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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which literacy histories and present literacy experiences of doctoral students shaped their literacy identities. Data were collected through surveys, interviews, and visual identity representations. This paper focuses on the literacy stories of two doctoral students with positive literacy identities. Findings suggest that participants valued literacy as a social learning experience from an early age through higher education. These social experiences with reading and writing can take many forms and can be embraced in various home and school contexts. Additionally, these findings highlight the need for schools to create and nurture such experiences across all grade levels, through multiple forums, which may lead to positive literacy identities.

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Shaping our Literate Lives: Examining the Role of Literacy Experiences in Shaping Positive Literacy Identities

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The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which literacy histories and present literacy experiences of doctoral students shaped their literacy identities. Data were collected through surveys, interviews, and visual identity representations. This paper focuses on the literacy stories of two doctoral students with positive literacy identities. Findings suggest that participants valued literacy as a social learning experience from an early age through higher education. These social experiences with reading and writing can take many forms and can be embraced in various home and school contexts. Additionally, these findings highlight the need for schools to create and nurture such experiences across all grade levels, through multiple forums, which may lead to positive literacy identities.

INTRODUCTION
The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is a valuable approach to advancing teaching and can guide faculty's choices related to pedagogy, curriculum, and other factors involved in student success in higher education (Bender & Gray, 1999; Gale & Golde, 2004; Huber & Robinson, 2016). This helps us to understand how students learn and the instructional practices that support learning. In considering the importance of SoTL, we recognize that new knowledge should be built on what's known as we consider how we can improve teaching and learning through research (Kreber, 2005; McKinney, 2003; Trigwell, 2013; Weimer, 1997). This guides our work with social learning experiences and research on identity.

Social learning has long been a focus of literacy education (Perry, 2012; Street, 1984). This idea supports the notion that students learn with and from others as they bring their personal experiences to their reading and writing. These personal experiences can influence the identity of students and how they "interact, respond, and learn in classrooms" (McCarthey & Moje, 2002, p. 229). With this in mind, it is important to examine these social learning experiences and how specifically they can impact the identity of learners.

Research has shown that social literacy opportunities have a positive impact on literacy learning (Flint, 2010; Griffin, 2002; Perez, 1998; Schunk, 2012). If literacy identities are socially constructed (Gee, 2012; Moje & Luke, 2009), and it is our goal as educators to foster positive literacy identities, it is important to examine the social activities that shape positive literacy identities in order to further explore ways in which to provide positive literacy experiences for students.

This study seeks to understand the social literacy learning experiences that two successful doctoral students, with positive literacy identities, value by examining their literacy histories. Using a sociocultural lens, this study was guided by the following question: *How do the literacy histories and experiences of doctoral students shape their positive literacy identities?* These findings could support higher education instructors in the SoTL process as they work to meet the literacy needs of their students across a range of disciplines. Through this research we hope that professors across institutions can draw on this work to advance teaching and learning

(Felten, 2013; McKinney, 2003), specifically related to social literacy practices in higher education. Furthermore, by engaging students in social literacy experiences, we can improve the quality of students' academic opportunities. As this study provides information related to the social literacy experiences of doctoral students, professors may use this information to design courses that promote social learning and nurture positive literacy identities.

Theoretical Framework
The sociocultural perspective views language learning as socially constructed experiences that are part of the cultural context of learners (Lave, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1993). Learning and constructing meaning are social practices (Cook-Gumperz, 1996; Gee, 2012; Wenger, 1999). These theories assert knowledge is constructed through social interactions, with students learning first through social interactions with peers and adults and eventually extending and internalizing knowledge to act independently (Vygotsky, 1978). These theories guided our current study and have also influenced other research on literacy identities (Gee, 2012; Kajee, 2008; McCarthey & Moje, 2002; Moje & Luke, 2009). Specifically, the sociocultural framework was used to help examine how doctoral students described their literacy histories, their literacy social experiences and the context in which these experiences occurred. The significance of this study is its contribution to our evolving understanding of literacy identities and how they are socially constructed.

Review of the Literature
Identities
To understand literacy identities we must first define what we mean by identities and literacy. Both identity and literacy have multiple interpretations across different theories and fields of study (Moje & Luke, 2009). We borrow from Holland and colleagues to define identities as "self-understandings" or the ways in which people "tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 3). While identities are enacted by the individual, they are socially constructed. Group membership, social interactions with others, and different contexts shape the identities people take on (McCarthey & Moje,

2002).

Identities are multiple, varied across time and context, and constantly in flux (Mishler, 2004). If we return to our definition of identities as "self understandings," consider how these understandings of oneself change with new experiences as well as shifting understandings of past experiences. Identities are not inherent characteristics of individuals, but rather they are brought to life when recognized by others within relationships or social contexts. This is important in the teaching and learning process as we work to build relationships that support the learning of students through social literacy experiences.

Literacy Identities
We use a sociocultural perspective to conceptualize literacy as a set of social practices (Street, 1984). Literacy is "what people *do* with reading, writing, and texts in real world contexts and why they do it" (Perry, 2012, p. 54). These literacy practices occur in specific social contexts and are influenced by the historical, cultural, and power structures within these contexts (Street, 1984). Because identities are social constructs, institutions play an active role in the development of individual's identity construction (Holland et al., 1998). The home, the community and the school are distinct but overlapping layers of influence in which people develop perceptions of themselves as readers and writers -- perceptions that make up literacy identities.

Both texts and literacy practices serve as the tools for shaping the literacy identities individuals construct, enact, and explore in various situations (Moje & Luke, 2009). Moreover, literacy identities influence the texts one chooses to read, write, and discuss in different contexts (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). The reciprocal relationship between one's identities and one's literacy practices develops over time and in different social situations, thus creating an ever-evolving sense of self as a literate being (Gee, 1996; Kajee, 2008; McCarthey, 2002). Therefore, one's literacy identities can be understood as co-constructed and socially situated self-understandings of how one engages in reading, writing, and texts in various contexts and over time. With this in mind, we define positive literacy identities as positive self-understandings and self-perceptions in relation to literacy.

Literacy Stories and Representations of Literacy Identities
An individual's sense of self, or identity, can be understood through stories (McAdams, 1993; McKinney & Giorgis, 2009) and visual representations (Adams-Budde, Howard, Jolliff, & Myers, 2014; Bustle, 2004; Georgakopoulou, 2007). Moreover, individuals are engaged in the process of identity construction through the telling of these stories and the creation of visual representations. (Bamberg, 2004; Mishler, 2004). Many researchers have used self-reported stories to explore literacy identities of a variety of participants including classroom teachers, literacy specialists, and students (Compton-Lilly, 2013; Drake, Spillane & Hufford-Ackles, 2001; McKinney & Giorgis, 2009). For example, in a study by Drake et al. (2001) participants shared common stories of continual literacy development at home and at school that shaped their personal and professional identities as classroom teachers. McKinney and Giorgis (2009) explored the ways four literacy specialists constructed their identities as writers and teachers of

writing through interviews and writer autobiographies. In another study, Compton-Lilly (2013) used the stories shared by a student, Jermaine, and his mother over a 10-year period to understand how his school literacy experiences shaped his literacy identities as well as his identity as a student. These studies align with and support Georgakopoulou's (2007) findings that both the telling and representing of identities is a productive means of documenting how identities take shape.

Doctoral Students' Identity Development
Few studies have focused specifically on identity development of doctoral students (e.g., Adams-Budde, Howard, Jolliff, & Myers, 2014; Hall & Burns, 2009; Johnson, 2012; Kriner, Coffman, Adkisson, Putman, & Monaghan, 2015; Noonan, 2015). Both Noonan (2015) and Johnson (2012) report on the findings of self-studies where the researchers examine their own identity development as researcher and scholars while participating in an educational doctoral program. Hall and Burns (2009) use theories of identity to explore the role faculty mentoring plays as educational doctoral students navigate new identities as scholars. The authors argue that mentors must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to assist diverse doctoral students in developing productive identities as researchers. Finally, Kriner et al. (2015) found that the students benefited and appreciated the chance to take on the role of scholar in the classroom context and that these experiences provided participants the opportunity to develop their scholarly identities.

As noted in these studies, a strong scholarly identity can help students find success in doctoral programs. The development of a scholarly identity requires strong literacy identities and skills. While literacy is critical to students' development of scholarly identities, these studies focus only on students' experience while in the program. We believe that students' experiences with literacy throughout their lives (their literacy histories), both at school and at home, shape their ever-evolving literacy identities. We also believe that students' stories related to these experiences offer insight into the process of their literacy identities construction.

While we recognize that there is much research in the areas of literacy and identity, this research is not focused on the literacy identity of doctoral students. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the role of social literacy learning experiences on the literacy identities of two doctoral students.

METHODS
This research study uses a case study approach (Yin, 2009) in order to examine how the literacy histories and experiences of doctoral students shaped their literacy identities. Each participant represents a different case. This approach provided an opportunity to carefully examine how the participants viewed their literacy experiences and stories through surveys, visual representations and interviews.

Participants and Context
The participants represented in this article are part of a larger study. At the time of the study, the participants were enrolled in the Teacher Education Higher Education (TEHE) Ph.D. program at a university in the southeast region of the United States. All seventy-four students enrolled in the program were invited to participate. Thirty-six students agreed to participate, and this article represents

the case studies of two participants, Eve and Julie (pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of participants). These two individuals were purposefully selected because their high survey scores revealed that their past literacy experiences impacted their current, positive literacy identities, and their success and experiences in the Ph.D. program. In addition, these participants were selected because their data captured the themes found across all participants with high literacy survey scores.

Julie was in her third year of the program as a doctoral student focusing on Instructional Technology and Professional Development. At the time she was working as an Instructional Technology Facilitator. Julie was a 33 year old, White, female. Prior to enrolling in the doctoral program, she worked as a classroom teacher and instructional coach. Eve was also in her third year as a doctoral student with a focus in Student Affairs. She was 35 years old, White, and prior to enrolling in the doctoral program, she worked as a mental health counselor at a university.

Data Collection
This study used multiple sources of data (Yin, 2009) including surveys, semi-structured interviews and visual representations created by participants. The survey instrument was created by the researchers using current literature on literacy identity (Gee, 2006; McCarthey, 2001; Moje & Luke, 2009). The instrument was shared with three reviewers with expertise in literacy and/or identity research and revised based on their feedback in order to increase the content validity. The survey questions were presented to participants at the beginning of the study via Qualtrics and served to examine participants' literacy histories and views toward literacy. The survey posed 10 questions, which were answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Example survey questions included: I have always enjoyed reading. Growing up, reading and writing were encouraged in my home. Growing up, I was a successful reader and writer.

Participants were selected for the interview process based on high survey scores. The semi-structured interview questions were grounded in literacy identity research (Gee, 2006; McCarthey, 2001; Moje & Luke, 2009) and sought to explore the relationship between participant's literacy histories and their literacy identities. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to an hour and provided an opportunity to examine participant's literacy stories. Interview data were audio recorded, and later transcribed. These stories were constructed as they shared and reflected upon their past experiences with reading and writing and how these experiences shaped their current experiences and identities. Example questions included: How would you describe your literacy abilities? Describe yourself as a reader and a writer. How did your home and school literacy practices impact how you read and write today?

The visual representations were created by the participants prior to the interview and discussed during the interview. The term visual representation includes a range of visual meaning making devices and symbols (Bustle, 2004). This tool (Shephard, 1993) was used as an additional representation of doctoral students' literacy identities.

Each of these data pieces built upon each other, creating layers of data sources. The surveys provided a framework to examine past literacy experiences and helped researchers to determine which participants had positive experiences and positive literacy

identities. The interview added depth and understanding, telling a story of how and why these identities were formed. Finally, the visual representation helped the researchers to view the participants' perceptions of their literacy identities through a different medium, while building upon and expanding their literacy stories.

Data Analysis
Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the mean scores of the survey responses. The reliability of the survey was .84 according to Cronbach's alpha. The qualitative data from the interviews were coded and analyzed using constant comparison analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To create a baseline for coding and analysis, the four researchers coded one interview individually. Researchers discussed the results of the independent coding in order to analyze emerging themes found in the data, resulting in six themes.

Following discussion and analysis, the six initial descriptive themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were collapsed into past literacy experiences, present literacy experiences, support systems and social experiences. From here, each researcher independently read and coded the remaining interviews using the collapsed themes. In this process, comparisons were made across interviews using constant comparison analysis. For the purpose of this article, data related to the social experiences theme is presented.

RESULTS
Data revealed that doctoral students with strong, confident literacy identities valued the social literacy experiences that served to shape their literacy identities. Additionally, results of the study revealed that participants with positive social literacy experiences also held strong, positive literacy identities in higher education programs. In sharing their literacy stories, these two participants chose to reflect on their most memorable experiences, which focused on their early and recent experiences with literacy and did not include examples from the middle years of their literacy identity development. A description of each case follows.

Julie
Julie's positive literacy identities were evident throughout the study. Not only did survey data show Julie as having positive literacy identities with her mean score as a 4.5 out of 5, but in her interview, she also characterized herself as a strong, confident reader and writer. Julie also described how she currently felt reading and writing came easily to her and discussed how she had been socially supported throughout her early and present literacy experiences.

Interview data revealed that Julie's social literacy learning experiences occurred at an early age. She described how she always remembered her parents reading instead of watching television. Julie shared how her parents would sit together on the couch, each with their own novel. Wanting to be a part of this literacy experience as a young child, Julie decided to join in and read with them. These social literacy experiences became the norm for her and her family once she decided to participate in this shared reading time.

As she got older, Julie's social literacy experiences became more formal. While at the time of the study she saw herself as a confident, strong, reader and writer, Julie had not always seen writing as her strong suit. It was not until she had a professor in her undergraduate program that guided her through the writing process with effective feedback and discussion that she began to

see herself as a writer. Julie began to identify as a writer through this social learning process. Julie also shared how similar discussions and feedback with her professors in the doctoral program assisted her in achieving success as a published author in scholarly publications.

Julie not only appreciated the supportive interactions with her professors, but she valued shared literacy and learning experiences with her peers as well. In the interview Julie stated, "The assignments we have when you have to read someone else's work, that's always helpful too because someone else will think of something in a completely different way that I never would have thought of." Julie respected the multiple perspectives of her peers and appreciated the opportunity to give and receive feedback. Additionally, while the class discussion boards were not face-to-face social interactions, Julie gained insight from those as well, "The discussion boards where we have to post and comment, I always learn a little bit about different ways to approach a topic or write something." Julie not only enjoyed the social learning provided by discussions in class, but her social learning extended beyond traditional classroom approaches and veered into broader online social forums.

Throughout her interview, Julie discussed her two blogs. She used one blog as an outlet to write about her children and to share their learning and growing experiences. Her other blog was an educational technology blog where she focused on topics she taught in her classroom, staff development, ideas for teachers using technology, etc. Julie shared,

> My blog has helped me to get out there too and make some connections with other educators and teacher educators….I also do a lot of reading and writing in 140 characters or less. I'm on Twitter a lot with other educators, so I make connections that way as well. I think things like blogs and Twitter that let you put your voice out there…has helped me in the field.

Julie used the Internet as a tool for writing and sharing her knowledge. She also used it as a tool for learning. This social approach helped Julie share information and be a resource for others.

While discussions with her face-to-face and online peers were valued, Julie also had what she called a "critical friend."

> I have a critical friend, who reads all my stuff and gives me really good feedback. I've done the same for him… So having a critical friend has really helped and we've also had a couple of things published together. We've read each other's writing so much that it helps our writing style kind of flow better when we try to write something together.

Having a critical friend provided Julie with someone who offered support and encouragement as well as constructive feedback for her writing. This relationship helped develop Julie's writing skills, her confidence as a scholarly writer and her literacy identities.

As previously mentioned, participants were asked to create an image that visually represented their literacy identities. Julie's visual representation was a sketch of her sitting at her computer desk with an iPad beside her (see Figure 1).

This image was another indication of the various ways in which she valued social learning and it represents the role of technology in her social literacy experiences as referenced in her discussion of her technology blog. Around the computer were the words "blogs, Twitter, Google docs." This is another clear indication that Julie's social learning stretched beyond face-to-face interactions

and extended into the realm of social media. In the corner of Julie's illustration were two children with books reading together, representing her own children and again showcasing the value she put on social literacy experiences.

Figure 1. Julie's visual representation

Eve

Eve's positive literacy identities were also showcased in her interview and survey with her mean score as a 4.9 out of 5. When asked to describe herself as a reader and writer, she described herself as strong, efficient, organized and concise. Eve attributed her success in literacy to her social learning experiences including feedback from her parents and collaboration with her professors and peers.

Similar to Julie, Eve's interview revealed social learning experiences at an early age. Eve had vivid memories of riding her bike with her sister and friends to the local library. Eve shared, "At the back of the library was the kids section and they had people who would come to read stories for story hour. All of your little friends would do it with you." The visual representation created by Eve (see Figure 2) represents an extension of these early literacy experiences.
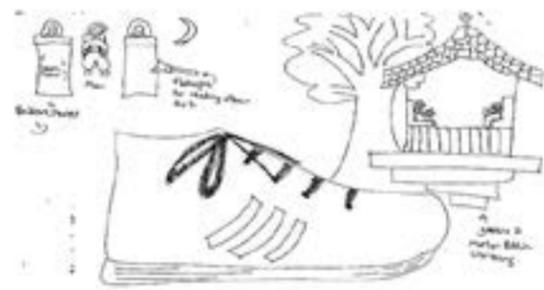

Figure 2. Eve's visual representation

> This is my representation of a sneaker, because it was a silver sneaker that the library had, and every time you read a book the sneaker got moved along the track…. Anyway, and then Mom would read to us every night so that was my side of the room and I have a twin sister, Allison and that was hers. Mom would sit in the middle and read to us. We always had a flashlight that you could use to read…And then um, outside

the library there was a gazebo and so it would be fun to sit out there and read. There was a huge tree that was behind the gazebo.

All of these experiences described by Eve in her discussion of her visual representation are social literacy experiences. As a child, she valued the opportunity to read with her sister, her mother, and those at the library. Some of these experiences translated into her adult life. Just as Eve read at night before bed with her mother and sister, Eve continued to read at night before bed, "that's what you did when you were little, so that's what I always do now," she explained. She also discussed that as adults, she and her sister continued to share books, passing them along to each other once they had finished them.

Eve had shared literacy experiences within her family, reading with her sister and mother, and receiving writing feedback from both her parents.

> Dad would read my papers before I would turn them in… so he was like your first grade… so it was just cool having the two of them to always go over your writing. As far as writing, my mom would always make us write hand-written thank you notes ever since we could.

These examples represent the idea that in addition to reading, writing was a social experience, and one highly valued in Eve's family. She discussed the fact that her father marked her papers a lot with corrections "but the end result was it was a better paper." Her parents provided her feedback on school writing assignments and additionally valued writing as a tool to communicate with the requirement of formal, hand-written thank you notes. These social writing experiences made Eve feel more confident in herself as a writer throughout her schooling.

Literacy as a social experience continued for Eve in higher education. In her interview she discussed collaborating with one of her professors.

> I just finished a research project with my professor, so of course we have to write up those findings…. On the paper we just finished, I gave him my lit[erature] review, he chopped it down to seven pages….at that point you also think everything's important, you know. I just find the more people I've written with, it's gotten much more concise…with my professor now, he's always been a much better writer than me, so I'll always take his feedback.

This example shows that collaboration with professors was important to Eve in her writing process. When asked how her writing had changed since entering the doctoral program, Eve shared, "I think it is more sophisticated than it was… All the feedback I've gotten, that's super helpful." Eve's writing was nurtured as her parents initially provided feedback, and later she built a relationship with her professor who provided feedback as well. Eve attributed her success and positive identity as a writer to these social literacy experiences.

DISCUSSION

In considering the importance of literacy as a social experience and examining the literacy experiences through the survey, interview and the visual representations of the participants, it is evident that both Julie and Eve not only valued social learning, but also attributed these experiences to their success and positive literacy identities. At the time of the study, both participants saw themselves as confident readers and writers. They both have published academic works, including book chapters and articles, which are indicators of strong literacy skills.

It does not come as a surprise that doctoral students have positive literacy identities and literacy histories, however, survey data revealed that some doctoral students did not have positive literacy identities and histories (Adams-Budde, Howard, Jolliff, & Myers, 2014). For this reason, we chose to highlight two participants that held these qualities in order to examine how their previous experiences shaped their current positive literacy identities with the hopes of promoting positive self-perceptions and providing these experiences for all students.

As the participants discussed their literacy histories and drew images representing their literacy identities, they highlighted their social experiences with others. The social interactions that contributed to participants' literacy identities are supported by research theories that suggest literacy is an interactive process of learning and that discussion helps in negotiating meaning as readers and writers (Perez, 1998). Next, we share common themes across Julie and Eve's case studies.

Feedback and Discussion

Julie and Eve both discussed the importance of writing with feedback and engaging in discussion as being an important part of their social learning processes. For both participants this social literacy learning took place with a variety of individuals.

Eve valued feedback, noting that her papers often ended up covered in ink from her parents, but that it helped her to revise her work, and later gave her confidence as a writer. In her interview, Eve discussed how feedback helped her in writing for publication and conference presentations, "I want the comments, and I don't take it personally." Perhaps because of the feedback Eve received growing up, it was easier to accept feedback as a doctoral student to recognize her weaknesses and learn how to turn them into opportunities for improvement.

Julie also shared the important role of feedback in her development as a writer. For Julie, this feedback came from both face-to-face interactions and online discussion boards and social media forums with her peers. Blogging also provided an opportunity for teaching, learning, and sharing ideas outside her immediate context. In addition, Julie's critical friend supported her work through shared reading and writing experiences that not only propelled her positive literacy identities but also served to increase her contributions to the field of literacy and learning through publications. Other researchers have also found peer feedback to be an effective teaching technique in getting graduate students to think more critically about their work as well as gain confidence in their abilities (Bernadowski & Aspinall, 2014; Maher et al., 2008).

Creating Spaces

The visual representations of both participants show important past and current spaces where social literacy was and is important for them. We believe, as Lefebvre (1991) suggests, space is not a fixed background to social action but is socially produced. Meaning, what people do is influenced by spaces and spaces are shaped by people. For example, Julie remembers sitting on the couch with her parents where they modeled reading, and she now enjoys doing the same with her children. In Eve's case, the past "spaces" she described were at the library where there was a "kid's section" and read aloud opportunities, and at home in her bedroom with her mother and sister at bedtime. Although Eve no longer shares a physical space with her sister, such

as their bedroom growing up, they continue to talk about and share books with each other.

For Julie, the current space of her social literacy learning occurs with her children and through her computer. As an adult, Julie's social literacy learning occurs in both physical and virtual spaces. Rather than seeing these spaces as separate, researchers such as Leander and McKim (2003) suggest that online and offline spaces are intertwined and embedded in broader social practices.

IMPLICATIONS

As students are said to construct new knowledge through participation in social practices (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1993), it is important to examine how teachers in K-12 classrooms and higher education can work to integrate social practices as a means of literacy instruction. Because identities are social constructs (Holland et al., 1998), classrooms can play an active role in the development of individual's identity construction. As noted by these participants, their most memorable social literacy experiences were with friends and family at an early age, and much later, in their higher education courses with professors and peers. There is no mention of positive social literacy experiences in school until these participants reached the college level, which begs the question of how to create and nurture these experiences that lead to positive literacy identities throughout school for students. With this in mind, in the field of teacher preparation in higher education, we believe it is essential to provide students with the foundational understanding and corresponding practices so that they can ensure their own students have opportunities to engage in collaborative learning experiences around reading and writing.

This study has important implications for higher education. The data illustrate the need to provide opportunities for students to use collaboration, communication and discussion of reading and writing to foster a mindset that values the social nature of learning. Research suggests that classroom contexts should foster an environment where students can read and write together and share multiple perspectives that cause them to think critically about these experiences (Bomer & Fowler-Amato, 2014; Guthrie, 2011). There are several ways instructors can provide opportunities for social learning. One approach is by modeling instruction through a sociocultural lens, the learning that occurs when students engage in authentic and meaningful discussion around reading and writing. In addition, we need to ensure students have experiences in higher education that promote the idea of creating a community of learners (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011), where students feel comfortable taking academic risks, sharing goals, and providing feedback (Jenson, 2013) which can take place through both face-to-face and online forums.

By understanding the idea that creating spaces does not always mean "physical spaces," we can look to Julie's social media and internet-based social spaces of literacy learning. In face-to-face and online contexts, instructors can support students in creating spaces where they can write collaboratively and have online discussions about their reading and new understandings (McKenna, Labbo, Conradi, & Baxter, 2011; West, 2008; Witte, 2007). This approach to creating spaces may serve to build positive identities for students as readers and writers.

While this study focuses on higher education, there are implications for K-12 classrooms. Although participants did not discuss social learning experiences in their elementary school environments, there is research to suggest social literacy learning experiences are regularly implemented in elementary classrooms (Flint, 2010; Griffin,

2002; Matthews & Kesner, 2003; Morrow, Tracey, & Del Nero, 2011). However, by the time students reach middle school, there is often a shift to more teacher-centered, direct instruction (Eccles & Roeser, 2010; McEwin & Greene, 2010) with fewer opportunities for social learning experiences, which is often the result of high stakes testing requirements in the upper grades (McEwin & Green, 2010; Musoleno & White, 2010). Findings support the idea that it may be beneficial to include more social literacy experiences in middle and secondary classrooms. In K-12 classrooms, social learning can be nurtured through the incorporation of activities such as book clubs, where students choose what and how they engage with texts, and perhaps guest readers, similar to what occurred at the library in Eve's experience. Students benefit from collaboration and communication around literacy. When students make sense of what they read and write with others, they are more actively engaged in their learning. Classroom teachers can model and support literacy rich environments with the creation of "kids spaces" as mentioned in Eve's interview, where there is comfortable furniture or outdoor spaces where students can read and write. These spaces can be created across grade levels, from elementary to secondary classrooms, and may serve to show students that even though they are not at a desk in their classroom, shared, positive, literacy experiences can take place anywhere.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study provides clear examples of the importance of literacy as a social experience. However, while reflecting and critically evaluating our research process, we identified several limitations. This study represents a small sample of doctoral students in one program at one university and the participants are not diverse in terms of race or gender. These limitations lead to opportunities for future research. For example, using a SoTL lens, we could recruit participants across institutions (McKinney, 2003) from diverse backgrounds. Understanding the various interactions and contexts of diverse groups can serve to be beneficial because having multiple perspectives may provide understanding into how diverse groups define literacy and engage in literacy throughout their lives. In addition, these perspectives may provide insight into the types of literacies that are valued in various contexts. Despite these limitations and opportunities for future research, this study addresses a gap in the literature that focuses on the combined fields of literacy and identity by linking them to success with doctoral students. This study underscores the need for educational institutions to examine doctoral students' literacy experiences therefore contributing to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

CONCLUSION

This study shows how higher education programs can focus on the teaching and learning process in ways that engage students and nurture their literacy identities. Kreber (2005) argues that there is a great deal of research on how to teach better, but little about "the kinds of learning experiences we hope students will have during their college and university years, and why we believe certain experiences are more valuable than others" (p. 391). This study provides insight into those learning experiences we want to provide for students. Specifically, the strategies discussed by these participants could be implemented across higher education programs including personalized feedback from professors, writing opportunities with professors and peers and social learning opportunities in online

spaces. Not only is the implementation of these practices important, but the valuing of student reading and writing within these practices is important. With positive literacy identities, students feel more confident in their abilities to read and write and find success in school programs. If we wish to nurture positive literacy experiences as a literacy community, it may benefit us to promote more authentic social literacy learning opportunities in higher education classrooms that will serve to enhance the positive literacy identities of students including those who may one day pursue their doctoral degree. This article provides insight into experiences doctoral students found to be beneficial. These experiences may not look the same across all students. Therefore, university instructors need to be able to value the experiences of all students as they continue to explore instructional decisions that positively shape students' literacy identities.

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