GIRLS' VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF LITERACY IN A RURAL UGANDAN COMMUNITY

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This Ugandan-based study examined how visual modes of communication provide insights into girls' perceptions of literacy, and open broader dialogues on literacy, women, and development. Twenty-nine primary school girls used drawing and 15 secondary school girls used photography to depict local literacy practices in relation to their own lives and experiences. The images they captured provide a window on the interface between local and global literacy practices, and the "freedoms" (Sen, 1999) associated with literacy. Drawing and photography move beyond language to make visible the barriers that have historically marginalized and excluded girls from full participation in the development process.

Key words: visual representations, literacy, girls, international development, Uganda

Cette étude menée en Ouganda montre comment des modes de communication visuels permettent de mieux comprendre les perceptions qu'ont les fillettes de la littératie et favorisent le dialogue sur la littératie, les femmes et le développement. Vingt-neuf écolières du primaire et quinze du secondaire ont illustré, les premières par des dessins, les secondes par des photos, des méthodes de littératie locales en lien avec leur propre vie et leurs propres expériences. Ces images montrent l'interface entre les méthodes de littératie locales et internationales et les « libertés » (Sen, 1999) associées à la littératie. Au-delà du langage, les dessins et les photos rendent visibles les obstacles qui ont depuis toujours marginalisé les filles et les ont exclues d'une pleine participation au processus de développement.

Mots clés : représentations visuelles, littératie, filles, développement international, Ouganda

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Recent scholarship in the area of literacy and development emphasizes that the success of literacy projects, programmes, and policies in diverse regions of the world is largely dependent on researchers, practitioners, and teachers understanding how local people themselves use and make meaning of literacy practices (e.g., Robinson-Pant, 2001; Street, 2001). The concept of literacy practices links literacy to broader social and cultural patterns, including the values and power structures embedded in the wider society (Street, 2003). Canagarajah (1998) similarly contends that politics of location is central to understanding the literacy practices of a given community. Development, however, is a highly contested category (Rogers, 2001, p. 204), particularly in terms of how it is measured in relation to improvements in education, health, agriculture, transportation, and economic and political life. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen insists that development is a holistic concept, involving one's mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, and social conditions, as well as one's economic situation. To measure development by economic indicators alone, Sen (1999) argues, is misleading and incomplete; what is more important is individual quality of life in relation to the freedoms one enjoys:

Development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy. Expanding the freedoms that we have reason to value not only makes our lives richer and more unfettered, but also allows us to be fuller social persons, exercising our own volitions and interacting with – and influencing – the world in which we live. (pp. 14-15)

Sen's theory has been pivotal in directing international development policy, central to which is the participation of women and girls (Duflo, 2003; Papen, 2001; Parry, 2004; Robinson-Pant, 2001). What is lacking in the research literature, however, is a more comprehensive understanding of women's and girls' perspectives on their own roles in relation to literacy and development.

The primary purpose of our study was to examine how drawing and photography – as modes of communication and representation – in the hands of primary and secondary school girls might provide insights into their perceptions of participation in local literacy practices, and open broader dialogues on literacy, women, and development. Our research takes place within the context of rural Uganda, a country in the eastern

part of Sub-Saharan Africa, characterized by chronic poverty, unfavourable health conditions, and gender imbalance (Bigsten & Kayizzi-Mugerwa, 1999). Our assumption is that women and girls are key stakeholders in the development process, and that a range of literacy practices is associated with the "freedoms" (Sen, 1999) required for full participation in health, education, economics, leisure, law, and politics. As part of a larger project on literacy, gender, and development funded by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), we addressed in this article the following research questions:

1. How do girls in a rural Ugandan community use the modalities of drawing and photography to represent literacy practices in their daily lives?
2. Does engagement with modalities such as drawing and photography afford opportunities for girls to perceive and situ-ate themselves in new ways in relation to the literacy practices within their societies and communities?

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Although a plethora of interdisciplinary literature exists on what literacy is and how literacy develops, little agreement occurs on the topic. As Egbo (2000) emphasizes, this topic remains enigmatic and conceptually ambiguous. In conceptualizing literacy for this research, we drew broadly from the fields of linguistics, anthropology, ethnographies of communication, and sociology with a focus on the increasing recognition that literacy is not only a skill to be learned, but a practice that is socially constructed and locally negotiated (see e.g., Baynham, 1995; Fairclough, 1992; Heath, 1983; New London Group, 1996). We found Giroux's (1993) and Carrington's (2003) perspectives helpful in conceptualizing literacy, particularly in relation to the notion of freedoms (Sen, 1999). Giroux (1993) proposes that literacy be viewed as,

a form of cultural citizenship and politics that provides the conditions for subordinate groups to learn the knowledge and skills necessary for empowerment . . . to live in a society in which they have the opportunity [i.e., the freedoms] to govern and shape history rather than be confined to its margins. (p. 367)

Carrington (2003) likewise argues for a critical view that conceptualizes literacy as providing skills and knowledge to mediate self in relation to one's social and cultural context. In particular, we took up her notion that "literacy is about who you are allowed to become in a given society" (p. 96).

With this critical perspective as our backdrop, we located our study within a framework of "literacy ecology" of communities,which, rather than isolating literacy practices to understand them, "aims to understand how literacy is embedded in other human activity, its embeddedness in social life and in thought, and its position in history, language, and learning" (Barton, 1994, p. 32). Baynham (1995) delineates a comprehensive framework for understanding literacy in contexts of use. The underpinnings of his framework emphasize that investigating literacy in social context involves understanding not just what people do with literacy, but also what they associate with what they do, how they construct the value of literacy, and the ideologies that surround literacy in a particular community. He stresses the need to expand the understanding of literacy by investigating how relationships of unequal power shape uses of literacy, specifically who is included and who is excluded in particular literacy practices.

We also draw on the sociocultural work of researchers such as Heath (1983), Barton and Hamilton (1998), Lave and Wenger (1991), Luke (1997), and Norton and Toohey (2004), all of whom view learners' literacy practices within the local and larger contexts in which they live and learn. This perspective emphasizes the importance of learners' imagined communities in understanding how and why they engage or do not engage with particular literacy practices. Imagined communities refer to "groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 241). Individuals interact with many communities including neighborhood communities, workplaces, educational institutions, and religious groups. However, these are not the only communities with which they are affiliated. As Wenger (1998) suggests, in addition to direct involvement with community practices and investment in tangible and concrete relationships, imagination – "a process of expanding one-

self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves" (p. 176) – is an equally important source of community.

Kanno and Norton (2003) argue that this notion of the imagined extends both spatially and temporally, which they link to Benedict Anderson, who first coined the term "imagined communities." Anderson (1991) contends that what individuals think of as nations are really imagined communities "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). In imagining connections to fellow compatriots across space and time, "we [individuals] can feel a sense of community with people we have not yet met, but perhaps hope to meet one day" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 241). Accordingly, learning is viewed as an integral part of changing patterns of participation in various communities with shared practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Thus, we view literacy as practices that construct, and are constructed by, "the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future" (Norton & Toohey, 2004, p. 1).

Literacy scholars in different regions of the world are giving greater attention to the importance of multiple and alternative modes of communication and representation that move beyond language (e.g., Menezes de Souza, 2002, 2003; Prinsloo & Stein, 2005; Stein, 2003). This emerging body of research informed our use of visual modes (specifically drawing and photography) as a means of enhancing understanding of the complexity of literacy practices. Scholars are increasingly recognizing that in any communicative mode, language, whether written or spoken, is only part of the meaning-making process, and that any communicative event involves simultaneous modes whereby meaning is communicated in different ways through images, gestures, and speech (Kress & Jewitt, 2003). Central to this body of research is social semiotics, which attempts to explain and understand how signs are used to "produce and communicate meanings in specific social settings" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 264). Signs simultaneously communicate the here and now of a social context while representing "what is to hand" (i.e., the resources a given culture values and makes readily available) (Kress,

1997). The meanings also reflect reality as imagined by the sign-maker and influenced by his or her beliefs, values, and biases.

Visual anthropology also broadly informs our understanding of multiple modes of representation within specific social and cultural settings. Visual anthropologists contend, "much that is observable, much that can be learned about a culture can be recorded most effectively and comprehensively through film, photography or by drawing" (Banks & Morphy, 1997, p. 14). They also argue that neglecting visual data may be a reflection of Western bias (i.e., the privileging of the intellectual over the experiential or phenomenological) or neglecting the importance of visual phenomena across cultures. Their position does not require that individuals use visual methods in all contexts, but are used where appropriate with the caveat that appropriateness may not be obvious from the outset of the study. Traditionally, researchers rather than research participants have used visual modes for recording culture. They view participants as co-researchers and put the visual tools of pencil and camera in their hands to enhance their understanding of their every day lives in general and their community's literacy practices in particular. For the study reported in this article, we used both drawing and photography to provide productive resources to supplement our understanding of the social and cultural setting, and concretely positioned our interviews and conversations with our participants.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY, CONTEXT, AND PARTICIPANTS

This study emerged from a larger study being conducted in three districts of Uganda: Masaka in the southwest, Mbale in the east, and Nebbi in the northwest. The study, which began in August 2003, is centrally concerned with the relationship between literacy, gender, and sustainable development, includes both formal and informal schooling with children and adults. For the purposes of this article, we have focused on two rural schools (one primary and one secondary) in Masaka District; both schools have a mixed population of girls and boys whose main language is Luganda. Data collection for this aspect of the larger study began in September 2004 and continued until August 2005. Jones lived full-time in Kyato village during this time; Kendrick made site visits in 2005. The students met both researchers in August 2003

through a long-time resident of the village. The researcher who lived in the community worked as a volunteer in the secondary school, in the community library, and as an adult literacy teacher. Girls in the community spent considerable time with her outside the context of the school. We also worked with two trained research assistants, one Ugandan and one Canadian. The Ugandan research assistant worked in the community library, shared with the school. He was a very trusted member of the wider community, and the girls regularly consulted him about personal issues and difficulties. The Canadian research assistant worked as a volunteer in the primary school, and the students enjoyed engaging in leisure activities with him such as soccer and games night at the library. Although we recognize that our presence in the community may have influenced the girls and their participation in our research project, we tried to minimize our influence by developing rapport with the girls, collecting a variety of data, and through triangulation of methods.

Our research questions, design, and interpretation within this study and the larger project are the result of a collaborative relationship among a team of Canadian and Ugandan researchers and practitioners. The relability and validity of our research is entirely dependent on these collaborative relationships (Brock-Utne, 1996). Further details of the specific methodologies used are discussed in relation to the drawing and photography activities. Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper.

Uganda is a land-locked country in East Africa, sharing borders with Kenya to the west, Democratic Republic of the Congo to the east, Sudan to the north, and Rwanda and Tanzania to the south. It has a total area of 241,040 square kilometers and a population of almost 28 million (United Nations Development Programme Uganda, 2007).[1] The nation is governed by the National Resistance Movement Party, under President Museveni, who came to power in 1986 after decades of civil war and unrest. Although violent conflict has occurred in Northern Uganda since Museveni's presidency began, the rest of the country has been at peace; Uganda has made significant progress in many areas such as education, economic growth, accountable government, and civil service reform, and commitments to poverty reduction and gender equality (Department for International Development, 1999; Pitamber & Chatterjee, 2005). Despite

its gains, however, Uganda is still one of the poorest countries in the world, ranked at 145 out of 177 countries on the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme Uganda, 2007). Thirty-eight per cent of the population lives below the poverty line, and the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is $320 US per year.

Kyato Village, typical of many rural Ugandan communities, has no electricity, and although piped water became available for a fee in 2004, the vast majority of people cannot afford it. The people are mostly sub-sistence-level farmers who grow crops such as maize, matooke (green bananas), cassava, sweet potatoes, yams, ("Irish") potatoes, beans, groundnuts, pineapples, mangoes, sweet bananas, jackfruit, papaya, watermelon, and guavas for family consumption. Most families possess a small number of livestock (chickens, pigs, or goats) for consumption or to sell in case of financial exigencies (i.e., school fees, medical expenses). Some families, if they have enough land, grow cash crops such as coffee and vanilla beans. There are distinct gender roles: women do most of the domestic work and farming, and men have more opportunities to earn an income through labour (e.g., making bricks, digging, building houses, driving taxis and boda-bodas, and clearing land). In Masaka District, over half of the entire households, with an average of 5.3 persons, live on less than about $50 US a month (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2002). Most families live in one or two room houses; private spaces for reading, writing, studying, or other individual activities are very scarce.

The Ugandan school system is structured in a hierarchical manner in a 7-4-2-3 system (seven years of primary, four years secondary 'O' level, two years secondary 'A' level, and minimum of three years at university level). Advancing to each new stage is contingent upon passing a national examination. This structure makes the education system highly selective and pyramidal in nature: as students progress through the system, there are fewer students at each level (Aguti, 2002), and in particular, fewer girls. In 1996, Uganda implemented a Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy, which has increased enrollment of both boys and girls aged between 6 and 12 years even among the very poor (Kasente, 2003). Universal Secondary Education (USE) has only recently been introduced in Uganda. Despite efforts such as UPE, USE, and the National Strategy for Girls' Education (Republic of Uganda, 1999) as well

as UNICEF's Girls' Education Movement, girls' school attendance at the secondary level still lags far behind boys' attendance for a variety of reasons including cultural and historic ideologies that influence decisions about whether families can do without the labour of girls, whether girls will be safe at school, and whether financial resources are available and should be invested in girls rather than boys (Kasente, 2003).

As a British Protectorate, Uganda was granted independence in 1962. English, Uganda's official language, still retains its elite position in the country but limited numbers of people speak the language fluently, particularly outside urban areas. In rural areas, English is the language of instruction from Primary 4 onwards although the majority of students have few opportunities to use and maintain the language. Reading and writing in English are equally challenging because access to resources (e.g., reading materials, Internet access) is limited at best. From a global participation perspective, literacy in Uganda is linked inextricably to the English language.

The families in this community, as in all of Masaka District, have been deeply affected by HIV/AIDS. Many of the girls in this study had been personally touched by tragic consequences associated with HIV /AIDS; they have seen family members, neighbours, and friends die from the disease. One of the secondary school girls lost both her parents (and, as her father was polygamous, his other six wives) to HIV/AIDS. The threat of contracting the disease looms large for girls, particularly because they have little control over many of their sexual activities. Very often, girls' sexual experiences were not within the context of an intimate, loving relationship; many of the adolescent girls had experienced forced sex, whether physically, through coercion and/or threats, or out of financial need.

Our study involved 44 girls, 29 from Kyato Primary School (this was the total number of the girls in Primary 6) and 15 from Kyato Secondary School (this was the total number of girls in Senior 3). Although we wanted to work with the highest level in each school, we selected Primary 6 and Senior 3 because we also wanted to be respectful of students in Primary 7 and Senior 4 who were under considerable pressure to pass final exams. Both schools are located in Kyato Village in Uganda's Masaka District. The girls in our study typically awoke before sunrise

each day, dug in the fields, planted and harvested crops, fetched water and firewood, prepared food, maintained their homes and compounds, washed clothes, cared for siblings – often all before they embarked on a long walk to school. They suffered without medication through regular bouts of malaria and other illnesses and pain, studied hard, and were accustomed to only the barest of necessities, typically going without. After school hours, some of the secondary school girls participated in choir, others belonged to dance or drumming groups, some played net-ball or participated in the newspaper club or the *Straight Talk* Club, which focused on issues such as HIV/AIDS, sexual health, and adoles-cent relationships. The primary school girls also learned dancing and singing, and enjoyed skipping, talking, and reading together in clusters around the schoolyard. They often wandered over to the secondary school to watch the older girls' dance and choir rehearsals.

DRAWINGS AS WINDOWS ON GIRLS' PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY

Procedure and Analysis

We premised our use of drawing as a visual method on research that consistently demonstrates children are able to communicate powerful and imaginative ideas and problems through a variety of symbol systems (Kress, 1997; Peterson, 1997; Weber & Mitchell, 1995; Wetton & McWhirter, 1998). The procedure we followed in soliciting the drawings included group discussions and interviews. The girls met with one of the researchers as well as a research assistant, who at the time of data collection had been living in the community for several months, to discuss and draw pictures of their ideas and experiences of literacy across the broad contexts of their lives (e.g., in and out of school, in the future). Because our goal was to explore the students' images and ideas about local literacy practices, we used lead-off questions to open a topic domain (e.g., "What kinds of reading and writing do you do in school and outside school?" "How do you think you will use reading and writing in the future?") (e.g., Carspecken, 1996). The directions for the drawing task did not specify who or what should be in the drawing, or where it might take place. Within the context of their classroom and outdoor school grounds, the girls were simply asked to draw pictures of reading and/or writing based on their own ideas and experiences. The

discussion provided the impetus for drawing, and we were aware that hearing the ideas of their peers could influence what the girls might draw. Our presence as foreigner researchers may also have influenced what the girls chose to draw; the practices and ideas they represent, however, are consistent with other data (see for example Jones, 2008; Kendrick & Hizzani, 2007; Kendrick & Mutonyi, 2007; Kendrick, Jones, Mutonyi, & Norton, 2006) we have collected over the past four years. The rapport established with the girls over several months should also have minimized our influence. Although all students had some English language ability, we worked with language interpreters to enhance data collection and communication with the students.

Drawing as a free-time activity was something all the students, both boys and girls, appeared to enjoy considerably; when we visited classrooms we often observed students drawing pictures – particularly soccer pictures – during the free moments that followed the completion of an exam or a classroom assignment (e.g., while they waited for classmates to complete).

We use an adaptation of Dyer's (1982) checklist for exploring what the drawings as signs might mean within this particular socio-cultural context. Specifically, we coded and analyzed the drawings according to the following categories: representations of bodies (age, male/female, race, hair, body, size, and looks), representations of manner (expression, eye contact, pose), representations of activity (touch, body movement, positional communication), and representations of props and setting. We concentrated first on a description of the visual, then established a narrative thread that wove together other elements and layers of meaning in the drawing, all the while contextualizing our interpretations within observational and interview data collected as part of the larger study. For this article, we focus on three drawings that are representative of the predominant literacy practices featured in the collection of drawings. These practices focus exclusively on the forms and functions of reading in the lives of these primary school girls (e.g., reading newspapers, adolescent newsletters, books; reading to get knowledge, to get a job, to learn English, for interest, to pass exams, to know about science, to keep cattle, to know the world).

Hannah's Drawing

In Hannah's drawing, a self-portrait, she is attired formally, wearing a dress and shoes not typical of school garments (see Figure 1). Secondary school girls in this area typically dress in this manner when they are traveling home from boarding school on weekends or holidays. Her manner of dress may also be reflective of a desired future lifestyle that affords her material goods such as fashionable clothing, which she does not currently possess.

Figure 1: Hannah's drawing

The bench situated under the tree most likely depicts a study environment. Sitting under a tree is a common place for students to read, especially during examinations when there are no classes, and students are preparing at home. Hannah's solitary positioning here may be indicative of her need to claim a private space away from the distractions and domestic responsibilities she is confronted with at home. Studying in private also signals that schoolwork is taken seriously, which is

reinforced by Hannah's concentrated facial expression and upright posture. She clearly labels her reading material *Young Talk*, which is a monthly national newspaper for youth that communicates information about HIV/AIDS and other sexual health issues. *Young Talk*, a common reading resource at the school, requires a high level of English language ability, which may reflect her desire to become part of the English literacy community because of the increased life opportunities it will afford her. As she explained in writing, she is reading *Young Talk* "to know about the [English] words."

The narrative Hannah composed in the drawing is about a well-dressed, young woman who is literate in English and possibly also knowledgeable about issues such as HIV/AIDS and sexuality, local concerns that could pose barriers to attaining an education and comfortable lifestyle. This image of herself, real or imagined, represents her "imagined freedoms" in relation to economics, education, and status in society.

Sarah's Drawing

Sarah also portrayed herself reading under a tree (see Figure 2). The reading event includes her friend, who appears to be a somewhat older girl. Sarah is wearing shoes, which again, most likely indicates she is away from home, possibly visiting her friend. Both girls are wearing school uniforms. The way they are sitting on the ground is a traditional sitting posture for girls and women in this area of Uganda; it signals to other members of the community that these are girls who engage in proper female behaviour (i.e., what is traditionally valued).

The girls are holding the newspaper *Young Talk*. Their faces show intense concentration, which reflects Sarah's written explanation that they are reading *Young Talk* because it "is the way to pass the examinations," which are in English. Their mouths are slightly open, perhaps because they are reading aloud or discussing what they are reading. The inclusion of talk is also representative of the continuum of communication in this context whereby literacy and spoken language intermingle in everyday interactions around text.

Figure 2: Sarah's drawing

The girls' shoulders are touching, demonstrating their level of comfort with each other; the image portrays the image of relationship: of friendship and support, a clear example of the social nature of literacy learning in this cultural context. The narrative Sarah constructed is most likely an instance taken from daily life events, in this case, studying with a friend so she can pass primary school examsr to attend secondary school.

Gertrude's Drawing

Gertrude's drawing includes two images of self (see Figure 3). In one, she is standing; in the other, she is sitting in a chair under a tree. In both, she is holding books. The two images taken together can be interpreted as the process of her coming to study under the tree. In the first frame, she is walking towards the chair, carrying a book; in the second, she is sitting and reading. She explained that she is reading an English book "to study the word." Similar to the other two girls, Gertrude's drawing

emphasizes the importance of English to education in this cultural context. The inclusion of the word *education* and images of books on the trunk and at the base of the tree may also profile the tree as a signifier of knowledge acquired through formal education in general and book reading in English in particular.

Figure 3: Gertrude's drawing

Occupying the space under a tree represents, as noted previously, a claim to a private space, in this case, ownership of a place to read. In this community, however, sitting in a chair is often the exclusive privilege of men. Gertrude's occupation of the chair as a young girl is a bold claim to status and power in her community. Her formal style of dress and high-heeled shoes indicate she is most likely away from home. The image is one of a well-educated woman, who has the economic resources for material goods such as fashionable clothing and books, and whose status

allows her to occupy important positions (e.g., the chair); these are the freedoms she imagines for herself in the future.

Emerging Patterns

The human mind, Hubbard (1989) posits, has a need for organizational systems that sort out the kaleidoscope of images to which individuals are exposed. Both art and language provide a means to encode experience, whether real or imagined (Baron, 1984). As Kress (2000) argues, the two modes are "embedded in distinct ways of conceptualizing, thinking, and communicating" (p. 195). Drawings in particular, he explains, show an astonishing conceptual understanding and imagination that cannot be expressed through language, even language in narrative format. By making visible what is hidden in their mind's eye, these girls reveal who they imagine they are allowed to become in this society. Their social and material choices about how to construct literacy constitute, in Willis's (1977) words, "the organization of self in relation to the future" (p. 172). In all the drawings, each girl situates herself as the central literacy participant. They portray themselves as readers who occupy private study spaces under trees, seated on chairs and benches. The chairs and benches indicate a serious student, and in this rural area, where very few adults are able to read and write, represent literacy itself. The girls use props such as English books and *Young Talk* to signal their membership in the literacy community, and in particular, the English literacy community. As Primary 6 students, communicating in spoken or written English remains quite challenging. As they explained in their written comments about their drawings, they read English texts and *Young Talk* to "learn the word" and "know the world." Learning about the world outside of their village depends upon knowing English because of the limited number of people outside of their district who could speak Luganda. The English language community is clearly a community to which they one day hope to belong.

The girls also include in the reading event participants other than themselves, specifically siblings and friends. Reading is often social and interactive, sometimes involving lively discussion or reading aloud. Strikingly absent from all the drawings, however, were teachers, parents, and other adults as mediators of literacy. From a pedagogical perspect-

ive, siblings and peers may play a more important role in scaffolding literacy learning than teachers and adult family members. Gregory (2001) describes this interaction as a synergy, a "unique reciprocity whereby siblings [and peers] act as adjuvants in each other's learning" (p. 309). From a Vygotskian perspective, peers and siblings take on the role of the more competent other in supporting and teaching reading outside of school contexts, which is where the majority of the literacy events in the drawings are situated.

Historically, communication in this cultural context was predominantly spoken. Spoken and literate practices are fused in many Ugandan communities where it is common to see a group of people interacting and engaging in discussions around a text that is read aloud. This intermingling of reading and talking was portrayed in many of the students' drawings. Writing practices, which tend to be more solitary and private, were not embedded in the social and cultural practices depicted in the drawings. Only one drawing included an example of writing, which was specifically for the purposes of exam writing.

Inextricably linked to the girls' constructions are the imagined freedoms they associate with literacy. They portray financial freedom through the inclusion of expensive clothing, make-up, shoes, and other material goods and lifestyle representations. Financial freedom has not been within the experiential realm of any of these girls; the three profiled here, along with many of the other participants, represent educational freedom through the depiction of themselves as secondary school students. For many Ugandan girls, the opportunity to attend secondary school is not assumed. Indeed, there is tremendous uncertainty whether their families will have the money to pay secondary school fees and other school-related expenses, whether they will choose to invest in the education of their female children, and whether they will release girls from apprenticing as mothers. From the perspective of these primary school girls, freedom from poverty provides access to full participation in the literacy practices of their society. This relationship between poverty and literacy needs to be addressed before girls and women in Uganda will gain the freedom to participate in all aspects of life in their society.

USING PHOTOGRAPHY TO EXPLORE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LITERACY AND LIFE OPPORTUNITY

Procedure and Analysis

We used photography as an investigative tool (e.g., Hamilton, 2000; Prosser, 1998) to explore the young women's understandings of literacy practices in relation to career and life opportunities. The girls ventured into their local community with a digital camera and photographed men and women engaged in a variety of activities, including domestic work, leisure, and paid employment. Prior to their photographic exploration, we held discussions with the girls about women's roles and literacy practices; the girls then documented everyday activities in three local contexts: their village, the neighbouring trading centre, and the nearest city.

The 15 girls from the secondary school assumed the role of co-researchers, which required that they pay particular attention to everyday literacy practices and interactions that may otherwise have gone unnoticed. The moments, individuals, activities, and signs captured in the photographs provide a "still life" gallery representation of the larger social ecology where these girls lived. The girls formed five sub-groups; each sub-group used photography to investigate literacy practices in one of the following domains: the village, the local trading centre, and upper-level or supervisory positions in companies and organizations in nearby Ganda Town. Before they embarked on the photography exercise, we engaged in a series of brainstorming activities and discussions around the themes and objectives of the activity. Each sub-group considered its focus theme and compiled a list of possible subjects related to that theme. Following this, each sub-group used a digital camera to capture images to represent their research subject. The girls viewed and analyzed the photographs after transferring them to a computer.

For the purposes of this article, we chose three photographs that represented each location (i.e., their village, the neighbouring trading centre, and the nearest city) to examine the girls' documentation of literacy practices in varying contexts in their local and extended community. Hamilton's (2000) "basic elements of literacy events and

practices" (p. 17) provide the framework for analyzing these photographs. This framework includes both visible components of photographs (e.g., participants, settings, artifacts, and activities) as they relate to literacy events, as well as the non-visible constituents of literacy practices. This approach to analysis places moments of everyday life captured by a camera in a much broader context of social and cultural constructions of literacy, where associations, values, understandings, and opportunities around literacy inform literacy events and practices. The framework also highlights the *absence of literacy* in the photographs, which is also associated with particular social and cultural values and understandings (e.g., limited life opportunities and possibilities for the future).

Nurse in Trading Centre Clinic

This photograph shows a nurse in a health clinic in the trading centre holding open a book that documents patient visits, their ailments, and treatments provided (see Figure 4). The patient record book is one of several immediately apparent examples of literacy practices in the context of the health clinic. On either side of the nurse are walls covered with text and illustrated posters conveying important messages on topics such as proper nutrition, safe sex practices, the use of mosquito nets to prevent malaria, the importance of clean drinking water, and the identification of various illnesses and diseases. The shelves of prescription drugs located behind the nurse are another important aspect of literacy. In ensuing discussions about this photograph, the girls identified print literacy as critical for understanding the contents of prescription medication and the proper dosage to administer.

The nursing profession embodies the need for literacy, both in terms of education necessary to become a nurse, as well as the daily, ongoing requirements of the job. The girls identified nursing as one of the very few paid positions in the trading centre where women could earn a reasonable salary (as opposed to unskilled, paid positions, such as restaurant workers, where women may earn as little as 50 cents US per day). The girls also discussed how literacy and education at secondary and post-secondary levels enable girls and women to make certain choices about who and what they will become. Associated with such

Figure 4: Nurse in trading centre clinic

empowerment are the freedoms associated with economic indepen-
dence, mobility, and status within the community.

District Commissioner of Police

In the photograph of the District Commissioner of the Police
Department, he is sitting at his desk in his office. There are various files,
newspapers, notices, and other papers scattered on top of his desk, as
well as several "tools" of literacy – a stapler, a hole punch, pens, and
paper clips. Beyond the border of the photo are numerous filing cabinets
and certificates with the Commissioner's credentials framed and hanging
on the wall, as well as posters on crime prevention published and dis-
tributed by the national government. In this photograph, seated across
the desk from the District Commissioner, is the group of three girls who
visited the police station as part of their research on literacy practices in
various institutions in Ganda Town. The District Commissioner emphas-
ized the importance of literacy and education for career opportunities by

Figure 5: Masaka District Commissioner of Police

enthusiastically encouraging the girls to complete their secondary school studies and consider a career with the police. He explained that the police force actively recruits bright, young women who have an interest in becoming policewomen or working in some other capacity with the police force. He showed them personnel files and the kinds of documentation required to apply for a position. In addition, he led the girls on a tour around the police station and introduced them to the various heads of departments, several of whom were women.

Young Woman Washing Dishes

In this photograph, a young woman is washing dishes outside her home (see Figure 6). Not much older than the secondary school girls who took the photograph, she spends her days performing domestic work. She lives at home with her mother and several siblings and is responsible for digging in the fields, preparing meals, keeping the compound clean, tending to younger children, and washing dishes and clothes. There are no literacy artifacts in her immediate environment, no demands for literacy for her domestic work, and little opportunity to engage in lit-

Figure 6: Young woman washing dishes

eracy practices. Because the young woman in the photo is of secondary
school age, it communicates an obvious message to the secondary school
girls: without secondary education, opportunities to provide economic
freedoms are more limited.

Emerging Patterns

During the collaborative analysis of all the photographs, several
important themes highlighting the relationship between literacy and life
opportunities emerged. These include the unequal division of domestic
labour, unequal access to income-earning opportunities, and the unequal
ratio of men to women in high-level positions. In many ways, these

themes epitomize the "unfreedoms" (Sen, 1999) that prevent girls and women from fully participating in their communities, and therefore, in national development. The girls maintained that there is an inseparable connection between opportunities for girls and women, literacy, and access to education. Photographs that explored and documented daily activities in the village, trading centre, and nearby city, showed that women and girls are overwhelmingly responsible for daily domestic labour such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water and firewood, looking after children, and digging in the gardens. If both husband and wife are farmers (as many are), or boys and girls have equal burdens of studying (which is certainly the case), women and girls do more overall work than men and boys. When we considered the conspicuous lack of men and boys in the village set of photographs, the girls said that the men were absent because they were either working in their fields, had income-earning jobs, or were simply "relaxing" while their wives worked at home. Clearly, the perception of the girls was that men and boys were afforded considerably more freedoms (e.g., employment/economic, time/leisure freedoms).

Although no one was surprised that the photographs revealed that women and girls do more domestic labour than do men and boys, this visual evidence became a catalyst for discussions about typical women's roles, expectations, opportunities in the local context, and paid/unpaid labour. In the trading centre, it was noted that men held almost all the income-earning jobs (e.g., car mechanics, tailors, barbers, bike mechanics, shoe repair). Although there were some women working in paid capacities such as hotel or restaurant staff, teachers, and nurses, the vast majority of income-earning work belonged to men and unpaid labour belonged to women. Contrasting these photos with the ones that showed women in paid positions, the girls noted the important relationship between education and income-earning opportunities: that being literate and educated would provide them with access to more employment opportunities, more equality in their marital and family relationships, and more status and respect within the community – in other words, more freedoms.

Photography served not only to document literacy practices, but also as a new role to provide the girls with a sense of purpose and entitle-

ment to venture into places and situations "for the purposes of research" that they had never been or experienced before. For example, the group of girls who took photographs of individuals occupying high-level positions in Ganda Town entered a bank, the Uganda Telecom office, a lawyer's office, and the police station for the first time in their lives. They were initially nervous and reticent to enter these offices and institutions, but afterwards, their sense of accomplishment was palpable. The experience allowed them to gain valuable information, through dialogue about various career opportunities. As one girl explained, she had previously been unaware of the possibility of having a career in the police department but because of this visit, she was seriously considering it as a career possibility. Other girls pointed out they were not aware of many different kinds of career options and would like to have career counseling at school. Simply being in possession of a camera and taking pictures seemed to afford the girls particular freedoms they had not previously experienced, which manifest in confidence and assertiveness. One girl, Shamim, who was chronically shy and retreating, demonstrated considerable talent as a photographer; she choreographed shots, successfully persuaded those who were reluctant to have their pictures taken to pose, and adamantly assumed the role of photographer for her group.

PATTERNS ACROSS THE DRAWINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

The images of literacy constructed in the drawings and photographs provide insight into the girls' perceptions and personal experiences of literacy, including what sense they have made of its complexities. Their constructions move beyond the depiction of local literacy practices alone, and reveal how local literacies interface with global literacies. Street (2003) argues local and global practices need to be contemplated as hybrid phenomena because local literacy uses are not isolated from the broader social structure:

The result of local-global encounters around literacy is always a new hybrid rather than a single essentialized version of either. It is these hybrid literacy practices that NLS [New Literacy Studies] focuses upon rather than either romanticizing the local or conceding the dominant privileging of the supposed 'global'. . . it is the recognition of this hybrid that lies at the heart of an NLS

approach to literacy acquisition regarding the relationship between local literacy practices and those of the school. (p. 80)

The girls' constructions of these hybrid literacies offer insights into not only what these girls and other community members do with literacy, but also what they associate with what they do, how they construct the value of literacy, and the ideologies that surround literacy in their community (Baynham, 1995). Of particular importance is the way the images disclose how relationships of unequal power shape uses of literacy in this community by focusing attention on who is included and who is excluded in particular literacy practices. In the drawings, the girls consistently included themselves as participants in literacy practices, but most typically, these were imagined versions of themselves in which they are older, secondary school students who are English language speakers with financial resources and material goods. In the exam-driven context of the Ugandan school system, it is English that the girls associate with advancing to the next level; a premium is placed on both education and English in relation to the economic gains and improved lifestyle they may provide. For the secondary school girls, images of daily life associated educated, professional men, with literacy, and with positions of privilege and power. Largely absent from the roles they associated with literacy and power were women, particulary women with limited financial means.

The drawn and photographic images also constitute new ways of knowing. Because the images are not language-based, they help to diminish the power distribution between adult and child (Schratz-Hadiwich, Walker, & Egg, 2004). The images also serve to traverse the language barriers that exist between adult academic researcher and child:

What young people see through the lens of a camera [or their mind's eye], and what they capture through their photographic frame [and drawings], demonstrates the 'interconnectedness' between places, rooms and areas, and feelings, emotions and associations. (Schratz & Löffler-Anzböck, 2004, p. 133)

By fixing images of daily life, the girls were able to reflect on and contemplate in new ways that which was familiar and taken for granted within the routine practices of their lives. Creating and viewing these

images as visual objects allowed them to engage in a process through which they were able to make the familiar strange. This reflective process engaged them in a dialogue and permitted them to imagine themselves in new places and situations, and to consider new possibilities for their futures. In other words, by giving these girls opportunities to engage with different kinds of texts and images, they observed and participated in the literate practices of other people, and as they added new tools, materials, and technologies to their repertoire, their understanding of who they are allowed to become in their society inevitably changes (Kress, 1997).

The positions the girls come to occupy – as both creators and subjects of the images – represent possible ways of being and each person's experience of those possibilities, as they are made available – or unavailable – through particular kinds of freedoms (e.g., economic, educational, political, domestic). From both Carrington's (2003) and Norton and Toohey's (2004) perspectives, the drawings and photographs testify to the girls' awareness that their ability or inability to participate in local literacy practices positioned them in particular ways in their communities, and made public statements about their histories (e.g., whether or not they were educated) and their possibilities for the future. Norton (2000) and Toohey (2000) contend imagined communities, such as those represented in the girls' visual images, provide a key to understanding how and why students engage or do not engage with particular literacy practices. For these girls, the freedoms associated with English, education, status, safety, space, and time were not only fundamental to their imagined communities, but represent the pre-requisites for full participation in the literacy world. Until girls and women can access the freedoms they associate with literacy, their participation in the development of their nation will remain marginalized.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the imagined freedoms that young girls in development contexts associate with literacy learning is a key component of successful development projects and initiatives that will allow for the full participation of girls and women. Alternative modes of representation and communication such as drawing, photography, and film in the

hands of diverse groups of girls and women (e.g., rural, urban, schooled, unschooled) move beyond language to make visible the unfreedoms (Sen, 1999) that have historically marginalized and excluded them from full participation in the development process. The National Strategy for Girls' Education effectively identifies many of the barriers to girls' education, but it does not address the fundamental unfreedoms related to poverty, gender inequity, and sexuality, and the degree to which those unfreedoms underpin those barriers (Republic of Uganda, 1999). Providing opportunities for girls to explore and consider their worlds through alternative modes of communication and representation has immense potential as a pedagogical approach to cultivate dialogue about the nature of gender inequities, and serve as a catalyst for the positing of imagined communities where those inequities might not exist.

NOTES

[1] By comparison, the province of British Columbia is 944,735 square kilometers and has a population of approximately 4,380,256 (British Columbia Stats, 2007).

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