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TEACHING, LEARNING,  
AND CURRICULUM STUDIES

“PAPER DOESN’T JUDGE YOU:” LITERACY IN THE LIVES OF THREE GIRLS  
WHO ATTENDED AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL (264 pp.)

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Literacy practices can be considered powerful tools used to claim a space, establish an identity, or provide a voice in various social interactions. The goals of this study were to understand the literacy practices of three female young adults who attended an alternative school prior to my study in the spring of 2008. The study also explored the purposes for the literacy practices, the outcomes of the literacy practices, and the factors that seemed to influence their reading and writing.

I used a qualitative case study design method to explore the girls’ personal and school literacy. Data were obtained through observations; weekly interviews with each girl; interviews with family members, interviews with teachers, an interview with the girls’ probation officer; literacy vignettes; school documents; and the girls’ writing.

Findings established that the girls participated in varied and extensive personal literacy practices including the reading of novels and informational texts and the writing of poetry, letters, and notes. The girls’ personal literacy practices helped them cope with their emotions, reflect on their life events, establish and maintain social networks with peers, and communicate with family members. Although I found the girls had well-articulated purposes for participating in their personal literacy practices, their school literacy practices were often disconnected from their lives.

**Key words:** alternative school, detention center, personal literacy, school literacy, girls

