individuals who are illiterate in their first language (such as refugees in a number of studies) lack a foundation for print acquisition (Freire, 1990) and would benefit from being taught in their first language before tackling print literacy in their second language (Bialystok, 2001; Roberts, 1994; Escamilla, 2006; The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth 2006; Loewen, 2004; Cummins, 1981;

Olimpo, n.d.). Cummins (1981) states that "English literacy skill is strongly related to the extent of development of first language literacy skills" (p. 57). So, just as there is transference from first language to second language writing systems, no matter which writing systems they are, there is transference in general from first language to second language, when a learner has literacy skills in her first language.

One study in particular, Palmer, El-Ashry, Leclere and Chang (2007), examines how the English skills of a 9-year old boy from Palestine improved when he was taught print literacy in his first language of Arabic. The study looks at how the Arabic language and the English language differ and, therefore, what transferable skills Abdallah (a pseudonym for the student being studied) would have in learning in his first language. For example, negative transfers from Arabic to English include: "letter forms take on a different shape based on placement in the word – initial, medial, or end"; "one letter equals one phoneme"; "short vowels are diacritical marks attached to consonants"; "it is written from right to left"; and "it has no verbs for *to have* and *to be*" (Palmer et al., 2007, p. 10). Interestingly, there are many varieties of spoken Arabic, but only one form of formal Arabic called Modern Standard Arabic, which can greatly differ from Arabic spoken varieties; as well as the fact that many Arabic speaking countries have strong oral language traditions (Palmer et al., 2007). Abdallah is described in the following way: "he seemed to know little about reading in his native language, had little information about English, and was making almost no progress in acquiring reading knowledge of either language" (Palmer et al, 2007, p. 8). He was lagging behind the other students in his EAL classroom, including those who also spoke his first language of Arabic, but could read and write in the language. The researchers used Cummins' (1981) Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP)

theory, which suggests that strength in one's first language provides knowledge and skills for second language acquisition, as a basis for their study. They began by testing Abdallah's skills in reading both Arabic and English in order to have a starting point for helping him to improve his print literacy skills. They found that "factors from Abdallah's limited knowledge of Arabic were confounding his acquisition of English" (Palmer et al, 2007, p. 11). Therefore, they began by working on strengthening his reading skills in Arabic. Abdallah met weekly with a teacher of Arabic for one and a half hour lessons. This tutoring took place over four months and, in that time, Abdallah had progressed to a fourth grade reading level of Arabic. Next, "direct instruction in Arabic-English positive and negative transfers was introduced" (Palmer et al, 2007, p. 14) for an additional four months. After eight months, there was definite improvement noted in Abdallah's English reading and writing skills. The authors concluded that first teaching Adballah to read and write in his first language was beneficial to learning in his second language. They suggest that if students cannot be taught in their first language, teachers should still attempt to develop a basic understanding of students' first language and its positive and negative transfers to English.

The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (2006) affirms this position, stating:

> There is clear evidence that tapping into first-language literacy can confer advantages to English-language learners. For example, there is evidence that language-minority students are able to take advantage of higher order vocabulary skills in the first language, such as the ability to provide formal definitions and interpret metaphors when speaking a second language. Studies also indicate that students are able to take advantage of cognate relationships between their first language and English to understand English words, an important precursor to comprehension. (p. 5)

So we can see from the study with Abdallah that learning in one's first language promotes literacy in a second language. One possible option for students, where available, are dual language programs (Roberts, 1994) or bilingual schools.

Escamilla (2006) looks at bilingual schools, and asserts:

> Bilingual education that uses a child's first language in instruction, particularly initial literacy instruction, can positively impact student academic achievement and can possibly reduce the number of inappropriate referrals and placements of ELA student in special education. The use of first language for initial literacy instruction is thought to be a particularly powerful intervention. (p. 2349)

Escamilla does, however, point out the importance of developing "a theory of literacy" (p. 2350) that is not based merely on monolingual English theory.

2.4.2 Authentic Literacy

Authentic Literacy includes literacy in context, involves real-life literacy practices and can occur in social contexts outside of the classroom (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson & Soler, 2002). "Using authentic texts in the classroom helps bridge the gap between the home and school and allows the students to clearly see real-life purposes for reading and writing that match the purposes used by their families or other community members" (Gates & Purcell-Gates, n.d., p. 14). The Cultural Practices of Literacy Study (CPLS) website ("CPLS", n.d.b), which I will discuss more in the following section, is a metastudy of various literacy practices in different communities worldwide and offers a number of model lessons for authentic literacy instruction in a way that complements the results of the CPLS research. The website states that the model lessons were designed in schools with much diversity and many different languages. The Cultural Practices of Literacy Study ("Creating Authentic

Literacy Activities K-3," n.d.) describes four things that are considered when planning authentic literacy activities, including:

> (1) Learning the literacy practices in the lives of your students; (2) Creating the necessary authentic contexts for literacy activity in your classroom; (3) Selecting both real-life texts for your students to read and write as well as real-life purposes for the reading and writing of these texts; and (4) the explicit teaching of skills and strategies as well as formative assessment of how your students are learning them. (p.5)

These model lessons do not suggest that there is such a thing as inauthentic literacy, but rather that "school-only" literacy develops cognitive literacy skills necessary for learning to read and write. However, teaching literacy only in this way is limiting and not beneficial to all students. "Authentic literacy is the reading and writing of real-life texts for real-life purposes in the literacy learning classroom" ("Creating Authentic Literacy Activities K-3", n.d.b, p. 1). Authentic literacy involves students, for example, not only reading a recipe, but preparing the dish.

Purcell-Gates' (2008) offers some strategies for teaching authentic literacy. The following are as a result of her research in Costa Rica:

> 1. Literacy instruction should stress the connection between the texts and purposes for reading/writing them that children experience in their out-of-school lives and the texts/purposes being used for beginning literacy instruction.
>
> 2. Schools should surround children who come from homes with limited text use with real life reasons for reading and writing and with real life texts for accomplishing those purposes. Teachers and others in the schools should also model reading and writing for real life purposes and make these events visible and explicit for the children. (p. 7-8)

Purcell-Gates stresses that connections should be made from texts that learners read to real-life purposes. She also notes that teachers need to model using literacy for real-life, authentic purposes. In addition, Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall & Tower (2006-2007) discuss the benefit of using "highly authentic" literacy which refers to authentic

literacy that uses, for example, real-life text for real-life purposes, as opposed to using authentic texts for school-only purposes. This type of learning, according to DeCapua and Marshall (2009), is very beneficial for SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education) EAL learners because "SLIFE need to see the direct connection between what they are learning and the practical realities in their lives" (p. 164), which is (according to Purcell-Gates, 2008) exactly what authentic literacy entails. DeCapua and Marshall go on to suggest that SLIFE learners come from HC (High Context) cultures that value collectivism, social relationships and working interdependently with others, which are very different from LC (Low Context) cultures (such as the US where the study takes place with SLIFE learners) that emphasize times and schedules with more focus placed on the individual than the group. Therefore, highly authentic lessons are beneficial for SLIFE learners since, according to DeCapua and Marhsall, because of their HC culture "for SLIFE, learning is part of one's relationship to others" (p. 164). It is, however, important to note that "HC and LC refer to general characteristics, not absolutes and that these cultures, ethnic group, subcultures, and individuals fall along a continuum of the spectrum" (p. 161). In other words, DeCapua and Marshall want to make it clear that they are not intending to stereotype or overgeneralize. Furthermore, Perry (2008) suggests that it is also beneficial for teachers to have access to community resources and programs to enhance their students' learning.

Wright (2001), on the other hand, discusses using the literacy of the people to develop second language acquisition. Through her experience observing an EFL classroom in Eritrea, she found that (although contrary to western teaching practices) teaching methods such as echoing, chanting, singing and choral responses seemed

effective for Eritrean students who come from a culture rich in oral language and traditions. She found that it was important to try to understand the literacy of the people and incorporate that into the design of the curriculum. Moreover, she discusses, as an example, that when creating an EFL curriculum for the teachers and learners in Eritrea, it was decided to continue with only the "look and say system" (p. 69) of learning language until third grade, when phonics would be introduced.

Keeping in mind the use of authentic literacy, as discussed previously, there are many different kinds of literacies beyond print literacy and in-school literacies. Purcell-Gates (2011) suggests that "teachers may want to consider ways of recognizing and incorporating what children learn from television and other media into their classrooms" (p. 302). Therefore, other types of media, such as texting and art could also be beneficial in improving students' literacy skills, depending on what they are interested in, their cultural backgrounds and home literacies.

2.5 Social and Cultural Practices of Literacy

2.5.1 The Cultural Practices of Literacy Study (CPLS)

After looking at possible teaching methods that may benefit EAL learners who lack first language print literacy, it is now important to look at how social practices of literacy affect EAL learners, since it is the focus of my thesis. The "Cultural Practices of Literacy Study" (CPLS) is a metastudy of the literacy practices within several different cultural communities. It is an umbrella project with a "primary focus on marginalized communities and a focus on creating culturally responsive literacy instruction" (Purcell-Gates, 2008, p. 1). The study is situated at the University of British Columbia and co-directed by Victoria Purcell-Gates and Kristen H. Perry ("CPLS", n.d.a). The CPLS (n.d.a.) states:

> Each case study is framed by theory that views literacy as social and cultural practice, patterned by institutions, historical events, values, beliefs, and power relationships. Each case study is also designed with the goal of developing early literacy instruction, particularly for marginalized and underachieving children, that builds on community literacy practices (n.d.a).

Purcell-Gates (2008), explores marginalization and education, stating that "children from marginalized populations the world over consistently underperform academically as compared to their peers from communities of power and status" (p. 12). Purcell-Gates (2008) notes the following reasons: " a) unequal opportunities to learn, (b) limited access to educationally relevant resources, (c) ethnic and racial stereotyping, and (d) cultural incompatibility between the home and school culture" (p. 12). Purcell-Gates' CPLS aims to study this reality and find new ways of teaching and understanding individuals who come from different literacy backgrounds that incorporates authentic, real-world literacy practices, and uses the literacy practices of the people to enhance their learning, and considers these practices valid, rather than deficient.

Purell-Gates (2008) states:

> The 'problem' of underachievement of children from marginalized communities lies not in the community marginalized but in the marginalizing community – in their socially constructed perceptions of deficit and difference and in the ways that those constructions impact the instruction provided these children. (p. 13)

What Purcell-Gates means is that we need to focus on the beliefs, values and assumptions that construct the instruction and marginalizing of children within marginalized communities, as opposed to faulting the children and their community for "underachievement".

For the purpose of this thesis, I have looked at a number of the CPLS publications that deal both with EAL learners in general, as well as EAL learners who may be illiterate in their first language and/or come from cultures with very different literacy practices from those within Canada's dominant society, such as strong oral language literacies. In looking specifically at marginalized children, Purcell-Gates (n.d.) considers the reasons why poor and marginalized children in Costa Rica (primarily Nicaraguan immigrants) experience difficulties in school, as well as explores the community-based literacy practices of these children. Purcell-Gates both visited the homes of these children and observed them in the classroom. She asked not to be told which students within the class were Nicaraguan, figuring that, based on descriptions she'd heard of these children, she would be able to pick them out. This, however, was not the case and she, in fact, discovered that she had been focusing on the wrong children (Purcell-Gates, 2008).

Purcell-Gates (2008) notes:

> Clearly the negative characteristics of difference ascribed to Nicaraguan parents and children are more constructed than not. They are not based on data but more on broader issues of fear, xenophobia, perceived (and partially constructed also) national crises, historical enmities, and scapegoating. (p. 12)

Previously, I discussed the oral language traditions of Sudanese refugees in the U.S. (according to Perry, 2008) and of students in Botswana (as researched by Molosiwa, 2007). Both of these cultural groups have had to adapt their oral language traditions in order to become a part of the changing world and fit into the literacy practices of the dominant society. In the case of the Sudanese refugee participants in Perry's study, individuals tried to find a way to preserve their Dinka culture and literacy practices within their new environment of the United States.

The Botswanian participants in Molosiwa's study, however, struggled with the power status that the English language had as the main language taught within their own country, while coming from families with oral traditions, and with children having little access to print material until beginning school. Moloswia found that print literacy was associated with power in Botswana and her participants opted to speak English as much as possible during their interactions with her, even though she could speak their native language of Setswana. The Sudanese refugees in Perry's study, however, adapted their cultural practice of storytelling, while still maintaining their Dinka culture. In fact, they even used storytelling as a sort of resistance against the dominant culture; -"…storytelling can be a politically powerful tool. Many of the stories told by these refugees critiqued those in power…" (Perry, 2008, p. 37). From both Perry's and Molosiwa's studies, it is apparent that the dominant culture has an effect on literacy practices. However, in Molosiwa's study, the participants seemed to accept English as the dominant language and as a language of power, choosing to speak English rather than their native language in a situation where they could speak Setswana, whereas in Perry's study, participants resisted the dominant culture to some extent through their determination to retain their own culture and cultural practices.

Another CPLS article written by Perry (2007b) discusses the stereotypes and deficit assumptions made about African refugees. The study looks at the literacy practices of Sudanese refugee families with young children. Perry wanted to understand refugees' beliefs about literacy and the various ways they use it within their lives, as well as how school literacy practices align with everyday literacy practices. Within the dominant society, there have been some views that regard particular home literacy practices and the education of parents as creating a

foundation for child literacy development in comparison to families who cannot provide the same opportunities. Thus, these children are viewed as "deficient". However, Perry (2007b) acknowledges "the need to understand literacy as a phenomenon that is not solely cognitive; literacy is an ideological social practice shaped by social, cultural, economic, political, and ideological factors" (p. 4). The immigrant and refugee families Perry observed relied on many different resources to try to understand a new language and literacy. She observed that they depended a lot on family members, with parents often relying on their children and the children even influencing their parents' literacy practices. How these new immigrants attempt to understand print literacy and make sense of it within their new environment is called "literacy brokering". Literacy brokering is defined as "the act of seeking out help in understanding texts and their purposes and uses in the real world" (Perry, 2007b, p. 4).

Throughout the CPLS research, it seems that home literacy plays a large role in the development of future literacy practices. O'Neil (2007) looks at the literacy practices of two undergraduate students and how home and school has shaped those practices. The participants' literacy practices, and their feelings and understanding of those practices, were shaped by both home and school, but it is suggested that their home literacy experiences engaged the participants the most, providing them with their first literacy events. Similarly, Rosolova (2007) studies the literacy practices of two adults who came as refugees to the U.S. from Cuba. Both participants had five years of university in Cuba and were literate in their first language. What Rosolova discovered was that political context plays a role in what people read and write (including what is accessible and what is denied). To one of the participants,

empowerment “comes with knowledge and cultural awareness” (Rosolova, 2007, p. 105), and there is a definite awareness that with print literacy comes social rewards. The participants’ literacy practices were heavily influenced by their family literacy practices in their countries of origin. Furthermore, “the literacy practices brought by both participants from their native countries intersect with the literacy practices they engage with in their new linguistic environment, although these appear to be somewhat modified due to different life circumstances” (Rosolova, 2007, p. 18), as well as the fact that their literacy practices from home “intersect with the social, political, and cultural contexts in which both participants live” (Rosolova, 2007, p. 110).

Rosolova (2007) reiterates:

> Literacy practices do not miraculously appear and disappear when one enters a new linguistic environment, but they seem to be closely linked to the social, cultural and political contexts in which they developed and as well as those of the new context in which they are modified and sustained. (p. 20)

Thus, when one moves into a new cultural environment where a new language must be learned, former literacy practices do not disappear while new ones are adopted. Rather, depending on social, cultural and political contexts, both old and new practices are employed.

2.5.2 The New Literacy Studies (NLS)

The New Literacy Studies (NLS) is a line of primarily ethnographic research that is designed to learn about social and cultural behaviour in regard to literacy practices. Kalman and Street (2013) use the premises of the NLS in their work in Latin America.

Kalman and Street (2013) state:

> In Latin America an idea that has dominated the official discourses for decades, if not more, is that reading and writing are singular, neutral, and objective skills that are learned through a progression of ordered exercises and then transferable to any situation. Consequently, governments and international agencies alike have promoted – and continue to promote – programs that reduce literacy to mechanical skills that fail to capture the complexity of literacy practices in the social world. (p. 1)

This quote also applies to other societies where print literacy is dominant and other types of literacy practices are undervalued. Lorenzatti (2013), as part of Kalman and Street's (2013) research in Latin America, observes the literacy practices of one individual, Marta Graciela, who lacks print literacy skills. Marta, who currently lives in Argentina where Lorenzatti's research takes place, was born in Boliva and, as a female, was not allowed to attend school. Although Marta is illiterate in the most basic sense of the term, she uses a number of other methods to make sense of everyday situations in her life. Lorenzatti (2013) emphasizes:

> Underschooled adults and youths are believed to be incapable of having an opinion, understanding complex issues, and participating in social spaces. People tagged and classified as illiterate, uneducated or poorly educated are generally not recognized as active social subjects despite the fact that they participate in institutions, struggle for their rights, constitute families, or plan and develop projects for the future. (p. 81)

Through her observations of Marta, Lorenzatti demonstrates the inaccuracy of this stereotype of under-schooled and illiterate individuals. Marta uses a number of different modes of representation to go about her daily life including: graphic images, oral language, flavours, fragrances, colours, memory skills and literacy brokering. Lorenzatti looked at a number of instances in Marta's life where 'literate' people would use reading and writing to aid them in accomplishing daily tasks, but Marta must use the above modes of representation. These daily tasks, for Marta, include:

selling cosmetics from a catalogue, attending and participating in church services, identifying medications, grocery shopping and finding her way throughout the city she lives in. For example, when Marta sells cosmetics, she uses a catalogue with full-page illustrations. The drawings and photographs help her to know what the products are and what customers wish to purchase. She allows her customers to peruse the catalogue and then asks them to write their names above the images they wish to buy (as she has a very basic understanding of letters), but also memorizes the chosen products. She uses literacy brokering to place the orders by asking a friend to help her fill in the forms and then organizes the products, once they arrive, based on her previous method of using the catalogue and her memory for remembering the products that particular clients purchased. Other examples of Marta using other forms of literacy include: how she pays attention to things such as colour, shape and size when identifying which pills she needs to take; looking at colours, commercial wrappings and images, as well as her sense of smell when buying things at the supermarket; and paying attention to landmarks and asking a number of people practical questions, instead of reading street names, when finding her way throughout the city.

2.6 Conclusion

Throughout this literature review, my focus has been on how EAL learners illiterate in their first language develop second language acquisition, as compared to EAL learners with print literacy acquisition in their first language. I also focused on known methods for teaching these individuals. In order to do this, I began by defining print literacy using both cognitive and social theories of literacy (as described by Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004). After that, I explored oral

language development. I then began to look, in particular, at teaching methods to aid in the learning of EAL first language illiterate learners, beginning with the cognitive theory approach of developing first language print acquisition in order to develop second language print acquisition more easily. The belief is that developing print acquisition in one's first language will help, through the transference of skills, with second language acquisition. Subsequently, I explored teaching methods that use social practices of literacy. The main point throughout this section is the importance of using authentic materials and connecting text to real-life practices. It also includes considering the cultural practices of literacy of learners' home countries in order to teach them English.

From there, I explored social and cultural practices of literacy through the CPLS studies. The studies looked at how social and cultural practices of literacy are patterned by relations of power, values, beliefs and relationships. They investigated different cultural communities and how individuals within those communities adapted and maintained their own cultural practices of literacy within their new environments, as well as how they adopted new forms of social and cultural practices. I also briefly looked at the NLS and, specifically, at how one particular study looked at the social practices of literacy of an illiterate woman in Argentina.

The next chapter details the methodology that informs my research and my research design. It includes explanations and descriptions of the methodology I draw on for my research, sharing information about my participants and their first language, the historical and cultural context of my research, gaining access to conduct my research and my data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

As Chapter Two illustrates, social and cultural practices of literacy, to put it succinctly, are quite complex. Since defining and understanding social and cultural practices of literacy is no easy feat, it follows that defining literacy as a whole (including its cognitive theory definitions) makes understanding what literacy is rather complicated. Although both theories of literacy have strengths, my research explores, specifically, social and cultural practices of literacy (Purcell-Gates, 2008). Because of this sociocultural focus and the nature of my research question, my research design and methodology are constructed using qualitative methods. This design is (1) suited to researching social and cultural practices of literacy and (2) is the type of research used by the Cultural Practices of Literacy Studies (Perry, 2008) that influence my research. In addition, it is important for me to note that there were limitations to my study and I reflect upon these in the final chapter of this thesis.

This chapter begins with the reasons for my methodology of choice. In depth, I then introduce my participants, describe the context in which my research takes place, discuss the complexity around their first language of Arabic and explain how I gained consent from my participants in order to conduct my research. I describe this information in depth because it is important to understand as fully as possible the social and cultural practices of my participants, who are prominent in my research. Finally, I discuss my three methods of data collection and how I analyzed the data I collected.

3.1 Methodology

This study explores the social and cultural practices of literacy of two EAL learners, who have no print literacy in their first language. What are the social and cultural practices of literacy of EAL learners who lack first language print literacy? In order to conduct my research, I draw on ethnographic methods and the genre of narrative inquiry, or more specifically, life history inquiry. I chose ethnography to inform my research because, in simple terms, it is the practice of studying and describing a group or culture, and my research does just that. It looks at the culture of the participants in order to attempt to better understand their literacy practices. Merriam (2009) describes the role of ethnographers as endeavoring to understand the cultural worlds that people construct, as well as "the interaction of individuals not just with others, but also with the culture of the society they live" (p. 23). Basically, she states that ethnography involves examining how individuals interact with, not only other people, but with the culture of the society of which they are a part. Goldbart & Hustler (2005) take the definition of ethnography one step further, stating that "people actively collaborate in the construction and maintenance of the cultural meaning which inform their actions" (p. 16), letting us know that individuals within a culture actually create and maintain the culture that they are a part of through their actions. Hence, ethnographers have the task of not only learning about the culture of their participants and how their participants interact with others within that culture, but also how the actions of their participants lend themselves to the foundation and preservation of the culture.

In short, I chose ethnography in order to guide my research because it assists me in studying the social and cultural practices of my participants (being, in

particular, their literacy practices), including how my participants interact with others within the culture(s) they belong and how they contribute to the upkeep of said culture(s). However, upon delving further into the analysis of my data and writing my thesis, I discovered that my work has also evolved into a kind of narrative inquiry, as well as drawing from ethnography. "Narrative inquiry is concerned with the production, interpretation and representation of storied accounts of lived experience" (Shacklock & Thorp, 2005, p. 156), and (as can be seen in Chapters Four and Five), this thesis uses a number of direct quotes from interviews with the participants in order to share their life experiences so that an understanding of their sociocultural literacy practices can be developed. Furthermore, just as ethnography assists me in my research through understanding what culture is, narrative inquiry helps me to understand how life histories affect lives, which (as can be seen in the following chapter) is a major theme that has emerged from my data collection. Hatch and Wisniewski (1995), for example, further describe narrative inquiry clarifying the difference between a life story and a life history stating that "an analysis of the social, historical, political and economic contexts of a life story by the researcher is what turns a life story into a life history" (p. 125). In other words, Hatch and Wisniewski are saying that a narrative inquiry becomes, specifically, a life history inquiry when social, historical, political and economic contexts of individuals' lives are explored. This exploration begins in this chapter and continues throughout this thesis. Having shared an understanding of the methodology and approach that inform my research, I now move to the information I gathered about my two participants.

3.2 Participants

As I mentioned in Chapter One, the participants for my study are a mother and son from South Sudan. Aheu (a pseudonym) is in her mid-forties and is mother to fifteen year -old Sahal (a pseudonym) who is currently in Grade Nine. Sahal is the youngest of Aheu's seven children; she has five sons and two daughters. In 2007, Aheu and her family came to Canada from a refugee camp in Egypt, before which they lived in their homeland of South Sudan. More specifically, Aheu and her family are from Juba, which is the capital city of the Republic of South Sudan. Aheu brought all of her children with her to Canada, except for one daughter who was already married and stayed with her family in South Sudan. Aheu made no mention of her children's father. Considering the family had to flee their homeland due to war, I was reluctant to ask about him, since I didn't want to stir up any bad memories in case something unfortunate happened to him.

Aheu and Sahal have now been in Canada for approximately six years. When Sahal first arrived in Canada, he spent three months at a school near his home. At the time, Sahal was in Grade Three. For religious purposes, Aheu then moved him to the school system where I was his Grade Four teacher. This school was also close to his home, but Sahal did not initially attend it when he first came to Canada because he was placed in his previous school due to the fact that it had an EAL program, and the school where I taught did not. However, despite the lack of an EAL program at the school where I taught, Aheu was insistent that Sahal (and Sahal's brother) attend the school because it offered a Catholic education and that was important to her.

It was interesting that Aheu chose to place Sahal in a school with no EAL program (though it is understandable that religion is important to her), because upon

arrival in Canada both Sahal and Aheu had no English language skills. In fact, none of her children did.

> *Sahal: All I knew how to say was "hi" and "bye". That's it pretty much.*

This information regarding my participants' language skills and education is an important part of my understanding their sociocultural practices. In addition, not only did Aheu and her family have no English language skills, all of her children, except for her daughter, are illiterate in their first language of Arabic. Although the majority of Aheu's children lack print literacy skills in their first language of Arabic, they were given some education while at the refugee camp in Egypt. Sahal told me the following:

> ***Researcher: Did you learn a little reading and writing in Arabic?***
>
> *Sahal: Yeah, uh, I knew how to read in Arabic. It was pretty easy though.*
>
> ***Researcher: Yeah?***
>
> *Sahal: Yeah, cause it was my first language and I knew, like, the whole…I knew everything about it, so it was pretty easy.*
>
> ***Researcher: Do you remember how to read it now?***
>
> *Sahal: No*

Even though Sahal had some schooling while in Egypt, the education he and his siblings received was minimal and, to this day, only Aheu's daughter has print literacy skills in Arabic (and I am uncertain as to the reason for this). Aheu herself had no opportunity in South Sudan to attend school since she stayed home and took care of her family while her brother made money for the family. Although Aheu had no formal schooling and is illiterate in her first language, she is multilingual, speaking Arabic, English and Kakwa, which is her mother's first language. Sahal and Aheu

told me that Aheu's mother, who also lives in Canada within the same city, but in a different home, speaks as many as five languages.

> *Sahal: My grandma, she knows like five languages.*
>
> ***Researcher: Does she? What other languages does she know?***
>
> *Aheu: Because my mom dad is from Congo, my grandma from Kakwa.*
>
> ***Researcher: Okay***
>
> *Aheu: Different, it's far.*
>
> ***Researcher: That's amazing.***
>
> *Aheu: That's why my mom is speak five language. Mom and dad language.*

In fact, South Sudan includes more than sixty tribes and "is home to a great number and diversity of languages" (Frahm, 2012, p. 36). The Government of Southern Sudan (2011) aligns with Frahm's statement reporting the country as "a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi-racial entity where such diversities peacefully co-exist" (p. 2). In reading this information, it makes sense that Aheu and her mother are both multilingual, coming from a country that is home to so many different languages and language varieties.

English is a new language that Aheu must now learn within her new country of Canada, and, although both Sahal and Aheu can communicate adequately in English, Aheu has much more difficulty than Sahal and often needs the help of her children to complete tasks. When Sahal was a student in my Grade Four classroom, he struggled to develop English language skills in comparison with the other EAL students in my class. I noticed a definite gap in how quickly the other EAL students were learning to read and write in English and how much longer it seemed to take Sahal. Now in Grade Nine, Sahal continues to have difficulty and is placed in a

modified program. Although he is able to speak and understand English, his reading and writing skills still remain far below grade level. Aheu has also learned some English since coming to Canada through classes within the community that were developed to aid new immigrants in learning English, and to adjust to their new Canadian society. Aheu is now able to communicate in English at a basic level, but has much difficulty with reading and writing. Besides having difficulty with learning a new language, Aheu has other difficulties – primarily, that she is unable to work due to a back injury, for which she takes medication.

> *Aheu: Yeah. Sometime, I take the medication, make me sleepy. That's why I'm sleeping sometime all day.*

Having provided biographical information in regard to my participants in order to attempt to describe who they are and where they come from, I now put forth my reasons for selecting my two participants. I chose my participants for a few reasons, including: I know the family and have interviewed them in the past for one of my master's classes; I taught Sahal when he first came to Canada and he was a major factor in sparking my passion for teaching EAL; I am interested in the topic of EAL individuals who are illiterate or have low literacy skills in their first language and are working on developing second language acquisition; and I have done other things to assist the family while I worked at the school Sahal attended (even when he was no longer my student). I have an interest in how he is progressing and a desire to further assist him in his learning and students like him.

In this section I have attempted to make it clear who my participants are and why I chose to work with them for my research purposes, which I described in detail in order to better understand their sociocultural practices. Sahal and Aheu fit into the category of EAL learners that I wish to study since they lack first language print

literacy skills in their first language. Plus, it is beneficial for my research to study the literacy practices of two family members who differ in age and gender (being mother and son) because differences in values and beliefs as to the necessity of developing English language skills, including print literacy skills, differ between my participants due to their ages and positions in their lives, which I will discuss throughout Chapters Four and Five in the discussion portions of my thesis. With thoughts of who my participants are in mind, the next section explores Sahal and Aheu's first language and why they speak Arabic instead of a Sudanese language variety.

3.3 Language

As mentioned, my participants speak Arabic as their first language. I was, however, curious as to why Arabic is Aheu and Sahal's first language, since from what I have heard and read about Sudan and South Sudan, Arabic is the predominant language in north Sudan (or Sudan, though I will refer to it as north Sudan for clarification), but not of South Sudan. Understanding why my participants speak Arabic is important to my understanding their social and cultural practices of literacy. I was puzzled since I knew that the predominant language of north Sudan is Arabic and my understanding was that South Sudan spoke a number of different language varieties (Government of Southern Sudan, 2011). I was also confused because all of the other Sudanese students that I taught spoke a language such as Dinka, Kakwa or Nuer, but not Arabic. Furthermore, the dominant religion of north Sudan is Islam and south Sudanese are primarily Christian (Encyclopedia of Nations, n.d.), and my understanding was that South Sudanese Christians viewed Arabic as an oppressive language due to the many years that north Sudan tried to dominant and assimilate the south to their beliefs and culture (which I will discuss more in the historical and

cultural context section). For instance, Frahm (2012) speaks about a south Sudanese Master's student who "calls for all Arabic names to be removed from Juba as they are a reminder of the oppressors from the North" (p. 13). So, if Sahal and Aheu are Catholic and come from South Sudan, why do they speak Arabic?

After my initial round of data collection, I realized I needed to know more about the family's language background. I tried to go back to my participants to have them answer this question for me, but Aheu, unfortunately, was quite ill and I was unable to meet with her. Therefore, I did some further research to find out why she and Sahal speak Arabic and I came up with some possibilities. One reason, according to Miller (2003), is that Arabic is still the dominant language in many urban centers. Aheu and Sahal do come from a city. Miller explains that the reasons Arabic is dominant in southern Sudanese cities is because "ethnic diversity and multilingualism was perceived as a threat to national unity and Arabization of the non-Arab speaking groups was called upon" (p. 115). Although the northern Arab part of Sudan (now two separate countries referred to as Sudan and South Sudan) sought to make Arabic the dominant language throughout Sudan and to eradicate other languages, Arabization failed and ethnic identity was not dissolved, but rather amplified. However, Arabic still has a significant place in all parts of Sudan.

Miller (2003) insists:

> But it would be difficult to deny that linguistic Arabization is not taking place. More and more people, especially in the urban setting, are either speaking the dominant language (Arabic), or are code-switching or code-mixing between different languages. (p. 115)

So, Aheu and Sahal most likely speak Arabic as their first language because they come from an urban center, Arabic is a dominant language within all Sudanese

cities, and also because of the Arabization that was forced on the south by north Sudan. The language remains dominant throughout all parts of the country.

Besides speaking purely Arabic, a further possibility as to the language of Aheu and Sahal could be that they speak Juba Arabic, especially considering that they come from the city of Juba. Juba Arabic is a variety of Arabic influenced by other south Sudanese languages. Miller (2003) states that "Juba Arabic is defined as the regional language, the language of the South" (p.118) and that Juba Arabic is a *lingua franca*, meaning that it is a shared language between people in South Sudan who do not share a mother-tongue.

To summarize, although I was uncertain as to why Sahal and Aheu speak Arabic as their first language when so many other south Sudanese students I taught spoke Sudanese languages, I have discovered that due to the attempt to create Arabization in South Sudan, Arabic became a dominant language throughout the country, particularly in cities. Sahal and Aheu come from the city of Juba and may speak Arabic because it is dominant within the city; they may speak Juba Arabic, a shared language between people who do not share the same first language; or they may code-switch between languages, especially considering that Aheu speaks Kakwa, the language of her mother, in addition to Arabic. The next section will further explore the history of the former Sudan and the reasoning and events around Sudan's civil wars, as well as describing Sahal and Aheu's current home.

3.4 Historical and Cultural Context

In this section, I work to describe both the historical and cultural context of where my research takes place, following the example of a number of the CPLS articles which also describe the historical, cultural and socio-political contexts of their participants within their studies. Understanding the historical and cultural context is also an important part of comprehending Sahal and Aheu's sociocultural literacy practices. I planned to discuss only the city where my participants now live in Canada, but realized that the context surrounding my research is actually much broader, including Sudan, Egypt and Canada, since all of these places where my participants lived helped in shaping their literacy practices. Therefore, I will begin by first describing why my participants ended up in Canada through summarizing Sudanese history beginning with the first Civil war that took place. Following my summary, I will describe my participants' current context within Canada.

According to Larson (2011), Sudan has undergone many years of conflict with the first Sudanese Civil War beginning in 1955 when southern insurgents developed a movement called Anyanya in order to gain independence due to fear of being dominated by northern Sudan. The war lasted until 1972 when the Southern Sudanese Liberation Movement was formed to negotiate a peace agreement with the Sudanese government, and an agreement entitled the Addis Ababa Agreement was signed. Peacetime followed until large oil fields were discovered in southern Sudan and the second civil war began, lasting for over twenty years beginning in 1983 when the Addis Ababa Agreement was abolished by the north because north Sudan (who controlled the government) wanted control of the oil fields. At the same time, President Nimeiry "institutes a bold Islamicization campaign, transforming Sudan into

a Muslim Arab State". From there mutinies occurred and rebel forces increased in the south. Simultaneously, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) formed in Ethiopia and the civil war continued with the SPLA attempting to gain control. Havoc was created throughout south Sudan as villages were attacked and obliterated, slavery became common, and famine occurred in some parts. Eventually, many southern Sudanese began to flee and take refuge in Egypt, Kenya and Ethiopia before being relocated to Canada, the US, Australia and Great Britain. The Second Civil War finally ended in 2005 when The Nairobi Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed. Finally, on July 9, 2011, south Sudan became independent of north Sudan and The Republic of South Sudan was born, but only after 2.5 million south Sudanese people had been killed and 5 million had been displaced as refugees (International Alliance to End Genocide, n.d.).

Aheu, Sahal and their family fled from the second Sudanese civil war, finding themselves in a refugee camp in Egypt before being relocated to Canada. Unfortunately, I do not know a lot about my participants' time in the refugee camp in Egypt since I did not want to ask them any questions that they might consider political. Before beginning the interviews, Aheu had made it clear that she was uncomfortable with answering any questions about the politics of Sudan, which would include the family's reasons for fleeing the country and ending up in an Egyptian refugee camp. However, when speaking with Aheu about tribal languages, she spoke about one tribe in particular (which I have written as "Sudanese Tribe" to respect the anonymity of the tribe and Aheu's concerns) that she considers to be violent due to her experiences with them. She said:

Aheu: I hate (?) it in my country. I hate the "Sudanese Tribe" (written as such for privacy).

Researcher: Oh, okay.

Aheu: This is bad people.

Researcher: The "Sudanese Tribe" are bad people?

Aheu: Yeah.

Researcher: Oh, I didn't know. I just know that lots of people speak that language.

Aheu: They kill people all the time (?). Maybe you never. I have my Sahal and is fighting. You come kill Sahal.

Researcher: Oh.

Aheu: Sahal, beating, beating, beating.

It is clear that Aheu and her family have experienced the effects of war and it is understandable that Aheu does not wish to discuss the politics of her country. After leaving Egypt, Sahal and Aheu moved to Canada where they now live in an urban community. The city they live in has a population of approximately 200,000 people with the last Statistics Canada census stating that in 2011 the population was 193,100 ("Statistics Canada", 2011), though the population has grown since then. The school that Sahal attended (and where I taught him) is a "community school", meaning that the demographics of the area reveal that the majority of inhabitants are lower income, at risk families, which has allowed the school to be designated a "community school" and, therefore, has more available funding for special programming, needs and supports.

The Saskatchewan Learning (2004) document entitled "Building Communities of Hope: Effective Practices for Meeting Diverse Needs of Children and Youth" states:

> Normally the existence of one risk factor, such as poverty, does not place a child at risk. However, risk factors tend to be present in clusters. For example, alcoholism and family dysfunction are often present with family poverty and it is these clusters that manifest problems for child wellbeing and success. (p. 5)

Schools that have students who are more at risk are often deemed community schools and provided with extra programs and supports. Some of the programs and supports include: prekindergarten, early childhood psychology and mental health services, nutrition and meal programs, transportation services, counselling services, parent education and support, family literacy programming, home visiting, a community school coordinator, support personnel and a nutrition coordinator (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). The school also has a number of new immigrants, including a noteworthy Sudanese population. However, Sahal has begun attending high school.

So, Sahal and Aheu have lived within a number of different contexts, including South Sudan, Egypt and Canada, all of which inform their literacy practices, making the context of my study much broader than I had originally imagined. Now that I have described the context of my research, I move into discussing how I gained consent from my participants in order to conduct my research.

3.5 Gaining Access

In order to gain consent, after ethics approval (see Appendix C), I contacted Aheu personally and set up a time to meet with her so that I could discuss the possibility of interviewing her and Sahal for my research. I took her to a nearby café and proposed my objective, considering that her English skills are minimal, though she does have a good basic understanding of spoken English, I did my best to explain what it was that I wanted to do in a number of ways so that she understood as fully as possible. I determined with the advice of the research ethics board committee that I

should use an Arabic-English translator who could explain to my participants what my research entailed, the role of my participants and my expectations. I, therefore, wrote letters of consent for my translator to go over with Aheu and Sahal (see Appendix B). I chose to have Aheu and Sahal give oral consent, as well written consent/assent since I would not be the one administering the forms and wanted proof and assurance of their consent and understanding. After attempting to gather together my participants and my translator, a fellow graduate student, a number of times to no avail due to a number of factors, including misunderstanding and weather, the translator ended up translating my consent/assent forms to Aheu and Sahal over the phone. This exchange occurred while I was present at Aheu and Sahal's home where the forms were also signed once it was apparent that they fully understood what the interviews and research entailed. So that Sahal and Aheu did not feel obliged to participate, I gave them the option to phone the translator if they had any more questions or concerns. Furthermore, if they decided not to participate, they also had the option to let translator know. The translator could then tell me if Sahal and Aheu decided not to participate instead of them having to inform me directly, which perhaps they would be uncomfortable or reluctant to do. After gaining consent from Sahal and Aheu, I was then free to begin my data collection, which I will now discuss.

3.6 Data Collection

After gaining the consent/assent of my participants, I began data collection. This process involved triangulation, "using a variety of data collection and analysis to address any one question or issue" (Handwerker, 2001, p. 13). Triangulation occurred through the use of three different methods for collecting data, including interviews, collecting artifacts and keeping a researcher's journal. I chose these methods because

they are all qualitative research methods, are ethnographic methods, and are used as part of the CPLS which informs my research. For example, Perry (2007b), in her CPLS article *Family & Community: Tools Sudanese Refugees Use to Navigate Diverse Literacy Landscapes*, uses interview questions, collects artifacts and makes field notes in order to show the knowledge and resourcefulness of Sudanese refugees and how teachers can use these skills to help their Sudanese students to be successful.

3.6.1 Interviews

According to Handwerker (2001), ethnographers must create personal relationships with the people they are studying through interaction, making them feel comfortable, and being a good listener. I agree with Handwerker because my experiences with interviewing people have made clear to me that I am likely to have a deeper exchange of information with my participants if I make sure that they are comfortable with me as the researcher. Handwerker also insists that ethnographers need to be aware of culture evolving, the differences between cultures, and the realization that as they learn about other people, they also think and act in a way that is individual to who they are based on their experiences. To put it another way, as the researcher, I need to be aware of the culture of my participants and how it has been shaped and evolved, but I also need to think about my own culture and what I bring to the conversation based on my own life experiences and identity, and consider how these life experiences affect my interviews and how I conduct them.

Keeping in mind the importance of making my participants comfortable and considering both their culture, as well as my own, I developed my interview questions. In order to develop my questions, I used CPLS protocol for interviewing as a guide based on the information Perry (2007b) described and uses in her study of

Sudanese refugees in the US (based on Purcell-Gates, 2007) to conduct her interviews. The protocol is as follows:

- begin with a narrative elicitation of what literacy means to the informant (or make it simpler, asking specifically how individuals use print literacy, or even other types for the following: to manage households, to communicate with others, to learn, to relax and to reflect - as mentioned in a book by Purcell-Gates as reasons people use reading and writing).
- ask about current and past literacy practices, both in and out of school (if they had schooling), and texts read/and or written
- the practices of people in participants' communities, family members, and so on.
- types of texts and literacy practices with which participants are engaged in, both in their countries of origin and in Canada.
- collect life histories and other important cultural information.

(Perry, 2007b, p. 9)

I organized my interview questions (see Appendix A) into four columns in order to have them prepared for all of my interviews, and make my analysis and coding my data easier once my interviews were completed. The "My Interview Questions" column simply states each question that I planned on asking my participants; the "Reasoning for Asking the Questions" column explains why I chose to ask each particular question in order to help me with my analysis; the "who" column indicates who I asked the questions to, within which I placed either "**B"** indicating a question I asked the boy (Sahal), "**M**" indicating a question I asked the mother (Aheu), "**X"** indicating a question that I asked both participants separately from each other, or "**Y"** indicating a question I asked both Sahal and Aheu when I interviewed them together; and the analysis column contains letters corresponding to particular categories that I planned on sorting my data into based on the above CPLS interview protocol, which I will explain in the analysis section that follows.

Since I wanted to make my participants feel comfortable during my interviews, I used a semi-structured interview method (Merriam, 2009; Perry, 2007b)

where I had my list of questions in front of me, but tried to read off of my paper as little as possible in order to create a more comfortable, less structured environment that allowed the conversation to develop somewhat naturally. The questions were all flexible and it was not necessary for me to read them word for word.

I conducted three half hour interviews – one with Sahal, one with Aheu and one with both Sahal and Aheu together. The interviews went well and my participants seemed to be comfortable and spoke easily with me. I conducted my first interview with Sahal in a classroom at the high school he attends. I chose this location because it was a Sunday and there were few other options, but I was given access to the school to conduct the interview. I remember going to his home to wait for him so that I could take him to the school. The following excerpt from my researcher's journal describes the scene as I waited:

> *I walked into the warmth of the house from the frigid, early winter weather. Aheu was in the kitchen making soup and welcomed me in, shaking my hand as she always did with a friendly, but light grip. She was wearing what she usually wore, a long patterned African (or rather Sudanese) dress. It was long and shapeless, but flattering. The deep brown, gold and black colours reminded me of the pictures I'd seen of the Sudanese landscape and for a moment I imagined Aheu in that setting – her homeland. She also wore a matching scarf that was wrapped around her head and knotted at the front, covering her forehead. She moved around the kitchen in bare feet and ushered me into the adjoining living room where I could wait for Sahal, who I was taking with me to interview that day. I spoke with one of Sahal's brothers, sitting on a deep green couch. A large television was playing in one corner of the small living room and I noticed family pictures on the walls. The familiar smell of soup broth wafted into the living room. Periodically Aheu left the kitchen, walked part way up the nearby staircase, yelling to Sahal in Arabic, trying to hurry him along.*

It had been a snowy day and it was a good thing that we were going to the school because Sahal "*had forgotten his winter jacket at school and was wearing only a flimsy zip-up shirt and runners*".

My second interview was with Aheu at the public library near her house and took place in a meeting room. I chose the library location because it was very close to Aheu's home and a quiet room, where we could speak undisturbed was available. I remember being somewhat frustrated trying to meet with Aheu, but made the following realization:

> *Today I attempted to meet with Aheu for my second interview. She said the afternoon should work around 2:00, but to call her first. I tired calling a number of times, but to no avail. It later struck me, in my frustration and desire for completion, that I must work on being understanding toward other cultures and their concept of time, which I had been doing – especially since my research focuses on other means of communication and different traditions. It also struck me, however, that as open minded, understanding and enlightened as I am considering myself and attempting to be, I too come from a particular culture and have particular beliefs, notions and ideas ingrained in me. I tried to imagine what it would be like for me entering a culture that was very different than my own, for example, in the case of beliefs in regards to time. I imagine that if I entered into a culture that was very lax when it came to time and meetings, I would become frustrated when things were not done to the way in which I am accustomed.*

My third interview with both Sahal and Aheu also took place at the nearby public library in the storytime room. I wrote the following in my researcher's journal afterwards:

> *When we were ushered into the storytime room at the library, I pulled up three chairs from the side of the room to a long table. Aheu took a seat at the far end and Sahal sat closer to me. Aheu was not the same as she had been during the interview where it was just she and I – she let Sahal do most of the talking. She was probably use to someone else talking for her, I thought and felt badly. I asked her the same questions that I asked Sahal, but she seemed in a bit of a daze today. She was somewhere else, perhaps somewhere far from here. I wondered what it was like for her having to rely on her children when she was probably use to them relying on her. She is a brave woman, I thought – coming all the way to Canada, taking care of her family and surviving. I wondered if her whole life had been about survival, and realized that it still was.*

I completed the interviews over the period of a month. Each interview lasted around a half an hour and was recorded using a hand held recording device. Throughout each

of the interviews, I attempted to collect artifacts, which I describe in the following section.

3.6.2 Artifact Collection

While conducting my interviews, I also planned to collect artifacts, following the data collection methods of Perry (2007b) who collected samples of written texts from her participants that she thought represented the literacy practices that her participants had discussed with her. I wanted to collect or copy any evidence of literacy used by my participants. These pieces of literacy could include pamphlets, books, magazines, advertisements, recipes, handwritten notes, or school work. I also planned to question my participants about the pieces of literacy and how they use them in their daily lives, and then categorize the artifacts according to Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener's (2004) claims about what are the purposes for reading and writing. Purcell-Gates et al. (2004) state that "people use reading and writing for all sorts of different purposes: to manage households, to shop, to communicate with others, to learn, to relax, and to reflect" (p. 34). I intended to sort the artifacts that I collected into these categories. However, for a number of reasons, I was only able to obtain one example of text, which was a form from Sahal's school. These reasons included: (1) my participants not having time for me come to their home to observe and collect pieces of literacy that they use, (2) the fact that they could not think of any examples to show me, and (3) because Sahal forgot his school books and school work which I had asked to see. I was, however, able to ask Sahal and Aheu questions in regard to pieces of literacy that they use, which I discuss in Chapter Five.

3.6.3 Researcher's Reflection

Throughout the data collection process, I kept a journal of my thoughts and observations in order to help me when analyzing my data and writing my thesis. I wrote down my thoughts and observations about my interview experiences and my participants, as well as my own personal thoughts and feelings throughout the process. I did not give myself any specific guidelines when writing my researcher's journal, nor did I ask myself any specific questions. Instead, I simply wrote down what came to mind after each of my interviews, as well as any other thoughts I had throughout the analysis process that I thought might be useful and help me to provide some 'thick description' (Geertz, 1994) or, otherwise put, rich description and details of what my participants say and do, into my writing. Furthermore, I kept in mind the idea of 'reflexivity' while writing my journal, which is the researcher's ability to self-reflect and be critical of her own points of view and how she affects the research (Goldbart & Hustler, 2005). I used reflexivity because I wanted to be able to represent my participants as fairly as possible and an important part of that involves the understanding that I bring my own experiences and beliefs into my writing and data interpretation, as I discussed in the introduction to the data collection section.

To summarize, I used three qualitative research methods of data collection based on the CPLS with my research being informed by ethnography and a narrative, life history inquiry approach. My methods included three interviews, one with each of my participants and one with both of them together; artifact collection which, although it did not go as planned and I was unable to collect any artifacts except for one, I was able to gather from my interviews and sort into categories based on CPLS; and a researcher's log where I gave myself the freedom to write my thoughts after

each interview and throughout the analysis process, keeping in mind how my own experiences and beliefs affect my writing and how I portray my participants.

3.7 Analysis

Finally, after discussing the methodologies that inform my research, my participants, the language of my participants, the context of my research, gaining access and my methods of data collection, I now explain how I went about analyzing my data. As mentioned in the interview section, I developed my interview questions based on the CPLS interview questions protocol used by Perry (2007b). Furthermore, I developed the categories for my data collection and analysis based on categories within the CPLS interview protocol, as well as information I wanted to know from my own research. My categories are as follows: background/demographic information, life histories, cultural information, literacy practices, text, literacy brokering and feelings about learning English. Furthermore, I organized my categories of questions using a chart (as seen in Appendix A) that included four columns, the first three of which I described in the interview section. The fourth column, I entitled 'analysis' and within that column I wrote a particular code that corresponded to the above categories. The codes are as follows: "**B**" for background/demographic information, "**LH**" for life histories, "**C**" for culture, "**LP**" for literacy practices, "**T**" for types of text, "**LB**" for literacy brokering, and "**F**" for feelings about learning English. For example, the question "Did you know any English when you first came to Canada?" refers to the category of literacy practices, so in the analysis column in the row corresponding to this question, I wrote LP, indicating Literacy Practices. Creating a chart that included coding to help organize my information helped me in the analysis

portion of my work, as well as in the planning stages, ensuring that I asked a variety of questions for each category.

When I reached the coding stage of my work, after transcribing my interviews, I went through each of my three interviews and labeled the questions and responses using my codes. For instance, when Sahal told me, "*when we're in Egypt, to celebrate we don't really stay at home or anything,*" I put a "**C"** next to this phrase to indicate that it fit into the category of culture. Of course, there was some overlapping, since some topics fit into more than one category. Discussing whether or not Sahal enjoys reading magazines, after all, fits into both the literacy practices category and the types of text category. After reading through and coding all of my interviews, I then copied pieces of discourse from the interviews to a new document where I pasted them under the appropriate category heading. In some cases, I had the same pieces of discourse under two or more different headings. Once all of my interview data was sorted as such, I went through each category in order to find subcategories and commonalities before beginning the writing process of my thesis. Once I began to write, however, the categories changed, themes began to emerge and more reading led me to new ideas. For example, some subcategories of themes that emerged include: community, oral traditions, semilingualism and ways of remembering.Therefore, how I coded my data was simply the way I organized my data in order to assist with my own thought processes. The categories and subcategories of the following discussion chapters do not completely match with how I began coding my data.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed ethnography and narrative inquiry as the methodologies that inform my research and research design for studying the social and cultural practices of literacy of two EAL learners who do not have first language print literacy skills. I began by describing my reasoning for choosing ethnography as my methodology and then described my participants, the complexities around their first language and the historical and cultural context represented in the lives of the participants, moving from South Sudan, to Egypt and finally to Canada. I also talked about how I gained consent from my participants for my research and then discussed my three methods of data collection (interviews, collecting artifacts and keeping a researcher's journal) and, lastly, my data analysis. The discussion chapters that follow are actually broken up into two chapters where I examine the life histories, cultures, literacy practices, types of text, literacy brokering and feelings about learning English of Sahal and Aheu. In Chapter Four, I discuss only the life histories and cultural practices of my participants which are important to be aware of as they help to define Sahal and Aheu's literacy practices before looking specifically at different types of literacy and how my participants use these literacies to go about their daily lives. In Chapter Five, I look specifically at literacy practices including semilingualism, learning English in Canada, listening and speaking, reading, writing and ways of remembering. I also discuss types of text used by my participants, literacy brokering and how my participants feel about learning English.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIFE HISTORY AND CULTURE

In the last chapter, I explained the methodology and approach that inform my research and my research design. Ethnography influences my research because it allows me to explore the culture of my participants; that is "the knowledge people use to live their lives and the way in which they do so" (Handwerker, 2001, p. 6). In particular, ethnography allows me to study their social and cultural practices of literacy. It is also the methodology used in the CPLS (Cultural Practices of Literacy Study), a metastudy of the literacy practices within several different cultural communities, which influences my research. Narrative analysis, particularly life history inquiry, also influences my research because it allows me to use the dialogue from my interviews to explore the life histories of my participants and how culture and societies have affected their life histories. Tierney (1999), for example, states that "one of the purposes of life history research is not to come to terms with an individual cohesive identity, but rather to see the greater complexity that exists across societies, across individuals" (p. 310). In other words, exploring one's life history is much more complex than merely learning about their individual identity and society plays a role in life history.

This first discussion chapter explores the life histories and cultures of my participants. It is important to first understand the life histories and cultures of Sahal and Aheu because they help in shaping their practices of literacy, just as it was important to explore in depth their background, language and the context of my research for the same reason. Barton and Hamilton (1998) claim that "literacy practices are culturally constructed, and, like all cultural phenomena, they have their

roots in the past" (p. 12). So, according to Barton and Hamilton (1998), literacy practices develop because of culture and they are connected to the past. It is, therefore, necessary to look at both the life histories of individuals, as well as their culture since an individual's literacy practices are rooted in and influenced by their life experiences and the cultures they come from. Therefore, including (and devoting a chapter to) the life histories and culture of my participants is significant to include in my research in order to attempt to understand Sahal and Aheu's social and cultural practices of literacy as fully as possible.

Another reason why I chose to include the life histories and cultures of my participants is because my work is influenced by the Cultural Practices of Literacy, and the CPLS meta-study project (Purcell-Gates, 2008) also incorporates life histories and cultures into their research. Moreover, ethnography (which my research draws on) is (at its simplest) the study of culture. In fact, culture is the distinguishing feature of ethnography that is always present to some extent within ethnographic research (Wolcott, 1999). In addition, it is important to realize that ethnography also includes telling life stories (Crang & Cook, 2007) and life history is a format for ethnographic research (Goldbart & Hustler, 2005), giving me another reason why understanding the life histories of my participants is also important to understanding my participants' sociocultural practices.

Besides simply describing the life histories and culture of my participants to better understand their literacy practices, I also examine how my own life experiences, culture and identity affect my research and my understanding of my participants. This inclusion is important since, in ethnography, the researcher is a

“human instrument” (Goldbart & Hustler, 2005) and, unavoidably, has her own background, experiences and cultures.

Wolcott (1999) states:

> The whole concept of ethnography hinges on recognition of aspects of human behaviour capable of being noticed by another human observer, something far more likely to occur with differences than similarities (p, 87).

In other words, an important part of ethnography is noticing and observing characteristics of human behaviour, which is much easier when differences can be recognized. Since my own life experiences and cultures are very different from those of my participants, I am able to recognize these differences in my research and compare them. It is also important for me to consider my own experiences, cultures and identity within my research because I wish to portray my participants as fairly as possible, yet I understand that it is impossible to be completely neutral since, as I explained previously, all researchers can’t help but have their own backgrounds, life experiences and cultures. Similarly, according to Shacklock & Thorp (2005), life history inquiry also involves being reflexive in one’s research, stating that “it is about being up-front about how, as researcher, you came to be telling another’s story in your words, and through an interpretive frame built upon you (other) experiences, assumptions and individual knowledge of human life” (p. 157).

In the same vein, Fetterman (1998) claims:

> Ethnographers must attempt to view another culture without making value judgements about unfamiliar practices, but ethnographers cannot be completely neutral. We are all products of our culture. We have personal beliefs, biases, and individual tastes. Socialization runs deep. The ethnographer can guard against the more obvious biases, however, by making them explicit and by trying to view another culture’s practices impartially. (p. 23)

In essence, ethnographers must be fair to their participants, and observe their cultures without making value judgements. But, since we all have individual beliefs, biases and opinions, it is impossible to be completely neutral.

While keeping in mind how my own life history and identity affect my research and how I portray my participants, the first section of this chapter deals with the life histories of Sahal and Aheu. Their life experiences began in South Sudan (which I will refer to as simply Sudan), before they spent time at a refugee camp in Egypt and, finally, moved to Canada. These experiences, which took place within a broad context, help in shaping Sahal and Aheu's literacy practices.

4.1 Life Histories

To begin, it is important to review narrative inquiry which influences my research because narrative inquiry includes stories of experience and can be "biography, life history, oral history, autoethnography, and autobiography" (Merriam, 2009, p. 32). In the case of my research, it is life history inquiry that has emerged. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, life history inquiry can be constructed through dialogues from interviews (Shacklock & Thorp, 2005) and involves the analysis of "social, historical, political and economic contexts of a life story by the researcher" (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 125).

Why, then, is it important to understand the life histories of my participants and how do their life experiences shape their literacy practices? Hamilton and Barton (1998) maintain that "a person's practices can be located also in their own history of literacy" (p. 12). What they mean is that if we look at an individual's past, we can find their literacy practices. If I think about my own life history, I realize that there are a lot of things that have molded my own literacy practices into what they are

today. For example, I was always read to as a child and could recite books as a toddler because I'd heard them so many times. I went to playschool, kindergarten and then grade school where print literacy was highly valued, before moving to a city to attend university. I have always used a variety of literacy practices and enjoy reading, watching T.V. and movies, listening to music and talking with friends, and I use print literacy for so many different tasks daily that I don't even notice just how much I rely on it.

So, what does all of this mean? It means that my life history growing up in Canada, attending school and being read to by my parents have shaped my literacy practices. My upbringing and education have instilled in me a desire to pursue further education. Had my life history and experiences been different, my literacy practices would be different as well. Sahal and Aheu have very different experiences from me and their life history has drastically changed with their moves from Sudan to Egypt to Canada.

Barton and Hamilton (1998) state:

> A person's practices can be located also in their own history of literacy. In order to understand this we need to take a life history approach, observing the history within a person's life. There are several dimensions to this: people use literacy to make changes in their lives; literacy changes people and people find themselves in the contemporary world of changing literacy practices. The literacy practices an individual engages with change across their lifetime, as a result of changing demands, available resources and people's interest. (p. 12)

Therefore, an individual's literacy practices are constantly changing throughout their lifetime. Sahal and Aheu are good examples of individuals whose literacy practices have undergone a huge change through coming to Canada as refugees and living within a new, and very different, environment where the dominant practices of

literacy greatly differ from those of their homeland and life histories there. Due to the change in their life histories, their literacy practices have changed as well and will continue to change.

A study by Dyer & Choksi (2001) provides a good example of how literacy practices change as life histories change. Their research looks at how literacy practices of the Rabaris of Kachchh (which they describe as a nomadic group from west India) are changed within a modernized society. The Rabaris continue to live within their ancestral environment, but their way of life is being challenged by modern developments, including their lack of print literacy skills in a modernized society where reading and writing are highly used and valued. Due to their illiteracy, they face many challenges and, just as Aheu and Sahal have been thrust into a modernized society where their cultural practices of literacy are not dominant, the Rabaris' "nomadic" lifestyle within their own country and their cultural practices of literacy are being challenged by a dominant, modernized society. The Rabaris have come to realize that "their indigenous, apprenticeship model of education is no longer sufficient to help them flourish in contemporary, modernising society" (p. 28).

Sahal and Aheu, like the Rabaris, have been thrust into a modernized society where they are faced with challenges because of their illiteracy, which stems from their life histories. Due to war, Sahal and Aheu have not had the opportunity to learn print literacy skills in their first language and have had to flee their homeland, eventually settling in Canada. Here, they have had to learn a new language in a society that highly values print literacy skills, which they lack. Sahal was too young when his family left Sudan to remember much about his country of birth and most of

his pre-Canada memories are from his time spent in a refugee camp in Egypt, but he was able to tell me about his first experiences in coming to Canada.

> *Sahal: It was, it was pretty hard. That's what I kinda thought. Yeah, because I barely knew English or anything you know, cause I can, when the people are talking to me, I don't know what to say back. It was pretty hard, until I got to more grades and all that and learned how to speak.*

We can see that, even at a young age, he was aware of and remembers his difficulties with not knowing English. He remembers that it was hard and that he didn't understand much English. Moving to Canada has changed Sahal's literacy practices and, just as Barton and Hamilton (1998) suggest, literacy changes people's lives. It is certainly true that literacy has changed Sahal's life when he came to Canada and it was necessary for him to learn another language within a culture very different from his own.

I also wanted to know about Aheu's experiences with coming to Canada and how he literacies have changed. When I asked Aheu what she disliked about Canada, she said the following:

> ***Researcher: So what do you dislike about Canada? What do you not like?***
>
> *Aheu: Hm? Canada is good because…*
>
> ***Researcher: But there must be some things that you don't like, you liked better at home...because it's your home.***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah, my home I like better my home because my family is there. I miss my home. Is stay together that's why it's different.*
>
> ***Researcher: Yeah. And the cold? Do you like the cold here?***
>
> *Aheu: No, and I learn now.*
>
> ***Researcher: You learned.***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah, first time, first year and second year, oh, I'm scared, now I am learned.*

Despite the cold winters that Aheu has now become accustomed to and the fact that she, of course, misses her family in Sudan, she said that she likes Canada.

> *Aheu: I like it because it's safe. My kids go to school. Ahhh…I stay in good house because government take care for me because I'm sick. I have problem my back. Yeah, that's why Canada is good. Different my county, because my country there, the people no save the money. The money in the bank.*

When I questioned Aheu further about what she meant about money in the bank, she explained that if you put money in the bank in Sudan, it may be gone after a number of days and if you have no money, you have no food. Aheu came to Canada as an adult and, therefore, has different opinions and realities than her son who came as a young child. She is happy that her family is safe and she values education, especially since she and Sahal were unable to attend school in Sudan. She told me the following about attending school in Sudan:

> ***Researcher: Did you get to go to school, or…?***
>
> *Aheu: Some people no go to school. You go to school, you rich. No go to school, no rich.*
>
> ***Researcher: So did you go to school?***
>
> *Aheu: Who?*
>
> ***Researcher: You.***
>
> *Aheu: No.*
>
> ***Researcher: You took care of family.***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah.*
>
> ***Researcher: That's a big job too.***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah.*

Now, in Canada, as mentioned earlier, Aheu is happy that her children can attend school. Aheu also appreciates government assistance since she is unable to work due to chronic back problems ("*government take care for me because I'm sick*"). These

new experiences upon coming to Canada have become a part of her life history and have, therefore, changed her literacy practices. She now has the opportunity to have education, develop some print literacy skills and learn another language; therefore, Aheu's literacy practices have changed, along with her views of literacy, simply by being in a new environment where she and her family now have the opportunity for education and where they must learn new social practices in regard to such things as government and banking. Aheu said the following about banking in Sudan when she was trying to explain to me why banking in Canada is good:

> ***Researcher: You don't save money in the bank?***
>
> *Aheu: Maybe today you in the third and maybe…in the first you got the money, maybe ten days the money is gone.*
>
> ***Researcher: Oh, really?***
>
> *Aheu: No food, no everything.*

Besides a change in Aheu's everyday practices with things like banking and going to school, living in a country that highly values print literacy has also changed the literacy practices of her and Sahal. Yet, not only do their literacy practices change in that they are now learning print literacy skills and necessary oral language skills within a new country, but they are doing it all in English, a language they didn't know prior to coming to Canada.

> ***Researcher: Did you know any English when you first came to Canada?***
>
> *Aheu: No, no. The first time I learn in Canada.*
>
> ***Researcher: You learned it in Canada.***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah.*
>
> ***Researcher: And your kids too? Sahal too?***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah.*

Researcher: He said he learned a little English in Egypt, or….

Aheu: A little bit, yeah.

Researcher: A very little bit? He said he could only say 'hello' and 'good-bye'.

Aheu: Yeah, and (brother) too. He learned maybe a little bit more.

Researcher: Mhm, yeah, so did Sahal…

Aheu: because go, this is school in Egypt.

Researcher: Okay.

Aheu: Government there give the money, you go to school you pay the money.

Researcher: You go to school. So did Sahal learn to read a write a little bit in Arabic in Egypt?

Aheu: Maybe forget. (brother) forget too.

Even though Sahal and his brother(s) were able to have some English lessons while at the refugee camp in Egypt, it appears that they forgot the language or learned very little before coming to Canada.

Having asked my participants about their life histories in coming to Canada, I also wanted to know about their life histories of literacy before they came. I, therefore, asked Sahal about his experiences going to school when he was in a refugee camp in Egypt, since I knew that he had had no formal education in Sudan. His schooling in Egypt is another aspect of his life history that helps us to understand the context of his literacy practices in his time in a refugee camp. Although Sahal was quite young when he attended some classes in Egypt, and the schooling was very minimal, he remembers a little. He has a positive attitude and describes his learning in Arabic as *"pretty fun"* and *"pretty easy"*, especially since it is his first language. He also remembers learning math, but using "*different writing*", which I understood to be Egyptian Arabic or Eastern Arabic numerals, as opposed to the western Arabic

numerals that English uses (Eastern Arabic numerals, 2013; Arabic learning resources, 2012). He describes his memories of his school in the following way:

> *Sahal: It was kinda like high school. We have to, like, switch classes and all that… it was like a normal, like a small school, you know. It was like in one floor only, not two floors.*

Sahal discusses his experiences with school in Egypt by comparing them to his schooling in Canada, describing the school in Egypt as similar to a high school having more than one floor (which his elementary school in Canada did not) and switching classes, as opposed to staying in one classroom like in elementary school. Sahal's concept of school and, by association, his literacy practices, have changed and developed as he finds himself in "the contemporary world of changing literacy practices" (Barton & Hamilton, p. 12, 1998).

Aheu is also a part of this world of 'changing literacy practices', though her experiences are different than her son's. When Aheu talks about the differences between Sudan and Canada, she is happy to be in Canada because it is safe, but, of course, misses her home. She explains that six of her seven children did not go to school in Sudan, though I am unsure as to why her daughter was able to learn first language print literacy skills, especially considering that males are much more likely to receive an education than females (Deng, 2006) (and I was, unfortunately, unable to further question Aheu about this because she became ill). The majority of Aheu's children, therefore, did not have the opportunity to learn how to read and write in their first language. Their life histories in their homeland of Sudan shaped their literacy practices, including their lack of print literacy skills. The following piece of discourse is an example of how war affected the literacy practices of Aheu and her family:

Researcher: Do you still have family living in Sudan?

Aheu: Yeah

Researcher: Your daughter, right.

Aheu: Yeah.

Researcher: And your mom is here, though.

Aheu: My mom is here. I have my…

Researcher: That's good that your mom is here.

Aheu: my sister mom back home my mom is ill. My sister mom is die??? I have my brother there.

Researcher: Okay. And can you tell me how Canada is different from Sudan? Like, what do you think is different about Canada?

Aheu: Uh, different. Sudan before is good. Before the fighting is good.

Researcher: Is good cause it's home.

Aheu: Yeah, now is different because no education there is good.

Researcher: Oh

Aheu: The kids they stay home. Uh, sometime no work in Africa. Mm, that's why it's different.

Because of the war in Sudan, there were fewer opportunities for education and many children had to stay home. According to Deng (2006), only 30% of students attended "Universal Primary Education" in south Sudan (where Sahal and Aheu are from) in 1999/2000 and the adult literacy rate was only 33%. Sudan had been at war since 1956, which is when the first civil war began. Before that, British Colonial rule (from 1898 to 1955) attempted to modernize the economic infrastructure of north Sudan, leaving the 'well-being' of south Sudan to Christian missionaries. This modernization of the north created further gaps between north and south Sudan as the north's economics flourished and south Sudan was left behind. Between the two civil wars, however, there was a ten-year period of peace from 1972 to 1982. Yet, it is interesting that Aheu says that before the fighting education was good *("before the*

fighting is good") since, according to Deng (2006) education and the number of students attending school was very poor.

Deng (2006) states:

> With population of 20 million during the inter-war period, the primary school enrolment rate was about 40 per cent in the north but less than 12 per cent in the south...In comparison to its size of population, the inequality in the level of access to education at all levels was significant and striking and clearly indicates that the central government did not exhort effort to narrow such inequality between north and south during the brief period of relative peace. (p. 6)

In contrast to Aheu's claim that before the fighting in Sudan education was good, Deng suggests that during the inter-war period (which is when I can assume Aheu was a child, based on her current age) the number of children attending school was still very low in south Sudan and the government continued to ignore the inequalities between the north and the south. Furthermore, "it was found that a child from a household headed by someone educated has twice the chance of attending school compared to a child from a household headed by someone with no education" (Deng, 2006, p. 15). So, according to Deng (2006), it is possible that another reason for Aheu's children not receiving an education in Sudan is because she herself did not receive one. In addition, a further possibility is that one may need money to go to school in Sudan since Aheu told me that *"Some people no go to school. You go to school, you rich. No go to school, no rich"*. In sum, then, the civil war in Sudan, inequalities between the north and the south, Aheu's lack of education throughout her life, and a lack of money are all a part of the life histories of Sahal and Aheu that have influenced their literacy practices and are possible reasons for why Sahal and Aheu did not attend school in their homeland of Sudan and why they are illiterate in their first language.

Coming to Canada has become a part of the life histories of my participants and has, subsequently, changed their literacy practices. For example, Aheu said the following about finding a job in Sudan.

> ***Researcher: Is it hard to find a good job in Sudan?***
>
> *Aheu: No, some people might go to school, some people no go to school.*
>
> ***Researcher: Yeah.***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah, is, one is stay maybe in the village, maybe me, in, in, no in the village. I go, go to school. I finish my university, I find a good job. Maybe my brother is staying back home in the village, no, no, no job. Yeah, he stay there.*

In Canada, in comparison (as mentioned earlier) Aheu is unable to work due to a back problem, but gets assistance from the government. Two major changes to Sahal and Aheu's literacy practices include learning a new language and developing some print literacy skills. In addition, becoming a part of a new society and culture that is very different from their previous culture has changed their literacy practices as well. The way they go about their daily tasks, such as banking or attending school is different within their new culture; therefore, culture is another important concept to look at when trying to understand the social and cultural literacy practices of my participants. The next section looks at just that, how culture affects and shapes an individual's practices of literacy.

4.2 Culture

The previous section of this chapter looked at the importance of knowing the life histories of individuals in order to understand their literacy practices, and how their life histories actually shape their practices of literacy. Now, I consider how culture affects literacy. First of all, it is necessary to attempt to understand what culture is.

According to Tylor (1871), culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 1). To put it another way, culture is a combination of how people go about their daily lives and what knowledge or information they need to have in order to do so. Wolcott (1999) takes the definition of culture a step further claiming that, "culture is revealed through discerning patterns of socially shared behaviour" (p. 67). According to Wolcott, then, culture is something that is understood through clear behavioural patterns that are shared within a group or society. He also says that culture can be "loosely defined as shared knowledge" (p. 69), and suggests that people belong to groups rather than cultures, meaning then that people within particular groups share knowledge. So, if it is true, as Wolcott suggests, that people belong to groups, then how do we define those groups? Wolcott (1999) also states that "culture is by no means limited to differences rooted in ethnicity" (p. 83), so what other groups within ethnicities can be found that define a culture?

Handwerker (2001) suggests that "each individual exists as a multicultural being" (p. 25) and that cultural differences result in the fact that no two people are alike in what they've experienced and how they make sense of those experiences. He suggests that "no one possesses a single culture", but "everyone participates in many cultures" (Handwerker, 2001, p. 9). So, in answer to the question of what is culture and how do we define it, since each individual is different and has different life experiences, people cannot be categorized into one particular culture (even though it appears as though they are and I refer to Sahal and Aheu's Sudanese culture for the purposes of this

thesis), but rather participates in a number of cultures. Just as Purcell-Gates et al. (2004) suggest that literacy is socially-situated and differs depending on the different domains in which it is used, culture too differs depending on each individual, their life experiences and the groups that they belong to. For example, the culture of one's school differs from the culture of her family or the culture of an individual's hockey team differs from the culture of his church. Furthermore, Handwerker (2001) suggests that culture changes and that there are many other factors that result in each person being a unique individual including upbringing, age, gender, ethnic background, education and knowledge, socio-economic status, and country of origin. So, just as the life histories of an individual are always changing, so too is a person's culture based on a number of factors unique to each individual and their life experiences.

For the purposes of my research, I want to understand how culture specifically affects literacy practices. Gay (2010) suggests that the cultures we come from influence how we communicate and make ourselves understood. The ways in which we do so also differ from culture to culture:

> Culture provides the tools to pursue the search for meaning and to convey our understanding to others and thereby has strong shaping influences on the communication styles prominent among different ethnic groups and their children (p. 76).

Since, as Gay (2010) suggests, culture has a strong influence on our communication styles and those styles differ between ethnic groups, then the culture (or groups, as Wolcott suggests) that Sahal and Aheu belong to affect how they communicate – their practices of literacy. Moreover, their cultural practices are changing as they continue to live within a new country and a new

culture, and because of this shift in culture, their cultural practices are quite complex. As Sahal and Aheu become a part of different groups, which differ between the two of them because they are individuals with different experiences, their literacy practices change. Coming to Canada has certainly changed my participants' literacy practices and, because Sahal and Aheu came from very different cultures than the one they are now a part, it is important to attempt to understand the cultural practices they experienced in Sudan and Egypt, and how these practices affect and shape their current literacy practices within their new culture in Canada. In order to explore the culture of my participants, I asked them a number of questions, which resulted in two categories.

The two categories that my interview questions pertaining to culture resulted in were Community and Oral Traditions. These two categories stood out for me when analyzing my data for a number of reasons. 1) Sahal and Aheu spoke a lot about visiting others and the sense of community that existed within both Sudan and the refugee camp in Egypt. 2) In much of the research I explored regarding Sudanese refugees and practices of literacy, community and oral traditions were present. 3) When thinking about my own culture the categories of community and oral traditions stood out to me as being different within my own culture and, as Wolcott (1999) suggests, recognition of aspects of human behaviour are more noticeable when more differences than similarities are present between the researcher and the participants; and it is certainly true that my culture and life experiences are more different from than similar to those of Sahal and Aheu.

4.2.1 Community

The first category that arose from my cultural questions is Community. As I mentioned, this category stood out to me because the sense of community that exists in Sudan (and existed in the refugee camp in Egypt), according to my participants, differs from my own culture, which is the dominant culture of the society in which Sahal and Aheu now live. My own life experiences and culture have impressed upon me what it means, in my world, to be part of a community. I belong to a number of different communities (or cultures or groups). I belong to the community of the city where I live, to the community of the school where I teach and the school system in which I work. I belong to the Ukrainian community within my city, as my heritage is Ukrainian and my husband is an immigrant from Ukraine, as well as a number of other groups that depend upon my life history, my interests, and my age. For me, each of these groups gives me what I consider to be a sense of community, though I have different feelings about different communities, which I illustrate in the following quote from my researcher's journal:

> *As I read through my interview transcripts, I can't help but notice differences between the culture I belong to and Sahal and Aheu's culture. When I think of the word 'community', I don't think of a lot of people living in my home or coming to visit me daily. I think about the different communities I belong to and my Ukrainian community is what comes to my mind first and foremost. It's a group that I feel as though I genuinely belong to. Other communities, such as my work community, can change and is a community that I am a part of because of my job. My Ukrainian community, on the other hand, I am born into. We share our Ukrainian blood, our stubbornness, our varanyky and borsht, our folk music, our heritage language and our religion and traditions. This community will never change, even as people move to and from the city I live in, the community, in general will always be there.*

I share similar histories, experiences or interests with others within each of the communities I belong to. I have friends and companions that I spend time with within

each community I am a part of, and I share certain commonalities with these friends because we are a part of particular groups that have become communities for a reason. However, it is my Ukrainian Community, for instance, that I feel I belong to the most because I am born into – I can't help but belong to it. My Ukrainian community shares a Ukrainian heritage or history, religion, language and food, whereas my teaching community shares work experiences and teaching knowledge. These are examples of the communities I come from and what we share together but, in contrast, part of Sudanese culture, as described below by Aheu, is to have a lot of visitors daily, and a number of people living in one's home.

> ***Researcher: Yeah. And what do you think was different about life in Africa? Like people visiting each other more or…what's different?***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah, in Africa, people coming more…*
>
> ***Researcher: To visit.***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah, any time.*
>
> ***Researcher: Yeah.***
>
> *Aheu: You come, your house busy.*

Having daily visitors (and more than myself, my daughter and my husband living within our home) is a very different understanding of what community is for me, and yet through my feeling of belonging within my Ukrainian community, I am able to begin to understand what community means to Aheu and Sahal because it is their family – something they can't help but belong to, something they are born into. Below is another example of how people in Sudan are always visiting and the house is always busy, as described by Aheu:

> ***Researcher: Umm, do people in your family or community help you out with English?***
>
> *Aheu: No, cause the people is busy.*

Researcher: In the community?

Sahal: Yeah, a lot of, like, the Sudanese people they are busy.

Researcher: Sudanese people are busy?

Sahal: They, like, work and all that.

Aheu: Some people working two job, three job

Researcher: Yeah

Aheu: No time, in Africa the community help you because you working one job. You go in the morning seven o'clock, two o'clock at home, maybe three. No two job in Africa.

I can recognize this cultural difference easily, since in my culture, my home is not always busy with people and people usually only come over when invited or for a particular purpose. Because people are always visiting each other in Sudan (according to Aheu), I understand that there is a strong sense of community there. According to Perry (2007b), "in many ways, there does not seem to be a clear boundary between the Sudanese definitions of 'family' and 'community'" (p. 15). Perry (2007b) states that the Sudanese refugees that she worked with "think of family in a very broad sense; indeed, 'family' and 'community' often seemed to mean much the same thing for these refugees" (p. 14).

I, on the other hand, do not think of family when I think of community. For me, my family is separate from my community and this is another reason why I was able to notice community as a theme within my interview data, as the definition of what community is is very different for Sahal and Aheu than it is for me. The Sudanese culture of my participants, as they have discussed with me, promotes this sense of community where people are always welcome within each other's homes. This sense of community is important in understanding the literacy practices of Sahal and Aheu since, because "literacy is a social phenomenon, the issue of community

plays an important role in shaping how individuals and groups take up literacy in their lives" (Perry, 2007b, p. 5). Basically, because literacy practices are socially situated, communities and families affect literacy practices. Aheu, for example, described her family and how many people lived in their home in Sudan.

> *Aheu: Yeah, maybe it's twenty people in the, in the house…You help your brother. Maybe brother no rich, maybe me rich, my brother no rich, you have kids, I bring all my home… maybe your brother die bring the kids in the home, um, brother is die bring the kids at home – all the family.*

The number of people living in Aheu's home affects her literacy practices. For instance, one of the reasons why Aheu is illiterate is because she had to stay home to take care of her family. Also, while living in Sudan, Aheu probably used oral language often to communicate with the many people living within her home. I, on the other hand, currently work part time after my maternity leave and while at home during the day, have only a one year old to talk to unless I decide to make plans to meet with friends or take my daughter out to run errands with me. Because so many people live within one household in Sudan, it appears that it is especially important for families to stick together and living is communal. I make this statement because, as Aheu states, there may be twenty people living within one household and if a member of your family passes away, you take his/her children into your home.

> *Aheu: maybe your brother die bring the kids in the home, um, brother is die bring the kids at home – all the family.*

Even in the refugee camp in Egypt, according to Sahal and Aheu, people would often congregate outside, sit and talk much more than people do in their new environment in Canada. When Sahal and Aheu moved to Canada and began living within a new and different culture, their literacy practices changed. Perry (2007b) states that "the issue of community becomes complicated when cultural groups disburse around the

world; this is especially true for refugees, whose lives have been seriously disrupted by warfare, violence, and multiple migrations and relocations around the world" (p. 5).

Consequently, because Sahal and Aheu have had to leave their homeland, the role that community had played in their lives has changed. I wanted to know exactly how the role of community has changed for my participants since they have moved to Canada since there are a number of Sudanese families that live near Sahal and Aheu and I wondered if they often spent time with them as they would have in Sudan. Therefore, I asked Aheu if she also has a lot of visitors at her home in Canada like she did in Sudan. She told me that people are too busy here to visit because they have to work a lot, which they did not have to do in Sudan.

> *Aheu: No time, in Africa the community help you because you working one job. You go in the morning seven o'clock, two o'clock at home, maybe three. No two job in Africa.*

From what Aheu has told me, Sudanese people often spend time with each other and help each other out, but in Canada people within the Sudanese community of my participants are often too busy to visit others because they work more than one job, whereas in Sudan they only worked one and were home by as early as three o'clock in the afternoon. Therefore, it is clear that the role of community has changed for Sahal and Aheu because their new environment has affected the importance of community in their daily lives. Aheu, for example, told me that not only is her community busy, but her family is as well. They have "*no time, running, running, all the time busy*". The involvement of my participants with their Sudanese community has changed and, because of this change in their cultural practices, their literacy practices have also changed in how they interact with others on a daily basis. They

have come from living in a culture where they had much interaction with their community, to one where they have little interaction with it.

DeCapua and Marshall (2009) suggest that there are two types of cultures and, according to their definitions of these two types of cultures, it appears that they directly relate to community. I realize that these definitions may run the risk of constructing binaries, but I use them here because they illustrate a point. According to DeCapua and Marshall's definitions (which I quote below) of the two types of cultures that exist, the Sudanese culture of Sahal and Aheu fit into one category and the new culture they now live in in Canada fits into another. DeCapua and Marshall state that "cultures can be classified along a continuum from low-context (LC) to high-context (HC)" (p. 161), which compares cultures focused on the individual in contrast with cultures that are collectivist.

DeCapua and Marshall (2009) define LC and HC as follows:

> Members of LC cultures, for instance, emphasize the importance of time, planning, and adherence to timetables and schedules; are more direct in their communicative styles, have less extended family networks, and are more focused on the individual: individual achievement, individual success, and individual self-actualization. (p. 161)
>
> Cultures toward the HC end of the continuum are also generally collectivistic cultures, that is, cultures where social relationships are highly valued and people see themselves as interdependent members of groups (usually large kinship networks), with concomitant responsibilities, obligations, commitments, and duties to others of their in-group. (p. 161)

From DeCapua and Marshall's descriptions of LC and HC cultures, it appears that Sahal and Aheu have moved from a culture that is HC to one that is very LC since they described their lives in Sudan as including visiting with others daily and living with many people within one household where individuals help each other, in

comparison to my participants' new environment in Canada where everyone within their Sudanese community is too busy to visit others, and work more than one job. Due to this change in how my participants interact with their community, their social practices of literacy have changed since they can no longer rely on the same amount of support from their community as they did in Sudan because people are too busy to help each other out and make time for one another. Instead, Sahal and Aheu are forced to become more independent or relying on the help of those within their immediate family only (which I will discuss in the literacy brokering section of the next chapter), with Aheu relying primarily on her daughter.

> *Aheu: Yeah, sometime, I want to call at home, make the appointment, my daughter to helping me.*

Sahal, for example, who had had little experience with attending school before coming to Canada, is graded individually and expected to complete assignments as an individual, which he may have not had much experience doing in the past. In addition, Sahal and Aheu must now adapt to their new environment in Canada while still possessing social and cultural practices of literacy from their homeland.

Another example of the importance of community in Sudan that differs within Canada deals with poverty in Sudan and the lack of government assistance. Aheu spoke to me about welcoming people who were poor and hungry into one's home. She told me that no one sleeps on the road because someone will take them in.

> *Aheu: My culture maybe you find somebody in the road, you come lock your door, you come, come on, come on, come on, welcome, welcome. You put the seat down, you give the tea, and food. You eat, yeah. Some people is poor, you come lock the door, I need is some food, you have the food, you bring, you take it. Maybe in the road somebody's sitting down, you have the something like this, you need help, put the money. Yeah, my country… You bring your home. Maybe you have house, my own house, I bring people. Somebody maybe knock my door, in my*

> *door, ah, I don't place sleeping. I need help. I give him nice bed. I don't have bed, blanket and everything sleeping in the ground.*

Aheu uses the word 'culture' when she describes taking someone into her home because they are poor and need help, reiterating the sense of community within Aheu's culture that is lacking within her new environment in Canada. It is another example of how, in Sudan, people welcome each other into their homes. Not only do they welcome each other into their homes, but Aheu describes bringing a stranger into one's home who is in need and showing that person kindness through providing him with basic needs, such as food, drink and shelter. But how is this cultural practice of welcoming someone in distress into one's home an example of a literacy practice? If we think about it, it is perhaps another example of how much connection people in Sudan have to others since people must rely on each other and those within their community for support and basic needs. In order to do so, I assume that people in Sudan must use oral language often to communicate in a way that contrasts to how people within the dominant society where Sahal and Aheu now live use oral language. The reason that the way oral language is used within their new society differs from their homeland of Sudan is perhaps because they have little connection to their community because people lead more isolated lives.

If, for example, I think about how I communicate with others, I use a number of types of literacy practices, including the telephone, emails, texts, social media sites, or talking to people directly, but I rarely leave my home to go and talk to someone in person without first connecting with them in some other way, such as by phoning or texting them. Since Aheu, especially, has difficulty with print literacy, her main option of communication within Canada must be the telephone, as it is not so convenient in the city she lives in to drop in on her

neighbours, most of whom (from her Sudanese community) are too busy (as Aheu has stated).

Clearly, community was a definite theme that emerged during my interviews. My participants come from a culture where the link to one's community is strong and community and family are interchangeable. The society that they live in now, however, does not construct community in the same way. This change has affected their social and cultural practices of literacy. In Sudan, Sahal and Aheu had daily visitors and a number of people living in their home. In Canada, family continues to be important to them, but they have lost touch with the Sudanese community since individuals within the community are all very busy, having to work more than one job to make ends meet. Due to this change in their lives, their cultural and social practices of literacy have changed since they have less interaction with other Sudanese people besides their immediate family. The next theme that was apparent during the interviews was oral traditions, which I will now discuss.

4.2.2 Oral Traditions

Another aspect of Sudanese culture that appears in literature is oral traditions (Perry, 2007a; NWS Migration Center, 2011). As discussed in the literature review section of this thesis, oral traditions play a big part of Sudanese culture and African culture in general.

Harris (n.d.) states:

> The oral tradition was the basis of African culture. It consisted of history, religious practices, cosmology, rituals, folktales, proverbs, riddles, games, songs, dance, magic, epic tales, myths and narratives. The African

> incorporated the everyday rhythms of life into his expression. African traditions of communalism, respect for elders, rituals of life and death, child rearing practices and storytelling were to later appear in the western hemisphere, having been brought by the enslaved Africans. (p. 3).

Harris describes the existence of oral traditions in Africa as being rooted in African cultures and incorporated into everyday life. However, although oral traditions is a big part of African cultures and appears in much of the literature that discusses Sudanese refugees, I was unsure at first as to whether my participants were from an oral culture. I was unsure due to their confusion when I asked them about oral traditions, even though research and literature states that south Sudanese people come from oral cultures. When I asked Sahal about oral traditions, for example, he was unsure what I meant (especially considering that he left Sudan at such a young age), but when I prompted him further asking if there were any people with in his current Sudanese community who liked to tell stories, he remembered an elderly Sudanese man in Canada who told him stories of the past and Sudan.

> *Sahal: There's a lot of them. They just like telling stories, and, about what happened to them back then. There was this one guy. He use to be, like, yeah he use to come to my house all the time and tell us stories.*

One might infer then that, perhaps Sahal does come from an oral culture, considering that (according to Harris, n.d.) part of African oral traditions includes respect for elders (such as listening to the stories they have to pass down as Sahal describes in the above quote), storytelling and history. But because oral traditions may be an everyday practice that has been incorporated into Sahal's culture, he may not consider it as special or part of his culture. For example, I have always understood that children are often potty trained around the age of three and to start training them between the ages of 18 months and three years old when the child appears to be 'developmentally ready'. I never considered this special or a part of the

culture I come from until my mother-in-law, who is from Ukraine, asked me if I had started potty training my daughter who was nine months old at the time. Of course, I hadn't! I went to Ukraine with my daughter when she was sixteen months old and my mother-in-law promptly began to potty train her. Not until this cultural difference was directly pointed out to me had I even thought about it as such. Perhaps this is the same with Sahal and Aheu and their understanding as to what I meant by oral traditions. When I asked Aheu about oral traditions, she was also unsure about what I meant, but told me about the kinds of things her grandmother would tell her.

> *Aheu: Because I don't know, my grandma, he ?? told me everything. He told me about the history, you got the married. You have to listen. This my grandma.*
>
> *Aheu: … My culture, it maybe sometime you put the kids down and talk to. You have to, uh, be smart, go to school. Uh, you have to learn, after finishing school, go to university. After university, is you go got the work. After working, maybe you got the marriage. Uh, take care about your mom and grandpa.*

Aheu's grandmother told her about history, marriage, education and life in general. These life lessons were how Aheu understood to answer my questions about oral traditions, and perhaps are an example of the passing down of information within a culture orally. Harris (n.d.) had described African oral traditions to include history, respect for elders, storytelling, rituals of life and death and child rearing practices, which is what Aheu describes her grandmother telling her. It is also important to note that Harris' (n.d.) description of African oral traditions also includes traditions of communalism which ties into the theme of community in the previous section.. Moreover, if it is true that Aheu has come from a culture of oral tradition as the literature states, I wonder, then, if Aheu, within her new environment, is able to pass down the life lessons and stories that her grandmother told her to her own children, or

whether her literacy practices and those of her family have changed since coming to Canada. Perhaps, like others in their Sudanese community in Canada (as Aheu had mentioned), Aheu and her family are too busy to sit together and listen to stories of Sudanese history and life lessons.

Because Sahal and Aheu were unsure about what I meant in regard to oral traditions, it is unclear as to the importance that oral traditions may or may not play in their cultural practices of literacy. When I asked Aheu about oral traditions, she said the following:

> ***Researcher: Mhm. So, I once read about, um, Sudanese oral traditions. Like, in Sudan, or Sudanese people, you tell a lot of stories.***
>
> *Aheu: Mhm.*
>
> ***Researcher: Older people will tell lots of stories to younger people. Are there lots of people in (city) who still tell stories? Sudanese people.***
>
> *Aheu: Hmm. Sudanese people.*
>
> ***Researcher: Yeah, like I learned somewhere, somebody told me that, in your culture, you tell a lot of stories. Like, kids will listen and older people tell them stories.***
>
> *Aheu: Oh, yeah…because, I don't know.*

Although Aheu is unable to directly answer my question about oral traditions, it appears that she has experienced the passing down of oral traditions within her culture by her grandmother and that Sahal has experienced the passing down of stories and history orally by an elderly Sudanese man. Since Aheu admits that those within her Sudanese community in Canada do not have time for each other due to busy schedules, I can assume that the literacy practices of my participants have changed since they no longer have the same involvement with their Sudanese community that they had in Sudan and Egypt and, therefore, they do not have the opportunity to

continue to pass down traditions to the extent that they otherwise would have. As someone who has grown up within the society that Sahal and Aheu are now a part of, I know that print literacy is valued much more than oral traditions. For instance, I remember my mother reading books to me every night before bed, but I do not remember her telling me stories by memory that she had learned from her parents and grandparents that were meant to be passed down and shared. In fact, if I think of my own experiences as a teacher in Canada, I have found within my classrooms that many students have difficulty with speaking and listening skills, as many families are busy and adults do not have the time to sit, talk to and have discussions with children. Instead, many adults and children are often plugged into some form of entertainment, be it television, music, or computer. Each year, I need to do listening and following directions activities with my Grade Three and Four students to improve their listening skills. Since those within the Sudanese community that live near Sahal and Aheu have fallen into a busy Canadian lifestyle, needing to work extra jobs to make ends meet, the skills that they do have, such as oral language and listening skills, may be affected because they are not practiced and continued, even within their own cultural community. Therefore, their literacy practices have changed.

Not only have their literacy practices changed because of the lack of community for my participants within Canada, but the Canadian education system is very much influenced by Canadian history and its white settler population, and teachers and educational practices are, therefore, affected by Canada's history and more accessible and aligned with the interests of students who, themselves, come from white settler backgrounds. Willinsky (1998) says that lessons in English for new immigrants, which involve students being taught to function socially and

academically within their new society, “grow out of a historical context” (p. 193). Sterzuk (2011) also views white settler influenced education as a product of history that functions to prepare students for lives within Canadian society, but ignores how colonialism has affected the education of students.

Sterzuk (2011) states:

> Education is often seen as a source of upward movement or as simply a place where children receive knowledge and skills required for successful lives. Often ignored is the continuing role that schools play as a nationalizing force and all that this phrase implies in terms of the pedagogical practices necessary for producing homogeneity in a heterogeneous settler society. Because while schools may indeed be sites of knowledge-building, they are also places where students are socialized into views, behaviours and identities deemed as ‘Canadian’, ‘grade-level’, ‘typical’, ‘standard’, ‘normal’ and ‘average’ (to name a few terms we might use when describing what is viewed as appropriate ways of being in settler schools). (p. 58)

In other words, students such as Sahal and Aheu are also taught in a way that privileges white settler beliefs and values, which are likely very different from their own. It is especially true that my participants are taught in a way that is monopolized by white settler culture considering that (as DeCapua and Marshall, 2009, described) Sahal and Aheu come from a culture that is collectivistic. In a collectivistic culture, social relationships and one’s position as a member of a group is valued, in contrast with the white settler culture that Sahal and Aheu are now a part of which focuses more on the individual than the group. Moreover, “the frame of mind in which teachers and students listen to those who speak other languages than they do, and the frame of mind in which they understand their own position in the world as English speakers may still bear traces of the history of imperial conquest and dominance” (Willinsky, 1998, p. 194). So, the education system that Sahal and Aheu are learning in,

and their new society which is influenced by that education system, is dominated by white settler beliefs. In addition, the teachers who teach within this white settler education system are also predisposed to white settler thinking and beliefs in regard to language and teaching. Therefore, it is important for teachers to consider their own backgrounds and biases, while trying to understand the life histories and cultures of their EAL students.

To review, much research and literature discusses the existence of oral traditions within African cultures in general, as well as south Sudanese cultures. My participants, however, had some difficulty in telling me about their oral traditions, though they were able to share with me some examples of what can be described (according to Harris, n.d.) as oral traditions such as storytelling, history, respect for elders, life rituals (such as marriage), child rearing, and communalism. Therefore, I assume that perhaps Sahal and Aheu were unable to recognize oral traditions, specifically, within their culture since it is something that is so normal and routine for them that they do not think of it as being special or unique. In addition, I also talked about how the society that Aheu and Sahal now live in within Canada may affect their oral traditions, since Canadian schools and teachers are very much influenced by colonial history and white settler culture, which differs from the culture of my participants and (from my own experiences as a white settler teacher) does not highly value oral tradition.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have worked to describe the life histories and culture of my participants because it will help me to have a better understanding of their practices of literacy. The first section of the chapter dealt with the life histories of Sahal and

Aheu. I looked at their histories of literacy in Sudan, in a refugee camp in Egypt and, finally, in Canada. The countries that Sahal and Aheu have lived in have affected their life experiences and, by association, their literacy practices. The cultures of my participants and the cultures of the countries they have lived in have also affect their social and cultural practices of literacy. Culture is a very complex term, but I came to understand it as the shared knowledge of the different social groups that Sahal and Aheu are a part of, which is unique to each of them as individuals. The literacy practices of Sahal and Aheu have changed as their cultures have changed and evolved, just as their life histories have affected their sociocultural practices of literacy as they have changed and evolved.

The next chapter examines literacy practices, delving into the second portion of the discussion of my research results. Having developed an understanding of my participants' life histories and culture, and how they shape their social and cultural practices of literacy, I now turn to specific practices of literacy, including the different types of literacy practices of Sahal and Aheu, types of text they use, literacy brokering and their feelings about learning English in Canada.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRACTICES OF LITERACY

In the previous chapter, I discussed the life histories and cultures of my participants, which was the first part of the discussion of the data I collected. This discussion section, in contrast, deals specifically with literacy practices and learning English including the themes of: semilingualism, learning English in Canada, listening and speaking, reading, writing, ways of remembering, literacy brokering, feelings about learning English, and the results of my intention to collect artifacts. After exploring the life histories and cultures of my participants, it is important to delve deeper and now look at their specific practices of literacy, as well as their overall feelings about learning English in Canada since one's feelings and motivation to learn a language also affect their sociocultural literacy practices.

Since my research considers the social and cultural practices of literacy of my first language illiterate participants, it is important to understand their specific literacy practices. But first, we must remind ourselves what literacy is (which I discussed in Chapter 2), as the definition of literacy is quite complex. Barton and Hamilton (1998) describe literacy as such:

> Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analyzed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. (p. 3)

What Barton and Hamilton are saying is that literacy is socially situated and is something that people do. Literacy can include oral literacy, media (including television and movies), computer, emotional, speaking, listening, viewing, art and

even texting. These different forms of literacy are used in different situations, although, literacy is ultimately about power and "marked by social status, income, race, ethnicity, and language" (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener, 2004, p. 1). So, basically, people use literacy in a variety of different ways in a number of different social situations, but, ultimately, literacy is influenced by the practices of the dominant society (which is yet another example of how culture affects literacy practices). When analyzing the data from my interviews, it was important to be aware of all of the different forms of literacy and which forms my participants use in their daily lives.

The first section of this chapter deals with semilingualism, and how learning English has affected Sahal's first language of Arabic and, therefore, changed his literacy practices. Unfortunately, learning English has been detrimental to Sahal's first language, as is illustrated in this section.

5.1 Semilingualism

Semilingualism (or bi-illiteracy), is defined by Escamilla (2006) as learners who are not proficient in either their first language or their second language. This lack of proficiency in both languages describes both Sahal and Aheu when referring to print literacy, but I was also surprised to hear what Sahal had to tell me in regard to his oral language skills. Before explaining what I mean in regard to semilingualism and Sahal's oral literacy skills, it is first necessary to remind readers of some background information regarding Sahal's literacy skills. Upon arriving in Canada, Sahal was unable to read and write in Arabic, however, he did learn some reading and writing (though very little, which he soon forgot) while at a refugee camp in Egypt.

Researcher: Did you learn a little reading and writing in Arabic?

Sahal: Yeah, uh, I knew how to read in Arabic. It was pretty easy though. Yeah, cause it was my first language and I knew, like, the whole…I knew everything about it, so it was pretty easy.

Researcher: Do you remember how to read it now?

Sahal: No

Although Sahal is illiterate in his first language, he does realize that the little reading and writing in Arabic that he did learn at one point in time was much easier for him to learn, being his first language. He is able to make this connection. "English literacy skill is strongly related to the extent of development of first language literacy skills" (Cummins, 1981, p. 57). Had he had the opportunity to fully develop print literacy skills in Arabic, he would not only be 'literate' (according to the basic definition of the term) in his first language, but he would find learning English easier. Basically, if Sahal had had the opportunity to learn to read and write in Arabic, he would have a much easier time learning to read and write in English (Palmer et al., 2007).

In addition, Sahal faces challenges in regard to speaking Arabic in Canada. Sahal says the following:

Sahal: No, Arabic was easy, the language, you know. It was pretty fun cause everybody that I knew, they speak it, so I wouldn't have to change my language or anything until I came here. I had to speak a different language. I thought there was going to be some other people that speak it with me, like, right now here, barely anyone speaks Arabic with me, so you know I speak English. So, it's kinda different.

Researcher: But you can speak English well now…

Sahal: Yeah, and I'm forgetting half of the language [Arabic] already. I don't know how much I know. I probably know 50% of it.

Researcher: But you talk with your mom in Arabic all of the time.

Sahal: Yeah, but sometimes I mumble because I don't know most of the things in Arabic now. It's crazy.

From this sample of discourse, we can see an example of semilingualism or bi-illiteracy (being learners who are not proficient in either their first language or their second language according to Escamilla, 2006) in regard to Sahal's oral language skills. Kouritzen (1999) refers to semilingulism as "language loss" stating that "language loss refers to the attrition of specific language skills such as knowledge of grammar and vocabulary or more general frustration and/or loss of ease with the language" (p. 18). Having no print literacy skills in his first language of Arabic and few people with whom to converse, Sahal is forgetting his first language and experiencing the gradual loss of his first language as he learns English. He even speaks English to his friends whose first language is Arabic because they are forgetting the language too.

Researcher: You speak English with your Sudanese friends?

Sahal: Yeah, cause some of them don't really know Arabic.

Researcher: They're forgetting

Sahal: They speak English, yeah.

Sahal describes this language loss as "*crazy*", leading me to believe that he has some understanding of the magnitude of losing one's first language and the repercussions. If you think about it, Sahal is exactly right in stating that the fact that he is forgetting half of his first language is "*crazy*". It is sad to consider an individual losing his mother tongue while learning a new language in a new country to such an extent that it is difficult to speak that language with family. Furthermore, it is interesting to consider how this language loss affects Sahal's mother and his family.

Wong Fillmore (1991) states:

> What is lost is no less than the means by which parents socialize their children: When parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences. They cannot teach them about the meaning of work, or about personal responsibility, or what it means to be a moral or ethical person in a world with too many choices and too few guide- posts to follow. What is lost are the bits of advice, the consejos parents should be able to offer children in their everyday interactions with them. Talk is a crucial link between parents and children: It is how parents impart their cultures to their children and enable them to become the kind of men and women they want them to be. When parents lose the means for socializing and influencing their children, rifts develop and families lose the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings. (p. 343)

Wong Fillmore (1991) discusses the gravity of how the loss of one's first language can influence family, create a loss of intimacy within a family, and deprive parents of being able to impart wisdom, culture and lessons in morality to their children. Aheu recognizes the problem with Sahal and other Sudanese youth within their community forgetting their mother tongue.

> ***Researcher: Do you know other Sudanese people that you talk Arabic with?***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah*
>
> ***Researcher: Yeah? Sahal?***
>
> *Sahal: Yeah, but I don't really speak Arabic with them.*
>
> ***Researcher: You speak English with your Sudanese friends?***
>
> *Sahal: Yeah, cause some of them don't really know Arabic.*
>
> ***Researcher: They're forgetting.***
>
> *Sahal: They speak English, yeah.*
>
> ***Researcher: That's too bad.***
>
> *Aheu: The kids…*
>
> ***Researcher: They forget.***
>
> *Aheu: The problem is they talk to English. Arabic and English together.*

Researcher: Oh, they speak kind of a mix.

Aheu: Mix, mix it, yeah.

Aheu realizes that the Sudanese youth in her Canadian community are forgetting Arabic. She also recognizes that they mix the two languages when speaking. I wonder how Aheu feels about her son's language loss and whether (as she discusses) she feels as though she cannot easily impart values, culture and wisdom to Sahal. I especially wonder if this is true considering that Sahal and Aheu come from a culture that values community and, possibly, oral traditions, and since Aheu's upbringing included how her grandmother passed down values, culture and wisdom.

Although Sahal is losing his mother tongue, he is still not completely fluent in English, which he now primarily speaks, and has much difficulty with reading and writing English, so is caught between the two languages, being semilingual in both. This semilingualism reminds me of my own experience with traveling to Ukraine with my husband in order to visit his family. The part of Ukraine that my husband comes from speaks a mix of Ukrainian and Russian, referred to as 'surzhyk'. "In Ukraine the term *surzhyk* may be simply translated as 'impure language', usually meaning a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian" (Bilaniuk, 2004, p. 410), meaning that many people in the town my husband is from speak a combination of Ukrainian and Russian. When speaking with my husband's former schoolmates, I had much difficulty communicating with them. I would not consider my Ukrainian fluent, but I can speak with and understand my in-laws; however, knowing only Ukrainian and no Russian, I was unable to communicate well with my husband's friends. They had to make a conscious effort to speak clear Ukrainian, but had much difficulty with speaking only Ukrainian and soon slipped back into 'surzhyk' (though this may be to

the nature of the setting we were in and the empty vodka bottles on the table). I imagine that it may also require much conscious effort for my husband's friends to speak purely Russian as well, though considered that their print literacy skills may differ if they need to use one language when reading or writing at work. It is also interesting that "surzhyk emerged among urbanizing Ukrainian-speaking peasants attempting to speak Russian in order to acquire the higher social status associated with that language" (Bilaniuk & Melnyk, 2008, p. 345), just as Sahal's semilingualism and mixture of Arabic and English (when speaking with his family and Arabic-speaking friends) emerged from Sahal's need to learn the dominant language of his new environment which holds more social status than his first language of Arabic. Sahal and my husband's schoolmates are caught between two languages. The difference, however, is that my husband's friends grew up speaking 'surzhyk', whereas, Sahal's semilingualism has developed as he learns English in Canada.

Although Sahal is experiencing semilingualism and the loss of his first language, the adults within Sahal and Aheu's Sudanese community do speak Arabic with each other, though their English is not as fluent as that of their children.

> ***Researcher: But you still speak just Arabic with the adults? With the moms and dads?***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah, Arabic, yeah.*
>
> ***Researcher: Are there lots of other Sudanese families that you visit and talk with or just your own family?***
>
> *Aheu: No, you come visit to talk to Arabic.*

Although the Sudanese youth are learning English more easily and quickly than the older generation of Sudanese immigrants, they are, unfortunately, (as I

discussed is the case with Sahal) losing their mother tongue which can be detrimental to their learning in general and an unfortunate example of how the literacy practices of Sahal and other Sudanese youth in his community in Canada are changing. In addition, speaking a mixture of Arabic and English is a literacy practice that Sahal uses to communicate. This gradual decline of one's mother tongue can also be referred to as 'subtractive bilingualism' (Wright, S., Macarthur, J. & Taylor, D., 2000).

Wright, et al., (2000) states:

> This emphasis on transition into the dominant language and a focus on preparation for participation in the dominant culture, although well-intentioned, can lead to negative depictions of the child's heritage language and culture and threatens the child's linguistic heritage. There are serious potential cognitive and emotional risks for individual children that arise from this disapprobation of their in group (Cummins, 1989; Wright & Taylor, 1995) and from the loss of their heritage language. (p. 64)

According to Wright, et al., the strong emphasis placed on children to learn the dominant language can be detrimental to their heritage language and result in other issues, including cognitive and emotional problems. According to Fantino & Colak (2001), not only does the loss of an individual's first language affect learning in their second language, but it also has emotional risks where the individual does not belong to one particular group or culture. Therefore, if the emphasis on the dominant language of English leads to negative depictions of Sahal and Aheu's first language, it may unfortunately lead to (especially in Sahal's case) to the loss of the first language, as well as the possibility of other emotional and cognitive issues. This reality makes me wonder how Sahal's semilingualism affects him emotionally, or whether he feels as though he does not belong to any one particular group. Perhaps he belongs to a small group of Arabic friends who speak a mixture of English and Arabic.

In sum, Aheu continues to speak Arabic to other Sudanese adults within the community (she said, "*No, you come visit to talk to Arabic*") and recognizes that many Sudanese youth, including Sahal, are forgetting the Arabic language ("*they forget*") as they learn the dominant language of English. This reality is especially disheartening since, not only are Sahal and other Sudanese youth in Canada losing their first language but, cultural differences can cause stress in learners who are trying to belong to two cultures, but fear belonging to none (Fantino & Colak, 2001), which is amplified by their semilingualism. In the next subsection, I look at Sahal and Aheu's experiences learning English in Canada. I wanted to know what methods of learning English have helped or hindered their learning, including which methods may best support their learning due to their social and cultural practices of literacy.

5.2 Learning English in Canada

After considering the realities of Sahal's semilingualism, I wanted to know what learning English while in Canada has been like for Sahal and Aheu, especially in light of how their changing life histories and cultures affect their literacy practices. Both Sahal and Aheu have had the opportunity to learn English within a classroom while in Canada, and Sahal continues to learn English while in high school, though (from what Sahal has told me) not as part of an EAL program. In this section, I discuss Sahal and Aheu's experiences with learning English while living in Canada in order to learn how their English language education in Canada has shaped their social and cultural practices of literacy.

Aheu has had the opportunity to learn some English in a program designed to help new adult immigrants, but no longer takes classes since she hurt her back. She hopes, however, to continue to learn English through library resources and perhaps

taking more classes through a different program in the future. She told me, for instance, about a CD resource that she liked which is no longer at the library.

> *Aheu: Last time I'm come here, I ask about the CD in the (school) there. Show maybe teacher like this, say that one is A and something in the that one you read. They say the CD no here. Don't have it.*

Sahal, of course, has had the opportunity to learn English in school. When he attended the school where I taught him, he had some time with an EAL teacher, but it was very minimal, and the learning resource teacher spent time with him as well.

So, Sahal and Aheu have both had the opportunity to learn English while in Canada in an academic setting. Because they have had this opportunity and change in their life histories, their literacy practices have changed including learning a new language and how they learn that language. Both Sahal and Aheu told me that they have a desire to better their English language skills and are glad to have the opportunity to learn English, but I am not sure how motivated they are or if they know where to begin. Aheu told me *"I like it learn"* and considers education important. She is happy to have the opportunity to learn, for both herself and her family. Sahal also has a positive attitude when it comes to learning, but in my interview with him I was uncertain as to how motivated he truly was or if he was trying to please me as his former teacher. Since I knew that learning English within a new country, while having no first language print literacy skills, was no easy task, I wanted Sahal and Aheu to tell me what their experiences were with learning English.

In an attempt to try to gather information from my participants regarding their struggles with learning English, I first asked Sahal what he finds difficult about learning English. He said that reading, spelling and writing give him the most trouble, though he does use spell check on the computer, but has difficulty typing. When I

asked Aheu what she finds difficult about learning English, she said that she also finds reading and writing the most difficult, but also said that she would like more practice talking, though she finds speaking easy now. She told me that *"before, it's difficult, now, it's easy"*. I can't help but wonder if Aheu's ability to learn to speak English fairly easily is a reflection of the possibility that Aheu comes from a strong oral culture, as well as being bilingual prior to learning English. According to Cenoz (2003) who looked at a number of studies in regard to "the additive effects of bilingualism on third language acquisition", "studies on the effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition conducted in different contexts tend to associate bilingualism with advantages in third language acquisition" (p. 78). Basically, because Aheu already spoke two languages (Arabic and Kakwa) before she began learning English, her bilingualism is beneficial in supporting her learning of her third language of English. If this is true, then, Aheu's culture and its oral traditions and bilingualism have shaped her social and cultural practices of literacy, being her ability to learn to speak another language, since she now considers English easy, even though it used to be difficult - *Before, it's difficult. Now, it's easy*. In addition, Aheu and Sahal's difficulty with reading and writing is most likely a result of their lack of print literacy in their first language since "developing literacy skills in a second language may be affected by literacy capabilities in the first language" (Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll & Kuehn, 1990, p. 246), as I have mentioned throughout this thesis.

Once I knew what Sahal and Aheu found difficult about learning English, being primarily reading and writing, I then asked them a number of questions regarding what types of things they learned in English through their schooling in Canada and the ways in which they learned them. I wanted to know their literacy learning experiences within their new environment. To begin, I asked Sahal if he was

able to work with a partner in class since (according to DeCapua and Marshall, 2009) my participants probably come from a 'high-context' culture that focuses on group relationships. Sahal said that he is sometimes given the opportunity to work with a partner and that he finds it helpful and prefers to work with someone else rather than by himself.

> ***R: Do you like better reading with a partner or reading by yourself – trying to read? Or with a teacher helping you? What do you like the best?***
>
> *S: It's better to read with a partner, cause you know we get to, like, take turns reading and all that, instead of reading the whole thing by yourself and helping each other.*

Although a number of students like to work with a partner (and working with a partner is helpful to EAL students), perhaps this is another example of Sahal's Sudanese culture and the importance it places on community and working as part of a group, since (according to Perry, 2007b) "the issue of community plays an important role in shaping how individuals and groups take up literacy in their lives" (p. 5), and (as I discussed in chapter 4) community seemed to play an important role in Sahal and Aheu's culture prior to coming to Canada.

Besides working with a partner in class, Sahal also said that he likes learning best when he can move around, as well as talk and listen to others within the classroom. The following example discusses a lesson that Sahal particularly enjoyed and remembers from elementary school:

> ***Researcher: Did you have any lessons that you were, like, oh this is so much fun? Or we did this science experiment?***
>
> *Sahal: How many…how many balls can, uh…no, how much drops of water can fill a whole entire thingy…a, no, not a cup…a cup of water.*
>
> ***Researcher: Okay***
>
> *Sahal: Like with a bottle thing.*

Researcher: Who did you do that with?

Sahal: It was some science teacher. We had a partner and we, you know, we had to, like, see how many drops we can do. It was actually pretty fun.

Researcher: Neat. Did you do anything else like that that you liked?

Sahal: We did a gum experient.

Researcher: So you like science experiments and stuff?

Sahal: Yes, science is actually pretty fun.

Researcher: Yeah, so you like, probably, doing things more than sitting and reading.

Sahal: Yeah.

DeCapua and Marshall (2009) discuss SLIFE (students with limited or interrupted formal education) EAL students who come from very HC cultures as needing "immediate applications, interpersonal relationships, collaborative opportunities, oral learning components, and repeated contextualized practice" (p. 167). Sahal fits into this description of SLIFE EAL learners who learn better as part of a group since, within their own cultures, the individual is not as important as the group (DeCapua & Marshall, 2009). This may explain why many of these students have difficulty, not only learning English, but learning in a different way than they are accustomed to in a society where often times "students are asked to learn about something by studying it, which is typically an isolated activity, rather than an interpersonal one" (DeCapua & Marshall, 2009, p. 165). Learning by studying individually is common (according to DeCapua & Marshall, 2009) in 'low context' cultures, which Sahal is now a part of. From this angle then, it makes sense that Sahal prefers to learn with a partner or as part of a group, since he comes from a culture that values community and working with others, and we can see yet another example of how culture affects literacy

practices and how life histories can change as cultures change also impacting sociocultural practices of literacy.

Not surprisingly, Aheu also prefers to learn with a group, as well as in an authentic, hands-on way just as Sahal does. When I asked Aheu what kinds of things she learned in her English classes in Canada, she said the following:

> *Aheu: Mm, super, superstore, some time weekend, uh, about the family. And week, and how, how ??? the day, the weekend. 7 days. Yeah. Monday, Tuesday, Friday, Thursday, Wednesday.*

Aheu has learned basic language that helps her to go about her daily tasks and function within her new society, including vocabulary associated with going to Superstore, things she does on the weekend, vocabulary to do with families and the days of the week. Aheu, however, prefers learning these things with others and in an authentic way. Although she told me that she likes having tests to study for (*"Yes, tests is good. You have to learn*), she found the best way for her to learn was to go somewhere with her class (such as a store) and learn the names of different things, or learn how to do something (such as cook). Aheu also showed an interest in wanting to learn English from a video, since she cannot read or write, as well as wanting to learn how to use a computer for email and Facebook. Her desire to want to use a computer is an example of how her literacy practices have changed as her life history and culture begin to change with moving to a new country where the culture differs from the ones she came from.

As I mentioned before, both Sahal and Aheu are positive about learning English and were also positive about their experiences learning English within a classroom in Canada. They both find reading and writing to be the most difficult

for them and they both prefer to learn with others, as well as to learn by doing, through moving around or taking a trip away from the classroom to learn. In the next section I discuss the literacy practices of my participants, and I continue looking at Sahal and Aheu's English learning, but specifically at listening and speaking, before moving into reading and writing.

5.3 Listening and Speaking

Both Sahal and Aheu find listening and speaking easier than reading and writing. As discussed earlier, this makes sense since they quite possible come from a very strong oral culture, with an emphasis on community, lack first language print literacy skills and have, therefore, always used speaking and listening as their primary methods of communication

Sahal: Speaking is way easier, yeah.

Researcher: And listening?

Sahal: Yeah, listening is pretty easy.

Although, both Sahal and Aheu find speaking and listening to be easier than reading and writing, students from other countries may find the opposite to be true. One example is students from the Philippines that I have taught in Canada. The majority of my Philippine students have found reading and writing easier than speaking and listening, mostly because they are much more comfortable with it since it is how they have been taught. This fact is not surprising since they probably come from 'low context' culture (according to DeCapua and Marshall, 2009) that puts more emphasis on the individual than on the group, and may be true of many other Asian cultures as well. Mesa and Guzman (2006) describe the Philippine instructional environment where "classroom configuration showed that traditional teacher-

authority system dominates" (p. 251); however, they suggest that teachers are aware of a more constructivist way of teaching and some are trying to implement these methods into their teaching, but, since many teachers were taught in a traditional classroom, they still primarily use traditional teacher-directed methods (Mesa & Guzman, 2006). Hu (2002), in comparison, describes the implementation of the CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) method in China to improve communicative competence among Chinese students learning English. The CLT method included activities that involve real communication to promote learning, activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks to promote learning, and language that is meaningful to the learner and supports the learning process (Hu, 2002). Hu (2002) argued that the CLT method was not effective for teaching Chinese students English since it went against their culture of learning. He argues "for the necessity of taking a cautiously eclectic approach and making well-informed pedagogical choices that are grounded in an understanding of sociocultural influences" (p. 93). What he means is that educators need to be careful when implementing pedagogy from a diverse range of sources, and when considering what teaching methods to implement, we need to be mindful of social and cultural influences. So, basically, some EAL learners who come to Canada may be more comfortable developing listening and speaking skills, whereas others may be more comfortable developing reading and writing skills depending on the culture they come from and the way that culture approaches education. The comparison between Sahal and Aheu and students learning English in the Philippines and China shows the importance of understanding cultural practices of literacy in order to teach EAL learners effectively.

Even though speaking and listening are easier literacy skills for Sahal and Aheu to develop than reading and writing skills (especially since they lack first language print literacy skills), they both still have some difficulty when speaking English. It is important to remember that it can take 7 to 10 years for first language illiterate learners to acquire language acquisition in English (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Brown et al, 2006; Dooley, 2009) in comparison to the 5 to 7 years it takes for immigrants who are literate in their first language (Cummins, 1981; Brown et a., 2006), and Sahal and Aheu have been in Canada for only six years. Sahal says that he sometimes has trouble expressing himself in English and thinking of the right word for what he wants to say.

> ***Researcher: What things do you think you'll really need to learn English better for?***
>
> *Sahal: How to say, like, words and, like, how to speak well. How to say, like, better words.*
>
> ***Researcher: Is it sometimes hard to think of the right word? You know what you want to say, but you… It's still hard sometimes, or it's pretty good?***
>
> *Sahal: Yeah, it's pretty hard to think of a good word. It's pretty hard sometimes to think of a good word, instead of, like, a easy word that people won't actually like sometimes.*
>
> ***Researcher: Yeah. It's hard to think of those things. So, do you find it, like, hard sometimes because you want to say things in a certain way. Like, you want to be polite, or you want to be funny or you want to be serious. Is it hard to find the right word or…you know what I mean?***
>
> *Sahal: Polite it takes sometimes, yeah. Polite it takes sometimes to say the right word.*

Although Sahal understands English well and is understood by others, he has made it clear that he still has some difficulty. Sahal's Basic Interpersonal Conversational Skills (BICS) have developed, but he still needs to work on his Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 2008). This means

that, although Sahal can converse easily and be understood, his academic, spoken language is lacking. I can imagine that Sahal must be frustrated with this fact considering that (as discussed earlier in the semiligualism section) he may not be able to think of the correct word in Arabic as well.

Aheu, on the other hand, still has some difficulty understanding people in English and being understood on a basic level.

> *Aheu: Yeah, it's….some time like me, no understand. Maybe I repeat two time, you understand because my English is broke, yeah.*

She is, therefore, still developing BICS. She often needs someone else to help her (which I will discuss more in the 'literacy brokering' section of my data analysis) with her everyday tasks and needs.

Sahal and Aheu have acknowledged that they both still need assistance and practice in learning to speak English. However, it should be noted that although Sahal and Aheu do not speak "standard/academic English", their own language variety should be recognized and valued. Gallagher-Geurtsen (2010) suggests that speaking standard English "and other hidden privileges protect power systems (such as schools) that maintain the high status of native standard English" (Gallagher-Geurtsen, p. 42) and that "there are real consequences if educators do not become aware of linguistic privileges of native standard English speakers: Students may malign or disregard their home language and culture....students may lose their first language and become monolingual English speakers instead of bilingual speakers" (Gallagher-Geurtsen, p. 43). So, as discussed earlier, there is a real danger of EAL students losing their first language when a strong emphasis and value is placed on the dominant language of

English and the students' first language is not equally valued. Furthermore, Gallagher-Geursten (2010) states:

> It is clear that the language/culture of classroom curriculum and instruction is a contested terrain that cannot be extracted from, for example, political interests, history, issues of economics, and human rights. Over time, dominant groups have assigned a particular status to languages and often place English at the top of their lists. The unequal status afforded different languages can translate into troubling cultural practices. When language/cultures are classified on a strict hierarchial scale, there is a tendency for brutal adherence to that hierarchy (Gallagher-Geurtsen, p. 41).

In other words, when English is given a higher value than other languages and language varieties, students tend to adhere to this belief which can greatly affect cultural practices. As we know from the semiligualism section of this chapter, this is exactly what is happening to Sahal as he loses his first language due to the strong emphasis placed on the dominant language of English and no real value being placed on the retention of his first language.

Now that we have some better understanding why Sahal and Aheu may have an easier time acquiring speaking and listening skills, the fact that they still have some difficulty with speaking and listening in English, and have an understanding of the value that is often placed on English in comparison to EAL learners' first languages, I move to what speaking English in Canada is like for Sahal and Aheu. Sahal and Aheu said the following in regard to when they use spoken English:

> *Sahal: Yeah, I mostly…whenever I go to a store, I always speak English, you know, cause most of the other people, you know, they don't know the language that I speak… So, I just speak English then and ask them.*
>
> ***Researcher: What's it like when you need to speak English? Like if you go to the bank, is it hard?***
>
> *Aheu: No, it's easy. Before, it's difficult. Now, it's easy.*

Researcher: Where are some of the places that you find you need to talk to Canadian people? Like the bank, or where else do you need to speak English?

Aheu: Bank, I go to store… Sometime I call, I need appointment doctor.

Researcher: So it's easy for you now? It's good.

Aheu: Yeah, before it's difficult.

Sahal realizes that few people can speak his first language of Arabic and that he must speak English when he goes to a store. This realization is a change in his life history from before he lived in Canada and everyone around him could speak his first language. Aheu discusses her need to speak English for particular tasks such as when going to the bank, a store or when making an appointment. She says that she now finds speaking English easy within these domains. She, too, has had change in her life through her need to speak English when going about her daily tasks. This necessity to speak English has become a part of her life history and changed practices of literacy.

Sahal and Aheu have needed to use different types of literacy (primarily speaking and listening) other than print literacy to manage their daily tasks, though it seems that things are becoming easier for them with time, though they still experience some difficulties. Although Sahal has an easier time than Aheu with understanding and speaking English, he is in danger of losing his mother tongue of Arabic, in part, due to the emphasis and value that is placed on English. As Sahal and Aheu go about their daily lives, their need to speak the dominant language of English to complete tasks has changed their life histories and, therefore, their literacy practices. In the next two sections I move from discussing my participants' listening and speaking skills to their reading and writing skills. Since Sahal and Aheu are currently living in a society where print literacy is highly valued, I also wanted to learn about their

experiences with reading and writing. I broke up the two into separate categories, beginning with reading.

5.4 Reading

When I asked Sahal and Aheu about reading, they both said that they had much difficulty with it. Aheu, in fact, is unable to read in English and Sahal says the following about reading:

> ***Researcher: So what do you find difficult?***
>
> *Sahal: Reading. Mostly reading, yeah.*
>
> ***Researcher: When you were reading, when we were looking at that form yesterday, was that still kind of difficult to do?***
>
> *Sahal: No, like some of them, like some of the words are pretty difficult, but…*
>
> ***Researcher: To read, yeah?***
>
> *Sahal: It's okay though. I still try though.*

Despite Sahal's difficulty with reading, Sahal seems to have a positive outlook and is willing to try. Since I was his former teacher, I still, however, get the feeling that Sahal sometimes tells me what he thinks I want to hear in order to please me. He did admit the following:

> *Sahal: Like, sometimes, I don't really like it, but I still, like, when I read I have to try, you know, I always try…*
>
> ***Researcher: That's good.***
>
> *Sahal: to see…I try sounding out the words or sometimes I ask, like, the teacher what this means to tell me what is it.*

Sahal does recognize that, although reading is difficult, he needs to try. Because Sahal and Aheu finding reading difficult, I asked them questions to find out what types of things they need to read as a part of their daily lives, as

well as what interests them. Both Sahal and Aheu, however, had difficulty in answering me.

> ***Researcher: If you could read about anything, what would be interesting to you?***
>
> *Sahal: I have no idea. There's a lot of things.*

Sahal was unable to tell me what he finds interesting to read about and I wondered if he has had many positive experiences with reading something that he enjoyed reading and learning about. It occurred to me that, even though Sahal and Aheu recognize learning to read in English as important for their futures in Canada, since it has not been a part of their cultural and social practices of literacy, they may not highly value it, especially in comparison to the dominant society. When I think about this, I am reminded of my one year old who, growing up in a society that highly values print literacy, is already able to pick up a book that has been read to her a number of times, turn it the right way up, point to the text and babble. My daughter's ability to do this is largely because she has been read to and because reading is a learned behaviour. Birch (2002) describes reading as "complicated because it involves a great deal of precise knowledge which must be acquired or learned and many processing strategies which must be practiced until they are automatic" (p. 2). Because my daughter is growing up as a member of a society that highly values print literacy, her social and cultural practices of literacy include reading. Sahal and Aheu, in contrast, grew up in a society where other modes of social and cultural practices of literacy were dominant, keeping in mind that the effects of war, poverty and no access to schooling are major reasons for Sahal and Aheu not having the opportunity to develop print literacy skills within Sudan.

In wondering about the value Sahal places on print literacy, especially considering that he has attended school in Canada for six years now, I asked him what reading English meant for him. He said that it was to get a better education so that he could get a better job, and, more specifically, for school work, knowing how to read bills, going on the computer to communicate with friends (primarily on Facebook) and watching movies with subtitles.

> *Sahal: Like sometimes you need to read, like, if a teacher gives you a thing to write, you have to read the information before you do something. Read the rules of a book, or something.*

So, Sahal does see the purposes of learning to read, but I still wonder how highly he values print literacy skills and how motivated he is to attain them.

When I spoke with Aheu about reading, she talked about her difficulty in learning to read – "*difficult for me the reading*" – but made known her desire to learn. She said, "*I like it because I want to try*". When I asked her what learning to read English meant for her, she said the following:

> *Aheu: Sometime maybe I need my paper. I, I want to fill it. I can't, difficult for me… Because I want to read my paper myself. Some time I have paper and give my kids, sometimes say, well, I'm tired. That's why I want to write learn myself and reading and maybe all my kids going another province sended me letters here. I go to look the people to read to me. That's why I need to read myself. Yeah, sometimes secret and in the family.*

Learning to read in her new environment in Canada means a kind of freedom and not having to rely on others. In Sudan, Aheu was in control of her household and the things she needed to do. Now, in Canada, she must rely on others as part of her literacy practices, though not in the same way that she did in Sudan, where people assisted one another due to their culture's sense of community, yet again reiterating how culture affects literacy practices.

In summary, it is clear that both Sahal and Aheu finding reading difficult, but they both see the purposes in learning to read and why it is important for them within their new country. They seem to have a positive attitude about wanting to learn, but need much more assistance in order to adopt new literacy practices and develop the print literacy skill of reading. Next, I discuss writing, which is another aspect of print literacy, and a literacy that Sahal and Aheu also find difficult.

5.5 Writing

When asked about writing, Sahal and Aheu had little to say, so I tried to guide them with my questioning to find out for what purposes they use writing, just as I had tried to discover for what purposes they use reading. Sahal's main purpose for writing was in school (as is true for many people). He has difficulty with both writing and spelling, and talked about his reliance on spell check and how it helps him to write, but typing takes time. Sahal also told me how he struggles with knowing what to write about, which isn't surprising since (as I've discussed throughout this thesis) first language illiteracy is a part of his life history of literacy. Sahal still has a positive attitude about writing, however, and admits that knowing the English language makes writing easier.

> *Sahal: It's pretty good, actually, you know, you get to, like, like put what you think, you know. Yeah, write what you want all about, if you know English, you know… Sometimes, you know, I don't know what to write. But, I just think about it first.*

Aheu, in comparison, is unable to write very much besides her own name. She said, "*I can't put in the paper*". Aheu described having to sign her name when she first came to Canada and did not know how to write.

> *Aheu: I'm come the first to Canada, I'm write my name cross.*

Besides that first experience in coming to Canada, Aheu has had to sign her name at the bank and on forms for her children's school.

> *Aheu: Sahal, like this sign (points to paper to be filled out for her son's school). Every day come bring the paper you want to sign.*

Aheu allowed me to make a copy of the document that she pointed to and use it in my thesis. She had brought it to our interview so that I could help her to fill it out and understand what some of it said. The form she gave me asked parents of high school students for health information, including whether the student is in good health in order to "take part in strenuous activities" and also asks parents for permission for their child to partake in physical activities and sports. The form then goes on to ask parents to specifically write which sports their child may take part in and then asks them to fill out a myriad of health information, beginning with such things as their names and addresses, as well as doctor information and a hospitalization number. Following this section, the parents much check off 'yes' or 'no' to a variety of health problems, including bleeding disorder, diabetes, heart problems, neurological problems, tuberculosis and so forth, as well as asking parents to provide details for any items marked 'yes'. From there the form asks parents to check off information about previous injuries, answer questions about asthma and allergies, list any medications, and finally describe any "other relevant conditions which may limit your child's full participation in activities" before signing and dating the form. In reading all of the specific language about medical issues and conditions, it is no wonder that Aheu has difficulty filling out such forms. She had simply checked 'no' in all sections and had Sahal write under the details section "*non of them*". It would, in fact, be a difficult form for many EAL learners to fill out, including those

who have first language print literacy skills, though they would have the ability to use a dictionary or the internet to assist them, whereas Aheu does not have those skills or resources. Filling out forms such as the one I've just described is an example of how Aheu's literacy practices have changed, as she now has to find ways to complete such forms when necessary.

Although Aheu is unable to fill out forms for her children's schools, I still wanted to know whether she uses writing for any purposes. Since writing is often used as a way to not only record things but to remember them, I asked both Sahal and Aheu whether they make lists to remember things. Sahal said that he did not, but had to in the past as part of a school assignment. Aheu, also had not made lists because she is unable to, but sees the purpose in it.

> *Aheu: No, the, the, the, writing in the paper. Sometime is good. You have to learn because it make you today, you spend how much the money. You buy potatoes how much and onions and that one, and that one, meat and chicken. This is good, yeah.*

Aheu sees some of the purposes of making lists as being to record and see how much money you have spent and to make grocery lists. Since Sahal and Aheu do not make lists, they, therefore, need to use other methods of remembering besides writing. I, on the other hand, cannot help but think of my own reliance on writing in growing up in a society that highly values print literacy. I need to make lists in order to remember things and, consequently, most likely do not have the same memorization skills as Sahal and Aheu. In addition, I find that I rely on writing, in a number of cases, more than I do on other modes of literacy. For example, I find it quite difficult to dictate an email to my cell phone. I have difficulty with speaking what I want to say in the form of an email and find it much easier to write/type the message that I

wish to send. Perhaps if the culture that I come from (which, truth be told, is privleged) put more of an emphasis on oral language, I would find dictating an email much easier, just as Sahal and Aheu would most likely find writing lists much easier had the society they came from put more of an emphasis on print literacy. This difference between the culture I come from and Sahal and Aheu's culture, is another example of how culture definitely affects our sociocultural practices of literacy.

To review, Sahal and Aheu both have difficulty with writing and reading. Although Sahal is learning to write in school, his writing skills are still underdeveloped. Aheu, on the other hand, has virtually no writing skills, except writing her name andcopying words. When I asked Sahal and Aheu about whether they ever made lists, they both said that they did not, but saw the purpose in making lists for remembering things. Since they do not make lists to remember things, they must use other ways of remembering things. This discussion on making lists to remember things leads into the next section which specifically discusses ways of remembering.

5.6 Ways of Remembering

Since Sahal and Aheu do not have print literacy skills in their first language, I considered what other methods they might use for remembering things instead of writing them down and reading them. Therefore, I asked both Sahal and Aheu if they thought there were better ways of remembering things than writing them down and how they remembered things. Firstly, Sahal told me that he does not write a list to remember things, but rather they just "pop up" in his head. Another way that he remembers things is to go for a walk, but also added that he might write it down.

> *Sahal: Yeah, like, sometimes, I just, like, if I wanna, like, you know, wanna remember something, I just go for a walk and after, when I'm walking, it just pops up in my head. Yeah, then I just…write it down, maybe.*

Sahal had, previously, told me that he does not make lists to remember things, but perhaps he does write down things such as schedules or dates, but he was not able to elaborate so I wondered if this was true. Aheu, however, was unable to tell me how she remembers things. Sahal told me that Aheu understands when her appointments are and where they take place, but is unable to write them down. He also added that she knows more than two languages (which I understand to be Arabic, Kakwa and English). Being multilingual may help her in remembering things more easily, since she has had the ability to learn a number of languages (*Paradowski*, n.d.). It would be interesting to be able to observe Aheu as she navigates through her daily activities to see, not only how she manages in a world dominated by print literacy with no print literacy skills, but also in a language that she is still learning.

Lorenzatti (2013) describes the literacy practices of a woman named Marta Graciela who is also illiterate in her first language and must use modes of literacy other than print literacy in order to navigate her way through society. Marta Graciela needed to do a number of things within her society without print literacy skills (just as Aheu and Sahal do) including, selling cosmetics from a catalogue, attending and participating in church services, identifying medications, grocery shopping and finding her way throughout the city she lives in. Marta Graciela, who is described as being very competent in a variety of contexts, has other ways of completing these tasks, remembering things and navigating through her world. Marta makes sense of her world primarily through images and oral language, but also uses flavours, fragrances, colours, memory skills and literacy brokering. Aheu too, possibly, uses a

number of these modalities to accomplish daily tasks. Aheu also talked about buying groceries in Sudan and it made me wonder how she manages in Canada. She told me that if she went into a store in Sudan and something cost two dollars, but she only had one and said that she didn't have money, they'd give her what she needed for one dollar.

> *Aheu: Maybe I want to buy something in two dollars. I say, oh, I don't have money, they give me one dollar.*

The difference between Marta Graciela and Sahal and Aheu, however, is that Sahal and Aheu must navigate through their environment while lacking print literacy skills in their second language (as well as their first language) which is the dominant language used in their environment. Yet, it is important to remember that Aheu is multilingual.

Even though Aheu lacks print literacy skills and Sahal's are still minimal, they are capable of navigating through their world using different ways of remembering things, though they could not tell me specifically how they do this. It would be interesting to follow Aheu for a day as she completes daily tasks and learn what modes of literacy she uses to navigate through her world and how her social and cultural practices of literacy have changed as she continues to live in Canada. Although Aheu must have some other methods for remembering things and going about her daily life, she also relies on others to help her with some tasks, which I will discuss in the next section, entitled 'literacy brokering'.

5.7 Literacy Brokering

Literacy brokering is "the act of seeking out help in understanding texts and their purposes and uses in the real world" (Perry, 2007b, p. 4). As I mentioned in previous sections, Aheu often has to rely on others to help her to complete tasks, such as filling out a form for Sahal's school. This reliance on others to help her with her second language literacy needs is called literacy brokering. Being within a new country that speaks a language differing from their own, Sahal and Aheu are forced to find ways to cope within their new environment. This includes asking others for help with tasks and situations that they are unable to do or understand on their own. "Immigrants and refugees rely on many resources as they work to understand a new language, new literacy practices, and how language and literacy are used in this new context" (Perry, 2007b, p. 7). Literacy brokering is one of these ways.

When asking others for help, Sahal mostly sought the help of others in school through working with teachers and other students. Aheu, however, being an adult and needing to complete a number of tasks within her new environment, originally had the support of a social worker.

> *Aheu: Mmmm sometime after school to, go bank, go together, say like this you want money, I need money.*
>
> ***Sahal: Shows her, like, directions, how to…***
>
> *Aheu: Uh, before take me the store, uh, hospital, clinic, and everything. Calling…you come my home, you call the people I want help, you call… Because my back. Sometimes coming in my home to help me read…, I need appointment.*

The social worker helped Aheu to go to different places, such as the bank, stores or to appointments. She would also read things to Aheu and made appointments

for her. In these ways, the social worker helped Aheu with her literacy needs. Aheu used her for literacy brokering.

Besides the social worker, who now no longer helps Aheu since her English speaking skills have improved, Aheu's children have helped her, especially her daughter. As I mentioned before, Aheu's daughter has been a great help to her since (for unknown reasons) she has print literacy skills in her first language and "well-developed literacy skills in first or heritage languages facilitate second language literacy development" (Gay, 2010, p. 93). Aheu's daughter also uses an English-Arabic dictionary to help understand different types of text.

> *Aheu: Yeah, sometime, I want to call at home, make the appointment, my daughter to helping me.*

Aheu's daughter often helps her to make appointments just as the social worker did, and Sahal and one of his brothers will also try to help when needed. The fact that Aheu's family help her with her literacy needs is another interesting way that their literacy practices have changed.

> *Aheu: Yeah, sometime, I want to call at home, make the appointment, my daughter to helping me.*
>
> ***Researcher: Mhm, so she must have learned English quickly then.***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah. I go to bank because you learn quick because the dictionary.*
>
> ***Researcher: She reads the dictionary.***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah, Arabic-English.*

> *Aheu: Mmm, sometime I can't understand good. I take my son because now it's difficult for me.*

Aheu must rely on her family for a number of tasks that involve reading and writing (as well as speaking and listening), which she cannot do on her own. Lorenzatti's (2009) participant, Marta Graciela, who lacks print literacy skills as well, also needed to ask others to help her with her reading and writing needs. Marta "uses oral and written language in deliberate ways to establish and maintain social relations and to participate in social and culturally valued activities" (p. 90), which Aheu also needs to do.

Besides using her family for literacy brokering, I also inquired about the Sudanese community, since in Sudan community is important and there are a number of Sudanese immigrants that live near the family. However, as discussed earlier, Aheu told me that everyone is too busy because they work more than one job ("*Some people working two job, three job"*). Due to the need to work to make enough money for survival, those in Aheu's Sudanese community have no time for living in a community. This lack of community support (as discussed in the previous chapter) is unfortunate and, as a result, is an important example of how and why the literacy practices of my participants have changed.

So, literacy brokering has been necessary for both Sahal and Aheu when they came to Canada and had to learn a new language. Sahal has primarily used literacy brokering for help at school, but Aheu has had to ask for assistance from others to help her with her with daily tasks that she has difficulty completing on her own due to minimal English language abilities. Aheu has gotten assistance from a social worker, as well as her family (and primarily her daughter), but has not had much support from her Sudanese community because everyone is so pre-occupied with survival.

Finally, I wanted to know what Sahal and Aheu's feelings were about learning English in a new country since, due to a number of factors, it can affect how they feel in their new environment, and how they feel and perceive the English language can affect their literacy practices. Therefore, in the next section I look at the feelings of my participants in regard to learning English.

5.8 Feelings about Learning English

After looking at the specific literacy practices of my participants and how they use literacy brokering for their needs, this section discusses how Sahal and Aheu feel about learning English, as part of doing ethnography (which informs my research) includes learning about how people feel (Handwerker, 2001). In addition, I believe that understanding my participants' feelings towards learning English to be important to my research and understanding their social practices of literacy because Sahal and Aheu did not choose to come to Canada, but were forced to due to unsafe conditions within their own country of Sudan. Therefore, their literacy practices were dramatically and forcibly changed and they had to adapt and learn to be able to survive within their new environment, and this change to their life histories and cultures also affected their sociocultural practices of literacy. According to Khawaja et al. (2008), there are many factors that can influence the feelings of my participants within their new environment including trauma from war and leaving one's home country; the need to adapt to a very different culture and society; difficulties such as environmental mastery, financial difficulties, social isolation and the impact of perceived racism (p. 19); as well as "adaptational demands such as learning a new language, becoming familiar with a new set of cultural values and practices and learning how to access a range of available resources" (Khawaja et al., 2008, p. 19).

Consequently, there are many other stressors that refugees experience besides language learning, including becoming a part of a new culture (which I discussed in the previous chapter). In addition, a lack of knowledge of the English language can add to social isolation if refugees are unable to access new networks within their new society (Khawaja et al., 2008) and, unfortunately, the Sudanese community in Sahal and Aheu's new environment has little time to come together and support one another due to busy schedules, which was one of the examples in the previous chapter as to how a change in culture has affected Sahal and Aheu's social and cultural practices of literacy.

Moreover, Freire (1990) states:

> The refugee tends naturally to reject everything that is new that could threaten even further his/her very shaky sense of identity. Refugees have the maturity and motivation to learn the second language, but emotional aspects of the refugee experience, including some survival defences (at conscious and subconscious levels), may initially impede the learning of the second language.

If this impediment of learning English affects my participants despite their desire to learn English, I have to wonder to what degree these emotional stressors have affected Sahal and Aheu and how much they still affect them after six years of being in Canada. Frieire (1990) argues that for refugees "it is an impossible task for them to become literate in the second language without first mastering literacy in their own language", which is exactly the case for Sahal and Aheu.

So, the feelings of Sahal and Aheu and how affected they were/are by the trauma and culture change they've experienced quite possibly affects their English language learning and, because of this, their literacy practices. Sahal and Aheu are now in a new country, with a very different culture from their own which puts much

emphasis on print literacy, and they are both illiterate in their first language, as well as have much difficulty with learning to read and write in English. Yet, despite this fact, both Sahal and Aheu seem to have a positive outlook on education, like learning and want to learn more.

Firstly, I look at Sahal's feelings and experiences with learning English before moving on to discuss what Aheu shared with me. As I mentioned, Sahal has a positive attitude about learning English, but admits that it is difficult.

> *Sahal: It's pretty good actually. It's a pretty good language to learn, but it's hard though…but it's okay.*

Sahal also told me that he likes learning English now that he can "sometimes" understand what people are saying.

> *Sahal: Uh, I like learning English and new things and all that, cause I can understand sometimes when people are talking to me, like mhmm…*

Perhaps what Sahal is trying to say is that he enjoys learning, but, obviously, learning becomes enjoyable when he can understand the language.

Currently Sahal is in Grade Nine and an alternate program at his high school which means that he is with other students who are, possibly, at his language level. However, I wonder about Sahal's placement in this program since it is meant for students who have some learning difficulties and Sahal is a bright and capable boy, but needs extra assistance and intervention to help him to develop second language acquisition, especially considering that he lacks first language print literacy skills. Sahal, however, feels comfortable in his classroom, since he considers the other students are at a similar level as he is.

Sahal: It wasn't really different because they knew what level I'm in, and I know what level they're in, so you know, and there was, and there was, like, other people who didn't even know English that much, so you know, it's okay, yeah.

Sahal likes the fact that everyone is at a similar level in his classes and that everyone knows what level they are in. It also seems as though there are some other EAL learners within his class and that this also makes him feel more comfortable. In fact, Sahal says that he prefers high school because all of the other students are at a similar level as he is, whereas in elementary school they were not.

Sahal: Yeah, here is…last year [referring to when he was in elementary school] was kinda different, but here is better actually cause most of the people in are the same level as you and all that.

Besides feeling comfortable within his class, Sahal also has a positive attitude about what he learns in school, though he admits that it's hard to sit and concentrate at times, and he can get bored if it's something that he doesn't really like. He says, for example,:

Sahal: It's pretty, you know….it takes pretty long to you know, be like…

Researcher: To sit and concentrate.

Sahal: Yeah, to sit and concentrate.

Sahal's difficulty with being able to concentrate at times and becoming bored in class shows the importance of using 'authentic' material and lessons for teaching students, such as Sahal, in order to keep their interest and attention. As I've mentioned before, 'authentic literacy' is literacy that has a real-life purpose and, according to Gates & Purcell-Gates (n.d.), authentic literacy "allows the students to clearly see real-life purposes for reading and writing that match the purposes used by their families or other community members" (p. 14). Since community (as discussed in Chapter 4) appears to be an important part of Sahal's culture, authentic materials would be

beneficial to use in teaching him English. According to DeCapua and Marshall (2009), "SLIFE need to see the direct connection between what they are learning and the practical realities of their lives" (p. 164). Therefore, Sahal may benefit from being taught English in an 'authentic' way because he would then be able to connect what he learns in school to real-life purposes.

I wanted to know if Sahal could remember any specific lessons that he especially liked in order to understand what interests him in regard to learning, and whether authentic literacy and hands-on lessons would be something that he enjoyed. Sahal remembered doing science experiments in elementary school that he especially liked (which was mentioned earlier in this chapter).

> *Sahal: How many…how many balls can, uh…no, how much drops of water can fill a whole entire thingy…a, no, not a cup…a cup of water. Like with a bottle thing… It was some science teacher. We had a partner and we, you know, we had to, like, see how many drops we can do. It was actually pretty fun.*

By choosing a science experiment that was done with a partner, we see anexample of how a hands-on approach to learning is preferable to students who are learning English, drawing from social situations and practices of literacy. Furthermore, Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall & Tower (2006) found that "those teachers who included more authentic literacy activities more of the time had students who showed higher growth in both comprehension and writing" (p. 345).

Besides using authentic literacy as a beneficial method for teaching Sahal, Sahal especially simply likes talking to people in order to learn English, as well as just sitting and listening. He likes working in a small group with a teacher (specifically the learning resource time he had in elementary school) and said he preferred this to staying with the whole class.

> *Sahal: Yeah, she lets us do things. She lets us talk and all that stuff. It makes it funner.*

Sahal's preference with working with others once again reiterates that Sahal prefers more group-oriented and oral tasks in school, which isn't surprising since (as discussed in the previous chapter) he comes from a very communal culture with possible oral traditions. Sahal's preference to work with others shows us, once again, how his culture has affected his social and cultural practices of literacy.

After learning how Sahal currently feels about learning English in Canada and his preferences for how he likes to learn, I wondered how he felt when he first came to Canada and knew no English. When I asked Sahal how he felt in elementary school, he said the following:

> *Sahal: It was, it was pretty hard. That's what I kind a thought. Yeah, because I barely knew English or anything you know, cause I can, when the people are talking to me, I don't know what to say back. It was pretty hard, until I got to more grades and all that and learned how to speak. Yeah, I was pretty nervous cause I didn't know anything, you know. I wanted to ask, but I just didn't know what to say.*

Sahal discusses how he barely knew English and how difficult he remembers that being. One can imagine how he must have felt as a child in Grade Three coming to a new country where no one spoke his language, especially someone whose main form of communication was oral, having little knowledge of print literacy, no technology skills nor much experience with schooling. Sahal's sociocultural practices of literacy were changed suddenly as he started school in Canada.. Having this memory of Sahal as a new student to Canada, I am happy that he now feels better about learning English.

In comparison, Aheu also liked her English classes and has the desire to learn more. She especially wants to learn how to read so that she can read the papers from

her children's schools (as well as other things) without having to rely on others (an example of literacy brokering, which I discussed in the previous section) for help. She says, "*Sometime maybe I need my paper. I, I want to fill it. I can't, difficult for me*". She wants independence. Aheu feels good about her English classes and liked having tests, as well as going places to learn.

> ***Researcher: And they had tests too?***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah.*
>
> ***Researcher: Did you like that?***
>
> *Aheu: I like it. Sometime I'm going, I, they give 10, sometime 8, 7, 6…*
>
> ***Researcher: Did you think that was good? Or do you wish there were no tests and you could just learn?***
>
> *Aheu: No, it's good. I'm happy.*

Although Aheu liked tests, she had said that she preferred going somewhere to learn, such as the examples below, which are examples of authentic literacy lessons.

> ***Researcher: What were the best things in your class that helped you to learn English?***
>
> *Aheu: I go to buy to groceries.*
>
> ***Researcher: What's that?***
>
> *Aheu: In store. That's why I'm learning.*
>
> ***Researcher: That was the best place to go to the store?***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah*

So, Aheu both likes tests and understands how they work. As discussed before, she also likes learning by going somewhere else, such as a store. Just as Sahal could benefit from authentic literacy lessons, so too could Aheu since she enjoys learning in a way that connects with her real-life purposes.

As a final point, I wanted to know what Sahal and Aheu's feelings were about how Canadian people treated them as English Language Learners, since how they are treated affects their feelings toward learning English and, by association, their social practices of literacy here in Canada. Sahal and Aheu both said that people are mostly good to them, although sometimes people do not understand Aheu and she needs to repeat herself.

> *Aheu: Yeah, it's….some time like me, no understand. Maybe I repeat two time, you understand because my English is broke, yeah.*
>
> ***Researcher: But they listen? They're not rude, or…***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah, some people is say, what'd he say, I no understand you, no understand you…Some people is good.*
>
> ***Researcher: Some people are good and some people aren't good?***
>
> *Aheu: Yeah*
>
> ***Sahal: Then a different person comes and helps her.***
>
> *Aheu: Maybe I go to bank you and Sahal. I ask you, you say no understand??? Sahal understand, he say no, I help you.*

Although some people are not as patient as others with Aheu when she is trying to speak English to others to accomplish tasks, it seems that most of her experiences are positive.

From what Sahal and Aheu have told me, they have primarily positive feelings about learning English, as well as a desire to learn it. They have, however, had difficulties. Sahal had difficulties understanding things in school and Aheu has had difficulties with being understood when needing to complete necessary tasks. Both Sahal and Aheu seem to prefer or could benefit from lessons that involve authentic literacy and working with others, which show us how their Sudanese culture and its emphasis on community affects their cultural practices of literacy. The next and final

section of this chapter looks at my goal of collecting artifacts as part of my methodology, putting the artifacts into categories and the types of literacies that are used by Sahal and Aheu.

5.9 Artifacts

Since my participants are illiterate in their first language and learning print literacy skills in their second language, I wanted to know what kinds of text they used in their daily lives and for what purposes, considering that they now live in a society that highly values print literacy and come in contact with print literacy to some degree, daily. I also wanted to know if and how my participants use text because, since they lack first language print literacy skills, they did not use text much (if at all) before coming to Canada and, therefore, the use of text is a way in which their sociocultural literacy practices have changed. This section overlaps with a number of other sections, including the literacy practices section where I discussed reading practices.

To review, Sahal uses text in school and when on the computer where he likes to chat with friends on Facebook, search the internet and download music. He also sometimes likes to look at sports magazines and read subtitles in movies. Aheu's reading skills are very minimal and she considers herself unable to read, though she wants to learn more. For instance, she wants to learn to use the computer for the purposes of email and Facebook. She has learned some reading in her English classes in Canada, but has difficulty reading the things she needs to, such as bills and papers from her children's schools.

Even though Aheu and Sahal don't seem to use a lot of text in their daily lives (outside of school), it is important to understand the print literacy practices that they

may use in order to fully understand their social and cultural practices of literacy and what types of authentic literacy lessons could come from their uses of text in order to help them, and other EAL learners like them, to better develop second language acquisition (SLA). For instance, "SLIFE learn by doing, by following a role model, by operating within a context, and by obtaining feedback from the results themselves or from other people" (DeCapual & Marshal, 2009, p. 166). Therefore, highly authentic lessons are ideal for these learners because authentic literacy (to review) includes literacy in context and involves real-life literacy practices (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson & Soler, 2002).

It would be interesting to spend time with Sahal and Aheu as they go about their daily lives to see how they utilize text in their daily lives (and if they do), including reading street signs, labels in stores, prices, advertisements, and store names. Having that information would also help in creating authentic lessons in order to teach them English, as well as understand their social practices of literacy.

I had planned to categorize the artifacts I collected, including any text/print literacy that was mentioned in the interviews, but I was unable to collect any artifacts, with the exception of the school medical form (which I discussed in detail in the reading section of this chapter). I was, however, able to ask my participants some questions during the interviews in regard to different types of literacy that they use. From my interviews, I organized the types of literacy used by my participants into five categories (manage households, communicate with others, learn, relax and reflect) developed by Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener's (2004) of the different uses of literacy. I describe briefly the types of text used by Sahal and Aheu in each category and then discuss their significance in the summary section that follows. It is

important for the reader to remember that I was unable to collect artifacts from my participants and am relying on myself as the researcher for information about the types of literacy used by Sahal and Aheu based on my interactions with them through my interviews.

Manage Households

Aheu needs help in reading bills and schedules. She has to remember things herself since she is unable to read schedules, write down lists for groceries or write down appointments. In addition, Aheu needs help with filling out forms for her childrens' schools.

Communicate with Others

Sahal uses Facebook to communicate with others through text and Aheu has a desire to learn how to use a computer for the purposes of using email and Facebook. In fact, Aheu was able to get her driver's license through using a computer, but had difficulty explaining to me exactly how it worked. The family also uses oral communication with each other and when they are able to spend time with friends.

Learn

In school, Sahal is required to read a number of things, including: history, Canadian history, science (specifically solar systems) and "What in the World Articles" which are about current events. He also has to read "rules" that the teacher gives to him in regard to how to complete a task or assignment and has had to make lists in school, but does not make them on his own to remember things. He is also reading a book in school called "A Hundred Ways to Change the World". Although

Aheu is unable to read, she was taught to read months and days of the week, as well as sign her name.

Relax

In order to relax, Sahal sometimes likes to look at sports magazines. He enjoys going on the computer to chat to friends on Facebook, as well as look at things on the internet and download music. He likes to watch movies, sometimes including movies with subtitles. He mentioned Disney movies specifically, as well as T.V. shows, including "Meet the Browns" and "Tyler Perry". Aheu does not like to watch a lot of T.V. or movies because she does not understand them, however, she does like to watch the news and WWF wrestling.

Reflect

There is nothing that can be categorized into this category.

Summary

Sahal and Aheu do not use print literacy for much more than they need to in order to do necessary tasks, such as banking, paying bills, filling out forms and doing school work, with the exception of using the computer for social networking and sports magazines that Sahal enjoys (though I'm not sure whether he reads articles or primarily looks at pictures). They do, however, use other types of literacies, including watching T.V. and movies, listening to music, using the computer, and oral language to speak with each other and friends.

To sum it all up, because Sahal and Aheu lack first language print literacy skills, it is possibly the reason why they still (after six years of being in Canada) use

print literacy for very few purposes, except for when there is no alternative. What I mean is that they do not seem to use print literacy for enjoyment purposes, but rather for necessary tasks. Their lack of use of print literacy is a big part of their social and cultural practices of literacy that has stemmed from their life histories in Sudan that deprived them of education, once again, reiterating the impact that their cultures and life histories have on their sociocultural literacy practices. Sahal and Aheu do seem to have a desire to acquire print literacy skills, but continue to have much difficulty with it. Even Sahal, who has had the opportunity to develop English print literacy skills in school, daily, for the past six years still struggles. Perhaps this struggle is due to the fact that my participants continue to lack reading and writing skills in their first language of Arabic since research shows that they would benefit from being taught in their first language before tackling print literacy in their second language (Bialystok, 2001; Roberts, 1994; Escamilla, 2006; The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth 2006; Loewen, 2004; Cummins, 1981; Olimpo, n.d.), which has been a major point throughout this thesis.

Although Sahal and Aheu still continue to struggle with reading and writing in English, they have adopted some other modes of literacy within their new environment in Canada, such as watching television in English and listening to music. These other modes of literacy have now become a part of their social and cultural practices of literacy, just as print literacy (and literacy brokering as well) are becoming a part of their literacy practices.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter, which is the second part of the discussion of my data collection, has sought to explain the specific literacy practices of my participants based on my

conversations with them since the purpose of this thesis is to learn the social and cultural practices of literacy of EAL learners who lack print literacy skills in their first language. The previous chapter discussed the importance of understanding the life histories and cultures of my participants before looking at their specific literacy practices because their life histories and cultures most definitely affect and shape their sociocultural practices of literacy. In this chapter, I began by examining Sahal's first language loss. Sahal lacks fluency in both of his languages and there are many possible detrimental effects because of this loss of his mother tongue. Next, I looked at the ways in which Sahal and Aheu have learned English in Canada and what methods have been beneficial to their learning, after which I discussed the strands of listening, speaking, reading and writing and what my participants' practices of literacy are in these categories. I then talked about the ways that Sahal and Aheu remember things, since their print literacy skills are limited and they must rely on other modes of remembering, as well as how they use literacy brokering to complete tasks and navigate through their worlds. I also wanted to know about Sahal and Aheu's feelings about learning English since, although their feelings are not specific literacy practices, they affect how they learn. Finally, I discussed my attempt at artifact collection and how I organized into categories developed by Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener (2008) the types of literacies that Sahal and Aheu use in their daily lives. The next chapter of this thesis discusses my recommendations for teaching first language illiterate learners English, the possibilities for future research in the area of first language illiterate EAL learners and my conclusion.

CHAPTER SIX

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The focus of my research was to explore the social and cultural practices of literacy of a Sudanese mother and son who are illiterate in their first language. I wanted to understand the sociocultural practices of literacy of these learners. My goal was to discover the different types of literacies that my participants use in different domains of their lives. The purpose of understanding and awareness of these literacy practices is to learn better ways to teach EAL learners similar to them. My interest in this topic stemmed from a number of students I taught who were refugees from South Sudan, had spent time in a refugee camp, had little or no schooling and lacked first language print literacy skills. I noticed a definite difference in how these students learned English in the classroom in comparison to EAL students who had first language print literacy skills. There was, however, little support at the time for these students and they were not recognized for their specific learning needs. My desire to help educators to support these students became the inspiration for my thesis.

I began my thesis with framing the larger problem, stating the fact that one fifth of the world's population (approximately 774 million people) is illiterate (UNESCO, 2008), making it clear that with the number of refugees and people with no or low-level literacy skills relocating to Canada, EAL teachers are faced with a challenge of how to support these students in their learning. I then discussed and related literature to my topic. I began by defining literacy, since it is much more complex than its basic definition of having the ability to read and write. I then looked at teaching methods to help first language illiterate EAL learners, including both

cognitive and social theory strategies, as well as the Cultural Practices of Literacy Study (CPLS) which influenced my work.

The data I collected was sorted into the following categories: background/demographic information (which I included in the methodology section when introducing my participants), life histories, cultural information, literacy practices, types of text, literacy brokering, and feelings about learning English. My discussion section became two chapters with the first chapter discussing the life histories and cultural practices of my participants. Understanding the life histories and cultures of my participants gave me an understanding of where they are coming from and how they fit into their new society and culture. One theme that became apparent is the loss of community that Sahal and Aheu experienced when they came to Canada. Although they live in a neighbourhood where a number of other Sudanese people live, the Sudanese community has difficulty spending time together since people are busy with multiple jobs, learning English, and caring for their families in a new country and don't have time to get together and socialize.

In the second chapter of the discussion of my results, I talked about the practices of literacy of my participants. Both Aheu and Sahal had difficulty with reading and writing in English, which makes sense since they lack first language print literacy skills, but I also wondered at the value they place on print literacy, considering it was not a part of their life histories until moving to Canada. I also looked at the issue of semilingualism in regard to Sahal who is not fluent in English and is now losing his mother tongue of Arabic as well. This is disheartening and reiterates the importance of learning and retaining one's heritage language. Another major theme that revealed itself in the literacy practices section was literacy

brokering. Aheu must rely on others for her literacy needs, including reading and filling out forms, making appointments and even speaking in different circumstances.

The previous chapter discussed the second part of the discussion of my data. I talked about the specific literacy practices of my participants as well as their feelings about learning English. This chapter looks to the future, including my recommendations for teaching EAL learners who lack first language print literacy, and the possibilities for future research. The first section, dealing specifically with my teaching recommendations, is divided into two parts including what governments can do to help support first language illiterate EAL learners and what teachers can do to support them.

6.1 Recommendations

In order for my research to serve a purpose, I have included a number of recommendations that have emerged from it. My recommendations are divided into two sections. The first is meant to provide information to governments, as to how they can assist EAL first language illiterate learners and the second provides ideas to help teachers in working with these specific learners and creating lessons and supports that work for them.

6.1.1 Considerations for Immigration and Educational Policy and Curriculum Development

As Perry (2008) suggests, it is beneficial for teachers to have access to community resources and programs to enhance their students' learning. Therefore, it is helpful to both teachers and learners if government programs are established for learners and a sense of community created for them. There are a number of resources

and programs in place such as, for example, the social worker that helped Aheu when she first came to Canada and the English classes that she took. Yet, if Ministries of Immigration can further assist refugees (since first language illiterate learners are primarily refugees, but not always), so that they do not need to work a number of jobs and neighbourhood programs are created to foster community, transitioning into the new culture that they have become a part of would be much easier. It would also promote the continuation of using their first language if they have more time for family and opportunities to meet with others in their Sudanese community.

Besides providing financial and community supports, it is also important for Ministries of Education and curriculum writers to recognize EAL learners who are illiterate in their first language as having different needs from other EAL learners. In most provinces these learners are recognized within school curriculums to some extent, being learners who have had little or no schooling, though first language illiteracy may not be mentioned. For example, in looking specifically at grades K-8 curriculums, Manitoba's EAL learners that are similar to my participants are referred to within a part of the curriculum in a framework for LAL (Literacy Academics and Language) and include students who may be refugees, had interrupted schooling or no schooling (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Training, 2007). Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, n.d.) recognizes refugees specifically, as do Alberta (Alberta Education, 2007), British Columbia (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013) and Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education Resources, 2008), noting that these students may have had little or no formal schooling. However, in Toronto specifically, these learners are labelled as "ESL literacy students".

The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (2005) defines these students as follows:

> ESL literacy students are those who face challenges in the basic skills of reading and writing in their first language or dialect. They have had limited access to education in their home or residing countries. These learners, while learning a new language also have difficulty transferring skills from the first to second language. (Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2005, p. 37)

Not only are these students recognized as having had limited education, but their lack of first language print literacy skills is also made explicit. Intensive EAL programs can help in supporting illiterate learners as soon as they arrive in in their new country (Bates et al., 2005). One such program (which I will use as my example) is Toronto's Literacy Enrichment Academic Program (LEAP). It is an intensive program geared towards young immigrants and refugees with little or no formal schooling, many of whom have significant gaps in their education. In 2007, 41 elementary schools in Toronto offered the program, as well as 15 secondary schools. Students range in ages from 11 to 16 and class sizes are a maximum of 12 students so that teachers can provide intensive instruction (Mahoney, 2007; Olimpo, n.d.).

Mahoney (2007) reports:

> Youngsters are expected to gain two grade levels in one school year, and officials say 85 percent make significant progress in that time. Students can have LEAP instruction for three years, although many graduate to regular ESL courses in a year or two. Some go on to college and university. (para. 22)

Although LEAP has proven to be somewhat successful, a 2005 document was created by the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto entitled "Renewing Toronto's ESL Programs: Charting a course towards more effective ESL program delivery" to notice gaps that still occur in English as a second language (ESL)

education within Toronto. In regard to students illiterate in their first language, the document looks specifically at the current service gap in regard to "specific literacy components for those students facing literacy challenges" (Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2005, p. 37). They note that the federal and provincial governments only allow for four year programs for such learners despite research that suggests it takes five to seven years for EAL learners without literacy challenges.

The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (2005) states this example:

> A Somali teenager attending an adult ESL literacy program had a very difficult time in the classroom. He had very little schooling in his home country to the extent that holding a pencil was a challenge. He had no family in Canada and lived alone in a basement apartment. He told his story of leaving his country and the atrocities he witnessed. He applied for high school and was sent to grade nine. A while later, he arrived back at the adult ESL classroom after one day asking the teacher for help. He pulled out the grade nine Science textbook and pointing at the section on photosynthesis, he said, "I just don't understand". (p. 38)

This example shows the reality of what first language illiterate students are facing when they come to Canada to learn English, and why it is so important for supports to be available for these students.

In summary, my recommendation for Ministries of Immigration and Education across Canada is to provide funds (though I realize this is easier said than done) for EAL learners that require extra assistance due to no or limited schooling and the lack of first language print literacy skills. This includes extra programming in schools, community programs to provide supports, extra assistance so individuals don't have to work a number of jobs (affordable housing could be an example of this), and the recognition of these learners and their needs.

6.1.2 Teachers

In the previous section, I discussed what I thought Ministries of Immigration, Ministries of Education and Curriculum Writers could do to support first language illiterate EAL learners. Now, it is also important to look at what teachers can do to support these learners in their classrooms. From my research, I have learned a number of things that teachers can do, including recognition of these learners, understanding of these learners and their cultural backgrounds and incorporating authentic literacy lessons into their teaching.

Firstly, just as it is important for Ministries of Education and Curriculum Writers to recognize these students and the extra supports they need, it is also important for teachers to be aware of them and recognize them, including the extra time it takes for these learners to develop second language acquisition. It is important that teachers realize that it will take first language illiterate EAL learners significantly longer to develop second language acquisition than EAL learners who have first language print literacy so that students are not unfairly labelled as having learning difficulties and that they are given the extra supports they require.

Secondly, it is important to consider the life histories and cultures of students. Geneva Bruner (1996) argues that "learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting and always dependent upon the utilization of cultural resources" (p. 4). So, having some basic understanding of the cultures from which EAL students come (including context, language, literacy practices, schooling and experiences with schooling) will assist teachers in developing teaching methods and tasks that are best suited to individual students. According to Gates and Purcell-Gates (n.d.), "culturally responsive instruction utilizes a student's home culture and experiences as a guide to

create or adjust educational program elements that will facilitate students' academic success" (p. 18). So basically, in knowing that Sahal and Aheu quite possibly come from a very oral culture, they could be taught with an emphasis on speaking and listening, just as Wright (2001) discovered that the Ethiopian students that she worked with and observed learned English better when oral language techniques (such as chanting and repeat and say methods) were used with students than western methods of teaching since the students come from a culture rich in oral language and traditions.

By understanding Sahal and Aheu's cultural practice of emphasizing the importance of community and how it helps and supports each other, rather than focusing on completing tasks individually, authentic lessons can be created that require team work and focusing on individual strengths within a group. It is, consequently, beneficial for teachers to be better able to understand how best to include culturally relevant and authentic material into their teaching through understanding the culture of their students. This also includes having some understanding, if possible, of the life histories of their students and what literacy experiences they have had and the types of literacies they use daily. In addition, I think that it is beneficial for teachers to also get to know their students and what interests them. What do they do in their free time? What do they like to read about? What music do they like to listen to and what television shows do they enjoy watching? And what are the different types of literacies that they use in different domains of their lives and how do they use them? Knowing these things about students will also help in creating authentic lessons and allow students to be more interested in learning when the content applies, specifically, to them. Since understanding these cultural practices of literacy are so important to the learning of

first language illiterate EAL learners, it would also be beneficial for teachers and pre-service teachers to be made aware of the fact that many learners use different types of literacies for different purposes and use different methods for making meaning of their world.

Thirdly, in understanding the culture of students and their social and cultural practices of literacy, teachers can incorporate authentic literacy into their teaching. This includes using "the reading and writing of real-life texts for real-life purposes in the literacy learning classroom" ("Creating Authentic Literacy Activities K-3", n.d.b, p. 1). Aheu and Sahal preferred this type of learning. For instance, Aheu especially liked to learn English while on a field trip (to a store, for example). Also, both Aheu and Sahal preferred learning as part of a group or with a partner. Therefore, both Sahal and Aheu would most likely benefit from peer-peer, which is essentially learning with a partner, and (according to Watanabe an Swain, 2007) peers (especially those of different proficiency levels) benefit in their language learning from working together. DeCapua and Marshall (2009) also suggest the benefit for SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Schooling) to use culturally relevant material and work with a group. They suggest a number of instructional features that teachers can use including "small group instruction, collaborative work, differentiated instruction, scaffolding, strategy development, sheltered content courses, and theme-based and academically challenging curriculum with language modifications" (p. 160). In addition, DeCapua and Marshall (2009) state:

> Key support features for SLIFE include: close, ongoing monitoring of student progress; coordination, cooperation, and planning involving all teachers and staff; structure and consistency in the program; the development of close ties between families and the school, as well as the

> larger community and other organizations; and ample professional development opportunities for teachers and staff. (p. 160)

Just as the LEAP program included intensive and explicit instruction for first language illiterate EAL learners, DeCapua and Marshall suggest much monitoring, support and collaboration on the part of the teachers and staff to support these students in their learning. They also see the importance of community for these learners, suggesting the involvement of community organizations.

Lastly, much research points towards the importance of learning print literacy skills in a student's first language, as it will provide transference when learning a second language (Birch, 2002; Cummins 1981; Palmer, El-Ashry, Leclere and Chang, 2007; Roberts, 1994). Furthermore, it is important to promote learning and retention of a student's first language in general, as students can lose their first language or become semilingual or bi-illiterate (Escamilla, 2006). This is what is happening with Sahal as he learns English. Although he understands English and his able to speak on a basic, conversational level, he struggles with print literacy and academic spoken English, and is now losing his first language of Arabic. He admitted to maybe knowing only 50% of the language and often mumbling words to his mother because he can't remember how to say them. This subtractive bilingualism (Wright et al., 2000) can be both cognitively and emotionally detrimental.

After being in Canada for six years, Aheu and Sahal still struggle with English, primarily with reading and writing. This makes sense since, although it takes most EAL learners 5 to 7 years for second language acquisition (Cummins, 1981; Brown et a., 2006), it can take 7 to 10 years for first language illiterate learners to acquire language acquisition in English (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Brown et al, 2006; Dooley, 2009). However, since there is still very little known about how to work with

learners such as Aheu and Sahal, it can be assumed that they are not necessarily being taught in a way that works to their strengths and takes into consideration their social and cultural practices of literacy, as well as cognitive strategies that have been proven successful with illiterate learners. Therefore, it is clear that this research is important and there is a need for much more research in the future. In the next section, I will discuss the possibilities for future research.

6.2 A Critical Look at Possible Future Research

The previous section discussed my recommendations to both governments and teachers for supporting the second language acquisition of first language illiterate EAL learners. I now discuss the possibilities for future research in learning about the social and cultural practices of literacy of EAL learners who lack first language print literacy and how their learning can be supported. This study's findings support the CPLS belief that "views literacy as social and cultural practice, patterned by institutions, historical events, values, beliefs, and power relationships" ("CPLS", n.d.a), but dealing specifically with EAL learners who lack first language print literacy skills. It is important to realize that there is not a lot of research in the area of how illiterate learners develop second language print literacy skills, whether through cognitive theory teachings or social practices of literacy instruction, despite the fact that it takes these learners longer than EAL learners who have first language print literacy skills to develop second language acquisition. A number of questions arose from my research in regard to future studies. What exactly is illiteracy and how is it measured or assessed? What are the social and cultural practices of literacy that first language illiterate EAL learners use to go about their daily lives? What can teachers do to help these learners to better develop second language acquisition?

Before I answer these questions and discuss my recommendations for future research, however, it is important that I consider what I would have done differently with this research if I had to do it again, in an effort to provide guidance to others who share my interest in learning about the sociocultural literacy practices of EAL learners who lack first language print literacy. Firstly, once I began writing my thesis, I had more questions for my participants and things that I wanted clarified. However, as luck would have it (or perhaps fate) the school I was placed at for the new school year where I would teach EAL is the high school that Sahal and his brother happen to attend. When I began my research, I was an elementary school classroom teacher and taught in a school far from the school that Sahal attended. I never imagined that I would end up, once again, teaching in the same school that Sahal attended. Because I would now be a teacher in Sahal's school, with access to his files, it would be unethical for me to continue to question him for my research. However, I did have a narrow window of opportunity to further question Sahal and Aheu before the school year began, but when I went to their home at the time Aheu had decided on, she was very ill. I wished her well and Sahal and I went to buy her Advil. There was nothing more that I could do.

Since I had no opportunity to further question my participants as questions arose, my thesis has some limitations in places where I would have liked to include my participants' voices more. Shacklock and Thorp (2005) state that "our task as interviewers is to invite others to tell their stories, to encourage them to take responsibility for the meaning of their talk" (p. 157). This encouragement and further understanding of the meaning of my participants' talk is what I wished to acquire when I returned to them during the writing process of my thesis.

Other difficulties with my research included language barriers, and misunderstandings about meeting times. Our statuses and views of each other within this western society also most likely influenced my participants' responses, as well as how I represented them and this is important to keep in mind. Finally, in looking back, I would have liked to include participant observation throughout my interviews in order to get a better picture of my participants' lives.

Moving into my suggestions for future research, I have a few recommendations. One area that could be studied and developed in the future is the definition of "illiteracy" and how individuals are viewed and assessed as such since there are problems with the basic definition of illiteracy (being the inability to read and write) because accounts of illiteracy have been either self-reported, based on gaps in education or lack of schooling, and no objective methods have been used to assess reading abilities (Loureiro, et al., 2003). Bigelow and Tarone (2004) suggest that second language acquisition researchers need to use valid and reliable assessments in order to properly gage literacy levels of learners with low first language literacy skills.

Another area that can be looked at in future studies is teaching methods and practices. In order to get a complete understanding of all EAL learners and the best practices and strategies for teaching them, first language illiterate EAL learners need to be included in studies. One example of the types of future studies that look at the social and cultural practices of literacy of these students is Lorenzatti's (2013) study of Marta Graciela, who is illiterate, where she follows her participant as she attends to her daily activities to see what practices of literacy Marta uses as she navigates through her world.

Finally, it is important for teachers to have the knowledge of what they can do to better help these learners develop second language acquisition, so I suggest more research in looking at different types of teaching methods, including the use of authentic literacy, and how it affects learning. It would also be beneficial to study how the second language skills of a first language illiterate individual progress when that person is first taught in their first language, similar to Palmer, El-Ashry, Leclere and Chang's (2007) study of how the English skills of a 9-year old boy from Palestine improve when he is taught print literacy in his first language of Arabic.

A number of researchers also suggest a need for future research in regard to sociocultural and socio-political influences on EAL learners (The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth 2006; Palmer, 2007; Purcell-Gates, 2008) in regard to literacy development. As, it is important to realize that learners need to feel that their first language is valued and respected (Loewen, 2004).

My research has brought about a number of possible recommendations to better support the learning of EAL learners lacking first language print literacy skills, including what both particular government ministries and teachers can do. Ministries of Immigration could help in providing more community supports and organizations to help these learners be a part of a community, including better assisting them in their needs so they can spend more time with family and community instead of working a number of jobs to make ends meet. Ministries of Education and Curriculum Writers could recognize these learners within curriculum and policy documents and provide funding for more programming in schools and other adult learner EAL programs. Teachers can also do a number of things to support these learners, including trying to understand their students' life histories and cultures, becoming familiar with their

social and cultural practices of literacy and teaching authentic literacy lessons that relate to students' daily lives and needs.

6.3 Conclusion

Finally, there is a need for more research in the area of how first language illiterate EAL learners develop second language acquisition. There is a specific need for research in regard to understanding the social and cultural practices of literacy of these learners, but there is also a lack of information in regard to cognitive theories as well. It is my hope that my research will provide valuable information to assist in future research in understanding the social and cultural practices of literacy of EAL learners who lack first language print literacy skills, in an effort to better support these learners in developing second language acquisition.

As a final thought, when I think about Sahal sitting in my Grade Four classroom trying to write his name in Arabic, I wonder where he would be today had he been given the supports he needed as an EAL learner who lacks first language print literacy. Perhaps he would not be in an alternate program in his high school, but would be working with a teacher assistant who supports him in his first language of Arabic in order to learn English. Perhaps he would not be semilingual, but rather be developing, not only his English language skills, but print literacy in Arabic as well. He would be retaining and developing his first language, as well as developing a sense of pride at the value being place on his mother tongue. This is my hope for the future in supporting the second language learning of students like Sahal.

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Appendix A

Interview questions to ask only Aheu:

My Interview Questions	Reasoning for Asking the Questions	Who	Analysis
How long have you been in Canada?	-Background question to be able to compare their English language skills with the length of time they've been in Canada.	M	B
Do you still have family living in Sudan? Who?	-To see if there are any issues of family separation that may affect language learning due to emotional distress.	M	B
Tell me how Canada is different from Sudan? (The boy probably won't remember.) What do you like and dislike about Canada?	-Experience question to be able to compare Sudanese culture to Canadian culture and find out what their experiences are within Canadian society.	M	C/LH

Interview questions to ask only Sahal:

My Interview Questions	Reasoning for Asking the Questions	Who	Analysis
Tell me about school before you came to Canada?	-I included this question in order to touch on FIRST LANGUAGE education, illiteracy and possible gaps in schooling.	B	LP
Tell me about what it's like learning English in school? Do you like it? What do you find easy/difficult? How do you feel in school?	-To find out the boy's personal views and opinions on learning English, including what he perceives as difficult.	B	LP
How do you think learning to read and write in English will help you in the future? Do you feel pressure to learn English well? From who? Why?	-To see what the boy's understanding of our society is in regards to reading and writing – and its purpose.	B	FO

Interview questions to ask both Aheu and Sahal separately:

My Interview Questions	Reasoning for Asking the Questions	Who	Analysis
What is your first language?	-Background information that will allow me to be able to compare their first language to English. (I was able to do this through reading the article "Learning from Abdallah: A Case Study of an Arabic-Speaking Child in a U.S. School by Palmer, El-Ashry, Leclere & Chang, 2007) -I know that they speak Arabic, but would like to get the information on record. Furthermore, I read that some Sudanese dislike Arabic because "Arabic carries a powerful stigma for southern Sudanese" (Perry in Cultural Practices of Literacy, 2007). I discovered more when I read further, and I know that the family came from Southern Sudan and are wondering if they would open up more on this particular topic to give me an idea of how language varieties affect the people of Southern Sudan.	X	B/LP
Do you read and write in your first language?	-Background information needed for the broader context of my theoretical framework dealing with first language illiteracy and second language literacy acquisition.	X	LP
Did you know any English when you first came to Canada?	-Also background information needed for my theoretical framework.	X	LP
Tell me what it's like learning English. (likes/disklikes, describe, tell me more, etc.)	-Part of my main focus is their experiences learning English. I will also try to probe them about feelings toward dominant culture English.	X	FO
How do you feel about English?	-A follow up question for more clarification if needed.	X	FO
Tell me about what it's like when you need to speak English (e.g. at the grocery store, bank, to teachers, with friends etc.). How do you feel? Why?	-Experience question to gain more insight and understanding into their experiences with English within Canadian society.	X	FO/LP
What does learning to read and write English mean for you?	-To find out participants feelings toward learning English print literacy and their needs. Is it necessary for them in their daily lives, and how do they cope?	X	FO/LP
What type of reading and writing do you do in school/class? At home?	-To find out about literacy practices in and out of school and how they differ and compare.	X	LP
Do you like reading and writing? What do you like to read and write?	-To find out their personal feelings in regards to English print literacy.	X	FO/T

Do you think there are better ways to remember things than reading and writing? Can you tell me about Sudanese oral traditions?	-To learn about their views in regards to oral language traditions and the importance they play or played in their lives.	X	LP/C
What do you find hard about learning English (reading, writing, etc.)?	-To find out what might hinder English language acquisition...what are the obstacles?	X	FO/LP
What would help you to learn English better? What did you find helpful when learning English?	-To find out what they found helpful and what can be done in the future to help them, as well as if they are able to pinpoint what that is.	X	FO/LP
What do you feel that you especially need to say or do in English?	-To find out what their immediate English language needs are and whether they are being met.	X, Y	LP

Interview questions to ask both the Aheu and Sahal together:

My Interview Questions	Reasoning for Asking the Questions	Who	Analysis
Tell me about the Sudanese community in Regina. (Do you know other Sudanese families in Regina? Do you spend time with them?)	-To see if the family has a cultural support system within Regina.	Y	C/B
What's special about Sudanese people?	-To learn about their cultural background...gain some insight into their world.	Y	C
How are Canadian people different from Sudanese people?	-To attempt to further understand their experiences within Canadian society.	Y	C
Do people in your family or community help you out with English? How? Can you give me some examples?	-To learn about "literacy brokering" as part of the participants literacy practices and to see how much community and family are involved in both their daily coping and learning.	Y	LB
When do you need to use reading and writing in your daily life? Can you show me some examples?	-To learn about their social practices of literacy and daily print literacy needs.	Y	LP/LB
Has learning to read and write helped you in Canada? How? Do you feel there are some	-To compare their experiences with print literacy in Canada and see what dominant print literacy practices are necessary for the family to manage within society.	Y	LP/LB

things/tasks that you don't (or shouldn't) need reading and writing for?			
How did you accomplish similar tasks in Sudan? Which method do you find easier? (The boy may not be able to answer this, but I will still ask it when interviewing both of them.)	-To compare the social practices of literacy of their home country to those of Canadian society.	Y	LP
How do the Canadian people you need to speak English to treat you/react?	-Behaviour question to, again, gain more insight into their experiences learning English in Canada, including whether it's a possibility that negative/positive experiences with English hinder/help their language acquisition.	Y	FO
What do you feel that you especially need to say or do in English?	-To find out what their immediate English language needs are and whether they are being met.	X, Y	LP
What do you think the best way to learn a new language is? What teaching method(s) have helped you the most?	-To find out what types of learning and learning tasks are found to be most helpful to my participants, especially considering that they come from a very oral culture that is much different from ours.	Y	FO/LP/LB
Tell me what it was like coming from Sudan/Egpyt to Canada.	-Experience question. I debated this question and left it for the end, as it might evoke traumatic memories or bad feelings.	Y	LH
Can you show me some examples of things that you like to read, print materials that you use, and print material that you find useful.	-This question is so that I can collect artifacts and talk with my participants about those artifacts.	Y	T/LP

Appendix B

Letter of Consent

Dear Participants,

I, Katerina Nakutnyy, am researching and collecting data for my thesis. The research is entitled *A study of the cultural practices of literacy of individuals who are illiterate, or have a low level of literacy, in their first language and are learning a second language within the social practices of the dominant society.* The study will examine what the main literacy practices of my participants are and compare them to those of the dominant society. This information will help me to look for more authentic ways of helping learners to develop print acquisition in English.

If you agree to be a participant of my research, you will be asked to have two interviews with me. One will be one-on-one and the other will be with your son/mother. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. The results will be kept confidential, including your identity. I will use pseudonyms and make no mention of specific places such as the city you live in or the school that you attend. Finally, if you agree to participate, I will be asking you for samples or examples of pieces of literacy (such as T.V. shows you watch, magazines, pamphlets, texting, recipes, bills and so forth) that you are willing to share with me. After the interviews are completed, I would like to show my gratitude by providing you with compensation for your time in the form of a gift certificate.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me.

Sincerely,

Katerina Nakutnyy

Your signature below indicates that I have read the above to you and you understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____ _____

Name of Participant Signature

This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the U of R Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at (585-4775 or research.ethics@uregina.ca).

Appendix C

University of Regina

OFFICE FOR RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND PARTNERSHIP

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 19, 2012

TO: Katerina Dawn Marie Nakutnyy

FROM: Dr. Larena Hoeber
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: **Cultural Practices of Literacy and L1 Illiteracy: L2 Print Acquisition (File # 12S1213)**

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

☑ 1. APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. For research lasting more than one year (Section 1F). **ETHICAL APPROVAL MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS.** Approval will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received. Any substantive changes in methodology or instrumentation must also be approved prior to their implementation.

☐ 2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB.** Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 3. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB.** Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 4. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. The proposal requires substantial additions or redesign. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.

Dr. Larena Hoeber

cc: Dr. Andrea Sterzuk - Education

** supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office for Research, Innovation and Partnership located in the Research and Innovation Centre, Room 109, or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca

Phone: (306) 585-4775
Fax: (306) 585-4893