Literacy mediation and literacy learning in community-based organisations for young people in a situation of precarity in Québec

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the relations between the literacy practices used in two community-based organisations and those of the young people in a situation of precarity (aged 16 to 30) who attended their activities in Québec (Canada). These organisations supported them to find work, housing, return to education, improve their social relationships, and integrate in society, which I refer to as social and professional insertion. Drawing on the New Literacy Studies (NLS), in this study literacies are considered as social practices rather than technical skills. The thesis brings together NLS and francophone studies on literacy, and uses terms originating in French and which have no precise equivalents in English. Examples are 'rapport à l'écrit' and 'situation of precarity'.

The methodological approach is ethnographic, critical, and participatory. The study had two phases of data collection. In the first phase, the chosen techniques were participant observation and semi-structured interviews, and the second phase involved participatory workshops.

The findings indicate that the young people had extremely rich and complex literacy practices. The literacy practices used as part of the organisations' activities and workshops for young people were hybrid; combining school-related, digital and vernacular literacies with practices associated with counselling, work, social relationships, and relations with the state. Some young people whose education got interrupted reconciled themselves with education and school-related literacy through their participation at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. With the support of the youth workers, the young people were encouraged to learn by doing, a form of learning that can be identified as apprenticeship.

The literacy practices used in the organisations were not exclusively controlled by the research participants. Some sponsors of literacy (e.g. the state and institutions) were imposing various literacy demands they had to respond to. The youth workers acted as literacy mediators with regards to some of these. Literacy mediation at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* can be qualified as a form of 'powerful literacies' since it can offer an alternative to counter dominant literacies and it can support learning. A new term—literacy intermediates—is suggested to describe the kind of literacy mediation that the youth workers were doing.

KEYWORDS

young people, community-based organisations, precarity, Quebec, New Literacy Studies; ethnographic approach, participatory approach, apprenticeship, literacy artefacts, digital literacies, literacy mediation, sponsors of literacy

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1 INTRODUCTION

This first chapter presents the key elements essential to the understanding of this study. I first present the background to my thesis, giving the reasons why I decided to conduct this doctoral study. I explain the various experiences that brought me to do a PhD. Then I offer a portrait of the particular social context in which my study was situated.

The major part of this chapter is dedicated to the three central elements of my study: young people in a situation of precarity, community-based organisations, and literacy studies in Québec. I introduce a few terms originating from French which have no precise equivalents in English: precarity, to be in a situation of precarity, social and professional insertion, social animation, conflictual cooperation, and *rapport à l'écrit*. I selected these because they are useful to explain abstract phenomena which English terms cannot fully explain. The young people participating in my study were aged 16 to 30 in 2012 and were attending activities in two community-based organisations supporting them to find work, housing, return to education, improve their social relationships, and integrate in society, which I refer to as social and professional insertion. The word professional here is used to refer to any kind of jobs and not only to highly qualified employments as it is often used in British English. In this chapter, I introduce the term 'precarity' since it allows me to describe the situations that my participants were experiencing in their everyday lives (Section 1.3). I use the term 'a situation of precarity' in its singular from since it is the closer translation to '*en situation de précarité*' in French that signifies in English any or all the multiple situations of precarity that can be experienced by people. The term 'precarity' is also closely related to 'insertion' as it has been used in France and in Québec (see Section 1.3.3). The term insertion covers a different network of phenomena than other words

used in English such as inclusion, and integration. This then leads me to present briefly community-based organisations, in particular those which offer social and professional insertion workshops to young people (Section 1.4). This includes an overview of the values that these organisations tend to adopt. After that, I introduce a few studies that were conducted in Québec which looked at literacy in community-based organisations. Two particularly influential French authors—Bernard Lahire and Jean-Marie Besse—are also briefly introduced in Section 1.5. Their work has had a significant influence on the way research about literacy is conducted in Québec and also on my own doctoral study.

After identifying the scientific and social relevance of my study, I present the main research objective and the four specific questions of my study in Section 1.7. This is then followed by a description of the thesis' structure (Section 1.8).

1.1   Background to my thesis

As part of my undergraduate studies in guidance counselling (in the United Kingdom (UK) this is called careers advising) at the *Université de Sherbrooke* (Québec, Canada), I did an internship in a community-based organisation offering individual and group activities to young people aged 16 to 35. I became involved in the design and running of social and professional workshops which were offered to young people in a situation of precarity (e.g. unemployed, not in education, receiving financial benefits from the state, and possibly also experiencing personal difficulties). This experience was crucial for my own professional development as I observed phenomena that I could not explain from what I had learned at university. One of these phenomena was specifically related to literacy (reading, writing, texts). These young people's reactions towards reading and writing were variable. Some activities

involving literacy were rejected by the participants, but others were received with interest and enthusiasm. This made me wonder about the place of literacy in the lives of these young people and the ways in which we could make use of it in youth work and guidance counselling.

While I was doing this internship, I also started working as a resource centre assistant at the *Équipe de recherche sur les transitions et l'apprentissage* [Research team on transitions and learning] (now a centre, see below). This was my first encounter with academia. I was arranging books and articles on bookshelves and increasingly found them interesting and relevant to the questions that emerged from my internship. This employment also allowed me to discuss ideas with staff and postgraduate students also working for that research team. Building on these experiences, I decided to pursue my studies and instead of doing a vocational master's degree that would give me the professional title of guidance counsellor; I decided to do a research-based master's degree.

Following my readings of empirical studies (see Section 1.5) about young people in a situation of precarity, I realised that little was known about the place of literacy in their everyday lives. There was a need to learn more about it, notably in order to inform practitioners and stakeholders. Previous work (Bélisle, 2003; 2007) suggested that there was a widespread belief amongst some employees of community-based organisations, and to a certain extent amongst the population in general, that young people in a situation of precarity do not like to read and write and do not engage in many personal literacy practices. Yet, this did not correspond to what I had observed during my internship. I then decided to explore this question further.

My master's thesis was part of a longitudinal study at the *Centre d'études et de recherches sur les transitions et l'apprentissage* (henceforth *CÉRTA*) [Centre of

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studies and research on transitions and learning]. This study looked at young people who were attending social and professional insertion programmes in community-based organisations called *Carrefours Jeunesse-emploi* (henceforth *CJE,* see Glossary in Appendix A) and at the transitions they were going through in their lives. My master's thesis (Thériault, 2008) focused on the literacy practices these young people use in their everyday lives. In my study I found that literacy often played a central role during important events in their lives (e.g. breaking-up of a relationship, losing a loved one, moving to another city, etc.) (Thériault, 2008). Also, the data suggested that the various support groups the young people attended in community-based organisations had a positive influence not only on their lives, but also their literacy practices. Some young people in my master's study mentioned having learned new literacy practices in these group activities (e.g. keeping personal diaries, reading and writing to improve self-awareness, reading and writing spiritual and religious texts). The idea of exploring further the relationship between the literacies used in group activities and young people's own practices started to emerge.

In parallel to my master's degree I continued being involved as a volunteer in a community-based organisation working with young people. I was a member of the administration board of a *CJE,* and also a volunteer for special events. These experiences allowed me to refine my understanding of the community-based milieu in Québec and its links with the state.

From autumn 2008 until summer 2011, I worked as a research associate at the *CÉRTA*. In 2008-2009, I was employed as a researcher on a project evaluating the Innovation, Development, Exploration and Orientation (IDEO 16-17) measure. This measure supports 16- and 17- year olds 'at risk of dropping out of school' or those who have already dropped out of education and who are in a situation of precarity

(Yergeau, et. al. 2009). From 2009 until 2011, I coordinated the project *Évaluation réaliste du Programme d'aide pour favoriser le retour en formation des 16-24 ans* [Evaluation of the programme to promote the return to education of people between the ages of 16 and 24] (Bourdon et al., 2011). Over these three years, I interviewed a vast number of young people in a situation of precarity and stakeholders in the community-based and adult education milieus across the Province of Québec. I visited community-based organisations in urban, semi-urban, and rural contexts. Some young people I met were from immigrant backgrounds. The majority were Francophone, but I also met young people from Anglophone backgrounds. I gained a deeper understanding of youth in Québec and its plural realities. Even though literacy was not the object of study of these evaluative studies, I could not help noticing the importance of reading, writing and of texts in these organisations. Some youth workers talked about the difficulties they were experiencing with some young people regarding reading and writing. Literacy was apparently a concern for some youth workers. They did not know how to use it in their work with young people. My experience as a research associate confirmed my choice of topic for my doctoral studies.

1.2   Context of the study

My doctoral study was conducted at a time of political and social turmoil in Québec. From February to September 2012, student associations across Québec protested against the rise in tuition fees at university. This vast protest movement was prompted by the decision of the government to increase tuition fees by 75% over five years starting in 2012. The protests lasted 134 days; 'one of the greatest social crises that Québec has known over the last 60 years' (Dufour and Savoie, 2014: 478 [My

translation, original in French]). It was named by the people involved, but mostly by the media '*le Printemps Érable*' (Maple Spring) echoing the 2011 uprisings in the Arab world (Sorochan, 2012). Young people were everywhere on the media (traditional and digital ones). The movement was characterised by a red square that supporters of the protests attached to their clothes with a safety pin (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2013). Asselin (2012) notes that 'those supporting the fees increase started wearing green squares; those supporting a moderate increase, an orange square; those supporting a moratorium, a white square, etc.' It seemed that the full colour wheel was covered. But of course, youth in Québec cannot only be defined by the green, orange, and red colours, and some groups of young people seemed excluded by this debate, or perhaps felt unconnected to it. In this thesis I talk about these other youth. The young people aged 16 to 30 whose education got interrupted, who received financial support from the government through the social assistance programme, had a low level of formal education (for the majority), and were experiencing a situation of precarity that affected various aspects of their lives (work, education, accommodation, social relationships, health, etc.).

The period from 16 to 30 years-old is considered crucial by researchers in Québec (see Charbonneau, 2004; Bélisle et al., 2011). It was traditionally the age of the transition from school to working life, and towards adulthood. Yet, this traditional pathway to adulthood seems to have undergone major changes since the 1980s (Charbonneau, 2004). In Québec young people might interrupt their studies, and return to education a few years later, they might also move out of their parents' house and have to go back for various reasons such as financial difficulties or divorce (Charbonneau, 2004; 2006). Bélisle et al. (2011) have identified some landmarks in young people' lives in Québec. They first note that until the age of 16 secondary education is compulsory

(*Gouvernement du Québec*, 2015a) (an overview of the education system in Québec is available in Appendix B). This means that a person aged 16 can decide to leave school and could for instance decide to work or attend an adult education centre. At 16, young people can also obtain their driving licence and buy a car. Considering the vast territory of the Province of Québec this might be an important element of young people's social and professional lives (Charbonneau, 2004; Fortin and Després, 2008). The legal age of majority in Québec is 18 years old. At this age, young people can buy alcohol and frequent clubs and bars. It is also at 18 that young people can make their first request to the social assistance programme (*Programme d'assistance sociale*) of the Québec Government (see Glossary in Appendix A).

Considerable debates about youth and youth rights were taking place at the time of my study. The high 'school dropouts' rate was an important concern across Québec. The province had the highest dropout rate in Canada in 2012 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015). In relation to this issue, it was suggested that the age for compulsory schooling should be increased to 18 years old in Québec (CSE, 2012). The number of young people aged between 16 to 24 attending courses at an adult education centre considerably increased since the 1980s (Bourdon, 2001; CSE, 2008; Rousseau et al., 2010). Adult education centres were traditionally targeted to adult learners, but they had to completely rethink their services and ways of teaching with regards to young people. Another important issue was the high rate of car accidents involving young people. It was suggested that the age to get a licence should be increased or that a curfew should be applied to young drivers (*Conseil permanent de la jeunesse*, 2007). None of the suggestions mentioned above had been put into practice at the beginning of my PhD in 2011. Yet, they informed the 'narratives' (Hamilton, 2012) that were present about young people at the time of my study.

Hamilton (2012: 1-2) uses the term 'narrative' to refer to how people 'imagine', 'think about' and tell themselves 'stories' about literacy. She also explains that

> […] narratives are also tightly integrated with others in adjacent areas of social life such as education practice, citizenship, poverty and with ethnocentric views of culture that compound their hold over our imagination and ways of thinking. This is what Charles Taylor (2007) refers to as the 'social imaginary': an implicit map of social place which forms a horizon we are virtually incapable of thinking beyond. (ibid.: 3)

I use the term 'narrative' as defined by Hamilton in my doctoral study. It is particularly interesting for me to consider how narratives about youth, school dropouts, precarity (see Section 1.3), and literacy intertwine. The political narratives in Québec about school dropouts made quite strong assumptions about young people and their problems. These narratives present these young people as being more likely to earn less money, having a higher probability of being unemployed or incarcerated, having a reduced life expectancy, being more at risk of experiencing exclusion and marginality, being less active citizens, having poor self-esteem and being less likely to stimulate an interest in education in their children (CRÉVALE; 2012). This presents a deficit view of young people. The focus of public policies has tended to be on the prevention of school dropouts and not so much on helping young people who had already broken off their studies (Bourdon et al., 2011).

1.3   Young people and precarity

How can we talk about young people whose education has been interrupted and/or who live in a situation of precarity without falling into a deficit view that is close to

exaggeration or even sensationalism? The other risk is to adopt an over optimistic perspective on their lives, ignoring the challenges they are facing and the support they (should) receive. So, an important question is how to refer to these young people? Many terms are used to refer to the young people attending professional and social insertion workshops in community-based organisations: disadvantaged, vulnerable, marginalised, from poor socio-economic backgrounds, and so on. The term precarity (*précarité*) is also widely used in Québec to talk about these young people. The way the term precarity is used in Québec draws on its uses in France.

1.3.1   Origins and meaning of the term precarity

The term precarity is central to this thesis. According to Barbier (2005) the use of this term rather than precariousness in English academic literature is relatively novel, and derives from the way the term *précarité* has been used in France. A considerable amount of literature has endeavoured to define the term and explain its origins (amongst others: Nicole-Dracourt, 1992; Barbier, 2002; 2005; Eckert, 2010; Cingolani, 2011; Bresson, 2013). Precarity has a plurality of meanings and a broad scope of usage. It is impossible to find one unequivocal definition of the term.

Precarity can be associated with vulnerability, fragility, poverty, exclusion, marginality, persistent poverty, and unemployment (Barbier, 2002). Yet, two terms—uncertainty and insecurity—seem to describe the essence of what precarity means. It is generally seen as something negative and is used to denounce the effects of neo-liberal economies at various levels of society and people's lives (Bresson, 2011). Barbier (2002) identifies four main meanings of the term, which he relates to 1) social conditions; 2) employment forms 3) 'state categories'; and 4) society in general.

In the 1970s the term precarity was closely related to poverty (Barbier, 2005). Pitrou's analysis (1978) of families from poor socio-economic backgrounds highlighted their precarious social conditions. She uses the adjective *précaires* (precarious) to describe their health, education or training, employment, accommodation, children and family context, conjugal relationships, and social ties. Barbier (2005) notes that mass unemployment was not yet a common phenomenon at the time Pitrou conducted her study, and this might explain why employment is only considered one amongst other aspects of families' lives.

From the end of the 1970s the term was used to refer to new forms of employment originating from the move towards greater flexibility in employment and managerial strategies associated with neoliberalism (Barbier, 2002). The term neoliberalism refers here to economies that put emphasis on competition, individual responsibility, self-improvement, free market, and a general disengagement of the state with regards to social structures (Apple, 2004; Kipnis, 2009). The notion of precarious employment (*emploi précaire*) started being used to refer to part-time jobs, temporary jobs, and other 'atypical' types of jobs (Barbier, 2002, 7). Paugan (2000; 2003) adds to this that precarity needs to be understood not only from an 'objective' point of view but also from the subjective perspective of the people experiencing it.

In the 1980s, *précarité* started to be used and measured by the state to define certain categories of employment (Barbier, 2002); it thus became an institutional term. Barbier (2002) explains how the term precarity permeated the discourses of the media and the state in France.

From the end of the 1990s some authors (for instance, Boltanski and Chiappello, 2005) have used the term precarity to characterise society in general. For these authors, the neoliberal economy affects the whole society, and therefore a general

process of precarisation (*précarisation*) affecting everybody is going on (Barbier, 2002; Waite, 2009). Waite (2009: 426) explains this as 'generalised societal malaise'. According to Bourdieu (1998: 96), even though not everybody is directly affected by precarity, everybody's 'consciousness is haunted' by its possibility and, as a consequence, this makes people feel that having a job is a privilege even if the working conditions are poor and deplorable.

1.3.2   *Precarity and young people in Québec*

With regards to young people, in Québec the term precarity has been generally associated with their 'professional insertion'. It was widely used during the employment crisis of the 1970s and 1980s to talk about the difficulties young people encountered in finding their first employment (Gauthier 2011). It was later used in relation to the changing nature of the job market, which led to young people being more likely to have part-time jobs or short-term contracts (Gauthier 2011). Youth are seen here as a homogenous group, and the difficulties they experience are lumped together without distinction (ibid.).

Precarity seems to be something uniquely concerned with the economy and employment. As Gauthier (2011: 4) puts it, this focus on economy and employment

> can distract from the 'real' precarity, it has certainly something to do
>
> with employment, especially with regard to employability, but also
>
> calls for other support measures which are not always directly related
>
> to the job market. [Original in French, my translation]

I agree with Gauthier and in this thesis based on the experiences of the young people I worked with I understand precarity as something that also affects other aspects of life

and not only employment. Other aspects that can potentially be experienced as precarity are: housing conditions, family relationships, social relationships, mental and physical health, education; drug and alcohol consumption, and legal and criminal issues.

1.3.3 Precarity and insertion

Barbier (2002) indicates that the term precarity in France has often been associated with 'insertion'. I would suggest that this is also the case in Québec. Three usages of the term insertion have been identified by Barbier and Théret (2001). The first relates to the social services offered to specific groups identified as socially excluded, to help 'them to use their social rights, socialising them through health and housing counselling, access to benefits and so on, but also counselling, training and employment schemes explicitly linked to the labour market' (2001: 158). The second use directly concerns employment and is generally understood as the transition from school to work. The third use is specifically related to public policies. Drawing on Castel (1995) Barbier and Théret (2001) claim that the state has a role to play in assuring a smooth transition between different periods of life (158). In this doctoral study, I use the term insertion to refer mostly to the first and third meanings identified by Barbier and Théret (2001). More specifically, in Québec, the expression 'social and professional insertion' (*insertion sociale et professionelle*) is used to describe the work of community-based organisations and programmes attended by young people whose education has been interrupted, and who are beneficiaries of financial support from the government through the social assistance programme (see Yergeau et al., 2009). Insertion here refers to more than insertion into the labour market, it also implies social inclusion, and in some cases empowerment (see Section 1.4.1).

1.3.4   Towards a comprehensive approach to precarity

I agree with Waite (2009) that the term precarity is more useful when applied to a specific group of people than to society in general. This observation relates to what other authors have claimed (Barbier 2005; Gauthier 2011) about the effects that neoliberalism has on specific groups of people more than others. According to Barbier (2002; 2005) and Eckert (2010) the groups that are generally more affected are women, immigrants, young people, older workers, and people with disabilities. This implies that particular individuals with such characteristics may experience precarity. It is also the case of people living in specific neighbourhoods described as 'dangerous' and 'poor'. This geographical characteristic might also play a role in the way some individuals experience employment difficulties (see, e.g., Bresson, 2013 for an overview of the question). It is easy though to develop a narrative of victimisation and blame (Smyth and Wringley 2013) concerning people experiencing precarity. Labelling these groups of people is not useful (Waite, 2009; Bresson, 2013). This is why it is important to take account of the 'external forces' (Smyth and Wringley, 2013) over which people have limited power and which can lead to precarity.

In Québec, the term 'situation of precarity' (*situation de précarité*) is also used especially to refer to young people's lives (see Bourdon and Bélisle, 2008). Similarly to the term 'precarity', 'situation of precarity' is rarely defined. In order to interpret it, I found inspiration in Bonvin's article (2011) in which he suggests using Amartya Sen's capability approach to address employment precarity. Bonvin explains that precarity has to be considered as a multidimensional phenomenon in order to understand the actual opportunities of people with regards to employment. I would like to apply this idea of a multidimensional perspective on precarity to the social conditions of people, not solely to employment precarity.

In this perspective, the focus is not only on employment but also looks at 1) the interactions between 'opportunity structures' (McInerney and Smyth, 2014) and public policies, 2) the individual characteristics and particular events in the lives of people, and 3) the political, economic and historical context. The amalgam of these three dimensions allows for a better understanding of precarity. With this perspective it is possible to explain how people with individual characteristics, from certain neighbourhoods, which put them 'at risk' of precarity, manage to avoid it. I would like to emphasise the idea of 'situation of precarity', to highlight the fact that precarity is situational, and can change over time and in relation to the evolution of the three dimensions mentioned before.

Waite (2009) comments on the political potential that is implied by the term precarity. She gives examples of the large social movements which arose in Western Europe in the 2000s in opposition to neoliberalism. Yet, I argue that this resistance and its political aspects can also be observed at a much smaller scale in the services of community-based organisations which specifically work at improving the everyday lives of people in a situation of precarity.

1.4   Community-based organisations in Québec

This section gives a brief overview of the development of the community-based movement and organisations for youth in Québec from the first half of the 20th century until today. This historical overview is followed by a description of the values and approaches that characterise community-based organisations today. In order to facilitate the understanding of this section, I separated this historical portrait into six time periods. I am using the term 'community-based organisations' as a translation for the term '*organismes communautaires*' that is used in Québec.

The first period spans the first half of the twentieth century and was characterised by a rapid growth of youth organisations, particularly charities and associations affiliated with the Catholic Church. At that time, the State was not involved in social policies (Tremblay, 1992, in Comeau and Favreau, 2007: 22). This period was characterised by religious and political conservatism in Québec (Lavoie and Panet-Raymond, 2011).

The second period (early 1960s) was marked by what is called the 'Quiet Revolution' in Québec (ibid.). This revolution was a social movement of secularisation and modernisation. At the State level, this period was characterised by the expansion of different government structures. For the community-based movement, this period was also marked by the emergence of what is called *animation sociale* [social animation] that consisted in the organisation of activities at a community level. Social animation is party covered by the term activism in English but it has more to do with making everyday life better for a given community by strengthening the social relationships within it. Duval and her colleagues (2005:10) claim that social animation aims to ensure the participation of all citizens in the redefinition of Québec society, particularly giving voice to people in a situation of precarity.

The third period, encompassing mid-1960s and early 1970s, was characterised by the emergence of various advocacy and activism movements in Québec. This period was also marked by a conflictual relationship between the community-based movement and the State (René et al., 2001; Duval et al., 2005). This signifies that some community-based organisations or associations were critical of the state (Lavoie and Panet-Raymond, 2011). This period was affected by the economic slowdown of 1973-1974 in Québec (Comeau and Favreau, 2007). At that time, new organisations emerged based on specific group identities and characteristics: young people, women, LGBT, etc. (René et al., 2001). The state struggled financially due to the recession and

the social issues that came with it (Comeau and Favreau, 2007). At the community level, it was during the 1970s that *maisons de jeunes* [youth community centres] started being established around Québec. They represent well the trend of the time aiming at 'the creation of links and places of belonging' in the community-based milieu (Duval, et. al, 2005: 11).

From the 1980s, in the fourth period, community-based organisations began to work in partnership with various social actors: private organisations, governmental institutions, unions, and other community-based organisations (René et al., 2001). Québec was again shaken by an economic crisis (1980-1982) and new political discourses oriented towards partnership and limited state intervention were strongly influenced by this economic situation (Lavoie and Panet-Raymond, 2011). Young people and other economically vulnerable groups were particularly affected by this recession (ibid.). Youth employability was a big concern and organisations dedicated to this issue emerged, notably the *CJE* that were funded by the state and established around the Province of Québec (Assogba, 2000; Comeau and Favreau, 2007).

For Lavoie and Panet-Raymond (2011: 40), in the fifth period, starting in the 1990s, Québec State switched from a Welfare-State (*État-providence*) model to a Partner State one (*État partenaire*). According to the same authors, the community-based organisations received official recognition and from that point on began to be more integrated in public policies (ibid.: 42) and to receive public funding. However, Duval and her colleagues (2005) claim that this led community-based organisations to adopt a paradoxical position of *coopération conflictuelle* (conflictual cooperation) strategies that implied 'the possibility of making alliances with institutional partners while maintaining and improving the ability for advocacy and mobilisation outside of formal settings' (Duval et al., 2005: 23[Original in French, my translation]). The economic

situation was still difficult (recession of 1990-1991), and the community-based organisations were adopting approaches addressing specific social issues (ibid.) (for instance, young people in a situation of precarity). Community-based organisations were also increasingly involved in employability measures notably because of a reform of the social assistance programme (1998) in Québec. As a result of that reform, young people aged 18 to 24 who were receiving benefits had to enrol in compulsory courses on social and professional integration (e.g. *Projet Solidarité jeunesse*, and later *Programme Alternative Jeunesse*, see Glossary in Appendix A) (Lavoie and Panet-Raymond, 2011: 42).

The sixth period, starting around the 2000s, was marked by an upsurge of neoliberalism in the Québec State administration and its relationships with community-based organisations and other partners (Lavoie and Panet-Raymond, 2011; Savard and Proulx, 2012). This approach also shaped youth measures and programs, and corresponds to what Bélisle and her colleagues (2011) called 'open programming'. This means that programmes and measures are designed to be flexible, grounded in a community's needs and involving different partners such as community-based organisations, schools, businesses, and public health services (ibid.). Lavoie and Panet-Raymond (2011) also explain that community-based organisations have to participate in various consultative committees. This new way of working collaboratively is not without its difficulties, as misunderstandings of each other's roles and distrust can be observed (Yergeau et al., 2009). However, many social actors share a common concern, namely that young people who have interrupted their education, should keep learning even if they have prematurely left school, hence the large number of social programmes aimed at this group of people (*Gouvernement du Québec*, 2002a; 2002b; Bourdon et al. 2011; Thériault and Bélisle,

2012). This sixth and last period corresponds roughly to the broader political context in which I conducted my doctoral study.

1.4.1 Community-Based Organisations' Values

According to Savard (2007), and Lavoie and Panet-Raymond (2011), 'community action' in Québec—in which they include the work of community-based organisations—has five main values. These values are: social justice, solidarity, democracy, autonomy (empowerment), and respect. These values are at the core of community-based organisations' missions and influence the practices of their employees.

Based on my literature review, two values seem to be central and occur right across the work of all community-based organisations whether working with young people in Québec or not: social justice (Lavoie and Panet-Raymond, 2011) and empowerment (autonomy) (Duval et al., 2005; Fréchette, 2007; Lavoie and Panet-Raymond, 2011). These two values need to be defined in relation to how they are used and understood in Québec. They are also strongly related to each other.

Social justice is seen as the foundation of community-based organisations (Lavoie and Panet-Raymond, 2011). According to Ninacs (1994),

> the concept of social justice implies the suppression of all forms of exploitation, oppression, and discrimination. Social justice is then, to all intents and purposes, the foundation on which stand all the characteristics of community-based work, its global approach, its egalitarian vision of the relationships between social workers and participants, its opposition towards

services as an end in themselves, and its distinctive way of exercising power.

[Original in French, my translation] (Lavoie and Panet-Raymond, 2011: 76)

Empowerment is central for many community-based organisations, especially those working with young people such as the *CJE* (Thériault and Bélisle, 2013). Duval et al. (2005: 38) associate the concept of empowerment with the feminist and anti-racist movements that sought social justice. They also note that the origins of this concept can be found in the educational work of Paolo Freire and the view that education can give more freedom and power to people from non-privileged backgrounds. In Québec, the work of William A. Ninacs was particularly influential in relation to the concept since he wrote about it in French and adapted it to the context of community work. According to Ninacs (2008: 15), empowerment starts from the premise that individuals, communities and organisations have the right to take part in the decisions that concern them. It also implies that the individuals or groups already have the competencies to do this, if not the potential to develop them. Within an empowerment approach, Fréchette (2007: 124) mentions that social change is not only the individual's responsibility, but also that of the community network and institutions working with these people.

It is important to explain here that in this study the term empowerment is not only used in the sense of individual self-development (Wildemeersch and Salling Olesen, 2012). I use it in the tradition developed in Québec that emphasises the solidarity and the power of community groups over powerful social structures such as institutions, politics, and economy (Lavoie and Panet-Raymond, 2011). Community-based organisations and their employees can support individuals, communities and community groups in their pursuit of empowerment, but they are the only ones who can really empower themselves. In relation to literacy, it is important to mention that it

is not because people learn how to read and write that they automatically become empowered. In this view, literacy cannot be seen solely as a tool that can be used by individuals to get empowered. In order to change, contest, or appeal to these powerful structures, people have to understand how they function, what kind of narratives they have, how they communicate, and all of that is generally mediated by text. I will come back to this in Section 2.4, and Chapters 9 and 10.

1.5   Literacy studies in Québec

In this section, I offer a brief overview of studies that looked at literacy in community-based organisations in Québec. I present four studies which have looked at literacy in community-based organisations working with young people in a situation of precarity in Québec. I focus in this section on studies conducted in Québec because they influenced my decision to use this topic for my PhD. Other studies conducted in other countries are presented in the following chapters and complete my literature review of the field. In this section, I also briefly present the work of two influential French authors. This is important in order to fully understand how literacy has been understood and studied in Québec by academics. These two authors are Bernard Lahire and Jean-Marie Besse. Both have influenced my approach to literacy.

Lahire studied the everyday literacy practices of French families and factory workers (see Lahire, 1993). In another study, he also looked at parents' influence on the literacy learning of primary school children (see Lahire, 1995). He was particularly interested in understanding how the values associated with literacy were transmitted from parents to children.

Lahire (2011) argues for a plural conceptualisation of social actors rather than a single conception of them. Different social contexts call for different habits and 'objectification means' (e.g. writing). Lahire (as reported in Bélisle, 2006a: 63) is critical of the large scale literacy surveys and tests that claim to determine who can or cannot read and write. He argues that these tests do not reflect the social actor's plural relationships with literacy (ibid.). This means that people might engage with literacy practices differently depending on the context. According to Lahire, these tests put the focus on what people cannot do instead of highlighting their competencies with literacy. He explains that the 'discourses' around illiteracy and alphabetisation are negative and contribute to stigmatising people who are not at ease with reading and writing. Lahire's view of literacy is similar to the one I decided to adopt in this doctoral study (see Section 2.1.1).

Jean-Marie Besse (1995) wrote about young children who learn to read and write, but also adults who attend literacy classes. Besse is also critical of literacy surveys and tests. Besse (1995) suggests that it is more useful to look at how learners organise their resources rather than focusing on their lack of skills. He proposes to pay more attention to the process by which people appropriate literacy (*appropriation de l'écrit*). He claims that literacy is never definitively 'acquired', but is rather appropriated over time and in a dynamic way. Besse (1995: 88) explains that it is a process that starts before school, changes with school, and continues to change with personal, professional, cultural, social activities, and with the changing literacy demands of society. Besse talks about the *rapport à l'écrit* [relationship with literacy] to describe the outcome of this dynamic process of appropriation. He identifies three main dimensions to it: affective, social, and cognitive. The affective dimension refers to a person's attitudes and emotions towards reading and writing. Besse explains that

in the case of adult learners this dimension could be shaped by their doubts, memories of failure, and feelings of being constantly evaluated. The social or relational dimension refers to the place of literacy in a person's everyday life, social context, and interaction with others. The cognitive dimension is related to the knowledge, strategies, abilities, memorisation, and understanding of the rules of writing a person has. These three dimensions are in constant interrelation.

The idea of plurality—as suggested by Lahire (2011)—is also central to Rachel Bélisle's work (2003, 2004, 2006b). She draws on Lahire to explore the plurality of *rapports à l'écrit* (Besse, 1995) of youth workers in community-based organisations working with young people with low levels of formal education. Following Lahire's work, Bélisle (2006b) also argues for a broader consideration of literacy which would not solely focus on school tests, statistics, and ranking. Bélisle (2003; 2004; 2006b) conducted a multi-sited ethnographic study in six community-based organisations situated in four different areas of Québec from 1998 to 2001. She observed various projects including four organisations supporting young people's social and professional insertion. The young people participating in Bélisle's study were aged 16 to 29. Bélisle (2003: 166) argues that literacy is 'omnipresent' in the community-based organisations she observed. She adopts a broad definition of the term literacy that includes any visible written signs (clothes, artefacts, walls, documents, etc.) or mention of literacy. This means that Bélisle considers as literacy any texts that could potentially be present in the organisations or during activities. Some texts might play an important role during these activities, but others might only be present in the environment. She also took into consideration the texts which are not physically present but were mentioned by her research participants.

Despite the omnipresence of literacy, she claims that 'literacy raises ambivalence amongst several [youth workers], who claim that 'there is a lot of paper' and that participants in the training projects 'do not like to read and write'' (Bélisle, 2006b: 157, [Original in French, my translation]). Consequently, youth workers might hesitate to use literacy or avoid it in their work with young people experiencing a situation of precarity. For instance, some youth workers might decide not to offer some activities which require reading and writing (e.g. writing a cover letter for a job application). Bélisle (2004:173) also explains that they might modify some activities requiring literacy and offer, for example, to read a document aloud to participants instead of asking them to read it individually, which might be a difficult task for them. Bélisle (2003) also points out that literacy is often an invisible aspect of the intervention, and that some employees of community-based organisations are using it without necessarily having reflected upon it. Bélisle's findings (2003, 2004, 2006b) are particularly important for my doctoral study, especially the omnipresence of literacy in community-based organisations and the relative ambivalence of youth workers vis-a-vis literacies.

The concept of *rapport à l'écrit* has been influential in studies conducted in Québec. I already mentioned Bélisle's study conducted in community-based organisations working with young people, but other studies have also used this concept, for example Danielle Desmarais's (2003; 2006) joint study about a community-based organisation working on literacy—*Boîte à lettres de Longueuil* (*BÀL*). Desmarais and the BÀL conducted a 'research-action-training' with young people (average age of 18) enrolled in a literacy programme. They adopted a biographical approach to understand the young people's *rapports à l'écrit* and the processes by which they develop literacy (*appropriation de l'écrit*) throughout their lives (Desmarais, 2006: 116). They found

out that the young people interviewed had very difficult and disrupted relationships with their families and with schools. Some young people interviewed in Desmarais and the BÀL's study (2003) stated that they had experienced, or were experiencing, a sense of shame and inferiority regarding their schooling. This study is also useful with regard to my own doctoral work since it highlights the importance of considering the 'biographical' aspect of people's relationship with literacy, that is to say how their attitudes towards literacy evolve over time. This is something that I also considered in my study.

Another study conducted in Québec also used this concept of *rapport à l'écrit*. Following the work of Bélisle (2003; 2004; 2006b), Marie Cardinal-Picard (2010) looked at the *rapport à l'écrit* of guidance counsellors (careers advisers) working in various community-based organisations working with adults and young people. From 2006 to 2008, six guidance counsellors were interviewed three times (ibid.). Bélisle and Cardinal-Picard (2012) also asked the counsellors to collect documents produced by the young people and adults who they met during individual counselling meetings. Cardinal-Picard and Bélisle (2009) note that guidance counsellors generally think of literacy as an impediment in their work. Yet, the findings of this study also indicate that it can contribute to the establishment of a good relationship between the counsellor and the participants. Cardinal-Picard (2010) also found that the counsellors' *rapports à l'écrit* had a direct effect on the way they were using reading and writing with their participants. For instance, counsellors who enjoy reading and writing and regularly engage with these kinds of activities in their everyday lives might draw more on activities involving literacy with participants. These activities could involve reading from a book, on a computer screen, or asking the participant to write during the meeting, etc. (ibid.). With regards to my doctoral study, Cardinal-

Picard's work (2010) is valuable since it indicates how practitioners' *rapport à l'écrit* can have an important effect on the way they use reading and writing with the people they are working with. This is an aspect that I will take into consideration in my analysis.

In continuity with Bélisle's work (2003, 2004, 2006b), my previous work (Thériault, 2008) focused on young people in a situation of precarity and the literacy practices they used in their everyday life. My master's thesis was part of a longitudinal study at the *CÉRTA*. This study looked at young people who were attending social and professional insertion programmes in *CJE* and at the transitions they went through in their lives. (Bourdon et al., 2008). During the first round of data collection, most of the 45 young people (aged 18 to 24) interviewed had already made their first application to the social assistance programme of the Québec Government. For my master's thesis, I only analysed the data from the first year which were collected between December 2006 and April 2007. For this work, I did not draw on Besse or Lahire but rather found inspiration in the New Literacy Studies perspective (this is explained in Section 2.1.1) (henceforth NLS). NLS usually adopts an ethnographic approach towards the study of literacy. Since I was not involved in the design of the wider research project, I was not able to collect observation data that would have allowed me to fully embrace the NLS perspective. Rather, I used Knud Illeris' learning framework (2007) to understand how literacy and learning were linked in the young people's lives, especially in relation to difficult events. Illeris' theory and Besse's concept of *rapport à l'écrit* share similarities. Illeris (2007) identifies three dimensions of learning: incentive, content, interaction. These three dimensions can be related to those identified by Besse (1995) in the *rapport à l'écrit*: affective, cognitive, and contextual. The use of Illeris' theory highlighted the importance of emotions and

of other people in young people's literacy practices and their learning. The majority of the young people interviewed (38 out of 45) reported having used literacy during important moments in their lives (e.g. the breaking-up of a relationship, losing a loved one, moving to another city, etc.) (Thériault, 2008). Young people mentioned for instance reading books or novels, writing in personal diaries, searching for answers on the Internet (ibid.). I found that young people participating in the study were using literacy in order to control their emotions, particularly their impulses towards anger and violence. I found that the various support groups young people attended in community-based organisations might positively influence their literacy practices (Thériault, 2008). However, in this study, I did not collect data allowing me to explore how the literacy practices used in the community-based organisations might relate to the young people's own literacy practices.

1.6   Implications for my study

My doctoral study is rooted in my personal experience as a youth worker, and a researcher on various research projects with young people in a situation of precarity. My observations and the interviews I conducted in numerous community-based organisations across the Province of Québec inspired my PhD study. These organisations were working for the social and professional insertion of young people and literacy was central to all their interventions. Yet, as suggested by previous work (Bélisle, 2003) there was a malaise regarding literacy in community-based organisations, especially when it was used with young people with a low level of formal education or in a situation of precarity. I adopted the term precarity in my study because of its political and critical implications. As Waite (2009) argues, it is important to look at the processes that create precarity. I also argue that it is equally

important to look at processes that can counter precarity as experienced by groups of people. As I will show in this thesis, literacy is often involved in the situations of precarity that young people might experience and this is why I am interested in the work of community-based organisations and their uses of literacy.

As mentioned above, a small number of previous studies have looked at literacy in community-based organisations in Québec. In the light of this short literature review, it seems that literacy is strongly present—in the practices of the employees and participants, but also physically in the premises—in community-based organisations. However, we do not know anything specific about this. Indeed, little is known about how the literacy practices used in community-based organisations relate to young people's own practices. The studies conducted in Québec (except Bélisle, 2003) all drew on interview data, often asking the participants to retrospectively reflect on their *rapports à l'écrit*. To address this gap, an ethnographic approach, which I have taken in my study, seems the most appropriate (further discussed in Chapter 3). A better understanding of the role of community-based organisations regarding literacy will help education specialists, teachers and youth workers to improve the continuity of services between schools and community and also to recognise the contribution of these organisations towards lifelong learning.

Regarding the academic study of literacy, I hope my research further contributes to the New Literacy Studies, since I apply its framework to new contexts, ie community-based organisations in Québec, and also make links with the work of Besse (1995) will allow me to further develop NLS theory. It also contributes to our understanding of the role that literacy can play in the lives of young people who are not in formal education. My study also contributes to the dialogue between the French and English traditions of studying literacy.

1.7   The research objective and questions

The main research objective is to understand the relations between the literacy practices used in community-based organisations and those of the young people in a situation of precarity who attend their activities.

The specific research questions are:

1) What are the kinds of literacy practices used by youth workers and young people in community-based organisations?

2) In what specific contexts do such literacy practices occur?

3) What potential roles could the literacy practices used in community-based organisations play in young people's personal and professional lives and with regard to their own literacy practices?

4) In what ways can the literacy practices used in these organisations potentially empower young people in a situation of precarity?

1.8   Structure of the thesis

My thesis is divided into eleven chapters. I decided to structure my thesis in an unconventional way—intertwining the theory, description, and analysis chapters—in an endeavour to make the thesis reader-friendly. I find this structure more logical as it supports the thread of my analysis.

The first chapter has provided information about the three key elements of my study: young people in a situation of precarity, community-based organisations, and literacy in Québec. The origins of the term precarity were also presented. I explained how it has been used in Québec, and how it relates to the community-based milieu.

In the second chapter I present the theoretical perspective I draw on. This perspective is called the New Literacy Studies (NLS). In that chapter, I present the key concepts related to the NLS and provide examples taken from empirical studies to explain them. These concepts are later mobilised in the descriptive and analysis chapters.

In chapter three, I provide a detailed overview of the methodology used for my study. My epistemological stance is explained. The two phases of data collection are introduced. I explain the methods used and data collected during each of these phases. I also describe how I carried out a content analysis of my data.

The fourth chapter includes all the relevant information about the community-based organisations, the youth workers, and the young people participating in my study. I explain why and how I selected them.

All the following chapters aim at answering the main research objective and the specific questions.

The fifth chapter presents young people's vernacular literacy practices. I explore literacy in different domains of the young people's lives. I also endeavour to retrace their *rapports à l'écrit* from a biographical point of view. This is also explored in relation to a literacy artefact that the young people selected and discussed with me. A special section is dedicated to digital literacies.

Chapter six focuses on the literacy practices present in the community-based organisations. I describe the way the youth workers and the young people were using literacy in the organisations. I also offer an overview of the semiotic landscape of the organisations—presenting the texts on the walls and discussing the narratives they imply about young people and youth work. I also offer a brief portrait of the youth workers' vernacular literacy practices and their effect on the literacy practices they use

in the organisations. This chapter ends with a discussion of the tensions and points of intersection between the young people's literacy practices and those of the youth workers and the community-based organisations.

Chapter seven includes a literature review about young people and digital literacy, and online counselling. Important terms are defined that support the analysis presented in the following chapter.

In chapter eight, I present my analysis of the role digital literacies play in the community-based organisations. I explore the different purposes that digital technologies have in youth workers' everyday work.

In Chapter nine, I define two important concepts for my study: literacy mediation, and sponsors of literacy. I offer examples of how these have been used in different studies, and discuss the potential links between these two concepts.

In chapter ten, I present my analysis of the data in relation to literacy mediation and literacy sponsorship. This chapter ends with a discussion based on my empirical data about how the concepts of literacy mediation and literacy sponsorship relate to each other in the context of my study. The use of these two concepts in my study allows me to explore questions of power, empowerment, precarity, and learning in relation to literacy.

Finally, chapter eleven is the conclusion of my thesis. At the outset I return to my research objective and questions, and present the core findings of the thesis. In that chapter, I also highlight the contributions of my study at five different levels: 1) context of the study, 2) methodological approach and methods, 3) clarification of concepts and proposition of a new one, 4) concrete implications for youth work, and 5) public narratives about young people and literacy.

2 LITERACY STUDIES

In this chapter I first present the perspective on literacy I selected for my study, the New Literacy Studies. I offer an overview of its origins and its stance vis-à-vis other views of literacy (e.g. autonomous, critical). I then introduce two central notions of the NLS: literacy events and literacy practices. I also present other concepts—dominant, vernacular, and powerful literacies—also associated with the NLS. I then introduce the concept of semiotic landscapes. This is followed by an overview of how the notion of learning has been used and understood in literacy studies. Finally, I present my own use of these concepts and explain how I articulate them in my study.

2.1 Perspectives on the study of literacy

According to NLS researchers, three perspectives on literacy are the most salient: social, autonomous, and critical. Different authors do not necessarily use the same terms, and researchers do not necessarily identify themselves as adopting a specific perspective, as noted by Street (2001). However, Street explains that it is useful to look at the different perspectives adopted to study literacy in order to 'fill the gap left by untheorised statements about literacy and to adopt a broader perspective than is apparent in any one writer' (2001: 432). These three perspectives have their roots in different disciplines and research traditions.

2.1.1 New Literacy Studies

The New Literacy Studies can be understood as the social view of literacy (Papen, 2005) or as the ideological model of literacy (Street, 1984; 1993, 2001). According to

Barton (2001), the NLS originated from dissatisfaction with purely cognitive conceptions of what reading and writing are. These 'over-simplistic psychological models' were particularly influential in schools (ibid.: 93). In their work, researchers associated with the NLS conducted studies in education settings but also in other contexts not associated with formal schooling.

For NLS researchers, literacy cannot be defined as the simple aptitude to read and write and needs to be understood in its socially and historically situated contexts. On this matter, Baynham and Prinsloo (2009: 2) explain that NLS researchers consider that

> literacy goings-on are always and already embedded in particular forms of activity; that one cannot define literacy or its uses in a vacuum; that reading and writing are studied in the context of social (cultural, historical, political and economic) practices of which they are a part and which operate in particular social spaces.

It is thus more useful to look at literacy in terms of what people do, as part of social interactions, as multimodal, as situated in contexts and as 'literacies' rather than 'literacy' (Street, 1984) (further explained in Section 2.1.2). Literacy should therefore be understood from the perspectives of the people using it and seen as situated in context.

The NLS is a research perspective developed by researchers from various disciplines—notably empirical psychology (Scribner and Cole, 1981), anthropology (Street, 1984), sociolinguistics and education (Heath, 1983). The first generation of NLS studies finely described the uses of literacy in diverse communities such as the Vai people in Liberia (Scribner and Cole, 1981), Iranian villagers (Street 1984) and families from three different communities in the South-Eastern United States (Heath,

1983). They used various methodologies, but were all drawing on observations and other ethnographic approaches. These studies have highlighted the importance of looking at literacy beyond a skills perspective and outside formal settings such as schools.

The second generation of NLS studies continued adopting an ethnographic approach. The landmark study by Barton and Hamilton (1998) conducted in a neighbourhood of Lancaster was a major contribution to the field. Based on their empirical work, they refined the definition of concepts such as literacy events and literacy practices (see Sections 2.2 and 2.3). Barton and Hamilton (1998) note that literacy is generally defined as the ability to read and write, but according to them literacy events (Section 2.2) often involve other modes such as spoken language but also signs, numbers, images, and so on. Therefore, literacy is much more than just reading and writing. People use an amalgam of modes while accomplishing tasks and making sense of their everyday lives.

Other studies from the second generation such as Baynham (1993), Besnier (1993), or the studies published in Prinsloo and Breier (1996) contributed to the exploration and development of new areas of literacy study such as literacy mediation, literacy and emotions, and the critical analysis of literacy policies. These studies highlighted the roles of other people in literacy practices; emphasising the social interactions around text and the delicate power issues that can occur in practices. Besnier's study (1993) also illustrated the close link between literacy (in this case writing) and emotions. The importance of emotions was not taken into consideration in more skill-oriented models of literacy, since skills and individual cognition were the main focus.

The NLS have evolved since their beginning. The NLS now cover a wide range of research interests such as health (Papen, 2009, 2012a; 2012b), workplaces (Tusting,

2009; 2010; Varey and Tusting, 2012), policy and narratives on literacy (Hamilton and Pitt, 2011; Hamilton, 2012), institutions such as prisons (Wilson, 2000), multimodality and spaces (Pahl and Rowsell, 2006), immigration, migration and transnational literacies (see for instance the volume of Linguistics and Education edited by Warriner (2007)), and the effects of globalisation on local practices (Jones, 2000a; 2000b; Papen 2007). The digital technologies and social media are also important research topics for NLS researchers (see notably Davies, 2006; Lee and Barton, 2009; Merchant et al., 2012; Barton and Lee, 2013; Burnett and Merchant, 2014). The digital technologies have enriched the study of literacies; revealing fast-changing, layered and complex contexts (see Section 2.2.2).

2.1.2   Autonomous model of literacy

The second perspective is what Street (1984; 1993, 2001) calls the autonomous model of literacy. According to him, literacy is conceptualised in this model as technical skills which are not bound to a social context. In other words, literacy is an 'autonomous variable' affecting society and its individuals (Street, 2001: 431). Street is particularly critical of authors such as Jack Goody, Walter J. Ong and David Olson and others who he links with the autonomous model. These authors are associated with the 'Great Divide' theory which distinguishes non-literate from literate societies by attributing characteristics to both of them (e.g. claiming more complex cognitive abilities in literate societies than in non-literate ones). The autonomous model of literacy is sometimes referred to as the skills view of literacy (Papen, 2005). According to Street (1984), the autonomous model emphasises one 'literacy' and therefore only one 'culture', overshadowing all the other literacies which are not recognised. What is generally considered as reading and writing in society is strongly

influenced by the autonomous model (Papen, 2015a). It is also strongly shaped by school and the expectations associated with this institution (Barton, 2001). Thus other ways of reading and writing not associated with schools but associated with other cultures and sub-cultures also present in society are not included in the term 'literacy' as used in the autonomous perspective. For instance, literacy practices in other languages, personal diaries, shopping lists, checklists, tattoos and so on, might not be included in the notion of Literacy 'with a large L and a small y' (Street, 2011: 582). The concept of literacies (plural form) is then more comprehensive and representative of the uses of literacy in everyday life and in different cultures and sub-cultures. Prinsloo (2013) explains that 'it is not helpful to think in terms of a single literacy when there is a remarkable diversity in the ways that people read and write for the performance of widely varying personal, social, and economic functions' (1). Crowther, Hamilton and Tett (2001) add to this that a skills oriented perspective emphasises a deficit view. This means that it highlights what people cannot do rather than what they can actually do with literacy. Barton and Hamilton (1998) argue that although literacy can generally be seen as a tool that people use to do things, it is in fact more complex than that because of its social nature and its central role in social relationships.

Collin (2013), in contrast, invites researchers to revisit Goody's work in order to understand how literacy can impact on society. According to him, researchers associated with a sociocultural approach to literacy have rejected Goody's view of literacy because it is associated with a perspective of technological determinism. That is to say that 'changes in literacy cause changes in culture, economics, politics, etc.' (ibid.: 28). Collin argues that socio-cultural approaches to literacy, on the contrary, tend to adopt a cultural determinism view that can be summarised as follow: 'literacy

is best understood as an expression of local culture' (28). However, Collin fails to suggest an innovative theoretical approach compatible with literacy studies which could balance between the two types of determinism. Also, it seems that his selection of sociocultural studies of literacy is limited, and his critique on the overemphasis on the local is not representative of the actual work in the field. I come back to this critique in Section 2.2, where I introduce a few authors who suggest ways of bridging the gap between the local and global contexts.

2.1.3   Critical literacy

The third perspective draws on the work of the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paolo Freire, and is generally referred to as critical literacy. This perspective on literacy aims at the empowerment and emancipation of people through literacy. One of Freire's book titles judiciously summarises this perspective: 'Literacy: Reading the Word and the World' (Freire and Macedo, 1987). Papen (2005) notes that this perspective started to gain popularity in the 70s and 80s, since policies and programmes based on a skills view of literacy were not reaching their expected aims. She explains that a Freirean approach to literacy 'includes having the ability to not only decode the literal meaning of texts, but to read behind the lines, and to engage in a critical discussion of the positions a text supports' (11).

For some authors close to the NLS, there are some important differences between the Freirean critical literacy perspective and the NLS. According to Rogers (1999: 225), the way literacy is taught in a Freirean perspective is decontextualised, that is to say it starts with syllables that are later brought together to form words. For Rogers (1999), this is not a method which corresponds to a NLS stance. Also, he argues that there is an ontological problem regarding oppression in Freire's critical pedagogy. Rogers

(Boughton, Rogers and Street, 2013) argues that in a Freirean perspective, researchers and practitioners start from the assumption that participants are oppressed. The NLS do not necessarily start from this assumption, but, rather, try to understand what people *do* with literacy; what their literacy practices are in context. Rogers (1999) notes that applied to literacy policies, a Freirean perspective can have ambiguous outcomes since what is seen as emancipatory literacy practices may not be the same for stakeholders and learners. Rogers's criticisms neglect the important contribution of the Freirean approach to literacy education, especially in developing countries. Despite the ontological problem mentioned above, educators working with a Freirean approach are working closely with the communities concerned and do care about the local needs. Hamilton, Barton and Ivanič (1992: 113) mention that

> Paulo Freire pointed out ways in which literacy can be seen as a form of power. Literacy that is imposed and learned for other people's purposes enslaves. Literacy that is self-generated and springs from people's own needs to communicate and act on the world can be empowering.

This quote illustrates one of the ideals pursued within the critical view of literacy. As I explain further in Chapter 9, Brandt (2001) argues that people's everyday literacy practices are rarely self-generated. It might not be fruitful to think that only self-generated practices are emancipatory. As I said in Chapter 1, literacies cannot be simply seen as tools that can be used to empower individuals. What really matters is for people to understand the narratives underlying powerful institutions and their texts. This can be better understood by adopting a social view of literacy.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I selected the NLS perspective on literacy for my study. In the following section, I explore other concepts that have been developed to explain what literacy means from a social point of view. For instance,

NLS researchers talk about literacy events and literacy practices. These concepts are the two main foci of research for NLS researchers.

2.2   Literacy events: from situatedness to transcontextuality

The concept of literacy events was first coined by Shirley Brice Heath in her seminal study 'Ways with Words' (Heath 1983). Drawing on Dell Hymes's notion of a speech event, Heath suggested the term literacy events in order to describe 'the occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies' (Heath, 1983: 50). Hymes' original concept of the speech event is used to describe 'activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules for the use of speech' (1967: 20). Heath (1983) explored bed time stories as literacy events, which highlighted the importance of 'talk around text' and therefore the multimodality involved in literacy events (Baynham, 2004). During bed time stories parents read a book to their child or children and potentially also talk about it with them. Baynham and Prinsloo (2009) explain that the notion of a literacy event, as proposed by Heath, considers that

> what counted in effective communication was not a generalized competence (e.g. being able to "speak English" or "code and decode letters") but a situated, communicative competence embedded in acquired, 'deep' cultural knowledge and learnt models of using situated language in specific ways. (3)

Indeed, Heath (1982) emphasises the importance of the community and its social rules which influence the social interactions and shared knowledge around literacy events. Heath compared three communities: a white working-class community (working in textile mills), a black working-class community (working in textile mills or farms) and

a middle-class mixed community. She found that at school the literacy events observed were more adapted to middle-class pupils' backgrounds. Even if all the communities were using a variety of literacy practices, those used in middle-class families were more socially valued and more prominently drawn on in schools.

The notion of literacy events was later taken up by Barton and Hamilton (1998). Based on their empirical data, they explain that literacy events are 'activities where literacy has a role' (7) and are generally repetitive and observable. For them, the literacy event is a useful notion since it allows researchers to talk about literacy as situated in a social context. Literacy events are a helpful 'starting-point for research into literacy' (ibid.: 7) since it may lead to a richer understanding of literacy practices (see below) and the role of social institutions, and power issues in relation to literacy.

Barton (2001) also mentions that in some situations literacy can be physically absent from a literacy event. He explains that 'the text can be central, as in the act of reading instructions from a manual; the text can be symbolic, as when swearing on the Bible; and the text can be implicit, as when talking about texts which are not present' (ibid.: 99). For example, this last situation could be a conversation amongst friends about an article shared on Facebook a few days earlier. It could also be a discussion between a lecturer and her students about an essay to be written.

The literacy event is probably the most criticised notion of the NLS. Many researchers (see, amongst others, Brandt and Clinton, 2002; Kell, 2006; 2011; Burnett and Merchant, 2014) have questioned its usefulness. Literacy events have been criticised for different reasons, including the difficulties of drawing clear boundaries around events and contexts. They have been criticised for limiting the analysis to a local context, and therefore neglecting more distant aspects of literacy practices. Critics say it does not allow researchers to account for the translocal movements (horizontal

moves) and the material nature of literacy (literacy as object or artefact). These issues are explored in the following sections.

2.2.1 *The moves of literacies across contexts*

Drawing on the work on Bruno Latour (1993), Brandt and Clinton (2002) take a critical look at the social view of literacy, what they call 'the social practice model of literacy' (337). According to them, the NLS—by rejecting strongly the skills view of literacy—have also rejected the idea of literacy as an object. Brandt and Clinton (2002: 339) claim that they 'seek to rehabilitate certain "autonomous" aspects of literacy without appealing to repudiated "autonomous models" of literacy'. Adopting an Actor-Network-Theory approach, they argue that

> [r]epairing the break between the local and global is especially important for studying literacy practices because the apparatus of literacy (that is, its physical manifestation) mainly has served to build and sustain long connections across time and space: ledgers, files, documents, books, computers, as well as other alphabetized instruments and machines, all have played a role in mediating larger and longer pieces of the social world, holding them in connection, across contexts. (Brandt and Clinton, 2002: 347)

Therefore, literacy studies should look at 'literacy's transcontextualized and transcontextualizing potentials' (338). They argue that a focus on the local embeddedness of literacy or its situatedness in specific local contexts does not allow researchers to explore the ways in which literacy moves and is used in and between different contexts (see also Luke, 2004). They suggest various concepts to understand literacy's 'transcontextualized and transcontextualizing potentials': 'literacy-in-

action', 'sponsors of literacy', 'folding in', 'localising moves' and 'globalising connects'. Amongst these, only the concept of sponsors of literacy is further explored in Chapters 9 and 10.

On the question of local-global relationships, Street (2003) argues that Brandt and Clinton's (2002) criticism is valuable, but notes that their use of the term 'autonomous' is not appropriate. He suggests the term 'distant' rather than 'autonomous', which would illustrate better what Brandt and Clinton endeavour to express. Street (2003: 2826) points out that 'their distantness, their relative power over local literacies and their 'non-invented' character as far as local users are concerned, do not make them 'autonomous', only 'distant', 'new', or 'hegemonic.' According to Street, the use of the concepts of literacy events and literacy practices are sufficient in order to explain the links between local (event) and distant contexts which can involve specific social practices.

2.2.2   *Contexts, boundaries, spaces and time*

Burgess (2010) advocates the consideration of space and time in the study of literacy. Her ethnographic study conducted in three adult literacy classes sought to understand the 'discoursal construction of identity' by adult learners (17). Burgess explains that '[r]ather than seeing context as a static container in which literacy learning occurs, I view it as a dynamic process of contextualisation in which language and context continuously co-construct each other' (17). This means that context is constantly changing. This adds to the understanding of how literacies are embedded in social and cultural context.

Authors such as Burgess (2010), Brandt and Clinton (2002), have brought new ideas (see above) to this relationship between literacy events and the context within which these take place. Another researcher who has challenged the focus on the local situatedness of literacy events is Catherine Kell (2011). For her, identifying the boundaries around a literacy event is not always straightforward. According to her, drawing such boundaries means that some literacies might not be taken into consideration by researchers because they are too subtle. She gives as an example the notes she found the inhabitants of South-African shanty-towns were writing on their arms in order to carry out activities in another context. She explains that without paper and pen, mobile phones or other forms of digital technology, this was a way of carrying important information (text and numbers) across contexts. She uses the term 'traffic of texts' (Kell, 2011: 613) to explain this idea of literacies moving across space and time. These movements are not always between local and global contexts (as explored by Brandt and Clinton 2002, and Burgess, 2010), but might also occur at a horizontal level; between various contexts which are not necessary positioned in a hierarchical order in terms of power.

As mentioned before, Burgess (2010: 17) explains that context is not a 'static container in which literacy learning occurs'. Similarly, Sheehy and Leander (2004:1) explain that: '[s]pace is not static—as in metaphorical images of borders, centres, and margins—it is dynamically relational. Space, as a noun, must be reconceived as an active, relational verb […].' The two concepts—context and space—show important relationships and seem to be interrelated. I draw on the notion of space as socially constructed in my understanding of context, which includes the community-based organisations' premises, the situation of precarity experienced by the young people,

the socio-political and historical contexts of Québec and community-based organisations. I come back to this idea in the Section 2.5 about semiotic landscapes.

2.2.3   The messiness of literacies

Burnett and Merchant (2014: 2) claim that 'the very process of locating literacy can imply a certain boundedness or fixity, which is at odds with the more fluid, hybrid landscapes and timescapes of the digital age'. Burnett and Merchant's work on digital literacies has led them to rethink the notions of context and literacy events. In their study about a virtual world called 'Barnsborough', they have looked at how English primary school pupils (9-10 years old) engage with literacy. Drawing on Kwa (2002) and Deleuze (2001), Burnett and Merchant (2014) explore the notion of baroque complexity in relation to 'context' and 'literacy events'. Baroque complexity highlights the importance of materiality, fluidity and inventiveness related to literacy. Similarly to Baroque music, which is characterised by its elaborate style and variety of contrasting sounds and melodies, this notion emphasises the complexity and plurality of interactions around a text. Using a baroque complexity approach, Burnett and Merchant (2014) are more interested in the amalgam of intentions, feelings, actions and materialities related to different literacies, than in identifying a single literacy event. Without rejecting completely the notion of the event, Burnett and Merchant (2014: 9-10) argue that NLS researchers should take into consideration the 'points of connection and disconnection between the experiences, interpretations and improvisations of individuals and groups; and the way texts are implicated in these relationships'.

Barton (2001: 99) explains that 'there are many relations between events: events can be serial, coordinated and chained; they can be embedded or subordinated; they can be

fuzzy'. So, we can see that the messiness of literacy events had already been identified by Barton (2001), but Merchant and Burnett (2014) expand it and offer the concept of baroque complexity to describe and understand it. According to Street (2003: 2827), NLS researchers can use both the notions of literacy events and practices to explore how people reinvent distant literacies in local contexts; exploring therefore 'hybrid literacy practices'. The authors mentioned above have highlighted some difficulties associated with this endeavour. However, NLS researchers have never suggested that it would be an easy process. Barton and Hamilton (1998), note that the amalgam of literacy events and practices is not always an easy one to understand. In the following section, the notion of literacy as social practice is further developed.

2.3   Literacy practices: what theoretical background?

The concept of literacy practices was first coined by Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole (1981) in their landmark study of 'literacy without schooling' in a Vai community of Liberia. They defined practice as 'the carrying out of a goal-directed sequence of activities, using particular technologies and applying particular systems of knowledge' (Scribner and Cole, 1978: 457). Their understanding of the notion of literacy practices is closely related to Vygotsky's work (see Section 2.6.1). Combining ethnographic with experimental psychological methods, they explored the uses of literacy outside school contexts. Scribner and Cole (2001) compared how literacy acquired in formal schooling and non-formal contexts could affect cognitive abilities such as communication skills and memory. They did not find significant differences in the cognitive abilities of people considered 'literate' and 'illiterate'. They also found that literacy played an important role amongst Vai people, even if their society was seen as an oral one. They therefore questioned the idea of the 'Great Divide' associated with

authors such as Goody and Olsen (see Section 2.1.2). Scribner and Cole (2001) claim that their study 'indicates that social organisation creates the conditions for a variety of literacy activities, and that different types of text reflect different social practices' (135). Their study also challenges the idea that dominant literacies (English literacy and literacy acquired at school) are better than vernacular ones (Vai literacy and literacy related to Quranic education). I define these two types of literacies in Section 2.4.

Hull and Schultz (2001) point out that in Scribner and Cole's notion of practices the focus is mainly on the technologies, abilities, skills, and knowledge involved in recurrent literacy activities. The notion of literacy practices was afterward taken up by NLS researchers who were less interested in these technical aspects. According to Hull and Schultz (2001), 'in the NLS, […] the focus is clearly on the ways in which activity is infused by ideology, and there is little interest in specifying the cognitive dimensions of social practices' (588). The concept of literacy practices was notably adopted by Brian Street (1984). According to him, the notion of literacy practices allows researchers to link (observable) literacy events to a broader social context (Street, 2000). The notion was then used by David Barton and Mary Hamilton in the 'Local Literacy' study. Barton (1991) explains that 'literacy practices are the general cultural ways of utilizing literacy that people draw upon in [a] literacy event.' (5). Similarly to Street (1984), Barton and Hamilton (1998) also explain that literacy practices, unlike literacy events, are not observable, since they also include elements such as attitudes, emotions, values and social relationships. These elements are partly individual, but Barton and Hamilton highlight that practices are also about 'social identities' and 'ideologies' (7). Therefore literacy practices are situated between people rather than at an individual level. They also point out that '[t]he notion of

literacy practices offers a powerful way of conceptualising the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998: 6). For instance, we can think about all the forms one has to fill out in order to receive services from the government. These forms use a certain type of language (register), specific terminology and they are structured in a specific way (layout). A number of explicit and implicit expectations come with these forms. These literacies, which can be defined as bureaucratic literacies (also see Section 2.4 about dominant literacies), help shape the ways institutions communicate, process information, make decisions and undertake actions that are of consequence to those who complete the forms.

The notion of literacy practices is now well established in the NLS. However, Street (2000) and Hull and Schultz (2001) observe that authors do not always define it explicitly. Indeed, Street (2000: 17) mentions that the meaning of literacy practices is now 'taken for granted'. If we look at the ways authors define it (explicitly or not), there is generally not an elaborated definition of how literacies are seen as practices and what exactly practices mean. Authors in the NLS seem to draw on a wide range of social theories in order to conceptualise literacy practices (e.g. Bourdieu (Gee, 2005; Albright and Luke, 2008), Vygotsky (Scribner and Cole, 1978), Lave and Wenger (see edited book by Barton and Tusting, 2005), Actor Network Theory and Schatzki (see Baynham and Prinsloo, 2009)).

More recent social practice theories should also be explored in relation to literacy studies. For instance, Elisabeth Shove (2009) draws on the work of Schatzki and others. She explains that

> practices exist as provisional but recognizable entities composed of also recognizable conventions, images and meanings; materials and forms of

competence. At the same time, if they are to exist at all, practices require active reproduction and performance. In other words, people have to do them. More than that, it is through these doings that the contours of individual practices are defined, reproduced and constituted. Since people engage in many practices (during a day, a year or a lifetime), any discussion of the temporal texture of daily life has to take account of how practices intersect in time and in space.

Shove's perspective (2009) on social practices includes some aspects that should be of interest to the NLS: time, materiality, spaces, etc. In her current work, Shove studies consumption practices, design practices, materiality in social practices and also how social practices change over time. She looks at practices over time, across contexts (spaces) and also as they involve different individuals (including their body and mind). I suggest that the dimensions of social practices identified by Shove are also relevant for the study of literacy practices. An example of how these dimensions can matter in social contexts that involve literacy is given by Kell (2006) in her study of a South-African 'shanty-town'.

In her later work, Kell (2011: 613) makes an important point about the concept of literacy practices. She suggests that researchers should 'talk about literacy in social practice rather than literacy as social practice'. For example, literacy practices are associated with broader social practices such as counselling practices, teaching practices, social work practices, baking practices, video games practices, shopping practices, and so on. This is an important element in my understanding of literacy practices, which I take into consideration in my analysis.

2.4 Dominant, vernacular and powerful literacies

As mentioned in the above sections, literacy should be studied in context, and context has to be understood as layered and complex. In an NLS perspective, literacy always involves power relationships, this is what Street (1984) calls the Ideological model of literacy. For Crowther, Hamilton and Tett (2001: 1), 'literacy is deeply and inescapably bound up with producing, reproducing and maintaining unequal arrangements of power.' As mentioned in the above section, literacy is part of larger social practices which are situated in specific social contexts or domains of life (e.g. work, home, school, etc.). The practices of these respective domains of life—including the literacy practices—are not considered equally in the eyes of society. Some practices are seen as more legitimate than others. For example, reading a book by Tolstoy is likely to be seen as more valuable than reading, for instance, a Spider-Man Comic Book at least by teachers or probably by some parents. Also, if a student writes his opinion on an online blog, this might not be seen as having the same social value as writing an academic essay according to some universities' standards.

Barton and Hamilton (1998) have identified two types of literacies: dominant and vernacular. Drawing on the findings of the study 'Local Literacies' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998), Hamilton (2002) defines dominant literacies as those associated with institutions. According to her, dominant literacies are part of the 'discourses of bounded communities of practice, and are standardised and defined in terms of the formal purposes of the institutions, rather than in terms of the multiple and shifting purposes of individual citizens and their communities' (Hamilton, 2002: 181). This signifies that dominant literacies can be associated with formal organisations (e.g. church, school, health institutions, and others). This suggests that some genres (defined in more detail in Section 9.1.1.4) are more present in certain institutions than

in others (e.g. essays, reading comprehension tests, problem solving exercises, and so on, are associated with school).

In Hamilton's perspective (2002) based on her early work with Barton (Barton and Hamilton, 1998), the opposite of the notion of dominant literacies would be vernacular literacies. According to Hamilton (2002), vernacular literacies are shaped by everyday-life demands, and are not controlled by institutions and their formal procedures. Vernacular literacies are often seen as having less social value than the dominant ones, and they can be devalued by some social actors. Hamilton also points out that vernacular literacies might not be 'visible' to people, since people use them more or less unconsciously as part of their everyday-life. Moreover, they might also be hidden, since they are related to people's private worlds (e.g. personal diaries, love letters, pornography, tattoos etc.). In their study 'Local Literacies' Barton and Hamilton (1998) identify six forms of vernacular literacies: 1) organising life (e.g. notice-boards, calendars, lists), 2) personal communication (e.g. cards, letters, notes), 3) private leisure (e.g. books, magazines, writing poems), 4) documenting life (e.g. albums, scrap books, records of finances), 5) sense making (e.g. instruction booklets, inspirational books, reading to solve a problem), and 6) social participation (e.g. newsletters, meetings documents, posters). I will come back to these various form of literacies in my analysis (see Chapter 6).

Crowther, Hamilton and Tett (2001; see also Tett, Hamilton and Crowther, 2012) adopt a perspective that bears a resemblance to Freire's critical literacy. They coin the term 'powerful literacies' to describe literacy practices that give back power to people and endeavour to counter dominant literacies. They argue that powerful literacies 'have to open up, expose and counteract the institutional processes and professional mystique whereby dominant forms of literacy are placed beyond question.' (3) They

also argue that powerful literacies should create new alternatives to traditional ways of teaching and learning. Instead of literacy addressing economic needs, powerful literacies should be grounded in everyday life and be entrenched in issues of social justice. This focus on social justice differentiates 'powerful literacies' from 'vernacular literacies', which simply refer to everyday-life literacy practices. According to Crowther, Hamilton and Tett (2001) it is necessary to understand what kind of literacies are useful and important in people's lives. Powerful literacies are also situated in social contexts and cannot be understood solely in terms of economic benefits and skills. Despite their similarities, powerful literacies are not the same as critical literacies in Freire's terms. As mentioned before, a Freirean approach still considers literacies as skills to be acquired in order to empower individuals.

2.5   Semiotic Landscapes

As mentioned before, I conceive of space and place as socially constructed in my thesis. I found inspiration in the field of human geography. Vadeboncoeur (2009), drawing on Edward William Soja, observes a 'spatial turn' in the social sciences. According to her, many disciplines—for instance sociology and education—are increasingly concerned with the influence of space on social practices. Sheehy and Leander (2004) note that the use of geographical terminology as metaphors in the social sciences is now common: borders, boundaries, margins, centres, peripheries, etc. However, beyond this superficial use of terminology, Soja (2004) notes that more and more social researchers are concerned about space as a social construct.

Massey (1994) argues that a place cannot be experienced and perceived the same way by different individuals. According to her, there is no 'single sense of place' (153). She says that a place has multiple identities, and explains that it is a 'meeting place' of

different individual trajectories, personal histories, memories, perception, imagination, etc.

In my thesis, I explore space and place through the lens of the semiotic landscape. Like Jaworski and Thurlow (2010), I also prefer the term 'semiotic landscape' to 'linguistic landscape'. These authors explain that the concept of the semiotic landscape emphasizes

> […] the way written discourse interacts with other discursive modalities: visual images, nonverbal communication, architecture and the built environment. For this reason, 'linguistic' is only one, albeit extremely important, element for the construction and interpretation of place. Although potentially misleading—all landscape is semiotic, i.e. its meaning is always construed in the act of socio-cultural interpretation […]. (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010: 1)

Linguistic landscapes became a popular field of study following the work of Landry and Bourhis (1997). This study adopted a quantitative approach to observe the presence of different languages on signs in a given public space. Linguistic landscape studies (see Gorter, 2012 for example) focused on language minorities, and bilingual and multilingual contexts, for example in a specific neighbourhood, a street, a district of a city, etc. Other studies have looked at the linguistic/semiotic landscapes of places with a focus on language but also narratives (or discourses) (for example Papen, 2012c; 2015b Lamarre, 2014). These studies are more interested in understanding the meaning of the texts and languages present in a specific place and the narratives that they might underline.

A few studies have looked at the linguistic or semiotic landscape inside buildings, these include a microbiology laboratory (Hanauer, 2009; 2010), schools (Brown,

2012; Poveda, 2012; Gorter and Cenoz, 2015), airports (Piller, 2010; Jaworski and Thurlow, 2012) and companies (Lüdi, 2012). These authors had to adapt the concepts developed by researchers doing linguistic/semiotic landscape studies. They also noticed differences in the kinds of signs they observed; their functions, authors and intended audience. These studies had to expand the two functions of texts—symbolic and informative—identified by Landry and Bourhis (1997). Gorter and Cenoz (2015) and Hanauer (2009) expanded the list of possible functions and adapted it to the context of schools and other spaces used in educational settings (a microbiology laboratory). Gorter and Cenoz (2015:155) identified nine new functions of texts in the Basque Country schools participating in their study: 1) teaching of language and subject content, 2) classroom management, 3) school management, 4) teaching values, 5) development of intellectual awareness, 6) promotion of the Basque language, 7) announcing collective events, 8) provisions of commercial information, 9) decoration.

Gorter and Cenoz (2015) also adapted the two categories of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' (Ben Rafael et al., 2006) usually used by linguistic/semiotic landscape researchers. 'Top-down' is used to describe texts produced by the government, and 'bottom-up' texts are produced by private companies or individuals (e.g. shop signs) (ibid.). In their study they changed the meaning of these categories, identifying as top-down the texts produced by authorities or put up 'by the school authorities or teachers.' (Gorter and Cenoz, 2015: 166). Bottom-up texts were those produced by the students, even if these might be produced following a teacher's demands.

Another important aspect that these studies took into consideration was the emplacement (Scollon and Wong-Scollon, 2003) of the texts. Emplacement refers to the physical place where a text is put. For instance, Poveda (2012) notices, in his study of a secondary school in Madrid, that the students from Latin American backgrounds

were not given legitimate spaces in the premises of the school to display their literacy artefacts related to their vernacular literacy practices rooted in hip-hop music. The students from Spanish backgrounds had more space to display their literacy artefacts related to activisms and were supported by school staff. Emplacement of texts can provide information about the purpose of text, but also its social legitimacy.

Finally, the semiotic landscape can also carry 'narratives' (Hamilton, 2012) about the people who inhabit and use a certain space. In Papen's study of a neighbourhood of Berlin (2015b), she found that the semiotic landscape of a given place is representative of the social practices, but also the values and identities of the people who use it. She indicates that the people who visit and live in this area might engage in practices involving consuming the products advertised on these signs. Coming back to a study looking at the interior of a school, Poveda (2012: 82) suggests that '[…] the semiotic landscape of the school sends messages about the social and academic positions of students of Latin American or Spanish origin in the school.' These 'messages sent' by the semiotic landscape are different from those identified by Papen (2015b), but they still highlight what is legitimate and valued on the premises of a school and what is not.

The use of the concept of the semiotic landscape seems appropriate to understand space as socially constructed. Following the authors presented in this section, I will explore the functions of texts, the categories of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up', the emplacements, and the underlying narratives of the semiotic landscapes of the two community-based organisation participating in my study.

2.6 Learning and apprenticeship

According to Barton and Hamilton (1998: 12), 'any theory of literacy implies a theory of learning'. This means that literacies have a central place in people's learning, at school, but also in their everyday lives. Despite the importance of learning with regards to the study of literacies, NLS researchers have not always been explicit about their perspective on learning.

For my study, I need a learning heuristic, that is to say, a general idea of learning in order to help me to identify what can be considered as learning in my data and to examine this from the perspective of my research participants, the key point being that I need a model to help me understand what constitutes learning for the research participants.

I identified two main perspectives on learning which seem to be commonly used in the NLS: constructivism and situated learning. Before introducing these two concepts, I need to say a few words about lifelong learning and what it means for my study. First, I do not use the term lifelong learning to solely describe the knowledge required by the job market, as it is sometimes presented in policy documents (see Wildemeersch and Salling Olesen, 2012, and the other articles published in this RELA special issue). This means that I do not see learning as solely being an economic tool which can fulfil market requirements. My study is situated in a lifelong learning perspective since it is looking at how people learn throughout their lives and outside formal schooling. Bélisle's interpretation (2012) of the term underlines the importance of learning in various domains of people's lives (work, health, literacy, citizenship, etc.) and not solely in formal schooling systems or for economic reasons. According to her, lifelong learning—as it was first defined by the UNESCO in 1997—was about diversifying learning and education opportunities and bridging the gaps between them. Lifelong

learning is understood in this study as how people learn throughout their lives in different contexts including formal education and other educational contexts. It implies that knowledge acquired at school is not superior to other forms of knowledge (see discussion about formal versus informal learning in Section 2.6.2).

2.6.1 *Situated learning*

Barton and Hamilton (2005) explain that the NLS and the theory of situated learning have shared roots in the work of Scribner and Cole (1981) (see Sections 2.1.1 and 2.3). Scribner and Cole (1981) started thinking of learning in terms of practices, a notion now central in both the NLS and situated learning theory.

Scribner and Cole worked with the Vai people in Liberia using a Vygotskian approach to learning. In Vygotsky's social constructivist approach to learning, cognitive development is seen as being influenced by people's experiences and their social environment. A few years after they had started their fieldwork in Liberia, Jean Lave also began a study with Vai people in Liberia. Lave (2011) drew on Scribner and Cole (1981) for her own work and understanding of learning. For over five years, Lave (2011) studied the apprenticeship practices through which people became tailors in Monrovia (the capital of Liberia). In this study, she observed and described how learning was transferred from the tailors to their apprentices. In 2011, Lave published a book, *Apprenticeship in Critical Ethnographic Practice*, in which she reflects on her fieldwork experience in Liberia. In this book, she explains that she failed to explore the 'conflictual, political-economic relations' (150), between the master tailors and their apprentices. According to her, '[s]uppressing analysis of relations of power is habitual under conventional theory, and I failed to oppose conventional theory is this respect' (Lave, 2011: 150). She explains that her later work with Etienne Wenger on

communities of practice was an endeavour to address this issue (Lave and Wenger, 1991). A community of practice is a group of people working together with a mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared communicative repertoire. Learning happens when people are participating in the community. Members of the community would produce things (material or abstract) together and these are traces of their learning and participation. This is what Lave and Wenger (1991) call reification. For this study, I decided not to use the concept of communities of practice since it was not clear that the two groups of young people I worked with had clear common goals. The young people were experiencing precarity in various ways and were taking part in social and professional insertion programmes for different reasons. Tensions observed in the two groups also suggest that mutual engagement was not always present in the groups participating in my study.

2.6.2   *Formal, non-formal, and informal learning*

Some authors distinguish between formal, non-formal and informal learning (see Bélisle, 2006b). Even though this triad might be useful to describe the plurality of learning people encounter in their lives, I argue that they should be used with caution. As suggested by Lave (2011), these terms imply that these forms of learning are different and related to each other in a hierarchy of importance. Lave (2011) explains that formal learning is commonly understood as being more transferable (out-of-context) than informal learning (context-embedded). This relates to what Street (1984) describes as the autonomous model of literacy (see Section 2.1.2).

Formal learning is commonly associated with learning which takes place in schools and which leads to certification or institutional recognition. Informal learning is the learning which happens in everyday life contexts. For instance, it could be learning to

play the saxophone by playing in a band with friends once a week. Non-formal learning occurs through more or less structured activities outside school but which do not necessarily lead to any institutional recognition by the education system. For instance, it could be used to describe the learning someone does by taking cooking lessons at an adult college or community centre.

For me, learning is always transferable and significant no matter where and how it is acquired. Being aware of the historical and political meaning of the concepts of formal and informal learning, I decided not to use them in my analysis. Following Lave (2011), I argue that learning always involves various social practices and these are always embedded in context (situated learning). I argue that it is not useful to label the kinds of learning that occur in a given context, but it is more fruitful to observe what kinds of social practices (including literacy practices) are involved.

2.6.3   *For a heuristic of situated learning*

The community-based organisations I am working with did not seem to work within a clearly defined conception of learning when they were working with the young people. Their practices seemed to cover a wide range of learning perspectives, sometimes drawing on school practices, sometimes drawing on their background in psychology, social work and counselling, but also on their practices related to their family and group of friends. This amalgam of practices characterised the work of the youth workers and the way the young people learned with them.

I shall return again to Jean Lave's study of tailors' apprentices in order to refine my understanding of learning. According to her, apprenticeship is more complex than

someone who knows showing how to do something to someone who does not know. She explains that

> From a relational perspective, I would now say […] that we are all apprentices, engaged in learning to do what we are already doing. [… T]o *learn* to do what you are already doing is a contradiction in terms; it implies that there is always more than one relation of knowing and doing in play—knowing and not knowing, doing and undoing, understanding theoretically but not empirically and vice versa, starting from both ends of processes of production and coming together in the middle in (relational, concrete) ways that transform conceptions of the ends. It surely implies that apprenticeship is a process of *changing* practice. (Lave, 2011: 156)

Based on Lave's quote, I would add that learning, more globally, is always about changing practices. This 'change' can occur in subtle ways or can be life changing. I believe that this perspective on learning emphasises its relational nature, integrating the role of others and of group dynamics into learning. It also takes into consideration the contexts, local and global, in which social practices take place, and are to be learned. This perspective also allows temporality to be taken into account, since change might need some time to occur and might be situated in a particular historical context. Looking at how practices are changing can also shed light not only on the cognitive but also on the emotional and embodied nature of learning. These elements are all part of the broader concept of learning that informs my analysis.

2.7   Implications for my study

In my study, I adopt a NLS perspective on literacy. I use both the notions of literacy events and literacy practices. Following Barton and Hamilton (1998), I use literacy events as a starting point in the study of literacy, that is to say, to talk about observable events involving literacy and situated in context. However, I am conscious of the limits of this concept, especially regarding the dangers of drawing artificial boundaries around an event and the layered complexity of the context. I am therefore trying to pay special attention to these issues in the analysis of my data. I also try to pay attention to sequences of literacy events which are interrelated. Yet, considering that I conducted my fieldwork on my own and over a relatively short period of time, I can only grasp parts of this complexity, and this affects the way I draw the boundaries around the literacy events observed.

I agree with Barton's definition (1991: 5) of literacy practices: they 'are the general cultural ways of utilizing literacy that people draw upon in [a] literacy event'. I consider that it is possible to observe literacy events and then infer literacy practices. However, Barton's definition seems incomplete considering the current debates in the field. It should also include questions of materiality, time, and space.

Considering the criticisms formulated by various authors (see Sections 2.2 and 2.3), these are the elements I take into consideration in my understanding of literacy practices:

- They are recurrent and patterned cultural ways of utilizing literacies that include texts, artefacts, and other modes.

- They are also situated in complex, changeable, and layered social contexts.

- Literacy practices are shaped by social rules and narratives, and evolve over time in socially constructed spaces.

- Literacy practices are situated at a social level, but also involve individual elements since they also include the cognitive and physical (bodily) aspects, abilities, attitudes, and emotions associated with literacy.

This last point relates to the notion of *rapport à l'écrit* introduced in Chapter 1. In my thesis, I draw on both the concepts of *rapport à l'écrit* and literacy practices. These two concepts cover different phenomena, and yet interrelate coherently with each other.

It is important to situate literacy practices in relation to the larger social practices they are part of as suggested by Kell (2011). For instance, in the case of my study, I look at literacy practices in relation to counselling practices, youth work practices, social work practices, practices of community-based organisations, career advising practices, etc.

One of the recurrent criticisms of the NLS is related to the local-global debate, that is to say how both the distant and local dimensions of literacy practices can be considered. As does Street (2003), I believe that the combination of literacy events and practices can overcome this challenge. However, I also use the notion of sponsors of literacy (see Section 9.2) which contributes to a better understanding of the interactions between distant and local literacies. The concepts of vernacular, dominant (Hamilton, 2002) and powerful literacies (Crowther, Hamilton and Tett, 2001) are also used since they contribute to the understanding of the role literacies play in broader social contexts, and in particular how different literacies relate to powerful narratives of institutions.

I use the concept of the semiotic landscape to explore how space is socially constructed. I look at the physical aspects of the premises of the organisations (e.g. texts, artefacts, furniture) in order to understand from another perspective the literacy practices of the organisations and the 'narratives' underlying their semiotic landscapes.

For my study, I decided to adopt a general heuristic of learning instead of a theory (e.g. Lave and Wenger's communities of practice (1991; Wenger, 1998) or Illeris's theory (2007) of learning). I found inspiration in Lave's work about apprenticeship which suggests that learning is fundamentally about changing practice. Learning is not necessarily a linear process. Sometimes people relearn things they thought they already knew. Both apprentices and masters learn in this process of changing practice. This corresponds to the kinds of learning I observed in the two community-based organisations I worked with.

Other concepts are also used in order to enhance the analysis (see Chapters 7 and 9). These theoretical elements are presented gradually in the thesis. Rather than all together, I decided to introduce the relevant theoretical elements before each results chapter. This way of presenting aims at increasing the readability of the thesis and at making the links between the data, results and theory stronger and more coherent.

3 METHODOLOGY

Inspired by previous studies in Québec (Chapter 1), and also by the NLS, this thesis considers that a qualitative methodology is best suited to study literacy practices. This chapter focuses on the methodological, epistemological, and ethical choices made with regards to data collection, treatment, and analysis. The methodological approach chosen is ethnographic and participatory.

I begin by describing the ethnographic approach chosen and its relevance for looking at literacy. After that, the data collection process is explained for the first and second phases of data collection, together with the methods used. I then explain the way I analysed the data. Finally, I address some ethical concerns about confidentiality and reciprocity.

3.1 Ethnographic approach

My research project draws on ethnography as a methodology. In this section, I endeavour to give a comprehensive definition of ethnography and the epistemological concerns underpinning it. I begin by defining in which ways my research is ethnographic. This is followed by an explanation of how ethnography is relevant for studying literacy. I then go on to present two main characteristics of my ethnographic approach; it is critical and reflexive.

As Barton and Hamilton (1998) highlight, approaches and methods in qualitative research are interpreted and understood in multiple ways. Ethnography is no exception. Therefore, it is important to firstly explain what ethnography means according to my understanding of the relevant academic literature. O'Reilly's

definition (2012: 86) of ethnographic research corresponds closely to my understanding of this methodology

> Ethnographic research is a special methodology that suggests we learn about people's lives (or aspects of their lives) from their own perspective and from within the context of their own lived experience. This involves not only talking to them and asking questions (as we do in surveys and interviews) but also learning from them by observing them, participating in their lives, and asking questions that relate to the daily life experience as we have seen and experienced it.

In traditional approaches to ethnographic research, the ethnographer usually spends an extended period of time in a culturally different community. The two most well-known examples of this type of ethnographic project are Bronisław Malinowski's research in the Trobriand Islands, and Margaret Mead's study of the Samoan people (Davies, 1999; O'Reilly, 2012). Between the 1920s-1940s, ethnographers of the Chicago school were more interested in urban phenomena and subcultures. They were already part of the culture they were studying: they were somehow 'native' or already immersed (Davies, 1999). Davies also suggest that '[i]n some situations, effective research can be carried out over a shorter period of time. Usually the interaction is neither as intensive (the ethnographer is not as isolated) nor sustained over as long a period.' (70) With regards to the aforementioned, I would qualify the methodological approach I used in my study as being ethnographic. My study took place in two community-based organisations situated in the Province of Québec, Canada (see Chapter 4).

As part of my previous employment as a research associate, I worked with a large number of young people in a situation of precarity, and visited numerous community-

based organisations across the Province of Québec. From this work experience, I gained a deeper understanding of youth in Québec, of community-based organisations and of the working realities of their employees (youth workers). When I started my PhD study, I was thus already immersed and 'native' in the field. I did not have to learn a new language, study the history or the political background of the area because I already knew it well.

Despite the short period of time spent in the field sites (a total of three months over two years), my epistemological stance is coherent with an ethnographic approach. Indeed, I adopted an insider (emic) perspective and I studied people and their experience with literacy in context, as they participated in the activities of the organisations. As Riemer (2011: 170) emphasises, 'individuals' beliefs and actions cannot be detached from their context'. These are important elements of an ethnographic approach, which I share. I pay particular attention to the youth workers' and the young people's attitudes, feelings, values, and interactions with their environment and social relationships associated with literacy. I also consider how young people in a situation of precarity and youth workers talk about and make sense of literacy in their everyday lives, and particularly in the community-based organisations they were attending. Papen (2005: 60) explains that contemporary approaches to ethnographic research would often 'look at only one aspect of a community's social world, and this could be people's reading and writing practices.' This is this specific aspect—literacy practices—that I decided to explore in my study. This question is deepened in the following section as I explain why ethnographic research is suitable for looking at literacy.

3.1.1   Literacy and ethnography

Papen (2005: 59) explains that a study looking at literacies as social and situated practices needs 'detailed accounts of what people actually do with reading and writing, and the meaning literacy has, in particular contexts'. She adds that it needs 'to study literacy in the contexts in which it is embedded' (62). As mentioned in the previous section, ethnography is a methodology that pays attention to people's everyday life and implies spending time with people in their own context in order to observe but also participate and learn from them. According to Papen (2005), and also other NLS researchers, the ethnographic approach is a pertinent methodology to look at literacies as social practices.

Ethnography is also suitable in the specific case of my research project because I was endeavouring to look at literacy practices in community-based organisations working with young people in a situation of precarity. Papen (2005) argues that literacy ethnographies highlight the uses and strategies developed by 'marginalised' populations with regards to literacy.

3.1.2   Critical ethnography

Thomas (1993) defines critical ethnography as a conventional form of ethnography with added political aims. Madison (2005: 5) says that critical ethnography can be a way of changing 'denigrated identities and communities'.

Considering the narratives about youth present in Québec at the time of my study (see Section 1.2), my study aims to challenge preconceived ideas about young people in a situation of precarity and their literacy practices.

In my master's thesis, I examined young people's own views of their literacy practices. I found that some young people might not be fully aware of the place that literacy had in their lives, and its role in difficult moments and in their learning. Also, they were not necessarily aware of the powerful narratives that some texts implied. I concluded that holding these negative beliefs regarding their own lack of literacy practices, and also regarding their alleged poor reading and writing skills, might also affect young people and lead them to devalue their own literacy practices. Therefore, the critical aspect of my study also involves raising young people's awareness regarding their own practices, and inviting them to rethink in more positive and critical ways their own views of literacy.

The narratives mentioned in Section 1.2 reinforce the idea that beyond the formal education system there was no opportunity to learn. Therefore, this study also aims to question those preconceived ideas whereby literacy and learning are confined to a formal kind of schooling. In order to do so, I want to give voice to people directly concerned with those questions: young people themselves and the community-based organisations, and more specifically their employees, who are working with them.

3.1.3 Reflexivity and participation

Davies (1999) defines reflexivity as a 'turning back on oneself' (4). Papen explains that adopting a reflexive stance in practice means that

> the researcher describes the process of research (including its difficulties and setbacks) and acknowledges gaps and challenges in her claims to authority. Accordingly, the researcher needs to question the grounds on which she

arrives at her interpretations and to be constantly ready to check her own interpretations against those of the research subjects. (2005: 65)

A reflexive stance has implications for the way researchers conduct fieldwork but also for their ethical concerns towards their participants and themselves. Researchers must be conscious of their power amongst the groups with whom they are working. They should not reproduce an unequal situation like the one their study is challenging (Hytten, 2004).

In my study, I have attempted, wherever possible, to involve participants in the research. There is a wide continuum of understandings and ways of applying the participatory paradigm (Holland et al., 2010). Some researchers consider as participatory studies in which young people or children have been simply invited to take part (ibid.). In contrast, others involve young people and children in the ethical approval, design, data collection, analysis, writing (e.g. Petrie et al., 2006) and dissemination stages of their research. We can see here that the participatory paradigm can be understood in various ways, from considering young people as simple participants to fully recognising them as co-researchers.

I would qualify my participatory stance as moderate, located in between the two poles explained above. I stayed flexible and adapted myself to the participants and their contexts. However, because I was studying in a different country than where I was doing my fieldwork and because of the nature and requirement of a PhD, I was not able to involve participants in the design of the project. Moreover, the group of young people at *Le Bercail* had not yet been put together at that time (see Section 4.2 for a description of the groups). In the first phase of data collection, I tried to involve the youth workers and the young people as much as possible. The interviews were designed in a flexible and participatory way allowing the young people and the youth

workers to shape them according to their concerns. In the second phase, a particular attention to participation was however paid. Following Barton and colleagues (2007), I brought back and discussed the results of the preliminary analysis with the participants in order to receive their feedback and give them more say in the process of interpretation (see Section 3.2.2).

3.2 Data collection

The study involved two main phases of data collection. The first phase took place in April and May 2012, and the second in April 2013.

3.2.1 First Phase of Fieldwork

The two principal methods I used in the first phase were participant observation and semi-structured interviews. In April and May 2012, I conducted participant observation in the two field sites: *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. In addition, I interviewed 21 research participants and was able to collect documents, have informal conversations, and take photographs.

As illustrated in Table 3.1, I carried out about 122 hours of participant observation in the two field sites. Because of the schedules of the organisations, I was generally able to visit both on the same day: spending the morning in one and the afternoon in the other. This is why the total number of days spent in the organisations is 25 and not 42. All the activities at *L'Envol* were in the afternoon and sometimes during the evening.

Table 3.1 Overview of the time spent in fieldwork in the first phase of the study

Organisations	Time in days or hours according to the research activity		
	Number of visits to the organisation (including days dedicated for interviews)	Approximate number of observation hours	Approximate number of hours dedicated to interviews
L'Envol	19 visits	45 hours	10 hours
Le Bercail	23 visits	77 hours	10 hours
Total	**42 visits***	**122 hours**	**20 hours**

Key:* = 25 days

Table 3.2 provides an overview of the number of people who took part in the observations and the interviews. In total, 27 people took part in the participant observation sessions (17 young people and 10 employees) and 21 people were interviewed (14 young people and 7 employees). More information is given in Chapter 4 about the research participants.

Table 3.2 Overview of the number of participants in the first phase of the study

Organis-ations	Type and number of participants according to the research activity			
	Observation		Interviews	
	Young people	Youth workers	Young people	Youth workers
L'Envol	10	6	7	3
Le Bercail	7	4	7	4
Total	**17**	**10**	**14**	**7**

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed (see Section 3.3.1). The 21 people interviewed all took part in the participant observation sessions. I interviewed the people who I got to know well over the two months of fieldwork. These people were

attending the observed activities on a regular basis. The interviews took place at the end of the fieldwork.

3.2.1.1   Participant observation

I explain in this section the 'participant' and the 'observation' components of my fieldwork and the dialectic relation between both of them that occurred during the first phase of my study.

To structure the 'observation' part of my fieldwork, I developed an observation schedule with five major aspects to look at: 1) people: young people, youth workers and any other people involved, 2) premises and environment: inside and outside the organisation; 3) documents and artefacts, 4) situations and activities, 5) relationships and interactions. This schedule was an initial attempt to think about what could be interesting to consider prior to entering the field sites. It was a flexible schedule and it evolved throughout the two months of fieldwork. The field notes I took are based on the five aspects of the observation schedule. In my field notes, I also included verbatim extracts of some conversations, mainly about the use of literacy in the organisations or in the everyday lives of the participants. When I considered a conversation relevant for my study, I tried to write down its complete content as soon as possible. I also included in my notes plans of the premises and of the physical position participants held in it. In their study about a homeless centre for young people, Barton et al. (2007: 45) indicated that: '[n]otes were not taken while at the centre, as this was felt to be too intrusive, but were written up as soon as possible afterwards.' I felt the same way during my fieldwork and usually wrote my notes at the end of the day or at lunch time. I sometimes went to another empty room (or into the toilets) in order to write down verbatim quotes. Towards the end of my fieldwork I

also recorded myself while I was reporting on the important events I had observed on a given day. I used this technique especially when I was coming back home late after a long day of participant observation. I was exhausted, but still wanted to 'take notes' of what had happened while it was still fresh in my memory.

Before describing the course of a typical participant observation session in each organisation, it is interesting to think about the dialectic relationship between two words that are apparently opposed: 'participation' and 'observation'. O'Reilly (2012: 106) expressed the view that '[t]his balancing of involvement and detachment, being both insider and outsider, strangeness and familiarity, is in fact a very creative and distinct way of being in and learning about the world.' She also explains how she often played with these two components—participation and observation—adapting herself according to the situation and trying to adopt the most useful position. In my study, I took three different roles during the observation periods according to the context and the group dynamic: participant, supporter, and observer. I describe these in the following paragraphs and sections.

At *Le Bercail*, the observation schedule was: Tuesday and Wednesday morning, from 8:30 to 1pm and Thursday from 8:30 to 4:30. I observed workshops such as woodworking, arts and crafts, multimedia, radio hosting, customer service (running the second-hand clothing and school supplies shop), and doing distance-learning modules, personal projects, and everyday indoor and outdoor caretaking and maintenance work. I explain these workshops in detail in Chapter 4.

Most of the workshops took place on the premises of the organisation. The customer service workshop (second-hand clothing and school supplies shop) was located in a nearby adult education centre (on the same street). I attended this workshop only once since it took place at the same time as the workshop about radio hosting. For the

customer service workshop the group was generally divided in two: two or three people went to the adult education centre, and two or three stayed at *Le Bercail* for the radio hosting workshop.

Regarding the roles I took on during the fieldwork at *Le Bercail*, in most cases I took part in the activities similarly to the young people. For example, one of the activities was about painting a flower pot and planting tomato seeds in it. I painted a pot and at the same time asked the young people questions about their choices. For example: 'Why have you chosen to paint this word on your pot? What does that mean to you?' From time to time I moved around to look at their work or give my opinion, if they were asking for it. The youth workers always prepared activity sheets for me, as if I had been one of the young people. However, during the activities I tried to be discreet and not to disturb the normal course of it.

For technical reasons, I was not always able to take part actively in all the workshops at *Le Bercail*. For example, I did not actively participate in the woodworking workshop because the pieces of wood were prepared in advance by a volunteer carpenter who was not aware that I was doing a study in the organisation at that time. In this context, I was still active but as a resource to help the young people with their work. For instance, if a young person needed help holding their pieces together, I would be there to help them. In this position, I was able to move around the table easily, observing and asking questions.

When the young people were doing academic work or working on their personal project, I was mostly an observer. These two activities were mostly individual, and I did not want to distract them. I sat around, observing or writing notes about previous workshops. Occasionally, mainly when there were no youth workers around, some young people would ask me to help them with their academic work. In that case, I

tried to help them, and it was also an opportunity for me to ask them questions about what they were doing, what they found interesting, or potential difficulties they were encountering.

At *L'Envol*, I attended group activities on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons from 1.30 to 17.00, and once every two weeks on Thursday evenings from 18.30 to 9.00 for a workshop about photography. Every Wednesday there was a community dinner, which I attended three times (from 17.00 to 19.00). At *L'Envol*, I mainly observed three different workshops: 1) food and gardening, 2) cooking for a community dinner and 3) photography. I describe these workshops in Chapter 4.

The workshops took place in two different buildings located on the same street. The two buildings were both parts of *L'Envol*. The group also used the backyard of the main building to do their gardening. At some point, the group visited several community gardens around the city. I visited one of those gardens with them.

In this organisation, I mainly took a participant role in all workshops. I carried out the same activities as the young people: cooking, gardening, picking vegetables, etc. I was able to informally talk to the young people and the youth workers during the workshops and to ask them questions about their uses of literacy.

3.2.1.2   Individual interviews

Generally, interviews conducted in ethnographic research 'are more like guided conversation than structured interviews' (Riemer, 2011: 173). For my study, I conducted semi-structured interviews—with some themes to be explored while remaining flexible. Thus, my interviews were more structured than a guided conversation. I chose to do semi-structured interviews because literacy is still a 'grey

zone' or an invisible aspect of community-based organisations' work (Thériault and Bélisle, 2012) and young people and youth workers are sometimes not conscious of the importance it can have (Thériault, 2008).

In total, 21 participants were interviewed: 14 young people (5 women and 9 men) and 7 youth workers (5 women and 2 men). The average time for an interview with the young people was 43 minutes (minimum: 35 minutes; maximum: 75 minutes.). With the youth workers, the average time was 60 minutes (minimum: 45 minutes; maximum: 75 minutes).

Two different interview schedules were created: one for the young people and the other for the youth workers (see the Appendices C and D for the complete schedules). The interviews always started with an overview of the ethical concerns in order to ensure the participants' informed consent. This was followed by a brief reminder of the research topic and aims. All interviews were conducted in French except for one in English with a young man at *L'Envol*. It is important to explain that the interview schedules were not strictly followed and the questions were always adapted in response to the interviewees: their language level, their need for reformulations, the references to previous discussions or activities observed, etc. Therefore, they were used as basic guidelines for conducting the interview.

The interview schedule for the young people was divided into five main sections. In the first section, I asked the young people to talk about an activity (organised at *Le Bercail* or *L'Envol*) of their choice and to explain it to me. Afterwards, I asked some questions about literacy in this specific activity. In the second section, I discussed with the young people an artefact related to their personal uses of literacy. This artefact would be significant or important to them. For example, a participant showed me her personal diary (see Section 5.3.1). The participants then explained to me what the

artefact was and why it was important to them. The use of a literacy artefact was a way to break the ice and talk about their vernacular literacy practices. I also asked, in that section, some specific questions about their uses of digital literacy, and about literacy in their family. The third section was about their previous experience with formal schooling. I asked them to talk about what they liked and disliked at school and how they felt about academic literacies. In the following section, I asked the young people to share with me their plans for the future and the role of literacy in relation to them. Finally, I gathered demographic and background information (age, sex, level of education, last occupation and parent's level of education and occupation.) I decided to ask these questions at the end of the interview because I did not want to start with these questions which would have seemed too formal and detached from the friendly relationship I had established with the young people. This temporal sequence in the interview—present, past, and future—was inspired by interview schedules created by the *CÉRTA* (Yergeau et al., 2009; Bourdon et al., 2009; Bourdon et al., 2011). The schedules created by the *CÉRTA* also tend to put the demographic and background questions at the end.

The interview schedule for the youth workers was divided into four sections. I began the interview by asking the youth workers for a description of the organisation and of their job. In the second section, I asked the youth workers to choose an activity that they were in charge of, and to describe it to me. I then asked specific questions about the uses of literacy (based on my observations) in and around this activity and others. In the third section of the interview, I asked about literacy practices that youth workers might encounter in their work. The youth workers had to tell me if these were frequent instances. They explained how they would usually address the issues, and provided concrete examples. I also asked questions about the administrative (e.g.

accounting and management) literacy practices of the organisations, and how these might affect their work with the young people. Finally, I asked short demographic and background questions in order to have a portrait of the youth workers: their level of education, position in the organisation and date of employment.

3.2.1.3 Photographs and documents collected

As shown in Table 3.3, I collected 69 documents and took 193 photographs. In this section, I describe what kind of documents and photographs I have collected.

Table 3.3 Overview of the other data collected in the first phase

	Time in days or hours according to the research activity	
	Documents	Photographs
Organisations		
L'Envol	42	61
Le Bercail	27	132
Total	**69**	**193**

The documents collected are mainly activity sheets, intervention tools or written material displayed in the organisation (e.g. pamphlets and newspapers). The majority of the documents collected were related to my field notes. For instance, I always collected the activity sheets of the workshops I observed. The documents were taken into account while analysing my field notes, thereby adding to the depth of analysis.

Regarding the photographs, I had planned to use a collaborative method, inspired by Hodge and Jones (1996; 2000), to look at the young people's vernacular literacy practices. I tried this in one of the organisations (*L'Envol*), since a Photo Club was

already in place. I asked the young people to take pictures of literacy artefacts that they considered important in their lives. The young people appeared to demonstrate great interest in the activity, but the actual participation rate turned out to be very low. The young people had about two weeks to take these pictures. Only one participant took pictures related to his vernacular literacy practices. Many of the young people were experiencing personal difficulties over these two weeks (health issues and family problems). This might be the reason why this method was not successful. I changed my initial idea and asked the young people to bring an object instead, as explained above. I took pictures of some of those objects with the permission of the participant.

According to Hamilton (2000: 17), '[p]hotographs are particularly appropriate for documenting [literacy events and literacy practices] since they are able to capture moments in which interactions around texts take place.' In my study, I took some photographs of participants in action, but most of the pictures were taken after an activity, since I was involved in a 'participant' role. The photographs taken are inseparable from the field notes, completing the portrait described therein. For example, I took pictures of the posters or leaflets that the youth workers or the young people were looking at or talking about. Also, some other pictures show artefacts that the young people had created (paintings, a wooden chest, pieces of paper with written songs, poems, plans, etc.) The photographs also illustrate the multimodal and multilingual nature of literacies in the two community-based organisations, as I will show in my analysis.

3.2.2   Second Phase of Fieldwork

In order to further engage the research participants, I decided to organize a second phase in which they could be involved in the analysis. The second phase of the study

took place in April 2013 in the same two community-based organisations, *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. Tracy (2010: 844) argues that qualitative researchers should create opportunities for participants to engage in some form of 'member reflections'. According to her, these occasions 'allow for sharing and dialoguing with participants about the study's findings, and providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation, and even collaboration' (ibid.). This is in line with the epistemological stance of my study and its methodological approach: critical, ethnographic, and participatory.

In this phase, I wanted to offer participants the opportunity for 'member reflections' (Tracy, 2010), but I could not ask them to analyse the interviews' transcripts for ethical reasons (similarly to Finlay et al., 2013). Also, this would probably not have been an interesting task for them. Instead, I developed workshops around seven important concepts I had identified in the data collected in the first phase of the study: 1) literacy practices; 2) digital literacies; 3) multilingual literacies; 4) literacy mediators; 5) sponsors of literacy; 6) learning, and 7) empowerment. I also created a workshop on one aspect that I did not cover during the first phase: the organisations' premises and its relation to literacy and young people's interactions and participation. The workshop design is in line with the philosophy and kinds of activities that the community-based organisations would organise for young people. The two organisations were often organising activities during which young people had to work in teams and generate ideas, sometimes using artistic or creative methods (e.g. video, drawings, writing poems, etc.). The workshops I created also adopted similar methods.

The workshops had four main objectives: 1) to give participants the opportunity to participate in the analysis; 2) collect their reactions, suggestions and criticisms of the project; 3) validate and refine my analysis; 4) collect information I was not able to

collect during the first phase. In this section I describe why I organised this second phase and how I carried it out.

I introduced the second phase of data collection to the research participants as workshops aiming to get their views about certain important topics of my study. I explained to them that it was important to me to give them more power over the analysis process.

Preparation		
• Identification of important concepts from Phase One; • Design of potential activities (aims and structure); • First contact via email with the youth workers.	**Organisation and Adaptation** • Face to face preparatory meeting with youth workers; • Adaptation of the activities; • Arranging time and dates; • Sending out the information letter	**Data collection** • Recordings of the workshops; • Observation notes; • Documents produced (n=6); • Photographs (n=41).

Figure 3.1 Overview of the second phase

As described in Figure 3.1, I first identified themes that seemed important in the data collected during the first phase. I then designed potential activities to explore these themes that I could do with the young people and the youth workers. I then wrote emails to the youth workers asking them if they would be interested in participating in a second phase of fieldwork. The youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* were both interested. We agreed to meet in person in order to arrange the details of the workshops. During these preparatory meetings (one in each of the organisations), I gave examples of the activities we could do during the workshops and asked them for their opinions and suggestions about them. I gathered helpful comments from them and adapted the activities. Accordingly, I changed the material following their specific interests and time constraints. For example, I created a document with short and

accessible definitions of theoretical concepts and avenues for further analysis. The youth workers and I also identified potential time periods and dates for the workshops. They then contacted the young people. The youth workers contacted me by email in order to confirm the chosen times. The workshops were planned for mid-April 2013.

After these preparatory meetings, I sent them an overview of my study: a timeline showing prior stages, upcoming stages, and conference papers presented. The workshops were audio recorded, and I took photographs of the materials produced. Before the workshops, all the research participants received a copy of the information letter and signed a consent form. I also explained orally the aims of the research and answered participants' questions.

The majority of the people involved in the second phase also participated in the first one. Only four new participants (2 young people and 2 youth workers) joined the workshop at *L'Envol*. At *Le Bercail*, one employee could not attend the workshop with the others; I consequently met him individually on another day.

Table 3.4 Overview of the participatory workshops at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*

| | Type and number of participants according to the activity | | | | | | |
| | Youth workers | | | Young people | | | |
Organisation	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3	Activity 3	Activity 4	Activity 5	Activity 6
L'Envol (n=8)	3	3	3	5	5	5	0
Le Bercail (n=7)	3	0	1	3	3	3	3
Total (n=14)	**6**	**3**	**4**	**8**	**8**	**8**	**3**

I organized, with the collaboration of the youth workers, five workshops in total: three at *Le Bercail* and two at *L'Envol* (details in Table 3.4). The workshops included a selection

of various activities. The activities I did with the young people were different from those addressing the youth workers (except for Activity 3).

In Activity 1, I asked the youth workers to create a map of the different groups of people, organisation and institutions they were working with and the kind of literacy demands they associated with each of them. I gave them cards on which were written the names of various organisations and institutions. They also received blank cards, a large poster, and various pencils to create their maps (see Appendix E for an example of a map created).

During Activity 2, I asked the youth workers to brainstorm about their perceptions of literacy in the lives of the young people they were working with. They wrote one idea per post-it note and put them up on a large poster. Once this step was completed, they regrouped their ideas into larger categories. I then asked the youth workers to use another colour of post-it note and to brainstorm on interventions they could do as youth workers regarding some aspects identified in the first step (see Appendix F for an example of map created).

I did Activity 3 with both the youth workers and the young people. I gave each participant a plan of the organisation. I asked the research participants to individually identify which room or area of the organisation they preferred and disliked. They circled the areas on their plans. We also talked about the presence of literacy in the premises. I asked them to tell me where they would go to find information in the organisations. I did not want to be too specific, as I wanted to see if they would say something about the texts and literacy artefacts visible on the premises (see Appendix G for an example). This question naturally brought up the topic of the texts present on the premises.

A major source of inspiration for the creation of Activity 4 was the Literacies for Learning in Further Education (LfLFE) project (Ivanič et al., 2009). This study carried out by Stirling University and Lancaster University used various creative and participatory

methods in order to explore the role of literacy in the lives of college students. One of the activities used was the 'Icon Mapping Exercise' (Mannion and Miller, 2005; Ivanič et al., 2009: 169). In their study, Ivanič and her colleagues (2009) asked participants to pick 10 icons out of 40 representing diverse literacy practices and to classify them in a three circle Venn diagram: each circle representing a different sphere of their lives (e.g. home and leisure, work, and school). These icons were created based on observations made by the researchers during an earlier phase of their project. The researchers describe this first phase as one of 'piloting research methods' (Mannion and Ivanič, 2007: 2) aiming at 'surveying the landscape through a variety of data collection methods' (ibid.: 3). Once the icons were put into the Venn diagram, the researchers questioned the participants about their choices in order to understand which forms of literacy were the most salient in different parts of their lives. This activity conceived within the LfLFE project is similar to what I have done with the young people participating in my study. However, I did not use a Venn diagram. Instead, I encouraged young people to draw their own borders between different spheres of their lives. They were free to use the wording they wanted to use to describe these spheres. The young people therefore had more flexibility and power over the creation process. The only constraint I gave them was to locate the community-based organisation they were attending at that time on their map. Some young people identified the place of the organisation from the beginning of the activity, and others decided to wait until the end of the activity (see Appendix H for an example of a map created).

In Activity 5, I asked the young people to think about a letter they had received recently and that had had an important effect on their lives. I provided them with a sheet of paper as a blank storyboard. They were asked to indicate who had sent the letter, what it was about, and what they did afterwards in relation to it (see Appendix I for a few examples).

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I only did Activity 6 with the young people at *Le Bercail*. As part of this activity, I asked the young people to look at a picture of the flower pots (see Section 6.1.7.1) they had painted in 2012. I asked them to explain to me its meaning and why they had all decided to write something in a language other than French on their pots. I finally asked them if they would do it differently today (examples in Appendix J).

The workshops with the young people lasted between 50 and 80 minutes, and those with the staff were between 50 and 120 minutes long. All the workshops took place on the premises of the organisations, except one which took place in the flat of one of the youth workers.

Only one youth worker (Charles) did Activity 3, which I did not have time to do with the other youth workers at *Le Bercail* (Ève-Lyne, Frédérique, and Tommy). Also, these three youth workers at *Le Bercail* carried out Activity 1 in such detail, that I judged it was not necessary to do Activity 2 with them. There would have been too much repetition.

In these workshops, I invited participants to use visual material in order to reflect and generate ideas on each of the concepts the activities were dealing with. These workshops aimed to be participatory, collaborative, flexible and creative. These kinds of mind mapping, card sorting (Activities 1, 2 and 4), and storyboard writing (Activity 5) activities are also common in other disciplines such as organisational management and design. They are often used in order to generate innovative ideas or solutions (see Martin and Hanington, 2012; Kumar, 2013).

After the activities, we turned to seven theoretical concepts based on the document prepared for this purpose (literacy practice, digital literacies, multilingual literacies, literacy mediators, sponsors of literacy, learning, and empowerment). With the youth workers, we looked at each of the concepts, reading the document I had prepared and commenting on it based on the activities' outcomes. With the young people, we discussed

some of the concepts, but in a more informal way. I orally explained some of the concepts and asked their opinion about them. I was not planning to give copies of the document listing the theoretical concepts and their definitions to young people, but asked if some of them would like to receive it by email. One participant asked me for a copy of it.

3.3 Data Analysis

My strategy for data analysis includes two levels, descriptive, and conceptual. The descriptive analysis focuses on what was observable and what participants stated in the interviews. The conceptual analysis is situated at a more interpretative level. I draw on theoretical concepts and seek to identify and discuss patterns and analytical themes identified in the data.

3.3.1 Preparation of the data

The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber. She also transcribed some of my field notes since some of them were audio files. She also recopied some of my handwritten notes. I instructed the transcriber to do an exact transcription of the interviews. Some oral expressions were slightly modified in order to facilitate the verbatim reading of the transcript. For instance, in Québec people often say '*pis*' as a shorter way of saying '*puis*' ('and' in English). This expression generally means that people are adding new information to their talk. However, it is also a widespread 'verbal tic' that does not add much to the conversation. She removed this kind of expression since their quantity made reading the verbatim transcript difficult. The transcriber regularly wrote me small reports, mentioning the decisions she had taken. She also indicated, between brackets, any silences, laughter, noises or other audible

elements. She also indicated within the text the words or passages that she was unsure how to transcribe. I also read carefully the two first transcriptions she did in order to verify the quality of the work and also to give her feedback on her work. The workshop recordings were not transcribed and I analysed them as audio files. I transcribed and translated relevant quotes for the purpose of this thesis. Once all the interviews and the field notes were transcribed, I transferred them into the qualitative data analysis software QSR NVivo.

The taxonomy I created at the beginning of data analysis included 165 codes (themes). Gibbs (2008: 40) defines codes as 'a focus for thinking about the text and its interpretation'. For my research, I created codes drawing on previous studies (Thériault, 2008; Yergeau et al., 2009; Bourdon et al., 2011), on theories and concepts (e.g. New Literacy Studies), on the interviews, on the main research objective and the specific questions as well as on my observations in the field sites. This taxonomy includes the names of each code and its definition. The codes' definitions are detailed enough in order to ensure the consistency of the coding procedure (Gibbs, 2008). I wrote definitions in such a way a person who knows little about the study could understand the ideas I am referring to. The codes were arranged in a hierarchical order, ranging from the more descriptive to the more analytical. Even though I started the analysis with a pre-established taxonomy, I stayed attentive to any new phenomena that cropped up throughout the coding process. Therefore, I adopted a flexible coding approach that enabled me to alter and adapt the codes and their definitions and also to add some that might be needed. For example, I added a code named 'YouTube' since many young people mentioned using this site regularly. I also developed the code named 'Learning' by adding two sub-codes named 'Role model' and 'Apprenticeship'. These two codes seemed to be particularly relevant regarding

what the young people and the youth workers said about learning in the two community-based organisations. At the end of this process I ended up with a total of 195 codes (see Appendix K for a general overview of the taxonomy used).

I first tested the taxonomy on two interview transcripts. This first coding aimed at validating the codes and ensuring their relevance vis-à-vis the data. Once this preliminary coding step was done, the rest of the data was coded.

3.3.2 Performing the content analysis drawing on the taxonomy

A content analysis was performed on the data. Gibbs (2008) explains that doing a content analysis 'involves identifying and recording one or more passages of text or other data items such as the parts of a picture that, in some sense, exemplify the same theoretical or descriptive idea' (38). Concretely, for my study this means that I read though each interview and observation note documents, and tagged (or coded) the portions of the texts with any relevant codes from the pre-established taxonomy. This signifies that a paragraph could be tagged with numerous codes (e.g. literacy mediation, parents, secondary school, etc.) if these were addressed in this extract. NVivo offers the possibility to read any excerpts of text tagged under a same code. For example, I could read everything related to the code 'literacy mediation' in one document, regardless of who said it. This facilitated my analysis around the selected key theoretical concepts.

3.3.3 Making sense of data

Miles and Huberman (1994) identify 13 strategies for making sense of qualitative data. I selected four of them for my study: 1) noting patterns and themes, 2) counting,

3) identifying contrasts and comparisons, and 4) noting relations between codes. In the following paragraphs, I explain how I concretely used these four strategies in the analysis of my data, and what they allowed me to find. These four strategies were often interrelated. I rarely drew on only one of them to make sense of the data.

I analysed the selected data looking for recurrent patterns or themes. For example, a large number of young people participating in my study shared with me experiences during which they (re)discovered an interest in reading and writing. These experiences generally involved a significant adult who expressed a clear interest in young people's vernacular literacies (see Section 5.2.2). This is an example of the many patterns and themes I was able to identify in my data. Its significance became apparent when I realised that a large number of young people had experienced it. This links to the second strategy used, counting.

I sometimes counted how many people mentioned a particular phenomenon, and how many times it occurred in the data in general. This allowed me to get a certain sense of which codes in my taxonomy were more important for my research participants. Counting allowed me to notice important codes that I had to analyse further in my study. It was through getting this sense of proportion that I decided to include chapters about digital literacies (Chapters 7 and 8) and literacy mediation (Chapters 9 and 10). These two themes strongly emerged from my data analysis. Their importance at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*, and for the youth workers and the young people was obvious in both the interviews and my observation notes. However, some phenomena were not perceived similarly by the youth workers and the young people. This led me to use a third strategy, identifying contrasts and comparisons.

NVivo has a function which allows researchers to assign characteristics or properties to 'sources' (documents such as interview transcripts or observation notes). These are

called 'attributes' in the software. For my project, I created three attributes, age, sex, and organisation (*Le Bercail* or *L'Envol*). These attributes were particularly helpful in order to identify 'similarities within or differences between groups' (Gibbs, 2008: 147) (e.g. youth workers vs. young people) or between different settings (*Le Bercail* vs. *L'Envol*). I used the attributes to create matrices that put into relation the individual characteristics of the participants and what they had said about a specific topic. For instance, I was able to identify that academic or school-related literacies were more present at *Le Bercail* than at *L'Envol* (see Section 6.1.7.4). I had already gained this impression from my fieldwork, but a matrix confirmed that it was indeed the case.

Identifying contrasts and comparisons is a strategy that I also used to analyse some of my photographs. Since I took photographs at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* in 2012 and 2013, I noticed differences in the types of texts present in their premises over the two years. This led me to look closer at the semiotic landscapes of the two organisations (see Section 6.2).

The matrices generated in NVivo were also useful in indicating relationships between different codes. For example, I was able to identify that the youth workers were acting as literacy mediators with bureaucratic literacies more than with any other types of literacies (See Chapter 10). I was then able to read carefully all the excerpts that related to literacy mediation and bureaucratic literacies (e.g. forms, government documents, official letters), and to identify patterns (cf. Strategy One identified by Miles and Huberman, 1994).

In my analysis, I compare diverse data collected (e.g. interviews, documents, pictures, and observation notes). Tracy (2010: 843) argues that 'multiple types of data, researcher viewpoints, theoretical frames, and methods of analysis allow different

facets of problems to be explored, increases scope, deepens understanding, and encourages consistent (re)interpretation [sic].' It is in this perspective that I compared the various data, and looked for relations between themes.

The second phase of data collection also allowed me to compare my own analysis with those of the youth workers and young people. What the research participants said in the second phase allowed me to refine my analysis and to confirm the importance of certain themes (e.g. digital literacies). For example, I was able to get a better understanding of the various organisations and institutions that could be at the origin of some of the literacy practices present in both organisations, what I will later refer to as sponsors of literacy (see Section 9.2 and 10.2). I already had a good idea of the potential sponsors of literacy for both organisations, but with the data collected in the second phase, I was able to confirm and extend this understanding. The youth workers created detailed maps of all the organisations or institutions that would potentially bring them or the young people to read and write (literacy demands) for specific purposes (e.g. to get access to a public service). These maps were central to my analysis and to my understanding of literacy sponsorship in both organisations.

3.4 Ethical concerns

There are different ethical issues to consider while doing qualitative research with groups of young people in a situation of precarity considering that they are 'potentially vulnerable on a variety of levels, because of their marginalized social, political and economic position' (Laverick, 2010: 76). The voices of the so called 'vulnerable or marginalised' groups are generally not heard in society and often they have little power in the research process (Pyett, 2002). Therefore researchers should pay particular attention to power issues and relationships in their project.

In the following sections, the ethics approval process is first described. Secondly, questions of confidentiality and anonymity pertaining to my research are presented. Thirdly, issues relating to the different roles and relationships in the field are discussed. Finally, the steps taken to ensure the reciprocity and mutuality of the actual research are exposed.

In January 2012, my project was reviewed and accepted by the Lancaster University Research Ethics Committee (see Appendices L and M for the information sheets and consent forms used). Some of the participants were aged less than 18 but they either did not have contact with their parents, or their relationship was conflictual. In that case, the informed consent form was completed with the support of the youth workers of the organisations.

For the second phase of data collection in mid-April 2013, I created a new information letter and consent form since new participants had joined the project. I also asked the participants who took part in the first phase to sign a new consent form. This form was very similar to the one used during the first phase. I wanted to make sure that I still had their informed consent considering the time lag between the two phases of data collection.

3.4.1   *Presenting myself to the organisations and the participants*

The first step, with a view to gaining access to the field sites, was to introduce my project and myself to some community-based organisation. This is described in Chapter 4. In this section I explain how I presented myself to the research participants.

I presented myself and my project as clearly as possible, putting forward the benefits and disadvantages related to it. I explained that the aims of my study were not to

evaluate the quality of services offered at the organisations or the skills of their employees. As Riemer (2011: 166) claims, participants are 'expert about their lives and their practices' and I always focused on this aspect with the participants, especially while talking about my project with the youth workers. I also explained that it was important for me to spend time with them and to get their points of view. I then presented my 'stance as a researcher' (O'Reilly, 2012) with regards to community-based organisations and their contribution to learning. I recognised the fact that community-based organisations are spaces where diverse forms of learning are taking place.

An information meeting took place on the first day of field work in each organisation, in order to present the project and answer any questions. An information letter and an informed consent form were given to all potential participants. I also had the opportunity to talk individually with all participants about the research before the interview and also informally, in between workshops. Special attention was given to ensuring informed consent had been given before interviewing the young people. I reread the information letter with them individually to be sure they understood the project.

During those information meetings, I introduced myself to the young people. In the study she conducted for her PhD degree, Russell (2005) presented herself to her participants as a 'writer' instead of a PhD student or researcher. However, I considered that it was important to explain my role as a researcher and I did not want to underestimate young people's capacity to understand the complexity of my role.

The personal characteristics of a researcher can affect the course and outcomes of a research project (Laverick, 2010). Being a young woman is often seen as an advantage in social research and particularly in ethnographic research. Indeed, young women are

seen as less threatening (Brewer, 2004). My young age, or at least my youthful appearance, has certainly played a role in the way I was able to develop close relationships with participants, a phenomenon also described by Russell (2005) who worked in secondary schools. My prior work experience as a researcher with community-based organisations and the fact that I was a PhD student abroad also increased my credibility as a researcher. All participants were very curious about my study and my life in the United Kingdom. I was seen as a 'specialist' in British culture, English language, and also in travelling (interests shared by many young people taking part in my study). The young people often asked me questions about these three topics.

The young people and youth workers called me simply by my forename, Virginie. Sometimes a participant would in a friendly way call me 'Virg'. I understood it as a sign of acceptance by the group.

Warr (2004: 579) argues that researchers are the main instrument of qualitative research, '[they] cannot avoid their own subjectivity when researching.' This question of subjectivity highlights the importance of the creation of relationships between the researcher and the research participants in the fieldwork. For Davies (1999: 79), 'the process of fieldwork is a transforming experience for both ethnographer and informants, and the development of understanding is a creative process in which both are engaged.' Building good relationships in field sites is seen by many researchers as part of fieldwork success (Pyett, 2002; Guillemin and Heggen, 2009). In that sense, my fieldwork was successful because I was able to build positive relationships with all the research participants. This was acknowledged by the youth workers both at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* since they told me that the young people had accepted me quickly.

3.4.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

All the real names of the participants, the organisations and of the city were replaced and do not appear in the thesis. Each participant was assigned an alpha-numeric code and also a new first name (representative of their age and sex). I also use pseudonyms for the names of the organisations (*Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*) and for their programmes (e.g. *Mobili-T*, *Espace Collectif*, *Avant-C*).

3.4.3 Safety in the fieldwork

As part of the ethical approval, I had to provide the University Research Ethics Committee a lone worker protocol. Writing this protocol led me to think about ethics in more detail. In fact, being ethical also involves putting in place resources in order to protect the physical and psychological safety of not only the participants but also ourselves and any other person engaged in the research project (McCosker, Barnard and Gerber, 2001).

Prior to starting the interviews, a timetable of the interviews was drawn up in close collaboration with the youth workers. A copy of this timetable was given to the employees (by email or orally). At *Le Bercail*, the interviews took place in an office situated in the organisation. At *L'Envol*, the interviews I conducted with the young people took place in their flats which form part of the organisation (a supervised housing programme). The youth workers at *L'Envol* were interviewed in an office situated in the organisation. After each interview, I always informed an employee of the organisation that the interview had ended.

For Warr (2004), researchers, especially if they are working with people in a situation of precarity, should plan some debriefing opportunities for themselves. After a day

spent in a field site or after an interview, I would complete reflexive notes about it. If a distressing or difficult event had occurred, my supervisor—and to some extent the transcriber—would have been the person with whom I could have discussed it. I also asked the youth workers for a debriefing/feedback meeting about my presence after one month of fieldwork in the organisations in order to make any adjustments to my practices if necessary, but said they did not think such a meeting was necessary.

During the two months of fieldwork, I had access to the premises of the local university, sharing an office with other postgraduate students. According to Davies (1999), developing contact with local academics during fieldwork and afterwards maintaining those contacts is desirable in order to get a local perspective which could lead the study to be more ethically sound. Having access to the premises of the local university helped me in various ways. For example, I had access to a lockable filing cabinet in a locked room. I also had the opportunity to talk with professors about my project, while respecting the principle of confidentiality and anonymity, and get advice and suggestions.

3.4.4 *Dealing with different roles and relationships in the fieldwork*

Identifying and taking roles we might, or should take on, in field sites as a researcher is not always straightforward. O'Reilly (2012) suggests that at times the role would be chosen for the researchers or sometimes they would have to participate in unanticipated ways. The roles of ethnographers are also affected by the various relationships they develop with their participants. Davies (1999) emphasises the evolving nature of human relationships in fieldwork. According to her, 'ethnographers must continually reflect upon and revaluate these relationships with informants, an

evaluation that should include recognition of changes that the contact has induced both in others and selves.' (Davies, 1999: 81)

The changing character of roles and relationships in the field raises many questions regarding ethics. Even though researchers have been through an ethics approval process with a research ethics committee, they are likely to encounter situations in which they have to take decisions about ethical issues. I faced this kind of situation during the fieldwork. For example, a young woman in one of the organisations started crying in front of me and telling me about her life and her problems with the group. I knew that there was only one employee in the organisation on that day, and he was with the rest of the group. I decided to listen to her even though this was not part of my role as a researcher. If I had rejected her at this moment where she needed to talk to someone, it would have been disrespectful to her and her feelings. Also, it could have affected our relationship negatively. At the same time, I did not want to appear to favour her. I was also worried that the employees of the organization might be annoyed about me doing their job. Considering this, I finally decided that my intervention was less harmful than my non-intervention. I also considered that the risk of harm was low since I possessed basic skills in counselling, having a bachelor's degree in guidance counselling.

In these cases, I endeavoured to protect the research participants' well-being. I also asked the youth workers for feedback on my presence in the fieldwork, asking for any ways I could adapt myself to their everyday activities. Youth workers in both organisations said that they had nothing negative to say about my presence, and that the young people seemed to have accepted me without resistance.

3.5   Reciprocity and equity

Warr (2004: 583) explains that as researchers we usually have a brief presence in our participants lives but they would stay in our minds as 'the tasks of processing, analysing, and writing up research data requires immersing oneself in the stories of people's lives and listening, reading, and thinking about them many times over.' In order to acknowledge the important role the participants have taken, and continue to play, in my study I have developed different ways of being reciprocal. The workshops organised during the second phase of data collection contributed to making my study more reciprocal and respectful, but I also used other ways.

In the ethical approval process I explained that my participants were young unemployed people and that I was planning to give them each CAN$20 compensation for the time given to the research project. In fact, one of the organisations (*Le Bercail*) was already giving a salary to the participants, because it was part of the Canadian Skills Link Program (see Glossary in Appendix A) for the social and professional insertion of young people in a situation of precarity. Following the suggestion of the employees of this organisation, I did not give those participants any monetary compensation because they were already paid for the time they were spending with me. In the other organisation (*L'Envol*), the situation was different and the young people were not being paid for taking part in the organisation's workshops. In this organisation, I gave a monetary contribution of CAN$20 to the young people after interviewing them.

As I mentioned before, it was important to me to have a respectful and a reciprocal relationship with the participants. So, I stayed as true to myself as possible with them sometimes disclosing information about myself and my interests. The young people enjoyed talking with me about travelling, English language (particularly about British

accents), cinema, music, American television series, etc. I shared some information about my personal life with the employees of the organisation, and they did the same with me. At the end of the first phase—when I was back in the United-Kingdom—I wrote 21 personalised postcards, one for each of my participants to thank them for taking part in my study. I wrote them a short message, mentioning a few qualities I had appreciated about each of them. I also sent them typical British sweets that cannot be easily found in Canada.

3.6   Summary

In sum, the methodological approach of the study is ethnographic, critical, and participatory. The study had two phases of data collection. In the first phase (April-May 2012), the chosen techniques were participant observation and semi-structured interviews (14 with young people and 7 with youth workers), and the second phase (April 2013) involved participatory workshops. Documents and photographs were collected over the two phases of data collection. A content analysis was performed on the data.

4   PLACES AND PARTICIPANTS

In this chapter I first explain the selection criteria and strategies used to select the two organisations participating in my study. I also present the two organisations in detail, their mission, staff, and services. I then present the specific programmes I observed in both organisations. I provide a brief overview of each of the youth workers who took part in my study. In these portraits, I mainly focus on the duties that each youth worker had in the organisations. Finally, I also introduce the young people taking part in my study. To protect their identity, I am not offering details of individuals, but instead offer a more global portrait of all of them.

4.1   Selection process of the organisations

I used two strategies to select the organisations; I contacted two informants working in community-based organisations and conducted research online. I had three selection criteria: 1) the organisations must address the needs of young people aged 16 to 35; 2) have group activities; 3) offer diverse workshops addressing the situation of precarity the young people were experiencing.

I asked the help of two informants—two youth workers—in the targeted city in the Province of Québec. I knew these two people from the volunteering work and internship I had done in a community-based organisation a few years ago. These people were employees of community-based organisations and were well-known and respected in the community-based milieu of this city. I explained my project to them (aims, duration, implications, etc.) and asked them if they could suggest some organisations that might be interested in taking part in this type of project. They suggested organisations and gave me the names of people I could contact. This

strategy proved to be an effective way of identifying appropriate field sites. Also, it was easier for me to introduce myself to the organisations selected following the advice given by those informants. In order to gain access to field sites the next step was to present my project and myself to some community-based organisations. I directly contacted some employees of the organisations suggested by the two informants. I explained the project to them and asked to meet them in person. We organised a face to face meeting in order to clarify the implications of the project, and to talk about potential times to do the fieldwork. With the help of the employees, I approached the directors of the two organisations with an official request. The two directors sent me an email to officially confirm the participation of their organisation. I then communicated with the employees to arrange the official dates of my stay in the organisations.

I also sent information and invitation letters to other organisations across the Province of Québec. I selected these organisations based on a list of community-based organisations working with young people available on a governmental website (*Conseil permanent de la jeunesse*, 2010). It is worth noting that the organisations identified by the two key informants were also on the list. Three different organisations were contacted this way. Only one organisation replied. I exchanged messages with the director of this organisation. Despite his interest in the study, it was difficult to find an appropriate period of time for fieldwork. I then decided not to pursue working with this organisation.

The two organisations selected are situated in the same place, a city of about 140,000-160,000 inhabitants in Québec (Canada). In July 2011 the percentage of people aged between 15 and 34 represented about 30% of the total population of this city (*Institut*

de la statistique du Québec, 2012). I gave the two organisations the pseudonyms *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*.

Le Bercail is located on the East-side of the city on one of the biggest commercial streets. *L'Envol* is situated in the city-centre on another important commercial street of the city. The two organisations are both located in commercial sectors but are also close to residential areas. *L'Envol* and *Le Bercail* are at a walkable distance from each other—about 15 minutes on foot. The two organisations are surrounded by various services and shops including health clinics, pharmacies, convenience stores, supermarkets, restaurants, cafés, bars, clothes shops, tattoo and piercing parlours, second hand shops, bus stations, adult education centres, *cégeps* (see Glossary in Appendix A), secondary schools, a job centre, other community-based organisations, a public library, and churches.

Both organisations are well-established and have a good reputation amongst the people involved in the community-based milieu of that city. From time to time, they both appear in local newspapers, publicising their success stories or promoting special events they organised. In the following sections I present the services offered at both organisations.

4.2   Le Bercail

Le Bercail was working with young people aged between 12 and 18, and was offering in 2012 four main services. As illustrated in Figure 4.1, these services were: 1) a supervised gathering place for teenagers, 2) a youth shelter for runaways (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week), and 3) two programmes aiming at preventing school dropout and promoting educational success—*Mobili-T* and *Jonction*. I also use

pseudonyms for the names of these programmes. *Le Bercail* employed about 10 people, mainly youth workers. About half of the team was working part-time in 2012.
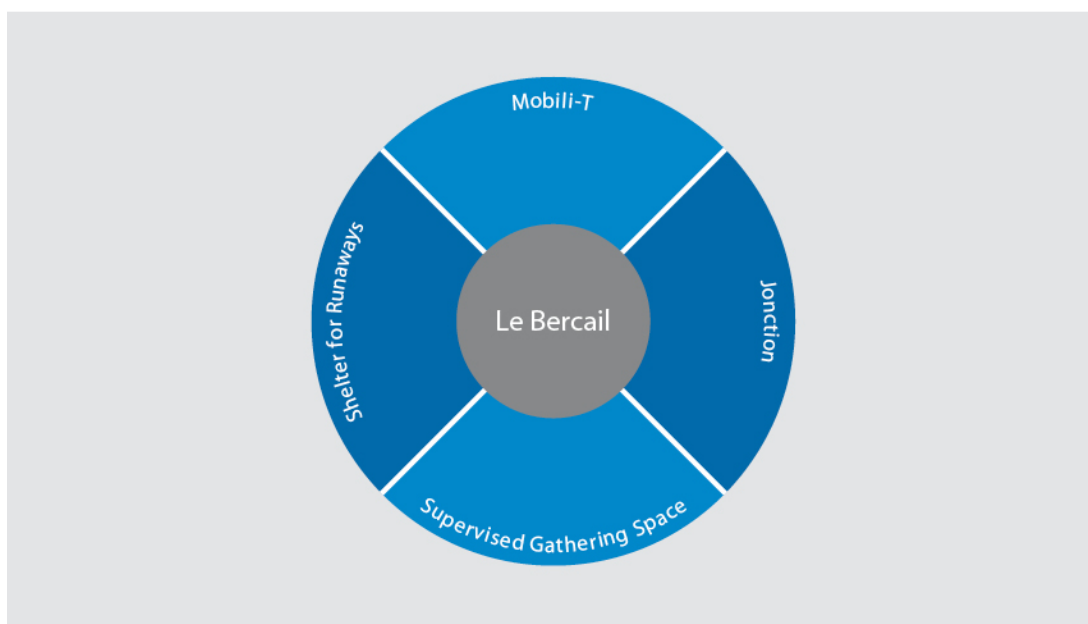
Figure 4.1 Overview of the services offered at *Le Bercail*

The shelter for runaways (aged 12 to 17) was situated on the first floor of the building. The offices of the youth workers and administrative staff were also situated on the first floor. Participants in the programmes *Jonction*, *Mobili-T* or attending the supervised gathering space did not have access to the first floor. *Jonction*, *Mobili-T* and the supervised gathering space all shared the same premises on the ground floor. These three services did not have the same schedule. *Mobili-T* and *Jonction* had access to the premises during day time, and the supervised gathering space used the premises during evenings. Participants in *Mobili-T* and *Jonction* were generally not allowed to attend the supervised gathering place because this activity was addressed to teenagers (aged 12 to 17). They could attend it only when it was specifically open to older groups (usually every Wednesday evenings).

For my research, I mainly focus on *Mobili-T*. It was financed by the Canadian Government's programme called Skills Link (see Glossary in Appendix A). The main objective of *Mobili-T* is to foster young people's social inclusion by facilitating their access to employment. The *Mobili-T* participants received a financial allocation which was the equivalent of the minimum salary in Québec at that time. *Mobili-T* lasted 6 months and brought together 6 young people in a situation of precarity aged between 16 and 19.

To a lesser extent, I also looked at the programme called *Jonction* that operates as a follow-on programme to *Mobili-T*. At the end of their 6 month period in *Mobili-T*, participants were automatically transferred to the programme *Jonction*. As part of *Jonction*, the young people had access to the premises of *Le Bercail* and were able to receive individual follow-up advice from the youth workers. No group activities were organised in *Jonction*. The individual follow-ups in *Jonction* aimed to support the young people with their education (e.g. support regarding education or enrolment in an education programme), career (e.g. preparing for an interview or revising a CV) or personal projects and difficulties (e.g. support regarding an unplanned pregnancy). The staff for the programmes *Mobili-T* and *Jonction* were the same.

The *Mobili-T* staff consisted of one full-time coordinator and one part-time youth worker both employed by *Le Bercail*, and two social integration teachers employed by an adult education centre. They all worked together on *Le Bercail*'s premises. In my thesis, I use the term youth workers to refer to all of them even though their roles were slightly different. I call them all youth workers because the differences between their roles and employers were not necessarily obvious to the young people.

Mobili-T addressed young people in a situation of precarity aged around 16 to 19. This programme consisted mainly of group activities, but also included individual

counselling and follow-up sessions. The individual or group activities were aimed at developing young people's personal, social and professional abilities. Throughout the project, participants received support and guidance in order to take action with regard to a life project (return to education, employment or others). *Mobili-T* also endeavoured to promote healthy lifestyles and encourage the development of self-esteem and self-confidence. Furthermore, throughout their participation in *Mobili-T*, the young people received individual support in order to regulate their civil and legal status (e.g. get a social insurance number) and to stabilise their living condition (e.g. find a safe place to stay or food support).

In Québec, the concept of *plateaux de travail* (workshops) refers specifically to collective projects (Yergeau et al., 2009) in each of which a group of young people is brought together to work together. Often, the participants would have to choose the nature of the project or, if imposed, would be involved in the subsequent decisions (designing activities, choosing topics to explore, distributing roles in the group, etc.). *Mobili-T* consists of an amalgam of different *plateaux de travail* including woodwork and arts, multimedia uses, radio hosting, helping run a second-hand clothing and school supplies shop, indoor and outdoor caretaking and maintenance work. In this thesis, I will refer to these *plateaux de travail* as workshops.

Some time periods were also allotted to academic work. The majority of the young people (5/6) were enrolled at the adult education centre in a distance-learning programme. They were completing school subjects such as mathematics, sciences, French, English at primary or secondary levels.

Table 4.1 Workshops and activities organise in the programme *Mobili-T*

Name of the workshops	Description
Woodworking and arts	The young people created a wooden chest. They had to find images online, trace them and paint them on the chest. They also painted images found online on small canvas and flower pots.
Multimedia workshops	The participants learned how to use Microsoft Office. They created small posters to promote the services offered at the second-hand clothing and school supplies shop. They created publicity material for another community-based organisation. The young people also produced a short video about a topic of their choice.
Radio hosting	In collaboration with the local community radio station, the young people prepared a radio show. They selected the music and prepared short pieces for broadcast about topics they selected (e.g. music group, film review).
Second-hand clothing and school supplies shop	This shop was located in the adult education centre. Twice a week the young people did voluntary work there, putting new clothes on hangers, helping clients, dealing with payments, and so on.
Distance-learning programme	In partnership with one of the local adult education centres, the *Mobili-T* participants were enrolled in a distance-learning programme in order to complete their secondary school diploma. During *Mobili-T*, time was allocated for the young people to work on their school modules.
Personal project	The participants also had to undertake a personal project which they selected according to their personal interests (e.g. create a website about music, write a story about their family, paint on a large canvas).
Indoor and outdoor caretaking and maintenance work	Once a week the young people cleaned the premises used by *Mobili-T*. They also had to clean the courtyard of the organisation.
Voluntary work	The young people did voluntary work for festivals or other community-based organisations (e.g. soup kitchen or food bank) as part of their participation in *Mobili-T*.
Sports activities	Some recreational and sports activities were also organised (e.g. basketball games) by the youth workers as a way to reward the young people for their good work.

For my study, I observed all these workshops and activities except for the voluntary work and the sports activities. Usually one of the workshops presented above would take place in the morning (8.30 to 12.45) and another one in the afternoon (12.45 to 16.30). The schedule was different every day since the workshops took place

alternatively. The young people usually attended the organisation from Tuesday to Friday.

4.2.1 Staff at Le Bercail

Four employees took part in my study at *Le Bercail*—Charles, Ève-Lyne, Frédérique, and Tommy. They were all aged around 30. All the youth workers had French as their mother tongue, but most of them had a good command of English. They all took part in both phases of data collection. I conducted four individual interviews with them in the first phase. They were also present during the observation periods. In the second phase, I met with Ève-Lyne, Frédérique, and Tommy together, and with Charles individually (Table 4.2 below).

Table 4.2 Employees at *Le Bercail*

Name	Phase	Sex	Occupation in the organisation	Highness educational level
Charles	1&2	M	Youth worker	Uncompleted Bachelor's degree (1 year) in special education
Ève-Lyne	1&2	F	Social integration teacher	Bachelor's degree in special education
Frédérique	1&2	F	Social integration teacher	Bachelor's degree special education
Tommy	1&2	M	Project coordinator / youth worker	Bachelor's degree in psychology

In 2012, Charles had been working part-time as a youth worker at *Le Bercail* for about 4 years. He had completed one year of a bachelor's degree in special education. He was involved in three services offered at *Le Bercail*: *Mobili-T*, the shelter for runaways, and the supervised gathering place for teenagers. With the *Mobili-T* participants, Charles was particularly involved in the indoor and outdoor caretaking and maintenance work. He would supervise the work of the young people, checking

the quality of their work. Charles did not meet with the *Mobili-T* or *Jonction* young people individually.

Ève-Lyne was working full-time as a social integration teacher employed by the adult education centre. She had a bachelor's degree in special education. The programme *Mobili-T* had a special partnership with the adult education centre since most of the young people were enrolled in a distance learning programme. Even though Ève-Lyne's employer was the centre, she mainly worked on *Le Bercail*'s premises. At the time of the interview in 2012, she mentioned having had a little less than one year of experience on the programme *Mobili-T*. She was replacing someone who was on maternity leave. Once a week, she worked from her office at the adult education centre to type up her notes about the young people (their progress, problems, important events, etc.) in a shared database. Ève-Lyne was generally in charge of the artistic workshops organised in the programme *Mobili-T*. She would also, for instance, teach the young people how to paint. Ève-Lyne was also in charge of accompanying the young people to the second-hand clothing and school supplies shop. She would supervise the young people's work and train them. She was also involved in individual follow-up meetings with the young people and helping them with their school work. Ève-Lyne was particularly involved in helping the young people with their written French. When I returned for my second visit in 2013, she was no longer working in the *Mobili-T* programme.

Frédérique was also working full-time as a social integration teacher employed by the adult education centre. She started working in the programme *Mobili-T* in 2007. This means that in 2012 she had had 5 years of experience in this programme. Her situation was the same as Ève-Lyne's. She worked mainly at *Le Bercail* except for one day per week at the centre. She also had a bachelor's degree in special education. As part of

the *Mobili-T* programme, Frédérique was in charge of the radio hosting workshop. She was also the one generally initiating the sports activities. As were Tommy and Ève-Lyne, Frédérique was involved in individual follow-up meetings with the young people and helping them with their school work.

Tommy was employed full-time by *Le Bercail* and was the coordinator of the programme *Mobili-T*. In 2012, he had been employed on *Mobili-T* for about 5 years. He had more administrative work to do in relation to the programme than the others. For instance, he was in charge of writing the accounting reports that would then be submitted to the funding body (Service Canada). He was also running activities (e.g. about budgeting), and was involved in individual follow-up meetings with the young people. He had a bachelor's degree in psychology (see Table 4.2). Tommy was also involved in supporting the young people with their school work, particularly regarding topics such as mathematics and sciences. Tommy had also a degree in computing and helped the young people to learn how to use Microsoft Office or other software.

4.2.2   *Young people at Le Bercail*

At *Le Bercail*, seven young people took part in my study. I interviewed and observed all of them in the first phase of data collection. In the second phase, I organised a workshop only with Darya, Julien, and Laurence. Table 4.3 offers a portrait of the young people who took part in my study in 2012 and 2013. An overview of the Québec education system and a table comparing the UK and Québec education systems are available in Appendix B. The first cycle of secondary education in Québec is the approximate equivalent of Key Stage 3 in the UK and the second cycle corresponds broadly to Key Stage 4

Table 4.3 Young people at *Le Bercail*

Name	Phase	Observed and/or interviewed	Sex	Age	Mother tongue	Level of formal education
Amélie	1	O&I	F	17	French	Secondary Cycle One *
Darya	1&2	O&I	F	18	Persian (Dari)	Secondary Cycle One *
Jérémie	1	O&I	M	20	French	Secondary Cycle Two *
Julien	1&2	O&I	M	18	French	Secondary Cycle Two *
Kelly-Ann	1	O&I	F	17	French	Primary*
Laurence	1&2	O&I	F	20	French	Secondary Cycle Two ***
Yoan	1	O&I	M	16	French	Secondary Cycle One *

Legend: * ongoing   ** interrupted   *** completed

The average age of the young people at *Le Bercail* in 2012 was 18 years old. The majority of the young people had French as their mother tongue. Only Darya had Persian (Dari) as her first language. Amélie, Darya, Julien, Kelly-Ann, Laurence, and Yoan were all taking part in the *Mobili-T* programme. Only Jérémie was at the time a participant in the programme *Jonction*. I included him in my observations and interviewed him because he was frequently present in the organisation. Also, he had recently finished his participation in the programme *Mobili-T* and could comment on the activities he had experienced with the benefit of hindsight.

I asked the young people about their family background (see Appendix C and Table 4.4). Some information is missing regarding the young people's parents because Darya's parents were both deceased, and Kelly-Ann did not have contact with her father. The majority of the parents were employed in 2012.

Table 4.4 Education level and employment situation of the young people's

parents at *Le Bercail*

Name	Young people's parents				
	Father		Mother		
	Education	Work	Education	Work	
Amélie	Secondary Cycle Two	yes	University certificate	yes	
Yoan	Secondary Cycle Two	-	Diploma of Vocational Studies	yes	
Darya	-	-	Secondary Cycle Two	-	
Jérémie	Secondary Cycle One	yes	Cégep	yes	
Kelly-Ann	-	no	Secondary Cycle Two	yes	
Laurence	Bachelor's	yes	-	yes	
Julien	Doctorate	yes	Bachelor's	no	

During the interviews (first phase), I asked the youth workers to offer me a global portrait of the young people they worked with. They explained to me that some participants had experienced various problems related to family, drugs, crime, social relationships (love and friendship in general), housing, and unemployment. They also mentioned that all of them had dropped out of school at some point.

The group dynamic at *Le Bercail* in 2012 was tense in the *Mobili-T* group. During the fieldwork, many conflicts occurred between Darya, Amélie, and Julien. Julien and Amélie did not like the way Darya behaved with her boyfriend who was not part of the group. Darya's religious beliefs (Islam) were also a source of tensions between the young people.

4.3 L'Envol

The main goal of *L'Envol* was to foster young people's autonomy. The services offered at *L'Envol* were aimed at socially and professionally inserting young people in

their community. The programmes and workshops also offered opportunities for isolated young people to develop their social skills.
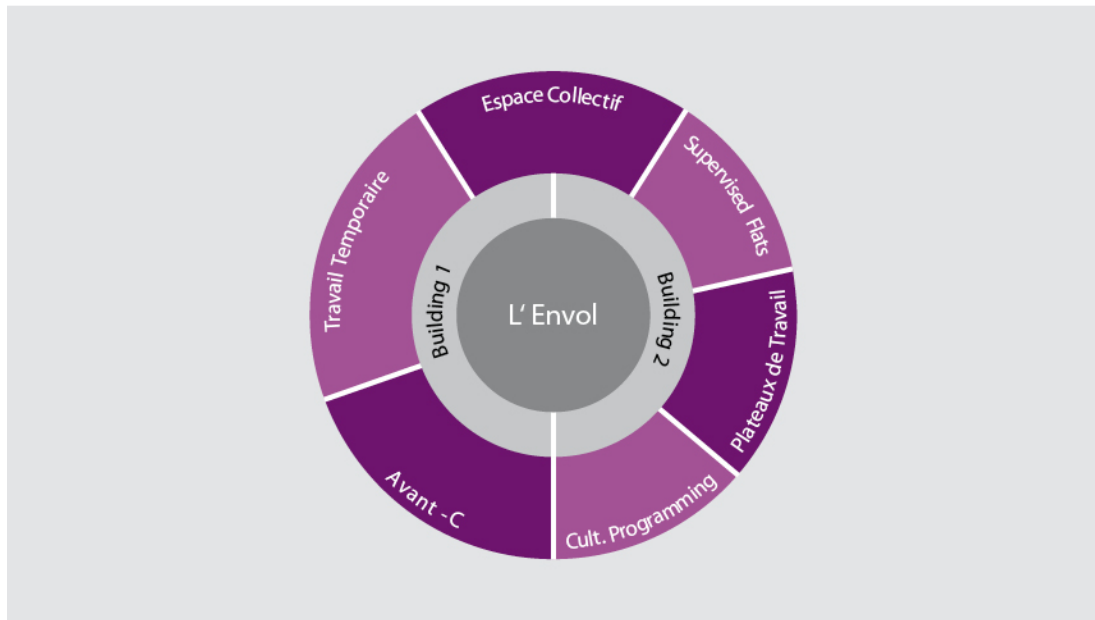
Figure 4.2 Overview of the services offered at *L'Envol*

L'Envol was located in two buildings located opposite each other on the same street. *L'Envol* addressed young people aged 16 to 30. Figure 4.2 illustrates the six main areas that *L'Envol* covered: 1) social housing (supervised flats); 2) gathering place and structured workshops for residents and the wider community (*Espace Collectif*); 3) arts programmes (e.g. art gallery, theatre, cultural events); 4) counselling services (*Avant-C*), 5) work placements for short periods (*Travail Temporaire*), and 6) *plateaux de travail* (workshops about cooking, housekeeping, customer services). In 2012, *L'Envol* employed around 10 people; the majority of them were working full-time. The *plateaux de travail* (workshops) started towards the end of my field work and I was not able to observe them.

Avant-C, *Travail Temporaire* and *Espace Collectif* shared offices on the ground floor of the building on the left. The other floors of this building were rented to people (e.g. *cégep* or university students) who did not have any links with *L'Envol*. The supervised

flats, the art programmes, and *Espace Collectif* were located in the other building. The art programmes were organised on the ground floor, and the supervised flats were on the upper floors. *Espace Collectif* was the only programme which used space in both buildings. In the left hand building (see Figure 4.2), *Espace Collectif* organised group activities such as the Photo Club, and the food and gardening workshops. In the other building, *Espace Collectif* used the kitchen to prepare the community-dinner, and the stage for the theatre activities. *Espace Collectif's* work team was composed of two full-time youth workers employed by *L'Envol*, and a few special collaborators who led workshops on a voluntary basis or as part of their job in another community-based organisation (this is explained in Section 4.3.1).

For my research, I focused on the service I call here *Espace Collectif*. It was a drug free environment where the young people could learn about budgeting, cooking, shopping, eating well, and working in a group. *Espace Collectif* is funded by various institutions. Their main source of funding was Service Canada, through its program Skills Link (see Glossary in Appendix A). The young people who were living in the supervised flats at *L'Envol* had to join the activities organised by the *Espace Collectif* if they were not in education, employment or training. It was a compulsory condition for them to have access to the social housing programme. The rents were adapted according to each young person's financial situation. The rents were considerably lower than market prices. *Espace Collectif* activities were mainly targeted at the residents of the supervised flats, but were also open to other young people interested in its activities. In 2012, *Espace Collectif* offered eight different workshops (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Workshop and activities organised by *Espace Collectif*

Name of the workshops	Description
Theatre workshops	Young people developed acting skills, wrote plays, designed costumes and decoration, and finally presented a play publically.
Self-expression workshops	Young people would devise, plan and develop a group project in order to foster critical thinking, self-esteem and the ability to speak effectively (e.g. creating a short documentary).
Food and gardening workshops	This workshop aimed at promoting food self-sufficiency, healthy eating habits and environmental awareness. The young people were in charge of a collective garden in the courtyard of one of the buildings. As part of this activity, the group went into the forest to collect balsam poplar's leaves (for cosmetic purposes) and fiddleheads (to cook them).
Community dinners	Participants chose the menu, went shopping, and cooked everything themselves. During the meals, the group discussed various topics with guest speakers (e.g. Iraqi culture, legalisation of prostitution, vegetarianism). The young people set the tables and were also in charge of cleaning the room and dishes afterwards.
Photo Club	The Photo Club aimed at introducing young people to technical skills and basic knowledge of photography. The young people could show each other the pictures they had taken on a large screen. They received constructive feedback from a professional photographer and by their peers.
Sports activities	Once a week, the group did a sport activity. This might be walking, volleyball, soccer, cycling, and so on.
Open access session	Every week, residents and young people could gather and exchange in an informal setting (e.g. to play board games or use the Internet). This activity was supervised by the *Espace Collectif*'s youth workers.
Special activities	The youth workers organised sporadic activities outside the city (e.g. a camping trip or a weekend on a farm).

As part of my work at *L'Envol*, I took part in the food and gardening workshops, the Photo Club, and community dinners.

4.3.1 Staff at *L'Envol*

At *L'Envol*, 8 employees took part in my study. They were all in their thirties, except the two trainees who were in their twenties, and the photographer who was more

mature. In the first phase, I interviewed Carl, Catherine, and Élise. Also during the first phase, I observed activities involving Catherine, Élise, Noémie, Paul, and Véronique. In the second phase, I organised a workshop with Catherine, Olivier, and Jonathan. I only collected detailed demographic and background data about the three employees I interviewed; Carl, Catherine, and Élise (see Table 4.6). These three youth workers had French as their mother tongue. Yet, they were all relatively confident in English.

Table 4.6 Employees at *L'Envol*

Name	Phase	Sex	Occupation in the organisation	Education
Carl	1	M	Psychosocial worker and career counsellor	Bachelor's degree in guidance counselling
Catherine	1 & 2	F	Community and residential worker	Master's degree in social work
Élise	1	F	Community and residential worker	Technical college diploma in special education
Noémie	1	F	Student trainee	-
Paul	1	M	Photographer	-
Véronique	1	F	Animator	-
Olivier	2	M	Community and residential worker	-
Jonathan	2	M	Student trainee	

In 2012, Carl said that he had been working at *L'Envol* for five years. He had a bachelor's degree in guidance counselling. He was working full time in the programme I call *Avant-C*. I decided to interview him because many of the young people attending the activities at the *Espace Collectif* would also meet with him occasionally. Carl was not involved in group activities. He solely met individually with young people. He would provide advice and support regarding personal, education, or professional issues. The special aspect of Carl's work is that he could provide sustained support to the young people—accompanying them for instance to

the school to enquire about the enrolment process. Carl met with the young people in his office, but also in different places depending on the issues the young people wanted his support for.

Catherine started working about 4 months before the beginning of the field work in April 2012. She was about to complete a master's degree in social work. Catherine worked full time at *L'Envol*. She also had a bachelor's degree in translation (English to French). She was working in two services, *Espace Collectif* and the supervised flats. Catherine had regular individual meetings with the tenants, discussing with them any personal problems they might have. She established an action plan with all the residents she supported individually. As part of *Espace Collectif*, Catherine was in charge of the following workshops: self-expression, sports activities, community dinners, and the Photo Club. She was present during all these workshops, running them or making sure they were going smoothly. Catherine also took part in the special events (e.g. a weekend on a farm).

During the interview that I conducted in 2012, Élise mentioned having worked full time at *L'Envol* for 7 years. Élise's duties were mainly concentrated around the programme *Espace Collectif*. Like Catherine, she also supported some of the tenants of the supervised flats. As part of *Espace Collectif*, she was in charge of the workshop about food and gardening. She was also involved in the special events, the sports activities, and the open access session.

Noémie was a student trainee in the programme *Espace Collectif*. I only observed her in the first phase of data collection. I did not interview her. She was completing a technical diploma in special education at one of the local *cégeps*. She took part in all the workshops organised. I mainly observed her during the Photo Club, the food and gardening workshop, and the community-dinner activities.

Paul was a professional photographer doing voluntary work at *L'Envol* fortnightly. He ran the Photo Club with the support of Catherine.

Véronique worked for another community-based organisation aiming at promoting self-sufficiency, healthy eating, and environmental awareness. She ran a workshop fortnightly with the *Espace Collectif* group. I observed Véronique only during the first phase of data collection, and did not interview her.

Olivier took part in the workshops I organised in the second phase of data collection. He replaced Élise who was, in 2013, on maternity leave.

Similarly to Noémie, Jonathan was a student trainee and was completing a technical diploma in special education. He only took part in the workshops I organised in the second phase of data collection.

4.3.2   The young people at L'Envol

In total, 13 young people took part in my study; 11 in the first phase and 5 in the second. Three young people took part in both phase one and two (Cassandra, Cédric, and Pierre-Luc). As indicated in Table 4.7, I only have demographic and background data about the seven young people I interviewed in the first phase of data collection (Cassandra, Cédric, Etienne, Thomas, Hugo, Pierre-Luc, and Francis).

In 2012, the average age of the young people I interviewed at *L'Envol* was 26 years old. Their level of education was relatively high. The majority of them went to the *cégep*, and one had started a university degree but did not finish it.

Table 4.7 Young people at *L'Envol*

Name	Phase	Observed and/or interviewed	Sex	Age	Mother tongue	Level of formal education
Ariane	1	O	F	-	-	-
Cassandra	1&2	O&I	F	21	French	Cégep**
Cédric	1&2	O&I	M	23	French	Cégep**
Daniel	1	O	M	-	-	-
Etienne	1	O&I	M	28	French	Bachelor's **
Francis	1	O&I	M	30	French	Cégep**
Hugo	1	O&I	M	24	French	Secondary Cycle Two **
Jacques	2	O	M	-	-	-
Jeanne	1	O	F	-	-	-
Pierre-Luc	1&2	O&I	M	26	French	Secondary Cycle Two *
Rebecca	1	O	F	-	-	-
Richard	2	O	M	-	-	-
Thomas	1	O&I	M	30	English	Cégep***

Legend: * ongoing   ** interrupted   *** completed

I asked the youth workers to describe the young people they were working with. According to them, some participants had experienced various problems related to mental health, family, drugs, criminal activities, marginalisation, isolation, exclusion, and unemployment.

The group dynamic at *L'Envol* was positive. I did not witness any major conflicts. The young people talked to each other both in French and in English. This can be explained by the fact that Thomas had English as his first language. The majority of the young people at *L'Envol* had a good command of English.

The young people's parents at *L'Envol* were mainly employed (see Table 4.8). Some of them were inactive or retired at the time of the interview in 2012. Their levels of education were diverse; from secondary education to master's degree.

Table 4.8 Education level and employment situation of the young people's parents at *L'Envol*

| Name | Young people's parents | | | |
| | Father | | Mother | |
	Education	Work	Education	Work
Étienne	Diploma of Vocational Studies	no	Bachelor's	no
Francis	Cégep	yes	Cégep	yes
Hugo	Master's	yes	Master's	yes
Thomas	Cégep	yes	Cégep	no
Pierre-Luc	DNK	-	Diploma of Vocational Studies	-
Cassandra	Secondary Cycle One	yes	Secondary Cycle One	no
Cédric	Other (workplace training)	no	Other (massage training)	yes

Legend: DNK: Do not know.   .

Pierre-Luc's parents were both deceased. The other young people had contact with their family. The young people at *L'Envol* came from various areas of Québec. Some of them were at the time of the interview living many hours (5-6 hours by car) away from their family.

4.4   Summary

The study was conducted in two community-based organisations—*Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*—for young people aged 16 to 30 who were in a situation of precarity. The services offered at either one or both organisations include a youth shelter for runaways, supervised flats, a gathering place, structured workshops, artistic programmes, and career advice services. Both organisations were situated in the same city in Québec (Canada).

At *Le Bercail*, four youth workers were involved in the study. Two main programmes were observed, *Mobili-T* and *Jonction*. In that organisation, seven young people took part in the study. Their average age was 18 years old.

Many people were involved in the study at *L'Envol*, but I have more information about the people whom I interviewed in the first phase. Three youth workers and seven young people were interviewd. I only observed workshops organised as part of the *Espace Collectif* programme. The average age of the young people at *L'Envol* was 26 years old.

5   YOUNG PEOPLE'S LITERACY PRACTICES AND *RAPPORT À L'ÉCRIT*

This chapter is central to the thesis since it sets out to fulfil the main research objective: to understand the relations between the literacy practices used in community-based organisations and those of the young people in a situation of precarity attending their activities. To understand these two sets of literacy practices and how they relate it is important first of all to gain a deeper understanding of what the young people were doing with literacy in their personal lives. I describe the vernacular literacy practices I either observed in the organisations directly or those that the young people reported to me during the interviews or the workshops.

In Section 5.1, I first describe how literacies were perceived in the young people's families. Section 5.2 focuses on the young people's experiences of school and with school-related literacies. Then, in Section 5.3 I present a few cases related to the literacy artefacts that the young people selected. The next sections, 5.4 and 5.5, are dedicated to the young people's digital literacy practices. Finally, I draw a few conclusions based on the findings presented in this chapter (see Section 5.6).

5.1   Literacies in Young People's Families

In this section, I present an overview of the literacy practices present in the young people's families. I asked them if reading and writing were perceived as important in their family, and the kind of literacy practices their family members engaged in. The majority of the participants were not living with their family anymore. However, family is often the first domain where people are socialised into literacy, and this is why an overview of literacy in the family can help understand young people's actual

literacy practices. This can be related to the notion of *rapport à l'écrit* (Besse, 1995, see Section 1.5); this relationship to literacy which develops over time, and through different experiences and encounters.

When I asked the young people to explain to me how reading and writing were perceived in their families, the reactions were diverse. For some young people (Laurence, Jérémie, Cédric, Kelly-Ann, Amélie, and Darya) literacy was not something they thought was valued in their family. Jérémie explained that other activities were more important than reading and writing in his family, such as watching television. Cédric also said that he never witnessed his father or his mother reading a book for instance. Yet, he regularly played video games with his father (see Section 5.4.4). In Darya's family, girls were not encouraged to go to school or to be able to read and write (See Section 5.3.1 for more details). For some participants (Thomas, Étienne, Julien, Cassandra, Francis, and Hugo), reading and writing were activities perceived as valued by the family.

Based on the socio-demographic data I collected, it seemed that the parents of the young people with higher levels of education in general valued reading and writing. Since I am working with qualitative data, I am not able to verify if this relation is statistically significant. However, this observation seems to support previous sociological work on school capital, and on taste and the selection of cultural products (Bourdieu, 1979).

Literacies provided a point of comparison for the young people participating in my study with regards to other members of their family. This was also observed by Barton and Hamilton (1998). They note that '[t]he idea of reading and of being a reader was imbued with values, just as the idea of writing and being a writer was.' (158) People in Barton and Hamilton's study (1998) compared themselves to others saying that they

were 'good readers', 'avid readers' or were more 'doers than readers'. In my study, the young people also compared their literacy practices with those of their parents, their siblings, and other members of their extended family such as an aunt, an uncle, a cousin, or a grandparent. The examples from the data that I describe in the following paragraphs illustrate that the young people participating in my study either took their distance from the literacy practices present in their family, or associated themselves with them.

Cassandra's parents did not finish their secondary school diploma. However, reading and writing were important to them. She was aware of their literacy practices, even the more intimate ones (e.g. a personal diary kept by her father). Cassandra also mentioned that she showed her personal diary to her mother. This suggests that reading and writing were common topics of conversation in Cassandra's family.

Excerpt 5.1 Literacy in Cassandra's family

Ma mère, elle aime ça lire, quand même. Mon père aussi, mais ce n'est pas des grands liseurs. Mais ils aiment ça. […] Mon père, il a été des années de temps à avoir un journal intime. Genre tous les jours, il écrivait. Mais je pense qu'il a arrêté ça. Ma mère, écrire, c'est plus difficile pour elle. Tu sais, elle a de la misère à composer comme moi mettons. Les idées lui viennent moins vite. Ça fait qu'elle trouve ça plus difficile. Ça fait qu'elle aime moins ça vu qu'elle trouve ça difficile.	My mother, she likes reading, to some extent. My father, too, but they are not big readers. But they like it. […] My father, he kept a diary over several years. Like every day, he was writing. But I think he's stopped that. My mother, writing, it's more difficult for her. You know, writing is difficult for her, like me. Ideas don't come to her so quickly. So she finds it more difficult. So she doesn't like it too much because she finds it difficult.

L'Envol, 15-05-2012

Cassandra knew that writing was difficult for her mother. She also saw a similarity with her own difficulties with writing. Cassandra also mentioned that her godmother had an important influence on her interest towards reading and writing. She said that her godmother would write short stories for her and would tell her about her reading.

Cassandra remembers that her godmother had a large quantity of books in her house. According to Cassandra, her godmother had an important influence on her when she was a child. Cassandra seems to identify with the practices of her family. Her godmother was an important figure—what Padmore (1994) would call a guiding light—in the development of her *rapport à l'écrit*. Padmore defines the term 'guiding light' as 'a particular individual, other than a parent or partner, who has played a significant role in [people's] upbringing or adult life; someone who has encouraged their literacy development, and someone who is spoken of with affection, respect and trust' (Padmore, 1994: 143). I will provide more examples relating to this term in Section 5.2.2.

Other young people also identified with the literacy practices of their family. For instance, Thomas described himself as someone who likes to read and write. He also mentioned that reading is seen as something important in his family.

Excerpt 5.2 Literacy in Thomas's family

Everyone reads. Everyone in my family reads. My dad reads like crazy, my mom reads like crazy, like my grandfather reads a lot […].

L'Envol, 17-05-2012

He said that the members of his family often discussed what they were reading together. His parents usually asked him what he was reading at the moment. Thomas seemed to particularly identify with his grandfather. He seemed proud of talking about him and of his accomplishments. Thomas said that his grandfather had studied for a while in Scotland. He also worked as a journalist in a famous Anglophone newspaper in the Province of Québec.

Excerpt 5.3 Thomas's comment about his grandfather

My grandfather actually writes. He wrote for the [Name of the newspaper] for years and years and years. […] And he wrote a couple of books that have been published. One of them was even almost made into a movie. […] He actually studied in Scotland, I think, for a little while, at [name of a Scottish university].

L'Envol, 17-05-2012

Thomas's grandfather seemed to be an important figure for him. Like his grandfather, he cherished the dream of writing a novel. Thomas was planning to return to education and said that his grandfather would be able to help him with his academic writing skills.

Laurence's father went to university and her mother was a housewife. Laurence did not know her mother's education level. According to Laurence, reading and writing was not valued in her family. She described her family as conservative; valuing traditional gendered roles and the Catholic religion. Laurence said that she wanted to move out from her parents' place as soon as possible. She could not relate to her parents and her siblings. She felt different. Laurence mentioned to me that she was an avid reader of novels and was keeping a personal diary. I suggest that reading and writing were practices that she engaged a lot with and that perhaps made her feel different from them.

Other young people mentioned that their literacy practices contrasted with those of their parents or siblings. Cédric liked to read and write, but these activities were not present in his family except when they were playing videogames together. Hugo, like his mother, liked to read. However, he preferred books about spirituality and she preferred romance or thriller novels (e.g. Agatha Christie). They could talk about what they were reading together. His mother suggested novels for him to read. Étienne also felt that his literacy practices were different from those of his parents.

Excerpt 5.4 Literacy in Étienne's family

Ma mère est enseignante au primaire. Des fois, elle me parlait qu'est-ce qu'elle faisait au primaire, quoi apprendre aux jeunes à écrire, à parler. Là, elle a pris sa retraite, ça fait que là, j'en entends moins parler. Mon père, jamais trop parlé, trop écrit non plus. […]Il lit sa Presse à chaque jour puis son Journal de Montréal. […] Il est resté un petit peu plus dans l'ancien temps, mettons à lire le journal en papier tandis que moi, je vais lire le papier directement sur Internet sur Wikipédia ou... Je ne consomme plus de journaux.	My mother is an elementary school teacher. Sometimes she would talk about what she was doing in elementary school, how to teach children how to write, to speak. Now, she is retired, so, I hear less about it. My father never talks too much, or writes either. […] He reads his *Presse* and his *Journal de Montréal*. [...] He sticks with the old ways, reading the printed newspapers while I'll read the paper directly on the Internet or on Wikipedia or ... I don't buy newspapers anymore.

L'Envol, 16-05-2012

For Étienne, his father was old-fashioned. He contrasted his father's practices with his own. Étienne's mother talked about her work as a teacher with him. Étienne also said that she usually told him about what she was reading. However, Étienne was not always interested in the novels she was reading. He knew her favourite authors; Danielle Steel and Mary Higgins Clark.

Some young people were also comparing their practices with those of their siblings. The young people who had siblings were aware of their practices. For instance, Yoan knew that his older brother had developed an interest in fantasy novels.

Excerpt 5.5 Literacy in Yoan's family

Puis à la place de jouer, il lit beaucoup les livres. Mais lui itou il était de même avant. Il jouait gros à l'ordi, mais à un moment donné, il s'est instruit aux livres puis il aime bien ça les histoires de même. Sinon, c'est plus mon petit frère qui va plus lire ou écrire parce que lui, il va à l'école.	Then instead of playing, he reads a lot of books. But he was also like this before. He played a lot on the computer, but at some point, he trained himself onto books and he likes stories and things like that. Otherwise, it's more my little brother who will read or write because he's the one who goes to school.

Le Bercail, 15-05-2012

Yoan explained that he was not interested in reading books unlike his brother. Yoan preferred videogames. He used the verb *instruit* (trained himself) to describe the process which his brother went through in order to appreciate novels. This suggests that for Yoan reading has to do with learning and with educating oneself. Yoan did not seem interested in going through this process. He saw himself more as a 'doer' than a reader (Barton and Hamilton, 1998).

As mentioned before (Section 2.4), literacies are always associated with issues of power. In the examples presented above, the young people talked about what counted as literacy in their family. They also implicitly marked some practices as more legitimate than others. The young people seemed to associate reading with books. Other literacy practices were mentioned but books were still the main indicator for the young people to characterise themselves or members of their family as avid readers.

5.2   Young People's experiences at School(s) and with School-Related Literacies

In order to fully explore young people's experiences of literacies, I asked them questions about education and their school-related literacy practices (See Appendix C). I describe the young people's experiences with school from their own perspectives. In this section, I do not aim to offer a negative view of the young people's schooling. However, I present some difficulties that the young people experienced at school. These difficulties were various and the young people shared poignant stories. All the young people mentioned some difficulties that they had experienced at school. For many participants, their problems started when they were still in primary school. These were various and included difficulties in staying focused, being said to have attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), being put in special needs classes, dyslexia, bullying, lack of self-confidence, truancy,

overloaded social life (e.g. parties), family problems, interventions by care and social services, change of school, and drug use. Below, I provide a few examples to illustrate the diversity of experiences the young people had at school and with school-related literacies. I also present some positive experiences that they had at school, for instance, with significant people they met. Overall, the young people participating in my study had mixed feelings about school and also about reading and writing at school. Their experiences at school had clearly contributed to constructing their *rapports à l'écrit*.

5.2.1   *Reading and writing at school*

Yoan said that he did not have problems finding inspiration to write a text, but made a lot of mistakes. He was having difficulties at school with grammar and verbs. He also mentioned that he did not have problems with reading comprehension exercises. However, he said that often he was not really interested in the topic of the texts. This is something that Kelly-Ann also mentioned. Kelly-Ann said that writing about topics such as politics, was 'impossible' for her because she found it uninteresting. She explained that she needed to be interested in the books or topics in order to read and write. Amélie also mentioned the importance of being interested in the topic in order to read a book.

Excerpt 5.6 Amélie's perspective on school literacies

C'est sûr que si ça serait un livre qu'ils nous demanderaient à nous de choisir, ça serait autre chose, mais tu sais, c'est des livres qu'ils nous imposent. Ce n'est pas des livres que nécessairement on va aimer puis qui vont nous accrocher. Ça fait que c'est sûr que c'est moins le fun. C'est arrivé une fois qu'ils nous ont demandé de choisir un livre, puis j'ai choisi. C'est Toi et moi à jamais. *Ce livre-là, je l'ai lu au complet, puis j'ai tripé. J'ai réussi à faire mon examen à la fin. Mais un livre qu'il va m'imposer puis que ce n'est pas mon genre, ça, je ne le lirai pas, je ne suis pas accrochée.*	Surely, if they would ask us to select a book, that would be different, but you know, they impose them on us. These are not necessarily books that we will like and that will capture our attention. So, it's certainly less fun. It happened once that they asked us to choose a book, and then I chose. It's 'You and me forever'. That book, I read it all, and I loved it. I managed to do my exam at the end. But a book that they will force on me and that's not my style, that, I won't read it, I'm not hooked.

Le Bercail, 17-05-2012

Amélie said that writing was relatively easy for her, even though she made many grammar and spelling mistakes. She said that her teachers were generally impressed by the quality of her stories, but found that her grammar was poor. Étienne also shared a similar experience. He could write a text easily, but struggled with proofreading it.

For others, reading and writing was their strong topic at secondary school and they enjoyed doing these activities. This was the case with Julien.

Excerpt 5.7 Julien's comment on French lessons at school

En français, c'était l'affaire que j'aimais le plus faire lire puis écrire. [...] J'avais tout le temps fini avant tout le monde.	In French class, it was the thing that I liked the most, reading and writing. [...] I was always finished before everyone else.

Le Bercail, 17-05-2012

Francis also mentioned that reading and writing in French (and in English) were always easy for him. Laurence also said that French was one of her stronger subjects at school. She was good at writing stories. According to her, her marks in secondary school would have been better if her personal life had been better. Darya also enjoyed

her French classes in secondary school. She found the French language complicated to understand; especially the verbs and also the letters that should not be pronounced in certain words. Instead of being discouraged by these complex features, Darya found French fascinating and wanted to understand its grammar and pronunciation. Jérémie said that mathematics used to be his favourite and one of his stronger subjects in secondary school—but at the time of the interview—he said he was discovering a new interest in reading and writing in French or English. Cédric said that his only problem at school with writing was that he used to write too much. His former teachers had to penalise him for writing texts which would exceed the word limit.

The *rapport à l'écrit* changed for some young people participating in my study when they started postsecondary education (*cégep* and university, see Appendix B for an overview of the Québec education system). They were confronted with new genres and new type of texts. The texts they had to read or write were much longer and complex. For some, the transition went smoothly, but for others it was more difficult. Cassandra said she had appreciated reading and writing in general, when she was at the secondary school and in her everyday life. However, when she started *cégep* she found it difficult to write long essays.

Excerpt 5.8 Cassandra's experience with writing at *cégep*

Lecture, oui. J'aimais ça lire. Écriture aussi. Mais c'est parce que tu sais, comme au secondaire, j'adorais ça écrire, composer des histoires, des affaires comme ça. Ça me venait quand même facilement. Mais au cégep, des dissertations, quand ils t'obligent comme à... Il y a comme full d'étapes à faire. J'haïs ça. J'haïs ça pour mourir. Pourtant, j'adore écrire, mais ça... [...] Il y a comme trop de règles à suivre genre puis ça me perd complètement.	Reading, yes. I liked to read. Writing too. You know, like in secondary school, I loved to write, write stories, things like that. It came to me quite easily. But in *cégep*, essays, when they force you like to... There are a lot of steps to do. I hate that. I hate it to death. Yet, I love writing, but it ... [...] There are too many rules to follow and it confuses me completely.

L'Envol, 15-05-2012

After finishing secondary school, Cassandra started the *cégep* in a general education course (*accueil integration*) which only includes the core disciplines of literature, French, philosophy, physical education, and complementary subjects (e.g. fauna and flora). For Cassandra, the genres at the *cégep* were different from those she was used to at secondary school. The philosophy or literature essays required the students to make links between texts that they had read, and to critically analyse them. They have to follow a predetermined structure with a fixed number of paragraphs each with a specific purpose, which is probably what Cassandra meant by 'steps'.

When he started his bachelor's degree in anthropology, Étienne was disappointed by the sheer amount of text he had to read. He was expecting something more practical; more related to archaeological fieldwork than anthropological theories.

Excerpt 5.9 Étienne's experience with reading at the university

J'ai fait une session à l'université en anthropologie. C'est ça qui m'a découragé en premier. Moi, je voulais jouer dehors puis aller me promener puis aller explorer. Ils nous donnaient des briques de 500 pages à lire. Ça m'a découragé, ça. J'ai fait juste une session à l'université, j'ai crissé mon camp. Je suis allé voyager. Je suis allé faire les vendanges en Europe puis un petit peu de travail manuel ici au Québec. Ça m'a occupé. Pour moi, c'était correct. Mes proches, ils disaient que je n'avais pas d'ambition. Pour moi, ce n'était pas de l'ambition. Je voulais juste être heureux puis pour moi, rester assis sur une chaise, ce n'était pas ça. […] C'est dur l'université justement, lire les livres. Tu t'épuises plus rapidement.	I did a term at the university in anthropology. That's what discouraged me first. I wanted to play outside and go around and explore. They gave us massive books of 500 pages to read. It discouraged me, that. I just did one term at the university, I scrammed. I travelled. I harvested grapes in Europe and did a bit of manual work here in Québec. It kept me busy. For me, it was okay. My family, they said I had no ambition. For me, it was not about ambition. I just wanted to be happy and for me, to stay stuck on a chair, it wasn't it. [...] University is tough, reading books. You get exhausted rapidly.

L'Envol, 16-05-2012

Étienne contrasted university with what he had learned while travelling. He explained that for him it was easier to learn through action, by doing and talking with people.

For instance, he was able to learn words in Hebrew and also to improve his English during his trip to Europe and Israel. He also visited many places in Egypt and learned more about ancient Egypt.

Thomas had a different experience with reading and writing at *cégep*. He particularly enjoyed the intellectual challenge of writing philosophical texts. However, he also mentioned that now that he was planning to go back to *cégép* and finish the programme he had started and quit a few years ago, he was concerned about his writing skills. He thought that Facebook and the use of online language (e.g. abbreviation) might have had a bad effect on his writing abilities. He mentioned writing a few full sentences per day to practice and get ready for *cégep*. He was already planning to seek help at the *cégep* regarding his literacy and numeracy skills. When I met the young people in 2012, many participants told me that they had returned to education (or attempted a return) at a certain moment in their lives. The majority of them had dropped out of their education in secondary school, and had gone to the adult education centre to complete their secondary school diploma (see Sections 4.2.2 and 4.3.2). They shared positive stories about the new schools they had attended, the staff, and also what they had discovered about themselves.

My data suggests that because of past negative experiences at school, some young people had the feeling of being incompetent with reading and writing. It seems that what the young people needed were positive experiences at school to make them change their perception of themselves and of their abilities. The majority of the young people had returned to education (before the interviews in 2012) when their personal lives were more stable (e.g. after therapy). The next section discusses in more detail when and how some of the young people developed a more positive view of school and school-related literacies.

5.2.2   The Rediscovery of School and the Role of Inspiring Figures

The *rapport à l'écrit* (Besse, 1995) is not static—it evolves at the pace of people's encounters with new genres, experiences of success or failure, and significant people. The examples indicate that some young people participating in my study discovered or developed an interest in reading and writing at different periods of their lives—often at the adult education centre. The teaching style (individualised) and the flexibility present at the adult education centre seemed to be important aspects that the young people particularly enjoyed. Amélie, Laurence, Hugo, and Pierre-Luc all mentioned having rediscovered schooling when they started attending an adult education centre. Laurence, Pierre-Luc, and Hugo discovered that they were actually 'good' at school and could have 'good marks'. Amélie discovered that she could work faster on her own than in a 'traditional' secondary school classroom.

Excerpt 5.10 Amélie explains why she prefers the adult education centre

Ça donne plus le goût de venir à l'école. Tu sais que tu n'es pas en prison, puis que si tu as le goût de t'en aller fumer une cigarette durant ton cours, bien tu vas fumer une cigarette durant ton cours. Whatever. L'école secondaire normale, ce n'est pas ça du tout. [...] Tu te sens moins coincée, moins encabanée. Tu fais ce que tu veux.	It makes you want to come to school. You know that you're not in prison, if you want to smoke a cigarette during your class, well you go out and smoke a cigarette during your class. Whatever. The normal secondary school, it's not like that at all. [...] You feel less stuck, less trapped. You do what you want.

Le Bercail, 17-05-2012

Amélie appreciated the flexibility of the adult education centre. These centres offer individualised learning paths, which means that the students do not attend classes like in a traditional secondary school. Usually the students are sitting together in the classroom and work individually, each on their specific module (English, mathematics, French, etc.). The students could work at different paces and on different

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modules depending on their progression. A teacher would sit in front of the class and be available if the young people had any questions.

This is something that Amélie also discussed during the fieldwork with Yoan and Frédérique. Frédérique, a youth worker at Le Bercail, was acknowledging the fast progress that both Amélie and Yoan had made in their textbooks, completing written activities in booklets provided by the adult education centre.

Excerpt 5.11 Conversation about the differences between *Le Bercail*, the adult education centre and secondary school

Yoan said 'it's different here when you're tired of it, you can do something else. It's not like in a classroom; here you can listen to music, fool around a bit.' Amélie agreed but also said that when she was at [name of the adult education centre] she was also progressing very quickly in each of the topics even though she had truancy problems. She said that her former teachers told her, 'You're not here very often, but when you're here you produce a lot.' Amélie, Frédérique and Yoan then talked about teachers who were disrespectful to their students, who shouted at them, or who were unfair. Amélie and Yoan had bad experiences with some teachers in secondary school.

Le Bercail, 10-05-2012

The relationship with the teachers seemed to be important for the young people. Yoan also shared with me positive memories about two teachers he had in secondary school; two male teachers who he could relate to.

Some teachers or other members of staff played an important role in the positive experience some young people had when they returned to education. Hugo mentioned that when he was at the adult education centre, a tutor helped him with his writing and also numeracy skills. This tutor also asked Hugo about his vernacular literacy practices. She invited him to bring some personal writings to one of their meetings. Hugo was proud to say that this person found his texts interesting and of value. Hugo also mentioned that he got very good grades at the adult education centre.

Some teachers or other staff contributed to (re)building a positive *rapport à l'écrit*. These people were guiding lights (Padmore, 1994; Gregory and Williams, 2000; Gregory, 2005) for the young people. They inspired the young people, were interested in their vernacular literacy practices, and made them feel good about themselves and their abilities to read and write.

Pierre-Luc explained to me how one of his teachers at the adult education centre motivated him to write and gave him positive feedback on his writing.

Excerpt 5.12 Pierre-Luc explains how his teacher motivated him at the adult education centre

Ma prof l'année passée, elle me donnait des défis, de trouver mettons un mot, de me mettre un mot dans un texte qu'elle ne connaissait pas. Ça fait que là, j'en mettais plein que même moi je ne connaissais pas. Elle dit : « OK, celui-là, je ne le connaissais pas. »	My teacher last year, she gave me challenges; like finding a word, put a word in a text that she didn't know. So, I put many that even I didn't know. She says, 'OK, this one, I didn't know it.'

L'Envol, 22-05-2012

Pierre-Luc discovered that he had a talent for writing. He also proudly explained that the placement test he did at the adult education centre at the beginning placed him in a primary school level, but after 3 weeks, he was placed in Secondary 4 (see Appendix B for an overview of the Québec education system). Cédric also had a similar experience. Having interrupted his studies before the end of Secondary 5 (equivalent to GCSE level in the UK), Cédric did not attend school again until he was 18 years old. He took part in a programme offered in the CJE (see Glossary in Appendix A) where he was supported by a teacher. This teacher at the CJE asked Cédric to pass a few placement tests. Cédric was proud that this teacher thought his test results and texts were good and that he would not have to attend classes at an adult education centre, but could directly pass the exams for the compulsory topics.

These tests allowed him to get his secondary school diploma (GCSE) and to access *cégep*. Cédric had to move to another city in order to undertake his *cégep* course in literature and translation. A severe depression prevented him from finishing this programme. He told me that he had the feeling of having spoiled his only chance to access higher education. When I met him in 2012 and 2013 he was not attending school and was receiving financial benefits from the Québec social assistance programme.

Other studies have suggested that a positive experience in a literacy programme (Desmarais, 2003; 2006; Tett and Maclachlan, 2007) or in adult education (Duckworth, 2013) can develop self-confidence and can change learners' perceptions towards reading and writing. Based on my observations and on what the young people told me during the research interviews, it seems that literacy and also education more generally is a sensitive issue of their lives. In my previous work (Thériault, 2008) I found that people in positions of authority (e.g. GP, teachers, youth workers) could have an important impact on young people's lives simply by suggesting to them to read and write for therapeutic purposes. Their advice was particularly far-reaching when it was made while the young people were experiencing difficulties (e.g. death of a loved one, depression, therapy).

The process of reconciliation with school literacies and school seemed to continue (or start in some cases) in the two community-based organisations participating in my study but in different ways. The youth workers in my study did not necessarily act as guiding lights but rather as literacy mediators. This is further developed in Chapters 9 and 10.

5.3   Literacy artefacts; exploring young people's vernacular literacy practices

In this section, I present a few accounts of young people around literacy artefacts (Pahl, 2004; Pahl and Rowsell, 2010). In the first phase of data collection, I invited the young people to bring one literacy artefact to be discussed during the research interview (see Section 3.2.1.2 for more details). I asked them to bring an object related to their uses of literacies in their everyday lives that was particularly significant for them. I gave examples of categories of objects they could bring such as digital devices, decorations, personal writings, tattoos, books, etc.

The use of literacy artefacts during the interviews was a way of exploring what young people saw as important in terms of literacy in their everyday lives. During the interviews, the participants explained to me what their artefact meant to them, where they had got it from, and why it was important to them; creating what Pahl (2004) calls narratives (used here in a different way than in Hamilton 2012). The young people could talk about as many artefacts as they wanted. Some young people had forgotten to bring an object with them, but nevertheless talked about certain objects which were particularly important to them.

The aim of this section is to give voice to the young people participating in my study about what really matters in terms of literacies in their lives. Talking around literacy artefacts led us to discussing very personal aspects of their lives. I decided not to include some details from their stories because of their sensitive nature (similarly to Warr, 2004).

The data suggest that the artefacts selected by the young people were generally related to important and transformative events in their lives (e.g. immigration, death of a parent, travel, change of school, etc.). By talking around a literacy artefact, I had the opportunity to understand better how young people's literacy practices evolved

through different spaces, time periods and interactions with members of their social network. The data collected with this method were complementary to the observation sessions. This method allowed me to access a more intimate sphere of young people's lives, and of their literacy practices which I would not have been able to observe otherwise.

5.3.1   Young people at Le Bercail

In this section, I offer a brief overview of the artefacts selected by the seven young people at *Le Bercail*. I did not see them the day before the interviews, and could not remind them to bring an object. Only Darya brought artefacts with her. In this section I focus on Darya* (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Overview of the literacy artefacts the young people chose to talk about at *Le Bercail*

Name	Literacy artefact(s)
Amélie	Mobile phone
Darya*	Letters, lyrics, and a notebook
Jérémie	Computer, and the 'Twilight' series by the American author Stephanie Meyers
Julien	Book 'The Alchemist' by the Brazilian author Paulo Coelho
Kelly-Ann	Letters
Laurence	Book 'Coraline' by the British author Neil Gaiman
Yoan	Obituary

Darya brought more than one artefact to the interview; a few letters from a friend, some sheets of paper with lyrics of songs she had written, and a notebook in which she wrote poems in Persian. During the interview, we focused mostly on the notebook. Darya grew up in Iran, but her family was originally from Afghanistan. She had 8 siblings; 6 sisters and 2 brothers. She briefly attended school in Iran but had to stop

when she was 7 years old. Her family told her she was old enough to stop school. She explained that she had to learn to read and write in her native language by herself with the help of her brother.

Excerpt 5.13 Darya explained the context behind her literacy artefact

J'ai recopié sur le papier. J'ai essayé plusieurs fois. J'ai essayé de comprendre qu'est-ce que ça veut dire. Avec l'aide de mon frère, il m'a appris… Au début, il ne m'a pas dit d'écrire des poèmes. Ça je l'ai copié de l'ordi. Le reste, je l'ai inventé parce que mon frère, il m'a dit : « Si tu copies tout le temps, tu ne vas rien apprendre. » Ça fait que j'aimais vraiment ça écrire des poèmes. J'adorais ça.	I recopied it on paper. I tried many times. I tried to understand what the meaning was. With the help of my brother, he taught me… At the beginning, he did not tell me to write poems. This, I copied it from the computer. The others, I made them up myself because my brother told me 'If you copy all the time, you will never learn anything.' So, I really liked writing poems. I loved it.

Le Bercail, 15-05-2012

Unlike her younger siblings, Darya was not going to school and found herself free to write poems about topics forbidden at school (e.g. love and relationships). She explained that nobody could judge or police her at home. Darya said that she would sometimes read her poems to her aunt, who was not able to read or write, and to her younger sister. They did not approve the kind of topics Darya was writing about. For her younger sister, writing about love was like a crime. Darya explained that in her culture 'you cannot love anybody else than God'. Only one of her older sisters was supportive of her poems and the topics they were about. This older sister also used to write poems. She asked Darya to write about her wedding. Darya explained to me that her sister stopped writing poems when she got married. Darya said 'I have now taken her place, now I like it'. Her sister—who was also living in Québec—appreciates her poems and was encouraging her to continue writing.

Darya showed me a poem she had written for a boy she was in love with when she was still in Iran. She explained that this boy was very important to her, and that they

had a secret friendship over a period of 5 years. She wrote the first letter of the boy's name next to the poem, but drew branches and leaves over it to conceal it from her family. Before leaving for Canada, she was unable to say goodbye to him.

Figure 5.1 is another example of a poem she wrote in her notebook. Written in Dari, the variety of the Persian language spoken in Afghanistan, the poem is about two lovers who have been separated and a messenger bird delivering messages between them.

Figure 5.1 Darya's poem 'Oh dear white bird with a crown'

In this notebook, Darya also had pictures of her family. She showed me a picture of her mother, who died at 30 years of age. Her father also died when she was a child in tragic circumstances. Darya and some of her siblings had moved to Canada three years ago with some relatives, when she was 15 years old. Since she moved to Québec, Darya started writing poems and songs in French. She wrote many songs when she

was attending secondary school. She was a victim of bullying and writing was a way to express her frustration. She wrote about racism and also about Muslim women's rights. At the time of fieldwork, Darya was dreaming of becoming a rap singer.

5.3.2   Young people at L'Envol

The interviews at *L'Envol* were conducted in the young people's flats, so all of them were able to show me an artefact. In this section I focus on Pierre-Luc* (see Table 5.2). I selected him because of the richness of the descriptions he offered around the artefacts.

Table 5.2 Overview of the literacy artefacts the young people decided to talk about at *L'Envol*

Name	Literacy artifact(s)
Cassandra	Notebook
Cédric	Poems and philosophy books
Etienne	Travel souvenirs (reproduction of the Rosetta Stone and a necklace with Egyptian hieroglyphs)
Francis	Cardboard box with words written on it in French, English, and Cantonese
Hugo	Folder of personal writing and the book 'Conversations with God' by the American author Neale Donald Walsch
Pierre-Luc*	Tattoo
Thomas	Buddhist altar and books

Pierre-Luc had a clear idea of what he wanted to talk about during the interview. He decided to tell me the story behind his tattoo. A few weeks ago, during a break, I asked him about it in front of other participants. From his reaction, I could see that this tattoo was very personal. He was reluctant to tell me about it. At the time, he just replied that it was for his mother. During the interview, Pierre-Luc explained in detail why this tattoo was so significant for him.

Excerpt 5.14 Pierre-Luc's explanation about his tattoo

Je me suis fait tatouer une croix avec la date de naissance de ma mère puis son année de décès, repose en paix, puis symboles chinois qui veulent dire mon ange. Moi, je pense que chaque personne sur la Terre traîne sa croix. Tu fais ton chemin de croix. C'est pour ça que la croix est là. Quand bien même tu sois bouddhiste ou tu sois qu'est-ce tu voudras, tu traînes ton chemin de vie puis tu fais avec qu'est-ce que tu as. C'est ça. Puis le reste, c'est pour ma mère. […] C'est aussi une marque de respect. Une marque d'amour. […] Elle a souffert pour m'élever. Moi, ce n'est rien souffrir avec des dzz, dzz, dzz [bruit d'une aiguille pour tatouer]. Ce n'est rien comparé à ce qu'elle a fait pour moi.	I got a tattoo of a cross with the date of birth of my mother and the date of her death, 'rest in peace', and some Chinese signs that mean 'my angel'. I think that each person on earth has to carry their cross. You do your 'Way of the Cross'. This is why the cross is there. Even if you are Buddhist or whatever you like, you carry your life path and you do with what you have. That's it. And the rest, it's for my mother. […] It is also a mark of respect. A mark of love. […] She suffered in order to raise me. For me, it's nothing to suffer with some dzz, dzz, dzz [sound of a tattoo needle]. This is nothing compared to what she did for me.

L'Envol, 22-05-2012

Pierre-Luc did not tell anybody about his plan to get a tattoo. He had had the idea for a long time, but only did it in 2011 (one year before the interview). Pierre-Luc explained that he decided to get a tattoo of a cross after he had finished therapy. The 'Way of the Cross' is a reference to Jesus' procession with the cross before his death. The Way of the Cross is used as a metaphor to talk about a series of difficult events or a difficult period in somebody's life. In Pierre-Luc's case, his mother's death and his drug use were part of his personal 'Way of the Cross'. He symbolically decided to get a tattoo of a cross to mark the end of this difficult period. Pierre-Luc said 'I was ready for it' and 'I had finished mourning'. He got this tattoo in the city where he is originally from. He then moved to the city in which *L'Envol* is situated. Pierre-Luc had the rest of the tattoo completed (Mandarin signs, dates of his mother birth and death, and R.I.P.). I asked him why he decided to write 'My Angel' in Mandarin (我的天使). These Chinese characters were selected mainly for the look, but Pierre-Luc also said that he selected them because his mother had been in a relationship with a

Chinese man when he was a child. He was able to speak Mandarin when he was younger. The choice of language is then also related to his memory of childhood. Pierre-Luc mentioned having found the Mandarin characters for the words 'My Angel' online. He was confident that the translation was correct. On a humorous note, he explained that the owner of a convenience store who was from China told him once that the meaning of his tattoo was indeed 'My Angel'. Pierre-Luc believes that his mother is looking after him from above. She is his angel; the one making sure that he is not 'doing anything stupid'. His tattoo is a tribute to her, and the sign that she would always be with him.

5.3.3   Literacy artefacts as a window into young people's past and future

I was able to trace the trajectories (Kell, 2011) of some literacy artefacts. These artefacts were not associated with one unique literacy event, but with a complex web of events, contexts and people. The examples presented above support the idea of literacies as social practices. All the artefacts presented were associated with important people in the young people's lives. The emotional aspect of literacy is visible in the stories the young people shared with me. The literacy artefacts often had a strong symbolic meaning for the young people—representing important events or people. In my previous work (Thériault, 2008) I also noted the importance of literacies during important and often difficult events in the lives of young people in a situation of precarity. Their uses of literacies allowed them to manage their negative emotions, express their feelings, and to communicate more positively with others. In this previous study, I did not explore the material aspect of these literacies. Looking more closely at the artefacts highlights the importance of multimodality (different modes such as drawings and talking around a text) and multilingualism (e.g. French, Dari,

Mandarin). The narratives around the artefacts also underline the personal history associated with literacies. These objects offered an opportunity to better understand some aspect of the young people's past. Yet, they also allowed me to understand their future. Indeed, for some of the young people, their literacy artefacts were rooted in their aspirations; what they wanted to become. This was the case with Thomas and his Buddhist altar. He had put some oriental philosophy books and a teapot on the windowsill, and described this space as a 'mini-temple'. Thomas cherished the dream of becoming a monk or a priest.

The data presented in this section indicate that the young people had rich vernacular literacy practices. Even though some of the young people mentioned that they had had difficulties at school and with school-related reading and writing, the majority of them expressed positive views about literacy. In general, they did not seem strongly against these kinds of practices. Literacy seemed to have an important role regarding self-expression in the lives of the participants in my study. Some of them used reading and writing to help them get through difficult periods of their lives. In the following section, I explore other types of literacies. The young people described in detail their uses of digital literacies.

5.4   Uses of digital literacies by the young people

In the interviews, I asked specific questions about the young people's uses of digital technologies in their everyday life. Based on my literature review, I made a short list of platforms that young people might be using (Facebook, MySpace, MSN, Email, and text messages). I asked them if they were using these, and to add any other platform, website or applications they were frequently using. The participants used an

average of 5 different platforms on a computer or a mobile phone. Figure 5.2 presents an overview of the most frequently used platforms.
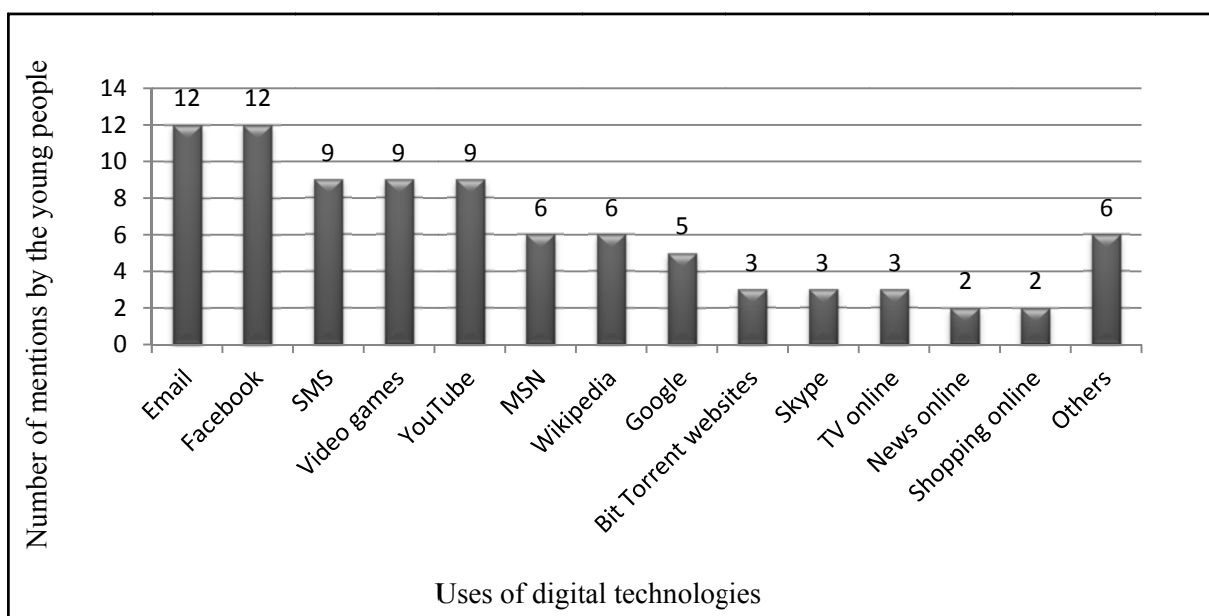
Figure 5.2 Uses of digital literacies

Others included bus schedules, MySpace, online banking, weather forecasts, cultural activities (cinema), Skype, Bit Torrents (sites to share files with other users), online shopping (eBay), and news. In the following sections, I present examples taken from the interviews with the young people and also based on my observations. I focus on the 6 main digital technologies the young people mentioned using the most. I did not include emails and instant messaging because the young people told me that they were rarely using them.

5.4.1 Facebook; Identity curation and the 'cleaning up' of the social network

Only two young people—Cédric and Hugo, both at *L'Envol*—out of the 14 said that they did not use Facebook. For all the others, Facebook was one of the social network sites they used the most. Based on the young people's comments and also on my

observations, the young people participating in my study had both positive and negative experiences of Facebook. Some of the young people described negative experiences they had had on the site. In this section, I present a few examples of these, such as inappropriate content posted by Hugo's friends, Yoan's account being hacked, and Darya receiving threats. In contrast, other young people had a more positive experience of Facebook and its affordances. A few participants (Kelly-Ann, Jérémie, and Francis) were using it to express themselves and communicate their feelings. Finally, some participants (amongst others, Francis and Étienne) explained that Facebook allowed them to stay in touch with their friends and family.

What the participants in my study were doing on Facebook could be described as 'designing' (Kress, 2003) and 'curating' (Potter, 2012). Some young people were using elements found online and were posting them on their Facebook page. They would change them slightly, add comments, and reinterpret them in new ways with regards to their context. This relates to the concept of design which highlights how people mix different modes (e.g. video, images, text) to produce new meanings from available resources (Kress, 2003). The content posted on the young people's Facebook pages originated at times from extensive research and reading online about a specific topic. Curation is another concept that also relates to design, but it is more related to the representation of oneself, to the self-conscious construction of identity. Potter (2012) uses the metaphor of museum curatorship to explain what people do on digital platforms. As she explains,

> when multimodal self-representation becomes possible in a new media form, curatorship becomes a useful metaphor for the resulting new literacy practice. This is because the range of collected assets are appropriated and held by the end user who shapes them, or a selection of them, using the tools available

[…]. Because they are digital, substantially the same resources can be endlessly reused and recombined to give new meanings for different exhibitions, just as a collection of artifacts or art works can be stored, brought out, laid out in new ways, and stored again. (Potter, 2012: 60-61)

In her study of trainee hairdressers and their digital literacy practices, Davies (2014) explores young women's identity curation. She also looks at how various spaces (workplaces, bars, bedrooms) enter into Facebook. About young women's identity curation, she suggests that '[t]heir textual identity performances both reflected but also affected how they saw themselves, their world and their place within it' (ibid.: 72). Miller (2011: 179) also notes a similar phenomenon. He explains that Facebook allows people to see 'a visible objectification of [themselves]' that helps them to 'discover who [they] are'. I explore the concepts of design and curation in relation to the representation of the self in the examples below.

During the fieldwork, Darya and I looked at her Facebook page together. She had many pictures of her siblings, and also selfies of herself on her wall. In these pictures she sometimes adopted a posture that could be associated with popular culture and celebrities (similarly to Davies, 2013). Davies (2013: 15) describes this, drawing on Taylor 2006, as 'postural intertextuality'. Her research participants adopted postures which were similar to those of pop stars such as Britney Spears (Davies, 2013). I observed this not only on Darya's Facebook but also on Amelie's and Kelly-Ann's.

Darya was in contact with people from three different countries—Iran, Afghanistan and Canada. She could thus be described as a transnational youth (McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg and Saliani, 2007; McLean, 2010). Darya explained that she had received threats on Facebook.

Excerpt 5.15 Darya received threats on Facebook

Un moment donné, j'ai reçu des menaces sur Facebook. C'était des Afghans, je ne les connaissais même pas. Il me dit : « Si on te voit, on va te tuer. On va te faire ci, on va faire ça. » […] « Checke tes photos de Facebook comment tu es habillée. Pourquoi tu n'as pas de voile? Tu n'es pas gênée de t'habiller de même. » Je suis comme... Je ne suis pas nue. […] Je n'ai juste pas le voile, puis je suis habillée de même. […] Puis après ça, il m'a bloquée. Je n'ai même pas su c'était qui. C'est quoi le nom. C'est juste écrit « utilisateur de Facebook ». Parce que quand qu'il te bloque, tu ne vois pas le nom. […] J'en ai reçu des menaces. Beaucoup. Ce n'est pas facile de vivre musulmane. […] Je ne sais pas si c'était mon frère. Je ne sais pas si c'était mon ami ou quelqu'un que je le connaissais.	At some point, I received threats on Facebook. They were Afghans; I didn't even know them. He said 'If we see you, we will kill you. We'll do this to you, we'll do that.' [...] 'Look at your Facebook photos, the way you dress. Why don't you wear a veil? Aren't you ashamed of dressing up like this?' I'm like ... I'm not naked. […] I'm just not wearing a veil and I am dressed like this. [...] Then after that, he blocked me. I didn't even know who it was. What's the name? It's just written 'Facebook user'. Because when he blocks you, you cannot see the name. [...] I have received threats. Many. It's not easy to be a Muslim woman. [...] I don't know if it was my brother. I don't know if it was my friend, or someone I knew.

Le Bercail, 15-05-2012

Darya was not worried about these threats. She did not report them to the police. It seemed to be normal; she even mentioned that her brother who lives in Afghanistan could be the one who had written the message. None of her siblings who are also established in Canada have a Facebook account. In the example above, Darya's 'identity curation' (Davies, 2014) on Facebook was attacked.

Not all the young people had a positive experience with curating their identity online. Darya's identity curation (expressed by pictures and images posted) was rejected by some of her Facebook friends. Her lifestyle, her clothes, and new friends in Canada, were not acceptable for some members of her extended social network. Miller (2011) mentions that Facebook brings together networks that are usually not related with each other (e.g. family and friends). In Darya's case, it brought together her social networks from Québec, Iran and Afghanistan. Miller (2011) notes that Facebook also links together friends from different time periods (actual work colleagues, former

schoolmates, relatives living in another country, etc.). This example suggests that this superposition of different social networks can provoke tensions and problematic situations in young people's lives.

Some young people participating in my study did not feel comfortable with the content posted by some of their 'friends' on Facebook. They were unhappy about the 'version of themselves' (Davies, 2014) that their Facebook page was conveying. Yoan and Hugo felt especially uneasy about content related to drugs, alcohol, and violence. Davies (2014) mentions that young people are often warned about the risks associated with posting such content.

Excerpt 5.16 Hugo's reasons for deleting his Facebook account

Hugo: J'étais tanné. J'étais tanné, puis ça ne m'apportait rien.	**Hugo**: I was tired. I was tired and I got nothing out of it.
Virginie: Qu'est-ce qui te tannait le plus là-dedans?	**Virginie:** What annoyed you the most about it?
Hugo: C'est parce que je parlais tout avec des chums de [nom de la région], puis c'était toujours: « Ah, j'ai fait ci. » En tout cas, ça ne m'intéressait plus. Puis les photos, puis tout, tu mets des photos, puis là, le monde, il taggue, puis là : « Heille, telle photo! », nananan. […] Je suis bien content de ne pas être là-dessus. […]	**Hugo:** That's because I was talking with pals from [name of area] and it was always, 'Oh, I did this.' Anyway, I wasn't interested anymore. Then the photos and everything you put pictures and then people would tag, and then 'Hey, what a picture!' blah blah blah. [...] I'm glad I'm not on it anymore. [...]
Virginie: Tu voulais un peu te dissocier un peu de...	**Virginie:** You wanted to take your distance from it a little...
Hugo: Oui. C'est parce que c'était toujours les mêmes affaires: « J'ai viré une brosse hier. J'ai fait ci. J'ai fait ça, bla, bla, bla ».	**Hugo:** Yes. It's because it was always the same stuff: 'I was pissed yesterday. I did this. I did that, blah, blah, blah'.

L'Envol, 21-05-2012

Hugo explained that he used to have a Facebook account, but deleted it a few months before the interview because he was not interested in the content his friends were posting. Hugo explained that he was still in touch via Facebook with friends from the

area where he is originally from. However, at some point he realised that these friends had a lifestyle which no longer corresponded to his new life choices. Later during the interview, Hugo told me that he had stopped using drugs and had therapy. He felt the need to 'clean up' his social network (this is further discussed in Section 8.4).

Yoan used Facebook frequently. His experience with Facebook shared some similarities with Hugo's story. Until recently, he had kept two Facebook accounts. The first account was hacked, and he was not able to access it for a while. He decided to create another one, but realised later that the old account was still online and accessible. Yoan said that he had too many 'friends' on his old account; people he did not know, even from different countries such as France and Italy. This is not a practice he wanted to pursue on his new Facebook account; he wanted to only have friends he knew. He also explained that the content that people posted (pictures or comments) on his wall was not appropriate since they were about alcohol and drugs. Similarly to Hugo, Yoan realised that he needed to change his network of friends. At the time of the fieldwork, Yoan was using a pseudonym on Facebook. He showed me pictures of himself on Facebook; some of them taken during parties. He did not mention if this was on his new account or his old one. It seemed that Yoan and Hugo wanted to have better control over the content posted on Facebook.

Jérémie, a former *Mobili-T* and now *Jonction* participant, mentioned that he changed the way he was using Facebook after attending activities at *Le Bercail*. After participating in the programme, he felt the need to reflect on his friendships, and the kind of person he wanted to keep in touch with. He decided to only befriend people he was regularly meeting in person. Jérémie said to me that he passed from 1 000 to 30 Facebook friends.

Other young people participating in my study had better experiences with Facebook than Hugo, Yoan and Darya. Kelly-Ann used Facebook to express herself, which could be related to identity curation. This was the main function it played in her life, something she would do when she was not in a good mood.

Excerpt 5.17 Kelly-Ann's uses of Facebook

Virginie: [...] Tu l'utilises plus avec tes amis ou ta famille?

Kelly-Ann: Non, pour m'exprimer. [...] Il y a plus de photos puis de phrases que... Genre, je n'irai pas chatter. Moi, je m'en fous. Je ne parlerai pas avec du monde. [...] Je mets rien que des statuts puis des photos.

Virginie: Quel genre de phrases mettons? Tu vas-tu mettre genre qu'est-ce que tu fais?

Kelly-Ann: Non, non, des phrases pris sur [Internet] des citations puis des affaires de même.

[...]

Virginie: Qu'est-ce que tu vas faire mettons quand ça ne feele pas?

Kelly-Ann: Aller me défouler sur mon mur Facebook. C'est la seule affaire, mais je n'écrirai pas un roman. Je vais genre marquer «criss». C'est tout.

Virginie: Do you use it more with your friends or your family?

Kelly-Ann: No, to express myself. [...] There are more photos and phrases that ... Like, I will not chat. I don't care about that. I will not talk with people. [...] I only put status and pictures.

Virginie: What kind of sentences for example? Do you write what you are doing?

Kelly-Ann: No, no, phrases taken [online] quotes and stuff like that.

[...]

V: What are you doing when you are not feeling good?

Kelly-Ann: Let off some steam on my Facebook wall. This is the only thing, but I will not write a novel. I'll write like 'criss.' That's it.

Le Bercail, 17-05-2012

When she was at home, Kelly-Ann said that Facebook would be open all day long. When she was not at home, she would use her mobile phone to access Facebook. In the quote above Kelly-Ann explained that she would not write a lot, just a word. The word 'criss' is a common swear word in Québec, originating from the word 'Christ'. It can be used as a verb, a noun, an adverb, or even as punctuation in a sentence. In Kelly-Ann's quote above (Excerpt 5.17), it expresses a feeling of deep frustration. Based on his ethnographic study conducted in Trinidad and Tobago, Miller (2011:

171) suggests that Facebook can, to a certain extent, become a 'meta-best friend' to people. According to him, since Facebook is 'made' of people, one might consider it as a 'meta-person-like' (ibid.: 172). He explains that 'Facebook was the public sharing of suffering, the feeling that Facebook was a 'witness' to suffering that might be cathartic in its own right.' This relates to what some of my research participants expressed. It did not matter to them if anybody actually reacted to their posts or not, they just wanted to share something and let off some steam. I asked Kelly-Ann how her friends would react when she posted this kind of message. She explained that some friends would ask her why she was so frustrated. She would then reply 'nothing'. Kelly-Ann said that her friends would understand that they should not insist, since she was already frustrated. She mentioned feeling much better after posting this kind of message. Jérémie also said that he sometimes communicated his feelings on Facebook when something made him angry or sad. He said that he would not explain the whole situation online, but would post a few words or an interesting quote found online. This practice is both related to design and curation.

Francis said that he sometimes shared his feelings on Facebook, but not very often. He found it easier to write about his feelings than to talk about them with someone. He described himself as being introverted. Francis used Facebook at least three times a day (morning, lunch time, and before going to bed). According to him, people tend to share important events that are going on in their lives on Facebook and one has to look at it to keep updated. He also explained that it is an efficient way of reaching many people at the same time. This links up to Étienne's use of Facebook. He talked about the fact that it was important for him to look at Facebook to keep in touch with friends living in other countries (France). He explained that people would post pictures of their family—their new baby, their new house, or other important events—on

Facebook. Étienne also shared interesting articles about politics on Facebook. Facebook is then used to keep in touch with friends and family. Another digital technology also seems to fulfil this important function in the young people's lives: text messaging.

5.4.2 *Text messaging: the cornerstone of young people's social lives*

Text messages were mainly used to communicate with friends and family. Many young people participating in my study mentioned using text messages to organise their social lives, arrange meetings or plan an activity (Laurence, Darya). It was also used to kill time and chat with friends (Hugo and Yoan). In some cases young people used it similarly to a personal diary (Amélie and Kelly-Ann).

Laurence explained that she only used text message to communicate briefly with friends and arrange meetings. She would rarely chat without a clear objective in mind (e.g. making a decision about what to do in the evening). Laurence explained that she mostly used text messages on her mobile phone because it was less expensive.

The financial aspect of mobile phone communication also shaped the way Hugo was communicating with his friends. Hugo was a keen user of text messages; he had even bought a small keyboard specifically for this purpose. He explained that he only sent text messages and called his friends after 18.00 because it was free. Hugo did not buy a mobile phone package that included access to the Internet, because it was too expensive for him.

Excerpt 5.18 Hugo's uses of text messages

Virginie: OK. Puis pourquoi après 18 heure?	Virginie: OK. Then why after 6 pm?
Hugo: Parce que c'est gratuit.	Hugo: Because it's free.
V: Ah, oui. OK. C'est ça. Je ne connais pas ça. Je n'en ai pas...	V: Oh, yes. OK. That's it. I don't know that. I don't have one...
H: Ah, non?	H: Really?
V: Non.	V: No.
H: Chanceuse. C'est une dépendance, ça, là. […]	H: Lucky you. It's an addiction, this thing. [...]
V: Peux-tu aller sur Internet dessus?	V: Can you go on the Internet on it?
H: Je ne l'ai pas pris parce que ça coûte trop cher.	H: I did not take it because it's too expensive.
V: OK. Ça fait que toi, c'est vraiment communications.	V: OK. So for you it's really about communications.
H: Oui. Téléphone, textos. […] Pas mal ça. Parce qu'Internet, ça coûte tellement cher!	H: Yes. Phone, texting. [...] That's it. Because the Internet, it's so expensive!

L'Envol, 21-05-2012

Hugo used text messages to communicate with his friends. He seemed to think that he was using his mobile phone too much as he told me that I was lucky not to have one. He said that using a mobile phone can easily become addictive. This is a feeling also shared by other young people.

Amélie's mobile phone was pink with a metallic finish, and a zebra pattern. It had a small integrated keyboard. I often observed her using it at *Le Bercail* during the breaks and sometimes during the activities, even though this was forbidden. She explained to me that her mobile phone was the cornerstone of her social life. With this phone, she communicated with her mother (similarly to Cassandra and Kelly-Ann) and with her friends. She could plan and arrange her social activities with it. She also used it to tell her friends about her personal problems. Later during the interview she

also explained that she used her mobile phone to write down how she feels, similarly to what she would write in a personal diary.

Excerpt 5.19 Amélie's uses of text messages

Amélie: Comme là, je m'étais chicanée avec mon ex. J'ai écrit dans... Là, là [pointe à son téléphone]. Ça commence mal, mais je lui ai écrit une lettre, pour lui. Tout ce que je n'aimais pas, puis tout ce qui me faisait de la peine, tout. Je l'ai écrit dans mon cellulaire.	**Amélie**: For example, I had a row with my ex-boyfriend. I wrote in… there [pointing her mobile phone]. It starts badly, but I wrote him a letter. Everything that I didn't like, and everything that made me feel sad, everything. I wrote it on my mobile phone.
Virginie: Est-ce que tu lui as envoyée?	**Virginie**: Did you send it to him?
A: Non.	**A**: No.
V: Non? C'est pour toi.	**V**: No? It was for you.
A: C'est pour moi.	**A**: It was for me.

Le Bercail, 17-05-2012

Amélie would also reread messages she had received or written to her friends, and at the time of the interview, to her ex-boyfriend. When she felt nostalgic, she would reread the messages she had received from him. She explained that her ex-boyfriend was still someone important in her life. Amélie was planning to erase his messages, and those she had written to him, when she finally had the feeling of having moved on. During the fieldwork Kelly-Ann also used her mobile phone to write to her ex-boyfriend, but did not send him the message. Kelly-Ann felt sorry because she did not pay the last bill for the flat they were sharing. She wanted to apologise.

I suggest that convenience is the reason why some young people were using their mobile phones as a diary. As illustrated by Amélie's and Kelly-Ann's cases, mobile phones were used to express feelings (guilt and sadness). Even though their text messages were addressed to their ex-boyfriends, they did not send them the messages.

A few young people participating in my study claimed not to send text messages or not to appreciate this way of communicating with others. Jérémie said that he did not

like writing text messages, because misunderstandings were more likely to happen. He would mainly use his mobile phone to call his friends. Text messages were reserved for situations when Jérémie knew that his friends could not receive phone calls. Francis also shared similar feelings about text messages. He preferred to call people. He did not like the size of mobile phone keyboards and preferred the size of those on computers. He also found mobile phones expensive. Pierre-Luc used text messages only with his girlfriend or for an emergency. He was not a big fan of text messages and of talking over the phone.

As illustrated by the examples above, mobile phones perform various functions in the lives of the young people participating in my study: planning social life, confiding in others, communicating with family and friends, being entertained when bored, and probably others not mentioned or observed in this study. It seems that text messages were used by most of the young people participating in my study because of their convenience and affordability. These results link up to what other studies have found about the use of mobile phones in countries of the South (Aker, Ksoll, and Lybbert, 2010; Velghe and Blommaert, 2014). In these studies, mobile phones are the preferred tool of communication for people from low socio-economic backgrounds. Most of the young people taking part in my study were, at the time of the study, receiving financial support from the government as part of the social assistance programme. Their income was therefore minimal. Text messages were the preferred way of communicating, since not all of them could afford a computer or the Internet. Also, a mobile phone is more mobile than a computer, and therefore it is more convenient to use it for everyday communication purposes.

I did not observe many text messages written by the young people participating in my study. Consequently, I cannot comment on the language they used to communicate

with the members of their social network. However, based on my data, I can claim that the participants were reading and writing a lot using their mobile phone.

5.4.3   YouTube: Pirating and Accessing Cultural Products

YouTube was a popular website amongst the young people interviewed in this study, with 9 out of 14 mentioning it. However, they did not explain to me in detail—as they did for Facebook or text messaging—what they were doing on YouTube. It might be because they thought it was self-explanatory when they mentioned using it to listen to music.

Excerpt 5.20 Pierre-Luc explained how he downloads music

Musique, c'est ça. Moi, j'ai dowloadé un converter, ça fait que la musique, je la download. Je la pogne de YouTube.	Music, that's it. I've downloaded a converter, so the music, I download it. I take it from YouTube.

L'Envol, 22-05-2012

Pierre-Luc and Amélie mentioned downloading music from YouTube. It is a practice that I also heard of during the fieldwork. It seems to be an easy way for young people to listen to their favourite music without paying for it, which would be difficult considering their financial situation. Young people seemed to help each other in finding ways to download music. Based on my observation notes and also on the interviews, listening to music seemed to be something important for the majority of the young people. For instance, Hugo mentioned being a keen user of YouTube. He did not mention any specific type of music, but others did. They had very different tastes. For instance, Cassandra liked Francophone music (e.g. Lisa Leblanc), Julien Indie music, Yoan reggae (e.g. Bob Marley), Richard hip-hop and rap, and Darya Russian pop and rap music.

Downloading music (and the use of Bit torrents websites) is generally considered pirating by the authorities and cultural industries. However, none of my research participants involved in these practices expressed concern about this. Downloading music for free seemed 'normal'. Some studies have looked at these issues and challenge the concept of pirating, suggesting that for some users Bit torrents and other ways of downloading illegally are ways of democratising cultural products (see Carter and Rogers, 2014; Özdemirci, 2014). For my participants, these illegal practices might represent a way of obtaining these cultural products that would otherwise remain inaccessible (or unaffordable).

5.4.4 Video Games and Second Language Learning

Many participants (9/14) mentioned playing video games. Amongst the participants who talked about video games, 7 were male; Yoan and Jérémie at *Le Bercail*, Cédric, Étienne, Francis, Hugo, and Thomas at *L'Envol*. They played them on their computers or consoles (Nintendo or PlayStation). Diverse genres of video games were mentioned. The most common ones were massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), role-playing games (including action, tactics, stealth, etc.), and shooter games (tactics or third-person). Some participants mentioned games they were playing often: *Lionheart*, *World of Warcraft*, *Metal Gear Solid*, *Diablo*, *Rainbow Six*, *Star Wars*, *Final Fantasy*, *Prototype*, *Grand Theft Auto*, *Uncharted*, and *SimCity*. All these games are characterised by high quality 3D graphics and some of them have a (sometimes complex) storyline. Most of these games, according to the young people, involved a lot of reading and writing.

Only two women, Darya and Laurence at *Le Bercail*, played video games. These two participants played different kinds of games (2D) on different media (iPod or mobile

phone). Laurence mentioned a game called *King's Quest VII: The Princeless Bride* which she played to 'kill time' and because she liked the graphics. Darya sometimes played a game on her iPod before going to bed. This game was about killing vampires and did not involve any reading or writing. Gee (2003; 2008a; 2008b; 2009) indicates that people engage in various complex practices while playing video games. Newon (2011) underlines the collaborative nature of online games and also their focus on multimodality (images, text, video, audio, etc.). Gee (2003: 13) notes that video games are not a 'waste of time' and can in fact result in significant learning. Videogames were not a waste of time for the young men participating in my study. For instance, Thomas said that he had the feeling of having accomplished something when he played video games for a couple of hours a day.

Gee does not explore the affordances of video games for second language learning. However, there is a growing body of research specifically addressing this question (Thorne and Payne, 2005; Thorne, Black and Sykes, 2009; Peterson, 2010; Thorne and Smith, 2011; Cornillie, Thorne, and Desmet, 2012; Rama, Black, Van Es and Warschauer, 2012; Thorne, Fischer and Lu, 2012). Thorne, Fischer and Lu's study (2012) about the linguistic complexity of World of Warcraft (henceforth WoW) shows that the quest texts and also the texts on game-external websites related with WoW generally used sophisticated words and syntax. Newon (2011) also notes that players use expert language on the WoW chat function that can be challenging to understand for a neophyte.

Interestingly, when I asked questions about reading, writing and video games, six young men talked about the importance of the English language for these games. The young people talked about the strategies they would adopt to cope with texts in their second language. They also talked about their learning preferences and trajectories.

They explained that some of the video games they played were not translated into French and they had to play them in English. Francis explained that some games are translated into French, but with an accent from France to which he could not relate to. Francis would play the English version of the game rather than the version from France.

Yoan, Hugo and Jérémie encountered some difficulties related with the language. They adopted different strategies to enable them to successfully play their favourite game. Yoan explained that in the game *Lionheart*, the 'quest texts' were in old English which was even more difficult for him and his little brother to understand.

Excerpt 5.21 Yoan explained how he proceeded to understand the game quests

Moi, j'allais sur Internet dans le fond. J'allais sur le site, puis j'allais voir c'était quoi... Je disais... Je marquais c'était quoi le nom de la quest, puis ils me le sortaient tout le temps en français parce que moi, je ne comprenais pas tout l'anglais, puis je ne catchais pas tous les bouts. Ou sinon, je le faisais souvent avec le GM. C'est genre le boss du jeu, lui que... Oui, c'est ça, le boss du jeu. Puis je le faisais souvent avec eux autres. Pas si pire.	Well, I would go on the Internet. I would go on the website to see what it was ... I'd say... I'd write the name of the quest, and then they would always give it to me in French because I didn't understand everything in English, and I didn't understand all the parts. Or else, I often did it with the GM. It's like the master of the game, the one who... Yes, that's right, the master of the game. And I often did it with them. Not too bad.

Le Bercail, 15-05-2012

In order to understand what actions were needed to achieve the quest, Yoan would visit a game-external website where he could find the French translations of the quests. Yoan said that he also sought help from the Game master (GM). This means that he received extra guidance and instructions from the game (e.g. popup help advice).

Hugo adopted another strategy to make sure that he understood the quest texts or the dialogues properly. He put subtitles in French when the game had this option. He was

then able to read (or hear) the text in English and to see its translation in French at the same time. According to Hugo, this was a good way to improve his skills in English.

Jérémie explained that by reading the whole sentence he was usually able to understand the meaning of the quest. He read them slowly, word by word. He seldom searched online or in a dictionary for a word he did not know.

Excerpt 5.22 Jérémie described what he learned by playing *World of Warcraft*

Jérémie: Je réussis à le… Je ne suis pas une bolle en anglais, mais je réussis à comprendre si je lis tranquillement, mot par mot, je réussi à comprendre le sens de la phrase. […]	**Jérémie**: I manage to ... I'm not brilliant in English, but I manage to understand if I read slowly, word by word, I manage to understand the meaning of the sentence. [...]
Virginie: OK. Puis ça, penses-tu que… Il y avait beaucoup d'anglais là-dedans. Ça t'a-tu…	**Virginie**: OK. And do you think that this... There was a lot of English in there. Did it...
Jérémie: Oui, tout *World of Warcraft* puis *Magic*, ça m'a aidé beaucoup en anglais. […] Mais on dirait que l'anglais en classe, écouter un professeur puis lire dans le livre, on dirait que ça ne rentrait pas. Mais on dirait quand je me suis mis à écouter plus des émissions en anglais, jouer à des jeux en anglais puis des affaires comme ça, on dirait que là, ça rentre, mais pas avec un professeur.	**Jérémie**: Yes, *World of Warcraft* and *Magic*, it helped me a lot in English. [...] But it looks like English in class, listening to a teacher and reading in a textbook, it seems it didn't work. But it looks like when I started listening to TV programs in English, playing games in English and stuff like that, it seems that then it works, but not with a teacher.

Le Bercail, 17-05-2012

Jérémie claimed that he improved his English by playing video games. He gave the example of the MMORPG *World of Warcraft* (WoW) and of the card game *Magic*. In these two games, a player has to read a lot and sometimes rapidly since an action might be required. According to him he learned more from these two games than by learning English at school.

This feeling was shared by Cédric and Francis at *L'Envol*. For these two young men, their interest in video games also led them to be interested in the English language. Cédric's passion for video games started when he was still a young boy. He would

play with his father who would offer an approximate translation of the 'quest texts' to him.

Excerpt 5.23 Cédric recalled how he was translating video games to his siblings

J'ai traduit comme ça pour mes petits frères. Parce que quand j'étais très, très jeune, quand j'avais genre cinq ans, mon père, il jouait tout le temps à des jeux vidéo avec moi. […] Puis justement, je le regardais jouer, je jouais avec lui, puis lui, il me traduisait tout. Il me lisait… il avait fait plus ou moins qu'est-ce que j'ai fait pour mes petites frères plus vieux. […] Il n'était pas parfait en anglais non plus. Il faisait un peu sa propre histoire, mais je l'ai fait mieux que lui après. Mais je veux dire… J'ai beaucoup passé de temps avec mon père en étant jeune à jouer à des jeux vidéo. Puis il doit avoir probablement commencé mon désir de traduction. Les jeux vidéo, ç'a tout le temps été un de mes grands hobbies, une de mes petites passions à cause de… Je crois que c'est drôle jouer, j'imagine.	I translated like this for my little brothers. Because when I was very, very young, when I was like five years old, my father, he was playing video games all the time with me. […] And I watched him play, I was playing with him, and he was translating everything for me. He was reading for me ... he did more or less what I did for my little brothers when I became older. […] He was not perfect in English either. He created a bit his own story, but I did it better than him later. But I mean... I spent a lot of time with my father when I was young playing video games. And he probably sparked my interest for translation. Video games have always been one of my big hobbies, one of my little passions because ... I think it's fun to play, I guess.

L'Envol, 23-05-2012

Cédric grew up in a rural area of Québec situated in a region far away from larger urban centres. He said that nobody could speak or read English in his village. Video games were the only way for him to access authentic texts in English. His father acted as a literacy mediator (see Section 9.1.1.4 for a definition of this term), translating the quest texts the best he could from English to French. Cédric saw a similarity between his father acting as a literacy mediator and him doing the same a few years later with his younger siblings. With the help of pocket dictionaries, Cédric translated the quest texts for his younger brothers. He spent a lot of time on each translation, making sure that it was accurate. According to Cédric, translating these texts helped him improve his English. When he was 15 years old, he learned grammar rules and verbs by using the Internet, which he did not have access to before. Cédric explained that playing

video games with his father and later with his brothers initiated his interest in translation. Cédric started a course on literature and languages at *Cégep*, but quit before the end. During the interview, Cédric mentioned that he was still interested in working as a translator.

5.4.5   *Wikipedia: a Support to Understand Everyday Life*

Wikipedia was also mentioned by some participants (6/14). I did not include it in the questionnaire, but the young people could mention other sites they were frequently using. Wikipedia seemed to be considered as a reliable source of information when they wanted to have an overview of a specific topic. Three participants mentioned using it regularly (Francis, Cédric, and Étienne).

As mentioned in the previous section, Cédric spent a lot of time reading online about subjects he found interesting. He thought of Wikipedia as the starting point for his searches. He would look at the sources cited on Wikipedia to extend his search.

Étienne explained that he used Wikipedia to understand better some events occurring in his life, in the lives of his friends or some events he read about on the news. Étienne explained that at the community dinner, the guest speaker was talking about Cameroon. Étienne was fascinated by the number of languages and dialects that people spoke in this country and wanted to know more about it. He then looked at the Wikipedia page on Cameroon.

Excerpt 5.24 Étienne's uses of Wikipedia

Des fois… Oui, c'est ça, de l'actualité sur les pays. Mettons il y a un coup d'état en Éthiopie, je vais aller voir c'est quoi qui se passe là-bas. Mettons au souper rencontre dernièrement, on a eu un souper sur le Cameroun, puis après ça, j'ai été voir sur Wikipédia des affaires.	Sometimes... Yes, that's right, news about countries. Say there is a coup d'état in Ethiopia, I'll go see what's happening there. At the community dinner lately, we had a dinner about Cameroon and then after that I went to look at some stuff on Wikipedia.

L'Envol, 16-05-2012

This links with what Ivanič et al. (2009) call literacies for finding things out and taking part. Étienne's interest in Cameroon was closely related to his participation in the community dinner. He would be able to talk about his researches with other participants at *L'Envol*. He also gave the example of a coup d'état in Ethiopia, a country that he did not know a lot about. This links up with Étienne's interest in anthropology—and, to some extent, archaeology. Étienne mentioned that he was discouraged by the amount of reading he had to do at university as part of the bachelor's degree in anthropology he did not complete. He said that it was too theoretical for him. However, it seems that reading about countries which he could relate to in his everyday life or because of current events was more motivating for him.

Some of the young people who took part in my study were interested in topics such as politics, economy, international relations, and so on. Reading the news was not always enough for them. For instance, Étienne wanted to go beyond what was available on the news. Wikipedia would provide an accessible introduction to the history, culture, and political background of a country mentioned in the news or during a meeting.

5.4.6   Google and other Online Search Engines; a Starting Point for Design and

   Curation

A few young people (5/14) specifically mentioned using Google to search information online. Other search engines might also be used, but the young people did not mention them. In general, they saw Google as a good starting point for any online search. Some young people would look online for advice regarding specific problems they were encountering in their lives or in their social network such as health problems (Étienne and Jérémie). Some young people used it to find new ideas and get inspiration (Jérémie) or for their personal intellectual development (Cédric). Google can also be used as a first step in the curation (Potter, 2012) and design (Kress, 2003) of their Facebook page, that is to say, to find quotes, images or video to post on their wall. Kelly-Ann found the quotes that she posted on her Facebook page on Google. She would type the word *citations* [quotes] on Google and look at the results to find something she liked and wanted to share. The quotes she shared were thoughts about life, love, hope, etc. This is something that Julien and Jérémie also did. These examples relate to the concepts of design and curation discussed before. These descriptions illustrate the process of selection and also to some extent the motivation behind it.

Étienne explained that he sometimes used Google to find information when he experienced health problems. He gave the example of problems he had recently had with his heart. Étienne was looking at forums or medical websites where cardiac dysrhythmia (also called arhythmia or irregular heartbeat) is discussed. He found the information useful since it helped him to understand the sensation he was feeling in his body at that time.

Excerpt 5.25 Étienne's uses of Google

Je fais un peu d'arythmie, ça fait que des fois, je vais voir sur Internet: « OK, là, présentement, j'ai tel symptôme. » Je vais voir sur Internet [pour comprendre] qu'est-ce qui se passe puis je regarde un peu avec les autres personnes qui ont écrit sur Internet qu'est-ce qu'ils pensent de ça.	I have a bit of arrhythmia, so sometimes, I'll have a look on the Internet, 'OK, now, I have such symptoms.' I'll have a look on the Internet to [understand] what's happening then I look at what other people have written on the Internet about what they think of it.

<div align="right"><i>L'Envol</i>, 16-05-2012</div>

This underlines an aspect of literacy that is not always mentioned in relation to digital literacy, embodiment. Thomas (2007: 166) mentioned that the body is an important aspect of literacy practices. In Étienne's case, his heart problems brought him to read online and helped him to make sense of his symptoms. Other studies (Thériault, 2008; Papen, 2012a; 2012b) have shown that the Internet can be an important source of information when a person, or someone in their social network, has health issues.

5.5   Relationships between the literacy practices online and offline

Thomas (2007) found that the problems that adolescents were experiencing in their 'offline' personal lives were not separate from their 'online' lives. She argues that the

> online world is not divorced from their real worlds, or from the struggles experienced in real worlds. Rather it is a reflection of the same sorts of struggles, albeit enacted in different ways. (Thomas, 2007: 173)

Adolescents in her study used online virtual spaces, text messaging, role-playing games, social media, blogs, forums and a writing website. They experienced problems related to relative positions of power in a group and popularity, identity shaping—that is to say finding who they were as individuals—and sexuality.

The difficulties that the young people in my study experienced were generally different from those of the adolescents in Thomas' studies (ibid.). Some of the problems experienced by my research participants might not be representative of mainstream youth and, I suggest, are related to the specific kinds of precarity that they were experiencing. These struggles shaped the young people's online practices in different ways.

Identity difficulties seemed to be experienced by some of my research participants. Some of the participants, especially at *Le Bercail*, posted pictures and thoughts on their Facebook pages trying out diverse identities and therefore curating their selves. At *L'Envol* this kind of practice was not so present. This might be related to the fact that the young people at *L'Envol* were older, 21 to 30 years-old, compared to the 16 to 20 age range at *Le Bercail*.

Some young people had the feeling that their social network (both online and offline) did not correspond to their new selves. All the young people participating in my study were undergoing some major changes in their lives (such as stopping taking drugs, relationship breakups, therapy, end of homelessness, etc.). Thus, they needed to 'clean up' their social network. This was done both online and offline; doing this online might facilitate the process offline, and vice versa.

The young people participating in my study confided in me variously that they had been diagnosed with a mental health problem, had sporadic health issues, or had undergone a surgical operation (i.e. abortion). As illustrated by Étienne's example, the Internet can be a source of information to understand a particular health issue. It was also used to understand the health problems of people in their social network.

Financial difficulties seemed to have had an important effect on the young people's digital practices. Hugo did not use his mobile phone to make phone calls because it

was too expensive. Consequently he mostly sent text messages. Darya did not have the Internet or a landline at home; this was a way of saving money.

Another difficulty that seemed to influence the digital literacy practices of some of the young people was bullying. For instance, Darya shared with me experiences of bullying and racism that she was a victim of at school. She explained that some of her peers would call her 'terrorist'. She also said that she once got into a fight with several young men who were intimidating her at school. This violence seems to also be present online. Other participants also mentioned having been contacted by people they did not know who had written offensive messages to them. During the fieldwork, fights in bars and other conflicts were mentioned by the participants, both by the young women and the men. This was especially present at *Le Bercail*.

Difficulties in love relationships were also being played out both off and online. This was particularly present in the interviews with Kelly-Ann, Amélie and Darya, and based on my observation. These young women had problems either with their current partner or their ex-boyfriend. Kelly-Ann even had to go to court to prevent her violent ex-boyfriend from contacting or approaching her. Despite this restraint order, Kelly-Ann still thought of sending a text message to her ex-boyfriend to apologise about not having paid the rent. A week after requesting this restraint order, Kelly-Ann asked for it to be cancelled because she had contacted her ex-boyfriend. These negative gendered relationships were also present in the young people's digital practices.

Difficulties regarding young people's identities, social network, health, financial situation, and social relationships were being played out on and offline. As Thomas (2007; 173) explains, the 'online world is not divorced' from what the young people do in their offline everyday lives. Because digital technologies are generally mediated

by literacy, it plays an important role in these difficult situations the participants experienced.

5.6   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored various aspects of the young people's literacy practices. Based on the analysis presented above, I argue that the participants in my study had very rich and complex vernacular literacy practices. My analysis of the way literacy was perceived in the young people's family, the various experiences they had with school and school-related literacies, and the exploration of literacy artefacts allowed me to consider the evolution of their *rapports à l'écrit*.

Literacy was a point of comparison for the young people between their representations of themselves and their family. Participants either took their distance towards the literacy practices present in their family, or associated themselves with them. Some significant figures (e.g. Cassandra's godmother or Thomas's grandfather) were identified as people who had influenced the way some young people perceived reading and writing.

Many young people mentioned having had some serious difficulties when they were in primary and secondary schools. Some participants had good memories related to reading and writing at school and others had experienced difficulties on this matter. Based on my data, it seems that school and school related literacies are sensitive topics for these young people. Their experiences at school were closely related to their perceptions of themselves and of their abilities as learners, readers and writers. Positive experiences—generally at the adult education centre— had given them back more confidence regarding their literacy abilities. This indicates that their *rapports à*

l'écrit had evolved through these experiences, and because of significant teachers or other staff that supported them.

By discussing literacy artefacts with the young people, I was able to explore the complex web of events, contexts and people associated with them. The artefacts selected by the participants were generally associated with important people and events in the young people's lives. I was able to trace the artefacts' trajectories (Kell, 2011), and that helped me to understand how literacy can be associated with emotions (e.g. mourning) and difficulties in young people's lives.

The importance of digital technologies in my participants' lives was striking, as illustrated by the analysis presented in Sections 5.4 and 5.5. Many young people mentioned using Facebook to express their feelings, which can be associated with identity curation (Potter, 2012; Davies, 2014). Young people selected and posted content that corresponded to the representation of themselves that they wanted to share with others. This was done by a process of design (Kress, 2003) that entailed selecting existing materials and modifying, reinterpreting and reconceptualising them on their Facebook pages. Digital literacies were also central in the organisation of the young people's social lives. Text messages and Facebook were the digital technologies they preferred for communicating with friends and family. The young people participating in my study talked about the learning affordances of digital technologies. Video games were central to the learning of English as a second language for a few of the young men. For others, Wikipedia and Google were sources of intellectual development and learning.

I also found that the young people's online literacy practices cannot be 'divorced' from their offline lives. Similarly to Thomas (2007), I observed that the difficulties experienced by the young people in their everyday lives were also being played out

online. This means that the situation of precarity they were experiencing was also shaping their online practices.

Finally, the analysis presented in this chapter indicates that the young people participating in my study were reading and writing a lot in their everyday lives. Their literacy practices were often multimodal—involving texts, spoken language, images, video, and so on. Their literacy practices were also multilingual. Many young people were writing or posting texts in languages other than French (e.g. English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Dari). In general, I would say that the young people had positive views on literacy and did not reject activities that involved reading and writing in their everyday lives.

6   LITERACY IN THE COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS

In this chapter, I focus on the literacy practices present in the two community-based organisations that took part in my study. In Section 6.1, I first offer a description of the literacy practices I observed during the workshops organised at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. I then go on, in Section 6.2, to analyse the semiotic landscapes of the organisations. This is followed by an analysis of the youth workers' vernacular literacy practices (see Section 6.3). In the next section, Section 6.4, I highlight some meeting points and tensions between the young people's literacy practices and those of the community-based organisations they were attending. I finally draw some conclusions based on the analysis presented in the chapter (Section 6.5).

6.1   Literacy practices in the community-based organisations

In this section, I offer an account of the literacy practices I was able to observe at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* during the first phase of data collection in 2012. I particularly draw on the analysis of my observations in this section.

In my observation notes, I was able to retrace an important number of literacy events. I identified 178 different literacy events that were central to the activities at *L'Envol* and 287 at *Le Bercail*. These numbers are probably not representative of the actual presence of literacy in the organisations, but they represent what I was able to observe over a period of two months. Even if I missed some literacy events the numbers show that literacy was prominent in the work of both organisations. In the following pages, I will infer literacy practices (Barton and Hamilton, 1998) based on what I observed. I draw on the well-established categories developed by Barton and Hamilton (1998), and later extended by Ivanič et al. (2009) in order to categorise the literacy practices

present at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. These categories allowed me to make sense of what I had observed.

The six categories developed by Barton and Hamilton (1998) to identify the areas of everyday life where literacy was important were: 1) organising life, 2) personal communication, 3) private leisure, 4) documenting life, 5) sense making, and 6) social participation. Even though these categories were developed to describe areas of everyday life, I was also able to observe them in the two organisations participating in my study. This already indicates something important about the nature of these community-based organisations. I will come back to this point later in my analysis in Section 6.1.11.

I also found the four categories developed by Ivanič et al. (2009) to describe students' literacy practices in college relevant to analyse my data: 1) literacy practices for becoming and being a college student, 2) literacy practices for learning content, 3) literacy practices for assessment, and 4) literacy practices relating to the imagined future for students on the course. In bringing these two category sets together, I had to adapt them slightly because they referred specifically to the context of UK colleges. I found that the categories 'sense making' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998) and 'literacy practices for learning content' (Ivanič et al., 2009) overlapped in my data and decided to merge them. They both refer to learning and in my data I was not able to distinguish these categories.

To the categories presented above, I also added a category used by Maybin (2007; 2013) to describe literacy practices that would occur 'under the desk', that is to say, unofficial practices taking place while students are supposed to be undertaking activities that are part of the official curriculum and set by the teachers. Once again, this category was developed in a different context (school) to the one in this study

(community-based organisation). I had to adapt it, and the others, to the settings of my study. I define how I understand and use these categories in this study in the following sections. This is supported by relevant examples taken from my observation notes.

6.1.1 *Literacy practices to organise life and get things done*

Barton and Hamilton (1998) explain that the literacy practices included in this category are aimed at organising, classifying and keeping records of everyday life activities. According to them, these kinds of literacies can be seen as 'chores', things that one has to do in order to accomplish everyday life tasks (e.g. shopping, going to appointments, paying bills).

This category of literacy practices played an important role in the day-to-day activities organised at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. In both organisations, lists were often used to structure the activities. This was also observed by Bélisle (2003) in other community-based organisations working with young people. In my study, it was common practice either to follow a checklist of things to do in any given activity, or to write up a list on the spot based on a brainstorming activity.

Figure 6.1 Example of a checklist used at *Le Bercail*

For instance, when the young people were cleaning the premises at *Le Bercail*, they had to follow a checklist that included all the chores they had to undertake (see Figure 6.1). This checklist included tasks such as 'empty the garbage bins', 'dust the computer', 'sweep the floor', etc. Once a task was done, the young people would check it on the list. This practice is similar to the lists that would be used in certain workplaces. For example, it is similar to the cleaning lists that can be seen in the toilets of restaurants, airports and other public places.

Other types of lists were also used at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. At *L'Envol*, the young people wrote lists during the gardening workshop. They listed all the seeds they had, and made a plan of the garden. The use of literacy played an important role in structuring this activity. The plan created based on their search (in books and online) would be used at a later stage, when they would work in the garden, planting out the seedlings in a specific way.

At *L'Envol*, Catherine and the young people would use the computer to look at supermarket offers. This is an example taken from my field notes.

Excerpt 6.1 Observation notes about 'Asian macaroni with minced meat'

All the young people gathered around the computer screen. They were looking at the grocery offers at the supermarket nearby.

-Catherine: The most expensive thing is always the meat.

The young people had to select the menu in relation to the kind of meat which was on offer that week. Chicken, minced meat and pork were on offer. The young people were discussing what they could do with each kind of meat. Cassandra suggested cooking an Asian macaroni with minced meat.

-Cassandra: You don't really need to find a recipe online for it. I know how to do it. It's very simple. You just need to fry vegetables and the macaroni in soya sauce.

The others agreed. Cassandra then told Catherine her idea. She was fine with it. They also agreed to prepare a soup as a starter and a courgette cake for dessert. Cassandra and Catherine looked online for recipes.

L'Envol, 4-04-2012

In this example, the young people and Catherine brainstormed ideas about recipes they could prepare for the community dinner based on what was on offer. Cassandra made a suggestion that seemed to please the majority of participants. The following week, she wrote down the list of ingredients they needed to prepare the selected dish. Figure 6.2 illustrates an example of a shopping list written for another community-dinner during which the young people cooked typical Cameroonian dishes.
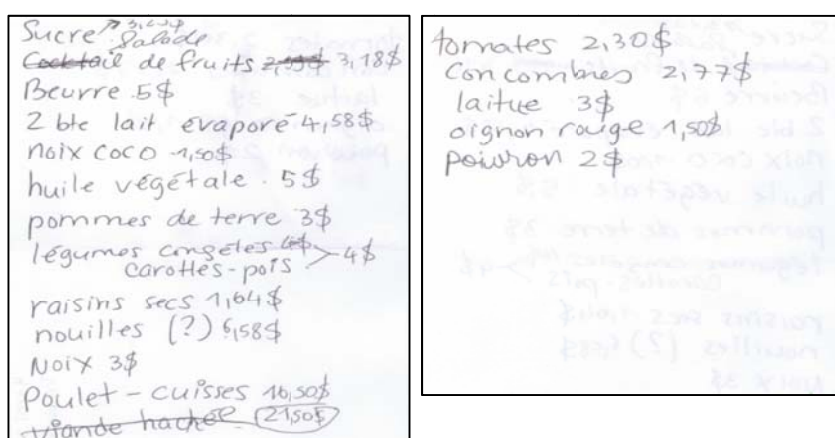
Figure 6.2 Shopping list for a community-dinner

The shopping list was usually given to another participant who would be in charge of estimating the cost of the ingredients while the group was shopping at the supermarket. This person (they would take turns) often used their mobile phone to calculate the cost of the products, and added the prices to the shopping list (see Figure 6.2). The group had a limited budget to keep within, and estimating the prices was a way of checking if they were managing to keep to it. The youth workers told me that they were also hoping that this would be a strategy that the young people would then apply to their own shopping practices.

Other lists were created by the youth workers only. For instance, Élise and Catherine at *L'Envol* organised a weekend at a farm, and asked the young people if they were interested in joining this activity. They pencilled down the names of the interested people on a piece of paper and created a list. The young people and the youth workers sometimes mentioned a waiting list at *L'Envol* to access the supervised flats programme. All the young people were aware of this list even though they probably never saw it.

Apart from the lists, other literacy practices were used to organise life and get things done. At *Le Bercail*, the youth workers gave the young people a diary they could use to write down a schedule of their activities. Also, after realising that the young people had a tendency to spend their pay rapidly, Ève-Lyne gave them little pieces of paper on which they could write down their expenses. With this information she wanted them to be able to help themselves to budget.

6.1.2 Literacy practices related to communication

In their study, Barton and Hamilton (1998) identified literacy practices that consisted of communicating with other people by sending letters and cards, putting up signs or publicity, or by leaving notes. Ivanič et al. (2009) also used this category to look at college students' literacy practices. They found that students were using mobile phones, emails, MSN messenger (chat), besides more traditional practices such as notes and letters to communicate with others. In my study, I also observed the youth workers and the young people using digital technologies together with traditional pen and paper to communicate with others.

The literacy practices related to communication that I most frequently observed in the premises of the organisations involved digital technologies such as mobile phones and computers. During the breaks, the young people would send text messages to their friends, their family, or even to each other.

Notes were also observed in both organisations. For instance, I noticed that at *Le Bercail* Frédérique answered a phone call from a young woman who had just found a job and asked Frédérique to inform Tommy about it. Frédérique took a note and gave it to Tommy later on the same day. This young woman was taking part in the *Jonction* programme.

Figure 6.3 Posters for the second-hand shop

In the communication category, I would also include other types of literacy practices that were related to publicity. At *Le Bercail*, I observed the young people producing small posters (see Figure 6.3) to advertise the second-hand shop located in the adult education centre. In teams of two, they selected images and wrote a short text presenting the shop's services. They used Microsoft Word to create these posters and found the images online.

The young people at *Le Bercail* also created posters to promote a car washing activity. For these posters, they used large sheets of cardboard and paint to write their message. They put up these posters to attract customers on the day of the car wash. The young people at *Le Bercail* also prepared a radio show. They searched online to select a topic and wrote a script for the the show that they would later broadcast live at the local community radio station. The literacy practices related to communication were often multimodal; involving images, spoken language, and text.

6.1.3   Literacy practices for documenting

According to Barton and Hamilton (1998), people tend to find various ways of documenting their lives. They might collect documents associated with specific periods of their lives (e.g. school transcripts, souvenirs, photos). They explain that some people document their lives by writing a personal diary, which could eventually be turned into an autobiography. Ivanič et al. (2009) mention that college students used their mobile phones or email accounts to document their lives. They would also use digital technologies to classify their pictures; creating folders for pictures related to specific events on their computer or mobile phone. Only a few students mentioned keeping a diary. In my study, 'documenting' practices were not widely spread amongst the young people and youth workers in the two community-based organisations.

At *Le Bercail*, each young person had to select a personal project they wanted to archive during their participation in the programme *Mobili-T*. Some young people decided to select activities that had something to do with documenting their lives. Darya decided to write the story of her family. She wrote about her parents and how they died. She also explained the circumstances of her immigration from Iran to Canada. Amélie and Kelly-Ann decided to create a mural of all the important people in their lives at that time. They used Facebook to select pictures and stuck them on a large poster. This was a way for them to reflect on the significant people in their lives.

At *Le Bercail*, I observed some activities that were aimed at documenting the changes and personal growth of the young people participating in the programme *Mobili-T*. At the beginning of the programme, Ève-Lyne asked the young people to write about their lives around three periods of time: 'yesterday, today, and tomorrow'. The young people first described their lives before their participation in *Mobili-T* (yesterday). In

the section called 'today' they described their lives at the time of their participation. Finally they had to reflect about what they would like their lives to be like in the future (tomorrow). Figure 6.4 presents the text that Julien wrote for the 'yesterday, today, and tomorrow' activity. He wrote that before taking part in *Mobili-T* he had had problems affecting different areas of his life (law, family, drugs, and school). In the 'today' section, he wrote about the fact that he was living in a shelter for young homeless people and made a very good friend there. In the last section, Julien wrote about his aspirations. He would like to study *psychoéducation* (special education) at the university, open a centre for young people with disabilities, and work for charities in Africa. This activity involved a lot of writing, and Julien used almost all the space that was available on the sheet to describe his situation.
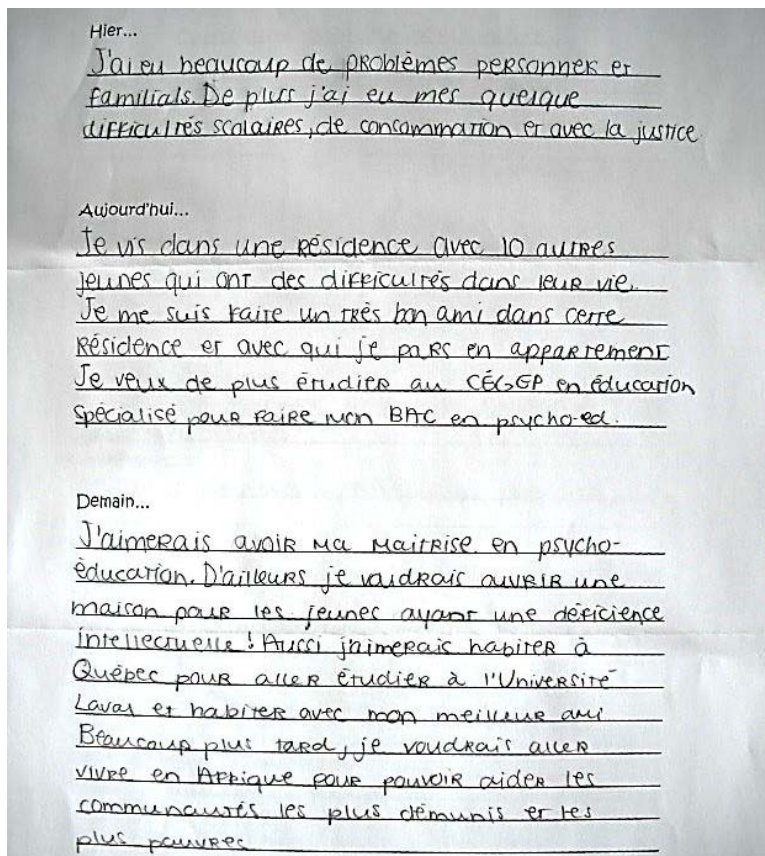
Figure 6.4 Julien's description of his life 'yesterday, today, and tomorrow'

Ève-Lyne was planning to give back these activity sheets to the young people at the end of their six months participation in the programme *Mobili-T*. She also took pictures of the participants at the beginning of their participation. Ève-Lyne explained to me that she wanted the young people to realise how much they had changed over the six months of the programme. She said that with previous groups the changes were stunning, and that the young people were moved by realising it.

The notice boards at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* were also used to document certain activities they organised. For example, they would put newspaper clippings up on these boards when their organisation was talked about on the news. At *L'Envol*, there was an article about the work of Paul, the professional photographer who was doing voluntary work at the Photo Club.

Some documenting practices were closer to accounting practices. For example, at *L'Envol*, Catherine took note of who took part in the community dinner. She would then be able to compile statistics to be submitted to funding bodies at the end of the year. Also, the youth workers mentioned having to take notes about the young people attending activities at *Le Bercail* or *L'Envol*. Each participant had a file. The information included in these files was aimed at keeping track of all the different kinds of intervention undertaken with each young person. This could be shared with other youth workers. At *Le Bercail*, the youth workers mentioned that they would use Facebook to help them complete their notes in the young people's files.

6.1.4   *Literacy practices for finding things out and taking part*

The category 'finding things out and taking part' is the name that Ivanič et al. (2009) gave to the category that Barton and Hamilton had identified as 'social participation'

in their 1998 study. I decided to keep Ivanič et al.'s name for my study. They explain that

> People wanted to find things out in order to take part in a leisure activity or to participate in a religious or community group; finding things out enabled taking part; and being engaged in particular activities often entailed finding out other information (Ivanič et al., 2009: 39-40).

This category is interesting because it takes into consideration the place that literacy can play in group and social activities. In my study, I focus on group activities and observed a large number of literacy practices that were aimed at finding things out and taking part.

A variety of sources of information were used by the young people and the youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. They used books, dictionaries, computers and their mobile phones to find things out and participate in activities.

At *Le Bercail*, dictionaries were sometimes used to support some activities (e.g. to search for the appropriate word to use or to find a definition) (see Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5 Dictionaries available at *Le Bercail*

At *L'Envol*, the young people had access to books about topics such as organic farming, plants, and survival skills in the forest. These books were generally provided by Véronique, the workshop leader. During the Photo Club, Paul (professional photographer) brought handouts for the young people. Other participants in the Photo Club also brought books about photography.

During the gardening and food workshop, the young people also used Google and Wikipedia to find information about some gardening techniques or plant properties (see Section 6.4.2 for an example). The group looked online for specific information about urban gardening, since they had a garden in the courtyard of the organisation.

At *Le Bercail*, young people looked online for images or short expressions they could paint on their wooden boxes. This was part of a woodworking workshop. Darya used Google Image and Google Translate (from Persian (Dari) to French, and vice versa) to find images (see Figure 6.6).

For the cover of the box, she selected images related to her origins (Iran and Afghanistan): a belly dancer and a henna tattoo pattern (Figure 6.6, left). On the other side of the box, she selected a picture of a serval cat. 'Serval' is Darya's rap singer name. She likes singing and sometimes writes rap songs. The rap singer called *La Fouine* (The Weasel) was her favourite. She wanted to also have a name of an animal as her singer name. She traced the images onto tracing paper and then onto the box with a pencil before painting them.
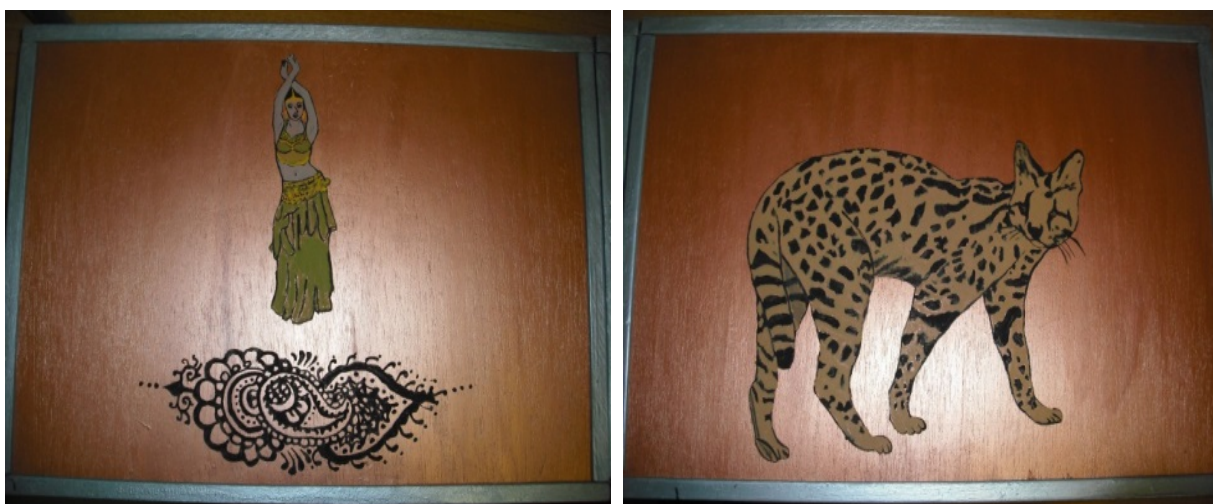
Figure 6.6 Darya's wooden box

The selected colours (golden and silver) were also representative of her tastes since she mentioned to me that she liked 'shiny colours' and often wore accessories with diamond, gold and silver decorations. This relates to the concept of curation (Potter, 2012) presented in Chapter 5. The young people at *Le Bercail* would often select images or words that would embody the images of themselves they wanted to share with others.

6.1.5 Reading and writing for pleasure

This category includes literacy practices that are not aimed at accomplishing something (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Ivanič et al., 2009). People would engage in those practices simply for pleasure. I identified a few literacy practices in the organisations that simply appeared to be aimed at having fun with each other. They were not part of the main activities organised.

For instance, a common practice in the group at *Le Bercail* was to write down riddles on a flipchart board. Tommy initiated this practice and the young people wrote their

own riddles as well. Tommy then brought riddle books that the young people were free to read in the premises of the organisation whenever they wanted.

Only Laurence at *Le Bercail* talked about books she liked or was reading at the moment (e.g. *Anansi Boys* by Neil Gaiman, 2008). At *L'Envol*, Hugo brought in films he wanted to watch with the other young people (e.g. *Shaun of the Dead*). A few young people looked at DVD covers and read their synopses.

The majority of the young people wanted to get tattooed, and this was a topic they talked about occasionally. They mentioned what kind of tattoo they would like to get. The majority of them were planning to get a short expression tattooed. This can be described as 'writing on the body' (Hamilton, 2000: 30). At *Le Bercail*, Kelly-Ann was considering '*Liberté, espérer, aimer* [Liberty, hope, and love]'—three values which were important to her. Julien liked 'One life. One chance', but a friend got it tattooed first. They wanted something more than images on their bodies. They found these mottos and phrases evoked something important to their own lives or expressed an inspiring principle they wanted to live by.

Reading and writing for pleasure also included looking at Facebook. The young people would look at their Facebook accounts before the activities organised at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* or during breaks.

6.1.6   *Literacy practices for getting access to services*

This category is inspired by what Ivanič and her colleagues (2009) call 'Literacy practices for becoming and being a college student'. They include in this category all the procedures that students have to go through in order to be enrolled in college. Ivanič and her colleagues (2009) mention that this begins with looking for information

(in leaflets and on websites) about college courses. Then the student would apply for the targeted course (forms). This category includes all the signs present in the premises of the college (notice boards, newsletters, posters, etc.) and the induction and other bureaucratic documents the students have to deal with. Ivanič and her colleagues (2009) mentioned that ice-breaking activities are also part of the literacy practices for becoming and being a college student. In my study, I decided to rename this category 'Literacy practices for getting access to services'. I use it to talk about the observed bureaucratic literacies that the young people had to deal with to access a variety of services during their participation at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*.

At both *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*, the young people had to sign an engagement contract. At *Le Bercail* they had to sign a contract for their participation in the programme *Mobili-T*, and at *L'Envol* for getting access to the supervised flats programme.

At *Le Bercail*, the youth workers made sure that the young people had all the necessary documents to return to education. They helped the young people to get birth certificates, school reports, and social insurance numbers. I also witnessed the youth workers helping the young people to get the documents needed in order to deal with certain problems: such as a police report, a court order against a violent ex-partner, a health insurance card (see Section 10.1.1), social assistance programme form, etc. I come back to the presence of bureaucratic literacies in the chapter about literacy mediation (Chapter 10).

At *L'Envol*, as part of the supervised flats programme, I witnessed many young people giving a cheque to Catherine or Élise to pay their rent and receiving a receipt in exchange. I also observed Cassandra dropping a letter into the mail box of *Emploi Québec* while we were passing by. She needed to send proof that she was not working

anymore in order to receive benefits from the government through the social assistance programme.

6.1.7   Literacy practices for learning

Ivanič and her colleagues (2009) identified two categories to talk about literacy practices aimed at learning: 'literacy practices for learning content' and 'learning and sense making'. Their first category was used solely to describe what the students learned in college, and the second one referred to what they learned in their everyday lives. In my study, I decided to merge the two categories to talk about the literacy practices I observed in the organisations. I divided this category into four sections: literacies for self-awareness, literacies for learning content related to the workshops, literacies to access information about services and resources, and school literacies.

6.1.7.1   Literacy practices for self-awareness

Many activities involving reading and writing at *Le Bercail* were aimed at developing young people's self-awareness. For example, the youth workers asked the young people to write about a topic: Why I am taking part in the project *Mobili-T* at *Le Bercail*? What are my personal goals in the project *Mobili-T*? What do I hate the most about myself?

Self-awareness activities sometimes had a creative element. Figure 6.7 shows the pots produced by the young people at *Le Bercail* at the beginning of the fieldwork. Ève-Lyne asked them to paint their pots so that they would represent their personality. The young people painted short expressions that were meaningful for them on the pots.

Key: Top-left: Darya's pot with the word 'love' in Persian (Dari). Top-middle: Amélie's pot with the word 'love' in traditional Chinese characters. Top-right: Kelly-Ann's pot with the words 'Believe in yourself'. Bottom-left: Yoan's pot with the words 'Never give up'. Bottom-middle: Laurence's pot with the words 'Different kind of human'. Bottom-right: Julien's pot with the words 'harmony and happiness' in traditional Chinese characters.

Figure 6.7 Pots produced by the young people at *Le Bercail*

For instance, Yoan painted the words 'Never give up' on his pot (Figure 6.7, left corner at the bottom). He told me that these were words that a friend had once told him. Yoan associated them with the death of his father, and the fact that he should not give up even if he sometimes still suffered from his loss. Yoan also used the colours of the Jamaican flag to decorate his pot because he is a big fan of Bob Marley. Once the pots were painted, Ève-Lyne gave the young people compost and tomato seeds. She told the young people that if they took good care of the seeds, they would develop as plants, and would eventually produce tomatoes. She explained that at *Le Bercail* they would be able to grow and develop as a person if they would take care of themselves. She used this metaphor to illustrate what the young people could learn at *Le Bercail*. I did not witness this kind of self-awareness activities at *L'Envol*. This might be due to the age of the participants. The young people at *L'Envol* were

older—and perhaps more mature—than those at *Le Bercail*. This self-awareness work was perhaps not as necessary with them.

6.1.7.2   Literacy practices for learning content related to the workshops

A large number of literacy practices were aimed at supporting the workshops organised at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. Some of them were used to teach content to the young people. At *L'Envol*, Catherine explained to me that by looking at the grocery offers with the young people, she wanted to develop their abilities to shop responsibly and cook instead of buying convenience meals. The activity also developed young people's 'financial literacy'—that is to say their knowledge and ability to budget and manage money. This is an activity that she regularly did with them.

Another example is of Tommy using the flipchart board when he endeavoured to explain to the group how a Registered Retirement Savings Plan works (*Régime enregistré d'épargne-retraite*) (see Figure 6.8).
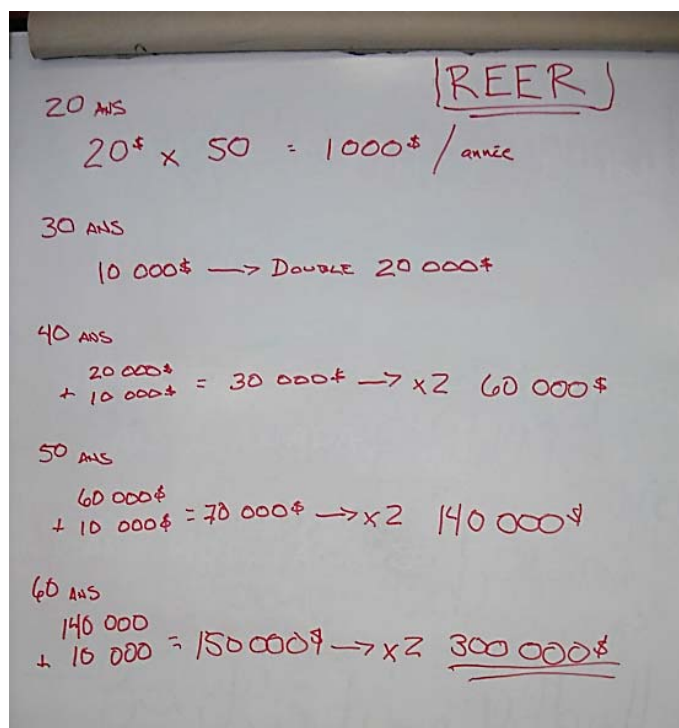
Figure 6.8 Tommy's explanations about REER

During the Photo Club at *L'Envol*, Paul and the young people spent time looking at their cameras; to understand their functions (menu). They also showed each other pictures using a computer, a projector, and a screen. Some pictures taken by the young people included written text. The aim of the activities was to learn how to maximise the use of their small digital cameras. The young people learned basic principles of photography (e.g. aperture, depth of field, image noise, ISO). Paul had prepared worksheets based on information found online (e.g. Wikipedia).

Figure 6.9 Note taking at *L'Envol* during the Photo Club

Some young people participating in my study at *L'Envol* took notes during the Photo Club. In particular, they wrote down comments about how they could improve their pictures and technique (see Figure 6.9).

6.1.7.3 Literacy practices to access information about services and resources

Some literacy practices related to learning were aimed at making the young people aware of other resources that could help them regarding various issues.

At *Le Bercail*, I observed the young people reading and discussing a leaflet about sexually transmitted infections. Also, a poster displayed in the men's room was the starting point of a discussion between Ève-Lyne and the young people about unplanned pregnancy (see Section 6.2.4).

Figure 6.10 Information about the new format of electricity bills

At *L'Envol*, the young people looked at an information sheet left on a table at *Espace Collectif* about the new format of electricity bills (see Figure 6.10). Élise talked about a soup kitchen that was offering free meals to anyone who needed help on this matter. She offered the young people tickets to access this soup kitchen. She also offered them free calendars provided by an organisation which aimed to encourage the management and prevention of debts. Élise mentioned the community-based organisation that provided the calendars, and explained that for each month there was

a tip about how to save and manage money. She read aloud one tip to the group; it was about sowing and gardening.

6.1.7.4   School literacy practices

As explained in Section 4.2.2, all the young people at *Le Bercail* (except Laurence) were enrolled in a distance learning programme with one of the local adult education centres. Consequently, I observed some academic literacies. The young people were sometimes working on the modules they subscribed to (e.g. mathematics, sciences, and English). They had small workbooks to complete. Some of the exercises were multiple choice questions, other required short answers. I observed more closely the mathematics and science exercises in which diagrams and pictures were provided as a support to some questions (see Figure 6.11 for an example).

Figure 6.11 Yoan's sciences booklet

I also observed former participants of the programme *Mobili-T* working on academic literacies at *Le Bercail*. Ève-Lyne and Frédérique supported them with their homework and coursework. I did not observe academic literacies at *L'Envol*.

6.1.8   Literacy practices for assessment

Ivanič and her colleagues (2009) explain that some of the literacy practices they observed in the college were aimed at preparing the students for an assessment, or to assess them with regards to the progress they had accomplished. This category was not common in my two field sites. I did not observe directly any practices aimed at assessing the young people.

At *Le Bercail*, the youth workers and the young people mentioned the placement tests they had to undertake in order to get enrolled at the adult education centre. The young people were stressed about these tests because they knew that they could be ranked in a lower level of education than what they had already accomplished. Some young people at *L'Envol* also mentioned these tests during the interviews I conducted with them.

At *Le Bercail*, the youth workers mentioned that they would have to assess the young people for accounting purposes. I did not observe this practice directly. What I understood, based on the youth workers' explanations, is that they would have to detail the progress made by each participant and submit a report to Service Canada to justify their continued funding.

6.1.9 Literacy practices related to an imagined future

In their study, Ivanič and her colleagues (2009) use the category label 'literacy practices relating to the imagined future for students on the course' to talk about texts relating to the future career or further education path that students intended to take on next. For my study, I broadened this category and called it 'literacy practices relating to an imagined future' of the young people. At both *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*, the youth workers and the young people were conscious of the fact that participants were attending these organisations on a temporary basis only. At *Le Bercail*, the young people would take part in *Mobili-T* for a period of six months. At *L'Envol*, the young people could stay in a supervised flat for a maximum of three years. It seemed to me that the youth workers were often referring to the young people's future projects. They sometimes explicitly invited them to project themselves into the future.
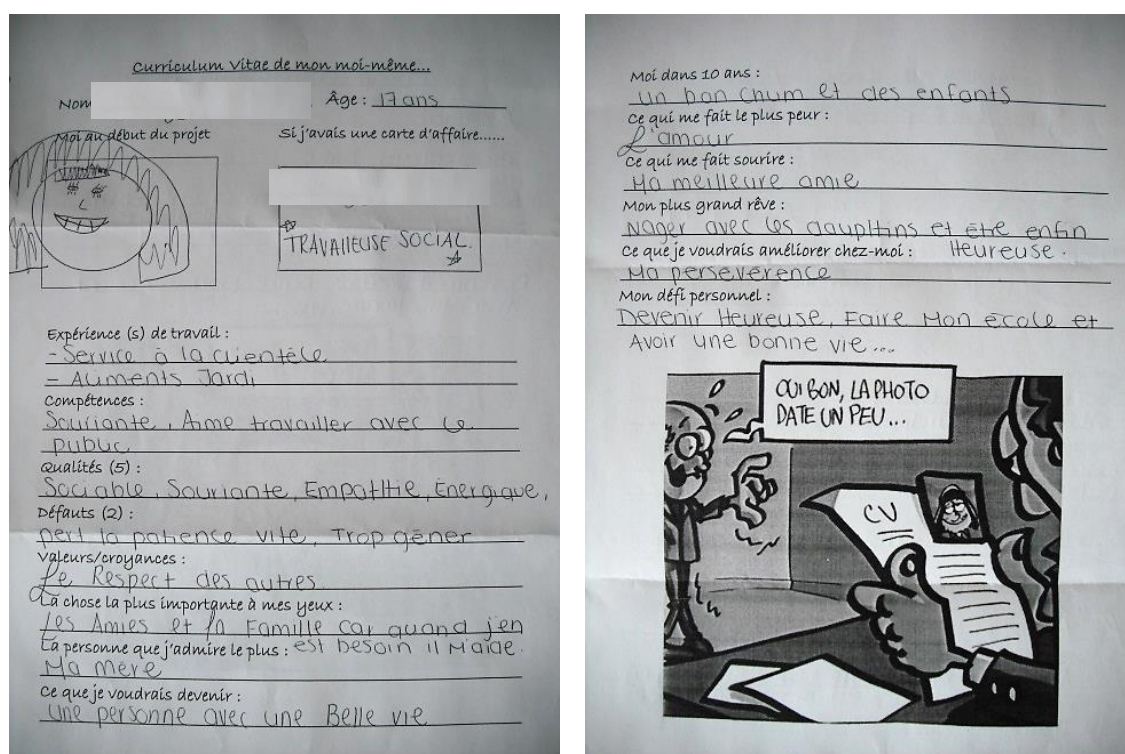
Figure 6.12 Kelly-Ann's answers on the CV activity sheet

At *Le Bercail*, the youth workers regularly gave the participants activity sheets to complete. As mentioned before, most of them were aimed at developing self-awareness. For example, they had to complete an activity sheet which had the structure of a CV (see Figure 6.12). They had one line to write about each of these themes: job experience; skills; strengths and weaknesses; values and beliefs; 'the most important thing in my life'; 'the person I admire most'; 'what I want to become'; 'me in ten years'; 'what scares me the most'; 'what makes me smile'; 'my biggest dream'; 'what I want to improve in my personality'; 'my biggest challenge'.

On the activity sheet presented in Figure 6.12, Kelly-Ann wrote that her personal goal was 'to become happy, finish school, and have a good life'. This is an activity the young people did one month after having started their participation at *Le Bercail*. In this activity, they were invited to think about their future.

Other documents were also produced to support young people's future projects. The young people at *Le Bercail* produced their *curriculum vitae* with the help of the youth workers. This CV would be used at a later stage, when the young people would be ready to find a job after the end of *Mobili-T*.

At *L'Envol*, each young person had an individualised action plan. The youth workers supported the young people in achieving the aims they had agreed on. I did not observe the way the youth workers and the young people worked together around these action plans, but they talked about it during the interviews.

6.1.10 Off-task literacy practices

The last category I observed at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* is related to what Maybin (2007; 2013) calls 'off-task' literacy practices. As explained before, these unofficial

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practices are performed in parallel to official activities. They are not part of the official curriculum, and people might perform them in secret. Maybin (2007; 2013) suggests that even though these practices are unofficial, the students can sometimes learn from them. In my study, I witnessed many off-task literacy practices, and most of them involved digital technologies.

I regularly observed the young people using their mobile phones during the breaks, but also clandestinely during activities (mainly at *Le Bercail*). They used it to send text messages to their friends (sometimes to participants physically present in the same room). For instance, while the group at *Le Bercail* was working at the second-hand shop, Julien asked if he could use the toilet. By coincidence, I also had to go in the same direction to pick up something from my handbag. I then saw Julien using his mobile phone to send a text message to a friend. He was very surprised to see me and said 'Ah, it's just you! Whew! I thought you were Ève-Lyne'. Julien was aware that I would not tell the youth workers about this 'illicit' activity. He knew perfectly well that this was not allowed during the activities, but could not resist the temptation.

At *Le Bercail*, the young people were allowed to put music on during the workshops. This practice was tolerated by the youth workers. The youth workers decided to regulate this activity at some point to avoid any conflicts. The young people had to create a playlist each week using YouTube (see Excerpt 6.2). This rule was explained to the young people during their first week at *Le Bercail*.

Excerpt 6.2 Observation notes about the music playlist at *Le Bercail*

Ève-Lyne explains that from now on there will be a music playlist to avoid the participants having to get up too frequently to put music on the computer. Each participant will have the right to select five songs. Ève-Lyne then puts the list on the bookshelves next to the computer lab.

Le Bercail, 4-04-2012

One of the young people at *Le Bercail* was responsible for collecting everybody's selections. Young people selected songs in French, but also in other languages such as English and Spanish. The process of creating the playlist was complex and often involved the use of pen and paper, a mobile phone or an iPod. Then this person would go on YouTube and create the list. *Le Bercail* had an account on YouTube and the list could be reused every day of the week. I also participated in this activity and suggested titles of songs I liked. I could then talk about them with the young people.

At *L'Envol*, the young people were also listening to music using a computer during the activities. This was also tolerated by the youth workers only during certain activities (cooking). YouTube was used when the young people were cooking all together for the community dinner. For example, Daniel put on some music from his home country (Cameroun) so that we could discover more about it. Cassandra shared with us music she had recently discovered (Lisa Leblanc). She explained she had a growing interest in music in French and music from Québec.

Listening to music seemed important for group cohesion during activities since the young people would use the music to let the others know about their favourite band or singer. The young people were showing each other new discoveries, funny videos, music from different countries, etc.

6.1.11 Other literacy practices

I also observed a few literacy events associated with brands and consumer culture. The young people often brought fast-food into the premises of *Le Bercail* and talked about it. A restaurant chain called 'Tim Horton' was very popular amongst the young people and the youth workers at *Le Bercail*. I often met up with the young people at

Tim Horton in the morning. At the time of the study, Tim Horton had its 'roll up the rim to win' promotion. So for a while we were at times talking around and about a paper cup. The promotions and packages of another chain—a local diner—also permeated the everyday activities at *Le Bercail*. I was not able to put these events into one of the categories presented above. They refer to the consumption practices of the young people and the youth workers at *Le Bercail*.

Even though some of the categories (those by Barton and Hamilton, 1998) I used in this section were developed to describe areas of everyday life, I was also able to observe them in the two organisations participating in my study. This already indicates something important about the nature of these community-based organisations. It suggests that their literacy practices are hybrid, but this hybridity is not just between school-related and vernacular literacies. Their practices also bring into contact other important aspects of young people's lives such as therapy, work, and citizenship. In the following section, I continue my exploration of the literacy practices present at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* through the texts and things that were present on their premises.

6.2   Semiotic landscape of the organisations

In this section, I explore the semiotic landscapes (see Section 2.5) of *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. I focus on the meaning of signs, colours, and other physical aspects such as their furniture. Even though the concept of the semiotic landscape has been mainly used to explore neighbourhoods, cities, or public spaces such as airports, I suggest that it is also possible to apply this concept to the premises of community-based organisations. This would provide complementary information on their practices, their cultures, and how they work with young people in a situation of precarity. As Massey

(1994: 3) notes, every place has its own 'social geometry of power and signification' that is constantly changing. To me this means that people have different roles, perceptions, and relative power in any given place. I associate the term 'signification' here to the concept of 'narrative' as defined by Hamilton (2012, see Section 1.2). Looking at the semiotic landscapes of the two organisations helps me to understand the specific social geometries of power and signification (e.g. narratives about young people) that were present at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* in 2012 and 2013. This provides valuable information to understand the relationships between the organisations' literacy practices and those of the young people attending their activities. Putting posters on the walls or displaying leaflets were literacy practices present in both of the organisations participating in my study. In this section I draw particularly on my analysis of the photographs I took in the organisations.

I endeavoured to take pictures of all the texts which were on the walls or on a piece of furniture, and were visible to the young people and the youth workers. However, even so, I might have missed some considering their great number. I deliberately excluded texts that were produced by other groups of people than those taking part in *Mobili-T* or *Espace Collectif* (see Chapter 4 for the description of the services). In this section, I also contrast the pictures I took during the first year of fieldwork with those taken one year later in the organisations. My analysis only focuses on the premises used during the group activities.

Bélisle (2003) noted that literacy was omnipresent in the community-based organisations in which she conducted fieldwork. Literacy was also everywhere in the two community-based organisations participating in my study. The quantity of text present on the walls and on the furniture was colossal. In the following sections I offer an analysis of what the semiotic landscapes of the two community-based organisations

tell us about the literacy practices of the organisations, the youth workers, and the young people. To do so, I explore the functions, emplacement, origins, and narratives of the texts, concepts introduced and defined in Section 2.5. To support my analysis, I describe a few examples of texts present in the organisations in 2012 and 2013.

6.2.1 Functions of the texts

I identified five specific functions based on the analysis of my data: 1) partnership and continuity of services, 2) critical thinking, 3) regulation, 4) socialisation, and 5) self-expression.

6.2.1.1 Partnership

The function of partnership was the most noticeable one on the premises of the two organisations. The majority of texts originated from other community-based organisations or institutions. For example, the toilets were filled with leaflets at *L'Envol* (see Figure 6.13). All these leaflets were provided by other community-based organisations or institutions offering various kinds of services. In 2012, there were leaflets about homophobia, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, hepatitis, literacy, homelessness, mental health, and so on. The youth workers at *L'Envol* mentioned to me that they did not keep track of the number of leaflets.

Figure 6.13 Unisex toilets at *L'Envol* in 2012

Posters and leaflets were ways for these organisations and institutions to get access to young people sometimes referred to as 'hard to reach' (Freimuth and Mettger, 1990). Frédérique, a youth worker at *Le Bercail*, suggested in 2013 that the information provided on the posters and leaflets could potentially support continuity of services. This means that if young people encounter a specific problem, they could find information at *L'Envol* or *Le Bercail* that would redirect them to more specialised resources. The posters and leaflets of these partners invited the young people to take action: join a Facebook group, take part in a support group, use needles safely, use condoms, call a help line, meet with a doctor, etc. This is further explored in terms of literacy sponsorship in Chapters 9 and 10. Also, the semiotic landscapes of the organisations were a reflection of the partnerships they had with other organisations and institutions. For instance, the needle box at *L'Envol* and the sanitary products offered at *Le Bercail* in 2013 were indications of new partnerships (see Figure 6.14) with the local community health centre.

Figure 6.14 Sanitary products offered for free in the women's toilet at *Le Bercail*

Charles, a youth worker, thought that the leaflets in the toilets were not appealing to the young people. *Le Bercail* did not have a way of knowing how many leaflets were taken. He explained that the leaflets were simply put there without any follow up.

6.2.1.2   Social inclusion

Another important function of some of the texts in the two organisations was related to social inclusion. By social inclusion I mean texts that were promoting activities that could break the isolation and exclusion experienced by some young people. Many activities were suggested to the young people: collective dinners, cycling activities, rap concerts, and so on, all activities that could help young people to meet others in a positive environment. This function was also present in texts aiming at improving young people's social skills.

Figure 6.15 Poster promoting empathic abilities

Figure 6.15 illustrates a poster at *Le Bercail* which endeavours to teach young people about empathy: *Soyez empathique* ☺ *Capacité de ressentir les émotions de l'autre 'Se mettre dans la peau de l'autre'* [Be empathic ☺ Capacity to feel the emotions of the other 'Put yourself in the shoes (the French term means 'the skin') of the other']. In 2013 it was situated in the main premises used by the *Mobili-T* young people, but also by the young people attending the supervised gathering place.

Other examples of texts with this function were observed at *L'Envol* (see Figure 6.16). The first picture on the left is a poster promoting a cycling activity. This poster was on the notice board beside the main entrance door.
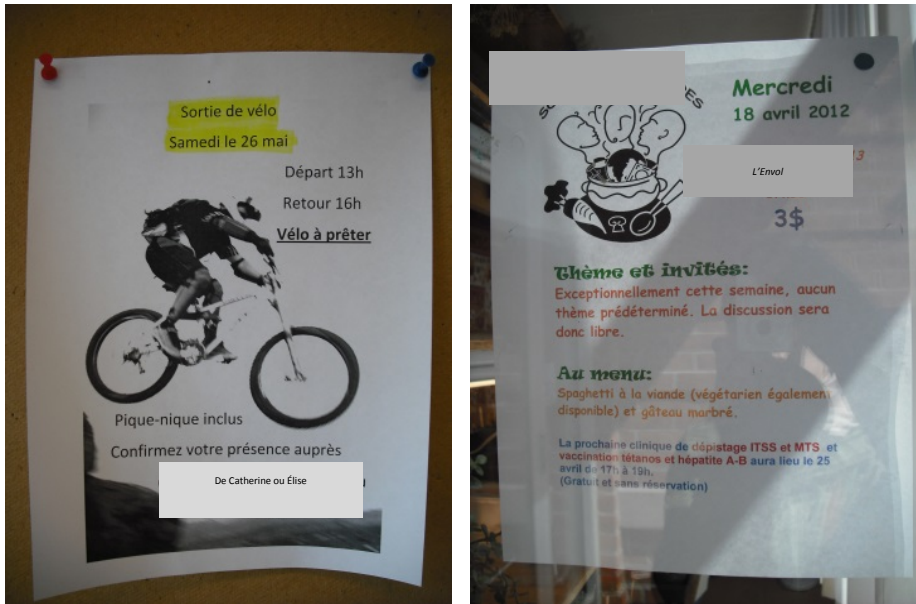
Figure 6.16 Posters in the main premises of *Espace Collectif* at *L'Envol* in 2012

The next image on the right is a poster promoting the weekly community-dinner. The poster provided the information about the dinner; the date (18th April 2012); the price ($3); the location (*L'Envol*); the theme (exceptionally no fixed one that week); and the menu (spaghetti and chocolate marble cake).

6.2.1.3 Critical thinking

Another function of the texts was to encourage young people's interest in politics and other general issues. Political debates were entering the organisation through literacy. For instance, at *L'Envol* there were alternative newspapers reporting on the current student protests (see Figure 6.17). This newspaper was distributed for free in a few community-based organisations.

Figure 6.17 Newspaper cover about the student protests

I observed a few young people reading articles in this newspaper in 2012. I also saw Ariane (a young woman who was there during my observation sessions) looking at a cartoon about food and pollution from this newspaper. At *L'Envol*, there was also a piece of art representing a red square like those that the students were wearing in 2012 (see Chapter 1).

The youth workers brought newspaper articles in about topics that could interest the young people such as school dropouts (seen at *Le Bercail*). They aimed to initiate debates amongst the young people about current issues.

6.2.1.4   Regulation

Some texts had the function of regulating the young people's behaviour within the organisation. These were rules to follow while using specific tools or objects in the organisations. For instance, at *L'Envol* there was a sign explaining how to use the needle disposal box in the toilet. There was also a sign in the kitchen the group used to

cook the community dinner about what to put in the dishwasher and what should be washed by hand.

Texts with a regulatory function were also present at *Le Bercail*. Figure 6.18 shows rules to follow during the woodworking activity. These were observed in 2013. Rules such as 'clean your paint brushes carefully before using another colour' or 'wear a working coat not to get dirty' were mentioned on these posters.

Figure 6.18 Rules about how to do woodworking

At *Le Bercail*, there were also signs about how to play with the new air hockey table. These texts aimed at structuring certain activities, and at preventing some accidents.

6.2.1.5   Self-expression

The last function was self-expression. It was not present in most of the texts present on the premises of the organisations. These texts were produced by the young people attending activities in the two organisations. For instance, at *l'Envol* in 2013 the young people took part in a photo exhibition which was a result of the Photo Club.

Some of the pictures included text. At *Le Bercail*, young people also prepared a photo exhibition which included short texts (observed in 2013). However, I did not observe this activity since it was organised between my two visits at *Le Bercail*.

At *L'Envol* on the other notice boards there was a mixture of information about other organisations (unplanned pregnancy), small ads, and a text produced by the young people. There was a written *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse) created by the young people during one of the open sessions organised by Catherine and Élise (see Figure 6.19).
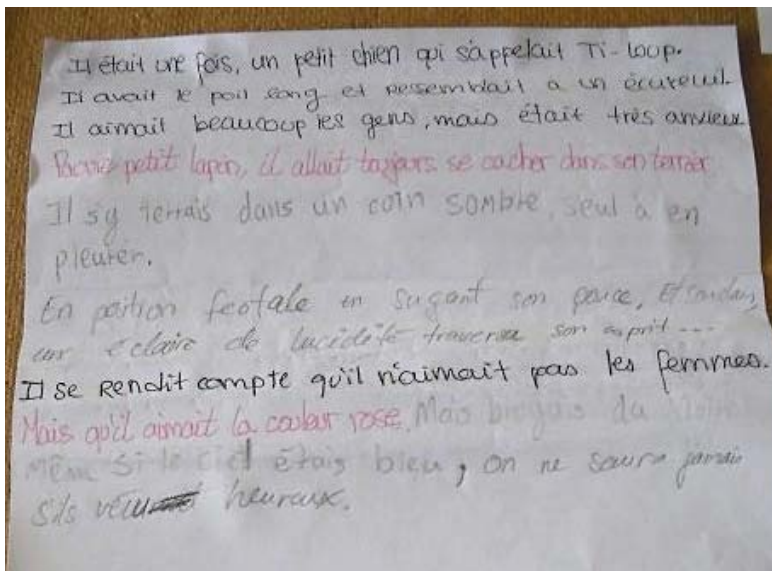
Figure 6.19 The 'Exquisite Corpse' created by the young people at *L'Envol*

Cadavre exquis, 'an Exquisite Corpse', is the French name for a game rather like 'Consequences'. It consists of a story written collectively by a group of people. The participants have to continue a sentence which another one started, but they only have access to the last words of the previous sentence since the sheet of paper was rolled up. This activity did not have any other aim than to have fun creating something with other people attending the open session at *L'Envol*.

6.2.2 Emplacement of texts

Scollon and Wong-Scollon (2003) mention that the emplacement of texts can offer valuable information about their meanings. In my study, the presence of literacy in the toilets of the two organisations might indicate that the youth workers thought that toilets were good spaces to inform young people about sensitive topics. The young people could have time—on their own—to read. The changes made in the toilet at *L'Envol* indicate, though, that there was a hierarchy of sensitive topics and practices. In 2013, the toilet had a different look than in 2012. The leaflet stand had been moved to the main entrance of the building. Only a small piece of furniture with shelves was left. The first thing that I noticed when I entered the room in 2013 was the big yellow needle disposal box. There were also a bottle of hand sanitizer and a golden box full of free condoms (see picture on the left in Figure 6.20). When I first entered the room, I thought that the appearance of the toilet in 2013 bore similarities to that of a health clinic. The beige colour seemed even blander, perhaps because the furniture was different.

The picture on the right (see Figure 6.20) shows a few posters that were also present in the toilet in 2013. Some of these—those about unplanned pregnancy—were the same as the one observed at *Le Bercail*. The other posters were about contraception and sexually transmitted diseases.

Figure 6.20 The unisex toilet at *L'Envol* in 2013

Even though there were dedicated places for information (notice boards), youth workers sometimes decided to put a poster or leaflets in an unusual place (directly on the wall or a window). This might be explained by the fact that literacy artefacts were so omnipresent in the organisations that the youth workers felt that they had to be inventive with space in order to make sure that the young people would notice the important messages. Texts were in a way competing with each other. Charles said, during the interview I conducted with him in 2013, that they used simple words and clear design to facilitate the readability of the posters they produced at *Le Bercail*. Examples of posters created by the youth workers at *Le Bercail* were presented in Figures 6.15 and 6.16. However, Charles rarely saw the young people actually reading these notices. According to him, even though the youth workers would introduce some posters to a group and explain the importance of reading them, the young people often did not notice them. In 2013, Charles was increasingly using the flipchart to communicate important messages. He would for example use it to write the schedule

of activities on a given day. He noticed that the young people paid more attention to it, especially when he used uncommon characters such as @ and &.

6.2.3   Authorship

Another important aspect to look at in order to understand the semiotic landscape of the organisations is authorship. Ben Rafael et al. (2006) suggest two categories—'top down' or 'bottom up'—to analyse text authorship. I found that the texts present in the organisations participating in my study could not easily be put into these two categories (similarly to Gorter and Cenoz, 2015). I have already mentioned that most of the texts originated from other community-based organisations or governmental institutions. Similarly to Gorter and Cenoz (2015), I consider these texts top-down since they were produced either by an authority or had been put up with the consent of the organisations. This suggests that the majority of texts in the two organisations were top-down. Other texts were produced locally by the youth workers. They were often produced using Word and printed out in black and white. These texts could also be defined as top-down—although at an intermediary level—since the youth workers were in a situation of authority in the organisations. As mentioned before, only a very limited amount of the texts on the walls were produced by the young people. These texts could be defined as bottom-up.

The organisations seemed to have (unofficial) internal policies which not only specified who could put texts on the walls, but also the language they should use. The vast majority of the texts observed in both organisations were in French. Yet, the soundscape (sounds, music, and conversations) (Lamarre, 2013) of the organisations indicated that the young people attending their activities could speak, understand, or were interested in languages other than French (e.g. English, Persian (Dari), African

languages). There was a mismatch between the linguistic landscape and the soundscape of the organisations. At *Le Bercail*, Charles explained to me in 2013 that there was an unofficial rule that prohibited the young people from putting things on the walls. Only the youth workers were allowed to do it. This can be explained by the fact that these premises were used by different groups of young people and not only by the *Mobili-T* participants. The space had to fulfil the needs of different groups of young people. Charles regrets that the young people were not involved in the decoration of the premises. He said that some young people found the premises 'too clean', lacking the friendly messiness which usually characterised this kind of organisation (*maison de jeunes,* see Glossary in Appendix A). However, Charles said that this did not prevent young people from attending the activities organised at *Le Bercail*.

At *L'Envol*, Catherine and Élise told me that they were trying to communicate in French with participants who had a different first language because they wanted to facilitate their integration and learning. This belief possibly had an influence on the language used on the walls. This could also be related to the Charter of the French Language (also known as Bill 101) that also applies to workplaces, although no participant mentioned it. The Charter designates French as the only official language in Québec (*Gouvernement du Québec*, 2015b). The texts in both organisations were created by youth workers who all had French as their first language.

The above suggests that the semiotic landscapes of these organisations were shaped by the youth workers. A comparison of the texts present in 2012 and 2013 suggests that the genres of texts used in the organisations might have changed because of new employees (e.g. more rules at *Le Bercail*). Also, the top-down texts seemed to stay on the walls for a longer period of time than the bottom-up ones. Other studies (Brown,

2012; Gorter and Cenoz, 2015) have also observed that certain texts tend to stay longer on the premises of schools than others. The texts produced and displayed by authorities (teachers, government) tended to stay on display for a longer period of time, or were fixed permanently on the walls. The texts produced by students (e.g. posters with pictures and short texts) tended to stay on the walls for shorter periods of time. This was also the case in my study. For example, texts produced by the young people were put up on the walls temporarily (e.g. photo exhibitions). Texts originating from other community-based organisations or institutions seemed to stay on the walls or on leaflet stands, and these were sometimes out of date.

6.2.4 Narratives about young people

A large number of texts were related to topics such as unprotected sex; unplanned pregnancy, contraception, abortion, prevention of HIV and hepatitis C. Other texts were about phenomena such as suicide, bullying and violence at school, dropping out of school, homophobia, and safe cycling.

In contrast with previous studies looking at the semiotic landscape of public places, the texts present in the two community-organisations did not necessarily represent practices in which the young people or the youth workers were engaged. These texts had a particular logic—a logic of prevention—which is different from those in other public places (airport, street, neighbourhood, etc.). Unlike commercial signs, the posters present at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* did not invite the young people to practice activities such as unprotected sex or bullying, but to prevent these kinds of practices. They encouraged practices such as using condoms, talking to a counsellor, or consulting a health professional. These kinds of posters can also be found in other

public places (e.g. schools) but not in such quantity or displayed in such a saturated way as in the organisations participating in my study.

It seemed that the young people attending the activities at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* were being categorised by certain organisations and institutions as being 'at risk' of experiencing these problems. The texts present in the organisations seemed to embody some preconceived ideas and 'narratives' (Hamilton, 2012) about young people in a situation of precarity. I suggest that these posters might also label the organisations as being places for people with difficulties. To a certain extent, by accepting these posters on their premises, *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* support and accept these narratives. The young people attending the organisations were in some way invited to inform themselves about these narratives and to accept them.

To illustrate my point, I present below the example of the texts present in the toilets at *Le Bercail*. The toilets at *Le Bercail* contained a large number of texts. The women's toilet was painted in fuchsia (see Figure 6.21), and the men's toilet was bright green (see Figure 6.22). There were more decorations in the women's toilet; a chest, large mirror, a plant, and an oriental lamp. The colours and decorations put in the toilets suggest a gendered distinction. More effort had been made to decorate the women's toilet.

Figure 6.21 The women's toilet at *Le Bercail* in 2012

The three pictures I Figure 6.21 were taken in 2012 in the women's toilet. The poster on the top left was about unplanned pregnancy and promoted the services of an organisation specialising in this matter. The poster on the right was about suicide and promoted a helpline. Both posters also had a small pocket in which business cards were available. The picture at the bottom illustrates a variety of leaflets arranged in a messy way in a small wooden display box. This box was situated on top of a beige chest. These leaflets were about topics such as unplanned pregnancy, contraception, abortion, and suicide. They were promoting organisations offering services such as a helpline for young people or consultation with qualified health professionals.

Figure 6.22 The men's toilet at *Le Bercail* in 2012

The three pictures in Figure 6.22 were taken in 2012 in the men's toilet. The poster on the top left promoted the services of an organisation helping people who face an unplanned pregnancy. On this poster was written: '*Une grossesse non planifiée ça te concerne aussi! Un gars est fertile 7 jours sur 7, 24h sur 24… On est là pour toi!*' [An unplanned pregnancy also concerns you! A guy is fertile 7 days a week, 24 hours a day… We are here for you!] The poster on the right is the same as the one in the women's toilet. It is promoting a helpline to prevent young people's suicide. Under this poster, there is a wall sticker quote: '*La grandeur de l'homme est grande en ce qu'il se connaît miserable (Pascal)*' [The greatness of man consists in the grandeur of knowing himself to be miserable (Pascal)] (as translated by Kaufmann, 1908). There were no leaflets in the men's toilet. The Pascal quote in the men's toilet invited the

young men to reflect on their actions and to be humble. This philosophical quote praises the ability of humankind to think, which differentiates humans from all other living things.

A closer look at the images on the posters about unplanned pregnancy indicates important differences between them. In the men's toilet the poster showed a young man unable to look at himself in a mirror and looking at a pregnancy test with despair. He is looking at a pregnancy test or gazing at the floor suggesting a feeling of guilt. In the women's toilet, the poster only shows the face of a young woman; thoughtful and sad. She is gazing at something we cannot see, or just staring blankly into space. Also, the young man is wearing a blue t-shirt and the young women' lips have been emphasised and are pink: two colours usually associated with the male and female gender (Koller, 2008). All these elements suggest that the organisation that provided these posters believed that the topic of unplanned pregnancy should not be approached in the same way with young men and young women. They anticipated the kind of emotions young people might have in this situation (guilt, thoughtfulness, or sadness). These beliefs also seemed present in the way the youth workers were approaching these issues as illustrated by the example below involving Ève-Lyne.

Excerpt 6.3 Observation notes describing a conversation about contraception

Ève-Lyne used the poster situated in the men's toilet as a starting point to talk about unplanned pregnancy and contraception. She told the young people that she liked this campaign because it highlights young men's responsibility in an unplanned pregnancy. She referred to the poster: '*Un gars est fertile 7 jours sur 7, 24h sur 24*' [A guy is fertile 7 days a week, 24 hours a day]. She explained that women are often the ones who have to take precautions and use contraception, whereas young men tend to shirk responsibility on that matter.

Le Bercail, 10-04-2012

This example indicated that parts of the semiotic landscape can be and were being used by the youth workers as intervention tools in their work with the young people.

This was also observed by Gorter and Cenoz, (2015) in their study of linguistics landscapes in Basque Country schools. They found that the linguistics landscape was sometimes used by the teachers during the lesson.

The quantity of leaflets was significant in the women's toilet. This is perhaps simply a matter of the space available, since the men's toilet was slightly smaller. But it could also be related to the narrative that it is young women who suffer the most from unprotected sex (unplanned pregnancy, more apparent STI symptoms, abortion, etc.).

The literacy practices used at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* had various functions: partnership, social inclusion, critical thinking, regulation, and self-expression. These functions highlight important aspects of these organisations; their relationship with other institutions, their aims (e.g. social inclusion, critical thinking, and self-awareness), and their implicit narratives about young people and their problems. My analysis also indicates that the youth workers, but also external institutions and organisations, had more power over determining the semiotic landscapes of the organisations than the young people. In the following section, I explore how the youth workers' *rapports à l'écrit* influenced the way they used reading and writing with the young people at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*.

6.3   Youth workers' *rapports à l'écrit*

Cardinal-Picard (2010) argues that it is important for guidance counsellors to take into consideration their own *rapport à l'écrit*, since it shapes the way they use literacies with their participants. The same could be said about youth workers. I asked the youth workers participating in my study about their literacy practices and their *rapports à l'écrit*. The first question was: 'What is the place of reading and writing in your

personal life?' I also asked them if they thought that what they did in terms of reading and writing in their personal life influenced the way they used reading and writing in their work with the young people. In this section, I present a couple of examples of what the youth workers said about their literacy practices and their effects on their professional uses of literacy.

Charles said that even though he 'hates' writing, he is actually good at it. He explained that writing used to be more important in his life when he was considering having a career as a stand-up comic. He wrote many texts related to this plan. He was also a French tutor at *cégep*, helping students with difficulties. Charles also mentioned not being good at answering emails or text messages. These are not good means of communication to use with him. Charles did not read novels. He read those that were compulsory at school, but no more. He said that he preferred comic books, newspapers, and magazines.

Charles seemed aware that his *rapport à l'écrit* might be different from those of the young people he was working with. He mentioned for instance that when he was their age, he did not use digital technologies such as mobile phones and computers. Charles explained that he often suggested writing as a way for young people to express feelings. Drawing on his own experience as a teenager, Charles said that writing could be a useful tool for young people going through difficult periods.

Excerpt 6.4 Charles's experience with writing at school

Dès que c'est écrit, à la main, que ce soit un dessin ou une écriture, je favorise beaucoup ça parce que moi, au secondaire, j'avais une prof qui nous obligeait à écrire dans un cahier à chaque cours de français, puis j'ai vraiment dénigré ça, puis j'ai boycotté cette activité-là tout le long. Puis en même temps, je la boycottais, mais je prenais le temps... Je la boycottais devant le groupe, mais je l'écrivais pareil, puis je le sais que ça m'a aidé à passer à travers des affaires. La prof, elle dit : « Écrivez comme vous voulez. Les fautes, pas de fautes. »	Whether it's handwritten, a drawing or a piece of writing, I encourage that a lot because when I was in secondary school I had a teacher who made us write in a notebook in every French lesson. I really dismissed that, I boycotted this activity the whole time. But at the same time, I boycotted it, but I took the time… I boycotted it in front of the group, but I wrote it anyway and it helped me to get through some things. The teacher, she said 'Write how you want. With mistakes, or without.'

Le Bercail, 25-05-2012

Writing is not something Charles liked, but he was able, based on his experience, to understand how useful it can be for young people. Charles preferred handwriting then writing on a computer or a mobile phone. He believed that it was a better way to express feelings than to quickly write something and post it on Facebook.

At *L'Envol*, Élise explained to me that she wrote a lot in her personal life, but that she did not read very often. She told me that sometimes she felt as if she was dyslexic; she mixed up letters when she read. She had rediscovered reading after a friend lent her books, and she said that slowly she was beginning to see the positive aspects of it. Élise mentioned that she wrote down on a piece of paper important points she wanted to talk about before talking about them with other people. She used this strategy whenever she felt frustrated or too emotional. This helped her structure her thoughts and make sure she did not forget anything important. This was a strategy that Élise also suggested to the young people attending activities at *L'Envol*. She would also invite the young people to draw four columns and write down the pros and cons of their two main options. They were then able to see visually which ones might be the

best. Élise said that she felt less confident about suggesting readings to the young people.

Excerpt 6.5 Élise's discomfort with reading

[…] je le sais c'est quoi avoir un sentiment d'échec envers la lecture, puis que je sais que c'est des gens qui ont à peine un secondaire 1, je n'étais pas à l'aise de les remettre dans un contexte d'échec. […] Si moi-même, je ne suis pas à l'aise de transmettre la passion de la lecture ou des trucs. Moi, je ne me sentais pas habilitée à apprendre aux gens à lire.	[…] I know what it is to have a sense of failure towards reading, and then I know that they just have a secondary 1, I was not comfortable to put them back in a context of failure. [...] If I, I'm not comfortable to convey the passion for reading and stuff. I did not feel I was the right person to teach people how to read.

L'Envol, 18-05-2012

She explained that her colleague Catherine complemented her on this matter since she enjoyed reading and was good at it. Also, Élise mentioned that *L'Envol* offered slam workshops (a mix of rap and poetry) that focus on reading and writing. The young people who are interested in reading and writing could find support from other people within the organisation.

The results presented above confirm previous work (Cardinal-Picard, 2010) which suggested that youth workers' *rapports à l'écrit* influence the way they use literacy in their everyday work. As mentioned in Section 1.5, Besse (1995) identified three dimensions to the *rapport à l'écrit*: affective, social, and cognitive. The examples presented above can be related to these dimensions. For example, in relation to the affective dimension, Catherine mentioned how literacy was 'super important' in her life. Concerning the social dimension, Ève-Lyne explained how literacy was important to keep in touch with her best friends. On the cognitive dimension, Élise said that she might be dyslexic and this is why she did not enjoy reading. The brief quotes provided in this section show that the youth workers' *rapports à l'écrit* was shaped by their personal experiences. Their narratives (Pahl, 2004) around literacy suggest that their

relationship is continuously evolving (e.g. Élise's example). All the youth workers participating in my study draw on their literacy practices in their work with the young people. Many examples related to therapeutic writing. Handwriting and reading novels seemed favoured for this purpose. These practices are similar to what young people might do when going through difficult events in their lives (Thériault, 2008; Thériault and Bélisle, 2012). The youth workers did not invite the young people to use digital technologies to express themselves. The youth workers generally had negative views on social media in relation to self-expression (see Chapter 8). Yet, this is a practice that the young people participating in my study were using (see Section 5.4.1). Charles, a youth worker at *Le Bercail*, believed that it was easier to express feelings with pen and paper than with a keyboard. Based on my previous work (Thériault, 2008), paper seemed to offer affordances that a computer or a mobile phone do not have. Some young people explained that they would tear apart their personal writing or throw it in the garbage bin (ibid.). This physical (tactile) aspect might also be part of the therapeutic aspect of handwriting for young people. This is not something young people could do with a laptop or mobile phone (if they had such devices).

The descriptions that Charles and Élise offered of their literacy practices offer an insight into their *rapports à l'écrit* and how they had evolved. Their experiences at school and in other domains of their lives influenced how they perceived themselves as writers and readers. They both mentioned significant people who had changed their literacy practices. Their personal experience with reading and writing affected the way they used literacy with the young people in their work.

6.4 Intersections and tensions

In this section, I begin to answer the question about the relationship between the literacy practices of the community-based organisations and those of the young people attending their activities. I first explore the place offered to vernacular literacies in the organisations. Then, I present data that indicates that the literacy practices used at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* can help to reconcile young people with school-related literacies. Finally, I identify some potential tensions between the organisations' literacy practices and those of the young people that are explored in the following chapters of the thesis.

6.4.1 Intersections: A place to share about literacies

In this chapter, I have presented data that indicate that the young people and the youth workers participating in my study brought a lot of their own literacy practices into the organisations. Youth workers and young people were all drawing on their personal experiences with literacy—their *rapports à l'écrit*—to meet literacy needs arising in the organisations. The youth workers expressed their interest in knowing what the young people were reading or writing. They regularly suggested to the young people they should write about their feelings. As suggested by previous work (Thériault, 2008), this is also a practice that some young people engage with spontaneously in their personal lives. 'Therapeutic writing' thus can be seen as an intersection point between the literacy practices used at *L'Envol* and *Le Bercail* and those of the youth workers and the young people.

Certain literacy practices that are not generally valued in society were accepted at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. For instance, tattoos were often talked about. The youth workers were open to looking at the sentences or images that the young people wanted to get

tattooed. As I described in Section 6.2, the semiotic landscapes of the organisations were generally monolingual (French). Yet, the young people brought within the premises of *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* many literacy artefacts that related to their vernacular practices that were multilingual (clothes, music, notebooks, tattoos, films, etc.). The youth workers were open to these texts. I witnessed literacy events where the youth workers were interested in texts written in languages other than French that the young people brought to the organisations. For instance, Darya brought some of her personal writing she had done in Persian (Dari) to Frédérique, Tommy, and Ève-Lyne.

Figure 6.23 Darya's 'dictionary'

Figure 6.23 presents an example of Darya's vernacular literacy practices. She wrote down words that were important to her (e.g. life, peace, death) and also the name of the colours in French, then their pronunciations in Persian using roman characters, and finally the words written in Persian (Dari). She explained to me and the youth workers

that this is something she had done a few times in the past, creating a kind a dictionary for herself. The youth workers seemed interested and asked her to translate other words for them.

My analysis indicates that young people's vernacular literacies were more visible at *Le Bercail* than at *L'Envol*. But that does not mean that the young people at *L'Envol* were not talking about their vernacular literacies with the youth workers. The young people at *Le Bercail* were often looking at their Facebook pages or sending text messages during the breaks (or even during the activities). I did not observe this at *L'Envol*. Once again, this might be related to the age difference. However, it might also be due to the format of the workshops which at *L'Envol* focused on definite and practical tasks (e.g. gardening, shopping, and cooking). At *Le Bercail*, most of the activities had the young people's personal lives and practices as their starting point (see the pots activity in Section 6.1.7.1). This opened the door for young people to bring artefacts from home. Some activities also allowed them to use Facebook and their mobile phones.

The boundaries between their every-day lives and what they did in the organisation were therefore permeable. At *L'Envol*, the aims of the activities were less focused on self-awareness. They were aimed at equipping the young people for their everyday lives and to break their social isolation. Also, *L'Envol* had supervised flats. All the young people participating in my study at *L'Envol* lived in one of these flats. This meant that Catherine and Élise were regularly meeting the young people in their apartments for personal follow up meetings. At *Le Bercail*, the young people were not living on the premises of the organisation, but lived with their parents, siblings, or in another organisation for young people. This meant that the individual follow ups with the young people took place at *Le Bercail* and were more visible for me during my

fieldwork. The distinction between the group activities and the individual follow-ups was perhaps not as straightforward at *Le Bercail*. The presence of vernacular literacies at *Le Bercail* might have been influenced by this characteristic. Some intimate aspects of the young people's lives were more visible—including their vernacular literacy practices.

These findings suggest that the boundaries between the literacy practices used in the organisations and in the lives of the young people were flexible. The young people could talk about their vernacular literacy practices with the youth workers, and they would generally be interested to learn about these. Other literacy practices used in the two organisations seemed to bridge the gap between other aspects of young people's lives such as school. In the following section I explore the links between school related literacies and those used at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*.

6.4.2   Learning and opportunities for reconciliation with school literacies

In Chapter 5, I described the ambivalent relationships that the young people had with school. Some of them had had negative experiences that had shaped their perception of themselves as readers and writers. Many young people attending activities at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* were hoping to go back to education. This was a project that the youth workers were supportive of. They were encouraging the young people, offering them concrete support and advice.

In the first phase, I observed various literacy events involving school-related literacies used during the workshops and activities organised at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. During the various workshops, young people were often invited to perform activities that were typically performed in school contexts. In this section, I present two situations observed during the first phase. The first was observed during a workshop at *L'Envol*

on the origin of food and gardening—this workshop was aimed at promoting food self-sufficiency, healthy eating, and environmental awareness.

Excerpt 6.6 Observation notes depicting an online search about raspberry plants

At *L'Envol*, Élise, a youth worker, asked for a volunteer to search online for information on raspberry plants: how to grow them, how to cut them, their properties, etc. The group had recently received free raspberry plants, and they needed to know how to care for them. Cassandra, a participant, volunteered to do it and Élise mentioned she wanted a little report on this matter: 'like in school'. Cassandra spent a few minutes online while others were undertaking other duties (e.g. replanting seedlings). She hand-wrote the information on an A4 sheet. Once the research was done, Cassandra spoke in front of the group giving them the relevant information and highlighting what she found particularly interesting.

L'Envol, 01-05-2012

Élise played an important role in this literacy event, since she guided Cassandra by pointing out what kind of genre was expected. Cassandra seemed to enjoy doing this task for the group and was interested in some of the information she found. Figure 6.24 shows an extract taken from the document produced by Cassandra. This extract is about the health benefits of raspberries and of raspberry leaves: containing vitamin C and minerals, good for the uterus, preparing for childbirth, easing premenstrual symptoms, and preventing diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancer.
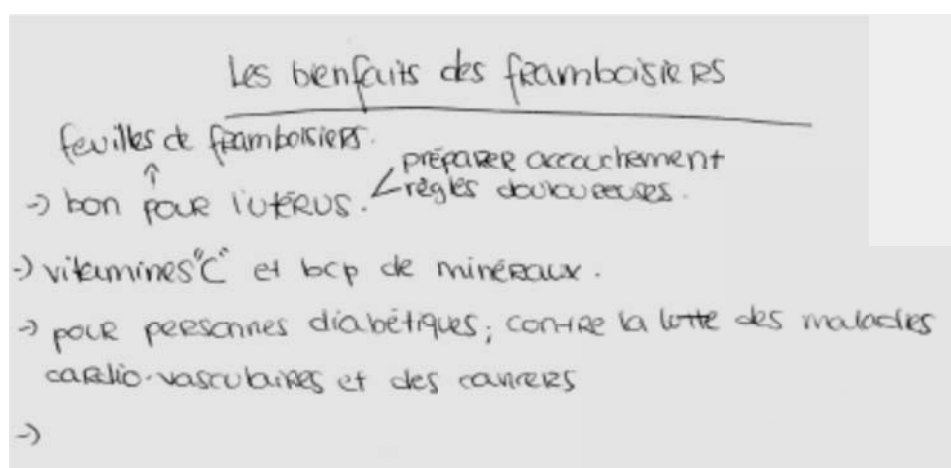
Figure 6.24 Extract from Cassandra's document about raspberry plants

This was a rewarding experience for Cassandra, since Élise and the other participants were interested in her research and positively reacted to it. For instance Élise commented 'This is interesting, I didn't know about it!' while Cassandra was presenting the information. Moreover, Cassandra knew this information would be useful at later stages: while planting and maintaining the plants, using the leaves and eating the fruit. When I met Cassandra in the first phase of my study, she was planning to return to education the following year (which she did, as observed in the second phase).

I observed another example of a literacy event involving school genres in the more informal context of a workshop, this time at *Le Bercail*. In this organisation, all participants had to decide on a few personal projects they would like to undertake throughout their participation in the *Mobili-T* programme. Laurence had recently been on a retreat to a monastery and wanted to share her experience with the others. She then decided to create a PowerPoint (PPT) presentation about, what had been for her, an important life experience.

Excerpt 6.7 Observation notes describing Frédérique's explanations about PowerPoint presentations

Frédérique told Laurence she could show her a few examples of PPT presentations she had created, so that Laurence could have ideas for hers. Laurence agreed and sat next to Frédérique and her computer. Frédérique first showed a PPT about her work at *Le Bercail*. She explained that she presented this PPT to the staff of an adult education centre in order to inform them about the services offered. There were many pictures in the PPT illustrating the kinds of activities they were doing with young people. Frédérique then showed another presentation she had made as part of another project. This presentation, explained Frédérique, had more text, since it was aimed at social workers and teachers. Frédérique also explained that she had had to obtain the written consent of every person appearing on the photographs she used on the PPT slides.

Le Bercail, 10-05-2012

In the literacy event described above, Frédérique used examples of PPTs to show Laurence various presentations, their aims and how they addressed specific audiences. Laurence had a high-school diploma and was planning to start college soon (which she did, as observed in the second phase). Frédérique was showing her how to use PowerPoint, which is regularly used in post-secondary education. Frédérique also introduced some notion of ethics by explaining to Laurence that if you use images of people and intend to show them publicly, you need their consent.

These two examples were embedded within the context and work of the organisations and made sense to Laurence and Cassandra with regard to their lives. At that time, they both had the project of returning to education and were taking part in a social integration programme (*Espace Collectif* and *Mobili-T*) supporting them in this direction. They both freely decided to engage. These examples offer a good illustration of how literacy events can become empowering, when young people can actively participate, feel respected and learn new things. They also show what role school-related literacy practices can play in these organisations, and how young people can learn such literacies in informal ways. By offering opportunities like these, youth workers were contributing to building, or rebuilding, a positive relationship with academic literacies for the young people. Indeed, many participants did not have a good opinion of school in general and often negatively compared the stimulating learning environment of the community-based organisation with a 'traditional school classroom' (see Section 5.2.2). On the same matter, Bélisle (2004: 179) found out that 'in social and professional non-formal education courses, young people can reconcile themselves with literacies they used to associate with their schooling failures' (free translation from French). Similarly to Bélisle (2004), I found that literacies in community-based organisations can help to rehabilitate certain forms of school

literacies in the eyes of young people, and this can eventually facilitate a return to education. This process, however, seems only partially visible to both young people and youth workers. This also relates to Desmarais' action research study (2003; 2006) conducted in a literacy and popular education organisation in Québec. She explains how young people's participation in these courses fostered their feeling of community, reflexivity and self-esteem. Consequently, their experience positively changed their relationships with literacy in general: their attitudes and feelings towards it (Desmarais, 2003; 2006.). Another research project (Tett and Maclachalan, 2007), conducted in Scotland, also found similar relations between participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses and participants' self-esteem with regards to literacy. In the light of the studies mentioned above, it seems that a similar process of changing attitudes and feelings towards literacy in a positive direction —what is captured by Besse's concept of *rapport à l'écrit*—and specifically concerning academic literacy practices, was occurring, albeit unintentionally, during the workshops observed.

In my previous work (Thériault, 2008), I found that group therapy (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous or therapy for drug addiction) seemed to positively change young people's literacy practices. The young people seemed keen to write or to read long texts, two literacy practices that they were reluctant to do at school. I questioned why these practices were more acceptable in these contexts and not at school. My hypothesis at the time was that the topics of the texts were about the young people's lives and also they seemed more authentic because they were embedded in real purposes. Consequently, the texts seemed more interesting to them. In the light of my current findings, I still think that the topic is an important element to foster young people's engagement. It also seems that the relation of the activity to the projected future of the young people is important. The positive relationship between the youth

workers and the young people also seemed to affect the engagement of the young people with literacy.

6.5   Conclusion

The data presented in this chapter suggest that there was an amalgam of different '*rapports à l'écrit*' that was unique to the organisations participating in my study at the time of data collection. My findings also indicate that literacy was omnipresent (Bélisle, 2003) in the two community-based organisations participating in my study. During the activities organised by the youth workers, the young people were asked to read and write a lot. They were in contact with a large variety of texts that were often multimodal (images, video, spoken language, text, etc.).

I argue that literacy can play an important role in creating a 'social geometry of power and signification' (Massey, 1994: 3) in a given place. At *L'Envol* and *Le Bercail*, the youth workers had more power over the legitimate literacy practices used during the workshops than the young people. However, young people's vernacular literacy practices were accepted and generally valued. A large number of texts coming from other organisations and institutions were present on the premises and sometimes had an important role in the activities (e.g. bureaucratic forms). The social geometry of power and signification was then not only created by the people directly involved in the activities but was also shaped by more powerful state institutions. Yet, the *rapports à l'écrit* and practices of the various people involved in the organisations contributed to create the place. Their *rapport à l'écrit* and practices were in turn influenced by their involvement in the place.

It seemed that the youth workers were concerned with young people's learning and development and this was visible in the literacy practices they used with them. The youth workers were interested in the young people's vernacular literacy practices and

were not rejecting them. They sometimes adapted their activities to fit closer with what the young people were doing in terms of reading and writing (e.g. therapeutic writing). My findings also suggest that the youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* were contributing to building, or rebuilding, a positive relationship with academic literacies for the young people.

7   DIGITAL LITERACIES: THEORY AND STUDIES

Researchers agree that the digital technologies are now necessary in almost all domains of life; work, home, school, leisure, community and the public sphere (Snyder and Prinsloo, 2007: 171; Barton and Lee, 2013; Velghe and Blommaert, 2014). According to Barton and Lee (2013), it is difficult to find an area of life which has not been changed by the digital technologies. They also note that '[t]his has all been happening in a relatively short period of time and has become naturalised and unnoticed by people in their lives' (ibid.: 2). This means that similar to other types of literacies we use in our everyday lives, digital literacies are seen as common, a normal part of our day to day routine. Also, Velghe and Blommaert (2014) point out that the digital technologies are almost all mediated by text; which means that people are increasingly reading and writing.

Digital literacies—such as required when using mobile phones, computers, video games, social network sites, tablets, text messaging, GPS—are central to people's everyday social practices. As Barton and Lee (2013) note, 'writing activities on the internet are not separable from people's lived experiences off the screen' (179). This relates to the dichotomy often referred to as 'online-offline'. Some early studies of the Internet—and even some recent ones—only focus on what people do online without putting it in the context of their everyday lives. NLS researchers have criticised this perspective and argue for a more ecological approach to the study of literacies online (see Gillen, 2015). This perspective can highlight important aspects of the uses of digital literacies such as the influence of others (e.g. family and friends) on the choice of using certain digital technologies and also in how people resolve technical problems they encounter (Mehra, Merkel and Peterson Bishop, 2004).

People reinvest online forms of literacy they already know and use in their everyday lives. For instance, as pointed out by Barton and Lee (2013), abbreviations were not invented with text messages or chat, they were already used in various domains of life. This is also the case with sharing pictures with friends and putting them in albums. These practices have been transformed but they happened before the existence of online sharing platforms (Flicker, Facebook, Dropbox, Skydrive, etc.). Even though digital literacies are—similarly to literacies in general—situated in social practices, they have new affordances which other types of literacy do not. Gillen and Barton (2009) note that digital technologies allow people to develop new literacy practices that were not possible before. According to them, digital literacies are changing very rapidly and people sometimes use them in innovative ways. For example, there are already major differences between Web 2.0 and Web 1.0 (Barton and Lee, 2013). Web 2.0 includes social network sites (e.g. Facebook and Twitter), sites where you can share pictures (e.g. Instagram and Flicker), and blogs, forums, chats, interactive dictionaries (Wikipedia, Wikihow), etc. Web 1.0 is generally described as websites consulted to find information but which do not offer possibilities for interaction, personalisation or contribution.

Digital literacies do not escape the deterministic or 'autonomous' view of literacies (Snyder and Prinsloo, 2007; Bulfin and Koutsogiannis, 2012). Barton and Lee (2013) explain that '[i]t is important to make clear that technologies themselves do not automatically introduce changes in life. In other words, new activities in life are not technologically determined but technology itself is also part of broader social changes' (3). This means that it is not uniquely because people have access to the Internet that they would, for instance, learn an incredible amount of new things and break their isolation. Conversely, it is not because people are texting and using

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abbreviations that their writing abilities would deteriorate (Velghe and Blommaert, 2014). Consequently, Barton and Lee (2013) suggest talking about digital literacies in terms of affordances instead of effects.

The autonomous view of digital literacies—which draws heavily on the acquisition of appropriate skills—is powerful and has influenced the media, public policies, and education. There is also an influential narrative on the risks and dangers associated with the Internet which calls for more monitoring and constraint notably from school (Notley, 2009). Bulfin and North (2007) note that digital literacies used in school are seen as not innovative and far away from the real life practices of young people. This means that people learn how to use, for instance, the Internet (Notley, 2009) or text message language (Velghe and Blommaert, 2014) in an informal way and potentially with the help of their friends, family or other people in their social network.

There is an abundance of academic literature on young people and their uses of digital literacies. Young people are seen to be heavy users of digital technologies. They are often referred to as digital natives (Barton and Lee, 2013). This term means that young people grow up in a digitally mediated world and therefore feel at ease with digital technologies. Researchers have explored various themes in relation to young people and their uses of digital literacies: the influence of popular culture (Williams, 2009); video games (Gee, 2008a; 2008b; 2003; 2009; Thomas, 2007; Kendall and McDougall, 2013); networking, relationships, and participation online (Davies, 2006a; 2006b; 2013; 2012; Thomas, 2007; Knobel and Lankshear, 2008; McLean, 2010), and identity and learning (Davies, 2007; McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg and Saliani, 2007; Thomas, 2007; Williams, 2009; Barton and Lee, 2013; Barton and Potts, 2013; Keipi and Oksanen, 2014). Prinsloo and Rowsell (2012) note that studies have mainly focused on 'Anglo-American or middle-class contexts' (271). However, a number of

studies show that not all young people are digital natives (see for instance Warschauer, 2009). This is further explored in the following section.

7.1   Accessibility to digital literacies and groups of people in a situation of precarity

The idea of the 'Great Divide' (see Section 2.1.2) is also used to refer to digital literacies, but in a different way. Some authors call it the 'digital divide' (Snyder and Prinsloo, 2007) to indicate that there is a gap between people using digital technologies (particularly computers and Internet), and those who do not (Mehra, Merkel and Peterson Bishop, 2004). This concept has been criticised because it focuses on the physical availability and access to the digital technologies, but does not address the question of how people use them (Mehra, Merkel, and Peterson Bishop, 2004; Notly, 2009). It is not only about having a computer, a mobile phone or access to the Internet, but it has more to do with what one does with them. Warschauer (2009) notes that it is important to look at the power issues related to digital technologies beyond questions of access and availability.

According to Bulfin and Koutsogiannis (2012) the actual academic literature about digital literacies can lead to generalisations such as the claim that digital technologies have a major influence on young people's identities. But young people are not a homogenous group and, as mentioned before, studies of digital literacies tend to look at middle-class young people speaking English. Only a few studies have looked at the uses of digital literacies by young people in a situation of precarity, transnationals, and/or from sexual or ethnic minorities.

In previous work (Thériault, 2008; Thériault and Bélisle, 2012), young people said they used various digital technologies in their everyday lives: Chat, MSN, mobile phones, Google, emails, video games, small ad websites, etc. They used the Internet to keep in touch with friends and family, make new friends, meet a new partner, find information about a specific topic, and download music (Thériault, 2008). The participants also described their uses of digital literacies during key moments of their lives. For instance, an 18 year old girl explained how it was difficult for her to tell her family and her friends about her homosexuality. All her friends were heterosexual, except three gay friends who she had met online. These three friends were an important source of support in this period of her life (ibid.: 90). These findings link up with Mehra, Merkel, and Peterson Bishop (2004), who also found that people's life experiences can bring them to use and learn about digital technologies.

A few studies have looked at the online practices of transnational young people. McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg and Saliani (2007) define transnational youth as 'youth who hold affinity ties and/or affiliations to two or more countries' (284). According to them, these young people use the Internet in order to keep in touch with people from their home country. McLean (2010) explains that for young immigrants the Internet can be a place where they can develop an identity for themselves that allowed them to resist the dominant view of them as immigrants and learners who struggle. McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg and Saliani (2007) also found that digital technologies and media were a place where young people had agency and contested preconceived ideas about immigration and transnational young people.

The studies presented above show that digital technologies can play an important role in the lives of young people 'on the margins' of society. The Internet can be a central element in their social lives helping them to make new friends or even find a new

partner (Thériault, 2008). For transnational young people, digital technologies seem to support their identity creation and provide opportunities for contestation and agency. This might also be relevant in order to understand the uses of digital technologies by other 'marginalised' young people, who might not relate to a mainstream view of youth (e.g. young people in a situation of precarity, from sexual minorities, or disadvantaged because of their ethnicity and/or gender).

The studies presented in this section relate to my analysis of the young people's digital literacy practices presented in Chapter 5. However, in my study, the young people did not always have positive experiences online. Their online lives were not separate from their offline everyday lives, and the problems they had were played out both online and offline. For the young people participating in my study, digital technologies offered important opportunities for identity curation. This indicates that the Internet might be a place where they can try various identities, protest against unfairness, but also find answers and support. This last point is explored in the following section.

7.2   Counselling and youth work online

Digital technologies affect different aspects of people's lives such as consumption, communications, entertainment, information seeking, and so on. They have also changed the way people look for social and psychological support (Mishna et al., 2012). There is a growing body of research looking at the changes digital technologies have brought about in counselling and social work. Digital technologies have also changed the way counsellors, youth and social workers are intervening, communicating and interacting (Mishna et al., 2012).

Finn and Barak (2010) define e-counselling as 'therapeutic services delivered by a helping professional over the internet via text, audio and/or video.' (268). They also explain that online counselling is more and more common because the Internet is now more accepted as a reliable means of communication. The use of digital technologies has also been encouraged by research evidence and the development of ethical guidelines supporting practitioners (Finn and Barak, 2010).

Digital technologies can play a more or less important part in practitioners' day-to-day work. Some are exclusively doing online intervention and use various tools such as video (e.g. Skype), chat rooms, emails, etc. (Hanley, 2012). Other practitioners use digital technologies as complementary practices in their face-to-face interventions, for example to schedule appointments, to send extra information, and keep in contact with their clients (Mishna et al., 2012).

According to Mishna et al. (2012), practitioners using digital technologies face various challenges. They mention that time and space can be extended by digital technologies; in both positive and negative ways. Drawing on interviews conducted with social workers, they also explain that emails can be send at any time of the day and from everywhere. Richards and Viganó (2013) also note that e-counselling is 'characterized by unique features and behaviours such as apparent anonymity, disinhibition, distance, time delay, convenience, and loss of social signalling.' (1002). This means that possible misinterpretation of written messages might occur since both the client and the social worker do not have access to non-verbal information (Mishna et al., 2012).

Studies looking at Internet supported interventions (also called e-counselling, cybertherapy, e-therapy, online counselling) have used methods such as pre and post-tests, questionnaires and interviews. They often focus on the counsellors' experience

and perception of their practices (Hanley, 2012). The perspective of those being counselled is generally studied in terms of satisfaction and effectiveness vis-à-vis the e-counselling services received (Finn and Barak, 2010). There appears to have been no discussion of the use of digital technologies in counselling and youth work from an NLS point of view. An ethnographic study could provide complementary information about the uses of digitally supported interventions by youth workers and social workers and how these relate to their literacy practices and those of the people they are working with.

7.3   Implications for my study

My ethnographic approach is different to most of the other studies of young people and digital literacies. I did not conduct an online ethnography to observe how people were using language online. I was not a Facebook friend of my research participants, and I did not search for their Twitter or other social media accounts. My approach is similar to that of the anthropologist Daniel Miller (2011), since I also combine participant observation in physical settings with interviews. The importance of digital literacies emerged from my observations. Both organisations had a small computer lab (4 computers at *Le Bercail* and 5 at *L'Envol*) which the young people could use for personal and project related activities. The organisations also offered other types of technological equipment such as digital cameras, screens, projectors, video cameras and sound systems.

I was able to observe how digital literacies were used by both the youth workers and the young people. Digital technologies (particularly Facebook) seemed central to the creation of relationships between the youth workers and the young people, but also between the participants. The physical settings of the organisations allowed me to

observe how online interactions (e.g. text messages) were often intertwined with 'local' face-to-face interactions. Therefore, my data do not focus on the content of the online interaction (e.g. detailed transcripts of Facebook discussions), but on the connections between online and face-to-face interactions. Consequently, I do not see offline and online as being separate but rather as being in a constant dynamic (Barton and Lee, 2013). The participants occasionally showed me their Facebook account or their text messages, but I was more interested in the interaction and discussions arising around these texts (e.g. conversations on how they would select pictures to put online and why; where they would find the content they put online (pictures, poems, thoughts, etc.).

I also observed how the youth workers used digital technologies in their everyday work. Because digital technologies and social media are so important in young people's lives, the youth workers offered an increasing number of activities to educate the young people on the risks related to the Internet. I also saw the youth workers combining digital technologies and face-to-face actions in their work with the young people. In my study, I use the term 'Internet-supported interventions' to refer to the interventions youth workers carry out online (particularly on Facebook, email and mobile phone).

8 DIGITAL LITERACIES IN THE ORGANISATIONS

In this chapter, I explore the literacy practices involving digital technologies in the two community-based organisations participating in my study. Based on the concepts and academic literature review presented in Chapter 7, I focus here on the youth workers' uses of digital technologies that were mediated by written text (e.g. Facebook, text messages, emails). The study of digital literacies generally includes a more comprehensive notion of text since various modes contribute to meaning making online. This means that videos, images, icons, and written text can all be interlinked and need to be considered together. Also, it is essential to look at the online text as inseparable from the 'offline'. This signifies that other texts ('offline') can be linked to the 'online' ones. This section focuses particularly on the meeting point between 'online' and 'offline'.

During the interviews (first phase), I did not ask the young people what they thought about the digital technologies available to them within the organisations. Also, I did not ask specific questions about how the young people communicated online or with their mobile phones with the youth workers. These two themes did not naturally come up during the workshops organised in the second phase either. However, I asked specific questions about digital technologies to the youth workers (see Appendix D). This means that in this section I mainly draw on the analysis of the interviews I conducted with the youth workers, but I also include data from my observation sessions.

In Section 8.1, I first offer a brief account of the presence of digital technologies in the two organisations. I then describe (Section 8.2) what the youth workers were doing with digital literacies in their work at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*, placing particular emphasis on their purposes (Section 8.3). I then (Section 8.4) explore the critical

stance that the youth workers adopted regarding young people's uses of digital technologies. After, in Section 8.5, I highlight possible issues of privacy, authority and ethics in relation to digital literacy practices at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. Then, in Section 8.6, I explain how the youth workers were learning non-standard forms of language online and what they thought about it. Finally, I offer a brief summary of the main findings presented in this chapter.

8.1 Presence of digital technologies in the organisations

In both organisations, a small computer lab was available for young people to use. At *Le Bercail*, three computers were situated in the room where most of the activities were taking place (Figure 8.1, left). Another computer was located in an office (Figure 8.1, middle). This computer seemed to be used by the young people for more private issues. For instance, Darya used it to start writing a book about her family. Also, Laurence used it to search for a new flat when she broke up with her boyfriend. Both Ève-Lyne and Frédérique had a laptop which they would bring to *Le Bercail* (Figure 8.1, right). Another computer was also in the main room and was exclusively used to listen to music.

Figure 8.1 An overview of the digital technologies available at *Le Bercail*

L'Envol also had a small computer lab; five computers were available for the young people (Figure 8.2, bottom). A computer was also available in the premises of the other building of the organisation (Figure 8.2, top right) where the group used to cook the community dinner. This computer was mainly used to listen to music when they were cooking. Occasionally, a projector and a screen (Figure 8.2, top middle) were used to show PowerPoint presentations (e.g. Photo Club) or documentaries (for instance 'Home', 2009).The youth workers had three laptops in their office (two for the youth workers, and one for a student trainee). These computers were exclusively used by the youth workers.

Figure 8.2 An overview of the digital technologies available at *L'Envol*

As mentioned in Chapter 6, I observed various uses of digital literacies involving different artefacts: computers, mobile phones, digital cameras, projectors and screens. I observed six main uses of the computer in the premises of the organisations: 1) searching for information for the activities; 2) searching online for personal purposes; 3) using Microsoft Office (particularly Word) during activities; 4) accessing Facebook; 5) using YouTube; and 6) various online activities, such as creating a website.

In Chapter 6, I provided many examples of how digital technologies were used during the workshops organised at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. However, other forms of digital literacies were also present in the organisations during my field work. Yet, these were more subtle and had to do with the ways youth workers were using digital literacies in their everyday work with young people.

8.2 Digital literacies in the everyday work of the youth workers

All the youth workers used digital technologies in their everyday work. They mainly used Facebook. Six people said they used it frequently, and one person said he used it only once every three months. This youth worker, Tommy, explained that he did not like social network sites and did not use them regularly.

Excerpt 8.1 Tommy's views on social network sites

Non, je ne suis pas encore à ce point-là réseau social.[...] *Je vais utiliser Facebook lorsqu'un intervenant qui va me dire : « Tommy, il y a un jeune qui t'a écrit. » Là, je vais prendre la peine d'aller discuter avec lui, d'envoyer un message. Mais encore là, je n'aime pas le manque de contact d'humain à humain. Je n'aime pas intervenir sans voir le non-verbal de mon interlocuteur de l'autre côté.*	No, I am not yet into social networking. [...] I will use Facebook when another youth worker will tell me 'Tommy, there is a young person who wrote to you.' Then, I will take some time to talk to him, send a message. But, I don't like the lack of human interaction. I don't like doing counselling without seeing the non-verbal of my interlocutor on the other side.

Le Bercail, 24-05-2012

Tommy's concerns were similar to what the social workers in Mishna et al.'s study (2012) explained. They were concerned about possible misinterpretations of written messages and the lack of non-verbal cues. Regarding mobile phones, there was a stronger resistance to their use. Only two youth workers, Élise and Catherine at *L'Envol*, had a mobile phone provided by their employer. In 2012, they had just received one mobile phone each. They were excited about this new technology and were hoping to be able to reach the young people more easily. However, they were disappointed because the mobile phones provided by the organisation were 'old fashioned' and were not adapted for text messages. The other youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* did not use text messages to communicate with the young people. This is further explored in the section about privacy, authority and ethical issues (Section 8.5).

The two organisations participating in my study had a Facebook account shared with other youth workers. At *Le Bercail*, Ève-Lyne, Frédérique, Tommy and Charles shared an account with the other employees of the organisation. The account was named after the organisation. At *L'Envol* the situation was similar. However, each service within the organisation had its own Facebook account. For instance, Carl and his colleague shared a Facebook account for the service called *Avant-C*. Catherine and Élise (in the second year Olivier) shared an account for *Espace Collectif.*

About these shared Facebook accounts, Ève-Lyne at *Le Bercail* said that the young people might not always be aware that all the employees of the organisation or the service could see their messages.

Excerpt 8.2 Ève-Lyne's comment about the shared Facebook account

[...] le message s'adresse souvent à... « Salut tout le monde! », « À tous les Mobili-T ». En fait, quand un jeune écrit, lui, je pense, dans sa tête, il ne pense pas que tous les intervenants du terrain ont accès à ça. Je pense que dans sa tête, c'est Frédérique, Tommy, Ève-Lyne, peut-être Charles. Un d'eux autres vont le lire. Effectivement, c'est un de nous qui allons répondre, mais tu sais, même les intervenants en haut lisent les messages. Ça fait qu'on reste toujours dans le professionnel.	[...] the message is often addressed to... 'Hello everybody!', 'To all the *Mobili-T*!'. In fact, when a young person writes, he, I think, in his head, he doesn't think that all the youth workers will see it. I think that in his head it's Frédérique, Tommy, Ève-Lyne, maybe Charles. One of them will read it. Indeed one of us will reply, but you know, even the other youth workers upstairs read the messages. So, we always stay professional.

Le Bercail, 22-05-2012

Yergeau et al. (2009) note that young people attending community-based organisations are not always aware that they are taking part in a specific social and professional insertion programme. For some young people, the relationship they develop with one youth worker is the element that really matters in their participation. Yet, these authors suggest that it is important for the young people to develop meaningful relationships with the organisation, the programme, and a team of youth

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workers. Yergeau and his colleagues (2009) explain that in the case of staff movement (e.g. maternity leave, change of employment, change of functions) the young people would still be able to have a trusting relationship with other youth workers than the one they were used to working with. The Facebook accounts used at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* might represent a step in that direction. However, Ève-Lyne's quote (Excerpt 8.2) suggests that the youth workers could clarify this with some young people, and Facebook could be instrumental in supporting this intervention.

The youth workers at *Le Bercail* said that to avoid any confusion while using the organisation's account they would sign the messages they send to young people. At *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*, the youth workers generally used the private message function instead of writing public messages on young people's walls (Facebook now calls this space a 'timeline').

In the following section, I explain in more detail how the youth workers were using digital literacy. I explore the different purposes that these literacy practices had at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*.

8.3 Purposes of the digital literacy practices

The youth workers participating in my study believed that digital technologies offered them new affordances in their everyday work. The majority of them had noticed a change in the way they were working. Some remembered the time when they only relied on phone calls and face-to-face meetings in order to communicate with young people.

I identified four main purposes of the digital literacy practices used at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*: 1) publicity and recruitment, 2) appointment management, 3) building relationships, 4) digital technologies as sources of evidence, and 5) counselling.

8.3.1   *Publicity and recruitment*

Two youth workers described how Facebook was an effective place where they could advertise the activities they organised. For instance, Catherine at *L'Envol* used it to advertise the community dinner: explaining what the menu would be and who would be the guest speaker. This information was also sent by email to the young people who lived in the supervised flats at *L'Envol*. However, Catherine preferred Facebook and believed that it was more effective. At *Le Bercail*, Charles explained that he often writes short individual messages on Facebook (e.g. private message and chat function) to young people in order to personally invite them to the evening activities.

Excerpt 8.3 Charles's uses of Facebook for publicity and recruitment purposes

C'est arrivé souvent que je voyais un jeune qui ne venait plus [aux activités du Bercail] puis qui était en ligne. Là, je dis : « Qu'est-ce tu fais à soir? » « Rien. » « Bon, bien je t'attends au Bercail. » Tu sais, ça, quand on n'avait pas Facebook, je n'aurais pas appelé le jeune pour le savoir : « Heille! Qu'est-ce tu fais à soir? » Parce que c'est long appeler, hein? Bien là, tu en vois 50 [jeunes] sur le chat, c'est très simple d'écrire : « Heille! Qu'est-ce tu fais à soir? » Prochain jeune : « Qu'est-ce tu fais à soir? » Prochaine jeune... « Rien. » « Rien. » « Rien. » « Venez-vous-en au Bercail, on fait ça, ça, ça. » « Parfait! » Puis ils s'en viennent.	It often happens that I saw a young person online who has not been attending [the activities at *Le Bercail*] for a long time. Then, I said 'What are you doing tonight?' 'Nothing.' 'Well, I will be waiting for you at *Le Bercail*.' You know, that wouldn't have been possible before without Facebook, I wouldn't have called a young person to know about it. Because phoning takes more time, no? Now, if you see 50 [young people] on the chat, it is very simple to write 'Hey! What are you doing tonight?' Next one 'What are you doing tonight?' Next one... 'Nothing' 'Nothing' 'Nothing' 'Come to *Le Bercail*, we will be doing this, this and this.' 'Perfect!' Then they all come.

Le Bercail, 25-05-2012

This form of 'recruitment' is more informal and personalised than a post made on a Facebook page. According to Charles, this way of communicating with young people was less time consuming than using the phone. Even though this is not clearly mentioned by Charles, functionalities such as copy-paste might also make it easier. The youth workers could copy-paste a message and send it to different young people and make it look personalised. Other functionalities of Facebook might also allow youth workers to save time. On Facebook, it is possible to chat with more than one person at the same time. Visually, it offers an opportunity to open as many 'chat boxes' as needed. Earlier discussion that a youth worker might have had with a young person would also appear in the chat boxes. This might make it easier for a youth worker to know when the last time they had communicated with the young people was.

8.3.2   Appointment management

The majority of the youth workers explained that they used Facebook (and at *L'Envol* text messages) mainly to schedule or reschedule appointments with the young people. Catherine explained how she used Facebook (e.g. private message and chat function), for this purpose:

Excerpt 8.4 Catherine's uses of Facebook for managing appointments

Tantôt, j'ai une rencontre avec Jacques. Il était sur Facebook tantôt. Je suis allée voir. J'ai dit : «Jacques, n'oublie pas, on a notre rencontre tantôt. » « Oui, c'est bon, merci, salut. » Ça fait que c'est les technologies que les jeunes utilisent. Si j'intervenais avec des gens de 50 ans, je ne fonctionnerais pas comme ça non plus. C'est sûr que la lecture puis l'écriture, pour [les jeunes], ça a une place plus prépondérante dans les modes de communication.	Later, I have an appointment with Jacques. He was on Facebook earlier. I went to have a look. I said 'Jacques, don't forget, we have an appointment later.' 'Yes, no worries. Thanks. Bye.' So, these are the technologies used by the young people. If I was working with people of 50 years old, I wouldn't work like this. For sure, reading and writing, for [the young people], take a big place in the ways they are communicating.

L'Envol, 22-05-2012

Facebook and text messages seem to offer informality and flexibility in communication with the young people. Based on the descriptions the youth workers made of their practices, it seemed easier for them to go on Facebook and remind young people of their appointments than call them. They considered it less time consuming and more efficient. I also suppose that it was probably seen as less intrusive by the young people than a phone call.

In general, all the youth workers mentioned using Facebook (or text messages at *L'Envol*) as a first step towards a face-to-face meeting or a phone call. It is especially the case when the situation described by the young people online seems urgent or serious. Ève-Lyne described how she usually dealt with crisis situations.

Excerpt 8.5 Ève-Lyne's use of Facebook to deal with crisis situations

Ça arrive souvent qu'on a des situations de crises à gérer via Facebook, en chat. Moi, ça, je n'aime pas bien ça. Je vais dire à la place : « Regarde, appelle-moi. Je vais être là entre telle heure puis telle heure. Appelle-moi au Bercail » Je te dirais que leur premier réflexe, c'est Facebook avant le téléphone ou avant de passer.	It happens regularly that we have to deal with crisis situations on Facebook, with the chat. I don't like it. Instead, I will say 'Look, call me. I will be at *Le Bercail* between this time and this time. Call me at *Le Bercail*' I would say that their first move would be Facebook before calling or coming in person.

Le Bercail, 22-05-2012

Ève-Lyne mentioned that the young people usually contact them via Facebook. Hanley (2012) suggests that it is important to understand why certain people prefer to contact counsellors online instead of calling or meeting them face-to-face. This could be an indicator of social problems such as mental health issues. This is an interesting avenue that could be explored by the youth workers in their interventions. In Section 8.3.5, I further explore how the youth workers did online counselling with young people experiencing a crisis. In some cases face-to-face meetings or phone calls were not possible.

8.3.3   Building relationships

Another purpose of digital technologies I identified in the data is building relationships. In certain cases Facebook offered interesting opportunities for the youth workers to get to know the young people better and also to build a trusting relationship with them. For example, Ève-Lyne explained that by looking at Facebook she could know what the participants at *Le Bercail* had done over the weekend. This helps her to understand and adapt herself better to the group dynamics. For example, it would be possible to see online if the young people had socialised together over the weekend. They could see who took part in the social activities and who was excluded. This information would then be useful in understanding the group dynamics at *Le Bercail*.

Another youth worker at *Le Bercail*, Frédérique, gave an example of how Facebook helped her build a trusting relationship with a participant. This young man had a very good relationship with a youth worker who was, at the time of the first phase of data collection, on maternity leave. Frédérique was then in charge of this young man's case. For him, the transition between the two youth workers was difficult. She

explained how Facebook was important in slowly, step by step, building a stronger relationship with him.

Excerpt 8.6 Frédérique's uses of Facebook to build a trusting relationship

Il parle souvent d'elle. Quand que je le vois, je dis : « J'ai des nouvelles de [nom de l'intervenante]. Je voulais te dire qu'elle va bien. Elle fait telle affaire. » Pas en détail. Par exemple, elle s'entraîne, elle a fait un marathon récemment. Lui, ça lui fait plaisir. Si je sais qu'il a un match de soccer, parce qu'il l'a écrit sur son Facebook, la fois d'après que je vais lui parler. Je ne vais pas nécessairement lui écrire bonne chance tout de suite, ou je vais voir. Je suis quand même capable de seizer assez bien quand est-ce que c'est le moment pour parler de ces choses-là.	He is often talking about her. When I see him, I say 'I have news from [name of the youth worker]. I want to tell you that she is doing fine. She is doing these things.' Not in great detail. For instance, she is training, she did a marathon recently. That makes him happy. If I know he has a football match, because he wrote it on Facebook, next time I see him I will ask about it. I won't necessarily write him 'good luck' right away, I'll see. I am able to identify quite well when it's a good time to talk about this kind of things.

L'Envol, 24-05-2012

In this example, Frédérique is using Facebook to get to know this young man better. Football was also one of Frédérique's passions. This was a topic that she felt comfortable talking about with him. According to her, the information found online should be used sparingly otherwise the young people might have the feeling that the youth workers were 'spying' on them (see Section 8.5.2).

8.3.4 Digital technologies as sources of evidence

Using digital technologies as evidence was only mentioned by one youth worker. However, it is reasonable to assume that other youth workers were also using them for this purpose without necessarily being aware of it. Élise gave an example of a situation she had recently faced with a former resident at *L'Envol*. She said that this young woman had left her supervised flat at L'Envol without giving notice. She had

left her pets in the flat without feeding them. The young woman was not returning Élise's phone calls. Other young people told Élise that this young woman was still looking at her Facebook account. Élise decided to use Facebook to send her warnings. She wrote to the young woman that her animals would be taken away by an animal welfare organisation, that she should pay her rent, and that her flat needed to be cleaned.

Excerpt 8.7 Élise's use of Facebook to keep evidence

Elle ne peut pas être victime de la situation, puis nous, on a des preuves aussi, écrit à quelque part, dans les ordis, qu'on a fait ce qu'on avait pu aussi.	She cannot put herself in a victim position, and us, we have proof of it as well, written somewhere, in the computers, that we had done what we could for her.

L'Envol, 18-05-2012

This situation was very difficult for Élise. *L'Envol* worked together with the '*Office Municipal de l'Habitation (OMH)*' [Municipal Housing Office]. The youth workers had to make sure that the young people were paying their rent and were respecting the rules of the social housing programme (e.g. no drugs, noise, keeping the flat clean, etc.). Élise had to prove that she had done everything she could to make this young woman respect her contract with the OHM.

My data also suggest that digital literacies could also be used as evidence. Youth workers could use digital texts as proof in case some young people tried to appeal against a decision (e.g. taking away pets or eviction from a flat). It would be possible to show evidence (texts written on Facebook on a mobile phone) of misbehaviour to people in positions of authority such as police officers or a judge. I suggest that these digital texts could become objects of power, and potentially of domination if they were misused.

Élise provided another example of how she could use text messages to confront young people regarding their behaviour. She mentioned that before using digital technologies, some young people would say that they did not remember their appointments with her. She did not have any proof that they had read her emails or listened to her messages on their voice mailbox.

Excerpt 8.8 Élise's comment about legal evidence

[…] je viens juste de demander à mon boss de ne plus avoir de ligne terrestre puis d'avoir un cellulaire pour pouvoir faire des textos avec certains jeunes aussi. Parce que s'ils me répondent, moi, j'ai une preuve aussi qu'ils m'ont répondu telle date. « Oui, je vais être là à mon rendez-vous. » OK, ça fait que ne viens pas me dire que tu ne le savais pas. À mon avis, ça va me donner un meilleur moyen pour communiquer plus efficacement.	[…] I just asked my boss to change our landline for a mobile phone to be able to send text messages to some young people. Because if they reply to me, I have proof that they have replied on that day. "Yes, I will be there at my appointment." Okay, and then don't tell me you didn't know. According to me, it will give me a better way to communicate effectively.

L'Envol, 18-05-2012

This issue raises many questions such as: were the young people aware that what they wrote online could be used against them? Is that made explicit when they befriend youth workers on Facebook or write them text messages? Is it ethical to use these texts to confront the young people about their behaviour? These are very sensitive issues. The use of digital technologies was therefore situated in a very complex web of practices and expectations. I argue that neither youth workers nor the young people who took part in my study were fully aware of this.

The final purpose of digital technologies identified was to provide a form of counselling to the young people. This is specifically explored in the following section, where I also offer a description of how online text can influence face-to-face intervention, and vice versa.

8.3.5   Digital literacies and counselling

The youth workers had different opinions about the uses of digital technologies in counselling. Some of the youth workers drew on them a lot (e.g. Frédérique and Ève-Lyne) and others only a little (e.g. Tommy and Carl). Facebook and text messages seemed to be the most common digital technologies used for counselling purposes. Élise at *L'Envol* said that she used to have a MySpace account before Facebook increased in popularity. She explained that she quickly understood the potential of social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook (see also Mishna et al., 2012). Social workers working with young people believed that they needed to be present where the young people are, and according to them many are on the Internet.

In the following section, I explore different aspects that seemed important to explain how the youth workers perceived online counselling.

8.3.5.1   Flexibility and availability

All the youth workers agreed that they would not use Facebook or text messages for counselling purposes except in extraordinary situations. For instance, Élise at *L'Envol* explained that if a young person moved to another city, so that face-to-face meetings or phone calls would be impossible, she would try to do her best online. Flexibility and availability seem to be two very important aspects related to counselling online. Some youth workers mentioned that Facebook allowed them to stay available even over the weekends and evenings. At *Le Bercail*, Frédérique said that she explicitly invited the young people to contact her via Facebook at any time.

Excerpt 8.9 Frédérique's views about the flexibility that offers Facebook

Moi, je vais [sur Facebook] quand même assez souvent. Mais en même temps, moi, je dis souvent aux jeunes : « Tu as besoin de parler, tu as besoin d'une question, tu n'es pas sûr de quelque chose? Facebook. » Moi, j'y vais souvent quand même. Ça fait que j'ai souvent des messages adressés à moi. Les autres inters peuvent le lire.	I often go on Facebook. So, I say to the young people 'You need to talk to someone, you have a question, you are not sure about something? Facebook.' I often go on Facebook. So, I regularly receive messages addressed to me. The other youth workers can read it.

L'Envol, 24-05-2012

Frédérique mentioned that she was thinking of taking some holidays over the summer and that Facebook was an element that would allow her to do so since she would still be able to keep in touch with the young people via Facebook.

The increased flexibility and availability possible with Facebook were not always seen as positive by some youth workers who expressed very different views on the matter. Ève-Lyne explained that

Excerpt 8.10 Ève-Lyne's views about the flexibility affordances of Facebook

Je te dirais que c'est lourd dans le sens où il faut toujours aller [sur Facebook]. Quand qu'on offre un service, il faut le maintenir ce service-là. Ça fait qu'il faut quand même toujours y aller sur Facebook.	I would say that it is heavy because we always have to go on [Facebook]. When we offer a service, we have to maintain it. So, we always have to go on Facebook.

Le Bercail, 22-05-2012

Based on Ève-Lyne's claim and those of others, the youth workers seem aware of the responsibilities that might come with the professional use of Facebook. It is not only used to advertise activities or reschedule appointments, but also to discuss important and urgent matters with the young people. This means that some young people might expect a rapid reply from the youth workers, and this even if they send their messages over the weekend or at night. I come back to this in Section 8.5.1.

8.3.5.2   A continuum of intervention

Many youth workers were using Facebook to complement their face-to-face intervention (group activities or individual meetings). Some youth workers mentioned that inappropriate Facebook posts (e.g. heinous messages, pictures showing substance abuse, provocative pictures, etc.) could be used as a starting point for an intervention. Frédérique gave the example of a recent case involving a young man posting pictures of marijuana on Facebook.

Excerpt 8.11 Intervention about inappropriate content posted on Facebook

Je pense à un jeune qui a photographié tout son sac de pot. Il met ça sur Facebook. Tu peux faire une belle intervention parce que là, ça n'a pas de bon sens. C'est même Charles qui l'a faite. Il a invité le jeune à appeler au Bercail quand qu'il verrait ce message-là. Ça fait qu'il lui a expliqué : « Tu te rends-tu compte de l'impact que ça pourrais avoir ? » « Ah, on s'en fout ! Même les polices, ils en fument quand ils font des saisies. » «Tu as déjà plusieurs problèmes avec la justice, pourquoi veux-tu en rajouter ?»	I am thinking of a young man who took a picture of a bag full of marijuana. He put it on Facebook. You can do a nice intervention based on that, because this is unacceptable. Charles did the intervention. He invited the young man to call him at *Le Bercail* when he would see his message. So, he explained to him 'Do you realise what kind of impact this could have?' 'Ah, nobody cares! Even the police officers smoke when they do seizures.' 'You already have a lot of problems with the criminal justice system, why do you want to add some more?'

Le Bercail, 24-05-2012

In this example, the intervention started from a picture seen on Facebook by the youth workers at *Le Bercail*. The content of the picture was judged inappropriate since it portrayed illegal activities (smoking drugs, and potentially selling them). This picture was the trigger for an intervention over the phone. It was then discussed with the young man. Charles put the discussion into context, and reminded the young man of his current situation and difficulties. In this example, Charles did not say to this young man that smoking marijuana was bad and that he should stop, but he adopted another approach which Frédérique called 'harm reduction' (*reduction des méfaits*). Within

the premises of the organisation, drugs were forbidden, however youth workers had limited power over what the young people do when they are not on the premises. Therefore, they adopted a more flexible approach, trying to encourage responsible behaviours (e.g. not smoking marijuana before going to work) or suggesting ways of keeping them away from problems with the law. Facebook seemed to be a good source to support this approach, and get to know better what the young people were doing when they were not at the community-based organisation. However, this matter involves some ethical issues about private life. I come back to it in Section 8.5.

Innovative literacy practices can also be used by the young people and the youth workers for counselling purposes. Charles gave a good example of how a mobile phone was used in an inventive way.

Excerpt 8.12 Example of an innovative intervention done with a mobile phone

La jeune, elle ne voulait pas parler, ça fait qu'elle me textait. Bien pas sur mon cell. à moi parce que je ne donne pas mon numéro. Elle textait à elle-même, les choses. Ça fait qu'elle textait, elle me donnait le cellulaire. Je lui répondais sur son cellulaire, je lui redonnais le cellulaire, elle textait. Ç'a été un échange de même qui a duré 15 minutes à peu près. C'était drôle, je n'avais jamais vu ça. Elle m'a texté toute sa situation. Puis en même temps, je trouvais ça bon parce qu'elle se texte elle-même. Elle va pouvoir relire ça chez eux ou n'importe quand ou le faire valider par d'autres gens. Les écrits restent, ça fait que ça soit de n'importe quelle façon, ça laisse des traces.	The young woman, she did not want to talk, so she sent me a text message. Well, not on my mobile phone since I don't give my number. She was sending text messages to herself. So, she was sending text messages and then was giving me the mobile phone. I was replying on her phone and was giving it back to her, she was sending another one. This discussion lasted for about 15 minutes. It was funny, I never saw this before. She explained the entire situation on text messages. At the same time, I thought it was a good idea because she was sending these messages to herself. She will be able to reread everything at home, at any time or she will be able to show it to other people so that they can validate. The written texts stay, so whatever the ways, it leaves traces.

Le Bercail, 25-05-2012

In this situation, the young woman did not want to talk about family issues in front of other young people. Charles and the young woman were sitting outside on one of the

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benches on the terrace. For the young woman, using her mobile phone was a discreet way of getting Charles's advice without showing the others that she was having problems. Charles accepted to use her mobile phone for this purpose. He seemed to see advantages to it; she would be able to reread it and to show it to others. This means that his intervention could have a longer lasting and potentially deeper effect since the young woman could show it to her friends or family and it could receive their approval. Charles also explained that Facebook

Excerpt 8.13 Charles's comments on the affordances of Facebook for counselling

[…] nous a ouvert des nouvelles portes. […] On l'utilise. Le mot « utiliser », c'est vraiment le bon terme. Nous, on l'utilise à son plein potentiel. […] Il faut faire attention de ne pas devenir « chummy-chummy » avec les jeunes. De ne pas se servir de ça comme intervention. C'est un ajout à notre intervention. Le contact humain doit être favorisé, il n'est plus là. Moi, j'utilise Facebook vraiment comme la poussée de plus que je peux donner. C'est un nouvel outil qui m'a permis de mieux faire mon intervention, mais pas de faire mon intervention.	[…] offers us new possibilities. […] We are using it, the word 'using' is really the correct word. We are using it to its full potential. […] We must be careful and not be too friendly with the young people. We should not use it for counselling purposes. It's adding something to our counselling practice. The face-to-face contact must be encouraged, it is not there anymore. Me, I am using Facebook really as a further push I can give. It is a new tool which allows me to do better counselling, but it does not do the counselling for me.

Le Bercail, 25-05-2012

For Charles, Facebook is mainly a tool. Something he can use to improve the way he is working with the young people. Charles seems to think that it is not because youth workers are using digital technologies (e.g. Facebook, text messages, email, etc.) that their intervention with young people would automatically be better. However, it seems to offer new affordances (Barton and Lee, 2013) for counselling. Charles's quote (Excerpt 8.13) illustrates how youth workers always have a responsibility towards the quality of their interventions with young people. Charles said that Facebook allowed him to do 'better counselling'. This seems to be related to the fact that he saw his work as a continuum; without assuming a distinction between 'online' and 'offline'.

This also reflects what others said about their uses of Facebook. They see the work they do 'online' as complementary to their face-to-face interaction. All the youth workers mentioned that face-to-face meetings should always prevail. This means that they would use Facebook or text messages to reach the young people, but would always prefer to see them in person. Charles's first example (Excerpt 8.12) also illustrates how digital technologies are 'creeping into face-to-face' counselling in sometimes very original ways (Mishna et al., 2012).

8.3.5.3   Cyber addiction: a new area of intervention

Three youth workers mentioned that young people can become addicted to their mobile phones or to the Internet. Carl described the intervention he did regarding addiction to digital technologies.

Excerpt 8.14 Carl's comments about cyber addiction and pornography

Carl : Pour ce qui est de la cyberdépendance, je fais plus référence à des gens qui se créent des doubles vies, qui deviennent quelqu'un d'autre sur le Net puis que là, ils sont accros à ça parce que ça marche leurs affaires : il y a des filles qui sont intéressées à eux, des belles, des gens qui ont l'air bien important dans le monde entier que là, oups, ils sont amis avec puis qu'ils échangent de l'information. « Je suis un big. J'existe pour vrai. » Mais dans les faits...	Carl: About cyber addiction, I am talking about people who create double lives, who become another person online and then start becoming addicted to it because they are being successful: girls are interested in them, pretty ones, they are friends with people who seem internationally important and share information with them. 'I'm big. I really exist.' But in fact…
Virginie : Est-ce que tu suis des gens à ce niveau présentement?	Virginie: Are you following people about this at the moment?
Carl : Oui. Oui. Puis la pornographie. Ça, il y en a quand même pas mal. […] Quand que ta seule source de plaisirs sexuels tu la prends [sur Internet] au lieu d'essayer de rencontrer quelqu'un parce que ça devient plus facile, oups! Là, ce n'est peut-être plus si simple.	Carl: Yes. Yes. And about pornography. This, there are quite a lot. […] When your only source of sexual pleasure you take it online instead of trying to meet someone because it's easier, oops! Then, this is maybe not so simple.

L'Envol, 22-05-2012

Carl also explained that in order to do counselling about addiction to online pornography, a strong trusting relationship is needed. He mentioned that in some cases, this kind of addiction can be extremely problematic and can restrict young people's social and professional inclusion. Even though this kind of issue is not frequent, Carl was working with two young people about their dependence on video games at the time of the first phase of data collection in 2012. According to him, their addiction to digital technologies also affected their diet and sleeping habits. It socially isolated them. Carl seemed to think of online social relations as less important that face-to-face ones. Based on my data, it seems that this belief was also shared by other youth workers who think that young people need to socialise 'offline' rather than 'online'.

8.4 Critical stance on digital technologies

As mentioned before, not all the youth workers frequently used digital technologies in their day-to-day work. Some of them seemed ambivalent towards the use of digital technologies. I noticed that youth workers were sometimes encouraging the young people to adopt a more critical stance towards digital technologies, particularly Facebook.

At *L'Envol*, I observed the student trainee called Jonathan discussing a YouTube video with some of the young people. The young people thought that the rap singers were not talented, and were laughing about their physical appearance. Jonathan said to them that the video was indeed very bad, but that had nothing to do with the singers' physical appearance. He wanted to make them realise that there was a difference between judging the quality of a video and judging the physical appearance of the

singers. At *Le Bercail*, I observed an activity organised by Ève-Lyne which was aimed at making the young people aware of the risks associated with Facebook.

Excerpt 8.15 Activity about Facebook organised by Ève-Lyne at *Le Bercail*

Ève-Lyne asked the group to sit in the lounge. She told them that today they will watch a film about Facebook called 'Catfish'. The film was an independent film and had a documentary style. She then distributed a handout on which she had put the Facebook logo. She asked the young people what is the purpose of Facebook, but before gathering the young people's answers, she talked about her own uses of it—to stay in touch with people, to share pictures, to keep a list of phone numbers.

-Kelly-Ann: Yes it's true, if someone is bothering you on your mobile phone you can check for their number on Facebook.

-Ève-Lyne: I think that Julien is using it to share thoughts, right?

-Julien: Yes.

-Ève-Lyne: It can also be used to express ourselves.

The young people took notes on the handout. Ève-Lyne continued reading questions from her notes.

-Ève-Lyne: Do you think it is a good idea to say where you are on Facebook? If you are on holiday and everybody knows that you are not at home. Would you be able to say aloud what you write on Facebook?

She then gave the example of a former participant who put pictures of marijuana on his Facebook page. She also explained that they have to be careful with the people they befriend. Facebook can be used by the police for investigation purposes. She gave the specific example of the manager of one of the most popular clubs in town. She told the young people that this man was under police investigation for traffic of date-rape drugs. Some of the young people were friends with him on Facebook.

-Ève-Lyne: Everything stays on Facebook. […] Are my pictures adequate?

She said that some girls put sexually suggestive pictures of themselves on Facebook.

-Ève-Lyne: What are my privacy settings on my account?

She then asked me to describe the kind of security settings I have on my account. We previously had a chat about it. I then told the young people that I do not use my real name and that only my friends and the friends of my friends could see me on Facebook. She then went on by asking the young people how many real friends they have in life.

-Ève-Lyne: We don't have 1,000 friends in real life. Sometimes it's good to do some 'housekeeping' on your account.

Julien then said he had 2,339 friends on his current Facebook account. He said that he would like to create a new account because doing the 'housekeeping' on this one would take too long. […]

Ève-Lyne started the film. The participants watched the movie in complete silence. Afterwards, Ève-Lyne asked what they thought of it. Everybody liked it. She gave an activity sheet to the young people and asked them to find the answers online. She also asked them to look at their Facebook page and think about how they could improve it security wise. On the activity sheet there were questions about Facebook. Only Laurence and Yoan looked up and found the answers. The others were looking at their Facebook pages.

Le Bercail, 25-04-2012

In the film Catfish, the main character, Nev, falls in love with a young woman on a social network site and begins an online relationship with her. By trying to meet her in person, he realises that she does not exist and was created by a lonely woman. Ève-Lyne was using this film as a starting point to discuss the risks related to Facebook.
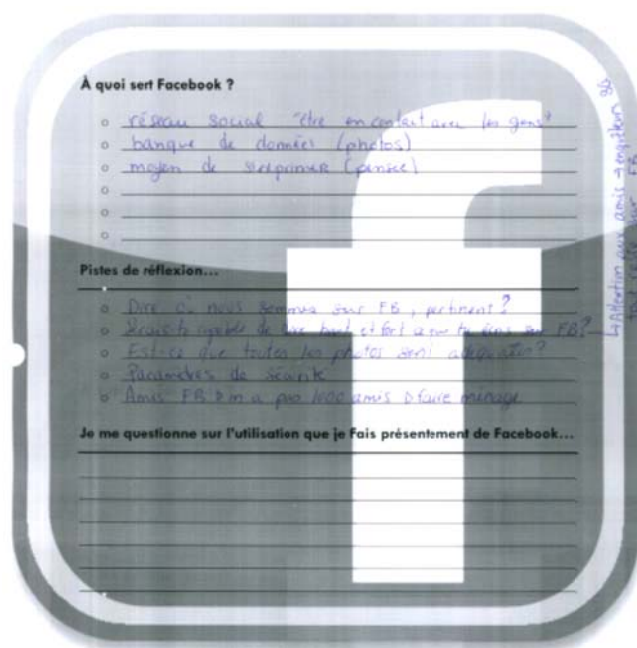
Figure 8.3 Activity sheet used during the Facebook activity

Figure 8.3 shows one of the activity sheets used during the activity described in Excerpt 8.15. It had the logo of Facebook in the background and three main sections entitled: '*À quoi sert Facebook*?' [What is the purpose of Facebook?], '*Pistes de réflexion*' [Food for thought], and '*Je me questionne sur l'utilisation que je fais présentement de Facebook*' [I am questioning myself about how I use Facebook at the moment]. Under each section, Ève-Lyne put a few lines so that the young people could take notes during the activity. The other activity sheet distributed at the end of the film included factual questions about Facebook itself (e.g. number of users). The young people had to check online to find the answers.

Even though Ève-Lyne frequently used Facebook—both in her personal and professional lives—she had adopted a critical stance towards it. She created an opportunity for the young people to think critically about their uses of Facebook but also on how others might use it. She wanted to make them aware of the continuum between what is going on 'online' and the effects (both positive and negative) it might have on their 'offline' lives.

The idea of 'cleaning up the social network' was also observed in other studies with young people in Québec (Bergier and Bourdon, 2009; Supeno and Bourdon, 2013). It seems that when young people go through an important period of transition in their lives they may feel the need to change their group of friends. This phenomenon seemed to occur both 'online' and 'offline'. They would discard the friends that did not fit anymore with their new perception of themselves. This process was expressed by Hugo, Yoan and Jérémie in my study (see Section 5.4.1). This activity organised by Ève-Lyne (Excerpt 8.15) supported the young people in making changes in their social network that they were perhaps already engaging with.

8.5   Privacy, authority and ethical issues

In relation to the difficulties they encountered with digital technologies, the youth workers spontaneously talked about two main topics: 1) work-life boundaries and private life, and 2) surveillance and authority. The youth workers did not mention the existence of ethical guidelines regarding the uses of digital technologies in the two organisations. Also they did not mention having taken part in training about digital technologies and ethics.

8.5.1 Work-life boundaries and private life

First, regarding the question of boundaries between work and private life, youth workers seemed to be particularly reluctant to use mobile phones. Five youth workers did not use text messages because they did not want to share their mobile numbers with the young people. Only Élise and Catherine were using mobile phones. Their phones were provided by their employer, *L'Envol*. Carl, also a youth worker at *L'Envol* explained his feeling towards the use of text messages.

Excerpt 8.16 Carl's views about the use of text messages

C'est ma vie… Je ne veux pas qu'ils aient mon numéro de téléphone, ça fait que je n'utilise pas ça non plus. […] Peut-être c'est moi qui vieillit et qui s'éloigne des jeunes générations, je ne le sais pas. Mais maintenant c'est « Je veux tout, tout de suite, facilement. » Ce qui fait qu'un texto, ça peut-être : « Carl, il faut que je te vois. Je suis à ton bureau dans 20 minutes. » Puis il ferme son téléphone. Moi, j'ai peut-être déjà un rendez-vous ou je ne suis pas au bureau. Écoute, c'est un fardeau incroyable. Moi, je n'embarque pas là-dedans. Je leur dis : « C'est téléphone ou en personne. C'est un ou l'autre, mais il faut être capable de se parler. »	It's my life… I don't want them to have my mobile number, so I don't use that as well. […] Maybe I am getting older and feel myself getting further away from the younger generations, I don't know. But now, it's 'I want everything, right now, and easily.' So, a text message can look like 'Carl, I need to see you. I will be at your office in 20 minutes.' Then he turns off his mobile phone. I might already have a meeting planned or might not be in my office. Listen, this is a real burden. I don't want to start doing this. I tell them 'It's by phone or face-to-face, but we must be able to talk to each other.'

L'Envol, 22-05-2012

Boundaries between their personal and professional lives were also an issue for the social workers in Mishna et al.'s 2012 study. Social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter were seen as difficult to integrate into interventions because of the difficulties of balancing work and private life. Mishna et al. (2012) point out that many workplaces do not always provide clear directives regarding the use of digital technologies with their participants. This means that social workers sometimes have to 'improvise' and take some risks in integrating them into their practice. In the case of

Carl, he was not ready to take these risks in his work and preferred not using text messages at all with the young people he was working with. The kind of situation he described in Excerpt 8.16 could affect the trusting relationship between a youth worker and a young person.

Youth workers sometimes used Facebook with the young people the way they would use it with their friends. Frédérique explained to me what kind of messages she would write to the *Mobili-T* participants on Facebook.

Excerpt 8.17 Overlap between professional and personal lives

Comme mettons, un contexte comme hier. Moi, je suis absente parce que j'ai un rendez-vous, mais je savais que Laurence, elle s'en allait à l'hôpital puis que Amélie, son chien feelait so-so, bien je leur ai écrit chacun un petit mot mardi soir. Je leur ai chacun écrit un petit mot : « J'espère que ça va mieux pour vous autres. » Ça fait qu'il y a un côté contact que je trouve bien. Eux autres, dans leur tête, ils ont quelqu'un qui pense à eux, puis qui se soucie qu'ils soient bien. Pour moi, ça va de soi, je le fais avec mes amis, je le fais avec ma famille des fois.	For example, in a situation like yesterday. I was away because I had an appointment, but I knew that Laurence had an appointment at the hospital and that Amélie's dog was not feeling well. Well, I wrote them a little message on Tuesday evening 'I hope you feel better.' So, there is this keeping-in-touch aspect that I like. For them, they think that there is someone thinking of them, someone who cares about their well-being. For me, it's a given. I do it with my friends, I do it with my family sometimes.

Le Bercail, 24-05-2012

For Frédérique, writing these short messages was natural. It was part of who she was and of the way she was interacting with her friends and family. She extended this practice to her professional life. She wanted to make the young people feel that she cared about them. This might have contributed to the creation of a trusting relationship between her and the young people. This relates to what Barton and Lee (2013) say about the fact that what people do online is not new. They reinvest literacy practices that they were already doing 'offline' in their practices 'online'. In the case of Frédérique, she reinvested what she knew about Facebook in her professional practice.

However, Frédérique was aware that there was a difference between using Facebook for professional and personal purposes. I come back to this question in Section 8.6.

As mentioned before, youth workers were conscious that the use of digital technologies implied certain responsibilities. Carl, at *L'Envol*, said that in his everyday work the use of Facebook meant that he had to spend more time in front of the computer and less in face-to-face interaction. Creating a professional Facebook account, Carl suggested, changed the nature of his job. Youth workers mentioned that young people could contact them during evenings, at night, and on weekends via Facebook. This had the effect of extending their work schedules. The flexibility that Facebook offered them posed certain challenges regarding temporality. At *Le Bercail*, Frédérique and Ève-Lyne mentioned looking at their Facebook account during evenings or holidays.

Excerpt 8.18 Ève-Lyne's responsibility

L'Internet puis les réseaux sociaux et tout ça, c'est dans le pouvoir de l'immédiat. Donc si tout de suite j'ai un problème, je le dis. Il n'est pas géré tout de suite, mais au moins, je l'ai dit. Il y a une gêne avec le téléphone. Ils sont gênés parce qu'ils savent que ce n'est pas nous autres qui allons répondre. […] Avec Facebook c'est de dire : « Je lance la balle, puis après ça, j'attends. » Ça déresponsabilise le jeune aussi dans le sens où : « Je l'ai dit, maintenant, c'est à eux de prendre soin de moi. »	Internet, the social networks and all the rest, it's in the power of what is happening now. So, if right now I have a problem, I say it. It won't be resolved right now, but at least I've said it. There is a reticence with using the phone. They are shy because they know that we won't be the one to answer. […] With Facebook it's 'I throw the ball, and then I wait.' It also takes some responsibility away from the young person in the sense where 'I said it, now they should take care of me.'

Le Bercail, 22-05-2012

What Ève-Lyne said above relates to what Mishna et al. (2012: 281) called 'Pandora's box'. They use this expression to refer to the challenges experienced by practitioners with digital technologies. They mention that time and space can be extended by digital technologies in both positive and negative ways. Drawing on interviews conducted

with social workers, Mishna and her colleagues (2012) explain that emails can be sent at any time of the day and from everywhere. It is the same for Facebook or text messages. If introverted 'clients' did not talk a lot during a counselling session, they could write to the practitioners and explain what they would have liked to say during the meeting (ibid.). However, as some 'clients' might expect the practitioner to reply to their email or text message within a short period of time; this could considerably extend the usual working schedule of the social workers (ibid.).

Ève-Lyne's comment above also illustrates that by using digital technologies, some young people might shrink from their responsibilities, transferring their issues to the youth workers via Facebook or text messages and expecting them to solve them. This represents a burden for the youth worker, as Carl described it in Excerpt 8.16. Despite this, the majority of the youth workers participating in my study used at least one form of digital technology to communicate with young people. They seemed to consider that the affordances they offered were greater than the challenges they posed.

8.5.2 Surveillance and authority

As mentioned before, youth workers were using Facebook to support their face-to-face interventions (see Section 8.3). Based on the youth workers' comments, it seemed difficult for them to balance the way they were using the information found online in such way that the young people would not feel monitored by them. The question is then to what extent it is ethically correct for the youth workers to use information found 'online' to feed into their face-to-face intervention. In Section 8.3.5.2 I provided an example of how Charles made an intervention with a young man about inappropriate content he had posted on Facebook (Excerpt 8.11). In the interview, Charles also talked about using information found on Facebook.

Excerpt 8.19 Charles's comments related to surveillance and authority

Des fois, il y a des jeunes que ça choque qu'on utilise cette information-là, mais en même temps, ils l'ont mis publiquement sur Facebook. Puis on leur dit : « Si vous n'êtes pas à l'aise, vous avez juste à nous enlever comme ami Facebook, enlever Le Bercail. » Ou des fois, il y en a qui sont wises. Ils restreignent l'accès. On leur dit : « C'est correct. C'est votre vie privée. »	Sometimes, there are some young people who are upset because we are using that information, but at the same time, they publicly put it on Facebook. Then we say 'If you feel uncomfortable, you just have to unfriend us on Facebook, remove *Le Bercail*.' Or sometimes, some of them are wise. They put some access restrictions. We tell them 'It's all right. That's your private life'.

Le Bercail, 25-05-2012

Charles's comments indicate that some young people did not feel comfortable with realising that the youth workers found out things about them via Facebook. Charles explained that in this kind of situation, he would respect the young person's decision and invite them to change their privacy settings or unfriend the organisation. The young people might want to befriend *Le Bercail* on Facebook in order to know about the news and activities organised, but might not want the youth workers to look at their pages. It is also reasonable to assume that some young people might think that their relationship would be affected negatively if they blocked certain sections of their Facebook account from the youth workers. This is a complex situation which I did not investigate with the young people at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*.

The feeling of being monitored was also expressed by one youth worker at Le Bercail. Frédérique mentioned that she was aware that all her colleagues and even her employer could see her messages on Facebook.

Excerpt 8.20 Frédérique's views on the language used on Facebook

Je garde toujours en tête que tout le monde du Bercail peut lire ce que j'écris [sur Facebook]. Ça fait que tu n'écris pas des niaiseries : « Salut le gros! » Je n'écris pas ça. C'est drôle qu'on parle de ça parce que j'ai resté surprise cette semaine. Une intervenante est revenue de son congé de maternité. Elle a écrit un message [sur Facebook] à une jeune : « Salut pitoune! Ça fait longtemps que je ne t'ai pas vu! » Moi, personnellement, je n'utiliserais pas ce mot-là. Peut-être qu'elle l'appelle de même, mais sur Facebook, ça peut être lu par tous les intervenants, par ta boss aussi parce qu'elle y a accès, puis tu écris « Salut pitoune! »? Moi, je n'écris pas : « Yo dude! What's up? » Au contraire, je m'applique. Puis je n'écris pas des fins de semaine « FDS ». J'écris les mots puis c'est ça.	I always keep in mind that everybody from *Le Bercail* can read what I am writing on Facebook. So, I am not writing stupid things 'Hi big!' I don't write this. It's funny we are talking about this because this week I was surprised. A youth worker came back from her maternity leave. She wrote to a young woman [on Facebook] 'Hi *pitoune*! Long time no see!' Personally, I wouldn't use this word. Maybe she is calling her like this, but on Facebook, all the youth workers can see it, your boss can also see it, and then you write 'Hi *pitoune*!'? I don't write 'Yo dude! What's up?' On the contrary, I do it properly. I don't write WKD, I write weekend. I write the full words, that's it.

Le Bercail, 24-05-2012

The fact that other colleagues could read Frédérique's messages affected the level of language that she was using (also see Section 8.6). In Québec, *pitoune* is a word generally used to describe a woman who is sexy, superficial or even vulgar. It might also be used by women as a way to colloquially refer to each other in a friendly manner. In this context, *pitoune* means a good-looking female friend. Frédérique seemed to think that a certain level of language needed to be used on the shared Facebook account.

Authority was present in the organisations relating to the way youth workers controlled young people's uses of digital technologies during the activities. The young people were not allowed to use their mobile phones during the activities organised by the two community-based organisations. At *L'Envol*, Catherine explained that they had to take action against the use of mobile phones.

Excerpt 8.21 Catherine's comments about young people's uses of mobile phones

Entre eux, ils se textent énormément. Il faut même qu'on interdise les cellulaires pendant les activités parce qu'ils n'écoutent plus puis ils sont en train de texter.	In between them, they use text messages a lot. We even have to forbid mobile phones during the activities because they don't listen anymore and send text messages.

L'Envol, 22-05-2012

Text messages were seen as a source of distraction by the youth workers. The way digital literacy practices were valued and what was considered as acceptable was framed by the organisations' aims and practices. The use of mobile phones or of computers was allowed during the activities only when it contributed to them. For instance, at *L'Envol* the young people could use their mobile phones when the group was shopping at the supermarket in order to calculate the cost of the ingredients. At *Le Bercail*, the young people were allowed to use the computers to search on Google to find images that they would paint on a canvas or a pot.

Another element associated with authority was related to potential 'unfair treatment'. Young people were sensible to the potential 'privileges' that youth workers would have. At *Le Bercail*, Frédérique received a text message and looked at it during an activity. Amélie immediately asked her why she was allowed to use her mobile phone and not them. Frédérique had to justify herself and explained that this was an extraordinary situation since her son had injured himself and needed medicine. I noticed that, especially at *Le Bercail*, the use of mobile phones was a sensitive topic. I observed young people using them clandestinely. They seemed to be resisting this rule that restricted the use of mobile phone during activities.

8.6   Language and digital literacies

The majority of the youth workers said that they found it difficult to understand what the young people were writing on Facebook or in their text messages. The majority of the youth workers had negative views of the way young people were writing online or on their mobile phones. Most of the youth workers mentioned not using abbreviations and non-standard forms of language when they were writing online. On this matter, Tommy said that he 'respects the French language too much' and this is why he did not use Facebook regularly (and no text messages at all) in his day-to-day work.

Charles explained in detail what he thought about the way young people were writing online.

Excerpt 8.22 Charles's thoughts about how non-standard forms of language online affects young people's writing

Ils écrivent à l'oreille. Puis le texto ou le chattage, moi, en tout cas, je suis convaincu que ça n'aident pas parce qu'ils coupent les mots courts. Ils coupent les mots le plus court possible, puis après ça, ça reste. Puis là, quand ils tapent un texte sur l'ordinateur ou quand ils chattent, ça ne te corrige pas parce que ce n'est pas des mots reconnus. Tu peux écrire château de deux-trois façons différentes. Si tu écris toutes les lettres, ils vont te le corriger, mais si tu écris château d'une façon qui n'existe pas du tout ou tu coupes le mot, ça... Je vois beaucoup ça quand on demande d'écrire un petit texte ou une réflexion. Tu lis ça puis tu ne comprends pas parce que c'est écrit vraiment au son. Ça fait qu'il faut quasiment que tu lises à voix haute pour être capable de trouver le sens.	They are writing the sounds. I am convinced that text messages or Chat doesn't help because they shorten the words. They cut the words as short as possible, and then it remains. Then, when they type a text on the computer or when they Chat, it doesn't correct you because these are not recognised words. You can write the words castle in two or three different ways. If you write all the letters, they will correct you, but if you write castle in a way that doesn't exist or shorten it, this... I see this a lot when we ask [people] to write a short text or a reflection. You read this and you cannot understand it because it is written phonetically. Then, you almost have to read it aloud to be able to find the meaning of it.

Le Bercail, 25-02-2012

Other youth workers also had the feeling that digital technologies were negatively affecting the way young people were writing. For Carl, the relation between the way

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young people were writing and their uses of digital technologies was clearly causal. According to him, some young people he knew had lost their knowledge of the French language because they were conditioned to write abbreviations and to use non-standard language online.

Excerpt 8.23 Carl's views on the negative effects of non-standard forms of language online

[…] j'ai vu des gens qui avaient des bonnes capacités en français, les perdent parce qu'ils étaient rendus automatisés quasiment avec le texto, le ci, le ça. Qui ne se rappellent pas une règle de français […].	[…] I saw people who had good capacities in French losing them because they were practically automatized by using text messages and other things. They were not able to remember a grammar rule in French […].

L'Envol, 22-05-2012

At *L'Envol*, I observed the Facebook pages of a few participants during the first phase of data collection. I did not notice that they were using non-standard forms of language online. I also observed some young people's written texts in both organisations and did not notice the use of abbreviations (see Figures 6.2, 6.4, 6.12, 6.19 and 6.23). The young people wrote the full words, for instance on the shopping list they used at *L'Envol*. Some grammatical mistakes were present, for instance on the activity sheets that the young people completed at *Le Bercail*. However, these were not major impediments to the readability of the texts.

As Velghe and Blommaert (2014) mention, it is not because people are texting and using abbreviations that they would unlearn how to write in a more 'standard' way. Studies conducted with children aged around 11 and 12 years old (Plester, Wood, and, Bell, 2008) have indicated that knowledge of 'texting' can be associated with greater writing abilities. Another study conducted with college students (Drouin and Davis, 2009) found that there was no difference in the way users of text messages and non-users wrote standard texts. However, these authors note that the college students

believed that the use of text messages and abbreviations could have a negative effect on their abilities to write standard texts (ibid.). According to Steinkuehler (2007) this idea that digital technologies negatively affect literacy skills is widespread in the media. She explains that this could be called the 'modern-day literacy crisis' (297). She refers here to the idea of a 'literacy crisis' that rose in popularity in the 1970s and was related to the fact that countries such as Canada and the UK thought that there was a large percentage of their population that did not have the necessary literacy skills to function in society (Lankshear and Knobel, 2011: 6). This narrative is now strongly associated with digital technologies in the media. It seems that the youth workers who took part in my study also shared this belief, especially with regards to young people. It is also reasonable to assume that some of the young people shared this view and thought that their uses of digital technologies had negatively affected their writing skills (see Thomas's comments in Section 5.2.1).

Despite the fact that she had negative views on non-standard forms of language online, Frédérique mentioned to me that she would try to learn the expressions used by the young people on Facebook or in their text messages (see Excerpt 8.24). Velghe and Blommaert (2014) explain that while doing fieldwork about women's use of mobile phones in South Africa, Velghe had to learn from one of the women the meaning of the 'textspeak' they used. They explain that Velghe learned it through 'informal learning processes (of trial and error, scaffolding, observation and informal tutoring by interlocutors, etc.)' (ibid.: 108). It seems that Frédérique went through a similar process.

Excerpt 8.24 Frédérique about learning non-standard forms of language online

[…] ça me scandalise à chaque fois. C'est comme Facebook. C'est des abréviations à n'en plus finir, c'est du langage… Je ne sais même pas encore c'est quoi « crowd » pour Yoan qui dit toujours « crowd ». « Crowd », c'est une foule, mais il va dire : « Hey, crowd! » Moi, ça ne me sonne pas de cloche dans ma tête. J'aime autant mieux qu'il dise ça que des pas beaux mots, mais quand même. Ce n'est pas toujours un langage que je comprends, je te dirais. Ça fait que c'est sûr que de les amener à m'expliquer le contenu par le sens, là, je comprends mieux. Ça fait qu'ils voient d'autres mots qu'ils pourraient dire à la place. Ça fait que là, après, on peut travailler [les fautes et la grammaire].	[…] it shocks me every time. It's like Facebook. There are incessant abbreviations, it's a language... I don't even know yet what's "crowd" means to Yoan who always says "crowd". "Crowd" is a *foule [in French]*, but he will say, "Hey, crowd!" For me it doesn't ring a bell in my head. I prefer him to say that than bad words, but still. It's not always a language that I understand, I must say. So, I try to get them to explain to me the contents by its meaning, then, I understand better. So they see other words they could say instead. So, after, you can work [on the mistakes and the grammar].

Le Bercail, 24-05-2012

As Velghe and Blommaert (2014) note, the language used in text messages is not taught in formal education settings. People have to learn with the help of others. I suggest that this could offer opportunities for the youth workers to put the young people in a position of power, where they could actually teach something to the youth workers. It might be more productive for the youth workers to learn with the young people the language they use online rather than to reproach them about their bad French. My data suggest that the youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* were already working in that direction. They were endeavouring to understand the content of the young people's writing before commenting on the typos or grammatical errors. I come back to this in Section 10.1.3 in relation to literacy mediation.

8.7   Conclusion

In Section 5.4, I described in detail the place of digital technologies in the lives of the young people participating in my study. They had a lot to say about how they used digital technologies to learn new things, to access cultural products, to solve problems, to express themselves, to communicate with friends and family, and so on. I concluded this section by arguing that the problems that the young people were experiencing in their 'offline' lives were also present 'online'. For example, if they were victim of bullying at school, this was also the case on their Facebook account. With that in mind, I understand why the youth workers wanted to be present online. It made sense for the youth workers to observe what the young people were doing online—considering the fact that it was an important aspect of their lives—in order to understand them better. Yet, this poses important ethical issues that need to be addressed by the youth workers and their employers. Ethical guidelines regarding the uses of digital technologies in youth work could be developed in each organisation. These should be developed by the youth workers themselves because they are already knowledgeable about these issues. My findings indicate that the youth workers already had established certain elements that could be characterised as the professional use of Facebook or mobile phones. For instance, they would avoid counselling on Facebook or via text messages. They also mentioned that they would not use abbreviations or non-standard language with the young people. Some ethical issues remain to be clarified especially regarding the use of content found online for counselling or as evidence to confront young people. A module exclusively addressing issues of ethics online could also be added to the initial training of social workers and youth workers at the *cégep* or the university.

I suggest that the fact that computers were available on the premises of the two organisations was an appealing element for the young people. Young people could use these computers before or after an activity or during break time. At *L'Envol*, there were periods of time allocated when the young people could use the computer lab for their personal purposes. Considering the financial difficulties that the majority of these young people experienced, free access to the Internet was important. For example, Darya at *Le Bercail* did not have a computer or a landline in the flat she was sharing with her sister. I observed Darya using the computer at *Le Bercail* every day in April and May 2012. Letting the young people use the computers for their own purposes (e.g. accessing Facebook or playing video games) meant that the young people spent more time on the premises of the organisations. This could be beneficial for the young people so that they could build a trusting relationship with the youth workers and the organisation itself.

The activity organised by Ève-Lyne about Facebook (Excerpt 8.15 in Section 8.4) and other situations observed indicates that the organisations were not just offering access to computers and the Internet, but were also supporting young people in learning how to use them. In Section 5.4.1, I described how some young people were using Facebook to express themselves. They sometimes used it on the spur of the moment, when they were angry or intoxicated. The activity organised by Ève-Lyne (Excerpt 8.15) was a good example of a task that invited young people to reflect on their uses of Facebook. As I mentioned before, and drawing on Barton and Lee (2013), it is not because people have access to a computer and the Internet that they would, for example, learn new things and break their isolation. Adopting an autonomous view of digital literacies (see Chapter 7) that would focus on the acquisition of appropriate skills would not be useful with the young people at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. The two

organisations were already engaging in reflective and non-judgemental discussions about the use of digital technologies (e.g. Facebook and YouTube). This could be pursued and other topics could be addressed such as the kind of language used online, piracy, and cyber addiction.

9 DEFINING LITERACY MEDIATION AND SPONSORSHIP

In this chapter, I define two key concepts of my study—literacy mediation and sponsors of literacy. I first offer an overview of the different terms used to talk about one person helping another to cope with a certain literacy demand (Section 9.1). I then explain why I selected the concept of literacy mediation for my study. After this, I explain how and why a person would become a literacy mediator. In the second major section of this chapter, I define the concept of sponsors of literacy (Section 9.2). I explain how it was used by different authors in recent studies. I finally pose the question of whether or not 'literacy mediator' could be seen as a complementary term to 'sponsor of literacy'.

9.1 Literacy mediation: Reading and writing—and much more—for and with others

One of the recurrent findings in the study of literacy as social practices is its importance as a 'communal resource' (Barton, 2009, 41). Several studies, notably Barton and Hamilton (1998), Kalman (1999), and more recently Papen (2007; 2009), have shown the importance of other people in literacy events and practices. According to Barton (2009), people often rely on their social networks (family, friends, neighbours, etc.) to cope with certain kinds of literacy demands. This is even more salient considering that in today's world literacy demands are abundant and literacy itself, as required in everyday life, in schools, and at work (Castleton, 2006), is becoming more complex. Drawing on Smith (1999), Papen (2012a: 79) explains that we are now living in 'highly textually mediated social worlds' and that asking someone else to act as literacy mediator with particular genres and texts is a

widespread practice. Moreover, Mace (2002) suggests that literacy mediation is nowadays so common that people do not even notice it.

I now explore the different terms used to describe a person supporting and helping another person with texts of different genres and registers. I also present a rationale for understanding why people need literacy mediation.

9.1.1 Plurality of terminology

Researchers have used several terms to refer to people who help others deal with literacy: *bricoleurs* (Robins, 1996), literacy or cultural brokers (Barton, 1991; Barton and Padmore, 1991; China and Robins, 1996; Robins, 1996; Papen, 2010), *écrivains publiques* (Baynham, 1993), ghostwriters (Brandt, 2007; Tomlinson, 2011), guiding lights (Padmore, 1994; Gregory and Williams, 2000; Gregory, 2005; Barton, 2009), literacy agents (Kalman, 2008), literacy coaches (Brandt, 2007), literacy mediators (Malan, 1996; Baynham and Masing, 2000; Jones, 2000a; 2000b; Kalman, 2001; Papen, 2007; 2010), mentors (Barton, 2009) or scribes (Kalman, 1999; Mace, 2002; Papen, 2010).

The boundaries between these terms are not clear cut, since they overlap in many ways. One could argue that some of these terms only focus on writing for others: scribe and ghostwriter. Other terms include both reading and writing for others: literacy agents and literacy coaches. The concepts of literacy mediator, literacy or cultural broker, mentor and guiding light (see Sections 5.1 and 5.2.2) are broader and involve more than reading and writing: they include the mediator navigating between different contexts and cultures. However, the terms cultural broker, mentor and

guiding light do not specifically relate to literacy and can be applied more widely to other forms of support.

People involved in literacy mediation perform various activities: advocating, copying, editing, note taking, paraphrasing, reading, representing someone, summarising, taking dictation, teaching (showing how to do something), transcribing, translating, typing and writing. Consequently, what is involved here is much more complicated than just reading and writing for others. Furthermore, according to Barton (2009: 46), a 'crucial distinction […] is between doing an activity on behalf of someone and the idea of supporting them to do the activity themselves.' This idea highlights the diversity of roles that people involved in literacy mediation take on. People acting as literacy mediators also fulfil different social roles such as activists, family members, friends, members of a group, neighbours, professionals, teachers, representatives of governmental institutions, Union employees, volunteers, workmates, etc. Therefore, some people act as literacy mediators as (part of) their job and others not. However, this is not necessarily an indicator of the kind of activities they would engage in and the type of support they would provide. Some literacy mediators aim to convey their knowledge to others, while others do not aim to do so for several reasons, including economic reasons. On this matter, Barton (1991) explains that some literacy mediators are 'institutionalised'. For instance, he gives the example of railway officials giving information on train schedules and travel agents preparing forms for clients. Similarly, Jones (2000b), as part of her five year-long study of literacy practices used by farmers in north-east Wales, identifies three types of people farmers would seek support from when dealing with farming-related bureaucratic documents: employees of the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), livestock auction staff and

national and regional farmers unions' employees. In this study, the three types of literacy mediators are all 'institutionalised' (ibid.).

In order to clarify these different forms of support—institutionalised or not—I explore further some of the terms widely used within the research literature: scribes, literacy or cultural brokers, ghostwriters and literacy mediators.

9.1.1.1 Scribes

For Baynham and Masing (2000), the difference between scribing and mediation lies at the level of intervention in the execution of the request. The authors claim that: 'scribing [has] a tendency towards the faithful transmission of a message without any intervening shaping on the part of the messenger [and] mediation involving an active process of transformation/contextualisation' (Baynham and Masing, 2000: 192).

Kalman (1999) studied professional scribes operating in a public space in Mexico City. She explains that public scribes were, and still are, present in various countries around the world (e.g. China, India, Iran, Mexico, Pakistan and Peru). According to Kalman (1999), public scribes generally receive money in exchange for their services. Scribes might undertake work such as 'taking dictation, copying documents, working from models, revising and organizing clients' drafts, and composing' (ibid.: 41). Furthermore, their job involves other duties such as 'suggest[ing] wording and approaches to clients who dictate to them without a draft, as well as advis[ing] the clients on what to say to the officials or employees who receive their documents when they are turned in' (ibid.: 42).

For Kalman (1999: 12), scribes are 'written language brokers' in the sense that they are fostering people's participation in highly literacy mediated social contexts such as institutional bureaucracy. She also argues that scribes' clients are not necessarily

'illiterate' people. Indeed, Kalman (1999: 13) claims that she observed clients from different social origins, with various levels of schooling. Moreover, she points out that '[e]ven those clients who would be considered illiterate by most standards make important contributions to their texts and supervise what the scribes write.'

In her study, Kalman (1999: 13) paid particular attention to the interactions of both scribes and their clients in 'document events'; she thus considers scribing as a 'heterogeneous collaborative literacy practice'. This differs, therefore, from the definition of scribing offered by Baynham and Masing (2000). If the difference between scribes and literacy mediators does not lie in the degree of intervention, is there any other difference between these two concepts?

One of the differences between both terms lies in their respective history: literacy mediators is a relatively new concept (see mediators of literacy in Wagner, Messick and Spratt, 1986) while the idea of scribes has a very long history. Mace (2002) mentions that being a scribe is one of the oldest jobs around the world. This is confirmed by Kalman's historical portrait (1999) of the profession in Mexico, since forms of scribing were performed before the colonial period. Mace (2002) argues that the profession of scribes has been historically both highly valued and dismissed. Being a scribe in the medieval era, for instance, was a socially valued position, but nowadays scribes are seen as 'mere copyists' (Mace, 2002: 30).

Mace (2002) uses the term scribing to refer to everyday life situations such as writing down a message while on the phone for someone else, or writing notes of a group meeting. She claims that '[i]t can be helpful to think of scribing as a role, rather than a job' (ibid.: 29). However, considering the history of the term scribe, and the fact that some people around the world are still doing it as a profession, it seems that while in

some contexts it is best to think of it as a role, in other situations it should be seen as a profession.

9.1.1.2 Literacy or cultural brokers

Robins (1996) situates the origin of the study of cultural brokerage in the anthropological work of Wolf and Geertz in Latin America. For Kalman (1999), '[b]rokering is in fact a widespread and common practice employed in many domains of communicative life. Some people hire lawyers to deal with special literacy needs, others turn to family members.' (6)

In his study, Robins (1996) focusses on the role of cultural brokers in 'mediating legal and bureaucratic literacy and anti-apartheid discourses in Leliefontein' (123) (Namaqualand, South Africa). Robins' findings illustrate how activists navigated between different 'cultural identities and discourses' in order to act as cultural brokers. For instance, he claims that the cultural brokers in his study were able to mobilise local farmers against the apartheid state by privileging face-to-face interactions with the community—instead of bureaucratic forms—which was coherent with the genres socially valued in Leliefontein. By using this type of interaction, the activists were 'connect[ing] local cultural and discursive worlds to national political discourses' (126).

Other authors (Barton, 1991; China and Robins, 1996) have used the term literacy broker in their work. They apply this idea of navigating between different social contexts and literacies. For instance, China and Robins (1996) explain how cultural and literacy brokers were 'code-switching' between local and bureaucratic literacies within the context of municipal meetings in a squatter settlement ('shantytown') of Cape Town, South Africa. Their findings show that the activists and inhabitants of the shantytown were marginalised during these meetings because they were not able to

use the technical register used by 'the White lawyers, property developers and planners' (ibid.: 165).

According to Papen (2010), the concepts of cultural brokers and of literacy mediators overlap in some ways. She argues that '[t]he only noticeable difference is the stronger emphasis in the accounts of cultural brokerage on the need for the broker to understand and translate the discourses, oral and written, of the dominant cultures and institutions those they support deal with' (ibid.: 77).

However, the term broker is also an economic metaphor referring to someone who arranges contracts or trades commodities and services. Considering the interactional nature of literacy mediation (see Kalman, 1999), literacy mediation cannot be considered as a unidirectional service transaction. This is not covered by the term broker which does not render justice to the complexity of the situations in which literacy mediation takes place.

9.1.1.3   Ghostwriters

In her article 'Who's the President?', Brandt offers an interesting portrait of ghostwriting notably in political and business contexts. Brandt (2007: 549) defines 'ghostwriting as taking on substantial parts of a composing process for which someone else, not you, will be credited—whether by byline, signature, institutional title, oral delivery, or in some other way.'

She explores 'the peculiar case of ghostwriting, in which, typically, subordinates write not for higher-ups but as if they are higher-ups and deliberately for the aggrandizement of higher-ups' (Brandt, 2007: 552). However, Brandt also uses the concept to refer to the literacy events in which volunteers help new immigrants fill out

governmental forms. In this kind of situation, ghostwriting seems to overlap with the notion of literacy mediation.

The use of ghostwriting in contexts other than in the political or business domains seems uncommon in literacy studies. Tomlinson (2011), in her study of legal literacies within a court mediation programme, describes how an attorney writes on behalf of her clients in different situations of legal mediation (e.g. divorce). She uses the term ghostwriting in a similar way to what others call literacy mediation (see Section 9.1.1.4). However, Tomlinson (2011) does not refer to the research literature on literacy mediation from the NLS researchers.

Ghostwriting is not an appropriate term for talking about everyday literacy events since it is strongly related to very specific contexts such as politics and business. Brandt suggests an interesting rationale for ghostwriting that can also be applied to literacy mediation 'literacy functions in a system of scarcity' (2007: 559). She identifies three scarcities—time, knowledge and skill—that can explain why one would use the services of a ghostwriter.

Writing is time-consuming, and the amount of writing demands that some people have to achieve in a limited period of time is substantial; hence the need for ghostwriters. This is an interesting point as there appears to have been little discussion of time in relation to literacy mediation in other studies by NLS researchers.

On knowledge scarcity, she explains that people in leadership positions have to take decisions on complex issues and contexts that they do not necessarily master. In this situation, they might hire the services of a ghostwriter who knows more about the matter or who would do research about it. Brandt (2007) claims that '[k]nowledge scarcity also can motivate private citizens to seek formal or informal writing help in, say, filing legal documents or composing an appeal of an immigration ruling' (559).

This notion of 'knowledge scarcity' also relates to the concept of 'cultural brokerage' presented in Section 9.1.1.2. In the following section on literacy mediators, I also explore the importance of 'genres' and 'registers' with regards to literacy mediation; two concepts which can be seen as linked to the notion of knowledge scarcity

Brandt (2007) points out that skill scarcity can also lead one to use the services of a ghostwriter. According to her, 'writing is treated as a talent in this society, and an unequally distributed talent at that, people who need more writing talent than they themselves possess may seek the services of ghostwriters' (ibid.: 559). For Brandt writing is culturally valued and can positively or negatively affect the legitimacy of a person. This suggests that even highly educated people might 'lack talent' at some point and need support from a ghostwriter. She also applies the notion of skill scarcity to everyday life literacy events citing Kalman's study about scribes (1999). In addition, she also explains that some people with disabilities (e.g. brain damage) need other people to support them with literacy. Kalman's study (1999) of public scribes in Mexico City nuances the importance of skill scarcity in literacy mediation. In her analysis of scribe-client interactions, she observed that clients were always contributing to the 'document event' whether they were comfortable or not with literacy.

9.1.1.4   Literacy mediators

Papen has made an important contribution toward the clarification of the concept of literacy mediators (Papen, 2007; 2009; 2010; 2012a; 2012b). The concept of literacy mediators 'allows researchers to capture the jointly accomplished nature of much reading and writing in everyday life' (Papen, 2012a: 74). Indeed, literacy mediators 'can be faithful transcribers, editors or composers of texts. They may read word by word, paraphrase, translate or summarise a text they were given' (ibid.).

Papen (2012b) mentions that literacy mediation can occur in both informal and formal contexts (e.g. schools). Literacy mediators can be professionals or members of a person's social network such as friends and family (Baynham, 1993; Papen, 2010). This echoes what other studies have found (see Robins, 1996; Kalman, 2008).

Literacy mediation often involves multimodality; incorporating gestures, visual, written and spoken language (Papen, 2010). For instance, in Jones' study (2000a), the 'talk around texts', which is a notion used within the NLS, involved 'text articulation, negotiation and inscription as being strategies people accomplish through talk to mediate textual bureaucracy.' (71). In his study of the Moroccan community in London, Baynham (1993) indicates the similarity and often overlaps between the roles of interpreter of oral language and literacy mediator. He also highlights the multilingual nature of the settings he observed in London and the 'cross-linguistic work' that might take place. Indeed, different languages can be at the core of literacy mediation and would consequently require participants to 'code-switch' between different languages (Baynham, 1993: 295; Papen, 2010).

According to Papen (2010), literacy mediators often assist others with texts of genres and registers that they are not familiar with. She adds that a person would often need the support of a literacy mediator while 'enter[ing] new spheres of social and/or economic activity, which demand of them new roles, understanding of new practices and familiarity with new discourses.' (79) These new 'spheres of social and/or economic activity' (ibid.) potentially use different genres and registers. Drawing on linguistic anthropology, Hanks (1987) defines genres as 'historically specific elements of social practice, whose defining features link […] to situated communicative acts' (668). They are 'elements of linguistic habitus, consisting of stylistic, thematic, and indexical schemata on which actors improvise in the course of linguistic production'

(ibid.). For instance, in Kalman's study (1999), public scribes could cover different genres: love letters, governmental forms, academic essays, etc. According to Agha, '[a] register is a linguistic repertoire that is associated, culture internally, with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices' (2000: 216). For example, Baynham (1993: 309) explains how he paraphrased the content of an official letter to a Moroccan immigrant using both technical and non-technical registers. Thus, register refers to the level of language, the type of vocabulary or kind of words used within a particular social context.

Finally, another important aspect of literacy mediation is its close relation to power distribution. Papen (2010) claims that literacy mediation 'is a process that can challenge the power of dominant literacies and discourses by allowing those not commonly familiar with these practices—via a mediator—to access and deploy them for their own needs' (79). Jones (2000a; 2000b) illustrates how economic globalisation affected the local literacy practices of farmers and the amount of bureaucratic literacies they had to deal with. Drawing on Giddens's work on the consequences of modernity (1990), Jones (2000a; 2000b) explains that institutions are nowadays 'disembedded' of local contexts and that bureaucratic literacies are at the core of this process. Jones (2000b) points out that '[i]n face-to-face bureaucratic encounters, professional mediators symbolically take on the position of the 'delegates' of an institution and accomplish what Giddens (1990) refers to as the 'facework commitment' on behalf of the faceless institution which employs them.' (215) Jones' work illustrates how the concept of literacy mediation allows researchers to look at the effect of wider social structures on local practices and relationships (Barton, 2009).

In conclusion to the above sections we can say that literacy mediation is interactional, can occur in both informal and formal contexts, can involve professionals or members

of the social network (e.g. family and friends), is often multimodal and multilingual, bridges between different genres and registers, and always involves issues of power distribution.

With regards to the other concepts used in the academic literature—scribes, literacy or cultural brokers and ghostwriters—the term literacy mediators seems to encompass most of the characteristics observed in studies of situations in which a person supports and helps another with reading and/or writing. Moreover, the term 'mediator' emphasises the interactional nature of this type of literacy practice, unlike others such as brokers, coaches, agents, etc. Also, 'mediation' is more suitable considering the multimodality and multilingualism used within these events, since it is not bound to only one mode. It is less centred on only the action of writing, as the terms scribes and ghostwriters suggest.

In this thesis, I use 'literacy mediation' as an umbrella term that includes all the concepts mentioned above. These other terms can be useful when characterising specific mediation events. For instance, a literacy mediator could act as cultural broker in some situations, or more like a scribe in others. Another important question is how and why one becomes a literacy mediator. I explore this question in the following section.

9.1.2   Becoming a literacy mediator

Drawing on various studies (China and Robins, 1996; Malan, 1996; Kalman, 1999; 2000; 2008; Papen, 2010), I identified three main ideas that seem to explain how and why one may become a literacy mediator: 1) new context, 2) apprenticeship and 3) legitimacy.

As mentioned before, Papen (2010: 79) argues that literacy mediation often occurs when a person enters 'new spheres of social and/or economic activity'. In her study, she shows how some people act as literacy mediators to support someone else who is facing a new situation. For instance, Papen (2012a) gives the example of a woman she named Kate who asked her sister to find information online about a chronic disease she was suffering from. The disease was serious and she had had no prior experience of it.

With regards to apprenticeship, Kalman (1999) explains how new scribes learned their profession by observing and asking questions of more experienced ones. Their previous jobs (e.g. office worker or clerk) also contributed to their understanding of scribes' duties and the requirements for certain types of forms and documents. She claims that literacy mediators have 'accumulated knowledge' of specific literacies and 'experience with discourses and their interpretation' on which they draw (Kalman, 2008: 530). Moreover, Kalman (1999) claims that they mainly learned their profession by doing and observing it. This echoes China and Robins' findings (1996) who found that 'local brokers who managed to access bureaucratic literacies were able to do this through exposure to apprenticeship learning in political and labour organisations' (163). The notion of apprenticeship (Lave, 2011) is particularly relevant for looking at literacy mediation. Some people learn how to be literacy mediators by observing others and becoming apprentices or they might undertake the role of literacy mediator because of specific experience or skills they gained and which they then use to help others.

Another important aspect of becoming a literacy mediator is that the mediator needs to have legitimacy. On this matter, Malan (1996: 144) explains that the mediators in her study needed to be people 'whose identities are grounded in the local realities and

forms of representation used in Newtown who can say they have local legitimacy.'
Acquiring legitimacy is therefore a multidirectional process: one has to access
dominant narratives and literacies, and the local ones. In her study of a local tourism
business in Namibia, Papen (2010) describes how the young tourist guides came to see
her as a legitimate person to act as a literacy mediator for them. China and Robins
(1996) have shown that literacy mediators may have legitimacy in one social context
but not necessarily in another.

9.2   Sponsors of literacy

Deborah Brandt's study (2001) conducted in the 1990s with 80 US-Americans sought
to understand how these people had learned to read and write throughout their life
span. Through in-depth interviews with the participants she found that economic and
historical factors particularly influenced their learning.

Brandt states that her work relates to the sociocultural view of literacy. She explains
that her methodological approach (autobiographical interviews) aimed at
understanding participants' literacy learning. However, Brandt explains that because
economics and history were salient in her data, she began to question a purely social
view of literacy. It is therefore important to mention that her view of literacy is
somewhat different from the NLS one. Brandt (2001) explains that

> [f]or the purposes of this study, literacy skill is treated primarily as a
> resource—economic, political, intellectual, spiritual—which, like wealth or
> education, or trade skill or social connections, is pursued for the opportunities
> and protections that it potentially grants its seekers. (5)

Brandt sees literacy as a resource and highlights its economic importance in US-American society. But Brandt (2001) does not think of literacy as an independent variable which can directly impact society. Her focus is on 'economic and other material influences in literacy' (ibid.: 7). This means that she conceives of economic and historical changes as central factors in people's literacy learning since these changes create new expectations regarding literacy.

Furthermore, Brandt (2001) criticises ethnographic studies of literacy, because their focus on local contexts does not allow the researchers to explore the origins of literacy practices. She explains that '[j]ust as illiteracy is rarely self-chosen and rarely self-created, the literacy that people practice is not the literacy they necessarily wish to practice' (ibid.: 11). She argues that by conceptualising literacy as a dynamic element of social structures (e.g. economy and politics), researchers could address 'the mixed motives, antipathies, and ambivalence with which so much literacy is learned and practiced (ibid.: 8).

In order to address the above mentioned issue, Brandt coined a new concept, sponsors of literacy. She admits that this new notion does not solve all the theoretical and analytical problems she identified in ethnographic studies of literacy, but that 'it begins to connect literacy as an individual development to literacy as an economic development' (ibid.: 19)

Sponsors of literacy can be described 'as underwriters of acts of reading or writing—those agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable or induce literacy and gain advantage by it in some way' (Brandt, 1998; Brandt and Clinton, 2002: 349). In other words, this concept emphasises that literacy practices and the demands these include come from somewhere or somebody: they are initiated by somebody or something, for a reason. The concept of sponsors of literacy allows

researchers to look beyond the locally situated literacy practices, and to understand the influence of powerful structures (e.g. institutions, politic, economy) at a global level on people's literacy practices.

The notion of sponsor is an economic or commercial metaphor and Brandt selected it for this reason. She explains that this term was appropriate considering 'all the commercial references that appeared in these twentieth-century accounts—the magazines, peddled encyclopaedias, essay contests, radio and television programs, toys, fan clubs, writing tools, and so on, from which so much experience with literacy was derived' (Brandt, 2001: 19-20). I argue that this might be even more salient in the current context considering the digital technologies, particularly social networking sites, in which publicity and commercial messages are so prominent.

Sponsors can be individuals (a parent, a teacher, a priest, etc.) or an institution, an organisation or a group of people. Once the sponsor(s) has been identified, Brandt (2001) invites researchers to look at the bigger economic and political structures associated with it. This signifies that to better understand literacy and literacy learning, researchers need to understand its roots. According to Brandt and Clinton (2002), a person's uses of literacy and learning are always influenced by others—'absent others' who are usually more powerful in terms of money and knowledge. Brandt (1998) also claims that sponsors of literacy 'are a tangible reminder that literacy learning throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, coercion, or, at minimum, contact with existing trade routes' (ibid.: 167).

Brandt (2001) gives the example of a man called Henry who worked as a dairy farm inspector. Henry's work was highly textually mediated (e.g. forms, loan documents, and government regulations). Brandt explains that Henry's literacy learning (in her

study she focused on writing) was sponsored by the various companies he worked for and by changes in government regulations. She also gives other examples of what she calls a 'pattern of sponsorship' or 'accumulated layers of sponsoring influences' (Brandt, 2001: 56) in the lives of people such as Dwayne, a line worker and later union representative, and Johnny, an ex-inmate who had spent 16 years in a maximum (and later medium) security prison. Brandt retraces the various sponsors (e.g. family, union, prison) who influenced these people's literacies over their life span. She highlights how political, economic, and societal changes had an effect on their learning.

Brandt also suggests that sponsors often compete against each other, which can create both 'opportunities' and 'barriers' for literacy learning (Brandt, 2001: 51). For her, '[c]ompetitions for control or ascendancy inject volatility into the value of people's literacy skills and are most responsible for the unrelenting rise in literacy standards' (ibid.: 51). This means that people have to fulfil different literacy demands initiated by various sponsors which require different literacy skills. Consequently, one has to be more and more versatile and flexible. For instance, Dwayne's literacy practices had to fulfil the union's requirements and purposes, but also respond to government legislation, and use the legal register common in companies and unions. Dwayne had to navigate these different literacy demands and had to adapt himself to the changing demands of different institutions and contexts.

Another point of tension can be between the sponsors and the sponsored. Brandt and Clinton (2002) argue that the motives of the sponsors and those of the sponsored frequently diverge, and might even clash. They mention that sponsors generally have more power since they often initiate literacy demands and establish the conditions for these. Sponsors might provide resources to the sponsored throughout the process, but

they would also claim or gain benefit from it (e.g. money, prestige or reputation) (Brandt, 2001). According to Brandt and Clinton (2002), the notion of sponsors of literacy can provide a more comprehensive portrait of competing motives and of how local and distant needs can both be sustained from the same literacy demand. Johnny, for example, learned how to read and write in prison, successfully completed a GED test, and got a degree as a paralegal technical (Brandt, 2001). He used his legal knowledge to get his case revised and also helped other inmates with their legal struggles. This is a good example of divergent motives between the main sponsors (prison and government legislation aiming at rehabilitation) and the sponsored who diverted what they had learned to emancipate and empower themselves.

The ideas of 'patterns of sponsorship' or 'accumulated layers of sponsoring influences' identified by Brandt are valuable concepts that help understand how people learn. This also relates to the concept of *rapport à l'écrit* (Besse, 1995, see Section 1.5), since it adds to our understanding of how it is built over time. Considering that Brandt's work is based on autobiographical interviews and that literacy mediation is often an invisible aspect of people's literacy practices, it is not surprising that the role of 'others' as mediators is not discussed in her work. The narratives she presents are powerful and well-articulated, but they are centred on an individual often opposed to more powerful others and institutions. At times she mentions the intervention of others as mediators, but she does not explain who they are. An example is when Johnny asked other people how to spell words and their definition. I suggest that a study combining both in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork examining literacy practices can offer a more comprehensive understanding of any others, sponsors and mediators, involved in literacy learning. People with different roles can be involved between the sponsors and the sponsored. Before I

develop this idea further, I describe how the NLS and other researchers have used the concept of literacy sponsorship.

9.2.1 NLS and literacy sponsorship

Brandt's work has had limited influence on the wider field of literacy studies. NLS researchers acknowledge Brandt's contribution to the field, but they rarely use the idea of sponsors of literacy in their work.

For Barton (2009), the concept of sponsors of literacy allows researchers to get a better understanding of texts' trajectories and their purposes. It also underlines the material nature of literacy. He explains that '[t]exts act as cultural artefacts – as agents with sponsors' (Barton, 2009: 49). This links up with the criticism around the boundedness of literacy events previously mentioned (see Section 2.2.2). Barton seems to directly link Brandt's concept of literacy sponsors with Actor-Network-Theory.

Kalman's (2008) understanding of sponsors of literacy resembles the concept of literacy mediators defined in Section 9.1.1.4. According to her, sponsors of literacy are individuals who can support others in their learning. For Kalman, literacy sponsorship is always positive. This contrasts with Brandt's view (2001).

Papen (2010) notes the similarities between the two concepts of literacy sponsors and literacy mediators. However, for Papen, the term sponsors of literacy seem to be more associated with literacy learning. According to her, there is a need to clarify the relations between these two concepts.

9.2.2 *How researchers have used sponsors of literacy*

The concept of sponsors of literacy has been applied to various fields of studies such as immigration and refugees (Fehler, 2010; McDonald, 2013; Perry and Hart, 2012), school settings and students' lives (Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007; Kirchoff, 2013), popular culture (Hall, 2003; Jacobs, 2007), the book industry (Trager Bohley, 2011), bureaucracy and institutions (Tomlinson, 2011), digital literacies (Shultz, 2011; Pavia, 2013), health literacy (Martins, 2009), community programmes or projects (Moss, 2010; Webber, 2012; Wright and Mahiri, 2012; Jacobs, 2013), and innovative methodologies to explore literacy sponsorship (Halbritter and Lindquist, 2012).

From the studies above, I have identified four different aspects of the concept of sponsors of literacy:

1) Focus of the study—either on known sponsors and unspecific people sponsored, or known people sponsored and imprecise sponsors;

2) Distance between the sponsor and the sponsored—local or distant;

3) Effect of the sponsors—whether sponsors have positive or negative effects on people's lives;

4) Kinds of sponsors—sponsors as individuals, institutions, groups of people, or fictional characters.

These aspects often overlap since any particular author generally combines several of them. However, it is interesting to look at them separately in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of how this notion has been used and developed by researchers. Based on examples taken from the academic literature I explain these different uses.

9.2.2.1 Focus of study

Some researchers focus on the lives of the sponsored, who are generally marginalised groups of people (e.g. refugees, immigrants, religious minorities, women) in order to understand the influence of sponsors of literacy on their learning and empowerment. Other studies investigated the mechanisms used by sponsors in order to affect people's lives. Studies generally present their results in these two main ways: 1) known people affected and imprecise sponsors, or 2) known sponsors and unspecific people affected.

An example of the first situation can be found in Webb-Sunderhaus's (2007) ethnographic case study of two English composition classes. In this study, she endeavours to understand the various sponsors of literacy influencing the identity and the academic performance of Appalachian students in the USA. Based on interviews, Webb-Sunderhaus identifies some family members as sponsors of literacy, but she also mentions the importance of the Church in some of the students' lives. The sponsorship of the Church is vague and can involve family members as intermediates. The family itself is not clearly defined. Webb-Sunderhaus (2007) notes that '[s]ponsorship is a messy process, one that cannot be neatly delineated. The same could be said of some Appalachian families as well' (6).

In his study of the Oprah's Book Club, Hall (2003) describes the different strategies used by Oprah Winfrey in order to maintain her role as a sponsor of literacy in the USA. Ms. Winfrey is a major public figure in the USA and her book club has many followers. Generally, the books selected by Oprah Winfrey rapidly become bestsellers. In Hall's study (2003) not much is said about the book club's members. We do not know how many people are influenced by Oprah Winfrey as a literacy sponsor.

These two examples illustrate two different empirical ways of approaching the concept of sponsors of literacy. Other studies endeavour to represent the perceptions of the sponsor and the sponsored by—for instance—interviewing people from both 'sides' (see MacDonald, 2013). However, based on the academic literature reviewed, I found that researchers tend to focus on one perspective more than on the other.

9.2.2.2   Distance between the sponsor and the sponsored

According to Brandt (1998: 167), '[i]ntuitively, sponsors seemed a fitting term for the figures who turned up most typically in people's memories of literacy learning: older relatives, teachers, priests, supervisors, military officers, editors, influential authors.' In this quote, most of the sponsors mentioned by Brandt are 'local' sponsors, individuals that might potentially be known by the sponsored. This understanding of the concept of sponsors of literacy relates to what other researchers have called 'guiding lights' (Padmore, 1994; Gregory and Williams, 2000; Gregory, 2005; Barton, 2009).

Brandt (2001) also explains that editors and popular authors can also be described as sponsors of literacy. Distant sponsors of literacy can also be associated with bureaucracies, institutions and corporations. Pavia (2013) offers an interesting account of the influence of commercial and religious sponsors of literacy on an online discussion board frequented by women members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon Church). In this case the distance between the sponsors and the sponsored is difficult to categorise since their interactions are online and could be considered by the people involved as being distant or local.

9.2.2.3 Quality of the effect

Another aspect to take into consideration is the way researchers depict the (potential) effects of literacy sponsorship. Sponsors can have positive effects (e.g. learning), negative effects (e.g. domination and disempowerment), but generally researchers acknowledge that there are both negative and positive effects.

In educational settings, the concept of sponsors of literacy is understood as mainly positive (see Kalman, 2008). For instance, Wright and Mahiri (2012) in their study of a programme aimed at engaging marginalised secondary school students in literacy and learning activities describe sponsors of literacy in solely positive terms. They explain, drawing on Brandt (1998), that the adults involved in the programme should, 'rather than being overly directive, […] be 'positioned to 'sponsor'—act to enable, support, or model—literacy development' (ibid.: 125). For Wright and Mahiri (2012), sponsors of literacy represent non-authoritarian and empowering figures.

This positive image of sponsors contrasts greatly with how MacDonald (2013) sees sponsorship for Sudanese refugees in the USA. He underlines the 'racist and imperialist assumptions' sponsors of literacy in the refugee camp hold about refugees as learners and writers. MacDonald's conception of literacy sponsorship is rather negative; seeing it as both disempowering and restrictive for the refugees. However, he mentions that it could become more positive if the sponsors would acknowledge the refugees' prior knowledge and competencies.

A more nuanced approach is used by Webb-Sunderhaus (2007) who studied family members acting as sponsors of literacy in the lives of Appalachian students. She describes cases in which sponsors have supported learning, and others cases in which sponsors have restricted literacy practices and learning. She called these 'inhibitors of literacy' (ibid.: 15).

9.2.2.4   Kinds of the sponsors

Sponsors of literacy can be institutions, groups of people, fictional characters, popular figures or individuals. Trager Bohley (2011: 86) examines how 'transnational mega-bookstores' influence the literacy practices of Singaporeans. According to her, these mega-bookstores are 're-engineering local print cultures and teaching people new ways to conceptualize, consume and interact with the printed word' (ibid.: 86).

Jacobs (2007) applies the concept of sponsor of literacy to the comic book industry. He explains how Marvel, a comic book company, was a sponsor of multimodal literacy in his life. He even identifies a specific comic as being particularly influential in his life, 'The Man Called Nova'. According to Jacobs (2007), comics influenced his literacy practices and his perception of them; emphasising the importance of multimodality. He explains that it still influenced what he reads and likes to read.

Sponsors of literacy can also be groups of people as in Fehler's study (2010) of Texas settlement houses (community or neighbourhood centres) which offer various services, including literacy support to Mexican immigrants. Fehler identifies the settlement workers as being literacy sponsors.

Individuals can also be sponsors of literacy. I have previously mentioned the examples of Oprah Winfrey (Hall, 2003) and of family members (Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007). Other people may also be sponsoring literacy as part of their job. MacDonald (2013: 9) explains that sponsors can take the 'form of aid workers, case managers, volunteers, tutors, and teachers as well as aid and charity organisations that promote literacy as a means for attaining citizenship, education, and employment.' Martins (2009) sees his doctor as a sponsor of literacy that relates to his diabetes. A magistrate offering legal mediation to support divorce cases can also be seen as a sponsor (Tomlinson 2011).

These are all examples of individuals who can influence the literacy practices of the people being sponsored. However, I would argue that in these examples some elements essential to the full understanding of the concept of sponsor of literacy are not included. The aid workers, teachers, or the managers in MacDonald's study (2013) do not act independently. The doctor (Martins, 2009) and the magistrate (Tomlinson, 2011) are parts of bigger institutions which shape what their jobs includes. I therefore suggest that Brandt's claim that important figures in a person's life (teacher, priest, relative, etc.) act as sponsors of literacy does not quite capture the full picture. A good example is Webb-Sunderhaus' study (2007). She discusses a student called Katie May whose brother sponsored her literacy practices, especially in relation to religion. Her brother, who was to start training to become a pastor and a church leader, suggested religious texts and books to Katie May. In this situation, like in others mentioned above (e.g. doctor, teachers, volunteers, magistrate), the individual distributes texts produced by an institution (Church, health, immigration and justice systems). The question then is who is the sponsor here? Is it Katie May's brother or rather the church he belongs to? I suggest that researchers interested in literacy sponsorship should always trace back to the institution, bureaucracy, commercial entity (e.g. Oprah Winfrey as a business or brand), corporation, and so on, which is at the roots of the situation observed.

I argue that sponsors of literacy are rarely individuals. Sponsors are generally distant and they do not usually know the people they sponsor. This does not mean that the studies referred to above are not insightful. On the contrary, the fact that so many individuals are involved in literacy sponsorship is revealing, but it is equally important to understand that these individuals are not the source of the sponsorship. They act as

sponsors (or representatives of them) on behalf of organisations or institutions. They are not the original source, but they pass on the sponsorship.

9.3   Implications for my study

According to Papen (2010), the relation between the concepts of literacy mediators and sponsors of literacy should be further explored. This is an interesting point as there appears to have been little discussion of the relationship between these two concepts in the NLS. Can literacy mediators also be sponsors of literacy, and vice versa? Should they be seen as complementary terms?

One of the main differences between literacy mediators and sponsors of literacy lies in the power distribution between the actors involved. Sponsors of literacy always have more power over the specific literacy practice and its demands, since they 'usually set the terms for access to what they control and wield incentives for loyalty and compliance' (Brandt and Clinton, 2002: 350). As mentioned before, literacy mediators can also be in a dominant position vis-à-vis the people they are helping or even take advantage of them. However, this is not a recurring characteristic of literacy mediation, the positive aspects of literacy mediation generally being emphasised. I also maintain that literacy mediators, similarly to sponsors of literacy, do not always foster learning. Some sponsors of literacy (e.g. schools) are more concerned with learning than others (e.g. businesses).

I argue that literacy mediation can be more difficult to identify in people's lives because, as mentioned before, people tend not to notice it (Mace, 2002). In Brandt's account (2001) of literacy learning in the lives of 80 Americans, mediators are not visible and the sponsored seem to be alone when they face literacy sponsorship.

Literacy mediation seems therefore to be a less noticed phenomenon; but a phenomenon which can be identified through ethnographic research.

In my study, I use the term literacy mediators to refer to individuals who help others cope with certain literacy demands. Consequently, literacy mediators cannot be sponsors of literacy. As mentioned before, I will use the concept of sponsors of literacy only to refer to institutions, bureaucracies, commercial entities, corporations, and groups of people. However, there are various ways literacy mediators might be associated with sponsors of literacy. This question is explored in Chapter 10.

10 LITERACY MEDIATION AND SPONSORSHIP: PARALLEL AND CONFLICTING PROCESSES

In this chapter, I continue my exploration of the concepts of 'literacy mediation' and 'sponsor of literacy' by examining how these two concepts were present at Le *Bercail* and *L'Envol*. These two concepts are central to the understanding of how the literacy practices used in the community-based organisations relate to those of the young people attending their activities. They highlight the fact that what was going on in the two organisations was not uniquely motivated by the youth workers and the young people. They had to deal with texts originating from more distant sponsors, which were generally more powerful.

I first provide a general overview of literacy mediation in the two organisations. I then focus on the bureaucratic literacies around which the youth workers were acting as literacy mediators. This brings back to the fore the notion of precarity presented in Chapter 1. The access to the public services that the young people needed in order to counter their situation of precarity was mediated by texts. I then discuss questions of learning, trust, and collaboration relating to literacy mediation.

I then go on by presenting a portrait of the various sponsors of literacy that initiated literacy demands at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. This analysis is based on the workshops I conducted with the youth workers in the second phase of data collection. I explain what kinds of texts they initiated by providing concrete example from my data. Then, I present the different configurations of literacy sponsorship that occurred in the two organisations. Finally, I come back to the discussion started in the previous chapter about whether or not the term 'literacy mediator' could be seen as complementary to 'sponsor of literacy'.

10.1 Youth workers acting as literacy mediators

Based on my data, I identified six main types of literacies in relation to which youth workers acted as mediators for the young people at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*: 1) vernacular literacies—letters to friends, partners, and particularly family members; 2) digital literacies—text messages and emails, mainly written to friends and partners; 3) literacies related to the project and to workshops—activity sheets, online research, and individual projects; 4) school-related literacies—at *Le Bercail*, young people were enrolled in distance learning courses; 5) bureaucratic literacies—contracts, forms and letters from institutions; and 6) 'marginal' forms of literacies—particularly tattoos. The types of literacies youth workers were providing mediation for illustrate that they had to navigate between very different genres and registers.

Due to space restrictions, I am not able to explore literacy mediation for all these literacies. In this section, I focus on bureaucratic literacies only. I selected these because it was with them that the youth workers were the most frequently acting as literacy mediators in my data.

I first explore how youth workers were acting as literacy mediators with bureaucratic literacies. I examine the genres, registers and forms of reading and writing involved, what purposes these documents had, what meanings they had, what was expected and how they were linked to institutions. I then describe how the youth workers in my study became legitimate literacy mediators by earning the young people's trust. This is followed by an analysis of the networks of literacy mediation that seemed to be in place in the community-based organisations observed. Throughout this section, I compare and contrast my findings with academic publications on literacy mediation.

In the first phase of my study (April-May 2012), the youth workers mentioned that they were providing literacy mediation with regards to various bureaucratic literacies: registration forms (especially for adult education centres), governmental forms (welfare, unemployment benefit, immigration, public health services, etc.), rental contracts, institutional and bureaucratic letters (schools, governments of Québec and Canada, banks, telecommunications companies, etc.). According to the youth workers in my study, events involving literacy mediation occurred in their everyday work, from at least once a month (n=2), twice a month (n=2), and once a week (n=2) to many times a week (n=1). It is important to note that because of their different roles, some youth workers were acting as literacy mediators more regularly than others. For instance, Carl at *L'Envol* was acting as a career counsellor, and the services he provided catered for a large group of young people.

In the second phase of data collection (April 2013), I asked the young people at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* to reflect on any letters they had received which contained important information that could potentially affect their lives (see Activity 5 in Section 3.2.2 and Appendix I for examples). This activity generated an interesting discussion. Some participants said that letters were usually bad news. Many young people asked me if they could write about an important email instead. I then explained that since letters had become less common nowadays, it was interesting to understand what types of letters they were still receiving. Three young people shared examples of personal writing they had received: a love letter, a letter from a family member, and letters from a foreign pen pal. All the other participants (n=6) gave an example of bureaucratic literacies: a letter of acceptance for a professional course, information for

a college programme, a letter summoning the recipient to appear in court, a follow-up letter from the youth criminal justice system, and bills from a social housing programme (n=2). Two young people mentioned that they usually ignore these official letters. Cédric gave an example of such a letter.

La lettre

Qui te l'a envoyée?	Pour quelles raisons?	Qu'est-ce que tu fais ensuite?
L'office municipal (OMH) m'envoie des lettres disant	Ils me réclame 5$ additionnel par mois	Je remet la lettre dans l'enveloppe et je ricane

Key: *La lettre*: the letter; *Qui te l'a envoyée ?*: Who sent it to you?; *Pour quelles raisons?:*: For what reasons ?; *Qu'est-ce que tu fais ensuite?*: What do you do next?

Figure 10.1 Cédric's description of an official letter he received

In Figure 10.1, Cédric wrote about important letters that he had received recently from the '*Office Municipal de l'Habitation* (OMH)' [Municipal Housing Office] (See Glossary in Appendix A), the organisation that manages the supervised flats at *L'Envol*. Cédric explained on the activity sheet that this organisation had sent him a few letters giving him notice that he would have to pay CAN$5 more per month for his rent. He wrote that his reaction to this letter was to put it back in its envelope and laugh.

The young people in my study did not spontaneously say that they would seek youth workers' help with bureaucratic literacies. Some wrote about other people, such as lawyers, acting as literacy mediators. After the activity, we had a group discussion. I then asked them for further information about how they would generally deal with bureaucratic literacies, and if they would at times ask someone to help them. The young people mentioned seeking help from their parents, other family members, friends and youth workers.

On this matter, Richard, one of the young people at *L'Envol*, said, 'When I receive letters from my lawyer, I really don't like him, and I don't understand what he wants to tell me.' Another participant, Cassandra, claimed, 'Before I didn't know anything about income tax documents, I was asking my mother about it because I didn't understand. On all the governmental documents as well.' She later mentioned that youth workers were also people she would ask for support with bureaucratic literacies. Richard, Jacques and Pierre-Luc stated they would often search online, on Google or Wikipedia, in order to understand bureaucratic documents they received by mail. Cédric, for his part, said he did not usually ask for help regarding literacy. However, he was seen by the group as a person who knew a lot and could act as a literacy mediator, 'This guy is Wikipedia on his own,' said Richard.

At *Le Bercail*, Laurence, Darya and Julien claimed they never sought literacy mediation from youth workers. However, I observed many events involving literacy mediation and these three young people at *Le Bercail*. With regards to letters and bureaucratic literacies, Laurence said it was different from other forms of literacy since it is 'more official', and Darya added that it is also 'more stressful'. Julien described it as 'more formal' especially when the letter starts this way 'For the attention of Mr.'. It is interesting to observe that some young people did not spontaneously remember how youth workers, or others, had helped them with certain genres and registers. This echoes Mace's claim (2002) about literacy mediation being so common that people do not even notice it.

In the first phase of my study, the majority of the youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* said that young people often panicked when receiving government letters or letters related to financial matters (e.g. banks and telecommunications companies). According to Ève-Lyne, 'They are so sure it would be difficult to understand that they

don't look at it.' The youth workers claimed that young people would ask them 'What should I do with this?', 'What is going on?', 'Did I understand it correctly?', 'Why are they sending this to me?' and 'What is it about?' Young people, therefore, seem to feel disempowered when confronted with bureaucratic literacies. The youth workers participating in my study confirmed the feeling of disempowerment young people expressed. What the youth workers said also shows that the young people did not necessarily always understand the letters.

In her study based on a rural town in South Africa, Malan (1996) describes how community members ignored written notices from the municipality office. Drawing on Bakhtin (1981) she claims that ignoring written documents is also a form of dialogue and 'a way of confronting the monologic voice of powerful institutions' (Malan, 1996: 111). Young people in my study might have adopted this attitude for the same reason; they were feeling disempowered vis-à-vis the monologic voice of some institutions. In Figure 10.1, Cédric's reaction might indicate his feeling of disempowerment regarding these letters. He did not appeal against this decision, and did not laugh because he found it funny. Rather, it seems reasonable to assume that he was laughing out of resignation. Cédric was already struggling financially, but because he was starting to earn just a little bit more money, his supervised flat rent was increased (the rent is adapted to each young person's financial situation).

The youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* explained that the registers (see Section 9.1.1.4) used in bureaucratic documents were often difficult to understand, even for them. The majority explained that they summarised the official documents using simple words. On this matter, Tommy, another youth worker, said

Excerpt 10.1 Tommy explains how he helped young people to cope with official letters

Ça fait que c'est comme on va lire les grandes lignes puis : « Le but, c'est que tu dois appeler ton agente de tel service et puis regarde, pose-lui telles, telles, telles questions. » Je fais juste la pister dans le fond sur deux-trois phrases à dire et ensuite, être à côté la plupart du temps pour écouter parce que souvent, ils nous font un gros point d'interrogation de « je ne comprends pas le menu électronique ». Ça fait que... C'est de l'accompagnement. C'est de l'accompagnement puis de la vulgarisation.	We will read the outline of the document and then 'The aim is that you have to call this person and then, ask her these questions.' I'm just guiding him or her on two or three sentences to say, and then I'll be next to her most of the time listening, because she might need help while making the phone call. For instance, she might say 'I don't understand the electronic menu!' It's all about supporting and presenting information in simple terms.

Le Bercail, 24-05-2012

This example of literacy mediation illustrates the 'cultural brokerage' youth workers do for the young people at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. As in Baynham's study (1993) of Moroccan immigrants in London, Tommy paraphrased the content of an official letter, mediating between two registers, bureaucratic and everyday language. This also relates to Brandt's notion (2007) of knowledge scarcity. Some young people mentioned, as stated before, that they did not know enough about certain genres and registers used by institutions (e.g. courts or Inland Revenue) to deal with them by themselves. Also, they probably would not know the practices of those institutions and their ways of interacting with citizens, which would consequently make those institutions' expectations difficult to understand and fulfil. An example of this was mentioned by a participant at *L'Envol*; Cassandra said she did not know how to fill out income tax forms and needed help with governmental documents in general.

Excerpt 10.1 also relates to what Varey and Tusting (2012) observed in an adult literacy classroom. They identified three strategies that the tutor would rely on when she was asking the adult learners to fill out forms: 'mediating' (109), 'sequencing'

(110), and 'embedding' (111). The first strategy consists in talking about the document with the learners, and in clarifying any misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the text. The second strategy sequencing is aimed at introducing the form at an appropriate moment to the group of learners. This signifies that the tutor would try to present this kind of document to the learners when a trusting relationship was established with them. Finally, the third strategy is embedding. The tutor who participated in Varey and Tusting's study (2012) was trying to include the forms in activities. She wanted to make them seem more interesting and fun. Based on my observations, it seems that the young workers were using similar strategies with the young people with regards to bureaucratic literacies. The youth workers were sometimes explaining the reasons why the young people had to comply with the institution's requirements (mediating). A revealing example of embedding is when Tommy asked the young people at *Le Bercail* to sign the fake form. I will describe this situation in Section 10.1.2 (see Excerpt 10.5). The youth workers at *Le Bercail* also said that they asked the young people to sign all the contracts at the beginning of their participation in the programme *Mobili-T* to 'get them out of the way'. This could relate to the concept of sequencing.

All the youth workers interviewed in my study mentioned that they consistently endeavoured to empower young people through literacy mediation. For instance, Ève-Lyne said 'I always start by looking at the form with him or her and say: 'I won't do it for you.' […] They finally realize it's not that difficult.' Others describe how they guide and support young people, emphasising the importance of fostering their autonomy and learning.

I observed an important number of situations during which the youth workers acted as literacy mediators with the young people. Here, I have selected one of them, which

happened at *Le Bercail* in May 2012. It involved a young woman I have named Laurence, and three youth workers, Frédérique, Ève-Lyne, and Tommy.

Before the presentation of Laurence's example, a few contextual clarifications are needed. According to the *Régie de l'Assurance Maladie du Québec* (2014), everybody in Québec is eligible for the Québec Health Insurance Plan (some exceptions are applicable). A proof of residence must be provided in order to obtain a health insurance card. This has to be presented every time that a person requires free health services. If the card has expired or been lost, some fees would apply for the health services received. A renewal notice is sent three months before the expiry date on the card.

Laurence had recently moved out of an apartment she had been sharing with her former partner. She was looking for a place to stay and was, in the meantime, living with her sister. Laurence had complained about abdominal pain over the weeks before and was increasingly worried about the method of contraception she was using at that time, and felt it was not appropriate for her body. My field notes are as follows:

Excerpt 10.2 Field notes about the renewal process of Laurence's health insurance card

> Laurence was about to leave *Le Bercail* to attend her annual medical examination with the local General Practitioner (GP). Frédérique offered her a lift since it was raining on that day. Laurence replied that she could go on foot since [Name of the Clinic] was not far from *Le Bercail*. She said goodbye to everyone and left *Le Bercail*.
>
> Laurence came back about 20 minutes later. She seemed devastated. Ève-Lyne asked her what the problem was. Laurence said that she was not able to attend her appointment because her health insurance card had expired. She told Ève-Lyne and Frédérique that if she wanted to attend her appointment without the card she would have had to pay CAN$80, but she did not have this kind of money. She told Ève-Lyne that she knew that her card had expired in September 2011, but she did not think that it could prevent her from attending her appointment for free. Ève-Lyne explained to her that if she had had a serious accident she would have had to pay a lot of money out of her pocket for medical care. Laurence had the renewal notice in her bag. [She had been carrying it with her for a while.] She also had her photograph taken the day before (for the card). Frédérique then offered to help Laurence with the

renewal process. They left *Le Bercail* immediately and went to the CLSC (*Centre Local de Services Communautaires*, Community Health Centre) where they could submit the completed form and photographs.

Frédérique and Laurence came back to *Le Bercail* about 20 minutes later. Laurence seemed even more discouraged. She then explained to Ève-Lyne that Frédérique and she were not able to renew the card because she did not have any proof of residence. Her name did not appear on any lease or bills. The receptionist at the CLSC told her that she must obtain a sworn statement to confirm that she was living with her sister. Ève-Lyne wondered how to get such a statement, Frédérique did not know either. Tommy, who was passing by, explained that Laurence would have to go to the bank with her sister. Laurence's sister would then have to swear before an employee of the bank that Laurence was really living with her.

Le Bercail, 10-05-2012

Excerpt 10.2 shows all the complexity of bureaucratic literacies and how they can be overwhelming for young people in a situation of precarity. Technically, everybody living in Québec can access free health services. However, as illustrated in this example, this right is controlled and mediated through bureaucratic literacies. The situation of precarity that Laurence was experiencing at that time made it even more difficult for her to access this right. She did not have an official address, and was temporarily relying on her sister's help as she did not have a good relationship with her parents at that time. The pain that she was experiencing probably made this situation even more difficult for her. As previously mentioned she used a method of contraception that her body did not cope well with and could not have access to a GP. Her financial situation was difficult; she was relying on the state benefits for her participation in the workshops at *Le Bercail*.

Laurence seemed to have misunderstood the way the health system works in Québec. She did not know that an expired card would prevent her from getting free health services. From what Laurence said on that day, it seemed that she had completed the form on her own but did not submit it. The youth workers at *Le Bercail* supported her in this situation. Frédérique went with her to the *CLSC* (see Glossary in Appendix A) to renew the card as she knew where to go to submit the renewal form. However,

Frédérique and Ève-Lyne were as puzzled as Laurence about where to get a sworn statement and who could act as a commissioner for oaths. Tommy offered helpful advice on this matter. This episode also highlights how youth workers help each other by sharing the knowledge they have of bureaucratic literacies.

Excerpt 10.2 also shows how the public services the young people needed were generally mediated by literacy. This brings back to the fore the notion of situation of precarity I presented in Chapter 1. As mentioned before, the interaction of the three following dimensions create a unique situation of precarity in a person's life: 1) the interactions between 'opportunity structures' (McInerney and Smyth, 2014) and public policies, 2) the individual characteristics and particular events in the lives of people, and 3) the political, economic and historical context. In Laurence's situation, the opportunity structures are the Québec public health system and also the help of the youth workers. Laurence's individual characteristics that had an effect on this situation are various; she was a young woman who was having financial difficulties and who did not have settled accommodation. The effect of the political, economic and historical context is more subtle in this situation. Yet, it seems reasonable to assume that the bureaucratic structure and complicated access to the public health system are characteristic of neoliberal economies and political systems (see Section 1.3.1).

Another example given by Carl at *L'Envol* also illustrates how the lack of access to services can be closely linked to precarity. Carl gives an example that illustrates the kind of situation that many young people participating in my study experienced. He tried to limit the effect of precarity experienced by the young people, but it has some limits since the access to essential services is never granted straightforwardly. Carl explained that

Excerpt 10.3 Carl's comments about precarity

40 % [des jeunes avec qui je travaille ont] des problèmes de santé mentale non stabilisés, dépendance, itinérance, toutes sortes de problématiques comme ça. Pas de revenus. Ceux-là, c'est plus difficile de faire quelque chose rapidement. Parce qu'on assiste d'un côté à une précarisation des conditions de vie de ces gens-là, puis de l'autre côté, une diminution de la qualité des services. [...] Depuis cinq ans, ça se détériore à vue d'œil. Si c'était difficile en 2009 parfois d'avoir accès à une mesure de formation [financée], aujourd'hui, c'est quoi? Ils vont prendre 20 % [des jeunes] qu'ils acceptaient en 2009. [... C'est la même chose avec] l'accès à un psychiatre, à un psychologue, à des soins de santé, à des diagnostics professionnels qui peuvent faire la différence dans les mesures [d'insertion sociale et professionnelle] que le jeune pourrait avoir. [...] Ça veut dire qu'avant qu'il commence à se mettre en action, il a un an et demi à ne rien foutre. Puis durant son année et demie qu'il rumine, il se précarise davantage parce qu'il n'est pas suivi [par un professionnel]. Va-t-il se rendre à son rendez-vous dans un an et demi? Va-t-il être encore à ici? Va-t-il avoir les mêmes coordonnées pour qu'on lui rappelle rendez-vous? Va-t-il avoir encore envie? [...] Peut-être sera-t-il dans une paranoïa X et ne voudra plus y aller. Peut-être aura-t-il été hospitalisé trois fois à l'urgence [...]. Ça, ça traumatise quelqu'un. [...] Les gens les plus précaires se précarisent davantage.	40% [of the young people I am working with have] non-stabilised mental health problems and addictions, are homeless, and so on. They don't earn money. With this group of people, it is difficult to have quick results. Because we are witnessing a precarisation of their living conditions, and on the other hand, a decrease in the quality of services. […] In the past five years, it has been getting significantly worse. It was sometimes difficult in 2009 to get access to a training programme [financed by the state], but talk about today! They might take in 20% of [the young people] they were accepting in 2009. [… It's the same thing concerning] access to a psychiatrist, a psychologist, health services and professional diagnosis that can make a difference in terms of access to beneficial [social and professional insertion] programmes. This means that before they can take action, these young people have one and a half years to do fuck all. And during this year and a half that they are ruminating, they are increasingly getting precarious since they are not followed [by a professional]. Are they going to attend their appointment in one year and a half? Are they still going to be here? Are they going to have the same contact information so that we can remind them of the appointment? Will they still be willing to go? Maybe they will be in some state of paranoia and won't want to go. Maybe they would have been hospitalised three times at the ER. […] This is a traumatic experience. […] The most precarious people get even more precarious.

The young people Carl is referring to in this quotation were on waiting lists to access health services, particularly mental health support. This quote suggests that the public health system's services were not able to meet the needs of the young people. According to Carl, some of them had to wait for months, and even more than a year.

All three dimensions of precarity are clearly present in this quote: the opportunity structures and public policies (e.g. training programmes financed by the state, health services, and social and professional insertion programmes, Carl's own work); individual characteristics (e.g. mental health problems, addictions, homelessness); political, economic and historical context (e.g. cuts in social programmes for economic and political reasons [specifically mentioned later in the interview]).

Carl latterly explicitly explained how his role as literacy mediator can be crucial in helping young people access essential services such the Québec Social Assistance programme or the Canadian Employment Insurance programme. According to him, if the young people applied to these programmes without the help of a youth worker like himself, the vast majority would get their application rejected. He noticed that if he helped the young people fill out the forms and also physically accompanied them to the government offices, their applications were generally successful. This process included filling out many forms, meeting with state representatives, receiving official letters, etc. Carl wondered why these bureaucratic documents were written in a complicated language. He asked 'Is that an unofficial filter to make sure that not too many people get accepted?'

What Carl said about these documents suggests that they are often very disconnected from the situation of precarity experienced by the young people. He gave this example:

Excerpt 10.4 Carl's comments about filling out forms

« Prouve-moi comment tu as pu subsister pendant trois mois. » Ta réponse va être différente de la mienne. Imagine pour quelqu'un qui n'a pas de secondaire. […] C'est trop compliqué. Pourquoi qu'ils ne le changent pas? […] C'est une grande question, mais moi, quand je vois ça subsistance, je me dis : « Bien regarde, je n'ai pas travaillé, ça fait que comment je fais [pour dire que] j'ai subvenu à mes besoins? J'ai squatté chez des amis, il y a du monde qui m'ont dépanné pour la bouffe… », […] C'est un processus au-delà de la compréhension du formulaire. C'est stressant. Tu as l'impression d'être jugé aussi parfois.	'Give a proof of how you subsisted over the last three months.' Your answer will be different from mine. Imagine for someone without a GCSE. [...] It's too complicated. Why don't they change it? [...] That's a big question, but for me, when I read 'subsisting', I say, 'Well look, I didn't work, so how can I [demonstrate how] I met my essential needs? I stayed at some friends' place, some people gave me food...' [...] It's a process that goes beyond the understanding of the form. It's stressful. You feel judged sometimes.

L'Envol, 22-05-2012

Carl claimed that young people sometimes felt judged by some questions asked in official forms. This could also explain the feeling of disempowerment expressed by some of them.

Catherine, a youth worker at *L'Envol*, said that because of young people's anxiety problems and their difficult financial situation, bureaucratic documents generally had an emotional charge which was difficult to cope with. Carl also argued that the young people he worked with did not trust institutions in general, and might ignore the information received or misunderstand it because of this. This again relates to Malan's study (1996) in which she suggests that ignoring written texts is a form of confrontation with the institutional monologic voice. Emotions seem to play an important role in the need for literacy mediation. This was noticeable in Laurence's situation (Excerpt 10.2) and also in Cedric's example of an official letter received

(Figure 10.1). Brandt's (2007) scarcities—time, knowledge, skill—do not explicitly consider the emotional aspect of literacy mediation, which might be at the core of important moments and literacy events (Thériault, 2008; Thériault and Bélisle, 2012).

10.1.2 *Informally teaching about bureaucratic literacies*

The empowerment process described above involves more than literacy mediation. The majority of the youth workers participating in my research described how they were also 'informally teaching' young people how to deal with bureaucratic literacies, anticipating difficulties they might encounter, working ahead of literacy mediation and contributing to empowerment. Below, I describe a situation I observed in the first phase of the study at *Le Bercail*. This situation illustrates effectively how youth workers might raise awareness about the power that bureaucratic literacies might have upon young people's lives. Tommy organised an activity around these aims. My field notes are as follows:

Excerpt 10.5 Tommy's activity about signing forms

On the first day of the project at *Le Bercail*, the newly formed group had to sign various forms in order to take part in the project. Tommy gave various documents related to the project. He distributed a contract to the group. All the young people signed it without reading it. Tommy then told the group that he lied to them. They had just signed a contract stipulating they should give Tommy half of their pay every week. The young people were astonished, and they did not know what to say. They all looked again at the form and realised that it was really the case. Tommy then explained how important it is to actually read forms and contracts before signing them. He told the group they could now destroy the fake contract. The participants were relieved and tore apart the document, laughing and exchanging expressions of relief.

Le Bercail, 3 April 2012

Tommy distributed this 'fake' contract a few seconds after the young people had signed the original one. The original contract stipulated the conditions of young people's participation at *Le Bercail* in the programme *Mobili-T*: their salary, number

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of working hours per week, holidays, etc. Tommy used the same layout (e.g. headings, front, and number of pages) as a form produced by the Government of Canada for this activity.

This situation illustrates how the youth workers anticipated young people's difficulties, and therefore engaged them in activities that would make them aware of the power that some literacies (e.g. their content and the young people's endorsement of it) can have. Mace (2001) explains that signatures have always been important marks of power. She describes how being able to sign can grant access to certain rights. The young people participating in my study at *Le Bercail* did not seem aware of the power of their signature. They were all able to read and write, but still did not read the contracts that Tommy presented to them. After this activity described in Excerpt 10.5, I also passed around documents related to my study. I asked the young people to look at the information letter and consent form. I had already explained to them its content, but I noticed that only Laurence looked at it carefully before signing it. This might indicate that making people aware of the power of the content of certain texts is a long term process that cannot be dealt with in one activity.

Another example of teaching about bureaucratic literacies was given by Ève-Lyne during the workshop organised in the second phase of data collection (April 2013). She explained that while she was attending the *Mobili-T* programme, Darya wanted to leave the flat she was sharing with her sister. They had had a fight and Darya did not want to live with her sister anymore. Ève-Lyne warned Darya, and told her that the lease contract she had signed meant that she could not leave the flat without consequences. Ève-Lyne sat with Darya and read the contract with her, explaining to her the meaning of it. This example also illustrates a form of informal teaching about bureaucratic documents. Ève-Lyne explained to Darya what her rights and

responsibilities were regarding the lease contract. This helped Darya to avoid problems with her sister.

10.1.3 Earning young people's trust: being a legitimate literacy mediator

Based on my observations and also on the interviews with the youth workers, I endeavour to explain how one can acquire the legitimacy to act as a literacy mediator. Indeed, beyond the professional title, youth worker, or the professional context, various elements seem to play a role in acquiring legitimacy as a literacy mediator.

Catherine and Élise, in their respective interviews, mentioned that they had to earn young people's 'trust' in order to act as literacy mediator for personal, or vernacular, literacies. Élise said she sometimes acted as a literacy mediator helping with love letters, letters written to family members or letters that dealt with conflicts. She said the young people wanted to know her opinion about the content of their letters. Often this was related to the appropriateness of the register used; they would, for instance, ask, 'Is it too direct?'. Catherine argued that when young people asked her to act as literacy mediator for personal literacies, 'this signifies they know I won't judge them, and I will try to understand. It's definitely a sign of trust.' Charles and Catherine explained how the process of gaining trust evolved naturally while they got to know the young people and asked them questions about their hobbies and what they were interested in. Time seems to play an important role in the establishment of a relationship of trust. According to the youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*, the young people more easily ask for help with bureaucratic literacies than with personal literacies. Ève-Lyne explained that personal writing is a 'very secret garden' for the young people.

On a related matter, Carl and Frédérique explained that they never focused on grammar and spelling mistakes while acting as literacy mediators for personal literacies. They would first give the participant their opinion and advice regarding the content and afterwards help correcting the errors, but only if he or she wanted to. With regards to whether one should correct mistakes or not, Frédérique explained

Excerpt 10.6 Frédérique's comments about correcting young people's mistakes

Je ne trouve pas que c'est une bonne façon de faire. Parce que moi, je ne serais pas portée à montrer mes affaires si la première chose que la personne me disait : « Crime, c'est bourré de fautes! » Je pense que tout se dit. Il y a une façon puis il y a un temps pour le dire.	I don't think it's the correct way of doing it. Because, I don't think I would personally want to show my writing if the first thing someone would tell me is 'Wow, it's full of errors!' I think everything can be said. However, there is a way and there is a time to do so.

Le Bercail, 24-05-2012

Concerning literacy mediation relating to digital literacies, Frédérique explained that she constantly had to learn to understand the register used by young people on Facebook and on their mobile phones (text messages). She asked questions and tried to learn the expressions and abbreviations used by young people. In these ways, it seems that youth workers were able to gain legitimacy with young people, not only by building a trusting relationship and preserving young people's self-esteem and emotions, but also by understanding the genre and registers they used. This means that Frédérique would therefore be able to understand more accurately the digital texts for which young people request her support as a literacy mediator.

The flexibility the youth workers in the two organisations offered allowed the young people to contact the youth workers at any time—in person, by phone or using digital technologies such as Facebook or mobile phone. Flexibility and accessibility might also play a role in the growing of a trusting relationship.

My findings corroborate some of Papen's observations (2010) from her study of a local tourism business in Namibia. Indeed, she mentions that

> [b]y the time the two events took place, the guides had known me for some time and they had come to see in me somebody whose knowledge and experience they believed to exceed their own understanding and competence. Thus, they were more than happy, indeed had invited me, to help them formulate a response to the consultant's report. (ibid.: 76)

Papen (2010) highlights the importance of time in the establishment of her legitimacy as a literacy mediator. She also claims that her 'knowledge and experience' were valued by the tourist guides. During her fieldwork Papen (2007) was also asked by the young tourist guides to produce a promotional leaflet for their business. The tourist guides valued her English language skills but 'also banked on [her] role as a tourist and visitor [herself] and [her] knowledge of the township and its history, gained from [her] own readings, [her] visits to literacy classes and [her] participation in their tours' (ibid.: 123). This tells us more about how Papen's knowledge and experience was acquired.

In sum, time, knowledge and experience, flexibility and accessibility, and sensibility towards young people and their self-esteem and emotions are important elements to consider when looking at how the youth workers became legitimate and trusted literacy mediators in the eyes of the young people they were working with. Unfortunately, very little was said by the youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* about how they established their legitimacy towards institutions (e.g. schools, *Emploi Québec*, *CLSC*, etc.) (see Glossary in Appendix A). Therefore, my data did not allow me to explore literacy mediation as a multidirectional process, that is to say, how youth workers access both dominant narratives and literacies, and the local ones.

10.1.4 Network of literacy mediation: distribution of roles and expertise

The youth workers at *Le Bercail* and at *L'Envol* seemed to have a clear idea of who could act as literacy mediator for certain genres and registers. Within the working teams, at both *Le Bercail* and at *L'Envol*, each youth worker appeared to have an area of expertise, which was also recognised by the others.

At *Le Bercail*, Tommy was seen as the point of reference for most governmental forms. He was also known to be good in mathematics and computing. Frédérique, Charles and Ève-Lyne were aware of Tommy's knowledge and often asked him questions about bureaucratic literacies. Frédérique explained that Tommy had more experience with certain forms than she did. However, Frédérique claimed that since she had a baby, she knew better how to deal with Québec Parental Insurance Plan's forms and information. Frédérique argued that Ève-Lyne was very good in French and liked to read. Therefore, she would be the point of reference if young people had questions about grammar rules or spelling.

At *L'Envol*, Catherine was seen as someone who was good with languages and liked to read. According to Élise, the young people would therefore ask Catherine questions about languages or to 'check their potential as a writer'. For her part, Élise mentioned that the young people would ask her to look at the content of a personal letter rather than to check for spelling or grammar errors.

The majority of the youth workers in my study said that in case of incertitude regarding certain bureaucratic literacies, they would refer young people to the appropriate person within the organisation or ask this person's advice on how to deal with it.

We can see from the above that within the organisations a kind of network of literacy mediation seems to exist. This network of literacy mediation can also go beyond the organisation. Some youth workers mentioned other organisations that might have better literacy mediators than them for specific genres (e.g. *curriculum vitæ* and immigration documents). However, as highlighted by Élise, this practice had advantages and disadvantages. She claimed that by referring them to another organisation, young people could learn how to look for appropriate and specialised resources in an autonomous way. However, since the young people did not have a trusting relationship with the employees of these other organisations, she believed that the referral might not be a successful enterprise.

The young people themselves were also important actors in this network of literacy mediation. At *L'Envol*, Élise explained that she would often refer one participant to another, especially to act as literacy mediator with digital literacies.

Excerpt 10.7 Élise explains how young people can act as literacy mediators

Mais là, dès qu'il y a une question, un truc qui apparaît qu'ils ne connaissent pas, qu'ils n'ont pas de points de repère, là… Ou ils veulent mettre de la musique sur leur cellulaire mettons. Ils viennent me demander comment faire. Mais moi, je ne le sais pas plus nécessairement, puis je n'ai pas nécessairement le goût de passer une heure à chercher comment faire, mais je le sais qu'il y a plein de jeunes qui sont vraiment bons là-dedans. Ça fait que là : « Ah, demande à un tel, il est super bon là-dedans. » Puis ce un tel là, ça lui fait vivre un sentiment de valorisation.	But then, as soon as there is a question, something that seems unfamiliar, for which they have no benchmarks... Or they want to put music on their mobile phone for example. They come and ask me how. But I do not necessarily know, and I do not necessarily feel like spending an hour looking for how to do it, but I know that there are lots of young people who are really good at that. So, I will say 'Ask him, he's very good at it.' And this situation is rewarding for them.

L'Envol, 18-05-2012

These networks of literacy mediation are consistent with what previous studies have found on the role of social networks (e.g. family and friends) in relation to literacy mediation (Fingeret, 1983; Barton and Padmore, 1991; Barton and Hamilton, 1998;

Barton, 2009). In the light of the results presented above, it seems that these networks were informally built according to youth workers'—and in some cases, young people's—personal interests (e.g. digital technologies), skills (e.g. Catherine's abilities with languages) and personal experiences (e.g. Frédérique's pregnancy).

10.2 Retracing literacy sponsorship in the community-based organisations

In this section, I present descriptions and analysis of the forms literacy sponsorship took in the two community-based organisations participating in my study. I first present the results from an activity conducted with the youth workers in the second phase of the study. I analysed the maps the youth workers created during Activity 1 (see Section 3.2.2 for explanations and Appendix E for bigger reproductions).

My instructions regarding this activity were broad, because I wanted to offer the youth workers space to explore the concept of sponsors of literacy from their own experience. Because of the flexibility of the activity, the youth workers at *Le Bercail* and at *L'Envol* created different kind of maps. At *Le Bercail*, Ève-Lyne, Frédérique, and Tommy decided to put the name of a participant in the middle of the map as a starting point for their reflection about literacy sponsorship. They explained to me that this would help them to provide concrete examples of the kind of texts that a young person might have to deal with, or that they might have to deal with on behalf or with this person. The participant they selected was Darya (see Figure 10.2).
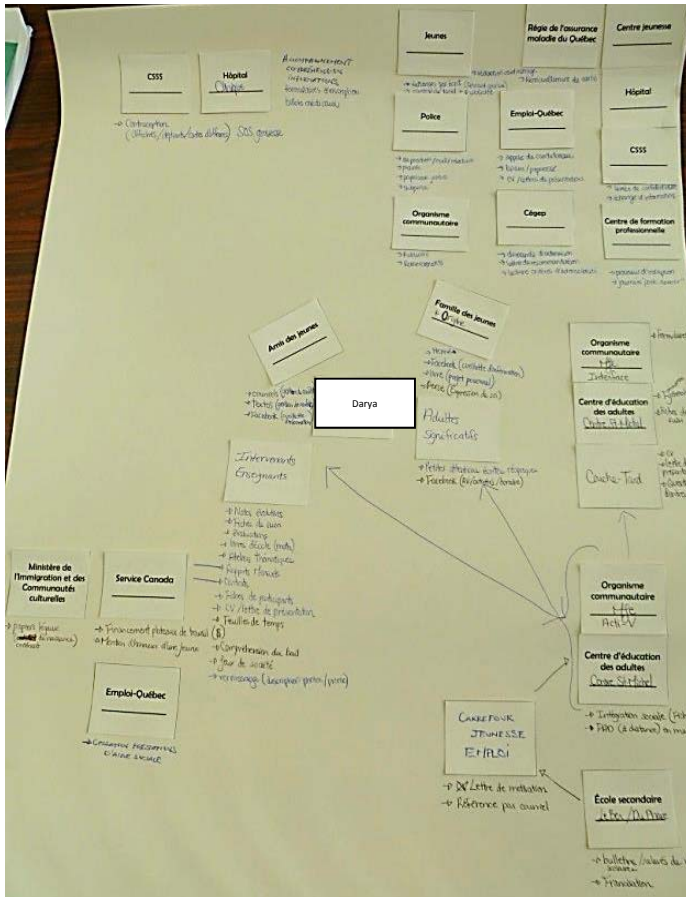
Figure 10.2 Sponsors of literacy identified at *Le Bercail*

At *L'Envol*, Catherine, Olivier, and Jonathan decided to create their map differently (see Figure 10.3). They put *L'Envol* and their role as youth workers in the middle of the map. They explain that they would place the other cards at different distance from the middle considering the frequency or closeness of the links they have with these different groups of people, organisations or institutions. They also indicated the kind of literacy demands that would be associated with each of these cards.

Figure 10.3 Literacy sponsorship identified at *L'Envol*

This activity was aimed at understanding where the different literacy demands originated from in the two community-based organisations. Because of space constraints, I am not able to include in my thesis detailed descriptions of the two maps created by the youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. From this activity, I was able to make a list of the sponsors of literacy and of the kind of literacy demands they posed. Sponsors of literacy can initiate a (or a series of) literacy event(s) which involve(s) specific reading and writing requirements, what I think of as literacy demands. I then present different configurations of literacy sponsorship related to the literacy demands experienced by the young people. Literacy mediation was sometimes part of these configurations. This is highlighted and explained with visual support, concrete examples from the field notes, and extracts from the interviews (first phase) and workshops (second phase).

The youth workers and the young people had to deal with certain literacy demands associated with various groups of people, organisations and institutions. So these are the source of specific literacy practices, which place demands on the young people,

that I see as literacy sponsors. These sponsors communicated differently with people. They had different expectations and requirements in general, but also with regards to reading and writing. They used literacy practices for different purposes, and different genres and registers. In this section, I present the different sponsors identified by the youth workers in five categories.

The first category of sponsors of literacy is institutional. The vast majority of the sponsors of literacy identified by the youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* were related to the Canadian or Québec Governments and included public services such as education, employment, justice and criminality, health and social services, and immigration. Institutions from various levels of the public school system in Québec were placed on the two maps: secondary schools, adult education centres, vocational centres, and *cégep*. The agencies related to employment were Service Canada and *Emploi-Québec* which were both responsible for programmes that the organisations and the young people were benefiting from. Institutions associated with the public justice system were also identified (police and court). Many health and social services were mentioned: *CSSS*, *centre jeunesse*, hospital, and RAMQ (see Glossary available in Appendix A). The '*Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles*' was another government agency mentioned. The literacy demands associated with these government institutions could be described as bureaucratic literacies: application forms, official letters, reference letters, contracts, consent forms, annual reports, evaluation reports, intervention plans, police statements, legal documents, etc. A large number of texts present in the organisations were aimed at providing information: leaflets, websites, and emails. These were in a way literacy demands in themselves; being placed in a certain place to be read by young people. With the exception of the literacy demands associated with accounting, most of these bureaucratic and

information containing literacies were addressed to the young people attending activities at *Le Bercail* or *L'Envol*.

The second category of sponsors is other community-based organisations that were collaborating with *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. The youth workers mentioned community-based organisations offering services of various kinds: food banks, employment, social housing, and so on. The youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* explained to me that the literacy demands originating from these community-based organisations were mainly aimed at exchanging information about their services (by email, or phone). These organisations might also provide leaflets and posters addressing young people to *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* to promote their services. The youth workers would also occasionally refer young people to other community-based organisations to receive specialised services. For example, they could refer the young people to another community-based organisation specialising in young people's employment in order to update their CV and write a cover letter. The youth workers would then help the young person to book an appointment with an employee of this community-based organisation (by email or phone).

Another category of sponsors of literacy identified was the two organisations themselves—*Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. The youth workers seemed conscious of the fact that they often asked the young people to read and write during the activities they organised. They were using different genres: activity sheets, recipes, written instructions, checklists, board games, therapeutic writing (writing about personal problems), artistic creations, timesheets, information about various topics (gardening, photography, plants' properties, etc.), and online searches.

The next category of sponsors of literacy is related to young people's social networks (family, friends, colleagues, etc.). The youth workers said that they rarely have to deal

with literacy demands initiated by this group of sponsors. They mentioned that the young people might ask them to read text messages, emails, and letters they had received from a friend or a family member. The young people would ask them their opinion about the text, and advice about how to reply to it. This category of sponsors is generally related to vernacular literacies.

The final category of sponsors of literacy I identified is related to the young people's (future) employers. The youth workers at *Le Bercail* said that Darya had to produce documents (CV and cover letter) to get employed in a convenience store. They helped her to write these documents. My data indicate that the employers might be more important sponsors of literacies than what was indicated on the maps created by the youth workers.

Figure 10.4 Extract from a fast-food restaurant's application form

In the first phase of data collection Charles also explained that he would sometimes help the young people fill out application forms required by employers. Figure 10.4 shows a form that Charles helped young people fill out. This form had to be completed in order to apply for a job in a fast-food restaurant. Charles pointed out to me two of the questions that young people struggled to understand '*Avez-vous déjà été*

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cautionné? Une caution vous a-t-elle déjà été refusée?' Charles did not remember what the exact meanings of these questione were. He admitted that these questions were difficult to understand even for him. I found a definition of the term '*cautionné'* in a document prepared by a literacy association: '*cautionné: approuvé par quelqu'un (habituellement dans un sens légal)'* ('be approved by someone (usually in legal terms)') (Geoffroy, 1998). There is no equivalent of '*cautionné'* in English. The two questions on the form use legal terms to ask the applicants if they have ever been successful in getting a line of credit, a credit card, a lease for a flat, etc.

10.2.1 Configurations of literacy sponsorship

Having identified different sponsors and the literacy demands they produce, I now draw on my literature review, and on the interviews, observations, and workshops data to present the different configurations of literacy sponsorship observed at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. By configuration I mean the different arrangements or interactions between the following elements: literacy sponsor(s), sponsored people, literacy demand(s), and literacy mediator(s). I identified five configurations of literacy sponsorship. Other configurations could potentially be possible, but these are those I observed at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. I present the different configurations of literacy sponsorships I observed separately. However, it is important to mention that these different configurations might in fact occur simultaneously.

The first configuration illustrated in Figure 10.5 represents a situation in which a sponsor of literacy initiates a literacy demand which involves specific reading and writing requirements. Young people or youth workers would respond to it without any support.

In this configuration, the sponsor of literacy contacts the young people or the youth workers directly. This was particularly present in the youth workers' everyday work. They had to reply to emails sent by other organisations or fill out reports which would then be sent to funding bodies.
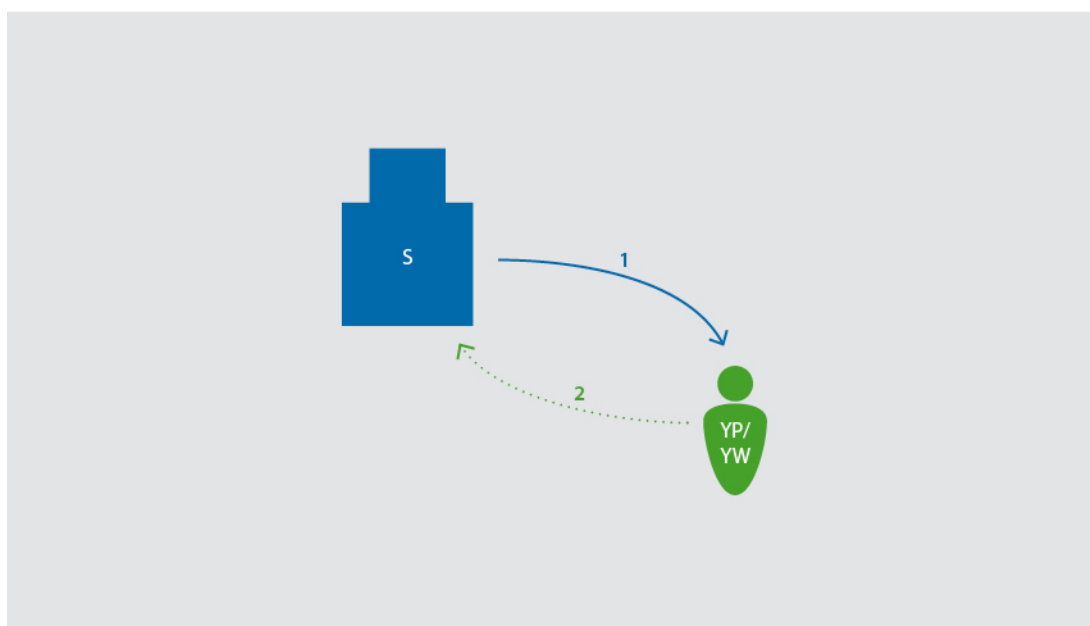
Key: YP: young people; S: sponsor; YW: youth workers; Blue arrow: literacy demand; Green arrow: reply or action undertaken following the literacy demand; Numbers: indicate the sequence of actions (literacy events)

Figure 10.5 Configuration one—Literacy sponsorship which does not involve literacy mediation

In relation to bureaucratic literacies, some young people mentioned ignoring official letters received by institutions (see Cédric's example, Figure 10.1). This would also be included in the first configuration. To indicate that the reply to the sponsor of literacy might be ignored the green arrow is dotted.

The next configuration of literacy sponsorship involves literacy mediation (see Figure 10.6). The data generated from the activity around an important letter received by the young people suggest that young people often needed support to comply with the literacy demands initiated by institutions.
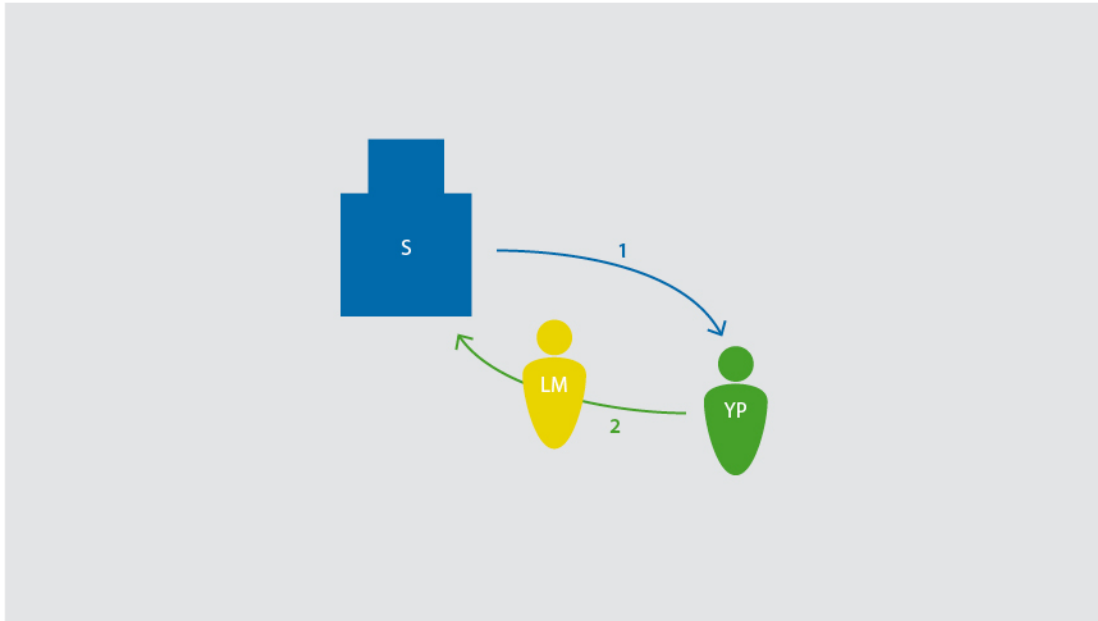
Figure 10.6 Configuration two(a)—Literacy sponsorship involving literacy mediation

In Section 10.1.1 about literacy mediation, I explained that some young people would search online—using Google or Wikipedia—in order to understand bureaucratic documents they received by mail. Others said they would ask family members, lawyers, friends, and/or also the youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. I observed many examples of this type of configuration in both organisations. Laurence's example presented in Section 10.1.1, illustrated how youth workers played the role of literacy mediator, trying to help her renew her health insurance card. The situation presented is more complex than the graphic presented above, but it can summarise what happened. Laurence received a renewal letter for her health insurance card (literacy demand) from the *RAMQ* (literacy sponsor). She encountered problems in getting access to health services and asked the help of Frédérique and Éve-Lyne (literacy mediators). With the help of Tommy (also a literacy mediator) they found out how to comply with the requirements of the institution.

Another variation of this second configuration is when young people encounter specific problems and need to access services offered by an institution (see Figure 10.7). This configuration is particularly related to bureaucracies and institutions, since their services might not be widely known by the population, as well as their procedures. As mentioned in Sections 2.3 and 2.4, I define bureaucratic literacies as any texts produced by institutions and their bureaucracies that relate to their ways of organising their actions and of communicating with people (e.g. contracts, forms and letters). For example, one might have to find online or in person (e.g. from the job centre, a governmental institution, and community-based organisation) a form in order to receive financial aid from the state (e.g. social assistance programme).

Key: YP: young people; S: sponsor; LM: literacy mediator; Blue arrow: literacy demand; Green arrow: reply or action undertaken; Numbers: indicate the sequence of actions (literacy events)

Figure 10.7 Configuration two(b)—Variation of literacy sponsorship involving literacy mediation

For example, Frédérique (literacy mediator) helped a young pregnant woman (the sponsored) filling out a form related to her pregnancy (literacy demand). Frédérique helped her to find the form on the Québec Government's site (literacy sponsor) to

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receive maternity leave benefits and supported her in filling it out. Because of her situation (pregnancy) the young woman had to fill out these forms in order to receive financial benefits. This young woman did not have any support from her family and could only count on Frédérique's help through her pregnancy. In this variation of the second configuration, the power distribution is even more unbalanced since the young people need to have certain prior knowledge about an institution in order to find the appropriate text (letter, form, reference letter, etc.). It is reasonable to assume that some young people might not know about the programmes offered to parents in Québec (e.g. Québec Insurance Plan) and would therefore not apply to it. Literacy mediators such as Frédérique can let the young people know about these beneficial opportunities. They also share their knowledge of an institution with the sponsored and help them find or process the appropriate text, and understand the sponsors' requirements.

The third configuration (Figure 10.8) illustrates a situation in which a literacy mediator plays the role of an intermediate between the young people and a sponsor. At *Le Bercail*, I observed this situation when the young people (sponsored) had to sign a contract (literacy demand) with Service Canada (literacy sponsor) in order to receive the state benefits for their participation in the programme *Mobili-T*.
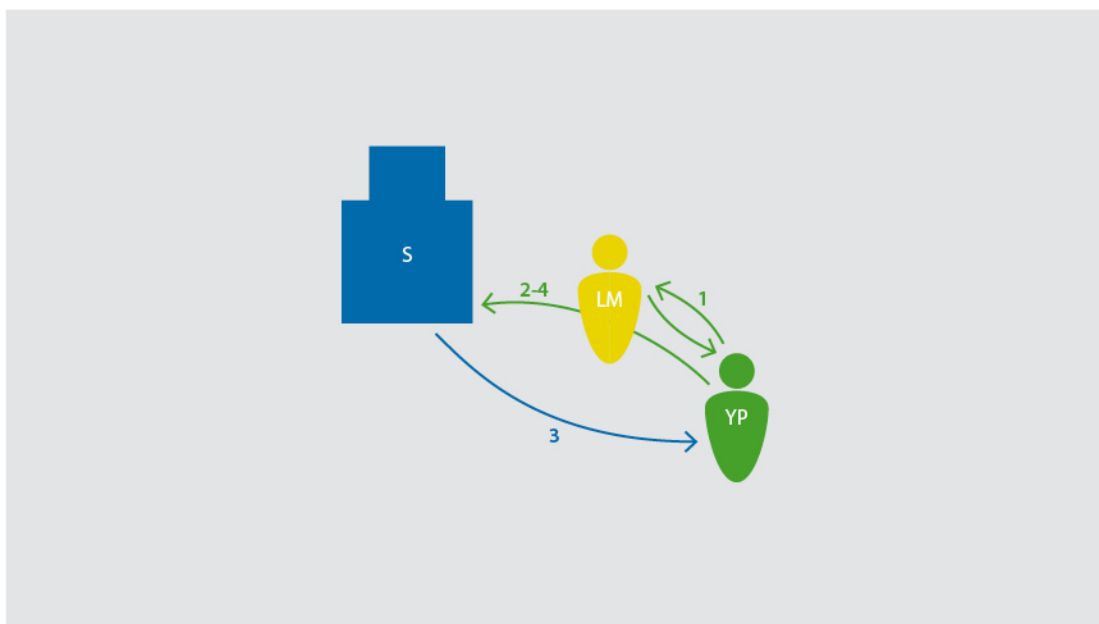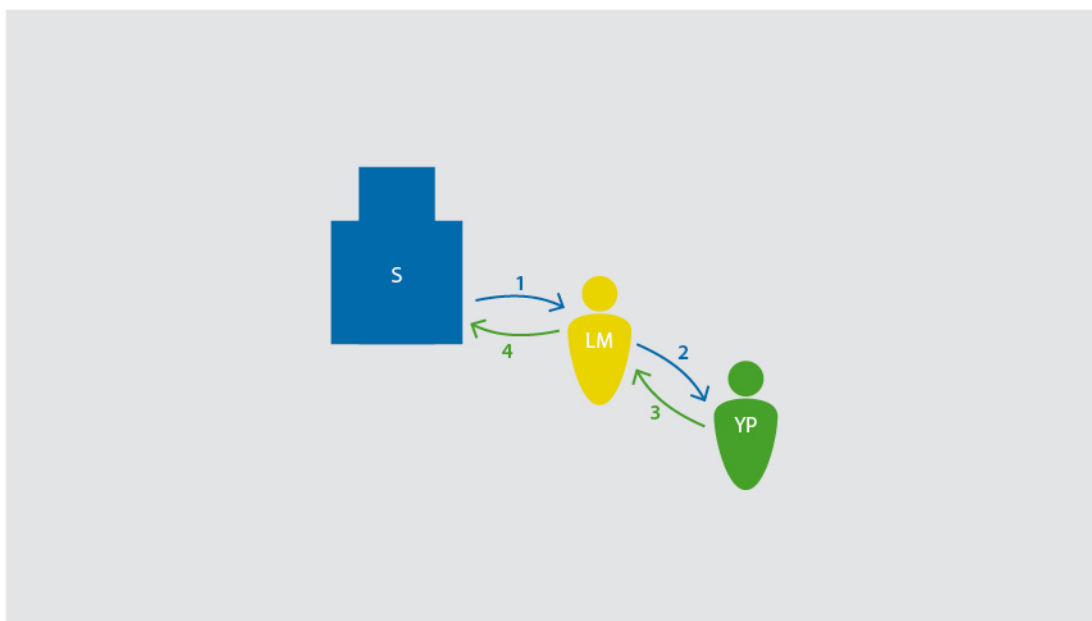
Key: YP: young people; S: sponsor; LM: literacy mediator; Blue arrow: literacy demand; Green arrow: reply or action undertaken following the literacy demand; Numbers: indicate the sequence of actions (literacy events)

Figure 10.8 Configuration three—Literacy sponsorship using a literacy mediator as an intermediate

In Section 10.1.2, I provided the example of the 'fake' contract that Tommy had given to the young people to sign (see Excerpt 10.5). Just before this exercise, the young people had also signed 'real' contracts that set the conditions of their participation in the *Mobili-T* programme. The youth workers would then pass on this contract to Service Canada. Ève-Lyne, Frédérique, and Tommy (literacy mediators) were present when the young people signed this contract. They explained to them what this document was about and gave a concrete example of how they could, for example, manage their extra hours in order to take a holiday in the summer. The youth workers at *Le Bercail* were intermediates between Service Canada and the young people.

I observed another example of this configuration at *L'Envol* when the youth workers had to give payment receipts to the young people on behalf of the '*Office Municipal*

de l'Habitation (OMH)' [Municipal Housing Office]. The youth workers seemed aware of the paradoxical situation they were in as illustrated by this excerpt:

Excerpt 10.8 An activity about the dual roles of the youth workers at *L'Envol*

Two young people—Pierre-Luc and Cassandra—were looking at papers left on the table. These were small flyers for an activity organised at *L'Envol*. It was about the supervised flats programme. Élise said, 'Ah, it's good that you are looking at that.' She explained to the young people that during this activity, the youth workers would clarify their 'dual' roles. She said that as part of their job, they have to defend young people's rights, but at the same time, they have to make sure that they respect the rules of the housing programme. She added that this also had an impact on their funding. She explained that it would be good if they could attend this meeting.

L'Envol, 10 April 2012

Their institutional partnerships put the two community-based organisations into delicate situations where they also had to be the representative of other institutions which had a degree of financial control over young people's lives. The youth workers were intermediates between these institutions and the young people, but could still adopt a critical stance towards them. For example, at *L'Envol* the youth workers would help the young people to appeal against an increase in their rent if the young people felt this decision was not justified or unfair.

The fourth configuration observed (Figure 10.9) at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* is more diffuse than the others. By 'diffuse' I mean that this configuration does not necessarily involve any specific literacy events or action undertaken to read literacy demands. This configuration is directly related to the semiotic landscapes described in Section 6.2. As mentioned before, the posters and leaflets in the premises of *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* invited young people to engage in particular practices: join a Facebook group, take part in a support group, use needles safely, use condoms, call a help line, see a doctor, etc. I also consider these as literacy demands, since they were placed in the organisations to be read, and invite the young people to undertake certain actions. The

young people were free to use this information or not, depending on their needs. The organisations' semiotic landscapes were representative of their partnerships with other organisations and institutions (sponsors of literacy).
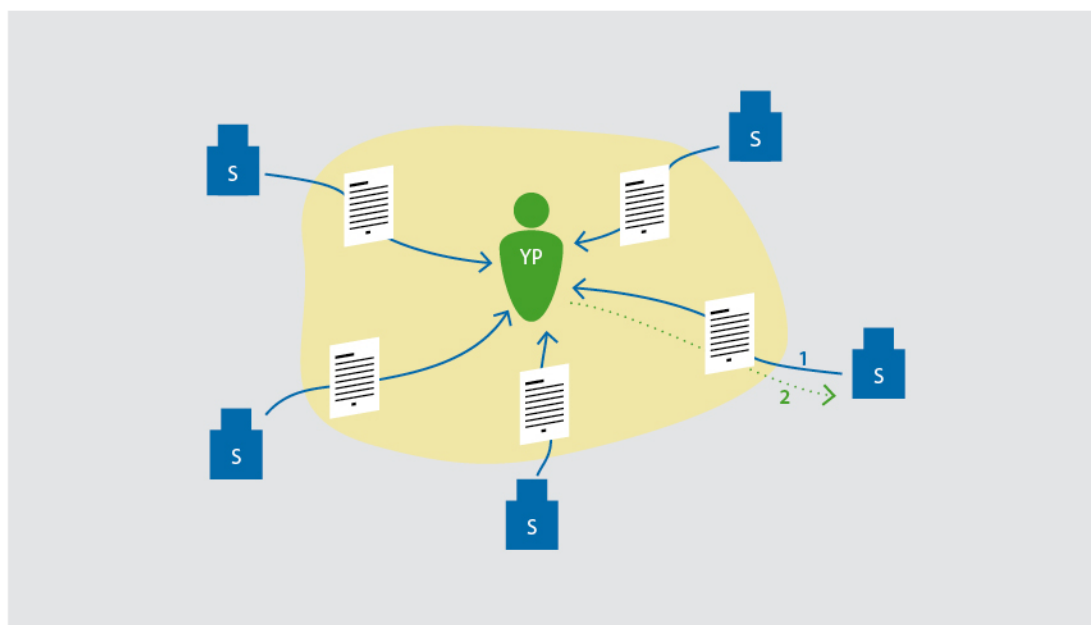
Key: YP: young people; S: sponsor of lliteracy; White rectagles: texts; Yellow area circle: potential literacy mediation; Blue arrow: literacy demand; Dotted green arrow: potential reply or action undertaken following the literacy demand; Numbers: indicate the sequence of actions (literacy events)

Figure 10.9 Configuration four—Diffuse literacy sponsorship and potential literacy mediation

Two examples of this configuration were the needle box at *L'Envol* and the sanitary products offered at *Le Bercail*. That these different partnerships existed might not have been obvious to the young people. Yet, they were bombarded with information originating from other organisations and institutions with which *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* were collaborating. Based on what the youth workers told me it seems that the young people were not paying attention to the texts present on the premises. This might be explained by the quantity of texts on the walls and the fact that these texts stayed on the walls for a long period of time. The young people did not see them anymore; they had become routinized and invisible. Based on my observations, it

seemed that in order to be considered by the young people, these texts needed to be introduced by the youth workers, therefore taking on the role of mediator. Talking about the posters and leaflets present in the premises of the organisations with the young people and using those as the starting point of an activity are both forms of literacy mediation. An example of this was the discussion that Ève-Lyne had with the young people at *Le Bercail* about a poster that promoted the services of an organisation helping people facing an unplanned pregnancy. During that group discussion, Ève-Lyne talked about the various types of contraception. She also talked about sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy. Some young people shared their experience of certain types of contraception. They also talked about friends who had experienced unplanned pregnancy. Ève-Lyne's comments were in line with the underlying narratives of these posters (see Section 6.2.4). I suggest that the discussions around posters, leaflets, and other texts present in the organisations could also be more critical; giving the young people opportunities to challenge the narratives the various texts on display seem to imply about them.

In the fifth and last configuration observed (Figure 10.10) the role of literacy sponsor and mediator overlap. This last configuration is related to the double role that *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* were often playing. They were initiating a large number of literacy demands, but their employees (youth workers) were also supporting the young people in fulfilling them.
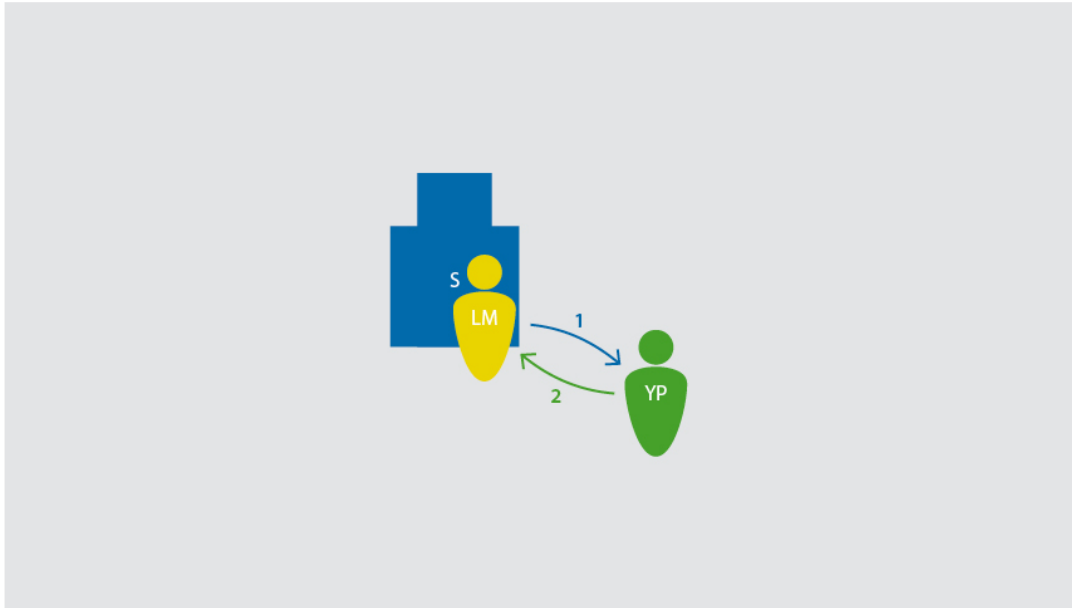
Key: YP: young people; S: literacy sponsors; LM: literacy mediator; Blue arrow: literacy demand; Green arrow: reply or action undertaken following the literacy demand; Numbers: indicate the sequence of actions (literacy events)

Figure 10.10 Configuration five—Overlap between the role of literacy sponsor and mediator

At the beginning of the fieldwork at *Le Bercail*, Ève-Lyne, Frédérique, and Tommy organised a game so that the young people could get to know each other better. They asked the young people to think about two true statements and one lie about themselves. The others then had to guess which of the three statements was false. The young people had to write down their statements on a flipchart board placed in front of the group. This literacy demand did not have any other further purpose than creating a feeling of belonging amongst the young people participating in the *Mobili-T* group. I noticed that the youth workers made sure they would be next to the young people while they were writing; helping them to write without making errors so that they did not feel embarrassed in front of the group (literacy mediator). The youth workers initiated this literacy demand as part of their employment at *Le Bercail* (literacy sponsor), but they also made sure that it would be a positive experience for the young people (sponsored), and that they would learn from it.

10.3 Conclusion

The concept of sponsors of literacy as proposed by Brandt (1998) is based on research interviews but my ethnographic insight suggests that the concept merits being refined. Combining both in-depth interviews and an ethnographic approach can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the others involved in literacy learning. Considering that Brandt's work (1998) is based on autobiographical interviews only, and that literacy mediation is often an invisible (Mace, 2002) aspect of people's literacy practices, it is not surprising that the role of the 'others' as mediators is not discussed in her work in relation to literacy sponsorship. The examples Brandt (1998) presents are powerful and well-articulated, but they are centred on an individual often opposed to more powerful others and institutions. At times she mentions the intervention of others as mediators, but she does not explain who they are. Based on my literature review, I found that one of the main limitations of current research into literacy sponsorship is that the roots of sponsorship are not always systematically identified. This can lead to a certain ambiguity in the way the concept is applied. People with different roles can be involved between the sponsors and their sponsored. People who are often intermediates are thought to be the sponsor of literacy, but in fact they are just the representative of an institution, a part of the chain.

As mentioned before, literacy mediators can bridge between different genres, registers, and narrative. When sponsors introduce literacy practices which require a specific language, a genre, a register or which address narratives the sponsored are not familiar with, they might ask for the support of a literacy mediator. Literacy mediation can then be a resource vis-à-vis the demands related to literacy sponsorship. I argue that in my study, literacy mediation was often needed as a response to literacy sponsorship in young people's lives. It is therefore a good complementary term to

sponsors of literacy. When literacy mediation occurs, it is in reaction to literacy sponsorship. But literacy sponsorship can occur without literacy mediation (see Configuration One in Section 10.2.1).

Because the young people participating in my study were experiencing precarity, they needed access to the services of various institutions (health services, financial support, housing support, etc.). The access to these services was mediated by literacy. Their participation at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* was also aimed at improving their living conditions and ameliorating their situation of precarity. Within the two organisations, the young people also had to comply with certain literacy demands initiated by more distant sponsors of literacy. The youth workers were often acting as literacy mediators with regards to these literacy demands. The youth workers were undertaking this role with great concern for young people's autonomy and learning. In that sense, I argue that literacy mediation—as I observed it at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*—was a form of 'powerful literacies' (Crowther, Hamilton and Tett, 2001; Tett, Hamilton and Crowther, 2012) (See Section 2.4). This signifies that the situations of literacy mediation I observed seemed to give back power to the young people. The youth workers described situations when they helped the young people to deal critically with bureaucratic literacies (in order to access essential services (see Excerpt 10.4 in Section 10.1.1).

Literacy mediation in the two organisations challenged dominant literacies, and offered new ways of teaching and learning. This could be related to what Lave (2011) calls apprenticeship (see Section 2.6.3). She explains that this form of learning is more complex than someone who knows something showing someone who does not know how to do it. According to her, everybody involved in this process learns something since 'apprenticeship is a process of changing practice' (Lave, 2011: 156). My data

indicate that the youth workers accompanied the young people in learning new ways of dealing with bureaucratic literacy and instigating a change in their practices. The youth workers were also learning through this process (see Sections 10.1.1 and 10.1.4).

Brandt (2001) explains how the sponsored can have agency in the context of literacy sponsorship. I argue that agency can also be situated at another level in a situation of literacy sponsorship. The work of some organisations and their employees cannot always be fully explained by either literacy mediation or sponsorship concepts. In some cases, these people mainly transmit literacy demands originating from distant sponsors of literacy, but sometimes they might adopt a critical stance towards them (see Configurations 3, 4, and 5). They are not sponsors of literacy but 'local' representatives of it.

Research has shown that there are often differences between what individuals, organisations or groups of people do and what was initially planned in the programmes or public policies they 'execute' (see Bourdon et al., 2011). They might do more than just passing on the literacy sponsorship without questioning it, especially in the case of community-based organisations in Québec that have a long tradition of a 'conflictual cooperation' relationship with the state and its funding bodies. Duval et al. (2005) explain that community-based organisations often adopt a conflictual cooperation strategy with the state that implies 'the possibility of making alliances with institutional partners while maintaining and improving the ability for advocacy and mobilisation outside of formal settings' (23). This means that employees working for the state—directly or indirectly—might adopt a critical stance regarding decisions made at a higher up level. I suggest that this idea of 'conflictual cooperation' was also present in the literacy mediation offered by the youth workers

to the young people. This was noticeable in Section 10.1.1 (see Excerpts 10.3, 10.4, and 10.8). Even though the two community-based organisations participating in my study received funding from the state, they were introducing bureaucratic literacies in a critical way to the young people. They were introducing them in different ways from those that the institution had initially planned (see Section 10.1.1, Excerpt 10.5). The youth workers would also help the young people to contest a decision they both judged to be unfair regarding their situation (e.g. rent, financial benefits, and access to programmes). The young people with the support of the youth workers were thus contesting the practices of these institutions, and this process of contestation was generally mediated through literacy.

The above implies that their actions were both informed by the policies of the institution they worked for/with, and also by the needs and contexts of the people. I argue that the employees and organisations in this 'in-between situation' also had agency over the process of literacy sponsorship. This means that they might not apply the rules of a specific literacy and institutional practice blindly. They might be flexible and accommodate the young people and their interests. In the case of the two community-based organisations I worked with, the youth workers were particularly concerned about young people's autonomy and learning. They were also sensitive to maintaining their partnerships while being committed to ameliorating the situation of precarity that the young people were experiencing (See Excerpt 10.8 in Section 10.1.1).

I would like to suggest a new concept that could account for this situation and could be complementary to the concepts of literacy mediators and sponsors of literacy. The suggested concept is 'literacy intermediates'. Literacy intermediates are individuals who represent sponsors of literacy but who can adopt a critical stance towards the

sponsored literacies. As Brandt (2001) notes, literacy is rarely self-generated and this concept of literacy intermediates underlines this dynamic. The literacy intermediate's actions are influenced by both the sponsors and the sponsored. They also have a certain agency in the way they transmit the literacy demands initiated by the sponsors. They could potentially facilitate—in some case complicate—the relations between sponsors and sponsored. I argue that literacy intermediates can also be included under the term of literacy mediation. As mentioned before, literacy mediation is an umbrella term that includes cultural brokerage, scribing, ghost writing, guiding light, and so on. The new term I suggest highlights another aspect of literacy mediation which had not been yet identified.

11 CONCLUSION

In this last chapter I offer an overview of the findings of my study, coming back to each of its specific questions, and also to the main research objective. I then discuss the limits of the present study. I also present its contributions at five different levels. I conclude this chapter by explaining the way I plan to disseminate the findings and also the further work that could be undertaken based on my study.

11.1 An overview of the study and return to the specific research questions

The study was conducted in two community-based organisations—*Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*—for young people aged 16 to 30 who were in a situation of precarity in Québec (Canada). The services offered at either one or both organisations include a youth shelter for runaways, supervised flats, a gathering place, structured workshops, artistic programmes, and career advice services. There were two main phases of data collection: the first phase took place in April and May 2012, and the second in April 2013. During the first phase, I conducted interviews (n=21), collected documents (n=69), took photographs (n=193) and carried out participant observation (122 hours). In 2013, I organised five participatory workshops as a form of 'member reflections' (Tracy, 2010).

Drawing on the New Literacy Studies (NLS), I consider literacies as social practices rather than technical skills. Accordingly, in my study I paid particular attention to the literacy events and practices people are involved in, and to their attitudes, feelings, values, and social relationships associated with literacies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

The study had four specific research questions:

1) What are the kinds of literacy practices used by youth workers and young people in community-based organisations?

2) In what specific contexts do such literacy practices occur?

3) What potential roles could the literacy practices used in community-based organisations play in young people's personal and professional lives and with regard to their own literacy practices?

4) In what ways can the literacy practices used in these organisations potentially empower young people in a situation of precarity?

11.1.1 First specific question

With regards to the first specific question, I found that the six forms of vernacular literacies developed by Barton and Hamilton (1998) and later extended by Ivanič et al. (2009) with four more categories describing the literacy practices present in colleges, could be applied to the community-based organisations participating in my study (see Chapter 6). I suggested that the literacy practices used at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* were hybrid. It seemed that this hybridity was not just between school-related and vernacular literacies, but also with other practices associated with various aspects of the young people's lives such as therapy, work, social relationships, and relations with the state.

The data presented in Chapters 5 and 6 also suggest that there was an amalgam of different '*rapports à l'écrit*' (Besse, 1995) in the two organisations. Both the young people and the youth workers had experienced situations at school and in other domains of their lives that influenced their perceptions of themselves as writers, readers, and also of their literacy abilities. This amalgam shaped the practices that the youth workers and the young people engaged in in the two organisations. This was

visible for instance in the use of therapeutic literacies or digital technologies by the youth workers with the young people.

As described in Chapter 8, the youth workers drew on the ways they used digital technologies in their personal lives for their everyday work. They avoided counselling online and preferred talking to the young people face-to-face or on the phone whenever it was possible. Digital technologies allowed them to get information about the young people in order to adjust their intervention and create a relationship of trust. The youth workers also explained that the writing traces left by text messages and on Facebook could be used as a support when they had to confront young people about 'inappropriate' behaviour (e.g. drug use). The organisations were not just offering access to computers and the Internet; the youth workers were also supporting young people in learning how to use them. I observed activities during which the young people were invited to reflect on their uses of digital technologies (e.g. Facebook). Both organisations engaged in reflective and non-judgemental discussions about the use of digital technologies (e.g. Facebook and YouTube). I suggested that this could be pursued and other topics could be addressed such as the kind of language used online, piracy, and cyber addiction.

11.1.2 *Second specific question*

In relation to the second specific question—In what specific contexts do such literacy practices occur?—my findings confirmed Bélisle's claim (2003) that literacy is everywhere in community-based organisations. Literacy had an important place in all the activities organised at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. Similarly to Bélisle (2003) I did not observe any activity that did not involve reading and writing. The physical context of the two organisations was saturated with texts. In Chapter 6, I mentioned that these

texts had various functions: ranging from regulation to partnership, social inclusion, critical thinking, and self-expression. These functions highlight important aspects of these organisations; their relationship with other institutions, their aims (e.g. developing social inclusion, critical thinking, and self-awareness), and their implicit narratives about young people and their problems. This links back to the 'narratives' (Hamilton, 2012) about young people I presented in the introduction of the thesis (Chapter 1).

This study was conducted in a context of social turmoil in Québec. Young people were protesting against a rise in tuition fees and for more inclusive and universal access to higher education. In my study, I worked with a group of young people who felt unconnected to this situation. The participants were aged 16 to 30, had had their education interrupted, were receiving financial support from the government through the social assistance programme, had a low level of formal education (for the majority), and were experiencing a situation of precarity that affected various aspects of their lives (work, education, accommodation, social relationships, health, etc.). The narratives I introduced in Chapter 1 presented a deficit view of young people in a situation of precarity.

The semiotic landscapes (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010) at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* also presented similar underlying narratives suggesting that these young people were more at risk of adopting behaviour considered as negligent or inadequate such as unprotected sex, bullying and violence at school, dropping out of school, homophobia, and unsafe cycling. The content of the texts present at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* pointed to potential problems that the young people might experience such as unplanned pregnancy, abortion, HIV, hepatitis, and suicidal thoughts. While I recognise the importance of informing young people about these very serious issues, I suggest that it

is important for community-based organisations such as *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* to be aware of the messages they are disseminating through their semiotic landscapes. The data indicated that the young people were not paying any attention to these texts because of their large quantity and concentration in the two organisations. I suggested that the youth workers should continue to discuss the posters, leaflets, and other texts present in the organisations with the young people. This could give the young people opportunities to challenge the narratives the semiotic landscapes imply about them.

In Chapter 1, I also presented the paradoxical position of *coopération conflictuelle* (conflictual cooperation, Duval et al., 2005: 23) that characterised the context in which the community-based organisation had to work in. They received funding from the state, but also had to adopt a critical stance towards it in order to defend and advocate for the group of people attending their activities. This position of conflictual cooperation was generally mediated through literacy, and more specifically bureaucratic literacies. I will come back to this point in Section 11.1.4.

11.1.3 Third specific question

The third specific question of my thesis was: What potential roles could literacy practices used in community-based organisations play in young people's personal and professional lives and with regard to their own literacy practices?

As explained in Section 5.2, the majority of the young people participating in my study had difficult—even painful—experiences at school. They all had interrupted their studies at least once. Many young people said that they had only discovered an interest and abilities in literacy when they went back to education at the adult education centre. My findings also indicate that the young people might also have

reconciled themselves with literacy through their participation at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. I observed various situations during which the youth workers invited the young people to use literacy in a way that resembled what is usually done in schools. In most of these situations, the youth workers adopted a flexible approach, asking for a volunteer or giving the young people the choice of the topic they wanted to read or write about. The positive relationship between the youth workers and the young people also seemed to affect their engagement with literacy at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol.*

In Chapter 9, I suggested that the youth workers were sometimes acting as literacy sponsors (Brandt, 2001) on behalf of their employer or funding body, as well as literacy mediators (Malan, 1996; Baynham and Masing, 2000; Jones, 2000a; 2000b; Kalman, 2001; Papen, 2007; 2010). I called this double role 'literacy intermediates'. This signifies that the youth workers would generally, if not always, support the young people in doing the task they asked them to do. It seemed that the youth workers would make sure that the young people would succeed and had positive experiences.

This brings back to the fore the notion of apprenticeship (Lave, 2011) presented in Chapter 2. The young people were encouraged to learn by doing, and this, with the support of the youth workers. Based on my data, it also seemed that the youth workers were learning from this process. It was therefore not only a unidirectional process during which a more experienced person shows how to do something to someone who does not know (ibid.). The young people were given the opportunity to change their ways of doing things; learning new ways of doing everyday practices. This was done through activities that the young people could relate to such as shopping, and reflecting about their uses of Facebook. The young people were brought into contact with a variety of genres (e.g. recipes, CVs, cover letters, bureaucratic documents)

through their participation in these two organisations. They learned about them with the support of the youth workers. The young people also learned about themselves through the workshops organised at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*; building self-esteem, self-confidence, and learning how to express themselves positively.

The theme of literacy mediation emerged as a major aspect in my study. I found that literacy mediation was central to the work of the two community-based organisations taking part in my study. The young people had to comply with certain literacy demands initiated by more distant and powerful sponsors of literacy such as the Québec or the Canadian Governments and their institutions. The youth workers were often acting as literacy mediators with regards to these literacy demands. I also observed that apprenticeship occurred through literacy mediation. Young people, and sometimes the youth workers, learned how to deal with complex bureaucratic literacies (e.g. forms, letters, official websites). They learned (or relearned) how to respond to these bureaucratic demands, sometimes challenging and protesting against unfair decisions made by these powerful sponsors. This last point relates directly to the last specific question of this study.

11.1.4 Fourth specific question

The fourth specific question includes two words that are central to this study: empowerment and precarity. This question reads as follows: In what ways can the literacy practices used in these organisations potentially empower young people in a situation of precarity? In the first chapter of my thesis, I explained that for me 'precarity' (Barbier, 2002; 2005) is a multidimensional phenomenon. I use the term 'situation of precarity' (Bourdon and Bélisle, 2008) in order to reflect the complex and changing relations between the opportunity structures and public policies, the

individual characteristics of a person or a group, and the political, economic and historical context. This signifies that individuals have agency, but it can be constrained by 'external forces' (Smyth and Wringley, 2013) over which they have limited power. I also adopted the term precarity in my study because of its political and critical implications. As Waite (2009) argues, it is important to look at the processes that create precarity. I also argue that it is equally important to look at processes that can counter the experience of precarity for groups of people. Because the young people participating in my study were experiencing precarity, they needed access to various institutions' services (health services, financial support, housing support, etc.). The access to these services was mediated by literacy.

This links back to the concept of empowerment as presented in Chapter 1. Empowerment means that individuals, communities and organisations can have a say in the decisions that concern them. It also implies that the individuals or groups already have the competencies to do this, or that they have the potential to develop those (Ninacs, 2008: 15). Based on the findings of my thesis, it seems that the role of literacy mediators that the youth workers often played at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* fostered young people's empowerment and also countered the situation of precarity they experienced. The youth workers offered essential support—generally involving literacy mediation—for the young people so that they could access public services.

Consequently, I argue that literacy mediation in the two community-based organisations participating in my study can be qualified as a form of 'powerful literacies' (Crowther, Hamilton and Tett, 2001; Tett, Hamilton and Crowther, 2012). This signifies that literacy mediation can offer an alternative to counter dominant literacies and it can support learning. As described in Section 10.1, the youth workers generally encouraged young people's autonomy and learning by helping them to react

to bureaucratic documents by going through the process <u>with</u> them, and not doing it for them.

In Chapter 10, I also suggested a new term—literacy intermediates—that could better describe the kind of literacy mediation that the youth workers were doing. This term implies that while acting as literacy mediators, the youth workers would take into consideration both the policies and practices of the institution they worked for/with, and the people's needs and contexts. This directly relates to the paradoxical position of conflictual cooperation (Duval et al., 2005) presented in Chapter 1. This paradoxical position that the organisations have within the state also affects the practices of their employees. This is visible in the ways they work as literacy mediators with the young people. I argued that the youth workers were sometimes representing sponsors of literacy but they were also adopting a critical stance towards them and the sponsored literacies.

11.2 Return to the main research objective

The main research objective was to understand the relations between the literacy practices used in community-based organisations and those of the young people in a situation of precarity who attend their activities.

In order to understand this, I first explored, in Chapter 5, the young people's literacy practices and also their past experiences in relation to reading and writing with their family and at school. The young people often compared their literacy practices with those of their family. They either took their distance towards the literacy practices present in their family, or associated themselves with them. The young people's experiences at school were closely related to their perceptions of themselves and of

their abilities as learners, readers and writers. For some, positive experiences at the adult education centre had given them back more confidence regarding their literacy abilities. This indicates that their *rapports à l'écrit* had evolved and been influenced by their families, but also their experiences at school. Young people selected one (or more) significant literacy artefact they wanted to talk about during the interview. These were generally associated with important people (e.g. parents, best friend, and teachers) and events in young people's lives (e.g. immigration, death of a parent, therapy). This highlighted the fact that literacy was sometimes associated with profound emotions (e.g. mourning) and difficulties in young people's lives.

In Chapter 5 I also reported on the young people's uses of digital technologies such as computers, mobile phones (text messages), video games, and sites such as Facebook, Google, YouTube and Wikipedia. The young people explained to me how they used digital technologies to learn new things (e.g. English as a second language), access cultural products, solve problems, express themselves through identity curation (Potter, 2012; Davies, 2014) and design (Kress, 2003), organise their social lives, and communicate with friends and family. I showed that the personal problems that the young people experienced in their lives—due to their situation of precarity—were also present online. Young people's online literacy practices cannot be 'divorced' from their offline lives (Thomas, 2007).

My data indicate that the young people participating in my study had extremely rich and complex literacy practices. Also, they were reading and writing a lot in their everyday lives. Their literacy practices were often multimodal and multilingual. This challenges the narrative or preconceived idea presented in Chapter 1, according to which young people in a situation of precarity do not like to read and write and do not engage in these kinds of activities (Bélisle, 2003).

At *L'Envol* and *Le Bercail*, the youth workers had more power over the literacy practices used during the workshops than the young people. However, young people's vernacular literacy practices were accepted and generally valued. The data presented in Chapters 5 and 6 indicate that the boundaries between the literacy practices used in the organisations and those of the young people were flexible. For example, the youth workers were open to discussing and looking at the young people's vernacular literacy practices including reading and writing in different languages, and also graffiti and tattoos. The youth workers sometimes adapted their activities to fit more closely with what the young people were doing in terms of reading and writing (e.g. therapeutic writing or an activity about Facebook). My findings also suggest that the youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* were contributing to building—or more precisely rebuilding—a positive relationship with academic literacies and with school for the young people.

As illustrated in Chapter 8, the two community-based organisations participating in my study played an important role in allowing young people to access digital technologies. The presence of digital technologies in the organisations might represent an attractive aspect for the young people. The fact that they allowed young people to use them for their personal purposes, without judgement, was also important. The youth workers in my study seemed to have understood how important digital technologies were in young people's lives. They understood that they needed to be present where the young people are, namely online. This is even more relevant considering the findings of my study that suggest that the problems that the young people experience in their lives were also present online.

My analysis around the concepts of literacy mediation and literacy sponsorship underlined the fact that what was going on in terms of reading and writing at *Le*

Bercail and *L'Envol* was not exclusively shaped by the young people and the youth workers. Some powerful literacy sponsors (e.g. state, institutions, and businesses) were imposing various literacy demands onto the young people and the youth workers. The youth workers were often acting as literacy mediators—cultural brokers and literacy intermediates—for the young people.

11.3 Limitations of the study

Because of the word limit, I was not able to pursue some elements of the analysis that I would have like to include in my thesis. In this section I briefly present a few limitations of my work.

My analysis of the semiotic landscape of the two organisations could have been more systematic and detailed. The use of Scollon and Wong-Scollon's geosemiotic theory (2003) would have allowed me to explore the nexus of practices in the two organisations. I could have also included the semiotic landscape of the neighbourhoods where the organisations were situated. This was too ambitious to include in the present thesis and would have been another thesis in itself.

Another limit of my study is related to the lack of examples of bureaucratic documents in my description of literacy mediation. This can be explained by the fact that I did not feel comfortable to ask the young people to take pictures of these document because of the sensitive subjects they were about (health issues, financial matters, immigration, etc.). The lack of example means that the readers have to draw on their own experience with these documents to understand what they could look like. Also, my analysis of how the young people dealt with these practices is limited to what they told me about it since I was not able to discuss a specific bureaucratic document with

them. Moreover, I did not conduct interviews with representative of the institutions identified as sponsors of literacy (see Section 10.2). It would have been interesting to get their points of view and understand who exactly was initiating the literacy demands and how much power individuals have over their content (use of templates, centralised system, personalised letter, etc.).

Another limitation of my study is related to my analysis of the digital literacies used by the organisation, especially Facebook and text messages. In my study, I decided not to befriend my research participants on Facebook. This means that my descriptions of their uses of Facebook only draw on my observations in the field work and on what they told me about it. I made this decision because I preferred to allow the young people to decide what they wanted to show me rather than to look at their profile without them. This means however, that I was not able to include screenshots of my participant's Facebook pages. It would have been interesting to have examples of interactions between youth workers and young people on Facebook or by text messages. These kinds of data would have allowed me to explore further questions of multimodality, identity curation, design, and relationship building. I did not ask about this to maintain the good relationships I had with the participants, I did not want them to have the feeling that I was seeking to study details of their private life and relations with youth workers.

Regarding the methodology and methods used, one of the limitations of my study is related to the relatively short period of time that I spend in both organisations. I conducted participant observation over a period of two months. I took this decision because it was adapted to the group of young people I was working with. Young people in a situation of precarity tend to move frequently and to have a greater geographic mobility (Bourdon and Bélisle, 2008). It consequently seemed preferable

to stay for a shorter but intensive period of time in the two field sites. I made this decision in order to follow the same young people, get to know them, and to build a relationship of trust with them.

11.4 Contributions

In this section, I explain how my study contributes at five main levels: 1) context of the study, 2) methodological approach and methods, 3) clarification of concepts and proposition of a new one, 4) concrete implications for youth work, and 5) public narratives about young people and literacy.

11.4.1 Context of the study

My doctoral thesis is one of the first studies conducted in Québec to explicitly adopt a NLS perspective. It applies the NLS perspective to new contexts; community-based organisations in Québec. The study builds on past exchanges between the English and French literacy studies (see Barton and Papen, 2010; Fraenkel and Mbodj, 2010). My thesis makes available to English-speaking academics the findings of studies conducted in Québec that had never been translated in English to this day. The studies conducted in Québec share important similarities with the NLS, for example in their understanding of literacy as entailing much more than a set of skills.

11.4.2 Methodology and methods used

This study also makes a contribution to the field of literacy studies because of its methodology and methods. The methodological approach was ethnographic, critical,

and participatory. I used creative and innovative methods to make sure that my research participants could shape the data collection process and also have a say at the analysis stage.

The use of literacy artefacts during the interviews with the young people was a useful method that allowed me to access very personal and sensitive aspects of their lives in relation to literacy. This method could be an alternative to other collaborative methods such as asking the young people to take pictures of their literacy practices. This kind of method requires more material (e.g. cameras or mobile phones) which might not be available and affordable, especially to PhD students.

The second phase of data collection involved participatory workshops with young people and youth workers at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. Tracy (2010) argues that qualitative researchers should create opportunities for participants to engage in some form of 'member reflections' (844). According to her, these occasions 'allow for sharing and dialoguing with participants about the study's findings, and providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation, and even collaboration.' (Tracy, 2010: 844). I agree with Tracy and this was one of the aims of the second phase of data collection. I adapted the workshops to the contexts of the community-based organisations I worked with. The methods used were visual, collaborative, creative and included activities such as mind mapping, and card sorting (see Chapter 3). Some activities I used were inspired by the Literacies for Learning in Further Education (LfLFE) project (Ivanič et al., 2009). These participatory workshops were essential to my understanding and analysis of the more complex concepts I used in my thesis such as literacy mediation and sponsors of literacy. Through some of these activities (1, 2, and 5), I was able to discuss aspects that helped me to identify the relations between these two concepts (see Sections 3.2.2 and 10.2).

11.4.3 Clarification of concepts

In Chapter 1, I explained the roots of the community-based milieu in Québec. I introduced the term 'precarity' which allowed me to avoid labelling the young people in categories such as disadvantaged, vulnerable, marginalised, from poor socio-economic backgrounds, and so on. I preferred the term '*en situation de précarité*' ('in a situation of precarity') to underline the multidimensional and situational nature of the precarity experienced by young people. This concept could also be useful for other researchers who are concerned about not labelling the group of people they are working with.

I also introduced the concept of *rapport à l'écrit* (Besse, 1995) that highlights the biographical and also emotional aspects of people's literacy practices. These two aspects are not clearly covered by the concept of literacy practices. *Rapport à l'écrit* refers to people's relationship with literacy that evolves over time, and through events and encounters. The use of the concept of *rapport à l'écrit* invites researchers to retrace significant experiences that people have had with reading and writing. Going back to the roots of people's *rapports à l'écrit* can help greatly in understanding their present literacy practices. Other concepts such as 'guiding lights' (Padmore, 1994) and literacy sponsors (Brandt, 2001) are also closely related to *rapport à l'écrit*. The first one refers to the significant people who influenced a person's *rapport à l'écrit*. The second explains how external forces—often more powerful ones such as the state and its institutions—also affect people's *rapports à l'écrit*. The expression 'accumulated layers of sponsoring influences' (Brandt, 2001: 56) describes this effect that sponsors can have on the *rapport à l'écrit*.

Continuing the work of clarification that Papen (2007; 2009; 2010; 2012a; 2012b) started around the concept of literacy mediation, this thesis provides a thorough

overview of the academic literature on the topic. I explained in detail the differences between the various concepts used to talk about individuals helping others cope with certain literacy demands. In view of the academic literature, I suggest that the concept of literacy mediation encompasses all the other terms used and can fully explain the complexity of the process. Literacy mediation can be used to refer to any situation during which individuals help others cope with certain literacy demands; it is always interactional, can occur in both informal and formal contexts, can involve professionals or members of the social network, is often multimodal and multilingual, bridges between different genres and registers, and always involves issues of power distribution.

In my thesis, I also clarify the meaning of the concept of sponsors of literacy. By looking at different studies which had used this concept, I found that it was a rather ambiguous concept which had been interpreted in various ways. I argue that sponsors of literacy are rarely individuals. Sponsors are generally distant and they do not usually know the people they sponsor. I noticed that in previous studies researchers attempted to identify individuals as sponsors of literacy, without questioning which institutions they were attached to.

In my data, I observed situations where it was difficult to differentiate if the youth workers were acting as sponsors of literacy or literacy mediators. That led me to question the relations between these two concepts, and to suggest a new one. I suggested the term 'literacy intermediates'. Literacy intermediates are individuals who represent sponsors of literacy but who adopt a critical stance towards the literacies they sponsor and their practices. I argued that literacy intermediates can also be included under the umbrella term of literacy mediation.

11.4.4 Concrete implications for youth work

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice. First, youth workers were not aware that literacy mediation was taking place, and of the power that some literacies (their functions, content and narratives) can have in society. The youth workers interviewed stated that they had never received training on this matter. I suggest that dialogue and exchanges between education specialists, teachers and youth workers might inform and improve the practices of all the social actors involved in young people's learning.

Literacy was often a grey area or invisible aspect of the work of the youth workers. Literacy mediation is not promoted as an important part of their work, and they do not receive training about it. All the youth workers participating in this study claimed that literacy was not a topic addressed in their initial training at college or university. Yet they have to navigate between extremely different and complex literacies. The youth workers explained that they learn how to deal with bureaucratic literacies by talking with their more experienced colleagues or from personal experience. Consequently, there might be a need to raise awareness concerning the important place literacy mediation takes in youth work. This could be done firstly by making youth workers and community-based organisations aware of the potential of what they are already doing without noticing it. Literacy mediation, as illustrated in the examples presented in this thesis (Chapter 10), can have a positive effect on young people's lives and might help counter their situation of precarity.

I suggested in Chapter 8 that ethical guidelines regarding the uses of digital technologies in youth work could be developed at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol*. The youth workers already had established certain elements that could be characterised as the professional use of Facebook or mobile phones in their work. They were not using

abbreviations or non-standard language nor doing counselling (only in exceptional occasion) on Facebook or via text messages. Because of their knowledge and experience, the youth workers should be involved in the establishment of ethical guidelines regarding the uses of digital technologies in their workplace. Some ethical issues remain to be clarified especially regarding the use of content found online for counselling or as evidence to confront young people. A module exclusively addressing issues of ethics online could also be added to the initial training of social workers and youth workers at the *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel* (henceforth *cégep*) or the university (see Glossary in Appendix A).

11.4.5 Addressing public narratives about young people and literacy

Because of the critical stance of this study, it also aimed at addressing public 'narratives' (Hamilton, 2012) about young people in a situation of precarity and their literacy practices. As part of my study, I wanted to give voice to people directly concerned with those narratives: the young people themselves, and the community-based organisations and the youth workers who are working with them. This is why I provided a substantial number of quotes throughout the thesis, which included the original words in French and an English translation of these.

Bélisle (2003) notes that there was a widespread 'narrative' or belief amongst some youth workers, and to some extent in society in general, according to which young people in a situation of precarity do not like to read and write and do not engage with such activities. The results of my doctoral study show that the young people at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* were not against literacy, and had rich and varied literacy practices. These results contradict the deficit view of young people mentioned above.

Another aspect that my study challenged is the preconceived idea whereby literacy and learning are confined to a formal kind of schooling. On this matter, one of the youth workers (Élise) told me during an informal chat that she often had the feeling that schools were looking down at the community-based milieu; thinking of their work as a mere source of unimportant social activities for young people. The findings of my study show that youth workers' work at *Le Bercail* and *L'Envol* was important in lives of the young people attending their activities. These young people learned about a variety of important topics (e.g. budgeting, social relationships, and self-awareness) and also learned new practices; including literacy practices such as therapeutic writing and bureaucratic literacies. A better understanding of the role of community-based organisations regarding literacy will help education specialists, teachers and youth workers to improve the continuity of services between schools and community and also to recognise the contribution of these organisations towards lifelong learning.

11.5 Dissemination of the results and further work

Since the beginning of my PhD, I planned a third phase to my study which would focus on the dissemination of my findings. My dissemination strategy has four levels: 1) young people, 2) youth workers, 3) community-based organisations, and 4) academic audience.

With the help of the youth workers at *Le Bercail* and at *L'Envol*, I want to contact the young people who took part in my study and send them a short summary of the findings of my study. These leaflets would use lay language and appealing visuals. I will also invite the young people to react to these findings by inviting them to a discussion session.

I will also organise a seminar session with the youth workers who took part in my study. I will also offer them the opportunity to write an article (in an academic or professional journal or a newspaper) or to present at a professional conference with me. Many of the youth workers I worked with are not employed any longer by *Le Bercail* or *L'Envol*, which would make this easier from an ethical point of view.

I would like to extend the dissemination of my findings to youth workers working in other community-based organisations in Québec. I am planning to offer free workshops in a few locations in Québec, publicising them through the youth workers' mailing list. I will also present my work in professional conferences attended by social and youth workers.

I have already presented some preliminary findings to various academic conferences in Europe. I am planning to further pursue disseminating the results of my finding in academic conferences, but also in academic journals.

Further research deserves to be undertaken about community-based organisations' uses of literacy with young people in a situation of precarity. Little is known about the uses of digital technologies by social and youth workers. This topic should be explored ethnographically, with a special attention to the online and offline interactions between the social/youth workers and their participants. Another aspect that should be further explored is the semiotic landscapes of community-based organisations. More work is needed in order to understand how the semiotic landscapes are perceived by young people, and how they are constructed by the organisations and other sponsors of literacy. Also, further ethnographic studies should be conducted on the relations between the concepts of literacy mediation and literacy sponsorship. The concept of literacy intermediates that I suggested in this thesis could potentially be applicable to other contexts.

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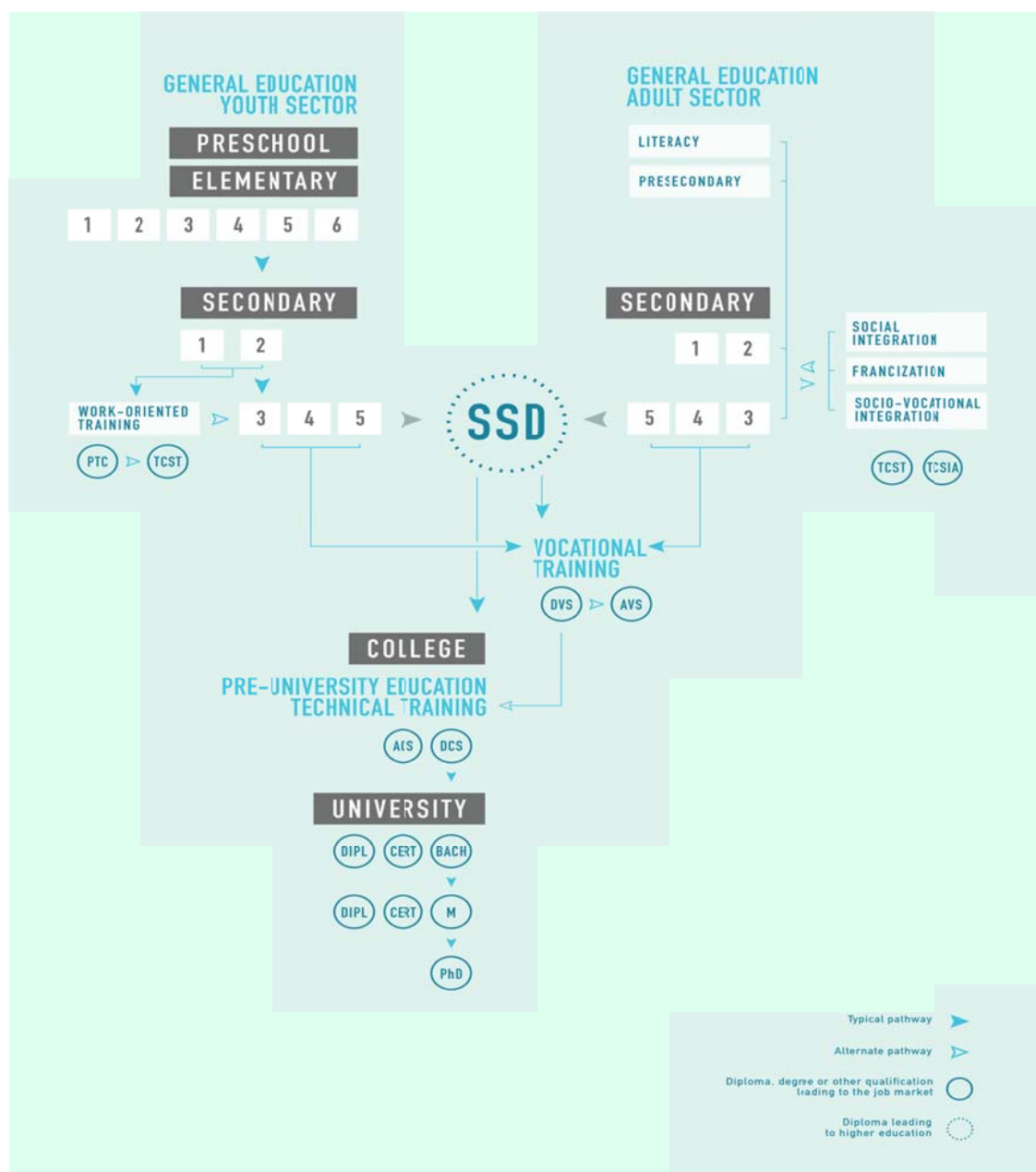
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Glossary

Full name of the organisation or institution	Acronym	Description
Centre local de services communautaires	CLSC	The 'Local Community Services Centres' are part of the health and social service centres (CSSSs, see below). They provide health and social services such as nursing care, medical consultations, blood tests, vaccinations, morning-after contraception. They are also involved in schools, workplaces, and at people's home. Source : http://www.santemontreal.qc.ca/en/where-to-go/local-community-services-centres-clscs/
Carrefour jeunesse-emploi	CJE	The *CJEs* are community-based organisations offering services for the social and professional insertion (inclusion) of young people. They offer services such as career advising, group activities for young people in a situation of precarity (as part of the *Alternative jeunesse* programme), and support for young entrepreuners, and for young people who want to establish themselves in rural regions. Source: http://www.rcjeq.org/les-cje/services-de-carrefours-jeunesse-emploi/
Centre de santé et de services sociaux	*CSSS*	The CSSSs are 'Health and Social Services Centres'. They are present all over the Province of Québec. CSSSs offer various health services to the population including doctor consultation, psychologist consultation, social worker follow up, sexually transmitted diseases testing, and so on. Source: http://sante.gouv.qc.ca/en/systeme-sante-en-bref/csss/
Centre jeunesse	CJ	CJs are Québec Government agencies that aim to protect children and young people. They offer psychosocial and rehabilitation services to children and young people in a situation of precarity and coming from difficult family backgrounds. Source: http://www.acjq.qc.ca/
Collège d'enseignement général	*Cégep*	According to the *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport du Québec* (2011): "[t]he colleges, or CEGEPs, provide regular preuniversity education in

et professionn el		two-year programs that make students eligible to apply for university. Technical three-year training programs prepare students to enter the labour market, in addition to allowing them to apply for university studies. Both paths lead to the Diploma of College Studies (DCS) […].” (2). Source: http://www.mrif.gouv.qc.ca/content/documents/inter/Fe uillet_ANG- FINAL_visionnement_lowres_10ao%C3%BBt11.pdf
Emploi- Québec *(Programm e d'assistance sociale*	EQ	*Emploi-Québec* is a Québec Government agency that aims at developing the workforce in Québec. It also aims to fight against unemployment, social exclusion and poverty. It runs 158 employement centres across Québec. *Emploi-Québec* offers various programmes including the Social Assistance programme for 'individuals and families who are unable to provide for their own needs'. The programme addressing the needs of young people in a situation of precarity is called *Programme alternative jeunesse* (see below). Source: http://www.emploiquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/about- us/
Maison de jeunes	MJ	*Maison de jeunes* (youth centres) are supervised gathering places that young people aged 12 to 17 can attend. They organise structured and flexible social activities for the young people to socialise and to meet significant adults (youth workers). Source: http://rmjq.org/a-propos-des-maisons-de- jeunes/
Office municipal de l'habitation	OMH	The OMH (Municipal Housing Office) is a public and non-profit organisation. The main mission of OMH is to manage and develop housing for individuals and families with low incomes. The OMH is funded by the Québec Government and offers social housing across the province. Source: http://flhlmq.com/livre/un-omh
Programme alternative jeunesse	PAJ	The PAJ (Youth Alternative Program) is for young people aged from 18 to 25 years-old who are experiencing precarity and receive benefits as part of the Social Assistance programme. The PAJ offers them the possibility to take part in workshops (called 'Jeunes en action') organised by community-based organisations such as the carrefours jeunesse-emploi. The Jeunes en action programme supports the young people to find or keep a job, or stay in or return to education.

		Sources : http://www.emploiquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/citizens/obtaining-financial-assistance/assistance-for-individuals-under-age-25/
		http://www.emploiquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/citizens/developing-your-skills-and-having-them-recognized/job-readiness/jeunes-en-action/
Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec	RAMQ	The *Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec* (RAMQ) is the Québec Government's health insurance board. It manages the public health and prescription drug insurance plans and it remunerates health professionals. Source : http://www.ramq.gouv.qc.ca/en/Pages/home.aspx
Service Canada	SC	Service Canada is a government agency that people can contact in order to get information and access to public services and programmes. For example, the following programmes can be access through Service Canada: Employment Insurance, Social Insurance Number, Passports, Apprenticeship Incentive Grants, and Wage Earner Protection Program. Service Canada is also in charge of the 'Skills Link Program' (see below). Source: http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/about/
Skills Link Program	SLP	Skills Link provides funding to employers and organisations to create employement opportunuities for young people a situation of precarity. Source : http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/epb/yi/yep/newprog/skillslink.shtml

Appendix B: Overview of the education system in Québec

Key:

ACS: Attestation of College Studies

AVS: Attestation of Vocational Specialization

BACH: Bachelor's

CERT: Certificate

DCS: Diploma of College Studies

DIPL: Diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées (advanced degree)

DVS: Diploma of Vocational Studies

M: Master's

PhD: Doctorate

PTC: Pre-work Training Certificate

SSD: Secondary Studies Diploma

TCSIA: Training Certificate In Sociovocational Integration Of Adults

TCST: Training Certificate for a Semi-skilled Trade

Comparative Chart of the Québec educational system and the British one

COMPARATIVE CHART			
Age	United Kingdom	Number of years in school	Quebec
06	Start of school	01	Start of school
07		02	
08		03	
09		04	
10		05	
11	End of elementary school	06	End of elementary school
12		07	
13		08	
14		09	
15		10	
16	End of middle secondary studies	11	End of high school
17		12	
18	End of advanced secondary studies	13	End of pre-university DCS
19		14	
20		15	
21	End of bachelor's degree	16	End of bachelor's degree

"Consequently

- The GSCE or CSE is equivalent to Secondary V in Quebec.
- The GCE-A/S Level is equivalent to a pre-university DCS in Quebec.
- The Bachelor's Degree is equivalent to the Bachelor's Degree in Quebec."

Source: https://sram.qc.ca/international-student/useful-information-by-country#british
(Accessed on the 13-10-2014)

Appendix C: Interview schedule for the young people

[This is a translation of the original schedule in French]

Section 1 – Your experience in the organization

In this first section, we will talk about how it goes for you here / in [organization name].

1. Can you explain to me how it usually goes at [organization name]?

    [Points to address if not mentioned by the interviewee.]
    - o Usual day;
    - o Type of activities;
    - o The other participants;
    - o Number of people;
    - o Places;
    - o Team.

2. When did you start attending [organization name]?

3. How did you get to know about [organization name]?

I will now show you some activity sheets that you have made here at [organization name]. I'll ask some questions to get your opinion on each.

4. **Can you explain to me what this activity is?**
   [Repeat these questions for all activities selected in collaboration with the young.]

   [Points to address if not mentioned by the interviewee.]
   - Objectives;
   - Places and premises;
   - The group;
   - Staff involved;

   - How does the group usually take part in this activity?
     - Resistance or Participation?

   - Do you consider this activity useful for you?
     - Why?

   - Have you learned something from this activity?
     - If so, what have you learned?

5. **Generally, what's it like for you when someone asks you to write about yourself?**

   - Do you have an example?

   - Do you have anything to say about [organization name] and the activities you are attending here?

Section 2 – Your use of literacy in everyday life

In this second section of the interview, we will talk about the use you make of literacy (reading and writing) in your life every day.

We will start by looking at the artefact that you brought.

6. **Can you explain to me what this object is?**
   [Repeat the question depending on the number of examples selected in collaboration with the youth.]

   [Points to address if not mentioned by the interviewee and if relevant.]
   - Places;
   - Person(s) involved;
   - Type(s) of activity;
   - Aim(s) or meaning.
   - Other artefact(s);

7. **Do you use the Internet or a cell phone to communicate with other people sometimes? Can you explain to me what your use of it is?**

   [Then ask specifically for the following categories.]
   - Facebook   Yes : _____   No : _____
   - MySpace   Yes : _____   No : _____
   - MSN   Yes : _____   No : _____
   - E-mail   Yes : _____   No : _____
   - SMS   Yes : _____   No : _____
   - Others_____

     _____

   - Which one(s) do you use the most?

   - Who do you use it the most with?

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8. **Do you live alone or with others?**
   8.1. If with other people: Do you live with your family or with a legal guardian?

   [Ask those questions in the past if the participant no longer lives with their parents or legal guardians.]

   - How are reading and writing seen in your family?

   - Are these activities present in your family?
     - If yes, do you have examples?

9. **Do you sometimes write when you are going through difficult times?**
   9.1. For example write a diary, letters, songs, poems, graffiti, etc.

   - Do you have an example?
     - Who were the people involved in this event?

10. **Do you sometimes read when you are going through difficult times?**
    10.1.   For example search for solutions on the Internet, read true stories, information books, novels, etc.

    - Do you have an example?
      - Who were the people involved in this event?

    - Do you have anything to say about the reading and writing that you do in your daily life or during difficult times?
    -

Section 3 – Your school path

In this third section, we will talk about your overall experience at school with reading and writing.

11. How was reading and writing at school for you?

- What was easier?
  - Do you have an example?

- What was harder?
  - Do you have an example?

- Do you have anything else to add about the school you went to and the reading and writing activities that you did there?

Section 4 – Your future projects

In this fourth section, we will talk about your future projects, what you would like to do after your participation in [project name] and also your long-term projects.

12. What are your short-term plans? In the coming months or after your participation in [project name]?

- What are the steps in this plan?

- Who are the people or the organizations that can help you with this plan?

- Do you have to read and write to realize this plan (e.g. application forms, written assignments)?
  - Do you consider this as an obstacle to your project?

13. What are your long-term projects, in the coming years?

- What are the steps in this project?

- Who are the people or the organizations that can help you with this project?

- Do you have to read and write to realize this project (e.g. application forms, written assignments)?
    - Do you consider this as an obstacle to your project?

- Do you have anything else to say about your future projects?

_____

Age : _____

Sex :   F ____   M ____

Educational levels completed: _____

_____

_____

Last job held (position) :   _____
        Date:_____   Place: _____

Educational levels of your parents:

        Father: _____Mother: _____

Parents' occupations:

        Father: _____Mother: _____

Conclusion

_____

- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience in the organization or about your experience with literacy?

- How was the interview?

_____

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Appendix D: Interview schedule for the youth workers

[This is the original schedule in French]

Section 1 – Description de l'organisme et de votre rôle dans celui-ci

Dans cette première section, je vais vous poser quelques questions afin de mieux connaître l'organisme pour lequel vous travaillez ainsi que votre rôle et vos tâches dans celui-ci.

1. Pouvez-vous me décrire l'organisme pour lequel vous travaillez ?

    [Points à aborder si non mentionnés par la personne interviewée.]
    - Services offerts;
    - Objectifs;
    - Type de participants;
    - Activités de groupe;
    - Nombres de personnes;
    - Lieux;
    - Équipe;
    - Partenaires.

2. Pouvez-vous me décrire quel est votre rôle dans l'organisme ?

    [Points à aborder si non mentionnés par la personne interviewée.]
    - Tâches;
    - Équipe de travail;
    - Temps plein ou temps partiel;
    - Lieux.

- Avez-vous autre chose à dire au sujet de vos tâches ou de l'organisme pour lequel vous travaillez?

Section 2 – Présence de l'écrit dans l'organisme

Dans cette deuxième section, je vais vous poser des questions afin d'explorer les diverses formes de lecture et d'écriture qui sont présentes dans votre contexte de travail et spécialement lors de vos interventions auprès des participantes et des participants.

Je vais d'abord vous présenter quelques exemples d'activités récoltés ici dans l'organisme et lors desquels l'écrit est sollicité.

3. **Pouvez-vous m'expliquer en quoi consiste cette activité ?**
   [*Répéter ces questions selon le nombre d'exemples sélectionnés en collaboration avec l'intervenante ou l'intervenant.*]

   [*Points à aborder si non mentionnés par la personne interviewée.*]
   - o Objectifs;
   - o Signification et utilité;
   - o Avec quel type de jeunes ?;
   - o Les lieux;
   - o Personnel impliqué;

   - Comment s'articule la relation de groupe lors de cette activité? (s'il y a lieu);

   - Quels apprentissages sont réalisés par les participants dans le cadre de cette activité (s'il a lieu) ?;

   - Est-ce que cette activité provoque la résistance ou l'engagement des participants ?;

   - Qu'est-ce qui provoque l'engagement ou le désengagement envers l'écrit dans le cas spécifique de cette activité ?

4. **De manière générale, est-ce qu'il y a certains types d'activités lors desquelles la lecture et l'écriture sont sollicités qui favorise davantage l'apprentissage des jeunes?**

   - Quels types d'écrit ?
   - Quels types d'apprentissage ?
   - Avez-vous un exemple concret en tête ?
   - Avez-vous autre chose à dire à ce sujet ?

Toujours concernant la présence de l'écrit dans l'organisme, les prochaines questions concernent davantage l'écrit administratif que vous avez à réaliser dans le cadre de vos tâches ici dans l'organisme.

5. **Pouvez-vous me décrire quel genre d'écrit administratif avez-vous à compléter dans le cadre de vos fonctions ?**
   5.1.1. Par exemple, il pourrait s'agir de demande de subvention, de formulaires, de dossiers de participants, de compte-rendu à remettre à un organisme subventionnaire, etc.

   - Qu'est-ce que cela représente en termes de temps dans vos tâches ?;

   - Quelles sont les formes les plus fréquentes ?;

   - Quels effets ces demandes d'écrit ont sur le type d'activités que vous mettez sur pied ?;

   - Quels effets ces demandes d'écrit ont sur votre disponibilité auprès des participants ?;

   - Quels effets ces demandes d'écrit ont sur la relation que vous avez auprès des participantes et des participants ?

   - Avez-vous autre chose à dire à ce sujet ?

Section 3 – Évènements et pratiques de l'écrit

Dans cette troisième section, je vais maintenant passer à des questions quelque peu différentes. Je vais vous mentionner quelques exemples de situations où l'écrit est présent et je vais vous demander s'il s'agit de situations que vous rencontrez à l'occasion dans le cadre de votre travail. Si oui, je vais vous demander de me donner un exemple concret dont vous vous souvenez.

6. **Un jeune vous demande de l'aide afin de compléter un formulaire ou afin de comprendre un document administratif qu'elle ou qu'il a reçu.**
    6.1. Par exemple, afin de compléter une demande d'admission ou afin de comprendre un document reçu de la part d'Emploi Québec ou d'une autre institution.
    [Répéter les questions ci-dessous pour les questions 7, 8 et 9]

    - Avez-vous un exemple concret de ce genre de situation ?

    - Est-ce une situation qui survient fréquemment ?

    - Si oui, comment cela se déroule habituellement ?

7. **Les compétences à lire et à écrire d'une participante ou d'un participant l'empêchent de s'investir dans certaines activités de l'organisme. Celui-ci vous demande de l'aide à ce sujet.**

8. **Un jeune partage avec vous ses écrits personnels et l'importance que cela joue dans sa vie.**
    8.1. Par exemple il pourrait s'agit de tag, de graffiti, de poésie, de chansons, de slam, de lecture, de tatouage, de journal intime, de lettre, etc.

9. **Un jeune utilise Internet ou un texto pour vous demander de l'aide.**
    9.1. Par exemple, en utilisant votre page Facebook professionnelle ou votre adresse courriel au travail ?

    - Avez-vous autre chose à dire au sujet de ces situations ou d'autres moments où l'écrit est central dans l'intervention ?

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Section 4 – Questionnaire

10. Sexe :   F _____ M _____

11. Diplôme ou dernier degré de scolarisation complété : _____
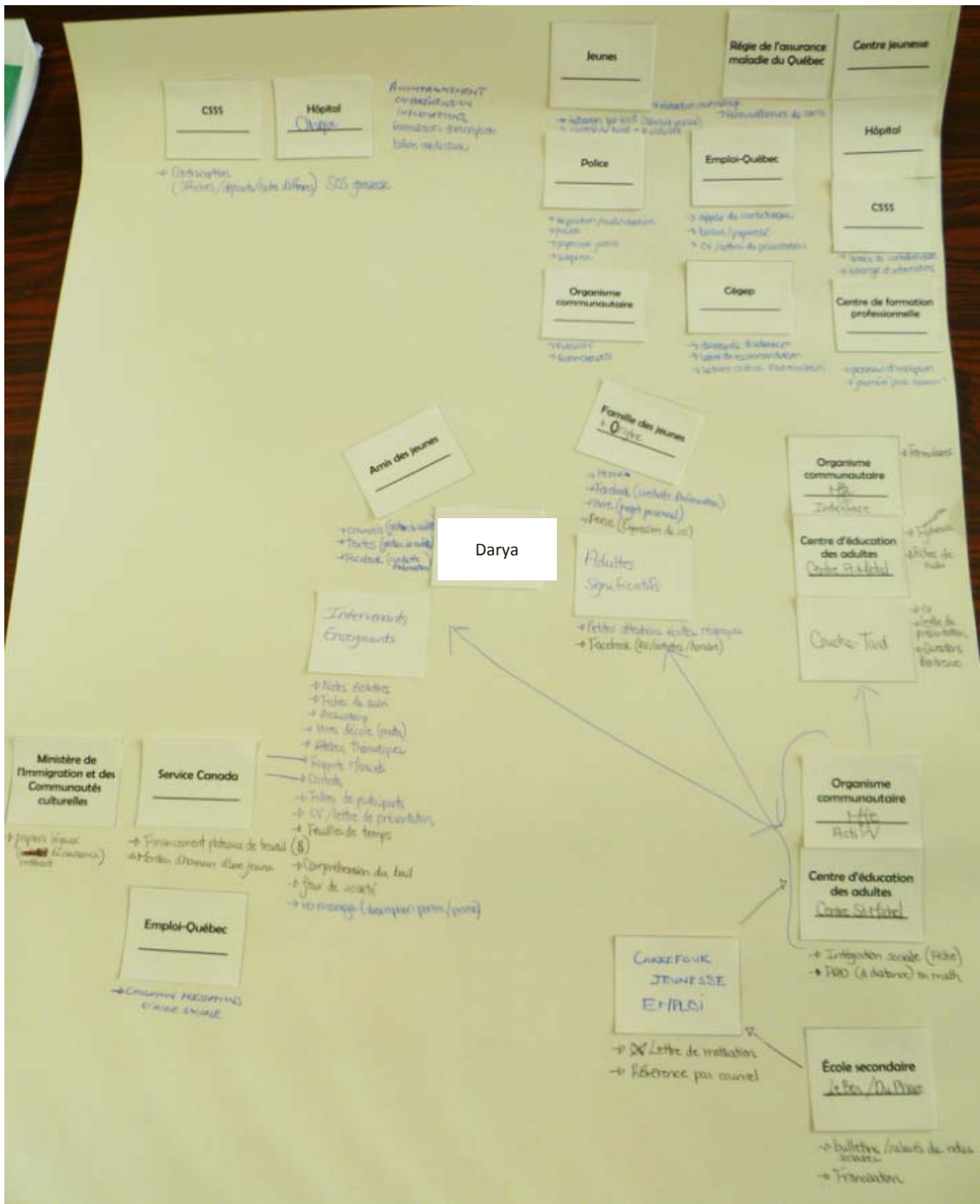
   _____

   _____

12. Poste occupé dans l'organisme : _____

13. Date de début: _____

Conclusion

- Est-ce qu'il y a autre chose dont nous n'avons pas parlé et dont vous aimeriez me faire part ?

- Comment s'est passé cette entrevue pour vous ?

Appendix E: Activity 1

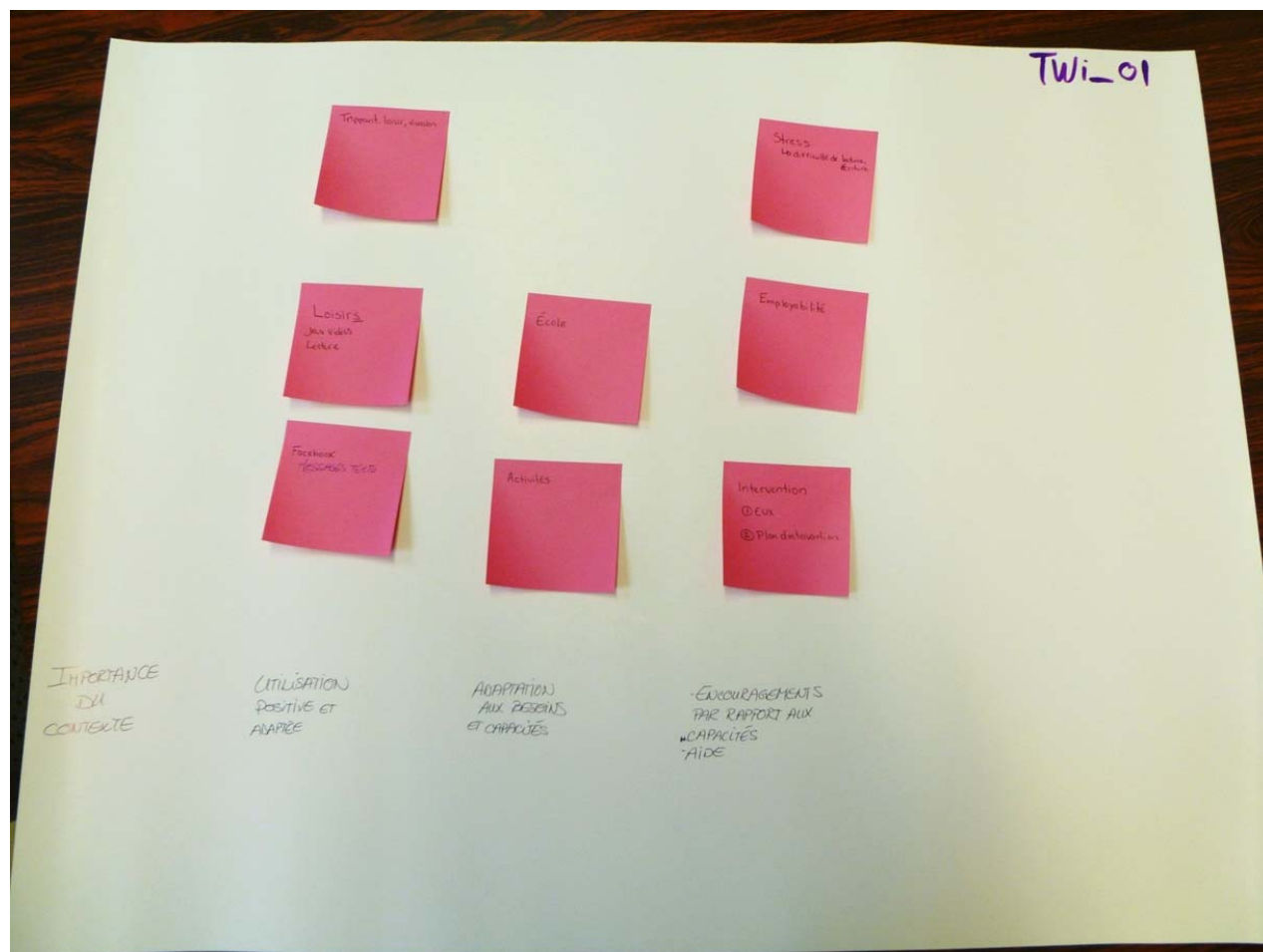**Activity 1 at *Le Bercail***

Participant's names: Ève-Lyne, Frédérique, and Tommy.

Activity 1 at *l'Envol*
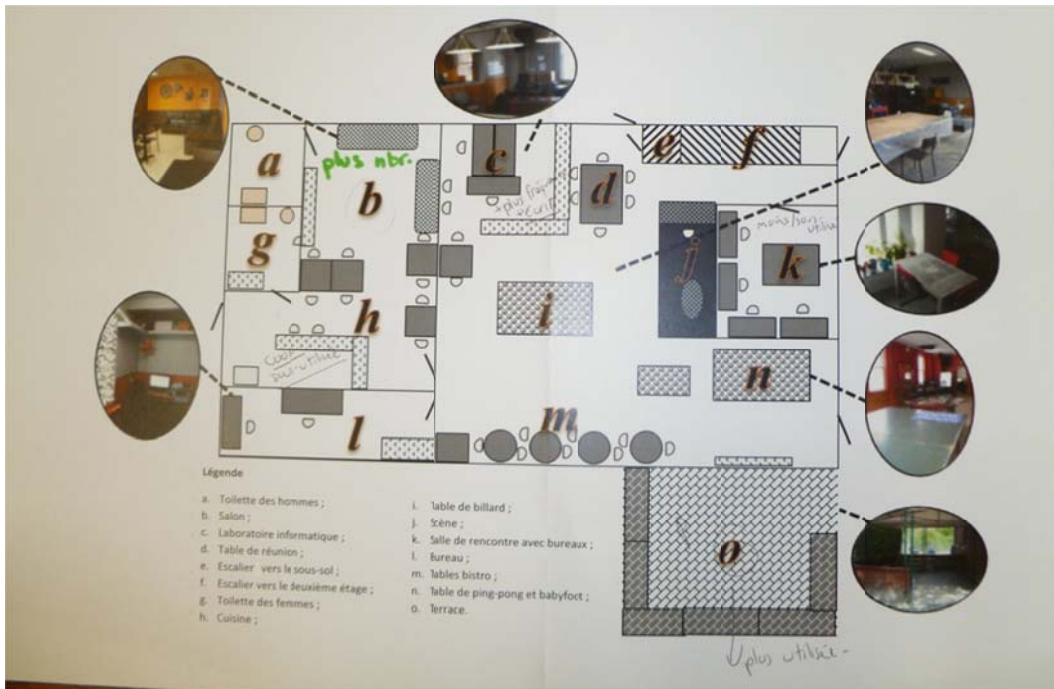
Participant's names: Catherine, Olivier, and Jonathan
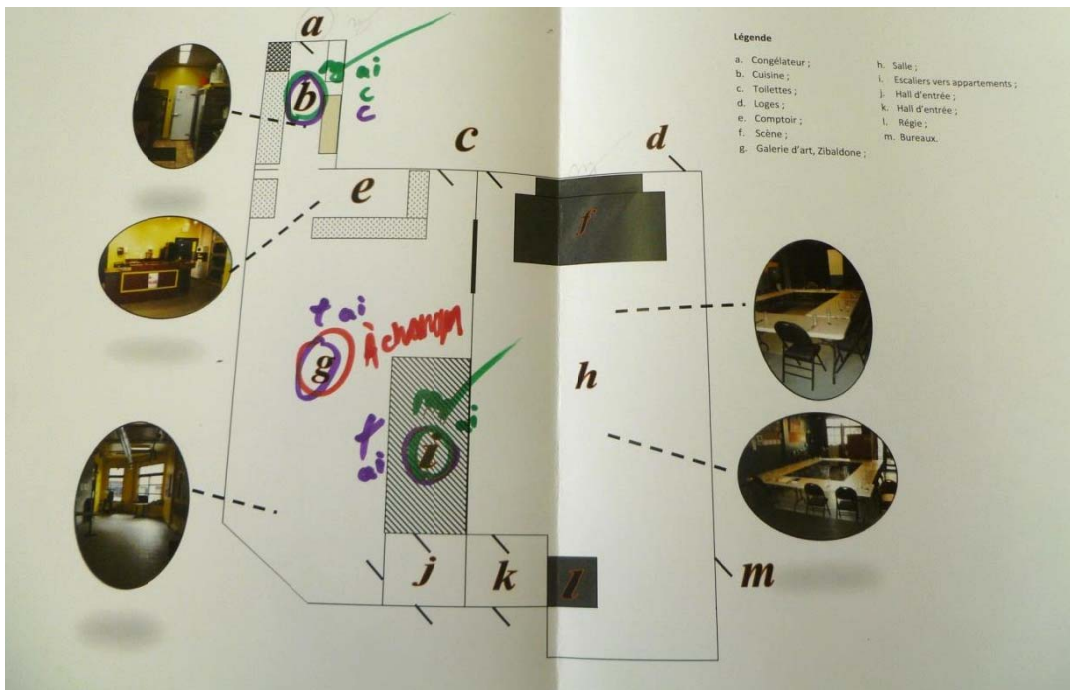
Appendix F: Activity 2

Activity 2 at *L'Envol*

Participant's names: Catherine, Olivier, and Jonathan

Appendix G: Activity 3

Légende

a. Toilette des hommes ;
b. Salon ;
c. Laboratoire informatique ;
d. Table de réunion ;
e. Escalier vers le sous-sol ;
f. Escalier vers le deuxième étage ;
g. Toilette des femmes ;
h. Cuisine ;

i. Table de billard ;
j. Scène ;
k. Salle de rencontre avec bureaux ;
l. Bureau ;
m. Tables bistro ;
n. Table de ping-pong et babyfoot ;
o. Terrace.

Activity 3 at *Le Bercail* (youth workers)

Participant's name: Charles

Légende

a. Congélateur ;
b. Cuisine ;
c. Toilettes ;
d. Loges ;
e. Comptoir ;
f. Scène ;
g. Galerie d'art, Zibaldone ;

h. Salle ;
i. Escaliers vers appartements ;
j. Hall d'entrée ;
k. Hall d'entrée ;
l. Régie ;
m. Bureaux.

Activity 3 at *L'Envol* (young people)
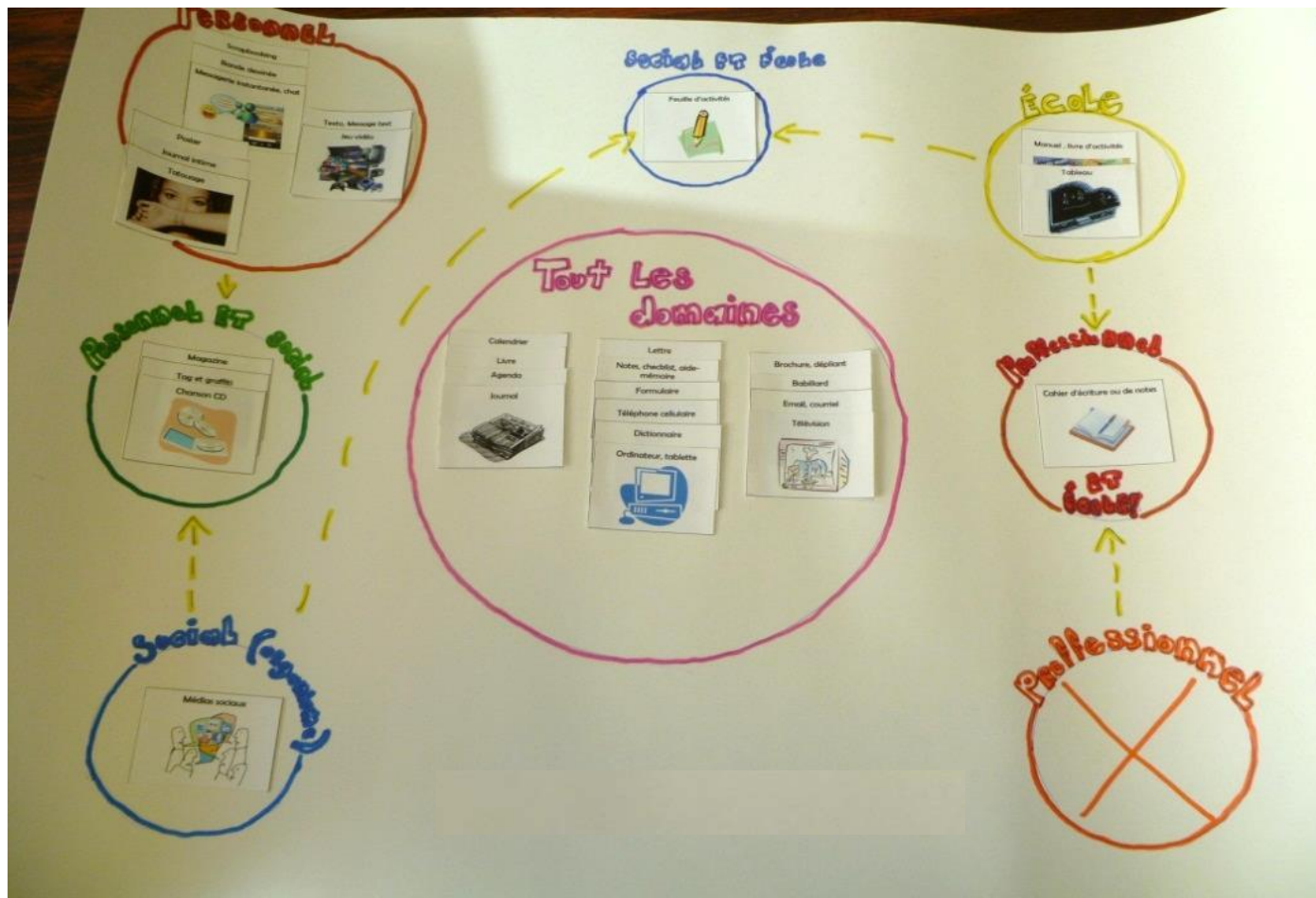
Participants'   names: Cédric,   Jacques,   and   Richard

Appendix H: Activity 4

Activity 4 at *Le Bercail*

Participants' names: Julien, Darya, and Laurence

Activity 4 at *L'Envol*

Participants' names: Cassandra and Pierre-Luc

Appendix I: Activity 5

La lettre

Qui te l'a envoyée?	Pour quelles raisons?	Qu'est-ce que tu fais ensuite?
Gouvernement du Canada (système pénale pour adolescent). et avocat.	Que mon dossier criminel était règlé et que je ne serais plus obligé de me présenté en cours parce que ma probation c'était terminé sans contraintes.	Je n'ai plus refait de délit pouvant m'amener à avoir des problèmes avec la justice.

Activity 5 at *Le Bercail*

Participant's name: Julien

La lettre

Qui te l'a envoyée?	Pour quelles raisons?	Qu'est-ce que tu fais ensuite?
L'office municipal (OMH) m'envoie des lettres. Quand j'avais 8 ans j'ai voulu faire de la correspondance avec une personne d'un autre pays. J'ai trouvé une personne au hasard et je lui ai écrit (avec quelques dessins). La madame, une Sandra Sansterre, m'as répondu.	Ils me réclame 5$ additionnel par mois. Juste une idée de gamin de converser avec une personne d'un autre pays. J'imagine qu'elle m'as répondu par gentillesse.	Je remet la lettre dans l'enveloppe et je ricane. J'ai maintenu la correspondance pendant quelques mois, mais éventuellement je ne savais plus quoi dire alors cela a prit fin. La dernière chose que je lui ai envoyé était un beau dessin d'un bateau avec un poisson géant en-dessous. Belle expérience.

Activity 5 at *L'Envol*

Participant's name: Cédric

Appendix J: Activity 6

Participant's name: Julien

Participant's name: Darya

Participant's name: Laurence

Appendix K: Taxonomy

[List extracted from NVivo.]

Name	Sources	References
FUTURE	14	19
LEARNING	0	0
Apprenticeship	11	15
Content	21	106
Process	21	110
Role model	12	22
LIFE EXPERIENCES - SITUATIONS	4	5
Court - Law	6	8
Death	3	3
Family	14	32
Friendship	14	20
Health problems	6	9
Homelessness	7	9
Immigration - moving	13	29
Love	10	18
Mental health	13	26
School	21	81
Sexually transmitted infections (STI)	0	0
Toxico	11	25
Travel	7	16
Violence	6	16
Work	18	51
LITERACIES	0	0
Academic literacy	18	60
Activity book	3	4
Activity sheet	10	17
Bills	2	2
Blackboard	3	3
Board games	3	4
Brochure	5	6
Calendar	1	1
Clothes	1	1
Comic book	3	3
CV - employability	14	18
Diary - Agenda - Planner	7	11
Dictionary	4	5
Digital literacy	21	93
Film	11	20
Flipchart	2	2
Form	8	17
Governmental	9	15
Information	7	10
Intervention tools	15	40
Letter	13	19
Magazine	2	2

Management and accounting	7	15
Newspaper	13	16
Notebook - Personnal diary	11	13
Notes	15	23
Novel	19	37
Numeracy	13	26
Other books	5	7
Others	12	26
Painting	6	12
Pencil	2	4
Personal writing	20	49
Poem	11	17
Poster	1	1
Radio	7	9
Scrapbooking	1	2
Sheet of paper	9	11
Song	9	12
Tag graffiti	2	2
Tattoo	7	7
Television	2	2
Therapeutic literacy	15	25

LITERACY PRACTICES	0	0
Artifact	14	20
Competences-skills	0	0
Literacy mediation	19	58
Multilingual literacy	17	39
Perceptions-Reactions	0	0
Power issues	0	0
Authority	19	59
Collaboration	17	44
Empowerment	17	54
Flexibility	20	63
Group dynamic	21	55
Privacy and ethics	12	17
Social pressure	13	20
Sponsor of literacy	21	111
Tensions	20	57
ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS	1	1
ASP Construction	2	3
Community-based organisations	2	2
Health and social system	0	0
Municipal services - Town	2	2
Other governmental institutions	1	1
Religious institution	1	2

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	10	13
Schooling system	10	13
Adult education centre	15	39
Cegep	9	15
High school	15	29
Others	4	9
Primary school	6	7
University	6	8
Vocational centre	5	7

	1	2
PEOPLE	1	2
Employee of the organisations	21	121
Family	8	8
Extended family	9	17
Grandparents	3	6
Parents	17	49
Siblings	12	22
Former participant	10	36
Friends	17	53
Health workers	5	6
Other professionals	9	16
Others	12	19
Participant (young people)	21	177
Partner	17	32
Teachers	12	17
SPACE	17	52
TIME	17	56

Appendix L: Consent form and information letter for the young people

Hello,

I am inviting you to participate in a research project. The main objective of this research is to better understand the effect of group activities on the participants' situations and future prospects, particularly with regards to literacy. I will be interested to see what forms of reading and writing are used in the group activities at [name of the organization] and to get your views on this question.

What will participation in this project involve?

I will be observing activities in [name of the organization] for 1 or 2 months. You will also be given the opportunity to take part in an interview.

Observation period

During the months of April and May 2012, I will attend group activities at [name of the organization]. I will observe the activities and take notes. I will sometimes be more involved and take part in the activities along with you. You won't have anything special to prepare during this observation period. I will not disturb the normal course of activities. I will possibly ask you some questions, during a break for example, in order to get your opinion. With your permission, I will make copies of the activity sheets you will use during group meetings at [name of the organization].

Individual interview

I will invite you to participate in an individual interview of about **60 minutes**. The questions I will ask during this interview will concern your experience at [name of the organization], your future plans and aims and also your life path (school, work, hobbies). I will not ask questions on topics too sensitive or personal. However, if you do not feel comfortable answering any of the questions, you are free to refuse to answer.

How will the data be used?

Your participation in the project will be **confidential**. This means that I will not use your real name or the real name of [name of the organization] in my work. It won't be possible to recognize you. Results will be presented in a thesis and may also be the subject of conference papers or articles in scientific journals. The data will not be used for purposes other than those described in this document.
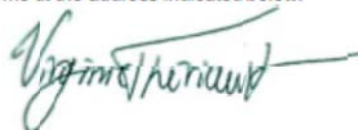
Is it obligatory to participate?

No. Participation in this study is voluntary. You are **free to participate or not, and to withdraw** at any time without having to explain your decision. The decision whether to participate in this study or not will not affect the services you receive at [name of the organization].

Are there any risks, harms or benefits?

Beyond the disadvantages mentioned so far (time for the interview), the researcher believes that the potential risks are minimal. With your participation in this study, you will help us to understand how projects in community-based organizations can support youth in their development. So you will have the opportunity to share your ideas about this. A fee of **$20** will be paid to participants **in the individual interviews**.

What if I have questions about the project?

If you have questions about this research project, do not hesitate to contact me at the address indicated below.

Virginie Thériault
MPhil/PhD student
under the direction of Uta Papen, PhD
Lancaster University

Tel : ???-????
v.theriault@lancaster.ac.uk

If you have any queries about the study, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Uta Papen, who can be contacted at u.papen@lancaster.ac.uk [in French or in English]. You may also contact the Head of Department, Prof. Elena Semino, on e.semino@lancaster.ac.uk [in English only].

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LANCASTER
UNIVERSITY

I have read and understood the information on the project The role of literacy in support groups attended by young adults. I understand the conditions, the risks and the benefits of my participation. I have received answers to any questions I had about this project. I freely agree to participate in this research project.

☐ I agree to participate in an individual interview.

☐ I agree to be included in the observation periods.

☐ I agree that the researcher collects documents that I have produced during the group activities at [name of the organization].

_____
Signature

_____
Name

_____
Date

Information sheet and consent form for the research project:

The role of literacy in support groups attended by young adults

Virginie Thériault, M.A.
under the direction of
Uta Papen, PhD.
Department of Linguistics and English Language
Lancaster University, Royaume-Uni

Young people

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Appendix M: Consent form and information letter for the youth workers

Sir or Madam,

I am inviting you to participate in a research project. The main objective of this research is to better understand the effect of group activities on participants' situations and future prospects, particularly with regards to literacy. I will be interested to see what forms of reading and writing are used in the group activities and get your views on this question.

What will the participation in this project involve?

I will be observing activities in [name of the organization] for 1 or 2 months. You will also be given the opportunity to take part in an interview.

Observation period

During the months of April and May 2012, I will attend group activities at [name of the organization]. I will observe the activities and take notes. I will sometimes be more involved and take part in the activities along with the group. You won't have anything special to prepare during this observation period. I will not disturb the normal course of activities. I will possibly ask you some questions, during a break for example, in order to get your opinion. With your permission, I will make copies of the activity sheets you will use during group meetings at [name of the organization].

Individual interview

I will invite you to participate in an individual interview of about **60 minutes**. The questions I will ask during this interview will concern your experience at [name of the organization] and your uses of literacy with the young people. The questions I will ask you are not aiming at evaluating your work. Thus, there will be no right or wrong answers. However, if you do not feel comfortable answering any of the questions, you are free to refuse to answer.

How will the data be used?

Your participation in the project will be **confidential**. This means that I will not use your real name or the real name of [name of the organization] in my work. It won't be possible to recognize you in following publications of this project. Results will be presented in a thesis and may also be the subject of conference papers or articles in scientific journals. The data will not be used for purposes other than those described in this document.

Is it obligatory to participate?

No. Participation in this study is voluntary. You are **free to participate or not**, and to **withdraw** at any time without having to explain your decision.

Are there any risks, harms or benefits?

Beyond the disadvantages mentioned so far (time for the interview), the researcher believes that the potential risks are minimal. With your participation in this study, you will help us to understand how projects in community-based organizations can support youth in their development, their learning and their relationship with literacy. No fee will be paid to you.

What if I have questions about the project?

If you have questions about this research project, do not hesitate to contact me at the address indicated below.

Virginie Thériault

Virginie Thériault
MPhil/PhD student
under the direction of Uta Papen, PhD
Lancaster University

Tel : ???-????
v.theriault@lancaster.ac.uk

If you have any queries about the study, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Uta Papen, who can be contacted at u.papen@lancaster.ac.uk [in French or in English]. You may also contact the Head of Department, Prof. Elena Semino, on e.semino@lancaster.ac.uk [in English only].

I have read and understood the information on the project The role of literacy in support groups attended by young adults. I understand the conditions, the risks and the benefits of my participation. I have received answers to any questions I had about this project. I freely agree to participate in this research project.

☐ I agree to participate in an individual interview.

☐ I agree to be included in the observation periods.

☐ I agree that the researcher can collect activities documents at [*name of the organization*].

Signature

Name

Date

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

Information sheet and consent form for the research project:

The role of literacy in support groups attended by young adults

Virginie Thériault, M.A.
under the direction of
Uta Papen, PhD.
Department of Linguistics and English Language
Lancaster University, Royaume-Uni

Youth workers