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**THE CROSS-AGED LITERACY PROGRAM:
EXTENDING THE BOUNDARIES FOR ADOLESCENTS WHO STRUGGLE
WITH READING, WRITING, AND SCHOOLING**

presented by

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has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in Teacher Education

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**A CROSS-AGED LITERACY PROGRAM: EXTENDING THE
BOUNDARIES FOR ADOLESCENTS WHO STRUGGLE WITH
READING, WRITING, AND SCHOOLING**

By

Fenice Burnetta Boyd

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

A CROSS-AGED LITERACY PROGRAM: EXTENDING THE BOUNDARIES FOR ADOLESCENTS WHO STRUGGLE WITH READING, WRITING, AND SCHOOLING

By

Fenice Burnetta Boyd

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling as they participated in an alternative literacy program. The study develops from criticisms of decontextualized literacy instruction for low-achieving students. Grounded in a social constructivist theoretical perspective, the study focused on four high school adolescents who were poor readers and writers. Three broad questions guided this study: How do the social interactions in an alternative literacy program help us to rethink, reconstruct and redefine literacy learning for adolescents who are poor readers and writers? What was the nature of participation in the preparation seminar and small cross-aged discussion groups in alternative literacy contexts? How do high school adolescents represent their literacy knowledge when interacting with fourth and fifth graders?

To address these questions, I studied high school adolescents as they participated in a series of literacy activities and tasks with a same-age peer group and with fourth- and fifth-grade students for a period of five months. Field notes, transcripts of discussions, students' written documents, and interviews formed the data sets. Since the high school students brought different background experiences, and since they conducted cross-aged literary discussions with

different children, their experiences in the study yielded interesting comparisons.

From the analyses, three findings emerged: First, the nature of interactions within each small group was contingent upon the roles and strategies that the high school adolescents used to engage the younger students and themselves in discussions about text. Second, the various literacy activities and the individual contributions from students provided a rich context for constructing knowledge within the small groups. Third, the study highlights the importance of oral language and the social nature of literacy learning for adolescents who do not read and write well. Contributing to the literacy field's understanding of the role of language in learning, the study supports rethinking and redefining what counts as literacy learning in an alternative instructional program for adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling.

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To Averick and Jamaal

The only thing that's really worthwhile is change. It's coming.

-- Septima Clark

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CHAPTER 1

WHY DO WE NEED TO CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE LITERACY CONTEXTS FOR ADOLESCENTS WHO STRUGGLE WITH READING, WRITING, AND SCHOOLING?

The need to explore alternative literacy learning contexts for adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling has never been greater. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 48% of students or 183,000 dropped out of Grade 12 in 1992. All the more disturbing is the fact that many adolescents as young as 15 decide to discontinue their schooling before Grade 12, at an alarming rate of 31.3% or 120,000 dropping out of school in Grade 11, and 20.9% or 80,000 dropping out in Grade 10. These dispiriting statistics suggest that our American high schools are failing to help many of our students continue their education successfully. Having large numbers of students who do not graduate from high school is a disservice to the individual as well as to society. It is a disservice to individuals who drop out of school because they will not have the adequate and sufficient literacy skills they need and deserve to sustain themselves in our ever-changing advanced technological society. Likewise, society will inherit many consequences due to dropouts because, as a whole, the nation will not experience the benefits of the potential and talent of many young adolescents.

Although students drop out of school for countless reasons, failure in literacy learning and acquisition is most certainly an underlying cause for many (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1993). Researchers have documented several predictors which account for unfortunate futures when students find it difficult to learn to read during early years of schooling: (a) over 90% of the children placed in the bottom-reading group in first grade are still poor readers in the upper

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grades (Juel, 1988); (b) children labeled as poor readers and writers during primary-grades are amongst those children most likely to be retained (Shepard & Smith, 1989); (c) children who are retained are those who are most likely to be classified as handicapped or learning disabled (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Mecklenburg, Graden, 1984); and (d) low-academic achievement, retention, and special-education placement are all associated with dropping out of school, teen parenthood, and unemployment or limited earning power in adulthood (Edelmann, 1988).

Behaviorist Theoretical Perspective

Often, the type of instructional approaches provided to poor readers and writers contribute to why these students do not achieve academically. Typically, instruction for students who do not read and write well has been based on behavioral theories. This perspective limits definitions of success to the products of literacy activities (e.g., oral fluency, ability to answer literal comprehension questions). More recently, theories of cognitive science have shifted the focus to individuals' reading and writing processes. Yet these theories have ignored the social nature of literacy learning. Both behavioral and cognitive theories pervade instructional programs mandated to track individual progress through decontextualized skills-based instruction. This is especially true for students who read and write poorly.

In the last decade, literacy instruction based on behavioral and cognitive theories has been criticized because of its reliance on practicing skills in isolation (e.g., Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989), tracking students into low-level literacy experiences (e.g., Applebee, 1991), and not providing opportunities for working with a variety of literary genres (Walmsley & Walp, 1990). Many scholars have

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noted the limited success of skills-based instructional programs (Carter, 1984; Cooley, 1981; Glass, 1986), suggesting that there are consequences for the students' development of higher cognitive processes. The very nature of traditional literacy instruction is narrowly focused because it does not encompass strategies that might enable students to develop higher thinking skills. Because many adolescents remain trapped in traditional skills-based programs (i.e., remedial reading, Chapter I) throughout their high school years, we need to change our thinking about approaches to literacy instruction for students who do not read and write well and who, all too often, drop out of school.

This exodus from high schools due to lack of academic success presents educators with an enormous challenge that must be addressed. The first step in considering the dilemmas involved in academic achievement for low-achieving adolescents is to identify reasonable options to encourage students to develop their own literacy education and stay in school. This requires educators to think about what we know about current conceptions of language, literacy, and learning as well as what we know about the population of students about whom we are concerned.

Establishing a Context For Literacy Instruction

Many scholars suggests that literacy learning is enhanced when students have opportunities to engage in natural, meaningful context-embedded interactions. For example, Wells (1992) argues that human development and learning is intrinsically social and interactive. Therefore, to become literate involves social interactions with other readers and writers, as well as individual cognitive achievement. Presently, many educators are exploring the connections between language and learning in context-embedded, goal-oriented literacy

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instruction in elementary classrooms (Pierce & Gilles, 1993). Such collaborative modes of social interaction and learning acknowledge the central role of language (Bakhtin, 1986; Gavelek, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, Chang, & Maher, 1990). Throughout the process, reading, writing, speaking, and listening are means for communicating intentions and meanings between the reader and text, and among people involved in the reading act. Background knowledge, experiences, and multiple voices play a significant role in how all readers construct meaning from what they read. Although this research has been conducted with young children, it has potential to add much to literacy instruction for high school students. However, much information is needed to help us understand what benefit meaningful and purposeful interactions might play on the literacy learning and acquisition of low-achieving adolescents who are at-risk of school failure.

The importance of emphasizing the cognitive and social aspect of literacy has direct implication for work with adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling. Many scholars (e.g., Au & Mason, 1981; Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Philips, 1983) document the differential treatment of diverse and minority learners in school contexts and argue that such differential treatment negatively affects students' achievement in literacy learning. Other scholars note the overrepresentation of students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds in traditional skills-based literacy programs (Kennedy, Jung, & Orland, 1986). For example, Cazden (1988) provides evidence in which minority students from New Zealand and the United States are discouraged from expanding upon their thoughts. Similarly, Michaels (1981) reports that when the narrative styles of minority children are at variance with the expectations of white teachers,

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interaction is often unsuccessful and, over time, may adversely affect school performance and achievement.

Applebee describes the lack of opportunity of low-tracked students to initiate interactions with their teachers or peers, and that the pattern of interaction follows one of teacher-controlled initiation, response, evaluation (I-R-E) interactions (see Cazden, 1988), in which the teacher initiates the topic through a question, a student is called upon to provide a response, and the teacher then evaluates the response before moving to the next I-R-E sequence. Although such procedures appear to work well among high-achievers and students who are well motivated, they do not appear to benefit low-achievers (Applebee, 1989). With such prescribed literacy activities from the teacher, these students have little voice about what they read or write about in their literacy programs and few opportunities for discussion. Their development in literacy learning is contingent upon working on decontextualized basic skills in order to reach a specific level of reading ability and involves little or no opportunity to develop the control or the motivation they will need for their long-term literacy education.

Theory and Rationale for a Cross-Aged Literacy Program

Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling as they participated in alternative literacy learning contexts. The study links fundamental principles of social constructivism to the literacy learning of adolescents as they take responsibility for their own learning in a cross-aged literacy program.¹

To study what low-achieving high school students learn about literacy

¹Elementary students literacy development is a concern of the overall study, but is not the focus of the dissertation.

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while participating in a cross-aged literacy program, I have adopted a social constructivist perspective (Vygotsky, 1978; Bakhtin, 1986; Gavelek, 1986).

Social constructivism stresses the importance of language and social interaction in learning and provides a conceptual framework to examine dialogue in cross-aged, student-led discussion groups. In such groups, high school adolescents who find learning to read and write difficult develop their own literacy skills while working as partners with fourth- and fifth-graders. Social constructivism suggests that cognitive development is formed in part through social interaction and that language and social acts play an essential role in the organization of higher psychological functions.

Three principles undergird social constructivist theories in learning: (a) higher psychological functions such as reading and writing are both social and cultural in nature, (b) knowledge is constructed through the interactions among individuals within the social context, and (c) learning is fostered through the assistance of more knowledgeable members of the community and culture.

Whether students are gifted or low-achievers, elementary or high schoolers, the principles of social constructivism acknowledge the role of oral and written language. These principles are useful when investigating psychological processes such as literacy learning, and its relationship to the various ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and academic abilities that all learners bring to the classroom.

The principles of social constructivism were essential to conceptualizing and analyzing the process, interactions and discussions in this cross-aged literacy program. In this study, adolescents who were struggling readers and writers were provided opportunities to use oral language and writing for learning and meaning construction with fourth and fifth graders in goal-embedded, task-oriented

settings. All students engaged in literary discussions, responded and reacted to their peers' ideas. Participants in this cross-aged literacy program who came from different academic, cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds created rich contexts where older and younger students could interrelate and generate meanings, and transform and negotiate their own values.

Cross-aged and peer-teaching relationships among students in formal and informal settings can be traced to the first century A.D. (Wagner, 1982).

Historians record tutoring as the main source of learning, particularly for the elite and wealthy (Bloom, 1988). Among the most renowned spokespersons for tutoring was Comenius, a 17th century Moravian educator whose philosophy was "He who teaches others teaches himself." Similarly, Joseph Lancaster, an 18th century educator is noted for his inexpensive form of mass education for the poor through peer and cross-aged tutoring (Bloom, 1988; Wagner, 1982). Within the past three decades, peer and cross-aged teaching has reemerged in the United States and Great Britain (Topping, 1988).

Research findings of cross-aged teaching programs identify positive benefits for the students who teach in several general areas: (a) motivation (Bloom, 1988; Dillner, 1971), (b) improved communication and social skills (Dollar, 1974), (c) increased opportunities for literacy learning (Allen, 1976; Cloward, 1967; Juel, 1991), and (d) development of positive attitudes toward school, teachers, literacy, and education (Dillner, 1974; Ellson, 1969; Granick, 1968; Paoni, 1971; Rosenshine & Furst, 1969; Snapp, 1970; Strodbeck & Granick, 1972; and Weitzman, 1965). While studies are mixed in reported benefits for tutors (Werth, 1968; cited in Cloward, 1976), overall, the benefits outweigh disadvantages for these students.

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The Cross-Aged Literacy Program: An Investigative Study of Adolescents Who Struggle With Reading, Writing, and Schooling

In the following chapters, I will describe the study I created to explore the potential benefits of an alternative literacy instructional program for low-achieving adolescents. The study is a response to calls for changes in current practices in reading instruction for students who struggle with literacy and schooling. Many studies report the limitations of programs such as remedial reading and special education for students who are “at-risk” of school failure in several different areas. First, instructional emphasis in reading and writing centers around activities other than reading books, and on goals other than comprehension of texts (e.g., Allington, Stuetzel, Shake, & Lamarche, 1986; Hiebert, 1983; Quirk, Trismen, Weinberg, & Nalin, 1976). Second, reports on the nature of the teacher’s instructional behavior during remedial instruction suggest that there is often little teacher to student interaction beyond monitoring on-task behavior and providing feedback on the accuracy of responses (e.g., McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1990; Rowan & Guthrie, 1989). Third, time allocated in programs such as Chapter I does not insure larger quantities of reading instruction (e.g., Birman, B. F., Orland, M. E., Jung, R. K., Anson, R. J., Garcia, G. N., Moore, M. T., Funkhouser, J. E., Morrison, D. R., Turnbull, B. J., & Reisner, E. R., 1987; Carter, 1984; Rowan & Guthrie, 1989; Stanley & Greenwood, 1983). Fourth, instruction adapted for individual differences has meant skills-based differential teaching within a reductionist framework (e.g., Gates, 1927; Kavale & Forness, 1987). Fifth, the individual nature of instruction encourages depersonalization (e.g., computer-based drill and practice, specific skillsheets *completed* in the isolation of a study carrel, programmed texts, and other

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individual work, cited in Johnston & Allington, 1991). The findings suggest that educators need to explore more creative and effective means of enhancing the literacy development of our adolescents who find learning to read and write difficult.

Using qualitative methods, I studied four adolescents participating in an alternative literacy program that reflected transformations in instruction, curriculum, and social interactions. Specifically, I designed the Cross-Aged Literacy Program to offer adolescents who received traditional reading instruction opportunities to engage in a different type of educative learning experience (Dewey, 1938). Two major components make up the Cross-Aged Literacy Project: (a) the Preparation Seminar, and (b) the Cross-Aged Literary Discussion Groups. The Preparation Seminar supported cross-age activities of the high school adolescents, helping prepare them to work with fourth- and fifth-graders. The Cross-Aged Literary Discussion Groups enabled the adolescents to facilitate and actively co-participate in literary discussion with fourth- and fifth-graders. The curriculum materials consisted of tradebooks, recognized by scholars who study children's literature as well-written texts conveying plots and characterization that kindle student response. The instructional methods entailed (a) oral reading in a whole-class context, (b) using reading logs to record ideas for sharing, and (c) interacting socially in both instructional contexts to intensify literacy learning.

This study begins with questions that emerged from research conducted in areas related to this topic. In Chapter 2, I review the literature in four broad areas that most affected the development of this study, each of which considers a different aspect of the investigation. First, I examine the appropriateness of

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changing the way we think about literacy instruction for adolescents who are frustrated readers and writers, reviewing research that explores the cultures of high schools and how those cultures contribute to the failure of low-achieving students' literacy education. In addition, I explore research findings that criticize programs which decontextualize literacy instruction. Second, I focus on the theoretical perspective used in this study -- social constructivism, which highlights the contextual and social nature of learning, emphasizing the role of language. Third, I examine selected literatures of collaborative learning to make the case that low-achieving adolescents need to participate in enriched literacy contexts. Fourth, I examine the potential benefits of offering adolescents who struggle with literacy learning and schooling the opportunity to engage in dialogue in alternative learning contexts. This literature review provides a justification for considering the potential of talk and learning for high school adolescents who are frustrated readers and writers to understand the necessity of changing the way we perceive literacy instruction and learning for these students.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the methodology used for this study, including (a) the context in which I conducted the study, (b) the participants, (c) the Cross-Aged Literacy Program, (d) the methods of data collection, and (e) analysis and interpretation. Chapters 4 and 5 present the analysis of the data collected over a five-month period. Chapter 4 focuses on my work with four high school students in the Preparation Seminar, while in Chapter 5, I focus on two high school students as they worked with fourth and fifth graders in small literary discussion groups. In Chapter 6, I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

I conducted this study of four ninth-grade students from an urban high school as they participated in an alternative literacy program to pursue three different questions:

1. How do the social interactions in an alternative literacy program help us to rethink, reconstruct and redefine literacy learning for adolescents who struggle with reading and writing?
2. What was the nature of participation in the two alternative literacy contexts?
3. How do high school adolescents represent their knowledge about literacy when interacting with fourth and fifth graders?

In the next chapter, I present the review of the literature that guided the development of this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERACY LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR LOW-ACHIEVING ADOLESCENTS: INTRICACIES AND POSSIBILITIES

Hooked on Books (Fader, 1968) was a guide written for teachers to “get the most reluctant readers to read.” Fader’s observations of teaching and learning in high school English classrooms prompted him to define students’ learning experiences as “poverty-stricken.” His definition of “poverty-stricken” was beyond the meaning of one who may be deprived in matters related to cultural, economic, and social conditions. Fader’s argument described “poverty-stricken schools” as those in which there were “impoverished learning experiences.” Impoverished learning experiences involve situations where students do not participate in their own learning, but instead passively “receive” knowledge from teachers and others who have been designated as more knowledgeable. Fader argued that “poverty-stricken schools” may be found in any community whether suburban, urban, or rural, and attention should be given to the needs of the students accordingly.

Today, we are still faced with similar, if not the same, situations in which adolescents do not participate in their own learning. This presents educators with a problem in dire need of attention. We need to conceptually understand the problems of literacy learning for adolescents who are frustrated readers and writers. We must recognize the complex nature of this problem, not simply attribute it to factors such as being economically disadvantaged or speaking non-standard English. Issues of motivation, frustration and hope (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) play a role in what and how low-achieving students experience schooling. The diversity of learners and the value

placed by each individual student on literacy learning play a significant role in what and how knowledge is acquired. Literacy learning and acquisition, where students' environment, experiences, what they are exposed to, and the extent to which that exposure and experience contribute to their learning, is embedded within a sociocultural ecology.

This review focuses on literatures that address three questions: (a) What factors contribute to creating impoverished learning experiences for adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling? (b) What is the basis for contextualized literacy learning for adolescents who do not read and write well? and (c) What potential benefits may derive from having low-achieving adolescents engage in discussions with younger students in alternative literacy learning experiences?

Perspectives on the State of Teaching and Learning in American Schools

In 1983, Secretary of Education T. H. Bell created The National Commission on Excellence in Education to examine the quality of education in the United States. The Commission paid particular attention to teenage youth and their educational experiences in high schools. The results of the Commission's 18 months of study was reported in A Nation at Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform (1983). The report cited alarming statistics of risk indicators that pierced this nation as a whole, focusing national attention on the complexities involved in the process and outcomes of public schooling. For instance, testimony was documented by the Commission, making claims that approximately 13% of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Moreover, functional illiteracy among minority youth may

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be as high as 40%, while 23 million adults in the country are functionally illiterate as evidenced by the inability to perform on simple tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

The Commission's report provided compelling evidence to make quality education a top priority for *every* student. Findings were reflected in four important areas (i.e., content, expectations, time, teaching), highlighting the "disturbing inadequacies in the way the educational process itself is often conducted" (p. 18). The findings suggest a hodgepodge of dilemmas that face educators at various institutional levels (e.g., high school, colleges, universities). The Commission made detailed recommendations in each of the four areas of their findings, calling for broad surface recommendations for each specific area.

The first recommendation put forth by the Commission suggests that state and local high school graduation requirements be strengthened and that, at a minimum, all students seeking a diploma be required to lay the foundations in the Five New Basics (i.e., 4 years of English, 3 years of mathematics, 3 years of science, 3 years of social studies, one-half year of computer science). This would require students to take a specific curriculum during their four years of high school in order to meet suggested requirements for content. The second recommendation was in two parts. The first suggests that schools, colleges, and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations for academic performance and student conduct. The second suggests that four-year colleges and universities raise their requirements for admission to meet criteria for standards and expectations. The Commission's **third** recommendation suggests that significantly more time be devoted to

learning the New Basics, calling for more effective use of the existing school day, a longer school day, or a lengthened school year. The fifth recommendation implies that teacher preparation programs improve, and create a situation where teaching is more rewarding and respected as a profession. Finally, the sixth recommendation suggest that citizens across the Nation hold educators and elected officials responsible for providing the leadership necessary to achieve these reforms, and that citizens provide the fiscal support and stability required to bring about the reforms the Commission proposed.

Eight years after the Commission's report and recommendations, another government report called for a long-term strategy to transform a "Nation at Risk" into a "Nation of Students." America 2000: An Education Strategy (1990) was adopted by then President Bush and governors across the nation. This educational strategy entailed six broad educational goals: (a) young children will begin school ready to learn, (b) high school graduation rates will increase, (c) students will demonstrate competency in various subjects at different levels of their education, (d) science and mathematics achievement will increase among American students, (e) the literacy rates will increase among adults, and (f) every school in America will be drug and violence free, fostering a positive environment that is conducive to learning. According to the report, goals would be accomplished by a complex and strategic four-part plan over time. Recommended strategies involved innovative procedures such as designing New World Standards for core subjects (i.e., science, mathematics), establishing Governors' Academies for principals and teachers, and giving more leverage to business leaders by setting up services for research and development through private resources.

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While the recommendations proposed by the National Commission on Excellence in Education and America 2000 are admirable, they suggest surface and “quick fix” solutions to complex socio-historical problems. Almost thirty years ago, Fader (1968) called attention to many of the same problems that high school adolescents faced. A key difference between Fader’s approach and that of current government leaders is Fader’s emphasis on working from the inside, in contrast to the government “outsider” bid for change. The rhetoric of both the Commission and the America 2000’s educational strategy involved little consideration of the “strengths” that many students bring to their education and the classroom or how teachers and their students might build upon those strengths. In contrast, by emphasizing students’ strengths, teachers have the power and influence to help students help themselves, and in so doing, help society as a whole.

With the current wave of criticism about students’ schooling experiences and the “cafeteria style curriculum” (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1984), many researchers have investigated the learning experiences of teachers and students, focusing on how talk enhances those experiences in literacy learning situations (e.g. Goatley, Raphael, Brock, 1995; Goldenberg, 1993; Pierce & Gilles, 1993; Short & Pierce, 1988). Other researchers have documented many internal dilemmas which complicate teaching and learning in classrooms, specifically in high schools (McNeil, 1986; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985; Sizer, 1984). For instance in Alvermann’s (1996) study of three middle school students’ perspectives of peer-led discussions, she raised concerns *regarding* issues of empowerment among young adolescents when they speak *their minds*. This concern is significant to teachers when faced with coordinating

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instruction such that students might have voice, and thinking about “whose interests are served when students speak.” Such ongoing research characterizes the complexities involved in the organization of secondary schools, and what the implications are for teaching and learning. In the next section, I describe some key studies that highlight some of the reasons why many low-achieving adolescents struggle with literacy learning, and what impact organizational structures bring to bear on those schooling experiences.

Critical Studies of Secondary Schools and Students’ Experiences

One of the most important ways to develop our understanding of the current state of schooling is to examine the organizational structure of schools and the nature of teaching and learning within them. Within the last decade, high schools have been criticized by various policy makers, Boards of Trustees from educational foundations (e.g., The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching), and specially appointed commissions (e.g., The National Commission on Excellence in Education). The criticisms of secondary education have resulted in implications for what needs to be done to reform American education. Below, I describe some key studies that critically analyzed the structure of American high schools, and related suggestions for improving teaching and learning.

Students’ Access to Knowledge

We can infer what students learn through schooling by examining what is taught in schools, the amount of time allocated to subjects in the curriculum, and who has access to what knowledge. Goodlad (1984) and his colleagues conducted an eight year study of American education to explore almost every facet of school life. Findings were reported in A Place Called School (Goodlad, 1984) which drew from an array of data sources, including a series of books on

the state-of-the-field in three areas of education (Becker, 1979; Davies, 1981; Hausman, 1980), contributions from compendiums of student, teacher, and parent data, curricula, content area subjects, demographics, and student experiences in schools, as well as technical reports.

One finding from this massive study of schooling indicated that differences in curricular emphases in elementary, junior, and senior high schools determine students' exposure to various areas of subject matter content. In junior and senior high schools, curricular balance was strikingly different in terms of the allocation of teachers to various content area subjects. More teachers taught English than mathematics at the junior high level. However, there seemed to be a balance among mathematics, social studies, and science teachers at the high school level. Some high schools with large minority student populations, had a large percentage of teachers devoted to teaching in vocational fields of study (e.g., 42%), while in other high schools teachers who taught English, mathematics, science, social studies, and foreign languages totaled 62%, and vocational education teachers totaled 13%. One point made by Goodlad (1984) was that the evidence suggested appreciable differences in the opportunities students had to acquire knowledge in school simply because of where they happened to live.

In addition to the content taught and the time spent on content learning, a third influence on students' access to knowledge stems from the organizational practice in secondary schools known as tracking. Scholars have reported their findings and implications when students are tracked into various ability groups and classes (Goodlad, 1984; Oakes, 1985; Powell, Farrar, Cohen, 1985). Studies (e.g., Schafer & Olexa, 1971) have shown that there tends to be lower self-esteem, more school misconduct, higher drop-out rates, and higher delinquency among

students in lower tracks than in higher tracks. Other scholars (e.g., Alexander, Cook, and McDill, 1978) note that tracking practices tend to determine the degree to which students are prepared for a higher education, favoring students placed in high track or advanced placement classes over those in lower tracks.

Applebee (1991) and Rosenbaum (1976) report that minority students and those from lower socioeconomic levels have been found in disproportionate numbers in lower-track classes, while students from upper socioeconomic levels have been found to be consistently overrepresented in higher tracks. Oakes (1985) asserts that curriculum tracking in secondary schools is a foundation for the inequalities that poor, disadvantaged, and minority students experience within the larger society. Actively teaching different types of knowledge to students who are diverse in terms of ability, ethnicity, and language results in students who are prepared to function only in particular economic and social classes. Working-class students without access to high-status knowledge have reduced opportunity for movement to higher socioeconomic levels.

Tracking practices create differences within as well as across high schools. Goodlad (1984) and his colleagues pursued questions related to whether or not there were marked differences in curriculum content, instructional approaches, social relationships, and human interactions from track to track in various junior and senior high schools. The general conclusions were that out of the 38 schools, students who were ready for learning were received differentially, were educated *differentially* in their classrooms, and they were graduated differentially. Thus, students were differentially tracked for either higher education, various areas of *employment*, and presumably vocational and social mobility. Approximately 17,163 students in the sample had different opportunities to gain access to

knowledge during their years of schooling. As reported by Goodlad (1984), some of the differences in opportunities to learn, appeared to be associated with economics and race.

McNeil (1986) conducted a comparative analysis of four middle-class high schools defined as “smooth running, good schools” (i.e., Forest Hills High, Freeburg High, Maizeville High, Nelson High). The investigation centered on a key difference among the schools; the tensions between administrative personnel and policies, and the access to classroom knowledge. To understand how those differences emerged, McNeil looked at the overt and hidden patterns of control and resistance in the four schools, and documented the strategies by which administrators and teachers set up patterns of autonomy or control to develop her understanding of how schools mediate cultural content. In brief, her findings suggests that there were contradictions between administrative policy, teaching, and learning, and those contradictions resulted in the failure of students’ access to knowledge.

The massive and meticulous study conducted by Goodlad (1984) indicated a “sameness” across many of the schools he examined. However, those who have observed, taught, and attended high schools know that they vary according to the influence and choices made by the individuals who make up a high school community (i.e., principals, teachers, parents, students, secretaries, guidance counselors, custodial staff). Individual choices help shape school knowledge and its credibility for students (McNeil, 1986). Thus, the four high schools McNeil (1986) investigated showed uneven educational quality. Teacher ideology for what knowledge they wanted their students to acquire suggested open-ended, long-term learning, begun by broad-ranging, depth-seeking inquiry and

discussion. But, the content presented was often limited to brief “right” answers, easily transmitted, easily answered, and easily graded. What teachers had envisioned and expressed as “real learning” was contradicted by the uniformity of student behavior and lesson content typical of most class sessions.

To understand the relationship between schools and the larger social structure, Anyon (1981) examined fifth-grade classrooms in five elementary schools in contrasting school communities in New Jersey. Data sources included classroom observations, interviews of students, teachers, principals, and district administrative staff; and assessment of curriculum and other materials in each classroom and school. In all schools the art, music, and gym teachers were observed and interviewed as well. Principals described all teachers in the study as “good” or “excellent.” There was one new teacher in the study and all others had taught for more than four years. The fifth grade in each school was observed by the investigator for ten three-hour periods between September 15, 1978, and June 20, 1979.

Anyon reported findings that suggest there is a “hidden curriculum” which prepares students from different socioeconomic backgrounds for class-specific roles in the dominant society. Students in working-class schools experienced knowledge as a series of rote, fragmented, low-level facts and procedures. Teachers in working class schools emphasized the need to keep students busy, and overtly stated that teaching students to think for themselves was ineffectual. But, teachers in the affluent professional schools had high expectations for their students, practicing instructional approaches such as learning from experiences, making sense of those experiences, and thinking for themselves. Anyon’s analysis of differences in schoolwork, and how it relates to

the larger society suggests that the “hidden curriculum” of schoolwork is tacit preparation for relating to the process of production in a particular way.

Critics who have investigated high school students’ access to knowledge during their high school years seem to imply that there is a critical need for educational reform such that all students might have access to different types of learning experiences. Close interpretation of their criticisms reveals their assumption that American secondary education should serve *all* students more effectively, and that reconstructing public confidence and support among policy makers, researchers, teachers, parents and students is long past due.

Critical Studies of Literacy Instruction and Learning

Research studies that report broad areas of schooling practices and structural procedures provided evidence and reasons to do further investigations, taking a closer look at the lives of teachers and students in classrooms, and the nature of instruction, particularly for students who struggle with reading and writing. Below, I describe some key studies which examined such issues in two areas: (a) characteristics of instruction, (b) instructional characteristics and social interactions. These studies are meant to help us understand factors which impact the literacy education of low-achieving high school students.

Characteristics of Instruction

Traditionally, commercial programs have been used to help improve the literacy knowledge and skills of poor readers and writers (e.g., SRA, Distar). Such instructional programs were designed from a reductionist framework, where information is taken out of context across content areas, and presented in bits and pieces of information. Many researchers argue that the curriculum content for poor readers and writers primarily involve completing skills-oriented tasks, where

students fill out worksheets, and read brief sentences or paragraphs to develop reading comprehension (Allington, et. al., 1986; Quirk, Trisman, Weinberg & Nalin, 1976). The reading and writing tasks and activities were compressed into small fragments of reading selections (i.e., brief paragraphs), and comprehension was determined by what percentage of questions students answered correctly. The goal of commercial literacy programs for students who do not read and write well was to help them master the complexity of the whole of literacy learning through an understanding of its parts (e.g., vocabulary development, phonic elements, decontextualized small reading passages). Scholars have documented findings which revealed that much of the content used in programs and classes which were specifically designed to improve reading and writing for students who struggle with it, consisted of artificially constructed texts rather than authentic literature such as children's literature, magazines, and other books (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989; Haynes & Jenkins, 1986; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, Graden, & Algozzine, 1984; Ysseldyke, & Algozzine, 1982). Thus, the programs designed to help students' literacy development did not provide them with a means "to engage in higher order thinking skills" (Birman et al., 1987, p. 114).

Curriculum content designed for students who struggle with literacy learning has been well-intentioned. However, researchers have noted that to develop students' literacy learning and acquisition, active involvement in actual reading and writing of texts is critical. Much evidence has been provided to suggest that students who struggle with reading and writing are the ones who are least likely to be asked to read or write - in any sustained form - during instruction (Walmsley & Allington, 1995). Rather, the areas of concentration for students who read and write poorly are technical and mechanical considerations

such as accuracy of print detail, and the completion of worksheet tasks rather than construction of meaning from text (Allington, 1983; Hiebert, 1983; Stanovich, 1986).

Other evidence has documented the ineffectiveness of instructional programs designed to enhance students' immediate and on-going literacy education. Carter (1984) and Slavin (1991) provided large-scale analyses of the effects of programs such as Chapter I remedial reading. They conclude that positive effects are at best small, even nonexistent in many cases. Walmsley and Allington (1995) suggest that instructional support programs such as remedial reading and special education do not adequately meet the needs of students assigned to them. This lack of effect may be due (in part) to the fact that since the students' needs are ostensibly met in another setting, the regular classroom teachers excuse themselves from responsibility for the low-achieving students' education. Yet, under the "least restrictive environment" requirement, low-achieving students spend more time in their regular education classrooms than they do in their special service classrooms (i.e., special education and remedial reading). The results tend to place the students in need of enhanced instructional support in a precarious situation. Students may actually receive less assistance in regular classroom settings, because classroom teachers do not consider it their responsibility to support them (Walmsley & Allington, 1995). Below, I expand on some of the literacy activities and nature of interactions that are generally practiced for students who find learning to read difficult.

Instructional Characteristics and Social Interactions

Research studies that investigate approaches to traditional reading group practices demonstrate that students' participation is restricted to responding. The

teacher, however, might exhibit an assortment of roles such as initiating, eliciting, extending, and evaluating (Barnes, Britton, & Rosen, 1971; Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman, & Smith, 1966; Bloome, 1981; Guzak, 1967; Mehan, 1979; O'Flahavan, Hartman, & Pearson, 1988; Philips, 1983). Alvermann and Hayes (1989) conducted a study to examine discussions of assigned readings in content area classrooms at the high school level. One purpose of the research was to attempt modifications of entrenched patterns of discussions so that they might reflect more higher-order thinking and critical reading. Results suggested that patterns of classroom discussions resembled recitation versus an interactive dialogue between teachers and students. In addition, the researchers were unable to modify discussion practices although they worked with the teachers for a six month period. The overall conclusions implied that it was difficult to alter entrenched patterns of classroom discussion, and to ask teachers to reflect upon those patterns was insufficient to change them.

Consistent with traditional reading-group practices in regular classrooms are the instructional approaches and activities in "remedial" classes designed for poor readers and writers. Basically, the instruction tends to focus on repetitive skill-oriented workbook activities (Johnston & Allington, 1991). Such activities focus more on procedures for completing assignments than on encouraging teacher guidance or teacher/student interactions (Nist & Mealey, 1991). Cazden (1988) argues that in the name of individualized instruction, "depersonalization" has evolved, focusing reading and writing on computer-based drill and practice, specific-skill sheets completed in isolation in a study carrel, programmed texts, and other individualized work. The emphasis that is placed on the performance of poor readers is judged by standardized test scores and tends to decrease the

quality of instructional activities. Such assessment limits reading and writing as a process as well as the social interaction between teachers and students who struggle with literacy learning and schooling.

When the norm is individualized instruction for poor readers and writers, social interactions between teacher and students and among students are not typically practiced. Generally, students work alone on different skill sheets based upon the students' level of reading and writing ability. In specialized programs (e.g., remedial and special education), the work of the teacher tends to involve monitoring students for "time on task" behaviors. Exchange of dialogue for sharing ideas and problem-solving between the teacher and students is rare. Many researchers have documented the lack of instructional explanation, modelling, or strategic prompts (Duffy, Roehler, Siven, Rackliffe, Book, Meloth, Vavrus, Wesselman, Putnam, Bassirir, 1987) to assist students in development of their literacy learning and acquisition (Allington, 1986; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989; Haynes & Jenkins, 1986; Quirk, Trismen, Nalin, & Weinberg, 1975; Rowan & Guthrie, 1989).

Alvermann, O'Brien, and Dillon (1990) conducted a study to describe and characterize middle school teachers' discussions following content area reading assignments. Twenty-four middle school teachers participated in the study and were asked to define and describe a good discussion. There were several overall findings. The first finding suggested the discussions in middle school classrooms range on a continuum from lecture/recitations, to recitations, to open forums. Second, the researchers found that a teacher's purpose for a lesson influenced the type of discussion. For instance, if the purpose of a discussion was to review reading assignments for a quiz or test, the discussion tended to be a recitation-

type discussion. Similarly, if the purpose of a discussion was to define terms or label parts or fill in missing information, the discussion is usually either a recitation or a lecture/recitation. Open forum discussions occurred when the purpose was to enhance comprehension. Last, Alvermann, O'Brien, and Dillon (1990) found that materials selected by teachers also influenced the type of discussions that emerged. For instance, the use of worksheets and/or textbooks tended to result in a lecture/recitations and recitations. However, materials such as videotapes, films, and notes are more likely to be found in open-forum materials.

Schmuck and Schmuck (1990) documented that the talk in the classrooms they observed was two-thirds teacher talk. Most classrooms were teacher-centered, with teachers standing in front lecturing to rows of students. Out of 119 classes, they observed only ten where they saw student-to-student talk that was planned by the teacher. Although the classes Schmuck and Schmuck observed were not for students with special needs, their observations are typical. Many classrooms (e.g., special education, remedial reading, regular education) do not provide a context to enable students to engage in inquiry and discovery. The instruction in the classrooms described above insinuate that it is not the students who need "remedial reading instruction" but rather, the instruction and social interactions that permeate classrooms designed for poor readers and writers that need "remediating" (Johnston & Allington, 1991).

Although the nature of instructional programs such as Chapter I and "remedial" reading were designed to promote literacy learning among students who struggle with it, these special services (i.e., instructional emphases, social interactions) have come under attack. Many researchers have questioned the exclusive focus of lower-order academic skills and instructional approaches for

poor readers and writers (Botel, 1978; Allington, Stuetzel, Shake, & Lamarche, 1986). Their ineffectiveness in terms of enhancing reading and writing for students who find it difficult is because students rarely reach the point where they are encouraged to participate in more challenging content area subjects. Many features of instructional support programs for students who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling do not challenge them, and limit their opportunities and progress (Calfee, 1986; Peterson, 1986; Romber, 1986).

These studies suggest that students have few opportunities to engage in discussions with their peers or with the teacher, leaving students with impoverished views of what it might mean to be able to read and write well. Underlying much of the reproach about the process and outcomes of secondary schooling, as well as the nature of instruction and interactions in instructional support programs and other classrooms is frustration with how we might best prepare students for the future. In the next section of this literature review, I discuss one theoretical perspective which holds promise for reshaping the language and literacy practices for low-achieving adolescents.

A Sociocultural Theoretical Perspective

Research concerned with language and literacy learning from a sociocultural view provides an interesting theoretical approach to explore alternative educative experiences for low-achieving adolescents. Theories of learning from a sociocultural perspective are pioneered by Vygotsky (1978), and extended by his colleagues and many scholars who have contextualized these ideas within notions of language and literacy instruction (Bakhtin, 1986; Cazden, 1988; Gavelek, 1986; McMahon, 1992; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). Sociocultural theory stresses the importance of language and social

interaction in learning and provides a context to examine the nature of dialogue use of low-achieving adolescents in alternative literacy contexts.

Sociocultural theory suggests that cognitive development is formed in part through social interaction and that language and social acts play an essential role in the organization of higher psychological functions (i. e., those functions that are not biological or “natural” such as mathematical reasoning, reading and writing). The development of those higher psychological processes related to literacy that are the focus of the Cross-Aged Literacy Program relate to oral reading, written responses to literature, and dialogue use for planning and reflecting upon literacy activities. Scholars who hold this view reject a reductionist view of cognitive development which places greater importance on individual development. Vygotsky (1978) argued that one internalizes higher cognitive abilities when language and social interactions converge. Because he viewed learning as a profoundly social process, this suggests that individuals master their surroundings when emersed in dialogue.

Vygotskian sociocultural theory in literacy learning is guided by three principles: (a) higher psychological functions are social and cultural in nature, (b) knowledge is constructed through the interactions among individuals within the social context, and (c) learning is fostered through the assistance of more knowledgeable members of the community and culture. Whether students are gifted, average, low-achievers, elementary or high schoolers, the principles of social constructivism acknowledge the role of oral and written language. These principles are useful when investigating such higher psychological processes as literacy learning and its relationship to the various academic abilities, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds that all learners bring to the classroom.

Higher Psychological Functions are Social and Cultural in Nature

The first assumption of sociocultural theory underscores that higher mental functions do not simply emerge within individuals. What higher psychological processes individuals are able to engage in occur first on the social plane or between people (interpsychological). Daily interactions, both formal and informal, are conducted in spoken language. Within school settings, dialogue is the means by which daily activities are conducted in classrooms, hallways, the cafeteria, and the principal's office. Students and teachers use language to converse, negotiate, discuss, and debate the issues necessary in order to develop a community of learners. In classrooms specifically, how we structure literacy instruction relates directly to how we perceive opportunities to enhance literacy learning. This assumption emphasizes how language within sociocultural environments fosters literacy learning and acquisition among students who find learning to read and write difficult.

Classrooms need to be structured to create opportunities for meaningful social interactions that promote higher order thinking. Although students bring different social and cultural backgrounds to the classrooms, sharing their unique experiences will be lost if they do not have opportunities to engage in dialogue, raise questions, or debate issues. The lack of social interaction among students thwarts occasions to share what one knows with peers as well as the teacher, resulting in missed chances to develop higher mental functions. Literacy instruction for poor readers and writers often entails isolated approaches, where students work at their desk alone with worksheets only. Classrooms that do not promote a social environment hinder poor readers and writers in developing higher order thinking because students do not share their thinking with others.

Knowledge is Constructed Through Interactions Among Individuals

The second assumption of sociocultural theory follows from the first. If higher psychological processes are social in nature before becoming internalized, it follows that knowledge is constructed through interactions among individuals. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that an important aspect of developing higher mental processes critical to literacy learning and acquisition is through interactions among individuals within a social context, the background and characteristics that acclimate human activity. The reconstruction of an external activity is referred to as internalization, and is demonstrated through problem-solving, voluntary attention, and memory. Internalization is not a process of mirroring external reality, but rather a process of reconstructing and negotiating meanings through the social interactions that occur among people.

Vygotsky (1978) suggests that learning occurs first between individuals (interpsychological), with the to-be-learned concepts eventually internalized as the individual appropriates and transforms what was learned for his or her own purposes (intrapsychological). This process recognizes the need to create social situations in which meaningful purposes are established for interacting around to-be-learned concepts. For example, imagine a situation where high school students were expected to engage in a discussion about text. Students who struggle with the texts written at a high school level need opportunity to read and respond to texts at an easier reading level. Further, they need to be able to read and respond to these texts in manners that parallel that of their more able peers. Thus, it is critical to create an environment where these high school students can engage in using language to promote literate thinking about the content of the books they are able to read. The preparation seminar, a key

component in the Cross-Aged Literacy Program provides such a setting.

Within the preparation seminar, high school students work together using both oral and written language as the basis for negotiating meaning. This phase of the program provides an opportunity for students to see and hear their peers respond to text, and to negotiate and reformulate emerging ideas, questions, and issues. The social interaction enables students to internalize the language, thoughts, and emotions of others as they begin to develop in their literacy knowledge in response to texts that they can read. Such texts, in fact, must be read to effectively participate in the upcoming component, the *cross-age discussion groups*, in which the high school students serve as facilitators of literary discussions among fourth and fifth graders. Through the public discourse in the preparation seminar, the high school students have access to the thinking of their peers as well as that of the more knowledgeable adult conducting the seminar. They have access to a range of models of literate thinking, and they are able to use language as a tool to engage in mature talk about text.

Learning is Fostered Through the Assistance of More Knowledgeable Others

Vygotsky (1978) suggested that learning is developed when it is closely linked to interactions among people. The concept, referred to as the zone of proximal development, implies that within interactions, more knowledgeable members of a culture influence what others learn. The “more knowledgeable others” in most cases are adults (i.e., teachers, parents). However, “more knowledgeable others” might also be more experienced peers who come from **d**iverse social and cultural backgrounds. Viewed in this perspective, when adults **a**nd peers collaboratively work together opportunities exist to expand one’s **l**iteracy education from a variety of human sources.

In an alternative literacy program for adolescents who struggle with reading and writing, several opportunities exist such that they might interact with “more knowledgeable others” and actually become “more knowledgeable others” and thus foster their own literacy learning. First, an initial step would entail an instructional situation where high school students might engage in literacy activities (i.e., reading, writing, discussion, planning, and debriefing) with a teacher. Through the process, students might be extensively immersed in literacy events that would serve as a model for what they could do with younger students. Then these adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling could serve as the more knowledgeable other to younger children. By being in such a position, the high school students would have numerous opportunities to make visible their own literacy knowledge and to apply it in assisting younger learners.

Bakhtin (1986), a Russian scholar, suggested that inner speech - a key aspect to internalizing concepts and processes introduced within the social context among individuals - is the result of various activities, interrelations, and social discourse. Social discourse occurs within a context where individuals who are part of a group join together in creating meaning. This notion is the foundation upon which higher psychological functions become possible, and provides an entry point for the learner. Individuals transform social discourse into inner speech which serves to guide or control the individual’s learning.

Bakhtin and his associates identify four social factors that influence the study and understanding of language and literacy learning (Emerson, 1986): (a) **language** and its impact occurs within a social context, (b) that context is **organized** so that individuals might become a part of a social group, (c) the study

of language requires that one consider the ideology that exists as a relation between (or among) a social group, and (d) words are rooted in experiences and social interactions, thus, their meaning stems from some memory of a previous usage in discourse.

The alternative literacy learning program described in this study is a context for examining the theoretical principles of Bakhtin. Within the Cross-Aged Literacy Program, adolescents who struggle with reading and writing engage in dialogue for specific reasons with a more knowledgeable other. The communication involves dialogue among members of the preparation seminar, where collectively group members orally read text, write responses, and share responses in order to develop various aspects of literary knowledge. The social nature of various activities with an adult provides the adolescents with background knowledge and skills such that they might conduct cross-aged literacy activities with elementary students. In addition, the actual cross-aged literary discussion sessions (i.e., older and younger students interacting over text) provide an additional context where dialogue is a significant part of the social context.

Bakhtin's second factor suggests that the social context must be organized socially in order that individuals be a part of a social group. The literacy events involving reading, writing, and discussions in the preparation seminar and the cross-aged discussion groups are examples of organized social experiences where individual students might become part of a social group. Within the settings, students work together, sharing insights about text, observations of younger students, and comparisons of past and present literacy learning experiences. When individuals willingly share their voices, and when all

group members respect those voices, there is the promise of creating a sense of community among people.

Bakhtin's third social factor suggests that when studying language, consideration of the ideology that exists as a relation between or among speakers and listeners, and between or among social groups should be given. Social groups have features of their language that are characteristic to that group. That is, each social group has its own dialect, which mirrors and includes a set of values and a sense of shared experiences and understandings (Emerson, 1986).

Although social groups share ideology, values, and experiences, these factors are not without complexity. Studying language within a social context where it occurs could be a complicated process. The complexity often requires that individuals who come together collectively as a group make attempts to negotiate during the process of social interactions.

Students who participate in cross-aged literacy learning settings come from different backgrounds both academically and socially. The collection of various background experiences created a rich social setting. Within the social setting, students interrelate and interact to construct meanings and to translate and negotiate her and his own set of values. Through the interactions, the complexity of the setting rises, presenting those studying language and interactions with a more challenging experience to explain the nature of the interactions, the value systems that emerge, and the ways in which members negotiate in order to make connections for themselves as well as their peers.

Bakhtin's fourth social factor emphasized that word meanings are rooted in experiences and social interactions. Words cannot be realized apart from the voices who speak them. Therefore, through the process of negotiation of

meanings, every word raises the question of authority. Students involved in a cross-aged literacy program in which all members of the group contribute their opinions and ideas about text learn that the experiences of different people help shape meanings of words. A reductionist perspective in which one's goal is to absorb knowledge from text contributes to the misunderstanding that words in a dialogic situation have only one meaning. Like high achieving students, low-achievers bring a frame of reference to a social setting. The language use and interaction of students who participate in a contextualized literacy learning setting provides a site to investigate literacy learning and acquisition. The different experiences of all students helps create rich and meaningful interpretations about text.

Linking Sociocultural Theory to Literacy Learning

The sociocultural perspective broadens the definition of literacy to recognize the inherently social nature of literacy events and to emphasize the contributions of social, linguistic, and cognitive processes to literacy learning (Green, 1990; Bloom & Green, 1984). In this reconceptualization of literacy learning, social contexts and language use and meaning depend on various social dimensions within specific contexts (Beach, 1993). Such social dimensions might include the participants' perceptions of responsibility, roles, needs, status, and motives. All of these factors contribute to meaning construction.

The significance of emphasizing the social and cognitive aspect of literacy learning has direct implications for work with low-achieving adolescents. It is an opportunity to negotiate a space for voices that are often silent to be heard. Kennedy, Jung, & Orland (1986) note the over-representation of students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds in remedial and low-tracked programs.

Other scholars (e.g., Au & Mason, 1981; Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Michaels, 1981; Philips, 1983) document the differential treatment of diverse and minority learners in school contexts and argue that such differential treatment negatively affects students' reading achievement. For example, Cazden (1988) provides evidence in which minority children from New Zealand and the United States are discouraged from expanding upon their thoughts. Similarly, Michaels (1981) reports that when the narrative styles of minority children are at variance with the expectations of Caucasian teachers, interaction is often unsuccessful and, over time, may adversely affect school performance and achievement. Such encounters with learning in schools often frustrate students when they learn that their background knowledge and experiences they bring to literacy learning is not valued nor heard by teachers and peers (Florio-Ruane, 1994).

I chose a sociocultural perspective because I was interested in exploring what potential the social nature of literacy learning might have for low-achieving adolescents who... "do less reading and writing and get less instruction and less personal interaction" (Johnston & Allington, 1991) than their peers who are considered average or high-achievers. Specifically, I wanted to develop an understanding of how low-achieving adolescents demonstrate and enhance their literacy knowledge while working with elementary students. In addition, I wanted to understand how they collaborated and negotiated with others in holistic goal-oriented, alternative literacy settings. In the next section, I highlight research literature that emphasizes the significance of providing students with opportunities to engage in literacy learning through oral and written language and social interactions.

Research Perspectives on Language and Literacy Learning

Presently, researchers and teachers are exploring oral language use and communicative development in learning, focusing on the potential of speaking and listening in the social and cognitive growth of children and adolescents (Cazden, John & Hymes, 1972; Cazden, 1988; Haroutunian-Gordon, 1991; King, 1984). This research provides impetus to explore new directions, and to pursue more in-depth understandings about the role of language in literacy instruction and learning for high school adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling. In the following section, I discuss: (a) the role of oral language in classrooms, and (b) literature discussions in the classroom.

The Role of Oral Language In Classrooms

High school adolescents live in a rich social world of language, and they spend a considerable amount of time in school talking. As they change classes, they engage in conversations with their peers, gossiping about friends, teachers, and family members. During lunch time, the sounds of voices rising and falling can be heard all across the cafeteria as students laugh and exchange secrets with one another. High school students quietly whisper to a neighbor or friend, or pass notes up and down a row of desks as the teacher lectures the class. In addition to talk at school, high school students talk with family and friends outside of school context, as they negotiate, debate, and discuss their positions about personal matters. These discussions occur within a context, where speakers and listeners share responsibility and negotiate turns. Research on language in social settings must address questions about how we might build upon what secondary students do well in order to better meet their literacy needs

in formal as well as informal settings.

Presently, research that is focused on language use acknowledges the importance of oral communication in the social and cognitive development of elementary students. Although much of the work has been concerned with the literacy development of young children, the work defines competence in new ways, emphasizing social interactions to enhance communication. Thus, this research justifies the necessity to examine similar paths in literacy instruction for adolescents who do not read and write well. The intent of this section is to review pertinent research on the role of talk in learning, how students become competent and effective users of language, and the implications for exploring oral language as a tool for literacy learning. The framework for this discussion includes: (a) classroom functions for oral language use, and (b) oral language and learning in the classroom.

Classroom Functions of Oral Language

Oral language is a medium that serves different purposes and functions in the lives of adults and children. It is used at family gatherings, stores, banks, and the YMCA. Talk is a special way in which people create meanings among themselves. Seemingly, oral language in the classroom would serve a similar purpose where teachers and students communicate with each other to explore ideas, engage in inquiry, and construct meaning. Through talk, the classroom community can establish meaningful and friendly relationships, ask questions, tell stories, give information, and influence each other. Although oral language is used to communicate, a sociocultural perspective underscores its role in learning. Classroom functions for oral language use depend upon what teachers and students do with language as they talk with each other. Barnes (1993) notes that

talk allows human beings to share and communicate just as it enables them consciously to inspect and reformulate (for themselves as well as for others) their understandings of the world, both social and physical. The development of higher psychological processes through language use can occur as teachers and students communicate orally for purposes that make sense to them as they interact with each other.

Scholars have used various methods to study oral language use in the classroom, depending upon the researcher's purpose and conceptual framework for the study (Malinowski, 1923; Bühler, 1934; Britton, 1970; Morris, 1967). For example, Halliday (1975) identified seven functions of language for young children when they enter school. These seven functions or uses of oral language evolve over time and include: (a) an *instrumental* function to satisfy basic needs, (b) a *regulatory* function to influence the actions and behavior of others, (c) an *interactional* function to negotiate relationships with others, (d) a *personal* function to express self, (e) a *heuristic* function to explore and find out about the environment, (f) an *imaginative* function to pretend and explore an imaginary world, and (g) an *informative* function to communicate information to others. Halliday (1975, 1978) argued that the seven functions of language used by children which tend to be utilitarian functions blend into three more general functions that characterize oral language use for adults: (a) *pragmatic* or *interpersonal* use to develop and maintain social relationships, (b) *ideational* use that serves to reflect on personal experience and explore the environment, and (c) *textual* function that concerns the use of language resources to construct oral texts (e.g., stories, conversation) within the context of the situation. The various functions of oral language as described by Halliday are useful when thinking

about the development of higher psychological processes. For instance, an *instrumental* function of language can only occur for a young child when she is capable of communicating to a “more knowledgeable other” what her needs are.

Other scholars have noted the potential of talk as a strategy for learning within the classroom (Barnes, 1990; 1993; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). Short and Armstrong (1993) conducted a classroom study referred to as the inquiry cycle, designed to help children make links between hands-on science experiences and literature. The process of the inquiry cycle became the curriculum framework where the researchers developed a two-month focus with second-grade students on the theme of ecology and interrelationships. The inquiry cycle developed from the children’s own life experiences where they explored common cycles in their daily lives such as getting ready for school. With the open-ended nature of the project on ecosystems, talk had a primary function (e.g., developing a inquiry-based curriculum) and purpose which played out in various ways to assist the children in learning. Short and Armstrong (1993) suggest that teachers can design specific curriculum structures that would support a wide range of exploratory talk in classroom inquiry. They found that the second graders used talk for a variety of purposes which included connecting with past experiences, sharing new experiences, exploring and re-considering their own experiences and ideas, developing new perspectives, building on the ideas of their peers, hypothesizing and exploring half-formed thoughts, asking questions, developing a focus, reflecting on their inquiry process, and presenting their understanding to others. The functions and purposes of talk in the inquiry cycle highlights the significance of talk and children’s learning.

Different functions and purposes of oral language were prevalent in the Cross-Aged Literacy Program. A pragmatic or interpersonal function was used in cross-aged literary discussion groups to collaborate, negotiate, encourage alternative views, and set standards for group norms. Personal language might also serve as a function in each key component of the program. For instance, in the preparation seminar, students might use their own agendas to move interactions and discussions forward in the setting. Program participants might share their personal opinions and beliefs about pieces of text. Structuring discussions such that opinions and beliefs are respected might be likened to language use as a personal function to express oneself and listen to others. Integrating personal background experiences into the world of the text might be viewed as an informative function, where older and younger students share information about themselves, friends, relatives, and make connections to literature they read.

Communication and Learning in the Classroom

Much of the current research that focuses on classroom communication is framed from a sociolinguistic perspective, and draws on methodologies and interpretative frameworks from a variety of disciplines (Cazden, 1986; Green & Smith, 1983; Green & Harker, 1988; Wilkinson, 1982). Within a sociolinguistic framework, language is seen as a window to provide information on the relationship between learning and social development (Pinnell & Jaggar, 1991). This perspective is useful to help researchers and teachers learn about how teachers and students learn to communicate via oral language use within classroom contexts.

Sociolinguistic studies of classroom communication and learning highlight

the distinctive discourse produced within the context of the classroom. In addition the studies tend to focus on two kinds of relationships in grades K-12: relationships between teachers and students, and between students and students.

Teacher and Student Talk in The Classroom

Research on communication between teacher and students has emphasized that power relationships exist in classrooms based upon how language is used, for what purposes and by whom. Edwards (1979) has noted that within the classroom environment, knowledge is typically framed by the teacher and communicated as the authority to the students, where the teacher “owns” instructional talk, with the authority to direct speakership and to make at least most of the decisions concerning turn-taking, duration, and content of the talk. Research regarding teacher and student talk focuses on how many students are perceived as disadvantaged and low-achievers, if they are not accustomed to reconstructing their knowledge and expressing it explicitly. Bernstein (1964, 1975) suggests that some classroom environments consist of “elaborated codes” where students must know and understand them in order to be able to function effectively within the classroom. Several scholars have documented the need for students to learn the behaviors and language functions of teachers as well as the content of school lessons in order to be considered successful students (Cazden, 1988; Delpit, 1988; Edwards, 1981; Mehan, 1979).

Opportunities to use language in the Cross-Aged Literacy Program varied for different purposes, at different times, and by different individuals. For instance, in the preparation seminar, there was equal access for communication between the researcher and students to make concerns, opinions, and beliefs public. Every participant was perceived as an authority, and talk was “owned”

by anyone who wished to speak. Likewise, within the cross-aged group setting, construction of knowledge through talk was equally shared by the older and younger students. Language behaviors and functions served meaningful purposes, and each group members' contribution was considered to be valuable.

Michaels (1981) conducted a study in an ethnically mixed, first grade classroom focusing on a discourse-oriented classroom activity called sharing time. Sharing time is defined as an activity where children are called upon to describe, object or give a narrative account about a past event to the entire class. One purpose underlying sharing time is to bridge the gap between the child's home-based oral discourse competence and the acquisition of literate discourse features required in written communication. In her analysis, Michaels provided a detailed microanalysis of the sharing styles of the children. This analysis suggests that children come to school with different narrative strategies and conventions for giving narrative accounts during sharing time. When the child's discourse style matches the teacher's own literate style and expectations, collaboration is often synchronized. However, when the child's narrative style is at variance with the teacher's expectations, collaboration is often unsuccessful and, over time, may adversely affect school performance and evaluation.

This discussion on the functions of oral language use in classrooms concerned how language is used as a tool to serve various purposes in classrooms. In the next section, I advance this review to include a related purpose for talk in classroom; literature discussions.

Literature Discussion in the Classroom

One of the most studied forms of discourse has been conversation. Numerous scholars have investigated social interactions, language, and literacy

learning within the classroom context to develop our understanding about how students develop their sense of the structure and design of talk in classrooms, and how those structures and designs vary according to culture (Tannen, 1982, 1985).

Many scholars suggests that language should be the center of any conception of learning (Barr, D'Arcy, Healey, 1982; Berrill, 1988; Hickman & Kimberly, 1988; Halliday, 1969, 1978, 1993; Tough, 1973, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978; Watson, 1987). Others have worked within a sociocultural framework, shifting from teacher-centered to student-centered activities so that students might have opportunities to engage in inquiry through language.

Within the last decade, researchers and teachers have been exploring the significance of having students engage in discussions in small groups, where the teacher plays a less dominant role. The interactions often center around literature, where children gather in groups to share ideas and talk about books. Raphael and McMahon (1994) designed and implemented the Book Club program as a collaborative study including university and teacher researchers (McMahon, 1992; Raphael, McMahon, Goatley, Bentley, Boyd, Pardo, & Woodman, 1992). The study was a response to calls for reform in literacy instruction and learning for upper elementary students of all ability levels to provide opportunities for them to engage in meaningful and purposeful conversations about books. Book Club consisted of four interconnected language and literacy components: (a) reading, (b) writing, (c) discussion, and (d) community share, which supported student-led discussion groups, or book clubs. Book clubs were groups of 3 to 5 students in a heterogeneous group with respect to gender, reading ability, and ethnicity.

Raphael & McMahon (1994) have documented the complexities involved in understanding what it means to create an alternative model of literacy instruction: (a) integrating reading within the language arts curriculum was important because writing and discussion promoted students' reading and interpretation of texts, (b) alternative models of literacy instruction were beneficial to students' literacy development, and (c) time and patience is important in order to give both teachers and students multiple opportunities to understand their roles and development in an alternative literacy program.

Student progress in relation to literacy development in the Book Club program has been reported (Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995; McMahon & Hauschildt, 1993; Raphael, et. al., 1992; Raphael, Boyd, Rittenhouse, 1993; Raphael & Boyd, (in press); Raphael, Goatley, McMahon, Woodman, 1995; Raphael & McMahon, 1994), highlighting their accomplishments in several different ways. During book club discussions, students held harmonious thematic conversations and encouraged all members of their book club to make meaningful contributions to the discussion. Diverse learners (e.g., second language, Chapter 1, special education) participated actively and assumed leadership in discussions regardless of the challenges presented by the text. The content, format, and range of ideas written in students reading logs became more sophisticated over time. Students in book clubs learned to value literacy, learned to talk about books inside and outside of school, and were enriched in ways that may not have been possible with more traditional approaches to school reading.

Often, when teachers decide to implement a context-based, alternative model for literacy instruction in their classrooms, their students do not experience the engaging literary discussions they read about in the literature. Roller and

Beed (1994) report their work in an article that helps us understand those less-than-perfect discussions and the roles they can play in children's literacy learning. They studied the book sharing sessions of four groups of 8- to 12-year-old children who received extra support for learning to read. Beed taught three groups of Chapter 1 students during the regular school year, while Roller taught one group of 15 children during a 6-week summer residential reading clinic.

Components of the book sharing sessions included reading workshops (Hansen, 1987), individualized reading, teacher-student conferences, and mini-lessons. Book sharing sessions were literature discussions conducted by children about their self-selected books. Thus the children selected their own texts to read from a library. Procedures for book sharing sessions involved the sharer giving the title, author, and a brief description of the book he or she had selected. Children shared their favorite pages by either discussing them or reading them aloud to their audience of peers. After the sharer completed his or her presentation of text, an invitation was extended to the responders, other children and the teacher, to offer comments and ask questions. Goals for the children as set forth by Roller and Beed (1994) included: (a) learning about ways to talk about books, (b) constructing meaning from the texts they read and discussed, (c) enjoying reading and discussion books, and (4) improving their self-concepts as readers.

This study is significant because Roller and Beed (1994) moved beyond studying what seemed to be the "best" exchanges. They discovered that the more ordinary exchanges (e.g., content-free enthusiasm, or substantive but lifeless discourse) among the students served definite and important purposes as the children developed ways to share and respond to pieces of text. Conclusions

were drawn from studying more ordinary versus exciting exchanges. The teachers: (a) learned to respect the children's enthusiasm; (b) gained confidence in their decisions to return occasionally to more directive formats, because they were useful for establishing a point; (c) learned that it is important for children to pursue their own paths when involved in discussions about text; and (d) learned that learning is most effective when ideas build upon the ideas of children. The inferences drawn by Roller and Beed (1994) extends the research on literature discussions in the classroom because they suggest that teachers should carefully weigh what children *are* accomplishing in their discussions rather than focus on what *is not* being accomplished. Further, their study shows positive ways of giving children who have difficulty learning to read and write, an entry point into literate conversations that may help launch them into the world of literacy, expanding the boundaries of teaching moments when uncertainties belie teacher expectations. Roller and Beed (1994) offer alternative viewpoints for thinking about what counts as literacy learning for students who find learning to read and write difficult.

Eeds and Wells (1989) investigated the nature of interactions in literature study groups composed of fifth- and sixth-grade students led by seventeen pre-service teachers. The younger students were heterogeneously mixed in groups of four to eight, and they met twice per week for 30 minutes each day, for four to five weeks. The researchers (i.e., Eeds and Wells) acted as participant observers and took extensive field notes which included physical descriptions, participants involved, and reconstructed dialogue. Leaders within the literature study groups kept journals of their experiences and their feelings about these experiences which were responded to weekly by one of the researchers.

Procedures for the study entailed transcribing fifteen literature study groups, reading all the transcripts to get a general sense of the data, and selecting four literature study groups for in-depth analysis - two (Natalie Babbitt's (1975) Tuck Everlasting and Betsy Byars' (1974) After the Goat Man) which seemed to be extremely successful, and two (Louise Fitzhugh's (1964) Harriet the Spy and Meredith Pierce's (1982) The Dark-Angel) which seemed less so. The researchers judgment of "less successful" was based on the impressions they had when first reading the transcripts that teachers had talked too much, jumping into pauses in the conversation with nervous comments or questions. In addition, questions aimed at initiating a conversation, missed "literary teachable moments," or students retelling the story or talking about the part they liked best were deemed "less successful" as well.

In these literature study groups made up of readers of varying abilities, children as young as ten participated in rich discussions of works of literature. Findings were revealed in several areas. First, the research study conveyed that children were capable of articulating their construction of simple meaning, but that changed as they heard alternative views. Second, it was learned that sharing personal stories inspired by the reading or discussion in poignant and revealing ways triggered identification among other group members. Third, children participated as active readers as evidenced by the predictions they made, their hypotheses, and confirming or disconfirming their predictions as they read. Last, the children showed that they had attained insights about how the author had communicated her message to them. They supported their evaluations of the communication with their interpretations of the text. The findings of Eeds and Wells (1989) supported those of Golden (1986) who asserted that talk helps to

confirm, extend, or modify individual interpretations and creates a better understanding of the text.

Conclusion

One purpose for this literature review was to argue that the curriculum and instructional programs designed to teach reading and writing to low-achieving adolescents inhibit their academic success. For over a decade, scholars have debated these issues and made claims that students who are placed in lower-accelerated classes (i.e., tracking) very often remain in them throughout their school careers. Likewise, students who receive “drill and skill” as a means of literacy instruction rarely move beyond that level and engage in problem-solving and critical thinking strategies. Many of the studies I cited in this review provide evidence to support the claims made by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, that there are alarming statistics of risk factors that contribute to high illiteracy rates (e.g., functional illiteracy among minority youth may be as high as 40%). From a sociocultural lens, when we look at the organization of the curriculum (e.g., tracking) and how literacy instruction occurs for students who find learning to read and write difficult, the system does not support a context for the literacy development of low-achievers. The traditional way of constructing meaning occurs between a student and worksheet, rather than among teachers and students, and students and students. In fact, quite often when students talk to each other in school about a lesson or a project, it is commonly referred to as “cheating.” Such a position places low-achievers at a disadvantage and ensures that the probability of them capitalizing on more advanced opportunities -- whether in academics or the job market -- are diminished. Therefore, it would seem that our educational system is failing to provide *all* of our students with a

quality education, where equal access to educational opportunities might be offered to everyone.

Most of the research on oral and written language in classrooms has focused on teaching, oral and written language use, and the literacy learning of younger students. Much of this research has not examined what might be done to enhance the literacy learning of high school students who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling. Principles of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Bakhtin, 1986) are useful for investigating the literacy learning of adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling. Thus, the second purpose for this literature review was to explore what potential these studies might have for low-achieving adolescents. Taken together, the studies I cited explored innovative approaches to teaching children to read and write for specific purposes (e.g., to develop an inquiry project), and within specific contexts, where oral language was an *enabler* for learning. Oral language as an *enabler* for learning was a consistent factor because students had opportunities to develop their existing body of knowledge by relating to new ideas and experiences to their existing ways of understanding and acting upon the world. Barnes (1993) refers to this as “working upon understanding.” As social beings, “working upon understanding” by talking with teachers and peers is a natural way of communicating in daily life. It makes sense for low-achieving students’ talk to play a significant role to learning in an alternative literacy learning program.

CHAPTER 3

THE EVOLUTION OF ONE CROSS-AGED LITERACY PROGRAM

This study is based on methods and procedures of what Bogdan and Biklen (1992) call qualitative research, what LeCompte and Preissle (1993) call ethnography, and what Florio-Ruane (1987) identifies as the sociolinguistic tradition. A particular assumption of these methods is that to understand the nature of cross-aged interactions and discussions, the researcher must observe and spend time within the setting regularly examining the interactions as the participants perceive them. I have chosen to work within a qualitative research paradigm because it is consistent with my theoretical perspective and my interest in both the meaning that high school adolescents make of their experiences in an alternative literacy program, and the nature of their literacy learning.

Within the qualitative tradition, a case study (Merriam, 1988) approach met my goals at three levels. First, a case study examines a specific phenomenon such as the nature of social interactions within each context of the study. For instance, in my study there are two interrelated but distinct settings. Within each setting, literacy events and discussions comprise social interactions that enable the student participants and me to engage in literacy learning activities. I examined the activities to determine the nature of the events within each setting. Second, a case study can illustrate the complexities of the social nature of literacy learning. For example, discourse and written language were central tools for instruction and learning in the preparation seminar. Similarly, discourse and written language were the principle means of instruction and learning in the cross-aged student-led discussion groups. Both instructional settings occurred in cultural locations -- schools and occasionally at Pizza Hut or McDonalds -- and

are conducted by members of the culture, students and me. A case study allows the exploration of the nature of social interactions within individual settings and across contexts. Finally, case study methods place an emphasis on the human instrument. As a regular participant observer in this study, I was a primary instrument in the data collection. This enabled me to conduct a thorough investigation of social interactions and dialogue in both instructional contexts, to integrate data across instructional contexts, and to compare and contrast data across the cross-aged discussion groups.

In this chapter, I describe the neighborhood setting of the high school, the elementary school, and the fourth/fifth split classroom. This general description is followed with a look at an alternative literacy learning program, the Cross-Aged Literacy program. I will describe the components of the program, and the literacy activities and tasks that comprised the program. Finally, I describe the participant selection process, data collection and analysis.

Septima Clark High School

Residential streets within the neighborhood of Septima Clark and Angelou¹ schools form a maze which leads to major streets that spread across a midwestern city. Houses are Tudor and ranch styles, single-family dwellings with well-manicured lawns. Some neighbors share paved driveways with separate-one and two-car garages located in their back yards. Other families have individual driveways with attached one and two car garages on either side of their homes.

A major factory is located within the neighborhood and is a branch of the auto industry. The factory consumes approximately four city blocks and sits

¹ The names of schools and all participants are pseudonyms.

between Septima Clark High and Angelou Elementary schools. A local bar and grill is located across the street from the factory. Other businesses include fast food restaurants, convenience stores and service stations.

Septima Clark is a 9-12 high school and is composed of students from families representing various racial backgrounds and cultures. The present building of Septima Clark High School was opened in 1942. The style of the building is a reminder of some of the historical influences of this society. Greek and Roman deities are represented in cement molds which line up across the front of the school. A clock tower hovers over the entire structure. Situated at each end of the building is a rotunda, adding to the architectural splendor of the building.

The building has three floors. Where the hallways intersect, there are mosaic tiles with symbols representing the fields of study that are taught in that particular area of the building. For example, on the second floor at the southeast end of the building, mosaic tiles with scientific scales, flasks, beakers and test tubes represent the science being taught in that area. The halls are clean and well-kept. The tiled floors shine from continued and on-going maintenance.

The student population is approximately 1,500. The percentage of low-income students is 22%. The high school has a range of ethnic and cultural groups, including 4% Asian, 6% Hispanic, 46% African-American, 42% Caucasian, and 2% Native American. Septima Clark is one of three high schools in the district and reports the lowest dropout rate and the smallest percentage of minority students who leave school early. This high school is located approximately four blocks from Angelou Elementary. Below, I briefly describe the elementary school.

Angelou Elementary School

Angelou Elementary is a K-5 building and is located north of Septima Clark. A two-story brick structure, the building was constructed in 1930. Angelou is a physical reminder of schools of the past. Square shaped, one is reminded of a small factory with a tall round chimney lingering over the building. The grounds are beautifully landscaped with trees, shrubs, and flowers.

The school sits on half a city block. While Angelou is a 65-year-old school building, renovations contribute to the pleasant environment. Modern energy-efficient windows have replaced the original ones. Conveniently located next to the school is a playground which was recently furnished with new colorful equipment. Blacktop paves another area of the playground, which includes a basketball court.

Many special features contribute to the warm and inviting environment of Angelou Elementary. The walls shine with ceramic tiles. Throughout the facility are terrazzo floors and wood trim, carpeted classrooms, colorful lockers along the hallways, and high ceilings.

The building has 11 classrooms on two floors. Hallways and classrooms are clean and well-kept. There are 33 computers available for students use. This provides students with access to new technology and enhances the basic curriculum requirements.

Children from various racial backgrounds and cultures attend Angelou. During the 1993-94 academic year, the student population was 236, representing ethnic and cultural diversity: 2% Asian, 14% Hispanic, 41% African-American, 44% Caucasian, and less than 1% Native American. Angelou Elementary is one of 33 elementary schools in the district. The building has 12 teachers, with a

student-teacher ratio of approximately 20 to 1. Approximately one third of students qualify for free or reduced breakfast and lunch.

The Fourth/Fifth-Grade Classroom

In this section of the chapter, I describe the classroom at Angelou Elementary where the high school students facilitated cross-aged literary discussions with small groups of fourth- and fifth-grade students.

Room 205

Room 205 at Angelou Elementary School is on the second floor, at the south end of the building, on the left side of the hallway. The classroom was a fourth/fifth split and upon entering the room, one might be reminded of a traditionally organized classroom (see Figure 1). The teacher had the desks organized to reflect the different grade levels that were present in the room. On the east side of the classroom, the fourth graders' desks were organized in rows of two to three on the left and right ends of the classroom. The teacher's desk sat approximately in the middle of the fourth graders' desk. The fifth graders' desks were on the west side of the classroom near the back in rows of two to three desks as well.

The north wall at the back of the classroom included a chalkboard and bulletin board. The bulletin board was always decorated by highlighting a theme. For example, during February pictures of famous African-Americans were posted on the bulletin board with borders and bright colored construction paper. Two semi-circle tables sat in front of the chalk board with three computers on each. A printer was on another small desk next to the computers. A roll-away bulletin board was in the back of the room near the computers. The bulletin board consisted of the children's art work and graded spelling tests.

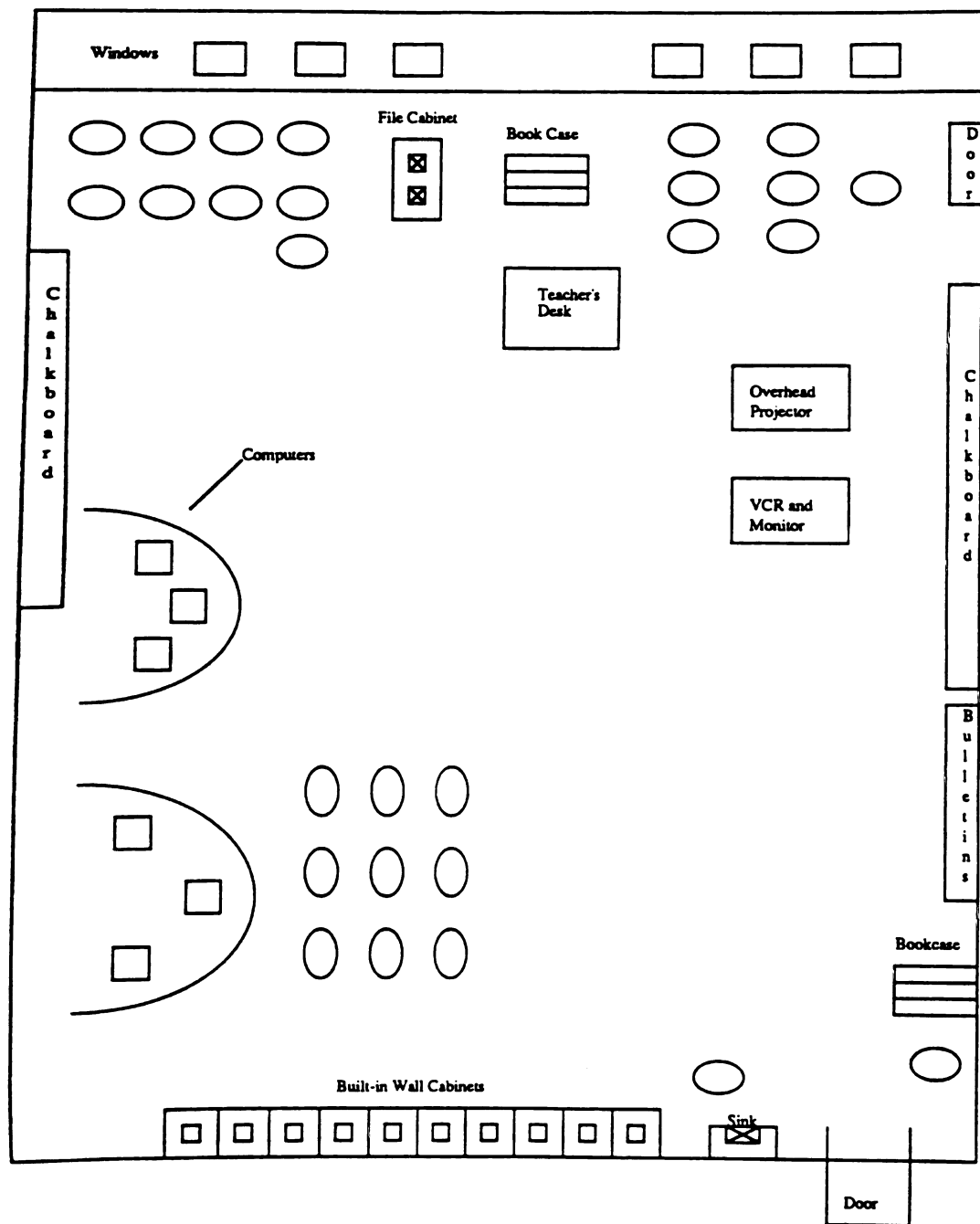


Figure 1. Diagram of Room 205.

The south wall at the front of the classroom included a chalkboard and bulletin boards at each end of the chalkboard. The bulletin board at the left included a poster of classroom rules. To the left of the bulletin board was a door which led to another classroom. The bulletin board at the right changed from time to time. The themes reflected depended upon what the students were studying at the time. For example, when the children and their classroom teacher planned, rehearsed and performed The Wizard of Oz, the bulletin board consisted of pictures of past performances of the same play. Above the chalkboard on the south wall was a corkboard that contained charts illustrating how to form the alphabet in cursive letters.

The east wall consisted of large built-in storage cabinets. One was a closet where the teacher stored her personal belongings. The others cabinets were in five rows with three separate doors in each row. They were made of wood and stained with a beautiful glossy finish. Storm windows were on the west wall. The teacher's large wooden desk sat in front of the windows between the fourth-graders desks. Students' desks were large and wooden with storage space for books and other personal belongings beneath the top of the desks. The floors consisted of indoor/outdoor carpet in a natural but dark tone.

The Cross-Aged Literacy Program

I designed and implemented the Cross-Aged Literacy program to offer low-achieving adolescents opportunities to engage in an alternative educative experience (Dewey, 1938) that involved literacy learning within interactive social contexts. My aim was to enhance and encourage the literacy development of adolescents who are frustrated and poorly motivated to read and write. The Cross-Aged Literacy program is comprised of two inter-related components. In

the section below, I present an overview of the project followed by a description of the activities and tasks that made up the preparation seminar and then the cross-aged discussion groups. Figure 2 is a model of the interrelated components of the program.

Overview of The Cross-Aged Literacy Program

The Cross-Aged Literacy program draws on the Book Club Program (Raphael, McMahon, Goatley, Bentley, Boyd, Pardo, Woodman, 1992) and peer tutoring (Bloom, 1988; Topping, 1988; Wagner, 1982), extending and modifying both concepts. From Book Club, the Cross-Aged Literacy program's language and literacy components are derived (e.g., reading, writing, book clubs); from peer-tutoring, I developed the cross-age nature of the program.

The preparation seminar supported cross-age activities of the high school and elementary school students, which helped prepare the high school students to work with the younger children. The cross-aged discussion groups consisted of a high school student leading, facilitating and actively co-participating in a conversation about a piece of literature with four to six children.

The Preparation Seminar

The first component of the program was the preparation seminar. The purposes of this component were threefold: (a) to facilitate literacy learning activities and tasks with the high school participants one to two times per week in a small group, (b) to plan the literacy activities and tasks that the high school students would do with younger children, and (c) to conduct debriefing sessions with the high school participants after each session they conducted with the younger students. The intent underlying the preparation seminar was to prepare the high school students to engage in literacy learning activities before meeting

The Cross-Aged Literacy Program Components

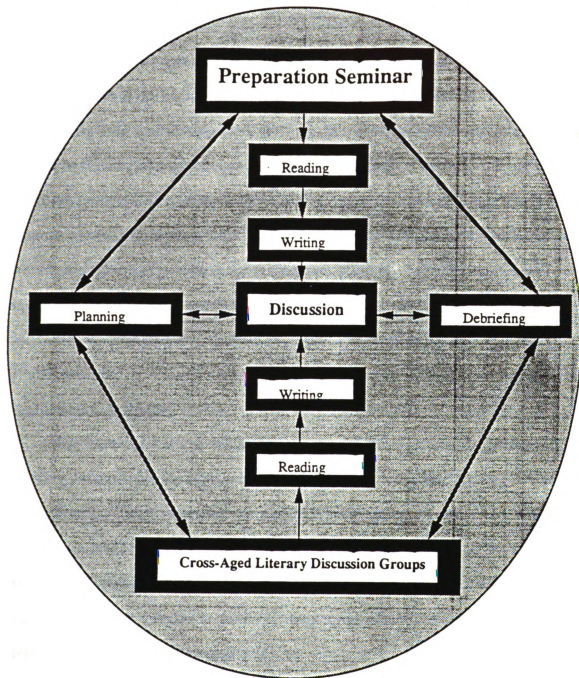


Figure 2. Cross-Aged Literacy Program Components

with younger children. In addition, I wanted to monitor and assess the nature of the social interactions and their overall experience as participants in an alternative literacy program.

The preparation seminar was part instructional, and part collaborative learning between the high school students and me. Instructionally, my overarching goal was to help them develop much-needed skills and strategies related to fluency and expression in oral reading, comprehension, and responses. Learning centered around these three literacy areas as students collaborated to prepare for their upcoming work with the fourth and fifth graders, work that would parallel our activities in the preparation seminar. In this section, I first explain my instructional activities and decisions. Then I describe the collaborative activities the students engaged in to prepare for the cross-age literacy events.

Instructional Activities

My instructional responsibilities spanned from selecting the literature to creating contexts for the high school students to read, respond to, and discuss the selected texts. There were four instructional foci: (a) select and read children's literature together orally; (b) write personal responses in reading logs; (c) share and discuss written responses among members of the group; (d) plan and prepare the agenda before meeting with the elementary children; and (e) conduct a debriefing session to reflect and analyze.

Literature selection. I selected the literature for our cross-aged literacy program. For this project, we read two picture books: (a) Tuesday (Wiesner, 1991), and (b) June 29, 1999 (Wiesner, 1992). In addition, we read two novels: (a) Song of the Trees (Taylor, 1971), and (b) Journey to Jo'Burg (Naidoo, 1986).

Some scholars suggest several determining factors (e.g., emotion, story understanding and liking, empathy with a certain character) that influence how students engage in a piece of literature (Black & Seifert, 1985; Golden & Guthrie, 1986; Hansen, 1986; Jose & Brewer, 1984; Mosenthal, 1987). I selected these novels because I wanted the students to read literature that addressed multicultural issues and themes. I believed that these novels would encourage rich discussions between the adolescents and me, and between the high school students and pupils. In addition, since the high school participants for this program were minority students, I selected literature that might raise some issues of personal relevance and interest to them (Purves & Beach, 1972; Sims, 1983).

Reading. In our preparation seminar, the high school students read on a voluntary basis. If students did not wish to read, I did not push them. If they refused to read, I read orally to them, using the occasion as an opportunity to model fluency, intonation and expression. Sloan (1991) suggests that when adults read orally to young children, this assigns a special role to reading, signaling to the child that adults find reading worthwhile and enjoyable. This notion is of similar concern for young adolescents who are less motivated to read. As our project and relationships progressed, the high school students eventually began to take risks and read orally. In fact, they reached a point where they felt comfortable enough to either tell me that they would read, or ask me if they might read. The procedure they established was to take turns, using a pause or end of a section or chapter to change readers. An exciting time of the study occurred when students showed initiative to read. It appeared that they had gained enough confidence in themselves to be willing to take risks and read orally to their peers and me.

Writing. In relation to writing responses to literature, I wanted to provide a context that would give students an opportunity to express themselves personally. That entailed providing a means to respond that was more than fill-in-the blank answers to questions. To do that, students wrote entries in their reading logs in response to: (a) questions that either I or their peer raised, (b) a key issue or event in the story that she or he wanted to discuss, or (c) an idea selected from the Reading Log Ideas response sheet (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). The response sheet enabled them to write their reactions from a broad range of ideas, giving them opportunities to choose and make decisions about *what* and *how* they wanted to share their ideas (Goatley & Raphael, 1992). I modified the log sheet to include ideas that high school as well as elementary students might find interesting to write about (Figure 3).

Reading logs were based on the ideas proposed by researchers who suggest that journals are a significant tool for students to reflect about their reading, to encourage close reading, and to prepare for later sharing of their ideas (Atwell, 1987; Blatt & Rosen, 1982; Fulwiler, 1982; Gambrell, 1985; McNeil, 1988; O'Sullivan, 1987; Reed, 1988). I modified the reading log think-sheets designed by McMahon & Pardo (1992) which contained specific prompts (e.g., a "Section [from book that] I would like to read to my small group and/or high school buddy: Why do I want to share this? Other ideas I'd like to talk about in my small group discussion"). I asked students to write a response to a particular piece of the text they wanted to share in the preparation seminar as a way to prepare for our discussion. Over the course of the study, I changed the type of reading log response sheet students used. The new log page had a blank space for students to record their names and date, pictures of books lined across the top

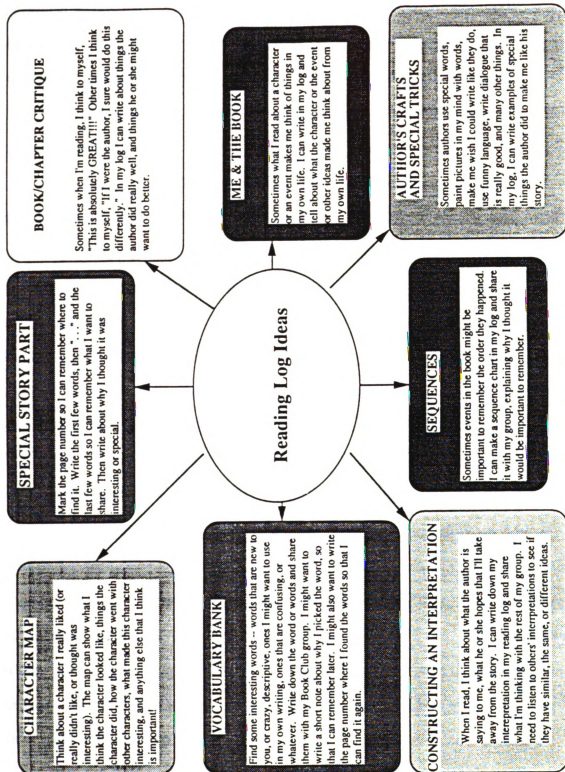


Figure 3

of the page, and blank lines (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). Students wrote a response to prompts (open-ended questions) which I wrote on the chalkboard. In addition, they had the option to use the back of the reading log think sheet which was unlined, to draw an event or character they wanted to represent. Students used these logs once or twice per week as a means to prepare themselves to have a discussion in our preparation seminar.

Discussion. The discussion component of the preparation seminar promoted two goals: (a) focusing on key issues or events in the literature, and (b) preparing students to engage in a literary discussion with younger children. For example, when reading the picture books, Tuesday and June 29, 1999, I decided to focus on helping students to learn more about creating meaning using picture books (Galda, 1988). Since Tuesday was wordless, I asked students to concentrate on creating their own story using the illustrations in the books as a means. Since the illustrations in Tuesday were very detailed, this provided an opportunity to orchestrate the reading experience closely, focusing on what students observed in the illustrations, and how they talked about them (i.e., describe the illustrations, make interpretations about the illustrations). My role during the discussion component was that of facilitator, where I provided the students with an opportunity to personally respond to the text, and experience open-ended discussions with their peers and me before going to the elementary school. As we participated in our discussion together, I modeled with them what their role and interactions might look like with the fourth- and fifth-graders as they discussed their novels.

After, the students had an opportunity to read, write, and personally respond to the literature, we reflected on it to brainstorm and plan literacy

activities they might do with the fourth- and fifth- graders. This resulted in another phase of discussion designed to plan literacy activities and tasks for the younger children.

Planning the lessons. The high school students were expected to conduct discussions with the children in their small groups in similar ways as the discussions in the preparation seminar. In order to do so, we planned the lessons and procedures to guide them in facilitating a literary discussion with the fourth- and fifth-graders. The planning component of the preparation seminar began by talking about the reading, writing and discussion activities we engaged in (e.g., who read, what was read, what key issues were raised, what they might talk about with younger children) as a model to help us develop lesson plans. Therefore, planning for the cross-aged literary discussions centered around: (a) who would read orally at Angelou Elementary, (b) what chapter(s) or section(s) would be read, and (c) what key questions, issues, and events would be raised. A variety of ideas emerged, specifically related to what key issues and events students might talk about in their small groups. After debating what would be discussed and developing questions, we made final decisions. I typed the lesson plans for the high school students to use as a guide when they worked with the younger children in their individual groups.

Debriefing. A fifth focus of the preparation seminar, the debriefing, was concerned with analysis and reflection to assess the nature of the cross-aged interactions and discussions. I planned the debriefing phase of the preparation seminar to talk with the high school students about: (a) their roles and responsibilities in their small groups, (b) the strengths and weaknesses of the cross-aged sessions, and (c) what they learned about themselves as facilitators of

cross-aged discussion groups with fourth- and fifth-graders.

To discuss roles and responsibilities as participants in the study, I gave students a list of guidelines that briefly outlined what “good tutors” do when they work with other students. The guidelines were set within the context of what “good tutors” do when they work with young children. Together, the high school students and I read and discussed the guidelines. I explained to them that they were role models for the children at Angelou Elementary, and to use the guidelines as a reference in consideration of appropriate behavior that role models should display (see Table 1). Over the course of the research study, discussions about students’ roles and responsibilities emerged based on the experiences that students encountered in their small groups. For example, if a high school student had one child who dominated discussion time during the cross-aged session, we brainstormed ideas as a group to help that student handle the situation in an appropriate manner. Students stored the guidelines for “good tutors” in their folders and used it as a reference source over the course of the study.

Roles and responsibilities were related to academic encounters as well as social interactions and role modeling. In order to study and learn about themselves as facilitators and co-participants in cross-aged literary discussions, students viewed “snippets” of videotape, to observe themselves as they worked with the fourth- and fifth-graders. To assess what we thought was going on in the videotape, either a student or I would pause the tape whenever we saw an event that we wanted to discuss. The student or I would describe the event to the group focusing on whatever he or she wanted to talk about from the videotape. After rendering a description, we talked about the events,

Table 1

15 Things a Good Tutor Does

1. Smiles often and is friendly at all times
2. Asks friendly questions before each session
3. Is on time
4. Is prepared for the tutoring session
5. Uses time efficiently
6. Gives clear instructions
7. Keeps correct, up-to-date records
8. Remember to praise partner, never criticizes
9. Says things like: "Very good," "Right," "You are doing very well," "Nice job"
10. Thinks of other ways to praise so (s)he doesn't always say the same thing
11. Never says, "That's wrong" or "No"
12. Never does or says anything to make the partner(s) feel bad
13. Helps partner(s) feel s/he is doing well so s(he) will enjoy being tutored
14. Gets the job done
15. Has a good time

highlighting the strengths and weaknesses. We discussed strengths to reinforce the positive things that all students (i.e., older and younger) did, and how the high school and younger students worked together in order to have a productive discussion. We discussed weaknesses in order to brainstorm ideas about what might be done differently when the students met for another cross-aged session. For example, if a student encountered a dilemma within her or his group, we discussed the problems, what they believed the source(s) of the problems were (e.g., a disagreement between students), and how things might be done differently. Occasionally, the high school students thought a literature discussion was not done very well. Thus, we used debriefing sessions to discuss ways to help them engage the younger children in a discussion about text.

Finally, students discussed how the various oral and written responses that the younger children had about the literature immersed, extended, or shortened discussions. For instance, the high school students observed occasions when children responded to a question, and how that response sometimes influenced how and what another group member said (e.g., a similar response, a completely different response). Debriefings related to this aspect of the cross-aged discussions enabled the high school students to learn strategies and skills they might use to help the children as well as themselves have productive literary discussions. Further, the debriefings in relation to oral and written responses enabled the high school students to consider some ideas made by the younger children about which they had not thought. A reflection and analysis of others' ideas helped students to consider what the activities, tasks and discussions meant for their own literacy learning and development socially and cognitively.

The instructional and debriefing focus of the preparation seminar gave the

high school students an opportunity to develop their oral communication skills by discussing the literacy activities (reading, writing, discussion), tasks, lesson plans, and the debriefings. The debriefings gave them a chance to reflect and critique themselves as learners and as “teachers.” It gave the students an opportunity to receive responses from each other as well as from me. Debriefing sessions also allowed the high school students to rethink and reformulate their literacy activities before their next visit with the elementary children. Overall, the preparation seminar component offered opportunities for low-achieving adolescents to engage in literacy-learning tasks and activities for meaningful purposes, and to develop their planning, organizational and decision making skills within a social setting.

Cross-Aged Literary Discussion Groups

Twice per week, the high school students went to Angelou Elementary school to conduct literacy-learning activities with pupils in a fourth/fifth split classroom. The small groups consisted of one high school student facilitating and co-participating in literacy activities with four to six elementary students. Three interrelated literacy activities comprised the cross-aged literary discussion sessions: (a) oral reading, (b) writing, and (c) discussion. The high school students conducted the cross-aged sessions, modeling the interactions we experienced in the preparation seminar.

Oral reading was shared among the older and younger students, where they took turns, changing at a pause or at the end of a chapter or section of the text. On occasion, I read to all of the students (i.e., older and younger) at Angelou Elementary to continue working with them on fluency, intonation and expression.

After reading orally, a high school student (from his or her lesson plan guide sheet) wrote questions on the chalkboard so that all students could read them. Then that same student read the discussion questions that were prepared during the preparation seminar. After reading the questions, the high school student asked the younger children to write their responses to questions in their reading log. Students were given the option of responding to two to four questions. The high school students wrote responses in their reading logs as well, continuing to model the process as well as providing additional thinking to their ideas about the literature. During some sessions of the cross-aged discussions, students were given an opportunity to write a response using the Reading Log Ideas response sheet as opposed to questions. The high school students and younger children alike kept records of their personal responses and reactions to the literature in their reading logs. Thus, written responses occurred in a range of ways: (a) a response to specific question(s); (b) a response or reflection to a comprehension strategy; (c) a response to a specific literary element such as a critique of the book; and (d) a personal response about something that the book reminded students about.

When all students completed their personal responses, they assembled in their individual small groups. In the small groups, the high school student began the session by reading a question or questions, and asking one child to share his or her response with the group. If students had selected an idea to write about from the Reading Logs Ideas think sheet instead of a question, they read that personal response. Likewise, the group facilitator (i.e., high school student) read her or his response, contributing ideas to the group as well. Each high school student facilitated the discussion in his or her small group by: (a) asking the

children if they had questions or comments to make about a group members response, (b) asking questions to clarify ideas, (c) making comments about shared ideas, (d) initiating new topics, (e) offering alternative views, and (f) taking critical positions. In turn, the elementary children assisted in facilitating the discussion by responding and commenting to each other as they talked about a piece of text.

The cross-aged literary discussion group sessions provided several features that are significant for the literacy education of the high school students. First, this component of the project placed the students in a literacy-learning context where they had to make informed and spontaneous decisions during interactions with the children. Second, the social context of the project was designed such that high school students had an occasion to enhance their leadership strategies and skills. Finally, the cross-aged setting provided the high school students with a double occasion to deepen their social and cognitive literacy education in a context designed to read, write and have conversations about literature that involved meaning and purpose.

Assessment log sheets. Probst (1988) suggests that the pattern for evaluation when using literature should grow logically out of the teacher's concern for student's responses to the literature and their analysis of their response. Questions which ask students to evaluate their own interaction with the text might focus on the experience of reading and discussion as opposed to the text. In addition, questions which ask students to assess their interactions might direct them to watch for changes, suggesting that growth in thinking is far more significant than correctness (Probst, 1988). For this study, assessment log sheets were created to reflect the notion of alternative ways of evaluation

(Figures 4 and 5). The assessment log sheets were based on ideas of Raphael and Englert (1990) who suggest that students benefit from having prompts that serve as a basis for thinking and for dialogues about text, to provide culmination of the reading experience. The assessment log sheets requested specific information from the high school and elementary students. However, the specific information requested was different for the two groups of students. For example, for the high school students, I wanted to understand their perceptions of the nature of interactions with the students in their small groups, and what they were learning from those interactions. From the fourth- and fifth-graders, I wanted to develop my understanding of how younger students perceived literacy tasks and activities with older students.

The High School Students

Four high school students participated in The Cross-Aged Literacy program and are the focus of this study. The group consisted of three males and one female. All of the students participated in the project over the course of five months. In the section below, I describe the process for selecting the students and a brief biography of each student (see Table 2).

Selecting the Participants

The Cross-Aged Literacy program was designed to provide an alternative literacy learning context for students who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling. One setting to observe these students is in a pull-out program such as “remedial reading.” However, the district where I conducted my study eliminated the program due to budget cuts. Although the program no longer existed, the students who had trouble still existed and were mainstreamed into regular content area classrooms. Therefore, I conducted my observations of “at



YOUR NAME _____

DATE _____

1. Did you enjoy reading the story? Can you say why you did or did not enjoy the story?

2. Did the story offer any new insight or point of view? If yes, in what way?

3. Did the story support thoughts or opinions you already held? If yes, in what way?

4. Did the discussion with your fourth-grade peers tell you anything about the story? If yes, what did it tell you?

5. Did the discussion with your fourth grade peers tell you anything about yourself? If yes, what did it tell you?

Figure 4. High school students' assessment log sheet.

Adapted from Probst, 1988, p. 225

NAME _____ BOOK _____

MY SUMMARY REFLECTION

In this summary reflection, I'm going to write about the small group discussions I had with my high school reading and writing buddy. The following sentences starters have been prepared for me. I will complete my thoughts in my own words.

This week we read

The story was about

My favorite part of the story was

I like this part of the story because

For my writing activity I

In our small group we talked about

Figure 5. Elementary students' assessment log sheet.

Table 2. Participant information

Student's Name	Ethnicity/Gender	Age	Grade
Teresa	African-American Female	15	9
Michael	African-American Male	15	9
Mark	African-American Male	15	9
Devon	African-American Male	15	9

risk” students in a regular subject area classroom.

The study began in Mrs. Carol Foster’s ninth-grade English classroom in September. Upon meeting her, I explained my research study and the principles underlying it. She was supportive of the project and the ideas underlying it in relation to the potential benefits for some of her low-achieving ninth-graders. Mrs. Foster believed that the project might benefit some of her students who were less motivated to be successful in school, and students who were distracted from engaging in academic activities. Therefore, Mrs. Foster was willing to allow four of her students to go to a fourth/fifth classroom, to work with children two days per week between January and June. Mrs. Foster supported and assisted me in selecting the students by: (a) talking with me about students she had observed and believed would benefit from the program, (b) talking to guidance counselors to re-arrange students’ schedules, (c) sending information about the project home to parents, and (d) filling out the necessary paperwork.

I began observing students in Mrs. Foster’s classroom on September 21, looking for potential participants. Twenty-five students were enrolled in the class. On my first visit, Mrs. Foster introduced me to her class by telling them my name, and that I was from Michigan State University. During my initial visit, I began to observe students who appeared to be resistant toward Mrs. Foster and class activities. In order to observe such behavior, I looked for instances where students appeared to be disengaged in class activities (i.e., heads down on desks during instruction), and when students made inappropriate comments at inappropriate times. I recorded such instances in my field notes if they were frequent in any given class session. For example, on September 21, I wrote in my field notes:

After introducing me to the class, Carol took up some papers from students and read one of them, I think as an example of what they're supposed to be doing. Before Carol started reading one of the papers, she told the students that she liked reading them. One student said, "Well we don't like listening." Carol's response to him was "manners."

My purpose for paying particular attention to students who appeared to be resistant to the teacher as well as some class activities was to investigate further whether these students might be considered students who were "at risk" of academic failure. This would help me make decisions about asking for participants for my research study.

After six observations, I provided basic information about the project, and the expectations I would have of those who participated. For example, I explained that I was interested in working with a small group of high school students, to prepare them to work with fourth- and fifth-graders at Angelou Elementary. The work that they would do with the children involved reading, writing and talking about children's literature. Also, I explained to the high school students that they would be officially dismissed from their class two days per week. However, they would be responsible for completing the class assignments they missed when we were at Angelou Elementary.

After informing students that I would need the services of 4 students only, I asked for volunteers. Surprisingly, 17 out of 23 volunteered. A sheet of notebook paper was circulated and each volunteer was asked to write her/his name and grade point average on it. Grade Point Average (GPA), teacher judgment and my observations and interest in certain students were used to make decisions about narrowing the pool of volunteers. Mrs. Foster and I discussed the students I was interested in, as well as students whom she believed would

benefit from the project. We consulted the list of volunteers to determine if any students whom we had considered had volunteered to participate. Her criteria for selection included students who were less motivated to participate in her class activities, and students whom she considered to be "headed for trouble."

Since the premise of the study was to provide an alternative literacy learning context for low-achievers, the first procedure for eliminating students who volunteered were those with high GPA's. For purposes of this study, a high GPA was 3.0 or higher. Realizing that there was a possibility that some students volunteered because they would be excused from their English class two times a week, I decided to ask students to write a brief statement explaining why they wanted to participate in this research study. Students' statements enabled Mrs. Foster and I to make further eliminations. We looked for statements which implied that they had interests in the program, as well as ideas about how they thought the program would contribute to their on-going literacy education (see Table 3).

The Four Case Study Students

Teresa. At the time of the study, Teresa was a 15-year-old, ninth grade, African-American female. She was petite in size, of average height, with black, shoulder-length hair. Teresa lived with her mother in a three-bedroom house on the south side of a midwestern city. When we first met, for her pre-interview, she anxiously told me that she did not see her mother very often during the week, because of her mother's work schedule. Her mother worked at a plant factory during second shift (i.e., 3 - 11 PM). Each afternoon when Teresa arrived home from school, her mother had already left for work. Because of conflicts in mother and daughter's work and school schedules, Teresa was usually asleep by the

Table 3
High School Students' Statements
November 5, 1993

Name	Statement
Michael	I would like to be a volunteer becuse I think It would be fun. And it would help me mouve Because I have a Job at B. C. F. I [Black Child and Family Institute]. And I have to would [work] with youger kids then me for so may hours And This will help me do so. And This might help me in the future.
Teresa	I would like to volunteer with your students because every time something well in other words a project like this I never get pick I don't know why I guess Im just the odd one out the crowed. but I wouldn't mind doing my work here. So if you have someone else in mind I will under stand it always happen like this.
Devon	Well the reason why I wanted the job was because. During the summer I work with kids and the extra experience will help me for next summer. Plus I have alot of energy and when I work with the kids I give off positive energy. I also work really hard when someone give's me a challenge. So I'm ready to give the job all I have. Thank you
Mark	Statement not available

time her mother arrived home. She had a twenty-one year old sister, and a nineteen year old brother. However, both of her siblings lived outside of the home she and her mother shared. Teresa's father lived in the same midwestern city, and worked at the factory next to her high school. But, she reported that she did not see him on a regular basis.

Teresa had two dogs and a cat. One of her dogs has been in her family since Teresa was one year old. She did not say how long she had had the second dog, but her cat had just joined the family two weeks prior to the interview. Teresa said that her pets were her companions, especially during the evenings when her mother was working.

Teresa participated in extracurricular activities after school hours. She was manager of the boy's basketball team. Also, she ran track. Teresa's beliefs about participating in activities after school were that they were something she enjoyed doing because of the company she received from being around other people. But even more than the companionship she received, she claimed that participating in extra-curricular activities after school were a means to keeping her "busy to stay out of trouble so it won't come back" to her. Since Teresa's mother worked on weekends as well, she spent most of her time doing things with one female friend who attended another high school.

Non-school related activities Teresa enjoyed doing were listening to music, talking on the telephone, spending time with her animals, visiting people, talking and laughing with friends, jogging, and exercising. She described listening to music as her "main priority." Her favorite board games were Clue and Big Boggle. Also, Teresa liked to play card games such as Tunk and Speed.

Teresa has been labeled as Learning Disabled (LD) and diagnosed as

dyslexic. Throughout elementary school, she participated in Special Education services until she entered middle school. Her favorite content area subject is science. She especially liked biology. Teresa reported that she did not particularly like school, but realized that getting an education was an important thing for her to do. She plans to become a veterinarian.

Michael. At the time of the study, Michael was a 15-year-old, ninth grade, African-American male. He was approximately 5' 4" tall and stocky. Michael had black hair that he always kept short and neat. He usually wore fashionable styles in clothes sporting the loose fit jeans, and matching shirts tucked neatly inside his pants. He wore the classic black Nike tennis shoes and a black and rust starter jacket.

Michael lived with his mother, stepfather, two younger brothers, and his older sister, in a two-story house on the west side of a Midwestern city. His mother worked as director of a local day care center, and his stepfather worked at a plant in a city 20 miles away. Michael's biological father owned a paint company in a large city in the northeast. Michael referred to his brother's as his "little brothers" and seemed protective of them. For example, his brother Andrew often caused trouble in school (i.e., starting fights) and Michael participated in the fights to defend his brother. In addition, to protecting his brother, Michael often spent time with both of them, babysitting, cooking and seeing to it that they did their homework while his parents worked.

Michael had a variety of extracurricular activities he enjoyed doing. He played in the tailback position with the junior varsity football team, and proudly talked about the 16 touchdowns he scored, as well as the 1300 yards he ran. Michael seemed proud of his record because he was just beginning to play

football on the high school level. In addition, Michael ran track and made the junior olympics earlier during the year. He made the relay team, which held the position of ninth in the country. Michael was proud to be a part of the junior olympics team as well, as he did not hesitate to tell me that the team was on television. In addition to his athletic accomplishments, Michael was the first freshman to ever make the Septima Clark High School Fashion Show program. That was a big school event where students prepared themselves to model the latest fashions.

A favorite pastime of Michael's was to listen to music. His favorite types of music included rhythm and blues, jazz and rap. He liked the "old music" that his mother listened to. Michael said that when his family lived in another Midwestern city, his mother played that "old music" (i.e., sounds of the 1970's) all the time, so he became accustomed to listening to the same type of music she listened to. In addition, he likes to play checkers, Monopoly and the UnGame. Michael described the Ungame as a hard "thinking game" where you get to know people and their families.

During his freshman year in high school, Michael applied to participate in a community youth service program. He had to submit a resume, a statement about why he was interested in the program, and what he believed he could contribute as well as get out of the program. Out of 60 applicants, Michael was chosen to serve as a peer education counselor. To prepare for the role, Michael participated in a training program at a local university for two weekends in one month. Michael chuckled when he told me that he thought that the youth group would go to the university, stay in the dormitory, and just have "fun." However, he soon learned that they were at the university to study about the consequences of

engaging in unsafe sex (i.e., AIDS and other venereal diseases), and how they could communicate such information to their peers without judging them.

Michael added that he learned that they were there to work and learn as he described the weekend preparation session as a “lockin and a lot of hard work!”

I became intrigued with Michael when I observed him sucking his thumb with a football jersey on during his English class. On several occasions, I saw Michael put his thumb in his mouth to suck on it, seemingly not ashamed to do so in the presence of his classmates and teacher. The thumb-sucking intrigued me because it seemed rather uncommon for a fifteen year old male to suck his thumb in public. At the same time, the thumb-sucking seemed to depict a nurturing gentle spirit in Michael, even though he was an infamous junior varsity football player.

Michael was in a “remedial” reading program when he was in third grade. He described it as a good experience because he “worked his way out” of the program. Michael was retained in fifth grade, and thus was a year older than most ninth graders.

Mark. At the time of the study, Mark, a 15-year-old African-American male was tall and slender. He kept his hair cut close and in a faded neat style. Mark wore his clothes the loose fit style clothes, sporting his shirts and jeans neatly. Many teenagers at his school wore NBA style starter jackets, and Mark was no exception. The style he wore was pull-over, and the colors were black and turquoise.

Mark lived with his mother, stepfather, and three younger brothers in a two-story house on the west side of town. He lived within one mile of his school. His mother worked at the local university in one of the health centers. His

stepfather worked for a construction company. Mark said his stepfather was laid off from work during the winter months due to weather conditions. His biological father had a carpentry business, where he worked on roofs and insulation for houses. Mark's biological father lived a few blocks away from his home, and he often took he and his two older brothers bowling. His brothers' ages were fourteen, nine, and one year old at the time of the study.

According to Mark, his family did not go places and do things together other than going to church. During many conversations we had, he often talked about how his mother read the Bible and wanted him and his brother to read the Bible "all of the time." When I asked Mark about the types of things he liked to do for himself when he was not in school, his response was that he liked to play basketball in the summertime. He played football on the junior varsity team during football season. When Mark visited his friends, they would rent movies and watch them. His favorite board games were Checkers and Monopoly. The family owned a computer, where Mark and his brothers played games on it as well.

Mark had a TV, VCR, and a telephone with his own number in his room. He spent time watching television or movies alone in his room. His favorite TV shows were Martin, Living Single, Married with Children, Rap City, and Roseanne. His favorite movies were Menace to Society, Boomerang, and Boyz in the Hood. Mark and his brothers owned a Nintendo, Super Nintendo, and Sega Genesis systems. It seemed that Mark entertained himself with the video games and television because he said that he did not like to be around a lot of people. He claimed that if he did not have to deal with individuals, he avoided them. According to Mark, he would rather "stay at home."

When I asked Mark what his favorite subjects were and what he liked about school, he responded “lunch time.” His next statement was that he liked all of his classes (i.e., math, English, gym, US history, life management skills, science). Mark said that none of his classes were really boring. His favorite thing to do during lunch hour was talk to the girls. Although Mark claimed he liked all of his classes, before the end of the interview, he defined school as a place to “sit and be bored.” This comment was elaborated upon where talked about how he “despised and hated school.” He recalled that he was on punishment during 7th and 8th grades “forever” because he never did his school work, even though he attended school regularly. Mark could not tell me why he hated school. He only knew that school was not something he enjoyed, and that he “pushed” himself to go to school because he wanted to “do something” with his life. Mark argued that if it were not for the fact that he wanted a “good job” for the rest of his life, he would “skip every day.”

Mark made reference to a reading class he remembered having to attend “down the hall” when he was in fourth and fifth grades. However, he did not say that he took “remedial” reading classes. I was intrigued with Mark because he talked to me and Mrs. Foster with such respect (a seemingly rare feature for many teenagers today). Mrs. Foster referred to him as a “sweetheart” and appeared to like him despite the fact that he did minimum work, and skipped her class occasionally.

Devon. At the time of the study, Devon, a ninth-grade 15-year-old African-American male referred to himself as “the class clown” and a “nice kind of guy.” He was approximately 5’ 4” tall and stocky. Devon’s hair was black and he wore it in a style called flat top. His hair was high on the top of his head,

but his sides and the lower back was bald. He wore clothes that were extra-extra-large, with shirt tails worn outside of his pants which were always “sagging.” Instead of a starter jacket, Devon wore a bulky down-filled one. Occasionally, he wore colorful bandanas that were tied around his head.

Devon lived with an extended-family in a two-story house, with his mother, stepfather, four cousins (i.e., two girls and two boys), and three brothers. He lived on the west side of town not far from Michael and Mark. Devon’s mother had an associate’s degree, and worked at a local hotel in the business office. His stepfather worked in the northern part of the state. Devon did not know what type of work his stepfather did. His older brothers were twenty-year old twins. They worked at a warehouse for a midwestern supermarket chain. One of his female cousins had a part-time job at a pizza restaurant. Devon worked during the summer months at a day care center. The child care facility was one that was designed to provide care for infants and children whose parents were employed with the company. Devon said that the children’s ages ranged from four to nine years, and he found the job difficult at times. He claimed that because he was a teenager, the children tended to take advantage of the situation occasionally. It was only when adults talked that the children listened. Although Devon found his responsibilities difficult at times, he seemed to like working with children.

Devon had a variety of interests and hobbies. He loved to listen to rap music, and rhythm and blues. In fact, listening to and writing “hard core” rap music was one of his favorite past times. He explained to me that there was a difference between hard core and mainstream rap music. He defined the difference; hard core rap music included a lot of “foul language” in the lyrics. He

chose to write and listen to music versus watching television. In addition, Devon had an extensive rap music collection. His collection included many cassette tapes that had parental advisory stickers stuck on them. He had been building his music library since 1989.

Devon liked to play sports such as basketball, baseball, and football. He played on his high school junior varsity football team before his knee injury. During the spring season, Devon ran track.

Another interesting hobby of Devon's as well as is of many teenagers was talking on the telephone. He claimed that he spent approximately two hours a day talking to his friends. Devon did not like to "stick around the house." To "hang out" with his friends was more appealing. When he was around his friends, he liked to tell jokes, be funny, and ask questions. In fact, Devon said that he often asked a lot questions. Devon liked to read adult novels. His favorite genre was realistic fiction. He had read Disappearing Acts by Terry McMillan (1989), and talked about his interests in the struggles of the characters in the book. He also liked to read humor, or as he put it, "books that make you laugh."

Devon's favorite thing to do at school was disrupt the class. He disrupted the class by asking questions that were funny in order to get the class laughing. In this context, Devon described himself as a "smart aleck." He said that sometimes, it is "just in me" to say something that will interrupt the teacher, and "goof off" in class.

Mrs. Foster described Devon as the "brightest" out of the four case-study students. However, Devon never did any of his school work. In fact, he was failing all of his classes. He asked me why was he selected to participate in the project given that he had the lowest grade point average of all of the students in

the English class. It appeared that Devon assumed that this study was meant for students with high GPAs, or at least students with better grade point averages than his own. I explained that he had other qualities that I believed would benefit him and the younger students he would work with. In addition, I was intrigued with his written statement where he explained that he worked hard when he was presented with a challenge.

Data Collection

Qualitative researchers, including ethnographers, deal with empirical data, or potentially verifiable information obtained from the environment and accessed via human senses (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The complex instructional interactions of The Cross-Aged Literacy program required a collection of rich and diverse data sets in order to facilitate answers to my queries. To examine the experiences of the high school participants in this study, I collected multiple sources of data, including: (a) field notes, (b) audiotaped preparation seminars and cross-aged discussion groups, (c) videotaped cross-aged discussion groups, (d) formal and informal student interviews, and (e) reading and reflection log entries (see Table 4). Below, I describe the data sets I collected.

Observing and Recording Field Notes

One to two times per week, beginning in January and ending in June, 1994, I met with the high school students for the preparation seminar. As a participant observer, I wrote field notes during the meetings. I used time after the meetings of the preparation seminar to expand my field notes, by reconstructing the social interactions, themes and issues raised by the students and me.

Twice per week, I observed and recorded field notes of the cross-aged

Table 4
Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Sources	Information Analyzed from Data Source
1. How do the social interactions in an alternative literacy program help us to rethink, reconstruct and redefine literacy learning for adolescents who struggle with reading and writing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Field notes b. Response Logs c. Audiotapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Written records will record observations made by the researcher. b. Response logs will reveal what topics were initiated by students via written language. c. Audiotapes will reveal what topics were initiated by students via oral language.
2. What was the nature of participation in the two alternative literacy contexts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Field notes b. Response Logs c. Video/Audiotapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Written records will enable the researcher to document students' interactions. b. Response logs will provide information to explore the content of discussions during each component of the research study. c. Video and audiotapes will be used to support researcher observations.
3. How do high school students represent their knowledge about literacy when interacting with fourth- and fifth-graders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Formal/Informal Interviews b. Video/Audiotapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Formal/Informal interviews will enable the researcher to have conversations about the nature of interactions. b. Video/audiotapes will help support information from informal interviews.

discussion groups.² During each session, I targeted a specific small group to observe and record the dialogue and interactions. In addition to keeping record of a group, I frequently monitored the students' interactions, keeping track of the interactions in other small groups. After the cross-aged discussion sessions, I expanded my notes on the computer by listening to the audiotapes and viewing the videotapes of targeted groups. I added my comments on patterns and themes I saw emerging in student interactions and behaviors.

Audiotaping the Students

I audiotaped formal and informal preparation seminars I conducted with the high school students. Audiotapes for each formal and informal preparation seminar were transcribed by me and a professional transcriber. I edited and reviewed the transcripts to check for accuracy of the speaker's voice, and to give proper credit of comments to the speaker who made them.

In addition, I audiotaped each cross-aged group discussion each time we visited Angelou Elementary. Audiotapes were randomly selected from the beginning, the middle, and the end of the cross-aged discussion groups for transcribing. The same professional transcriber and I transcribed the audiotapes from the selected cross-aged discussion groups. I followed the same procedures for editing and reviewing transcripts of the cross-aged discussion groups, as I followed for the preparation seminar. This process enabled me to characterize how the students responded to the agenda we set forth in the preparation

²Writing field notes for four separate cross-aged discussion groups proved to be an enormous task for one individual. During the middle of the study, I announced that I was looking for a graduate student who was interested in participating in a school-based research project. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to James Erikson for helping me with my field notes. His observations and recordings were invaluable.

seminar, and to get a sense of the themes and issues raised by the students and pupils alike in their cross-aged discussion groups.

Videotaping the Students

In addition to audiotaping, I videotaped the cross-aged discussion groups twice per week. Prior to going to Angelou Elementary, I decided which cross-aged group I would videotape. Videotapes provided detailed information about the social interactions and behaviors of the cross-aged discussion groups. Occasionally, videotapes were used as a source of study in some preparation seminars. The purpose for these sessions was to have the high school participants critique their interactions in their small groups with the pupils. The videotape critiques provided the high school participants with detailed information of their own interactions and behaviors with the younger children.

Formal and Informal Interviews

To understand students' interests outside of school and their perceptions about literacy learning and acquisition, I conducted a pre-interview with each high school participant, and six elementary participants. Two cross-aged groups were interviewed together at the end of the project. For the other two groups, the high school students and the pupils were interviewed separately. The interviews were open-ended questions.

On-going informal interviews were conducted with the high school students during the preparation seminar. For example, students often talked about what happened in their groups as we were in transit from Angelou Elementary to Septima Clark High School. I capitalized on their reflections by participating with follow through questions. During some of the transit reflections, I simply listened to what they said. All interviews (with the exception

of what students talked about in transit), both formal and informal were audiotaped.

Reading and Reflection Logs

All students kept reading logs to write free responses to the literature they read. The high school students wrote in their reading logs during the preparation seminar. In addition, they wrote responses in their reading logs during the cross-aged discussion sessions. Students' logs enabled me to keep track of their personal written responses to the literature we read.

The high school students kept a reflection log. The purpose of the reflection log was to help them keep track of their interactions with the younger children. In addition, the reflection log enabled me to have a record of how the students perceived their experiences in the Cross-Aged Literacy Project.

Analyzing and Interpreting Data

The process of analyzing the data I collected for this research study might be likened to assembling a jigsaw puzzle (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The edge pieces are located first and assembled to provide a frame of reference to begin the interior work necessary to complete the puzzle. However, more striking aspects of the puzzle pieces emerge, thus providing another frame to work on separately. Having stolen some clandestine peeks at the complete picture on the box, the puzzle worker places the assembled parts in their general location within the frame, and finally locates and adds the connecting puzzle pieces until no holes remain visible. The analysis of the data for this qualitative research study might be viewed as a staged process, by which a whole occurrence was divided into its components and then reassembled under various new categories to make sense of the overall project.

Initiating Analysis

I began the frame for this study by organizing all of my data sets after concluding the fieldwork. The organization procedures involved labeling and filing documents (e.g., interview transcripts, preparation seminar transcripts), and cataloging audio- and videotapes. Also, in addition to filing papers, I filed various categories of information on my computer (e.g., interview transcripts) in order to keep multiple and permanent records. After organizing the various data sets, I sorted data to compile information collected for each individual high school student. Below, I explain the procedures I used for this method.

Setting Up

To begin, I created a notebook for each high school student as a means of helping me to see what and how much information I had on each high school participant. The notebooks included: (a) field notes, (b) analytical memos, (c) transcripts from preparation seminar sessions, (d) transcripts from cross-aged discussion sessions, (e) reading log entry copies, and (f) transcripts from formal and informal interviews. The notebooks were a means to the first step to analyzing the raw data, where I made notes and observations of what I saw. These observations led me to compare and contrast my original research questions to the raw data, thus generating new questions, insights, and pieces of the puzzle to ponder.

Exploring The Data for Patterns and Themes

I used three questions to begin my exploration of the data for patterns and themes: (1) What literacy strategies and skills develop through students' participation in a cross-age multicultural literature-based literacy program? (2) How do students' knowledge of literary elements and responses to literature

influence their ability to comprehend and interpret literary texts? (3) How do students' attitudes and beliefs about themselves as literacy learners evolve when given a more active and responsible role for their literacy learning?

An initial attempt at exploration entailed an examination across transcripts of the first session of the preparation seminar (i.e., January 11), the first session of each high school students' cross-aged discussion group (i.e., February 4), and the second session of the preparation seminar (i.e., February 12). As I read the transcripts from the preparation seminars and the individual cross-aged discussion groups, I conducted a macroanalysis of events in each instructional context. I established five broad categories: (a) managerial procedures and rules, (b) instructional modeling, (c) instructional procedures, (d) instructional conversations, and (e) analysis and reflection of interactions in small groups.

Given the role of language and social interactions to sociocultural theory, I decided to note the content of students' comments, thus conducting a microanalysis of details to discern and define the five categories. In defining these five categories, I noted strategies and skills students used to facilitate and actively co-participant in their small groups as readers, writers, and discussants. In addition, I noted the discourse patterns of the high school students to develop an understanding of how they drew on various information sources to engage the younger students and themselves in a discussion centered around text.

Although the five categories were present in each student's cross-aged discussion group, they were different for different students. This convinced me to take a closer look at more transcripts from preparation seminars and individual sessions of cross-aged discussion groups that were conducted throughout the study. I reexamined transcripts from the beginning sessions of the preparation

seminars. Transcripts from the cross-age discussion groups were examined from the beginning, middle, and end of the study for each high school student. Several over-arching questions guided the second phase of my analysis: What is the nature of oral language use in the preparation seminar? What influence might the activities and tasks in the preparation seminar have on students to help them conduct a discussion with fourth- and fifth-graders? How do the high school students assume a leadership role in their small groups? How do the high school students facilitate and actively co-participate in a discussion about literature with younger students? What do students seem to be drawing on in order to expand and facilitate their discussions?

Within a sociocultural frame, cognitive development and learning are social and interactive. This might occur through cultural learning (Rogoff, 1990) where novices and experts work together collaboratively in a meaningful activity to achieve a goal. A microanalysis of data from each instructional contexts revealed that each high school student facilitated and actively co-participated in unique ways in their small groups as well as the preparation seminar. This investigation of differences in the interactions, activities, tasks and personal responses of each high school students' small group enabled me to develop another frame for analysis.

Developing Cases of the Students

The different patterns that emerged from my analysis of the preparation seminars, and each case study students' small group activities, and discussions about text prompted me to continue with a third phase of analysis. In this phase, I drew on Lofland (1971) who proposed using six units to analyze qualitative data from social settings in order to make sense out of what one is learning during

the process of analysis. Below, I describe how I used Lofland's suggestions to continue building a frame for the two instructional settings.

Microanalysis of the preparation seminar. The final phase of analysis for the preparation seminar was developed by using Lofland's third analytic unit - meanings. This analytic unit helped me sort and classify observations I made from the previous phases of my analysis, and to sort and classify my observations. I raised two broad questions about this instructional context to help me understand the nature of the interactions between the four case study students and me: (1) What situationally-specific meanings do the participants and the participant observer employ in the preparation seminars? (2) What phases of meanings seem to occur among the participants and the participant observer in the preparation seminar?

With these questions, I read and reread transcripts from three preparation seminars. Using these two questions, I developed a semantic map to answer each question. The semantic maps were used to enable me to discern the content of contributions made by each case study student and me. After developing a semantic map for each of the four preparation seminar sessions, I looked at transcripts across the selected preparation seminars to see what patterns and themes were consistent for each student. The semantic maps assisted me to compare and contrast the topics initiated by the students and me in order to discern how we negotiated and positioned each other in the first instructional context of the study. Based on the content of topics raised, I chose two focus students.

Microanalysis of the cross-aged literary discussions. The final phase of analysis for the cross-aged literary discussion sessions were also developed by

drawing on Lofland (1971). To begin, I looked at cross-aged discussions from the beginning, middle, and end of the study using five of the six units (i.e., acts, activities, meanings, participation, relationships). To develop my understanding about the nature of interactions in the groups, I adapted questions suggested by Lofland to assist in making orderly sense of what I was learning. For each unit, a two-part question was raised. For example, for the unit of analysis referred to as acts, my questions were: (a) What static acts seem to recur and to have some importance among all or various types of participants in this cross-aged discussion setting? (b) What are phases of recurring acts among various participants in this setting? For the unit of analysis referred to as meanings, my questions were: (a) What situationally-specific meanings are employed by the participants in this cross-aged discussion setting? (b) What phases of meaning seem to occur among participants in this cross-aged discussion setting? This micro-level of analysis assisted me in understanding more about the overlap in the focus students roles, ways of facilitating and actively co-participating in literary discussions with fourth- and fifth-graders, and patterns and themes that were present in the content of the discussions.

Having described the participants, the contexts, and the methods of data collection and analysis, I continue with the analysis of the data. In Chapter 4, I explore the discussions and patterns of interactions for six preparation seminars. Chapter 5 examines the work of two focus students as they interact with fourth- and fifth-grader students in small group discussions about text.

CHAPTER 4

THE PREPARATION SEMINAR: A CONTEXT TO RECONSTRUCT MEANINGS OF SCHOOLING, LITERACY, AND STUDENT

This chapter describes the discussions and patterns of interaction in the preparation seminar under the broad theme of the social construction of literacy learning. Three subthemes underscore how the high school students and I socially constructed a context for literacy learning: (a) reconstructing meanings of schooling, (b) reconstructing meanings of literacy, and (c) reconstructing meanings of student.

The work of Lofland (1971), specifically his analytic unit of “meanings” strongly influenced my analysis of the preparation seminar. As defined by Lofland, “meanings tend to be transbehavioral in the sense that they define, justify, and otherwise refer to behavior and are not simply a description of it; that is, meanings interpret behavior among participants in a social world (e.g., preparation seminar), even though they may also describe it” (p. 24).

Emerging Themes For Analysis

To capture the flow of meanings in the preparation seminar, the first issue for analysis involved understanding emerging content and the patterns of interactions in this instructional context. For each meeting, I had a specific agenda (i.e., reading, writing, discussion, planning cross-age literacy activities, debriefing) I wanted to pursue encouraging students to assume increasing responsibility and become deeply involved in the instructional context. Consistent with a sociocultural perspective of learning, the four case study students brought their *own* histories of schooling to the preparation seminar meetings, raising challenges such as lack of attendance and participation,

which had to be addressed in order to move the program forward. It was critical that this setting be a context where students' voices be heard. Thus, it was necessary to socially construct particular understandings among participants of what is involved when developing an alternative literacy learning environment. These themes became apparent during data analysis as key concepts for understanding how teaching and literacy learning content developed in the preparation seminar (see Table 5).

Reconstructing Meanings of Schooling

Analysis of meanings often center on the question of how members perceive problems in a given situation. That which is perceived as problematic may be so defined by the observer, the members, or both (Lofland, 1971). As a participant observer, the first subtheme for analysis centered on addressing the meaning of "volunteering to participate" since it reflected a problem that emerged due to differences in my and the students' definitions of participation in school-related activities. Behaviors such as avoidance and lack of attendance among the students in the preparation seminar became opportunities to address issues of schooling, focusing on attendance, commitment, and responsibility. The case study students willingly volunteered to participate in the study. However, this willingness was without recognizing that the Cross-Aged Literacy Program involved more than simply getting out of their regular English class. Students were not aware initially of what "preparation" and "planning" meant when asked to work with fourth- and fifth-grade students. The problem of meanings we each brought in terms of "volunteering to participate," "preparation" and "planning" resulted in the initiation of various topics related to commitment and responsibility by all participants, including me.

Table 5**The Social Construction of Literacy Learning**

Themes	Features
Reconstructing Meanings of Schooling	Establishing a sense of commitment Commitment to project attendance and participation Taking responsibility for collaboration Taking responsibility to critique emerging challenges
Reconstructing Meanings of Literacy	Spontaneous engagement with text The role of imagination Reflections on what was learned Making intertextual links
Reconstructing Meanings of Students	Perceptions about collaboration Making personal connections

Reconstructing Meanings of Literacy

The second subtheme for analysis focused on how the students' *reconstructed meanings of literacy*. The various ways that their perceptions emerged were based upon the social accomplishments of the participants in the preparation seminar. This analysis builds upon previous research which proposes that teachers and students socially construct the norms, expectations, roles and relationships that define what counts as literacy in the events of classrooms (Baker & Luke, 1991; Bloome, 1986, 1988; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Golden, 1988, 1990; Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992; Weade & Green, 1989). This subtheme emerged as the participants expressed their overall views of text, and their observations of interactions and behavior in their small cross-aged discussion groups. Categories for conceptualizing how the students reconstructed their meanings of literacy included: (a) spontaneous engagement with text, (b) the role of imagination in literary discussions, (c) reflections on what was learned about literary response from interacting with younger students, and (d) making intertextual links between the literature they read, social issues, and personal background experiences.

Reconstructing Meanings of Student

The third subtheme for analysis focused on how the participants evolved as students in the Cross-Aged Literacy Program. As they became active participants in each component of the program, they developed alternative views about the contributions and purposes that the project made to their literacy development and overall perceptions of learning. Data analysis revealed that students discussed connections between the information and ideas they acquired in the preparation seminar, and how those played out in the cross-aged discussion

groups. In addition, selected participants used ideas they collected from the program to assist them in their high school classes.

I selected six preparation seminars (i.e., January 11, February 12, February 17, March 1, April 1, April 12) for extensive analysis as a means of developing my understanding about the ways in which the participants' behaviors, voices, and their overall experiences helped to socially construct the literacy content in the setting. To provide a context for understanding the three subthemes, the following description outlines key pieces of the preparation seminar.

Placing the Preparation Seminar in Context

The time and setting for the preparation seminars occurred after school hours, from 3 to 4:30 p.m., one to two times per week at Septima Clark High School. Occasionally, the high school students and I met at Pizza Hut or McDonalds to conduct the preparation seminars when we were unable to meet in the classroom, or when we agreed that we needed a different type of ambience (see Table 6).

I was the facilitator for the lessons. Part of my responsibility involved developing the curriculum and an agenda for each session (explained in detail in chapter 3). The agenda was my guide to discuss logistical procedures, literacy learning activities (reading, writing, discussion about text), and to analyze the nature of the older students interactions with the fourth and fifth graders. Each part of the preparation seminar lessons was designed to provide students with meaningful and purposeful literacy learning experiences; that is, while the logistical procedures were necessary in order to make sure that students knew how to facilitate a discussion about text with the younger students, engagement in literacy activities such as reading, writing responding to the literature, and

TABLE 6
PREPARATION SEMINAR
TIMELINE AND PARTICIPANTS

DATE	PREPARATION SEMINAR	PARTICIPANTS
January 11, 1994	√	Teresa, Michael, Devon
January 23, 1994	√	Teresa, Michael, Devon, Mark
January 24, 1994	√	Teresa, Michael, Mark
February 8, 1994	√	Devon
February 12, 1994	√	Teresa, Michael, Mark
February 17, 1994	√	Michael, Mark, Devon
February 22, 1994	√	Michael, Mark, Devon
March 1, 1994	√	Michael, Mark, Devon
March 15, 1994	√	Michael, Mark, Devon
March 20, 1994	√	Mark, Devon
April 1, 1994	√	Michael
April 12, 1994	√	Devon
April 21, 1994	√	Teresa, Michael, Mark
April 22, 1994	√	Michael, Mark

talking about written responses with peers and with me was also a necessary part of each lesson.

Within the procedures and activities of the preparation seminar, I also viewed my role as an active co-participant for this setting. As the high school students read literature, I read with them. When they wrote responses to the literature, I did also. The students discussed the selected pieces of children's literature, and I guided and participated in the conversation by raising questions, and sharing opinions. We planned the instructional activities to be conducted with the fourth and fifth graders, and reflected upon and analyzed their interactions of previous cross-aged literary discussion sessions. I believed that all of the activities created for the preparation seminar would serve as a model to help the high school participants envision their roles as facilitators and active co-participants in their cross-aged literary discussion groups.

With an agenda, activity plans, and reasons for my decisions in place, I had a curriculum, materials, ideas, and participants who had willingly volunteered to take active roles in this alternative literacy program. However, early in the study, I saw patterns that helped me understand that my agenda and intent for them did not necessarily parallel their agendas and intent for themselves. Having briefly described the context for the preparation seminar sessions, below I describe how we actually socially negotiated the content for the setting.

Reconstructing Meanings of Schooling

Even though alternative programs might be designed to enhance literacy learning opportunities for adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling, students bring histories which must be addressed in order to create a different space for understanding schooling, teaching, and learning. Within this

setting, a lack of attendance and lack of active participation within the preparation seminar disrupted the flow of activity and conversation that I had envisioned. Analysis of transcripts, field notes, and observations for the early preparation seminar sessions revealed that issues of commitment and responsibility played a major role in the development of teaching and literacy learning content in the overall project.

Establishing a Sense of Commitment

The first preparation seminar was scheduled for January 10 at 3 p.m at Septima Clark High School. I had consulted each student about the time and place to see if the chosen time would fit their schedules. Arriving early on January 10, I set up the audio cassette recorders and the folders that we would use for our first session. Teresa arrived shortly after 3 p.m, and we chatted (e.g., about her day and plans for after school) while we waited for Mark, Devon, and Michael. They did not attend the session.

Thus, our first meeting, while scheduled for the 10th, actually occurred on January 11. The students who did not attend presented a dilemma which needed to be worked through by all of us. On the 11th, I was tempted to ignore the fact that the three had not appeared the previous day, focusing instead on the logistics and planning that felt quite urgent to me. However, I forced myself to begin by addressing the situation in terms of my disappointment and exploring with them why they had decided that they need not attend. The following transcript illustrates the approach I took to force a conscious decision on their part: asking each student, beginning with Devon, to commit now to full participation or abandon the project so I could select one of the other volunteers.

- 1 Fenice: ... just, you need to let me know because this is important. Speak now or forever hold your peace.
- 2 Teresa: You need to go ... [inaudible]
- 3 Fenice: Hmm?
- 4 Teresa: You need to go Michael.
- 5 Fenice: Devon?
- 6 Devon: Hmm? What?
- 7 Fenice: If you don't want to participate, you can just let me know now.
- 8 Devon: No, I do.
- 9 Fenice: Okay, and you're making a commitment to meet with me on Monday and go to Angelou on Thursdays and Fridays, during second hour?
- 10 Devon: Yeah.
- 11 Fenice: Okay.

I chose to tell them directly and assertively that they needed to commit to working on the project and make clear that the choice was theirs. At the same time, I wanted to make clear that in making the choice to continue, I would expect them to commit to all parts of the project, making clear the terms of participation (i.e., attendance). This series of exchanges set the stage for making clear to the students that there were responsibilities that came along with leading literacy activities with younger students.

Time was passing quickly and I was thinking ahead about logistical and instructional procedures that students needed to know. In turn 5, I turned to Devon and I specifically stated that if he did not want to participate in the project, he should let me know at that point and time. Devon responded by saying "No, I do." To be certain that we had a clear understanding, I asked him another direct

and specific question which was whether he was committing himself to go to the meetings on Monday afternoons after school, and then go to Angelou Elementary every Thursday and Friday morning. In turn 10, Devon responded by saying, “Yeah.” Teresa then asked a legitimate and relevant question. In the next segment of transcript, notice how I answered Teresa in line 15, and then abruptly moved the conversation to other very important matters related to planning, rather than continuing to ask the remaining two students (i.e., Michael, Matt) about their intentions.

- 12 Teresa: What if you had, you have something to do on one of the days, if we're not gonna be here for a doctor's appointment?
- 13 Fenice: After school?
- 14 Teresa: After school.
- 15 Fenice: I mean, that's a legitimate excuse. But saying I forgot is not. It's not. It's no excuse. I mean, you can remember what you want to remember. Right? Okay. Now, let me explain a little bit about what we're gonna do. Every Tues..., Thursday and Friday when we go to Angelou, you will be responsible for um basically conducting whatever we do in reading and writing, with the fourth graders. It's a fourth/fifth split. It's about 24 students in a classroom. So um each one of you will work with a group of six...
- 16 Michael: Six...six or four...
- 17 Fenice: Maybe four to five. Okay. Um, do you think you would feel comfortable working in pairs with each other, or would you feel better working like with a group by yourself? How would that, how do you think that would, you would feel about that?

In turn 12, Teresa raised an important question for clarification of the boundaries for missing preparation seminar sessions. I explained that missing sessions due to scheduled appointments (i.e., doctor appointments) was

acceptable. After the explanation, there was an interesting move in the flow of the discussion. While I had felt that I needed to confront the students about their irresponsible behavior, I was eager and ready to get the project “off the ground.” Therefore, after answering Teresa’s question, I moved into explaining the instructional and logistical procedures of the project, and the students followed my lead. As I explained the number of younger students each of them would have in their small groups, Michael spoke, echoing what I was about to say. My abrupt change in the focus of the discussion, and the move on Michael’s behalf to assist me seemed to give us all permission to discontinue the much needed “verbal contract” of their commitment and responsibility to attend the preparation seminar. There was tacit agreement that they were interested in remaining involved in the project.

I proceeded with three different but interrelated statements: when, where, and what they would be doing with younger students; the configuration of the classroom; and the number of fourth and fifth graders in the class. Thus, by the end of this segment, the students clearly understood my position and the importance of their participation in ALL aspects of the project. Given their histories in schooling and other pull-out programs, it was not surprising that they may have defined “participation” in a way that was more consistent with past behaviors than with the level of commitment that I had expected. When confronted, they positively responded and all students agreed, whether explicitly or tacitly, that they would become full participating members who attended all activities unless an emergency (e.g., doctor’s appointment) prevented them from doing so. Yet, despite their suggestions that they were committed to participation, further challenges presented themselves over the next month.

Commitment to Project Attendance and Participation

The February 12 preparation seminar was held at Pizza Hut. Analysis of transcripts and fieldnotes for this session provided information and insight about how the students viewed their roles as participants in the Cross-Aged Literacy Project.

I started this session by asking the students if they knew what I would do with the information I collected from the project. My purpose was to stress the purpose and the importance of attending both components of this project. Both Michael and Mark seemed to have discussed this between themselves, because as we talked, Michael shared the conversation that he and Mark were having as they saw me driving into the parking lot of the restaurant.

- 18 Fenice: I know Devon already knows. Do you guys know what I'm doing, I mean, what I'll do with the information from this project?
- 19 Michael: Yeah. You told us the other day at the beginning of the thing. You'll be taping it and it's like a research project. Tellin' how kids study, kids learn, and maybe take what we learn, what we do, [inaudible]
- 20 Fenice: Okay. That's part of it.
- 21 Michael: Okay, we, I don't know the rest.
- 22 Fenice: Mark?
- 23 Mark: I just know what Michael know.
- 24 Fenice: Teresa?
- 25 Teresa: I just knew it was a project and we'd get a grade for it.
- 26 Fenice: Who gets a grade?
- 27 Teresa: You. Or you get somethin' for it.

- 28 Fenice: Yeah, okay. I do. I have to write what's called dissertation ... it is really a book.
- 29 Mark: I heard about that.
- 30 Michael: A book. Uh huh.
- 31 Mark: So we helpin' you and you helpin' us out.
- 32 Fenice: You're helpin' me out a lot.
- 33 Fenice: So, I just wanted you to know how important this is. Okay. And that the dissertation is gonna be about each one of you.
- 34 Michael: We were talkin' about it while you weren't here. I was like ... when you drove up I was like man she gettin' pissed at us. And ah, Joe said yea, we gotta start comin'.

Seemingly, Michael and Mark had discussed the lack of attendance between themselves because they could see that I was frustrated. What is interesting to note is that, apparently, their decision to make a commitment to attend the preparation seminar was to "please me." Their comment required a reaction to the obvious change in their thinking about attending and actively participating in this instructional context.

I was honest with Teresa, Michael, and Mark about how stymied I felt about this dilemma I had to face for each session. I told them that I had concerns about their lack of attendance for many reasons. I was concerned that they would not receive adequate preparation for their sessions with the younger students and would not have sufficient time to interact socially with me and with each other in order to learn about what was going on in each small group. Moreover, I explained to the students that I had to write a major paper about their work and services in this project. If I made the students feel guilty, that was not my intent. However, I did intend to let them know that they should assume

responsibility and make a commitment to participate fully in the first instructional context of this study.

During this brief lecture about the purposes underlying the project, and the significance of attendance at the preparation seminar, students interrupted me to ask questions about my dissertation. Michael asked “How long is a dissertation?” A noteworthy point in this series of exchanges was that Michael seemed to realize that this program might work to his advantage. He acknowledged what his role in the project might mean for his future, because he said that he would be able to use it as a reference. Teresa stated that she knew I would get a “grade” for it [dissertation]. Mark’s comment was related to the advantages of this research study on both sides, stating that they were helping me out, and I was helping them out.

- 35 Fenice: Yeah. One of my friends was surprised. You remember the first day I asked for volunteers and I think it was like 17 students out of Mrs. Forest’s class volunteered that day. And I said well, he said, why wouldn’t they volunteer. They get to participate in a research project. I said, well ...]
- 36 Michael: [We ain’t know it was a research project. We just did it ‘cause you said we get out of class.]
- 37 Teresa: I know. That’s what, yup.
- 38 Fenice: I knew that was part of it.
- 39 Mark: But now we, but now we see it’s not all about gettin’ out of class. We see ... we have home work and we workin’ wit’ kids. See that’s why I like it.

I had considered that the reason so many students volunteered was to get out of going to their English class. As Michael openly shared his personal reasons for participating in the project, Teresa concurred. It is interesting to note that Michael spoke for all of the students as evidenced by his use of “we.”

Mark did not explicitly acknowledge that he had ulterior motives for volunteering his services. However, he did move the conversation to a different level. That is, Mark accentuated the advantages Teresa, Michael, the younger students, and he received as a result of participating in the Cross-Aged Literacy Program. Mark acknowledged that “home work” needed to be done before one can facilitate discussions with younger students implied that he was developing his understanding of what it means to take responsibility in “teaching” younger students (i.e., preparation and planning).

It is interesting to explore how Mark refocused the value of attendance in the preparation seminar. As he spoke, his comment seemed to suggest that cooperation and participation was necessary in order that the project be successful. In making this assertion, Mark expressed a sense of personal identity in connection to the project. His assertion appeared to move the discussion away from the negative series of occurrences as far as the lack of attendance was concerned. Rather, Mark appeared to be highlighting the potential benefits for all involved, by publicly expressing his unique point of view. Noting Mark’s use of the term “we” in his response in turn 39, it is clear that Mark has changed his thinking such to accept responsibility for becoming involved in various literacy activities before he can facilitate cross-aged discussions with younger students.

Taking Responsibility for Collaboration

A second topic which emerged in the preparation seminar focused on the students’ observations from collaborating with the younger students in their small groups. This topic emerged early in the study, as they shared their thinking after three 30-minute sessions of cross-aged meetings (i.e., February 4, 10, 11).

The transcript below provides examples of increasing responsibility to participate

in the preparation seminar sessions.

- 40 Michael: I like my group, too. They, they're all right.
- 41 Mark: I got, I got a little ...]
- 42 Michael: [I ain't know they was that smart.
- 43 Teresa: I know.
- 44 Mark: I got a little [inaudible]
- 45 Michael: Smart kids.
- 46 Teresa: I know. I'm thinkin' that they act like they're [inaudible]. You know they don't know nothing and everything. I was like ...]
- 47 Michael: Them two the only one I like ... the only one who acts his age is, um, I think it's Joshua.
- 48 Teresa: None of my kids act their age.
- 49 Fenice: In your group?
- 50 Michael: I know Sandy, Daniel, Marcus, Alice, Robert and the one that, the other little, the chubby one.
- 51 Fenice: James.
- 52 Michael: James. Yeah. James.

There are several noteworthy points in this exchange. Michael's comments (i.e., turns 40, 42, 45, 47, 50) reveal that he had gathered information about the fourth- and fifth-grade students in his group. He had made observations about behavior, both socially and intellectually, and he had remembered several of the younger students' names. Michael's observations are examples of his involvement in both components of the program: first in actively constructing meaning about the younger students with whom he worked and then in sharing those observations of them with his peers in the preparation seminar.

Like Michael, Teresa's comment conveyed that she was beginning to gather information about the younger students in her group as well. She agreed with Michael, commenting in turn 46 that she had assumed that the younger students would not know anything, but that she had changed her opinion after working with them. These comments from Michael and Teresa show that they were making important observations in order to learn about the fourth and fifth graders in their small group. In doing so, it provided evidence that the students' levels of commitment were increasing as they began to see their responsibilities in working with a group of, in their view, sharp and interesting younger students. Mark showed concern for one of his students, suggesting he had begun to feel responsible for altering the less-appropriate behaviors of students within his group. When Mark found a point to enter the conversation, this is what he said.

- 53 Mark: I just know one of mine. In my group. I know their names if I see 'em, but I just can't ... but it's this one little bad kid in my group that used to be in Devon's group but now he in my group. The boy is foul ... He, they, I gotta ... in my group.
- 54 Fenice: Oh, Brandon. Is that who you're talkin' about?
- 55 Mark: Little one? Yup. BAD! The boy is BAD! And then we was talkin' about them uh, about them "lilly pads" [instead of lily pads] and stuff. He was sayin' all kinds of stuff. When the girls went by us, he'd say somethin' to the girls. He was like, hey, girl when you gonna let me m-m-m-m-m!

Mark's dramatic description of Brandon reflect a personal opinion and values he held. Mark's tone and expression suggested that he did not think Brandon made appropriate responses to the illustrations in Tuesday. This was important because when Brandon misbehaved, it affected the dynamics within the group. During the session that Mark worked with Brandon, he had not

disrupted the entire class. But, Brandon had called enough attention to himself such that Mark analyzed his behavior and had strong reactions about it.

What appeared to be especially troublesome to Mark as he spoke about Brandon, were the sexual overtones the younger boy made to the fourth- and fifth-grade females, as well as the responses written in his reading log. Mark had made reference to the inappropriateness of Brandon's behavior on several occasions. Once, when I was driving the students from Angelou Elementary back to Septima Clark, Mark engaged in a monologue about Brandon. He appeared to be distressed about an incident that transpired in his group. I wrote down Mark's comments in my fieldnotes after the students went into the building.

I wanted to put my hands on Brandon so BAD! That dude talks about big lips and this and that. He's BAD! He's a HOODLUM! Little boy will think about stuff I aint NEVER thought about! I try not to laugh. I tell him to chill man. Nonkonzo and Brandon were at each others throat all day. Brandon kept messing with Nonkonzo. The story the boy wrote, oh my GOD! He was talking about Annette, and said Annette always be saying Brandon you look nice today. Brandon said that Annette say this just to get the ball. I think the boy has problems. (Fieldnotes, February 28, 1994)

The details about Brandon that Mark referred to communicate how and what he paid attention to. First, Mark noticed that Brandon made inappropriate comments, both orally and in writing (i.e., talks about..., the story the boy wrote...). Second, Mark conveyed that Brandon's comments were directed toward specific girls in the group (i.e., Nonkonzo, Annette). Third, Mark made an inference about the reason Brandon behaved inappropriately (i.e., the boy has problems). In addition to facilitating a discussion with younger students, Mark made a critical analysis about the social nature of interactions around him. This was a distinct change from earlier stances Mark had taken, from not showing up for the preparation seminars to minimal participation. The shift in his attitude that

began with his conversation with Michael about the need to show up more consistently continued as he became more involved in the substantive activities in preparing for and working with the younger students, and in the challenges associated with them.

Taking Responsibility for Critiquing Emerging Challenges

The seventh preparation seminar was held at McDonald's restaurant on March 1. Although I had a written agenda, the students began the session by initiating their own topics. The students' early contributions to the meeting agenda was typical of the more recent preparation seminars, where they had assumed more responsibility, claiming opportunities to voice their opinions. This revealed how we had moved from my setting the agenda and asking for their contributions, to their active participation from the moment we arrived. This situation enabled us to negotiate the logistical, planning, and debriefing topics I needed to address in addition to their own.

The students began the afternoon session by talking about a school rule which they referred to as "ridiculous." The rule stated that students were not allowed to wear a coat inside the building for security reasons; that is, school administrators wanted to be able to control the possibility of weapons coming into the school. According to Michael, Mark, and Devon, weapons and violence were not a problem at their school. They considered the atmosphere to be safe which explains their opinions about the no-coat policy as "ridiculous."

In addition to the dialogue about the school coat policy, Michael and Mark talked about key aspects of their work in the Cross-Aged Literacy Program, demands that emerged with specific children in their group. Michael had trouble with Marcus, a fifth grader in his group, while Mark continued to have difficulty

with Brandon. As they expressed their frustrations, I encouraged them to continue as they had been, handling the situations as they emerged. For example, when I listened to the audiotape of Michael's group from the previous cross-aged discussion, he told Marcus that if he were having a bad day, he could ask to be excused rather than talk to him in a disrespectful manner. Mark had taken Brandon out in the hall to talk with him in private. Both seemed to be responsible in handling the problems, which I had encouraged them to do from the beginning of the project. While I wanted to bring closure to these issues so that we could discuss Song of the Trees and plan for the next cross-aged session, Mark and Michael continued to assert their roles in this preparation seminar by venting their frustrations about the fourth and fifth graders who were disrupting their small group discussions.

- 56 Michael: But I'm tellin' ya, I did wanta hurt Marcus.
- 57 Mark: Now, you ain't wanting to hurt Marcus like I wanted to hurt Brandon. I kinda like to just put my hand over the [undecipherable]
- 58 Michael: I grabbed, I said Marcus, I was like come here, let me tell you somethin'. I walked over there, I put my hand right here (?) around him like this...]
- 59 Fenice: [You did that?
- 60 Michael: Well Miss Black wasn't there. I said let me tell you somethin' man. I was squeezing ... (laughing)
- 61 Fenice: I was... I was...
- 62 Michael: And he was like okay, okay. Just leave me alone.
- 63 Fenice: Michael, I was praising you for the way you handled the situation. See, I didn't know all this. I was just listening to the tape.
- 64 Michael: Man. I just, I said it, I knew what I was gonna do. See, I couldn't take no more of that.

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65 Mark: That dude was bad, yo.

66 Devon: I don't really have any bad students since Brandon got out.

The first topic I wanted to discuss in this session was related to what Michael, Mark, and Devon considered to be important issues to discuss from Song of the Trees. Although their topics were not related to what I wanted to talk about, it was a very important topic nevertheless. There are three significant points about Mark and Michael's dialogue: (a) they initiate an agenda for this session which is related to their small groups, (b) they acknowledge that they want and need to do something about the students who were frustrating them, and (c) they talk to each other about the dilemmas. Devon's comment (i.e., turn 66) implies that some of his challenges were passed on to Mark, making Devon's group easier to coordinate.

In addition to talking about younger students who gave them trouble, Michael raised an issue related to his brother. One of his younger brothers was in middle school and was kept in isolation during school hours. He described the room where his brother was kept as a "closet where ain't nothin' but just one window." Michael continued by describing his brother's behavior, and how he reached the point where he had to be isolated from his peers. Mark and Michael were friends and neighbors, so they knew each other's family very well. As he talked, Mark chimed in, supporting Michael's assertions about his brother (i.e., he has emotional problems). It appeared that Michael was exploring problem-solving strategies, or making general connections between the situation he was having with Marcus (i.e., the student in his group) and the difficult situation that his brother had to encounter at the middle school.

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Reconstructing Meanings of Literacy

Analysis of transcripts of four preparation seminars (i.e., January 11, February 12, February 12, March 1) convey how students and I constructed topics related to their views on literary response which included: (a) spontaneous engagement with text, (b) the role of imagination in constructing meaning, (c) interacting with fourth and fifth graders about text, and (d) making intertextual links between text and political issues.

Spontaneous Engagement with Text

Spontaneous engagement with text in the preparation seminar involved instances where students talked about a piece of text by retelling and recalling events of a story, asking questions, asking for clarification of an idea or opinion, and making comments drawing on personal background experiences. The instances of spontaneous engagement occurred beyond a superficial level, where students stated positions drawing from other information resources (i.e., cross-aged discussions). The spontaneous talk involved open-ended discussions, as students developed their ideas along with peers. As students actively discussed a piece of text, they raised complex conceptual issues, where all learners shared responsibility for constructing meaning together.

In my analysis, the four students spontaneously involved themselves with the literature we read for the preparation seminar. For example, on January 11, spontaneous engagement began when I told the students that they were going to begin reading, writing, and discussing literature with the younger students using a wordless picture book. I held Tuesday up and asked them if they were familiar with the book. Michael was the first to comment saying that he was not familiar with that particular book, but that he remembered those “kind of books.” He

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continued by asking me if they were going to read it. In the next section of transcript, I describe the exchange of dialogue that occurred after my response to Michael's question.

- 67 Fenice: Um, it's not a lot in there to read. So we have to create some other kind of activities.
- 68 Devon: Man, [inaudible]
- 69 Teresa: You have to use your imagination and stuff.
- 70 Michael: Ohhhh! Is this where you go like ... It's Tuesday evening around eight. It was a still night ...
- 71 Fenice: Make up a story? Is that what you're saying?
- 72 Michael: Yeah, about the pictures.
- 73 Teresa: (laughs)
- 74 Fenice: Yeah. All right. I saw... I got a reaction there. What's that about Michael?

My response to Michael's question set a context for the students to explore the contents of the pictures. It seemed that Michael thought that there would be words to read, and I responded by suggesting that we would have to create activities. Devon responded to a picture he observed as he turned pages, and blurted a loud "Man" to a picture. In turn 69, Teresa's comment demonstrated that she had knowledge about constructing meaning from text, because she suggested that they would need to use their imaginations.

Michael also demonstrated that he had some understanding about constructing meaning from a wordless picture book. He modeled what he was thinking by reading the story starter and then continued to create an oral narrative for the pictures. As Teresa flipped through the pages of the book, she obviously saw something humorous, because in turn 73, there was a loud burst of laughter. Their comments suggest that for these students, what initially counted

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as literacy was the understanding that words were present to be read. As the conversation evolved, they engaged in literate activity around text that contained no words. Thus, their spontaneous engagement with the text helped to underscore that literacy involves text of many kinds, not simply words.

Michael then made a comment (see line 75 below) that I thought important and I responded by asking him to share what he was thinking. I return to the transcript and present Michael's response, or actually lack of response, to my question, "Why?" in line 78 and my request for clarification in line 80.

- 75 Michael: It's gonna' be hard.
- 76 Matt: ... Lily pads.
- 77 Michael: It might be kinda hard.
- 78 Fenice: Why?
- 79 Teresa: Right!
- 80 Fenice: To look at the picture and make up a story?
- 81 Devon: Yeah, frogs chasin' birds.
- 82 Michael: Man, this is crazy! Look! Boy!
- 83 Matt: They're taking people now.
- 84 Michael: Yup.
- 85 Teresa: That's a cute house.
- 86 Michael: It's flyin' frogs. (Laugh) He got a cape on (laugh).
Woo, they messin' wit' 'dat lady's TV (laugh). Man,
this is a funny book.

Michael's comment, "it's gonna be hard," initiates a discussion that involved Teresa, Matt, and Devon. All had interpretations about exactly what would be hard. Since "it" is an unclear referent, this is not surprising. I asked for clarification, while Teresa agrees (though her tone indicated that she spoke

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sarcastically), Devon points to the absurdity of “frogs chasin’ birds,” Matt points to the frogs “taking people” and Michael continues by saying the whole thing is “crazy” raising specific examples from the text. In short, the text prompted students to identify a range of things that might make discussion difficult, most of which centered around the oddity of the plot, conveyed through pictures rather than print. At the same time, while agreeing that it would be “hard,” they nonetheless demonstrate that there is much that can be discussed related to the storyline conveyed through the pictures, underscoring that what counts as literacy may be more complex than words alone.

Further, Michael’s comment that “it’s gonna be hard” suggests that he had given thought to their reasons for exploring this text, that their purpose for doing so involved their later responsibilities in working with younger students. Thus, Michael conveys in a short phrase his views of the text, the upcoming work with the younger students, and a recognition that what counts as literacy in this context involves social interactions beyond the individual and the same-age peer groups in which he had been involved. I will return to this point later in the chapter when I talk about Michael’s reflections on his collaborative group work with the fourth- and fifth-grade students using Tuesday.

On March 1, the students lunged into another spontaneous discussion that centered on Song of the Trees. One purpose for this session was to set a context for developing their own questions to be used in their small groups. Analysis revealed that while the students believed that they had “covered” all of the significant ideas in their discussions, what they said they talked about with the fourth and fifth graders and the themes and issues they raised within the context of the preparation seminar were different. As students clarified what they meant

by “going over everything” they naturally talked about characters and events in Song of the Trees, making public their views and opinions about what counts as literacy in a discussion with peers. Placing the exchange in context will assist in clarifying this point.

During the cross-aged literary sessions on Song of the Trees, the students had been working on characterization. The idea underlying characterization was that the students pay particular attention to a character or characters they liked or disliked in the story. Students had to specify reasons as to why they did or did not like the character they selected. Michael seemed to think that because he and the younger students in his group already “went over everything” such as making predictions and whether the younger students liked or disliked the book, there was not much more to discuss. Mark supported Michael’s opinion, adding that they needed to talk about what sections of the story they would read the next day. Mark concluded his comment by saying that was the only “real” thing left to discuss.

The comments made by Michael and Mark regarding significant issues to discuss, suggested that their views about what constituted a discussion about Song of the Trees were at a surface level. They did not appear to be thinking about underlying issues (i.e., dignity, power, poverty) that they could discuss with the fourth and fifth graders. Concerned that they did not comment about more complex issues in the text such as control and power, I raised a specific question which I thought should be addressed.

- 87 Fenice: Okay, now what about, um you don't think this, you tell me what you think. You remember the part in the story where um Mr. Anderson offers the mother and grandmother the \$65]

- 88 Michael: [\$65.
- 89 Fenice: To sell the trees, I mean, to um let him cut as many trees as he want, wants to cut. What do you think about that?
- 90 Michael: I think she bully, he's a bully.
- 91 Devon: He was cheap.
- 92 Michael: He was cheatin' her first of all.
- 93 Fenice: He was cheap? Is that the only thing you think? He was cheap?
- 94 Michael: He was cheating her first of all. Second of all, the little threats, like he said he would hurt David. I think it was all, I mean, to me, I think he coulda got over without payin' anything. He had to kept making them there idle threats and ...]
- 95 Mark: Broke his jaw. He wouldn't left that porch.
- 96 Devon: He was cheap.
- 97 Fenice: That's the only thing you think, that he was cheap?

The first point to note is that I focused on a specific character and situation in the story that I wanted the students to explore, making public a salient point in the story. Michael and Devon's description of Mr. Anderson shows that they recognized some features of the character's personality as evidenced by their comments to demonstrate why they thought Mr. Anderson was a "bully."

Despite Michael's earlier comment that there really was not anything else about the story to discuss, he made a strong assertion about the character I was thinking about (i.e., Mr. Anderson), providing details to show that he had made some assessment of that character. Likewise, Devon indicated that Mr. Anderson was cheap and explained why he had drawn this conclusion. In my attempt to help him consider other matters, I asked Devon the same question I asked

Michael, if the only thing he thought was that he was cheap. At that point, Mark responded (line 98). Notice how he was in agreement with the others, that Mr. Anderson was trying to cheat the Logan family. But then he moved the conversation so that we were all able to consider other perspectives in relation to the part of the story we were discussing.

- 98 Mark: I think he was a rip off. I wonder how much money he woulda got for them trees. He really got for them trees.
- 99 Michael: I say about 2...230.
- 100 Fenice: Well, it would depend on how many he cut, right?
- 101 Mark: He was gonna cut down all of 'em.
- 102 Devon: Well, see he shoulda um ...
- 103 Michael: Except them baby ones.
- 104 Mark: He said that he was gonna cut down the baby ones if he had to.
- 105 Michael: Yep.

The question Mark raised suggested that he was thinking about other money-making possibilities for Mr. Anderson, "I wonder how much money he woulda got for them trees, he really got for them trees?" As he talked, Mark placed an emphasis on the word really, suggesting that he did not think that Mr. Anderson would sell the trees for the same amount of money he paid the Logans for them. His question was insightful and implied that Mark was "reading between the lines" of the printed page, raising a question related to capitalism. In this response, Mark made an inference based on what he had remembered about the story and drew on personal background knowledge about the possibilities of capitalism.

As the discussion continued to progress, the students explored more issues that helped them to think about the story from various perspectives.

Occasionally, I raised questions to redirect the discussion. In the next section of transcript, notice how I attempt to guide the students to think about this same situation, but from a different perspective.

- 106 Fenice: What do you think about the way the mother and the grandmother handled it? I mean ...]
- 107 Michael: [I thought the grandmother handled it too hasty]
- 108 Devon: [But they did need the money though.
- 109 Michael: I think she handled it too hasty. I think she oughta, she shoulda waited for David to get back or somethin'. If they knew they was gonna send for David, I think she shoulda waited.
- 110 Mark: But they ain't know until that, remember, they didn't know until that night I think, after they had made the deal. But they ...]
- 111 Michael: As soon as he woulda came, I woulda called you know]
- 112 Fenice: Did they make, did they make a deal?
- 113 Michael: Yeah. \$65.
- 114 Mark: \$65
- 115 Fenice: That's what he offered them. Is that what the mother and the grandmother settled for?
- 116 Michael: Nah, that's ...
- 117 Mark: Yup, that's what they settled, that's what they settled for.
- 118 Michael: They couldn't do nothin' else about it. That's the final offer. And then after he tried to give them \$35, to make it a even 100, but that wasn't nothin'.

The point to note in this segment of transcript was the counter argument Devon raised. Michael was the first student to respond to my question, stating that he thought the grandmother (i.e., Caroline) acted too hastily in making her decision. Devon attempted to get Michael to think about the situation from another angle; that is, if the grandmother acted too fast, perhaps it was in their best interest because the family needed the money that was offered to them. A second point to note is how Michael viewed the “hastiness” of the grandmother in the story. His argument was that the mother and grandmother should have waited for the father to return before giving Mr. Anderson an answer about the offer. Michael did not expound upon Devon’s comment, but chose to continue arguing his own point. Even though Michael and Devon slightly disagreed, what is noteworthy about this segment of transcript is that they were having a discussion, presenting their own views, rationalizing why they had those views.

I noticed that at one point I needed to clarify an idea (i.e., the Logan family did not accept the offer of \$65 for their trees). Mark argued incorrectly that they accepted the \$65 offer and Michael was in agreement with him. Michael elaborated by stating that the Logan women could not do anything about the situation because Mr. Anderson made a final offer when he said that he would give them \$35 more in order to make the contract worth an even \$100.

In this interaction, it is interesting to note that Michael, Mark, and Devon discussed fundamental issues from Song of the Trees. Michael understood that there was some wrongful intent going on in the story on the part of Mr. Anderson (i.e., attempted to cheat the Logan family, made idle threats). Mark and Devon understood the same idea, even though Devon argued that the character was only cheap. Mark was especially insightful in bringing out a point that dealt

with issues of capitalism, when he stated that he wondered how much money Mr. Anderson would really get for “them trees.”

The preceding analysis of discussions between the four students illustrated the potentially empowering nature of talk among low-achieving adolescents, and highlighted the salient points they raised about Tuesday and Song of the Trees. If we look at features of their talk (i.e., modeling, making interpretations, asking questions, exploring counter arguments), we see that these students spontaneously engaged in talk about text with peers. Their discussions were beyond a general and literal level of discussion, and highlighted their perceptions of what counted as literacy during discussions about a piece of literature. These students spontaneous engagement with the text provide examples to suggest that we might refocus our thinking about teaching and learning, bringing alternative perspectives on what counts as literacy for low-achieving adolescents.

The Role of Imagination

In my role as facilitator, I wanted to understand what Mark, Teresa, and Michael learned after working with the younger students using a wordless picture book. Even though each student had the same text, the nature of interactions, and what and how topics emerged in discussing the text varied. Mark began by raising a topic he had mentioned previously, how the younger students used their imaginations. The idea of using one’s imagination pervaded a series of discussions about successful literacy activities, emphasizing students’ perceptions of what counts as literacy learning in alternative settings.

119 Mark: I know this is because you remember when you said
ask them questions about the book?

120 Fenice: Uh huh.

- 121 Mark: We asked them questions about the book. I noticed some, some, some kids, they will say, they will say the same thing as another person. About like, about the frog book. But these kids have their own imagination. Everybody thought something different about that page, or whichever page we was on. Nobody had the same, same thought. Everybody had their own thoughts.
- 122 Michael: Yup, even if it was good one, different people are like when old ladies in TV, they, some of them said she would just watch TV. Then I had some sayin' she's watchin' Geraldo. Watching Arsenio Hall. You know.
- 123 Mark: Yup, everybody had their own imagination. Own thought.
- 124 Michael: Then they gave my man with the sandwich the different name, Bill, Tom. And uh Sandy, I think she gave, his name was, uh,uh Christopher Williams.

In his first two turns (i.e., 119, 121) Mark's assertion revealed two points.

First, Mark had followed my suggestion about how they might facilitate a discussion about text with the younger students, when he noticed that when he asked the students questions, they used the pictures to share their thoughts. Second, Mark had paid close attention to what the younger students said about the text. Taking into consideration Mark's observations of his groups' responses, his comments suggest that he had considered what counted as the younger students used their imaginations to highlight features of a wordless picture book.

Michael followed Mark's lead, stating how the students in his small group expressed themselves. As Michael talked, he described details that the younger students in his group mentioned, For example, Michael observed how the students' used their imaginations to name a character and a familiar television show. Mark and Michael's observations were noteworthy because they shared

what and how the fourth and fifth graders discussed what counted as literacy, using their imaginations while developing a narrative about the story.

Engaging in Literate Thought

The phrase “engaging in literate thought” seems appropriate for describing ways in which the high school students critiqued cross-aged interactions (i.e., Tuesday) and previous schooling experiences that were based on (i. e., classes in middle school). Analysis of the preparation seminars on February 12 and 17 provided information on ways in which students engaged in literate thought, emphasizing features of the talk to underscore what counts as literacy learning from the various sources they drew on. For example, during the February 12 session, students spoke of the difficulties they had with Tuesday and why. However, during the cross-aged interactions, what and how older and younger peers talked about the text assisted them in critiquing it from an alternative point of view.

- 125 Michael: And another thing good about ‘em is they young. You know how young kids tend to, now you give this to a older crowd, they’re like the book was flat out stupid. And I don’t have nothin’ to say ... it was so dumb.
- 126 Mark: Yeah, that was a good one Michael.
- 127 Michael: And that’s the same thing ... that’s what I was wanting to say but I just didn’t say it because it was part of the project.
- 128 [loud burst of laughter]
- 129 Mark: But I mean, yeah, that’s another thing. When he said the older kids thought it was so stupid, we thought it was stupid. But when we got around them, they brought out, they helped us bring out what they really thought about the book. It helped us see that the book could be what we want it to be because they thought it was fun. And we thought it was stupid,

they thought it was fun. They, and they found, they found the fun parts in it that which we didn't see. And that's the good thing about it.

As Michael and Mark engaged in literate thought, they spoke of an advantage to being “young” and reading a wordless picture book with elementary students. Underlying Michael and Mark's comments are how the students in their small groups helped them to rethink and refocus on Tuesday differently, focusing on hidden features and details in the illustrations which made the activity “fun.” As the discussion progressed, Teresa, Michael, and Mark continued to engage in literate thought by investigating their own reactions to the text. Notice, how they recall specific details in Tuesday, which they had not seen prior to working with the younger students.

- 130 Teresa: Like the cat. I didn't see the cat.
- 131 Michael: Yeah, I never saw the cat neither ... [laughter] and I never saw the swan ... the, the frog swinging on the thing]
- 132 Mark: [That's the one only thing I seen, was the cat.
- 133 Michael: Was the frog swingin' on the fence...
- 134 Mark: Nope. I didn't see the frog.
- 135 Teresa: I didn't see the frog. I seen the one with the...[inaudible]
- 136 Michael: No, the frog was swingin' it and stuff it was funny. I was crackin' up. I ain't noticed it.

This segment of transcript illustrates that Michael, Mark, and Teresa were developing their literate thinking as they engaged in a conversation with fourth and fifth graders. They recalled details in the illustrations of Tuesday that the younger students pointed out which they had not previously paid attention to (i.e., cat, swan, frog). Underlying the discussion was the credit that Mark,

Michael, and Teresa gave the younger students for assisting them in making observations of hidden details. This reflection seemed to imply that the high school students had not realized what impact a wordless picture book might have on their literacy learning, in relation to the significance of noticing details and the role of imagination in making sense of text.

I now turn to specific examples that the students gave in relation to what they learned from engaging in dialogue about a wordless picture book with younger children. Moreover, their explanations explore the role of imagination in working with text without words, emphasizing the potential of socially interacting with others.

- 137 Fenice: This is good. Okay, now, tell me, tell me more about ... Let's digress a minute and tell me more about your experience with this particular book. I think cause we kind of beat this book to death a little bit. We had three sessions on it. And it's really not a long book. Just what it was like for you, having to read a picture book. A wordless picture book, no less.
- 138 Teresa: I thought it was cute. I'm sick of readin'. All we do is read. We don't have picture books in high school or anything. It was something different.
- 139 Mark: Yea, that's, that's one thing where I think we kinda lose track. Just reading.
- 140 Michael: Yep, we can't use our imaginations.
- 141 Mark: You can't use your imagination.
- 142 Michael: Sometimes it's good to use your imagination.
- 143 Mark: 'Cause the books we're reading don't have pictures. We use our imagination in, with just readin' a book but we, when we're reading a book, that's all, that's all we do.
- 144 Michael: And therefore, sometimes we don't even have to, in the book we read, you don't have to, you don't have to ...]

- 145 Mark: You don't even imagine.
- 146 Michael: You don't have to imagine 'cause the words, I mean, the author paints the picture for you.
- 147 Mark: But in this ...]
- 148 Michael: You can imagine what it'd look like but ...]
- 149 Mark: But when we read the book without the words, we imagined, we seen the, we seen the pictures but still we imagined, we imagined words and we imagined everything that was goin' on. We didn't imagine, we didn't imagine just the words. Or how do I say ...]
- 150 Fenice: What with Tuesday you imagined everything that was going on?
- 151 Mark: Was goin' on. Like, like we seen the pictures like but still we got to imagine like what the, what the people would really say, or what we think they would really say. Even what they, even what the people in the picture were thinkin'. That's the, that's another thing we had, we got to do.

I specifically asked the students to talk about their experiences with the book (i.e., turn 137). While waiting for comments from the students, I acknowledged that when I looked back, we spent perhaps more time than necessary on the book. In turn 138, Teresa makes a comment that is interesting to discuss. In an interview with her (January 5), I asked her if she liked to read. Teresa described reading as a "struggle," due (in part) to her learning disability. Her tone as she comments, "I'm sick of readin" seemed to reflect her frustration. Therefore, Teresa suggested that the wordless picture book provided her with a different and less-frustrating reading experience.

Mark's support of Teresa's assertion seemed to be based on a specific frame of reference. On several occasions, I had observed these students during their English class. I noticed that during the first five minutes of class, they wrote

in journals based on a topic that Mrs. Foster had written on the chalkboard, even though they had the option to choose a topic of their own. Students never shared or read what they wrote in their journals. Nor did Mrs. Foster. She checked the number of entries during a grading period to ensure that students had the number of entries that they had been assigned to do.

Beyond having few opportunities to talk about their journals, Mark's comment, "just reading," seems to suggest that he rarely experienced sharing his ideas about what he has read. When I observed the students in their English class, students read orally. Mrs. Foster stopped them at certain points to ask questions about the literature, usually calling on students to answer the questions. Mrs. Foster then asked the next student to read. I never observed the students and Mrs. Foster in text discussions. Mark's comment was consistent with the events in his English classroom. Essentially, reading was the end, not the means to related literate activity.

There are several significant points in this series of exchanges. First, both Michael and Mark used their background experiences in schooling and literacy learning in general to make assertions about the benefits they gained from reading Tuesday. Underlying their perceptions were that in reading Tuesday, they were allowed to use their own imaginations to engage in meaning construction. They talked about how there were few opportunities to use their imagination with the books they read in their high school classes. Second, Michael and Mark provided details about how they thought the interaction with Tuesday was different. As they explained their observations, a sense of interaction between a reader and text overshadowed their explanation. Specifically, in turn 149, Mark made reference to how he imagined interaction in

the text (i.e., ...we imagined everything that was going on). He was supported in this assertion by Michael, when he suggested that he interacted with the text to “imagine like what the people would say, or what we think they would really say.” These comments illustrate that Teresa, Michael, and Mark considered Tuesday to be a different type of literacy learning experience, where they made comparisons between various literacy learning opportunities (i.e., regular school and cross-aged discussions).

Beyond the general comment Teresa made earlier (i.e., turn 138), she explored deeper opinions about reading in general and Tuesday specifically. In the next segment of transcript, I asked her to share her thoughts about Tuesday, and what she meant by “I’m sick of readin.” Notice how she connects her background experiences with literacy learning as she reflected on her interactions around the picture book.

- 152 Fenice: Now what were you sayin’ Teresa? You haven’t talked too much. You said um something about “I’m sick of reading. That’s all we do.”
- 153 Teresa: Yeah. That’s all we do. We don’t get to look at picture books and do our own imagination or anything We have to do the ... we have to um ...
- 154 Michael: (inaudible)
- 155 Teresa: You feel under pressure when you read it.
- 156 Fenice: Huh?
- 157 Teresa: You feel under pressure when you read it. Like Michael said. But um when you’re doing a picture book, you can think of what you want. You don’t feel any pressure. It’s your imagination. I mean, nothin’s wrong. You can’t get nothin’ wrong. You can’t just say a word or /// anything.
- 158 Fenice: You say you don’t feel the pressure?

- 159 Teresa: Cause when you're reading you're like, everybody's gonna see, see if you messed up so they can laugh or somethin'. When you're doing a picture book, it's not like that. You can see your own words. You won't mess up on the words.

Teresa's underlying ideas were both the ability to imagine and the ease and freedom she encountered as she read a wordless picture book with the fourth and fifth graders. Teresa stated that [high school] students do not get to look at picture books and use their imagination. Apparently, "reading pictures" in a wordless picture book relieved Teresa from such pressures, because she followed up her comment by saying that when reading a picture book, the text is whatever one's imagination says it should be.

In turn 157, Teresa explained an issue about the struggles students encounter in schools--being right or wrong--while reading text. In her argument, the differences between being right and wrong relate to pronouncing words accurately while reading, based on her experiences as a reader, as indicated by her comment in turn 159. She stated that while "you're reading like, everybody's gonna see, see if you messed up so they can laugh or somethin'." She eloquently summarized her opinions by stating that people cannot judge word-decoding when using wordless picture books because the reader uses her or his own words which nullifies the chance of "messaging up" on the words written by the author.

Teresa's statements reveal her thoughts about herself as a literacy learner. As detailed in chapter three, she had been labeled as Learning Disabled (LD) and diagnosed as dyslexic. In an interview with Teresa, I had asked her about her experiences with reading. She described reading as a "struggle," drawing upon her background experiences and learning disability. In this conversation, she said

“you feel under pressure” and “everybody’s gonna see if you messed up.” The you she was referring to was herself, a position consistent with her interview.

Also, as part of this conversation, Teresa's comments suggest that during this experience, what counted as literacy learning was not "decoding" but rather engagement in a successful experience with younger students. Teresa was able to be imaginative and creative without feeling that she would be ridiculed if she did not articulate a word correctly. Being imaginative and creative enabled her to use her own words and share her own voice, without feeling compelled to read what another had written. For Teresa to have voice in the discussion was an important step for her, to see herself as a potentially literate person and move forward in her literacy development. Reading a wordless picture book with fourth-and fifth-grade students provided her with an opportunity to reconstruct meanings of what counted as literacy. As she explained earlier "it was something different." Above, Teresa explained why the experience was different for her.

During the February 17 session, I wanted to develop my understanding of how the students worked with texts in the past. Analysis of transcripts and fieldnotes from the preparation seminar provided information about their opinions of those experiences, where Devon, Mark, and Michael engaged in literate thought by critiquing past literacy activities from some of their classes during their middle school years.

- 160 Fenice: Okay. I don't know a lot about how you used... stories or books um prior to this class.
- 161 Michael: All we do is read stories in here and have tests on the stories we read.
- 162 Fenice: What about you, Mark? What can you remember about your reading and writing experiences prior to coming to Septima Clark?

- 163 Mark: Last year in English we never read nothing!
- 164 Devon: [laugh] You had Mr. Wayne... didn't you? Yeah, we didn't read.
- 165 Mark: We did a whole bunch of writin' and stuff like that.
- 166 Devon: And grammar.
- 167 Mark: ... and grammar.
- 168 Fenice: What kind of writing?
- 169 Mark: Like ... we did like adverbs. We had, we learned how to write proper sentences and ...
- 170 Michael: That sounds boring.
- 171 Mark: This was just, this was just regular ... I mean, it wasn't boring but, that's what we did. He ...
- 172 Michael: Like in sixth grade, a book, adv... pronouns, singular, adverbs
- 173 Mark: Yeah, we got into all that stuff.
- 174 Michael:Just A + B, go to Y, makes the Y silent. Stupid stuff like that!

In this segment of transcript, the students focus on types of literacy learning activities they had experienced or did not experience during previous school years. Michael's reference was to his current English class, where he suggested that students typically read stories and answer questions about them without talking with their peers or teacher about what they have read. Mark and Devon's experience was quite the opposite during Grade 8, where there appeared to be a lack of "reading." They referred to the literacy activities as opportunities to work on "grammar." What is interesting to note is how Michael characterized the literacy activities of Mark and Devon, referring to them as boring and "stupid stuff" while Mark defended what he had learned to do in his

work at school.

Devon recalled a different learning opportunity, by retelling a story he had read. In the next segment of transcript, he narrates a story and Michael chimes in to assist in recalling details about a story they had read two years earlier.

- 175 Devon: Well, seventh grade we didn't really do anything neither 'cause I had Miss Jones. We didn't really do nothin' in her class.
- 176 Fenice: What do you mean, you didn't do anything?
- 177 Devon: Like, like we read some stories but like we read outta like um, it's kinda hard to remember, um, we didn't really do that much. She would read stories to us about weird stuff. We had ... she told us this one story about, oh, this lady and she had died. No she played it on a tape. It was a tape, she played it and she let us listen to it. And it was talking about how this lady had died and they had buried her. And then, they buried her, over this gold right?
- 178 Michael: No, they buried....she had like some jewelry....
- 179 Devon: Yea, some gold rings....and then they, the people....the grave robbers, they dug her up and like they took all her jewelry and stuff and it was a ring stuck on her finger. So then they cut her finger off and (laughs) and then they got the ring.
- 180 Michael: So the lady was screaming. She wasn't dead.
- 181 Devon: Then the lady had woke up 'cause she wasn't really dead. So then the two robbers ran off, and she had, came home and was knocking on the door, on her door ... and then her little daughter opened up the door and she was like tellin' her dad that it was her mom, and it was like ain't she dead? (laugh)
- 182 Michael: He was like go back to the grave, you're dead, you're dead. Go back to the grave.
- 183 Devon: It was like, and like we didn't read. Like she would play tapes to us that we listened to, instead of reading a book. And we did a lot of English.

As Devon recounted a story from Grade 7, he received confirmation and assistance from Michael, who helped him clarify ideas as he narrated the story. Devon laughed at one point (i.e., turn 179), signaling the humor in the story. Michael added a line to the story assisting Devon in the narration. This segment of transcript illustrates how the students engaged in a moment of literate thought as they recollected an earlier literacy learning experience.

In these transcripts, the discussions convey that the four students work with the fourth and fifth graders influenced their views of what counts as literacy. Their comments about the work in their small groups took into consideration an expanded definition of literacy learning. Since their comments conveyed broader features, they were more likely to consider what plays a role in meaning construction such as the ability to use one's imagination and paying close attention to details. In addition, Mark, Michael, and Devon contrasted earlier literacy learning experiences which suggest that the lack of engagement in discussion with peers and the teacher results in a "boring" experience or lessens the opportunity to construct meaning from text or engage in literate thought. In contrast, reading stories or listening to humorous stories on tapes provided a chance for them to interact with the storyteller (tape) as they listened. This is a noteworthy point because students did not talk explicitly about the stories that they read to answer questions for tests. However, they talked more explicitly about stories they remembered reading for enjoyment.

Making Intertextual Connections

The literature I selected for use within the Cross-Aged Literacy Program had to meet a range of criteria, from being reading-level appropriate for the elementary students to content that was significant to both the younger and

older students. Not surprisingly, the content of the unit thematically connected by the broad theme of human and civil rights elicited responses from students that invited connections to their own experiences as well as intertextual connections across the literature (see Hartman, 1991). By the March 1 preparation seminar, students had read and discussed Taylor's (1975) Song of the Trees and were beginning to prepare for the literacy activities related to Naidoo's (1986) Journey To Jo'Burg. During the March 1 session, I introduced the book and provided a brief synthesis of the plot: the story of a sister and brother in South Africa who had to walk hundreds of miles to get their mother because their baby sister was ill. I explained to the students that one reason I chose Journey to Jo'Burg was because there were parallels between its contents and Song of the Trees, specifically the struggles for civil rights of black people in South Africa and America. The students responded to my general comments as they raised questions about the book itself and the potentially related issues.

- 184 Michael: Can I see the back? [back cover of Journey To Jo'Burg]
- 185 Mark: [Somethin' about Bobby someone he knows from school]. Okay, alright, we sorry, we sorry, we sorry.
- 186 Michael: My mma [reading the back cover of the book]. Oh, they're about to go get their mom for their little baby sister.
- 187 Fenice: It's a lot of the stuff that, that's goin' on in South Africa right now is similar to what um African Americans went through in this country when we um were //trying to...]
- 188 Mark: I wonder what they were doin' down in California about that time?]
- 189 Fenice: [...abolish segregation. So it's a lot of parallels. In California? The same thing?

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- 190 Mark: Huh?
- 191 Fenice: You think things weren't segregated in California?
- 192 Mark: I don't know. I mean, I wondered what ... did they go to Compton and tell them black people that they couldn't ride on the bus?
- 193 Mark: Compton ain't always been like Compton is now.
- 194 Mark: I wonder did they go to Watts and South Central? I bet you they didn't.
- 195 Michael: Black folks ain't crazy nowadays you know they bet' not go to a black person and be like wash my shoes BOY! (Laugh)

As Michael read the cover of the book, he read aloud. While I continued to explain my reasons for choosing the text, Mark raised an interesting query in line 188. In an area called South Central Los Angeles (LA), there had been a great deal of publicity related to human rights and race relationships during the year in which this study occurred, much of which centered around the Rodney King beating and subsequent trials. South Central LA has a large minority population (i.e., African-Americans, Latino). Similarly, Compton (LA) (i.e., turn 192) has a large minority population too. Thus, Mark made a connection between my setting the context in America and South Africa and specific events that had happened here in recent memory. Mark wondered if black people in "Compton" were told that "they couldn't ride on the bus?" He raised a social and political issue linked to literature from this project.

A few days earlier, I had given Mark a different book entitled Mississippi Bridge by Mildred D. Taylor (1990) because he told me how he loved to listen to his grandfather "tell 'dem old time stories from down South." One political issue raised in the text was that in the South during the 1930s, African-Americans were

designated back row seats on public buses. If white people filled all of the front seats that were designated for them, then African-Americans were forced to give up their seats in the back rows. Seemingly, Mark raised his questions to make connections between the lives of people in California (i.e., Compton) historically, and what he read in Mississippi Bridge.

Michael's assertion in line 195 that black people would not accept being told "nowadays you bet' wash my shoes boy" reflect his perceptions of the differences in time both socially and politically. Further, Michael's remark implies that he recognizes some of the injustices and oppression that occurred in the past. Therefore, Michael was making links between issues raised in Song of the Trees, and what is presently happening among people in this society.

Reconstructing Meanings of Student

Analysis of transcripts from the preparation seminar conducted on March 1, informal interviews conducted on April 1 and 12, and observations of participation provided information and insights into students' perspectives of developing an understanding of how the program contributed to their ongoing literacy education. Views about the purposes of the preparation seminar and the roles that the high school students played in it emerged from the initial lack of attendance and participation to an evolving understanding of how their voices and leadership skills played a part in the overall program. Categories that emerged from their perceptions were related to their perceived notions of (a) the value of collaboration and (b) making connections to their high school classes.

Perceptions About Collaboration

The preparation seminar held on March 1 centered on a variety of instructional activities (i.e., reading, writing) as well as debriefing. During the

debriefing, I asked students how they viewed their time and effort in the preparation seminar.

- 196 Fenice: I have some questions to ask. Tell me what you think the purpose of the preparation seminars ...]
- 197 Devon: To get prepared for the next session you go to.
- 198 Michael: To get prepared for the next session.
- 199 Fenice: Is that the only thing you think this is about?
- 200 Devon: No, and it's to communicate and get closer to my fellow work mates...it's to communicate with my fellow work mates.
- 201 Michael: And to see how everything else is going in our groups.
- 202 Mark: Oh man. Michael, you just, look at that car!
- 203 Michael: We gotta stay focused. Shhhh! Stay focused. Stay focused.
- 204 Devon: And to answer questions that we've been stuck on for the last...]
- 205 Michael: [To talk about how everything's goin' within our groups and stuff and get the problems out in the open, you know, so we can address them so we won't have them problems the next week, from here on.
- 206 Fenice: Mark?
- 207 Mark: Yo, what's the question?
- 208 Devon: What do you think the purpose is...]
- 209 Michael: [of the preparation seminar?
- 210 Mark: Oh, oh, okay. To um... ah ... um ...to understand and get ideas from each other and to help, to answer, further help us on our way of helpin the kids. Because we can get ideas from each other that can help us help somebody else that, you know...
- 211 Michael: Yuh, yuh, yuh. Somethin' like that. Yuh.

212 Fenice: Anything else?

213 Michael: Nope.

Based on two interrelated components of the program, Devon's idea of the "next session," in this case, was to prepare and plan the lessons for the fourth and fifth graders. A point to be made about Devon's response is that he had some notion about what impact collaboration with peers might have in a small-group setting. In addition, Devon's comment implied that he understands the magnitude of collaborating with others (i.e., get closer). Michael agreed with Devon. That is "to see how everything else is going in our groups" would be opportunities to communicate and perhaps to "get closer" as students interacted socially about the problems and possibilities in their cross-aged literary discussion sessions.

Devon and Michael comment about the debriefing feature of the preparation seminar, focusing on putting challenges out on the table so that all group members could engage in problem-solving collectively. Mark's description of the purposes of the preparation seminar draws on Vygotsky's (1978) principle which assumes that knowledge is constructed through interactions among individuals. From Mark's perspective, the preparation seminar assisted him in gathering ideas from his peers through the reading, writing, and discussions which made up the preparation seminar. The ideas that Mark collected from the preparation seminar were reconstructed and meanings renegotiated through the discussions and interactions that he facilitated with his small group of fourth and fifth graders.

Michael expanded upon the notion of the value of collaboration in an informal one-on-one interview held on April 1. His description characterized

collaboration as meaningful, drawing on his observations of how talk and interactions played out over time in his small group.

- 214 Fenice: Can you explain to me out of the whole complete picture [of the program], what's important and why is it important, to you? Or is it important? If there's not anything that's important, just tell me that too.
- 215 Michael: It's important for me to um, for our discussions because when I discuss with them [younger students], I feel like ... the more I talk to them, the more they feel that they can talk to me. Like 'cause when I first started, they really ... didn't talk much because I felt that they didn't know me. But the more we had our discussions, the more I talked to them, the more they talked back and that made ... so that made like the next time we read a book or their discussion, when the discussion part came around, that made our discussions more, you know, interesting, because they were able to talk to me.
- 216 Fenice: Now, it sounds like you're saying the talk and the level of talk ...that you do in the small groups is important, right?
- 217 Michael: Uh huh.
- 218 Fenice: Why?
- 219 Michael: It's important to me because I feel so that they like me and they're not just doing this because they have to. They're gonna get, it's important to, you know, it's important to me to know how they feel and what, you know, they wanta' do.
- 220 Fenice: Why?
- 221 Michael: Because, you know, if I'm sittin' here and we're makin' them do somethin' that they don't wanta do, that's not gonna make it, not gonna get anything out of 'em because they don't wanta do it. Communication is important to me and that without that communication then I won't be able to write what I'm supposed to write. You know. Get it?
- 222 Fenice: What's the communication is important, the discussion is important, but why is it important to you?

- 223 Michael: Um, it's important to me because, I want a relationship with the kids... and it's important to me because it helps me to know what to write and what to, you know, and for me to be able to understand where, you know, my group is coming from when they talk about different things ... it's helping me in terms of getting, I mean, it's helping me in terms of wanting to read more because I know I'm not gonna read more as, you know, I go on further in school in terms of books and everything. And the reading in this program is helpin' me a lot cause it's not, I don't, I used to think reading was really boring but you know, it's ... I liked reading but now it's like I like it even more. And I kinda owe that to all of that. 'Cause I just started really reading books on this start, when this group thing, this project.... Now I'm reading more. 'Cause to me, sometimes it relaxes me, helping me take my mind off a lot of different things when I go there. So it helps me in that sense cause when I'm there, you know, it's like I know what I have to do and I know why I'm there and I can have fun while I'm doin' it. You know, there's no sort of specific way to how I'm supposed to go about doing things.

Michael defined collaboration in two areas. First, he saw discussion as a tool for establishing a line of communication among members of a group. Second, he described building relationships with students as important, and noted one way to do so was through discussion. Michael also viewed collaboration with the elementary students as a way of helping him to read more and to develop alternative perceptions of reading and some of its purposes (i.e., reading for relaxation). His last comment regarding "no sort of specific way to how I'm supposed to go about doing things" suggests that sharing and building upon the ideas of others through collaboration places merit on what others contribute in group situations. Thus, acknowledging the contributions of individual group members is developed as they share and collaborate about their ideas.

This section of the preparation seminar and informal interviews suggested that the three students had an understanding of the significance of collaborating

with others. Topics underlying their comments related to the value of collaboration and social interaction; that is, they seemed to understand that peer interactions granted them assistance in working with the fourth- and fifth-graders in the cross-aged literary discussion setting. This seemed to be important for working to solve dilemmas, to develop ideas for literacy activities and tasks, and to establishing positive lines of communication among group members.

Making Personal Connections

Analysis of the March 1 group preparation seminar and one-on-one seminars held on April 1 and 12 suggest that students found the instructional components useful for fostering ideas to help them with various literacy activities. Categories that seemed important to the students in terms of what they were getting from the overall program (i.e., preparation seminar, cross-aged discussions) related to how their contributions helped me accomplish my graduate degree, how they use information to enhance literacy activities in their high school classes, and how they used information to develop personal hobbies.

- 224 Fenice: Okay, now how do you feel about the time and the effort that you put into the prep sems? Not the time we go to Angelou but just this?
- 225 Michael: I think it's helping but you know, I think we need to get more serious about the thing. I think we need to realize that this is your job that we're messin' wit'.... I'm tellin' you the truth. This stuff we gotta realize, honest to God. Don't you? I mean, she gotta write her dis-o-tation

During the March 1 session, Michael started this phase of the discussion by commenting on an issue which emerged at the beginning of the program (i.e., establishing a sense of commitment and responsibility). His suggestions regarding "get more serious about the thing" [preparation seminar] mirror some of the

“lectures” I had made since our first session on January 11. What seems most significant to Michael were the connections he made between the groups’ efforts and contributions and how that would enable me to finish my project. His argument about the necessity to put more effort into the preparation seminar represents a recurring change in his thinking about the purposes and value of working together in this setting.

In this same session, Mark told us how he drew on information he acquired from the program to assist him in writing a creative story in one of his high school classes.

- 226 Fenice: Okay, Mark, what do you get out of the prep sems?
- 227 Mark: Knowledge.
- 228 Fenice: What kind of knowledge?
- 229 Mark: Out of the prep sems, it does, it helps me not only just in my little groups, it helps me in school too. ‘Cause you know most of the time I just have one idea or whatever, but you know ever since I started comin’ to the prep sem they make me get more ideas like in my classes and stuff.
- 230 Fenice: Okay, give me an example.
- 231 Mark: Like today, I had to do, like in fifth hour, you heard my story? [asking Michael]
- 232 Michael: Sure you right. I heard it.
- 233 Mark: I ain’t ... yesterday I didn’t have not one idea whatsoever and I ... I had to write my last reflection thing, in my reflection log. And I was thinkin’ to myself these kids always come up with these good ideas, and I was just, you know, I was thinkin’ about the little kids’ book, and I had to write a story, a short story.
- 234 Michael: Oh, yea. He did, he did.
- 235 Mark: I had to write a short story]

236 Michael: [Grasshopper and an ant.

237 Mark: No, it was setting goals. And I was like, I could use a little kid's story ... and it won't be so hard. My kids helped me. Show me right!

Mark communicated how he drew on ideas he acquired from the fourth and fifth graders to assist him in writing a piece of text for one of his classes at Septima Clark. As Mark talked about this experience, Michael confirmed his idea. Mark's commentary implied that in addition to being a facilitator and active co-participant in his small group, he was making some assessment of what might be useful for him to adapt for his own literacy learning activities at the high school level.

Devon made personal connections between the literacy activities in the program and a hobby he liked, writing lyrics to rap songs. In a one-on-one debriefing session on April 12, Devon shared how he drew on Tuesday, to write a different type of rap song.

238 Devon: I've written a song called "Upside Down" ... because well, usually I write like songs about the streets as they say. When I, you can kinda say that the book inspired me and I've written a song, it's called, "Upside Down."

239 Fenice: What book inspired you?

240 Devon: Tuesday.

241 Fenice: Okay. What's "Upside Down" about?

242 Devon: It's about ... there's really no point to it but it's just about how there's all different kinds of people in the world and ... there's not anything, I mean, there's somethin' special about everything. And creativity, it has a lot of stuff about creativity ... in a way

243 Fenice: What do you mean by in a way?

- 244 Devon: 'Cause when I was sittin' down with my brother, right, and I was, um like tryin' to figure out a song to write, right? And then I had the book laying on the, um, bed right next to me and he asked me what the book was and I was like it's somethin' I'm doing for a project. Then he said what's it about? I was like it's about these frogs and he was said what about the frogs and I was like talking about how he was flyin' and stuff, right, then he said wouldn't it be a good idea for a song. And I was like nah, I'm not gonna write about no flyin' frogs but he said, try somethin' a little different. So then I was yeah, I can do somethin' different. That's how we usually get started.

As this transcript illustrated, Devon made personal connections between the project and a hobby he enjoyed by drawing on a piece of text we used in the program (i.e., Tuesday) to write lyrics for a rap song. In making personal connections between Tuesday and writing a rap song, Devon found a worthwhile way to construct meaning from a wordless picture book. Further, through the process, Devon initiated use of various skills and strategies which were context based (i.e., thinking, creative writing, reading).

In this section, Michael, Mark, and Devon told how they had made personal connections between the overall program and the various literacy activities they encountered. Underlying concepts in their comments related to (a) taking the preparation seminar more seriously, (b) drawing on literacy activities from the program to incorporate them in high school coursework, and (c) drawing on literacy activities from the program to develop personal hobbies.

Striking Aspects of the Preparation Seminar

At the beginning of the Cross-Aged Literacy Program, the four high school adolescents volunteered to participate in this alternative instructional program which entailed two interrelated components, the preparation seminar and cross-aged discussions. Initially, there were struggles that centered on problems of

attendance and participation. The problems developed as content for the preparation seminar, resulting in working to establish a sense of commitment and responsibility among all members of the group. Developing a sense of commitment to the overall program led students to take more responsibility in areas such as sharing ideas and critiquing the challenges they faced in their small literature groups. As students were enabled to have a voice, they assisted in socially constructing the literacy content in the preparation seminar. Three broad themes developed within the preparation seminar; reconstructing meanings of schooling, reconstructing meanings of literacy, and reconstructing meanings of student. These themes emerged from the students' voices, and their voices created much of the content for the preparation seminar.

The second component of the Cross-Aged Literacy Program involved the high school students' work with the fourth and fifth graders, where they separated into small groups with four to six younger students. As they facilitated and actively co-participated literary discussions with their students, they drew from the literacy activities in the preparation seminar as well as other information sources to assemble a context for developing literacy. This is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

RECONSTRUCTING MEANINGS OF LITERACY LEARNING EXPERIENCES THROUGH CROSS-AGED DISCUSSION GROUPS

In this chapter, I focus on the second component of the study and highlight the cross-aged literary discussions that were facilitated by two students: Teresa and Michael. These two students elected to participate in the preparation seminar in different ways, and - perhaps not coincidentally - had different approaches to their interactions with the younger students during the cross-aged literacy discussions. Their contrasting interactions with the younger students related to the moment-to-moment decisions they made, the strategies they used to develop discussions, and the different themes and issues that evolved throughout the process of each literacy lesson. Together, they represent contrasting examples of how roles were constructed to talk about books with fourth and fifth graders.

While collaboration through the preparation seminar was available to all the high school students, Michael attended and participated in the seminar on a regular basis while Teresa's seminar attendance and participation was limited (discussed in chapter 4). As a result, she did not receive the full benefit of the social interactions, literacy activities, suggestions from peers, and overall collaboration and community relations of the preparation seminar. My analysis describes the differences in the way the two high school students' interactions with the younger students occurred and traces potential explanations for these differences to the differences in their participation in the preparation seminar.

Teresa and Michael's work with the elementary students provide researchers and teachers with a forum to rethink, redefine and reconstruct

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meanings of alternative literacy experiences for students who struggle with reading, writing and schooling. To explore these two cases, I have organized the chapter into the following three sections. I begin with an overview that provides a window into Mrs. Brody's fourth/fifth split-grade classroom at Angelou elementary school, the site of the cross-aged literacy discussions led by Teresa, Michael, Devon, and Mark. In the next two sections, I present Teresa's and Michael's cases, respectively. I present each case in terms of emerging themes, supported by a description of the talk and patterns of interactions reflected in transcripts of the cross-age discussions. In Michael's case, I also drew upon his written responses for further support of my analysis and interpretations.

Beginning A Day of Cross-Aged Interactions about Text

During the preparation seminar on January 11, the students decided upon a literacy activity that they would do when they read Tuesday (Wiesner, 1991) with the fourth and fifth graders. Overall, the high school students agreed that they would create a narrative text based upon the pictures in the wordless picture book. The story would be developed in round-robin style, where they would invite each of the younger students to talk about the details and make-up a story as they interpreted Tuesday.

On February 4, I picked up Michael, Teresa, Mark, and Devon at Septima Clark High School to drive them to their second meeting with their younger students at Angelou Elementary. The fourth- and fifth-grade students had been heterogeneously grouped for the cross-aged literacy discussions, each led by one of the four high school students. The text for the literacy activity was Tuesday, a wordless picture book by David Wiesner (1991). Each high school student had one copy of the text. One goal the high school students had identified during the

preceding preparation seminar was to involve the younger students in the development of a narrative to accompany the illustrations in this wordless picture book. After they entered the room, each student selected their group of students with whom to work and sat down. Since Michael and Mark had missed the first session, they began by introducing themselves to the students in their group, asked the children their names, and then began the literacy activities. Devon and Teresa simply began with a focus on the text. The classroom buzzed with the hum of students in each of four cross-aged discussion groups, spread out across the four corners of the classroom. As I observed the older and younger students interacting around Tuesday, I noticed variations in how each of the high school students initiated and facilitated the discussion.

Devon

On the Northeast side of Room 205, Devon worked with five children - four males and one female. He modeled how to make up a story as he “read the pictures” and made interpretations about them. While reading the pictures, he held the book so that the children could see them as he made interpretations. Since written text did not accompany the illustrations, Brandon (i.e., a fourth-grader) appeared confused. He asked Devon, “You readin’ the story or somein’?” Devon responded by explaining that for each page in the book, they should look at the pictures and make up their own story by describing the details in the pictures. After Devon finished modeling what the children were to do, he told them to do what he had modeled. Devon listened as the fourth and fifth graders tried to create their story. He encouraged the children to draw on literary elements such as character by giving names to the people and the dog in the illustrations. In addition, Devon supported the children by making the point that

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there were no right or wrong answers to what they said, and that they did not need to feel shy about doing the activity. As Devon and the younger students in his group talked, they constructed an oral narrative. They laughed whenever students made humorous interpretations about the pictures. After they finished the book, Devon asked the children what they thought about the story, and then asked each child to write individual stories in their reading logs.

Mark

Mark was located on the Southwest side of the classroom with a group of four female fifth graders. Like Devon, Mark began the activity by making interpretations about the illustrations in the story with enthusiasm and expression. He “read the pictures” and commented on what he thought was happening with the frogs and people in the illustrations. As the four students responded to Mark, he encouraged them to place themselves in various events and situations that occurred throughout the text. Mark did this by asking the fifth graders how they thought they might feel if they were in the same situation. As Mark discussed the pictures, he analyzed them and created an oral narrative of Tuesday. The students in his small group laughed throughout their discussions, and followed Mark’s lead as they pointed out their own observations and made interpretations.

Michael

Michael was in a Northwest corner of the room with a small group of five students - four males and one female (see Table 7 for names of students). Like Devon and Mark, Michael made interpretations about the pictures as well. As I eavesdropped on Michael’s discussion, I noticed that he modeled what he wanted the students to do by zooming in on specific details in the illustrations.

Table 7**Cross-Aged Literary Discussion Group Participants**

Names of High School Students	Names of Fourth- and Fifth-Grade Students
Teresa	Brad Cathy Chaucey Edith Janet Stanley
Michael	Alice Daniel James Lena Marcus Robert Sandy Zee

As Michael narrated the story, he concurrently made interpretations about the pictures. For example, Michael said “One day, there was this ... turtle in the pond. He knew something was gon’ happen’ that’s why he had that funny look on his face.” After Michael created an oral narrative for Tuesday, he encouraged the children to write a group story that was based upon each child’s description of details in the pictures. To facilitate this group activity, Michael called on each student. In turn, they elicited a description of the picture or an event to add to their groups’ story.

Teresa

Teresa sat on the Southwest corner in a circle with four females and two males (see Table 7). In contrast to Devon, Mark, and Michael, Teresa started her group discussion by telling the younger students what she wanted them to do, rather than modeling how she wanted them to interact with the book. Teresa explained to Brad, Cathy, Chaucey, Edith, Janet and Stanley that they had to create their own words for the book. She elaborated by stating that each student’s contribution must follow from the previous student’s “description” of the illustration, rather than beginning a new storyline.

Frustration surfaced over confusion among the younger students between “describing the pictures” as they were doing and “telling a story” as Teresa wanted them to do. After approximately four minutes of the fourth and fifth graders simply describing the pictures, Teresa decided to actively participate and model what she wanted them to do as she spontaneously began creating an oral narrative of the text: “There’s a man sitting at the table [undecipherable] about 11:21. All of a sudden he looked out the window, and he seen these flyin’ frogs.” After Teresa finished, she explicitly told the children what she wanted

them to do by saying “You have to put it like that - in a story.” Teresa’s turn provided an example for the students of both telling a story related to the illustrations and of being expressive as they talked. While they continued to describe the pictures rather than tell a story, their tone of voice changed from simply describing, to making an effort to be more expressive. However, Teresa continued to struggle with conveying the difference between description and storytelling and did not model any further examples of how one might construct an oral narrative. Thus, Teresa had experienced one tension that her peers did not: inconsistency between her goals for the activity and the way the event unfolded.

In addition, Teresa encountered another struggle that Devon, Mark and Michael did not experience since she had an “experienced” cross-aged literacy project fifth-grade student. Stanley had participated in the first study of the Cross-Aged Literacy Program during the previous year (Boyd, 1995: Boyd & Raphael, in preparation). Since Stanley had had prior experience in discussion groups with older students, he seemed confident about what was going on, and did not hesitate to let the other students (including Teresa) know that he had participated in the previous project.

In summary, the cross-aged discussions at Angelou Elementary School were characterized by all four high school students’ active participation with the elementary school students as they met in small groups to create narratives as a basis for discussing the story. While adults were present during these discussions, they did not intervene, instead allowing the high school students to assume leadership and responsibility for the discussion. There were similarities across groups in terms of number of participants, text used as the basis for discussion,

and length of discussion time. However, there was a marked contrast between the approach and focus of the three high school students who had participated in the preparation seminar and their ability to handle the groups' discussions, and Teresa's approach, focus, and ability to handle the small group discussion.

Defining Teresa and Michael's Role in Cross-Aged Discussions

In the next two sections, I present the cases of Teresa and of Michael. These two cases provide interesting contrasts in terms of their leadership roles which I describe as *facilitator* and *co-participant*. I define *facilitator* as one who models and guides the fourth and fifth graders through literary discussions by inviting students to participate through raising questions, making comments, and orchestrating turn-taking among the younger students (Raphael & Goatley, in press). The role of *co-participant* is defined as one who is actively engaged in the discussions with the younger students, by reading written responses orally, interweaving strategies and skills into discussions, stating personal opinions, displaying values (e.g., animal rights), background knowledge, and integrating personal experiences. Teresa and Michael were both *facilitators* and *co-participants*, and they enacted their roles differently at different times during the literacy activities. For instance, as a *facilitator*, Teresa used her typewritten suggestions from the preparation seminar and the younger students' responses to orchestrate the discussions. As a *co-participant*, she included her personal opinions and beliefs within the context of the discussions, thus mediating the talk in her existing and less constructivist views of teaching -- a "teacher" managing her students and looking for the right answers. Therefore, what Teresa tended to focus on was order and logistics, telling rather than modeling, and what she tells is to describe rather than construct meaning with the younger students. In contrast,

Michael was a *facilitator* when he followed the suggestions made at the preparation seminar sessions and incorporated his knowledge as an “apprentice observer.” Lortie (1975) refers to this as the “apprenticeship-of-observation” to describe the ways that general schooling prepares students for work, especially with public school teachers. Students have sustained face-to-face and consequential interactions with established teachers for approximately 13,000 hours by the time they graduate from high school. Michael appeared to incorporate his background knowledge of teaching, schooling, and the preparation seminar to assist him with the activities in his small group. As a *co-participant*, Michael was involved in the cross-aged discussions by orchestrating the flow of the conversation, taking no more responsibility than the younger students (Raphael & Goatley, in press), and reading his written responses from his reading log.

Themes in Teresa’s Cross-Aged Setting

Analysis of the transcripts revealed that Teresa conducted the discussions in her cross-aged group as a *facilitator* and *co-participant*. In this case, I argue that since Teresa did not participate in the preparation seminar on a regular and consistent basis, her discussions with the fourth/fifth graders were less-than-perfect (Roller & Beed, 1994). This resulted in Teresa’s reliance on traditional ways of conducting literary discussions (e.g., management and rules). In order to understand how Teresa’s case provides a context for reconstructing notions of literacy learning for low-achieving students, I discuss the cross-aged interactions and the roles they can play in low-achieving adolescents’ literacy learning and acquisition.

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Reconstructing Meanings of Learner

The first issue for analysis was how Teresa organized the group to establish her role as a learner, “teacher,” and leader to guide the cross-aged discussions. When she met the younger students to discuss the literature, two features consistently emerged: (a) management and rules, and (b) instructional procedures. Management and rules were the brief statements Teresa made to the fourth and fifth graders to get them organized before and occasionally during discussions. Instructional procedures were instances where she described literacy activities. The nature of her descriptions included literacy content. Although occurrences of these two features (i.e., management, instructional procedures) were temporary and short, they emerged consistently during the cross-aged literary discussions that Teresa conducted with the younger students.

A second issue that emerged during the cross-aged discussion groups was the methods that Teresa used to develop literary discussions. As I examined the transcripts of the cross-aged discussions, I was initially attracted to the ways in which Teresa appeared to be assisting the younger students to make personal connections with the text. However, further analysis revealed that she was more or less “winging it” versus drawing on the discussions and planning from the preparation seminar, and her sense of literary knowledge. Thus, rather than giving the discussions an appearance of framing and assembling pieces of a puzzle, often times it appeared that Teresa was trying to force pieces of a puzzle together that should not have been attached.

Teresa’s strategies for conducting cross-aged literary discussions included asking questions based upon the younger students’ responses and comments. Simultaneously, the activity strategies used to develop discussions reinforced

Teresa's organizational strategies, and her role as facilitator. The activity strategies assisted Teresa and the younger students to "keep a conversation about text going" although they were less-than-perfect.

The fourth and fifth graders in Teresa's small group were Brad, Cathy, Chauncey, Edith, Janet, and Stanley. In this section of the chapter, I focus on how Teresa interacted with the students, drawing on transcript data from February 4, 25, March 3, April 15, 28, and May 5 and 19. I explore the strategies she used in attempts to frame and assemble puzzle pieces that did not necessarily connect, then concentrate on the analysis of the transcripts of her cross-aged discussions. I will critique the transcripts in sections, then summarize the findings.

To discuss Teresa as a learner by teaching a small group of fourth and fifth graders, I continue with the description of how the students interacted with Tuesday on February 4. The first session gave Teresa an opportunity to explore the literacy activities we worked on and talked about in our preparation seminar on January 11.

To begin the literacy activities, Teresa helped the students to get organized for discussion simultaneously establishing her role within her group. Patterns for setting the context to begin a discussion emerged in two different ways; management and rules, and giving instructional procedures. Below I discuss this phase.

Management and rules. An alternative literacy learning program designed for low-achieving students requires new ways of looking at how a low-achieving student develops as a learner through teaching. However, we must understand that historical, social and experiential background definitions of schooling, teaching and learning remain with adolescents who have been labeled even

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though they might participate in programs designed to offer alternative experiences.

Keeping within a sociocultural theoretical perspective, oral language was the principle tool for enhancing the social interactions and literacy activities among all students. Norms for interaction shaped the way Teresa perceived her dual roles as learner and teacher, and the ways in which she saw her relationship with the younger students in her group. How language was used, and for what purposes, provided opportunities for knowledge construction and literacy learning for Teresa as well as the younger students. The dual role of learner and “teacher” not only provided Teresa with an opportunity to participate in her own learning by interacting with others, it elevated her status, and gave her permission and authority to make decisions about the group dynamics and norms. How she presented herself and treated matters that emerged contributed to her own learning regarding leadership, organization, and making immediate decisions. Therefore, it was important to understand how Teresa established managerial procedures and group norms in order to move the group forward in reading, writing, and discussion.

Teresa organized the fourth and fifth graders in her group to prepare for discussions by embedding various managerial procedures and rules within the context of discussions and interactions. For example, having students begin their group discussion after each group member finished writing a response in their reading log was one norm that was shared and understood by all of the younger students and was common throughout the study. A second norm related to turn-taking, in contrast to students talking simultaneously. This enabled Teresa to hear the voices of each student individually, as well as avoid her potential loss of

control of the small group. At the same time, such methods resembled “traditional” ways of interacting in a classroom. The management and procedures that were prevalent in the cross-aged setting suggested that Teresa used her own experiences and information about schooling and teaching to assist her as she worked with the cross-aged group.

The managerial procedures and rules were temporary and short term and emerged for different purposes at various times throughout the discussions. For instance, sometimes Teresa stated managerial instructions as a response to a question or comment made by students in her small group. At other times, the norms established for management and rules surfaced as a result of tensions that emerged during interactions among students. The moment-to-moment interactions in the group required that Teresa make immediate decisions. As learner and “teacher” this enhanced her role as facilitator and co-participant within the context of her small group.

In general, Stanley's actions and behavior seemed to create conflict with Teresa. Recall that Stanley was the fifth-grade student who had had prior experience in working with high school students during my first study of the Cross-Aged Literacy Program. For Teresa, this was a first and new experience in working with a small group of fourth- and fifth-graders in a literary discussion group. Below, I present an excerpt from the beginning of the February 4 session which appeared to be the beginning of the tension between Teresa and Michael. She responded by establishing implicit norms taken from background information from the initial meeting of the preparation seminar, prior knowledge, and a sense of schooling.

1 Stanley: You have to speak up louder.

- 2 Cathy: I had an interview (??).
- 3 Stanley: I think it's about an animals now....??
- 4 Teresa: Not yet, you gotta wait until we go through the whole book and then??

[Approximately one minute allowed to browse through Tuesday]

- 5 Teresa: Alright, you ready?
- 6 Edith: Yea.
- 7 Teresa: Okay. You wanna be the first one?
- 8 Edith: It's about frogs.
- 9 Teresa: I know but we gotta match, it's like, you gonna say, like for instance, if I was supposed to do this page, you gotta say what's going on and it's like, it's like you're creating your own words for the book. And I'm gonna pick, you gotta match the other person's description. You can't just write somethin' wild like, pink frogs.
- 10 Stanley: Anyway, that's not a frog it's a toad.
- 11 Teresa: Oh, well whatever. Okay, we'll start with you. What do you think is going on in this picture?

In this exchange, Stanley began the discussion by telling Cathy she had to speak louder. Stanley's directions to Cathy to speak louder might have been due to several purposes: for audio taping reasons, so that the rest of the members in the small group could hear her, or to speak louder for both of these reasons. Even though Stanley spoke to Cathy, he offered all of the group members a managerial procedure to follow, suggesting that in order for others to hear, the speaker had to speak louder. Consequently, Stanley implicitly gave himself permission to set a standard for the group before Teresa had an opportunity to speak.

As Stanley spoke and made a prediction about the story (i.e., turn 3), Teresa immediately responded by telling him that it was not time to talk about the

book, because everyone had to “go through” [look at] all of the pictures in the book before the discussion could begin. After giving the students approximately one minute to look at all of the pictures in Tuesday, she asked them if they were finished. Instead of giving Stanley the opportunity to go first as he had given himself permission to do earlier, Teresa asked Edith if she wanted to start. Edith responded and proceeded to tell Teresa and the children what she thought the book was going to be about by predicting the obvious, “it’s about frogs.”

In turn 9, Teresa explained how she wanted the students to go about discussing the book, emphasizing that they should match the description of the previous speaker in order to create a narrative text structure for the pictures in Tuesday. She suggested that the next speaker had to be logical about the story: “you can’t just write somethin’ wild like, pink frogs.” In turn 10, Stanley spoke out to correct Teresa, asserting that the pictures were not those of frogs, but toads. She acknowledged Stanley’s intervention by saying “whatever.”

At the beginning of the first session, Stanley rather than Teresa started the discussion, but not about the picture storybook, thus creating an opportunity to manage and establish norms within the group. The other fourth and fifth graders were familiar with Stanley because they all had been in the same classroom together since the beginning of the school year. However, this was Teresa’s first opportunity to interact with the small group in a social and intellectual setting. If the students recognized Stanley as an organizer, such instances might raise issues in connection to Teresa’s status within the group, even though they knew Teresa was the group leader. Consequently, this situation set a context for Teresa to explore ways to control the younger students as opposed to constructing meanings from text.

On February 25, students were reading, writing about, and discussing Song of the Trees. Teresa was in the process of asking the fourth- and fifth-grade students questions about their favorite character in the story. Like the February 4 session, Teresa embedded managerial procedures and implied norms within the discussions and interactions. In the transcript below, notice how Teresa interjects specific directions to the students simultaneously as she attempts to facilitate the discussion.

- 12 Teresa: Christopher. Now, if you um say Cassie, raise your hand. Now um you said Cassie didn't you? So tell all of you guys, well one at a time, tell a little bit about Cassie.
- 13 Cathy: Um
- 14 Teresa: Your ideas.
- 15 Edith: Cassie, she, she didn't she has three brothers. She lived with her grandmother, her mother, and her dad and her brothers.
- 16 Stanley: And her grandfather.

Initially in turn 12, Teresa asked the students to talk about a character they liked by making it public. In a traditional manner, she directed them to do so by telling them to raise a hand when she called a students' name. Perhaps such reasons might be due to potentially losing control of the group if everyone were to speak at once. It should be noted that Teresa directed the younger students to raise a hand one at a time, and they complied with her request.

In this section, I have described the ways in which Teresa managed and organized the students simultaneously as she facilitated the discussion. It is important to note that the group norms that Teresa requested (i.e., raise your hand one at a time) were not discussed in the preparation seminar. Nor did we talk

about embedding rules within a context. Therefore, it seems feasible that the means in which Teresa set norms in this cross-aged setting were based upon her previous schooling experiences as a student.

Coupled with establishing various norms related to rules, Teresa used instructional procedures that were content related, contributing to the development of her role as a facilitator and co-participant. In this phase of my analysis, Teresa's role as a co-participant is enacted as a "teller" rather than actually doing. In the next section, I describe Teresa's instructional procedures as she worked with the younger students.

Instructional procedure. I define an instructional procedure as instances where Teresa explained, described, and asked the fourth and fifth graders to do various literacy activities. The nature of her explanations included literacy-related content (e.g., take out your reading logs) as opposed to classroom management (e.g., raise your hand). The experience of directing younger students for literacy activities and tasks endowed Teresa with the dual responsibility to maintain group norms, while creating the potential for literacy learning among all students. In the February 4 session, the discussions in the small group prompted Teresa to respond by stating the instructional procedures she wanted the students to follow for the next phase of their discussion. In the transcript below, notice how Stanley involved himself in the discussion and how Teresa responded.

- | | | |
|----|---------|--|
| 17 | Teresa: | Alright um ... |
| 18 | Edith: | Is that it? |
| 19 | Teresa: | Um, no. This time we're gonna describe what's in the picture. We're only gonna do some pictures. Like what's all the details you see about the pictures? |

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- 20 Cathy: Um, the turtles are looking around um, seeing if everything's okay...[??]
- 21 Stanley: [What do we have to do?
- 22 Teresa: Details about this picture? What do you see?
- 23 Stanley: Um, I see a turtle, it looks like it's from a further distance ... and a lot of grass...and the moon is still up and stars and that's it. And the um turtle is on a log.
- 24 Teresa: Do you notice anything about the flower?
- 25 Stanley: Yea, there's two more, and they're like ... one is opened out and one is ...]
- 26 Cathy: [...they're closed because it's summer time...[??]
- 27 Stanley: Well thanks a lot Cathy, just take my ...[??] (some mumbling)
- 28 Teresa: Alright now, describe this picture. What are some of the details that you see about this picture?
- 29 Edith: Well there's ...[??]
- 30 Stanley: Edith speak up.
- 31 Edith: Oh. I see a frog and in the window...[??] and there's a branch over one of the frogs and there's trees in the background and [inaudible]
- 32 Teresa: Do you see anything different about the trees? What do you think ... how ... does the tree looks normal, or does it look old or what?
- 33 Edith: It looks old.

There are two points to note in this transcript. The first point is that in turn 28, Teresa explained the instructional procedure that the students should follow, thus, lessening the potential of conflict between Stanley and Cathy. As Teresa continued to turn the pages of the book, she posed specific questions to the fourth and fifth graders in her group. Through these interactions, Stanley was assertive. However, the message underlying Teresa's response spoke to Stanley

specifically and the group overall. Her reactions to Stanley suggest that she was attempting to avoid tensions, and thus maintain her status as the group leader and facilitator. Intervening with explanations of an instructional procedure was a strategy which refocused the nature of the discussion, and organized and managed the group without calling attention to inappropriate behavior, or to any individual student.

On March 3, there was another occurrence in which Teresa strategically embedded an instructional procedure within the norms of her small group during a discussion that centered on Song of the Trees. In this example, the instructional procedure was incorporated in the literacy activities to develop the interactions and discussion among the group, rather than as intervention of potential tensions. In the transcript below, notice how Teresa gave instructions to students in order to move them into another phase of discussion.

- 34 Teresa: Um, so when do you think the father is comin' back?
- 35 Stanley: Tomorrow.
- 36 Teresa: In the book?
- 37 Brad: Two more days?
- 38 Stanley: No tomorrow.
- 39 Brad: Where is he at?

[Note: children guess when father will return in number of days]

- 40 Teresa: Alright, we're about to write in our logs. Write what you ... write what you um, what's the most thing that sticks out from what we've read. And what do you want to talk about that? Write it in your log.

[Teresa waits for children to write a response in their log and she writes in her log also]

- 41 Stanley: What are we supposed to write in our reading logs?

42 Cathy: Everything that's happened.

In turn 34, Teresa asked the students to make a prediction about the story. As Stanley and Brad predict when they think the father in Song of the Trees will return to his family (i.e., David), Teresa strategically moved the interactions into an instructional procedure by asking the students to write in their reading logs (i.e., turn 40). She continued to expand upon the instructional procedure she expected the students to follow by explicitly stating what they should respond to. After describing the procedure, Teresa offered the students an option by asking them what they wanted to discuss which should be written down in their logs. These exchanges reveal how Teresa strategically organized and managed the fourth and fifth graders by providing them with instructions that included literacy content.

But the nature of Teresa's question in turn 34 also suggest that she is looking for "the right answer" from the younger students. I support my interpretation of her question by the directive she gives the students in turn 36. There she tells them to look in the book. What appears to be happening is that Teresa understands the book to be the authority for finding "the right answer." Therefore, they should focus their attention in the book and get the answer she seems to be looking for.

Teresa managed to reinforce traditional methods of classroom management in this alternative literacy program. The expectation was that all students would make contributions to the literary discussion by using text and their ideas collectively to construct meaning. The notion of using traditional means of classroom management as a tool to frame literary discussions was not addressed in the preparation seminar, however other problem-solving strategies were discussed

(i.e., helping younger students make personal connections to the text). Since Teresa was not a regular community member of the preparation seminar setting, it is not surprising that she chose to practice common and traditional ways to conduct the literacy activities. Although these interactions were ordinary and not what I had anticipated, it is important to understand that Teresa pursued some of her own paths to facilitate cross-aged discussions (Roller & Beed, 1994). The moment-to-moment decisions that Teresa made provided her with an entry point for learning about how to develop leadership skills and literary discussions. Further, upon reflecting on the opportunity that the overall experience of the cross-aged program provided Teresa, there was the potential to launch her into the world of literacy and enhance her self-esteem.

Reconstructing Meanings of Literacy

The second theme for analysis that emerged in Teresa's case study entailed how she integrated questions, personal opinions, prior knowledge, and background experiences into her small group discussions. This theme featured the following ideas: (a) questions without content, (b) questions without excitement, (c) integrating background experiences into discussions, and (d) integrating personal opinions. On one hand, these features of Teresa's case study provide examples to introduce an awareness of some contextual functions of literacy development and learning for students who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling. On the other hand, some of the discussions as facilitated by Teresa sounded like traditional teacher/student interaction where she asked questions to get the "right answers" from the younger students.

The anticipation of comments made by younger students provided entry points for Teresa to emphasize details and facts, and to develop elaborate

discussions about text. However, the comments and features of the text that Teresa called the younger students' attention to raised some concerns because of the surface level of the discussions. Analysis and reflection of the cross-aged conversations suggest that Teresa made attempts to develop conversations by asking questions that were without content, and by making points that were based upon personal challenges that she was experiencing in her life. Often the content and topics that Teresa introduced into the discussion were irrelevant and inappropriate. Therefore, her role as facilitator and co-participant often suggested that she had not planned and made adequate preparations to engage in a literary discussion with the younger children. Below, I return to the discussion that centered on Tuesday.

Questions without content. As the students reached the end of Tuesday, they noticed the illustration of pigs flying in the air. The moon peeked above the top of trees with its light reflecting on a weather vane which sat on top of a barn. As the fourth and fifth graders paid close attention to the switch in the story from frogs to pigs, they commented on their observations. In the next section of transcript, I return to a section discussed previously where Teresa asked the students to describe all the details they observed in the pictures. Notice how Teresa listened to the students' responses and took opportunities to explore their observations by asking questions that did not have content.

53 Cathy: Next Tuesday at 7PM, ??

Note: Everyone talks at once, making it difficult to understand what they are talking about. But students are saying something about the flying pigs.

54 Stanley: Man think about it as pigs could fly. Think about if it fall in you windshield and stuff.

- 55 Teresa: Okay, what do you think is gonna happen with the pigs?
- 56 Stanley: Um, I think it's gonna just repeat. It's gonna...everything is gonna go like it did when the frogs came.
- 57 Cathy: Except nothin' is gonna be like..'cause ??
- 58 Edith: ??
- 59 Stanley: They're gonna fly you never know they may have to
- 60 Teresa: Alright, um...
- 61 Edith: Is that it?
- 62 Teresa: Um, no. This time we're gonna describe what's in the picture. We're only gonna do some pictures. Like what's all the details you see about the pictures?

In turn 53, Cathy read the last page of the story which showed a picture of a pig flying. All of the students started talking at once, apparently commenting on the switch in the text, moving from illustrations of flying frogs to a flying pig. Stanley initiated an interesting issue in turn 54. As he asked his peers to think about alternatives for the text, he implied that there was the potential for chaos if pigs could fly and then fall. Turn 55 is an example of how Teresa took an opportunity to explore Stanley's observation, using his idea to ask the students to make a prediction about the pigs entering the story at the end. Stanley, continued to share his thoughts, stating that he believed that the events in the story might repeat, but instead of frogs, the story would consist of pigs. Even though Teresa responded to Stanley's idea, she does not develop or initiate any ideas that were related or different on her own.

After listening to the students debate Stanley's prediction, Teresa re-entered the discussion. She stated that they were not done, and that they move

to highlighting the various details they noticed in the picture. Another example from the February 4 session will help illustrate how Teresa asked the students a question without substance and neglected to help develop the observations made by the younger students.

- 63 Teresa: Alright, is there anything you would like to discuss about the book? Anything you would like to discuss?
- 64 Cathy: Is there gonna be another book about ... ??
- 65 Teresa: Hmm?
- 66 Cathy: Do you think there's gonna be another book about flyin' pigs?
- 67 Teresa: I don't know there could be.
- 68 Edith: What did she say?
- 69 Teresa: If there's gonna be another um book about flyin' pigs. Did you like it?
- 70 Cathy: ??
- 71 Teresa: Do you think they're gonna um move up and start with flyin' cows year after year? What do you think will be next? After the pigs?
- 72 Edith: Um...birds [laugh].

In turn 63, Teresa asked the students a rote question without interest or enthusiasm. Her question is one that is content-free and lifeless (Roller & Beed, 1994), where there is no issue put forth for younger students and her to struggle with. Thus, she asked a question and left it open for the younger students to raise topics and issues they might want to discuss without providing adequate input to help them.

Questions without excitement. By March 3, we were well into Song of the Trees. Teresa and the younger students discussed the issue of the contract that

Mr. Anderson offered the Logans to cut down an unlimited number of trees from their forest. The excerpt below is an example of how Teresa initiated a probing question to one student's response, taking an opportunity to develop the conversation.

- 73 Teresa: Anybody else?
- 74 Cathy: If they want more trees, I think they should give them more money. But if they don't wanna give them more money they should ??.
- 75 Brad: I think he was trying to cheat her in just saying no, but he really was gonna take 'em all. But she didn't know that. And so that's how he was gonna cheat her out of the trees.
- 76 Teresa: Okay Brad um /// why do you think that they should pay more? I mean back in them days that was ... that was a lotta money.
- 77 Brad: Well ... that ... that was like um all they had was like a house, and the land and stuff and the trees. And so they didn't like, they didn't have kids didn't have stuff ?? so um ... I don't know, it was just like that was all the trees that they had, it's not like more would just pop up or something.
- 78 Teresa: Okay, Edith?

In this example, Teresa asked the students to explore issues related to the text, initially asking Brad a question, then inviting others to respond (line 73). Cathy offered her opinion, stating that she thought Mr. Anderson should give the Logan family more money if he wanted more trees. Cathy's comment suggested that she had some notions about what entailed the Logan's getting full value for their money. It is interesting to note that Brad's interpretation of this situation was that he did not think the mother and grandmother knew that they were being cheated, as he said "but she didn't know that" in line 75. His interpretation gave Mr. Anderson the economic advantage over the women in

the Logan family. Brad's comment also suggests that he understood the strategy that Mr. Anderson was using to maintain his economic standing. Even though Cathy and Brad dealt with critical issues that were directly related to the story, Teresa did not become engaged in the exchange other than to acknowledge that the offer Anderson made seemed reasonable given the times in which the story was written. In turn 77, Brad explained why he believed that the Logans should not sell the trees for the offer Mr. Anderson made. His suggestions imply that he supported the Logans because they had limited assets, and that the trees were not such that they would instantly grow again. Further, Brad specified that the "kids didn't have stuff." Brad was not specific about what he meant by "stuff." However, his response showed that he appeared to have empathy for the Logan family's economic situation.

Teresa continued to ask questions without enthusiasm while the students in her small group continued to discuss the unfair contract that Anderson offered the Logans in Song of the Trees. Continuing with my analysis and interpretations of the March 3 session, below I present another instance of how Teresa took an opportunity presented by students to ask them questions to engage them and not herself in the discussion.

79 Teresa: I wish they woulda' went to another um forest. Do you think they woulda' got more money or would they have to give up more money?

80 Brad: Well I think..

[tape is turned off]

81 Teresa: So um what would you do if you were in Ma's situation?

82 Edith: I wouldn't take the money. I would wait.

- 83 Teresa: Alright, um...um...]
- 84 Stanley: [I think... I think that they um she should just take the money well, make stop it right now don't let 'em take it, don't let em cut down any more trees and make him pay extra.
- 85 Fenice: Why?
- 86 Stanley: Because he took just about all her trees. That left them with nothing. 'Cause if you look at the pictures look... all.... most of the trees are gone.
- 87 Brad: I would of said um, I'd have to think about it until a week. And then send Christopher John, or [yea...
- 88 Edith: [Stacey?
- 89 Brad: Yea ah to go get their dad like right away that night. And so he might be back with the dad so then he could like....]

In this excerpt, I begin where Teresa made her opinion of Mr. Anderson and his workers public, and where she asked the younger students to make a prediction from a hypothetical situation. It is unclear as to why Teresa raised this question. Therefore, it appears to be one that she simply raised to keep the students talking.

In turn 81 however, Teresa raised a different sort of question to invite the students to share their thoughts about the situation Big Ma faced. Edith began by saying she would not take the money right away, but wait. Stanley commented that he thought that the mother and grandmother should prevent Anderson from cutting down more trees, arguing that Anderson had taken almost all of the trees from the forest. As Stanley talked he used a picture of the forest in the book to provide support for what he argued. Teresa's question provided the students with an issue to explore, and encouraged them to place themselves in the position of a character. As they publicly expressed various perspectives and

points of view, they collaboratively constructed knowledge about binding issues which underlie contracts between people.

As Brad entered the discussion, he suggested one way that the Logan family might stall Anderson, while Christopher John traveled to get the father, offering the group another way of thinking about the text. Edith provided clarity and support for Brad, stating that it was Stacey who should go to Louisiana rather than Christopher John. As Brad started to explain why he thought the family should get the father to return to Mississippi, Teresa suspended Brad's response, initiating an opportunity to ask another question. Below, I present her question, and the interchange that emerged as a result of it.

- 90 Teresa: But don't you think at night if um... if Mr. Anderson wants he could go cut down the trees for free?
- 91 Brad: Well...]
- 92 Teresa: [How could you prevent that?
- 93 Brad: Well they could call the cops. If was gonna just go cut down the trees they could call the sheriff.
- 94 Teresa: You think sheriffs were back then?

This example illustrates how Teresa invited Brad to think about the situation from another perspective. The nature of her question seemed to imply that Anderson was the type of man who would do whatever he needed to do, to get what he wanted regardless of the actions of the Logan family. At the same time, Teresa's question offered some insight and suggest that she had some notions of her own as to what might occur. This series of exchanges is different because the question Teresa raised resulted from story content.

The second part to her question (i.e., turn 92) asked Brad to think about the consequences of the problem-solving strategies he had suggested earlier -

“How would you prevent that?” In turn 93, Brad suggested that the family could call the sheriff. This comment is interesting to ponder, because Brad answered Teresa based upon influences of modern times and the world in which he knows, rather than the situation for African-Americans in the 1930’s, in the rural South. In this respect, Brad has merged his knowledge and understanding of the world in 1994, to the world of the Logan family in the 1930’s, thus making interpersonal connections to the text.

Teresa asked Brad if he thought there were sheriffs “back then.” Like Brad, Teresa’s question is interesting because it implies that Teresa did not think there were sheriffs during the setting of the story. This statement raises a question about the thinking underlying Teresa’s question - did Teresa believe that there were no sheriffs during the 1930’s, or did she believe that there were sheriffs, but not to protect the Logans? Based on Brad’s comment, Teresa took an opportunity to help him explore his reflections within the context of when the story was written.

The heterogeneous mix of this cross-aged group (i.e., ability, gender, ethnicity), and the individual background experiences was a rich context for enhancing the literary knowledge of the students. However, the discussions in this section were not as rich as the physical setting. I provided evidence to support my claims that the questions Teresa raised were often without content. I discussed how she participated but without engagement and excitement. Whereas she took opportunities to explore their observations and comments, she neglected to actively become involved in the conversation. In these examples, Teresa did not do much talking. Rather, her questions were posed so that the younger students might develop the discussion about text. Her skills as a leader

enabled her to strategically manage the dynamics of the group, attempting to engage them in the content of the literature. However, her lack of skills for engaging in literary thought as a reader and writer limited the possibilities for developing the discussions among all student. “The experience of enthusiastic involvement with books is an important one” (Roller & Beed, 1994). The nature of these cross-aged discussions were not as rich an experience for Teresa as I had envisioned. Nevertheless, the experience itself provided her with an entrance to the world of literate thought, and an alternative to simply working on strategies and skills to strengthen literacy development. In the next section, I explore my third theme for assisting us to reconstruct meanings of literacy learning and acquisition for Teresa.

Integrating background knowledge into discussions. Evans (1996) notes that how language is used in literature discussions influences how students position themselves and others within the contexts. Often, there might be potential consequences for such positioning where the stances that the participants take bring some bearing on how ideas are received. The concept of positioning as explained by Harré and Van Langenhove (1991) suggest that positioning is based on the premise that people position themselves - take up a position in relation to other people - through discourse. Described in this way, the concept of positioning is more dynamic than a role which is perceived as static and unmoving.

In the next section, I illustrate how Teresa integrated her personal background experiences into the discussions. As she blended her knowledge of her world into the world of the text and the discussions, she positioned herself as an authority on various topics and issues. Consequently, as she took a stance,

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she positioned the students where they often acquiesced to Teresa's ideas.

Here, I return to the February 4 session where the students discussed Tuesday. They finished describing details they noticed in the illustrations as Teresa had asked, and then the discussion moved from descriptions about the pictures, to reflection and analysis. Notice how Teresa allowed the students to do most of the talking, but then intervened to ask a question. Underlying her question, was her own background knowledge about the care of animals.

- 95 Stanley: Um, I think next it will probably be.....pigs, I mean not pigs but um maybe um, um, chickens, maybe chickens or cows..]
- 96 Edith: It'll be people...]
- 97 Cathy: Raining cats and dogs...]
- 98 Edith: [... or people
- 99 Cathy: Or um cats and dogs flying in the rain ...]
- 100 Teresa: But wouldn't that hurt 'em?
- 101 Edith: Hurt what?
- 102 Teresa: See you say the pigs ... the frogs [??] wouldn't you think they would hurt the dogs and cats?

The issue to note in this series of exchanges is the relevance of Teresa's questions in turns 100 and 102. Previously, she had asked the students if they wanted to discuss anything about the text. As ideas for a sequel to Tuesday, Cathy, Edith, and Stanley offered a random selection of names of animals one might use in another wordless picture book. Their suggestions are in sync with the same genre in which Wiesner wrote Tuesday. After several turns by Stanley, Edith, and Cathy, Teresa made one move to ask a different question, "But wouldn't that hurt 'em?" This question is inappropriate given the nature of the

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younger students' conversation. They were engaged in a discussion of ideas for constructing a fantasy. But the content and tone of Teresa's question implies that she was thinking about real animals falling from the sky versus imaginary animals, because cats and dogs cannot be hurt in a story created as a fantasy. Seemingly, the question Teresa posed to the students is drawn from her personal background experience as the owner of a cat and two dogs. In this example, she changed the nature of the discussion by raising a question that positioned her as an authority on animal care. Consequently she positioned the younger students as well, where they were placed in a situation to address the unrelated question Teresa raised.

On April 15, the students were discussing Journey To Jo'Burg. An additional instance emerged in which Teresa blended her background knowledge into the cross-aged discussion, thus, positioning the students to consider alternative views. Below, notice how she encouraged them to proceed.

- 103 Teresa: Are you done? Okay, Cathy, go on.
- 104 Cathy: I think um um...Naledi and Tiro are um ...]
- 105 Teresa: [I can't hear you.
- 106 Cathy: I think the two of 'em are very, very brave and um they've met a lot of friends on the way. The boy at the orange orchard, the truck driver ?? I don't think ??]
- 107 Teresa: [Do you think that was kinda brave of them, goin' up to that man and what, what woulda happened if ...]
- 108 Cathy: [No, I mean like the, um, brave to go all the way to Johannesburg.
- 109 Teresa: [Yeah, but I was talkin' about, askin' a question about the man. Do you think it was pretty brave of them to ask for a ride? Or would you hada' done that if you were out there on the roads?

110 Cathy: No. Um, um...]

111 Teresa: [Would you had kept on walkin?

The question Teresa asked Cathy in turn 107 might be considered a challenge in several ways. First, Teresa might be challenging the plot of the story itself, where she questions Cathy as to whether or not it seems realistic for two young children to hitch-hike a ride from a stranger. If Teresa was challenging the plot of the story, one might say that she had considered a possible flaw in the text. If Teresa was considering a flaw in the text, that raises another question; from what context was she drawing this idea?

Another way to interpret Teresa's question might be whether or not she was positioning Cathy to think deeper about the consequences of two children "hitch-hiking" a ride from a stranger. In posing the question to Cathy, Teresa positioned herself as a more mature thinker about the potential aftermath of accepting rides from strangers. This interpretation raises an issue of whether there are underlying concerns behind her question. It appeared that she wanted the students to consider the potential danger of accepting a ride from someone whom one does not know. At the same time, Teresa was moving the discussion to consider issues that were beyond the text. Reflected upon in this way, Teresa seemed to be considering issues related to fear and what it means to be safe. If Teresa was challenging Cathy's response to what it might mean for two children to be brave, it could be possible that she was bringing her own culture and background into the context of the story. In order to understand my second interpretation of this interchange, it is important to revisit Teresa's background and consider some of the reasons she might ask the younger students to consider other points of view as she takes a critical stance to Cathy's response.

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In chapter 3, I wrote a brief biography of Teresa where I explained that she spent a lot of time alone at night because of her mother's work schedule. Teresa often talked about how she was "scared" when she was home alone at night. Also, she shared how she was unable to fall asleep because she was constantly listening for "noises." If Teresa was looking at Cathy's response from her personal world versus the context of the written text, then it seems that she was thinking about what it might mean to accept a ride from a stranger from her modern day, American teenager's point of view. Assuming that this is the case, it appeared that Teresa had stepped into the world of the text (Langer, 1992), where she used her previously constructed knowledge about safeness, and Journey To Jo'Burg to further create meanings from the text. Barthes (1985) might argue that Teresa was in the process of "rewriting the text of Journey To Jo'Burg within the text of her life." In so doing, she drew two texts together, the literature and the text of her own personal life and background knowledge. Consequently, in posing her question, Teresa positioned herself, Cathy and the other students in her group and raised some awareness that there might be other interpretations to consider.

On April 28, Teresa integrated background knowledge into the cross-aged discussions about Journey To Jo'Burg again. However, in this session, she used her artistic ability, and encouraged the fourth- and fifth-graders to do so as well. In the transcript below, we enter the lesson where Teresa is developing the content for discussion by asking the fourth and fifth graders to share their drawings with the group members. Notice how she gives several students opportunities to share their drawings, and then offers to include her illustration.

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- 112 Teresa: What are we um writin' about? What did we do?
What was our assignment today?
- 113 Brad: Uh, we were supposed to write something or draw something.
- 114 Cathy: Like what we draw]
- 115 Brad: [...um that didn't really tell about, well it didn't have a picture so we'd know what it looked like and write about it.
- 116 Teresa: Okay. And are you done with yours?
- 117 Brad: I did.....
- 118 Teresa: First, first read what you wrote.
- 119 Brad: I did I'm writing about how the police looked and how the train looked while people were tryin' to get out at the same time.
- 120 Teresa: Okay. Show us. Are you payin' attention Jasmine? // Now tell us a little bit about that. Um, what color would you have that? What color do you think it would be?
- 121 Brad: The train ah.... red, green.
- 122 Teresa: And were there people inside?
- 123 Brad: Yeah. That's Grace, [inaudible] and that's the bridge.
- 124 Teresa: There was only one policeman?

Teresa began the lesson by asking the students to clarify the literacy activity for the April 28 session, and proceeded by guiding Brad through specific details in his drawing. Features that Teresa asked Brad to focus on included reading the caption he wrote to describe his drawing, colors he might include, and whether or not there were people in his illustration. After going around the circle to ask others to share their drawing, Teresa moved to share her own. In the transcript below, notice how she describes features of her illustration, modeling

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what she had asked Brad to do.

- 125 Teresa: Well, I'll show mine. I drew the boss, the uh mother's boss, the woman she works for. And how she looked. (inaudible) [the children laugh] That's how I pictured her. Old lady, kinda lookin' mean. White hair. Red shirt on.
- 126 Janet: Actually I don't think she's mean. She let their mom off of work.
- 127 Teresa: Yeah, but she didn't really, she like hesitated. Well, I need you for this and this.
- 128 Janet: Yeah.
- 129 Teresa: What about yours? Are you done?

As Teresa shared her drawing, she shared a different type of literacy skill, her ability to draw (see Figure 6). In an interview with Teresa on January 5, she talked about how she often used her talent to express herself when she could not recall the words to say what she needed to say. In this example, Teresa expressed what she wanted to say about the boss lady in Journey To Jo'burg, highlighting features she considered to be indicative of power and authority. For example, Teresa used adjectives such as "old" and "kinda lookin' mean" as a way of helping the students understand what she thought about the character. When Janet questioned her about the picture, Teresa defended her position by arguing that even though the boss lady let Naledi and Tiro's mother off from work, she did not without attempting to instill guilt feelings into the mother. In arguing for her position on instilling guilt, Janet was positioned and capitulated to Teresa's argument as evidenced by her response in turn 128.

Integrating personal opinions. From analyzing how Teresa integrated her personal opinions into cross-aged discussions, she often positioned the younger students such that they were swayed to consider alternative points of view. In



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Figure 6. Teresa's drawing of the Madam in Journey To Jo'burg.

many instances, the alternative points of view were argued strongly by Teresa and resulted in the younger students searching for ideas that Teresa wanted. In the next section of transcript, I return to the April 15 discussion where the students were discussing Journey To Jo'burg. I begin where Brad responded after Teresa asked the question "Would you had kept on walkin'?"

- 130 Brad: Well, I think it's, it would be like different there than it is here.
- 131 Stanley: Yea, 'cause here....like you never know. You could probably get kidnapped then if you do it in Johannesburg.
- 132 Teresa: You have anything else to say on this?
- 133 Brad: Well, it's, I think it's...it would probably be dangerous.
- 134 Cathy: But I mean, if they were in Johannesburg it might be ... probably would be. But since they were out there on the road...
- 135 Brad: Yeah. It would be.
- 136 Cathy: Since they were out in the country and everything.
- 137 Teresa: But still, in Johannesburg, if somebody woulda picked you up, somebody would at least have seen you if you had a got kidnapped. This is out on a road, nobody would a known you got kidnapped for a long time. Right? So would you rather get a ride in Johannesburg or out in the boon docks where nobody knows where you are?
- 138 Cathy: Well, I think what I woulda' done is I woulda' asked a few questions just to make sure.
- 139 Teresa: Okay. You done, Stanley? /// // Anybody have questions about anybody else's comments?

Brad made the first move to respond to Teresa's question stating that he believed that things in a rural area of South Africa would be different than here (i.e., the United States). Brad takes a critical stance, arguing that living in a safe

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place in his own country is questionable. Stanley supported Brad's response (i.e., turn 108), explicitly stating that there is the potential of one being kidnapped in this country, but less likely in Johannesburg. In turn 132, Teresa asked a follow-up question and positioned the students to make further comments. Brad responded to Teresa in turn 133, acknowledging that it might be dangerous for Naledi and Tiro to ask a stranger for a ride. At that point, it appeared that Brad was positioned to capitulate to Teresa's challenging opinion, even though he was the student who initiated a critical stance against the notion Teresa had spoke out on; it would be dangerous to hitch-hike in rural South Africa.

Seemingly, Cathy sensed that Brad was giving in to Teresa's argument because she reentered the discussion, stating that if one were to hitch-hike in South Africa, then the experience would probably be different between rural and large urban areas. It is interesting to note the differences in comparisons that all of the students seemed to be making in their discussion. When Cathy entered the conversation, she kept the issue of safety in hitch-hiking. However, she made comparisons between hitch-hiking in rural and urban areas in South Africa, while Teresa made comparisons between hitch-hiking in the United States and South Africa. The way in which Teresa positioned herself and the younger students seemed to persuade them to reconsider the critical stance that they had initiated and think about the story from Teresa's point of view. Therefore, Brad and Cathy were persuaded to change their perspectives about the trip that Naledi and Tiro took from the country into Johannesburg.

In positioning the students in turn 137, Teresa was continuing to draw her criticism from her personal opinions and experiences. Underlying her comment and question is the notion of fear and uncertainty (i.e., out on the road nobody

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woulda known you got kidnapped for a long time). The issues of fear and uncertainty Teresa raised implied that she was making assumptions, and raising critical issues based upon her world and experiences. This notion relates to a previous statement I made regarding Teresa's experiences of being independent and alone. In the preparation seminar discussions about Journey To Jo'Burg and issues of fear and uncertainty in relation to the trip that Naleido and Tiro took to Johannesburg were not raised.

During the interactions on May 5, another instance arose where Teresa integrated her personal opinions into the discussion. As she positioned the students to expand their perspectives on the story, she asked them a question: "And why did Grace say that in black schools they taught rubbish?" This question underscores some thinking about various social and political issues in education. Below, I continue with their discussion of Journey To Jo'Burg.

- 140 Edith: Because ... because it was only about um ... um ...]
- 141 Janet: [... about being a maid.
- 142 Edith: [about, um, um, um white people's history and they don't didn't teach um black people's history.
- 143 Teresa: Do you guys think they still do that today?
- 144 Janet: Because they were teaching women how to be maids.
- 145 Brad: No.
- 146 Cathy: Yes, they do.
- 147 Edith: In the book they didn't say that.
- 148 Teresa: I know, but do you think, no not in the book, in real life. Do you think they only teach white, only white people ... about white people?
- 149 Edith: No.

150 Janet: No.

151 Teresa: How many, how many times do you guys talk about black Americans?

Teresa asked the fourth and fifth graders two questions which positioned them to think about the learning experiences of students in the United States and the learning experiences of children in South Africa (i.e., not teaching about the experiences of African-Americans) as presented in the text. Teresa integrated this issue into the discussion by asking the students a question about the text first (i.e., why did Grace say that in black schools, they taught rubbish). As she proceeded to develop the discussion, she positioned herself and the students in her group to make the question applicable to the context of their own schools. As illustrated in the transcript, the younger students voiced different opinions about what they thought they were taught. For instance Brad did not believe students in the United States are taught “rubbish” while Cathy seemed to think students United States schools are taught “rubbish.” Teresa continued to help the students to push their thinking by asking them a clarifying question removed from the text to “real life” (i.e., do they only teach about white people’s history). Janet and Edith disagreed with Teresa’s underlying personal opinion. After they answered Teresa, she continued to push the issue, asking Janet and Edith “how many times they talked about black Americans.” For Teresa to question the students about the amount of time they studied “black Americans” shows that she included her personal being and opinion into what gets left out of the school curriculum.

In the May 19 cross-aged discussion, another personal opinion emerged for Teresa, drawn from the literature. The students were concluding their work by

comparing and contrasting, Song of the Trees, Journey To Jo'burg, and the movie "Sarafina." Teresa shared what she had written in her reading log with the younger students, and then requested that they share their work as well. After sharing what they had written in their reading logs, Teresa asked a question which seemed to appear out of nowhere, yet suggested that a personal opinion was behind it. In turn 152 below, Teresa positioned herself and the younger students to think about the world of schooling, teaching, and learning.

- 152 Teresa: All right. I have a question to ask you guys. Is, have you ever heard of such a teacher that has like a lot of authority? You know, they're high ranked and they take advantage of their position?
- 153 Edith: What do you mean?
- 154 Teresa: Just like the police in all these um stories. They like took advantage of, it's like they went overboard with their job. It's like, okay, if we put.....
- 155 Edith: Are they nice or mean?
- 156 Teresa: Edith....Listen. If we put Brad, like if he was like /// if he was like /// a teacher or somethin', he told you kids, like clean your room all the time and do the chores for him. Isn't that taking advantage of his job? He's supposed to be teaching you guys.
- 157 Edith: Yeah.
- 158 Teresa: Wasn't that the same case in these stories? ... That was takin' advantage of him. I mean, he didn't have to go overboard like that.

A close interpretation of this exchange will provide insight about how the question emerged. First, it is important to note that Teresa embedded her question within the context of the literature (i.e., Journey To Jo'burg), thus making a private concern public for students to debate among themselves. In so doing, she positioned herself as the individual with a specific issue related to teachers,

power, and authority; an issue that Teresa obviously wanted to explore with the students. Given that Teresa stressed “such a teacher” as she asked her question implies that she was thinking about a particular teacher. It shows how she positioned herself to vent obvious frustrations about a teacher into the context of a literary discussion

In this episode, Teresa positioned herself as the authority for taking a critical perspective on how teachers exert their authority in the classroom. Consequently, she positioned the students in her cross-aged group to take a critical look at how teachers display authority in the classroom and to what end. Even though Teresa attempted to relate her question to the story, it was raised completely out of context. Therefore, it was intended to position herself and the students to explore issues with which she was struggling.

What Might We Learn From Teresa’s Case?

There are several significant points about Teresa’s case. First, Teresa’s participation in the Cross-Aged Literacy Program rendered a new experience to reconstruct meanings of her as a literacy learner who had been labeled as a low-achiever. Reconstructing meanings of Teresa as a literacy learner were provided through the two components of the study, where multiple ways of interacting with different people existed (i. e, Fenice, high school peers, fourth- and fifth-grade students). This context was conceptualized as the core of the study for enhancing her literacy education.

Although Teresa generated her own strategies to establish her leadership role (i.e., embedding managerial rules and instructional procedures as norms within the group), they were based upon her preconceived notions and experiences of teaching and schooling, or what Lortie (1975) refers to as the

“apprenticeship of observation.” During earlier sessions of the cross-aged discussions, she did not hesitate to strategically organize the group by embedding implied norms. It should be noted that the ways in which Teresa established managerial rules and instructional procedures was not an emphasis in our preparation seminars. Since Teresa opted to limit her participation in the preparation seminar for various reasons (i.e., extra-curricular activities after school; excuses) her options for developing an understanding of how she might use strategies to solve problems when she encountered them (i.e., Stanley dominating the discussion) were very limited. Thus, relying on traditional notions of teaching seemed appropriate for her.

Second, as the group facilitator, Teresa employed various strategies during discussions. As the fourth and fifth graders engaged in literary response, Teresa took opportunities to draw on their responses to develop the discussions. Through the process of developing discussions, students moved beyond the text to make connections to other information resources. Although Teresa was able to support the cross-aged discussions such that topics and issues were extended beyond the text, there was a concern of how Teresa positioned herself and thus the students to take stances that seemed to be based upon the personal challenges that she was encountering in her own life. Taken from this perspective, the cross-aged discussions were a place for Teresa to “vent frustrations” about personal matters rather than enhance her literary understanding. Moreover, since Teresa’s participation in the preparation seminar was limited, she did not have the opportunity to engage in literary response with Michael, Devon, Mark, and me. Therefore, as she attempted to facilitate the cross-aged discussions, she made personal connections where she deemed necessary

and drew upon what was familiar. In so doing, she integrated her personal opinions, background knowledge and experiences into the discussions. Yet, she inhibited the younger students and their potential to make contributions to discussions based upon their prior knowledge and background experiences.

The Case of Michael

Michael's case provides an interesting contrast to Teresa's. Unlike Teresa, Michael attended and actively participated in the preparation seminar on a consistent and regular basis. He read the literature during the preparation seminar sessions. When we did not finish reading the stories during those sessions, Michael often took books home to finish reading them. Michael asked questions about the literature for various purposes such as to clarify ideas and to explore concerns and critical issues about the text. He offered suggestions to his peers and me concerning what the nature of cross-aged literacy activities might entail. As conversations in the preparation seminar emerged, Michael talked about the text and linked them to his schooling experiences (for example, see chapter 4). The activities in the preparation seminar, and the contributions Michael and his peers made to the group provided him with rich sources of information.

However, Michael's interactions in his cross-aged discussion group were far different from how he interacted and engaged himself in the preparation seminar. His role as facilitator with the younger students was very structured. I saw several distinctions between the ways Teresa and Michael participated in the preparation seminar and conducted their cross-aged group discussions. For instance, as described in chapter 4, Teresa was not an active and consistent participant in the preparation seminar. She conducted the cross-aged discussions by employing traditional means, yet she included much of her personal

background experiences into the interactions and discussions with the fourth and fifth graders. On the other hand, while Michael brought his personal opinions in the preparation seminar, he did not do so in the cross-aged discussions. While he engaged the younger students in conversations about the text, his personal contributions within the cross-aged group were limited. Teresa's focus was on telling students what to do, then sharing her personal response. In contrast, Michael followed procedures for completing the planned activities for the day by inviting the fourth and fifth graders in his group to participate, and by reading his log responses as he has asked them to do. However, after completing what he had planned, he often initiated unrelated activities with the fourth- and fifth-grade students. For example, he played a game called "Hang Man" or he engaged them in conversation about extra-curricular activities. Games and discussions of extracurricular activities may be viewed as "non-school" in content but, playing "Hang Man" is school-like for many students who do not participate in their own learning. Thus, Michael was a co-participant in a variety of ways that were both traditional (e.g., asking questions) and non-traditional (e.g., playing Hang Man).

In this case, I illustrate how Michael enacted his roles as facilitator and co-participant in the cross-aged literary discussions as he raised questions to guide the discussions, how he linked written and oral language, and how he drew on both to elicit and encourage discussion among the students. I trace his strategies back to the preparation seminar to suggest that his interactions with the younger students were based upon both the alternative literacy learning experiences and his "apprenticeship of observation" perspectives of teaching and schooling.

Themes in Michael's Cross-Aged Setting

The cross-aged discussions in Michael's group are presented under two broad themes: (a) reconstructing meanings of learner, and (b) reconstructing meanings of literacy. First, I focus on the theme of reconstructing meanings of learner and feature Michael's strategies for asking questions to describe the manner in which Michael's role as facilitator emerged. Then I turn to reconstructing meanings of literacy. In that section, I describe how Michael made connections between oral and written language, making contributions by modeling reading log responses to the younger students. The examples I use show how Michael's role and interactions serve as a co-participant of literacy learning.

Reconstructing Meanings of Learner: Asking Questions

Commeyras (1995) notes that the asking of questions is and has been a pillar of teaching in western cultures since the time of Plato and Socrates (355 B.C.). Socrates, a Greek teacher, used questions to engage students in a question and answer dialogue with the intent of leading them to the "right" answer. Boydston (1981) has noted that John Dewey wrote about the pedagogical virtuosity of asking questions, arguing that "a question will force the mind to go wherever it is capable of going, better than will the most ingenious pedagogical devices." Still others have made observations in classrooms throughout the United States and repeatedly found that teachers ask hundreds of questions of their students each and every day (Dillon, 1988; Gall, 1970).

Consistent with how questions are used for teaching and learning, Michael asked questions in his cross-aged discussion group to stimulate participation among the students. The primary source for the questions he asked were those

we developed in the preparation seminar. A secondary source for Michael's questions stemmed from the younger student's responses used to elicit discussion. Over the course of the literacy lessons, he modified the questions he asked based on the fourth and fifth graders reactions to text. Michael's role as a facilitator and the questions he asked to enhance the discussions encouraged the group's communication and meaning construction. Michael's questions appeared to serve three purposes: (a) to seek information in response to questions, (b) to probe for understanding, and (c) to pose a challenge to prompt further discussion.

Seeking information in response to questions. Burbules (1993) asserts that during dialogue, questions are asked for a variety of different purposes. The simplest questions serve to seek a specific piece of information, but rarely promote ongoing discussion. Yet, simple questions are often the first step in ongoing instructional discussions to collaboratively construct knowledge. Such was the case in Michael's group.

During the cross-aged discussions on February 4, 10, and March 3, the students read and discussed Tuesday and Song of the Trees. Analysis of transcripts and field notes revealed that Michael encouraged students to talk by initiating questions to seek specific pieces of information about the text. The questions Michael asked were those of the simplest sort; to seek information to determine if the younger students wanted to share their ideas from the reading logs, and if students understood his instructional procedures. Unlike Teresa who structured and organized her group's discussion around conversational rules, Michael moved his group directly to the content of text.

On February 4, Michael asked the students about sharing their ideas to give them a choice as to whether or not they might participate.

159 Michael: One day there was this // turtle in the pond. He knew something was gon' happen' ... that's why he had that funny look on his face. Now which way ... are you gonna say now?

160 Zee: The turtles are really ... [inaudible] so they went back into the shell. And on the lilly pads were flying frogs.

161 Michael: Okay. Naw, don't move that. You ... it'll pick it up. It'll pick it up.

The point to note in this excerpt is how Michael facilitated the discussion by sharing his ideas about the illustrations in the story with the students; in doing so, he modeled what he expected members of his group to do. The modeling and role playing were the basis for others to create an oral narrative.

When the students finished "reading the pictures" orally, Michael requested that they write their own narrative about the story in their individual reading logs. Because they had only one book, Michael turned the pages of the book so that all students might see the illustrations, asking students if they were finished so as to move on to the next page. When reading log entries were completed, Michael modeled how the students were to share what they had written by reading his own log entry. Then he asked for a volunteer.

162 Michael: By the time the sun was coming up, the lily pads were losing power, and the frogs began to fall off the lily pad back into the pond. But back in the city there was a lot of questions to be answered. Now who would like to read theirs?

In this example, Michael's question invites students to share what they had written. This transcript segment illustrates how Michael enhanced his group members' participation by modeling what he expected of them. His questions

were simple ones, seemingly to elicit students' participation. However, such questions were a necessary first step, beginning a line of communication and engagement with the fourth and fifth graders. Further, Michael is following suggestions generated during the January 11 preparation seminar. The high school students had talked about creating a story by talking about the pictures in Tuesday. During the preparation seminar, Michael had suggested that they tell the younger students that they would be making up the story themselves.

Analysis of the February 10 session revealed that Michael asked students questions to seek information about their understanding of detailed illustrations in the wordless picture book. Michael's questions tended to follow the participation structure described as I-R-E: initiation, response, evaluation (I-R-E). Cazden describes this basic pattern and related modifications such as I-R-I-R-E. Michael initiated a question to seek specific information. When the student to whom he was speaking responded, he turned to the next student, asking him or her a question to seek additional responses.

- 163 Michael: Okay, we gonna talk about the pictures ... we gon' go around [tape stops] What do you see?
- 164 Sandy: [inaudible]
- 165 Michael: What do you see Alice?
- 166 Alice: Um, stars.
- 167 Michael: Stars? What do you see?
- 168 James: [inaudible]
- 169 Michael: [inaudible] ... little flags flying. Hold on guys. Oh, naw, that ... it's still recording. So, um, what do you guys think this, I mean, um don't turn that. And this page?
- 170 Daniel: It's weird.

171 Michael: It's weird? What do you think?

Michael moved around the circle of students in round robin style, asking each student what she or he saw in the pictures. He repeated his question (line 167) "What do you see?" or restated a student's response (line 171). Michael's procedures for engaging the students appear to stem from his tacit knowledge about what constitutes interactions between teachers and students. Researchers have documented the presence and frequency of I-R-E exchanges as characteristic of schooling across grade levels. Therefore, this is an example of how Michael practices "apprenticeship-of-observation."

The simple questions Michael asked and the style in which he asked them in these examples limit possibilities of advancing to an ongoing, interactive discussion. Yet, as noted by Burbules (1993), the questions Michael asked were a necessary prerequisite to identifying conditions that would promote a discussion among members of the group. Michael used questions so that he and the students could work together to construct knowledge. For example, to embellish a discussion about details in the illustrations of Tuesday, Michael needed to understand what the students noticed and their thoughts about the pictures. Thus, he asked students to share their thinking as he simultaneously opened the potential for students to introduce new issues and topics.

Straightforward, simple questions may help create an interactive discussion (Burbules, 1993), where all participants in the group can contribute. However, the drawback to asking simple questions is their potential to deaden opportunities for enthusiasm and spontaneity when a question simply is raised and a response provided. More elaborate questions might probe for understanding (Burbules, 1993, p. 87). In the next section, I describe how

Michael learned to ask more elaborate questions.

Asking questions to probe for understanding. Burbules (1993) defines probing questions as open-ended requests for opinions, beliefs, evaluations, interpretations, and elaborations. The purpose underlying probing questions is to seek information in some detail about what another thinks, knows, or feels about a topic or issue.

Burbules (1993) suggest that there are a variety of reasons why one might ask probing questions. The questioner might want to understand something better than she or he presently does. One might ask probing questions to learn more about the person whom she is questioning. Still further, probing questions might be asked to encourage others to seek out concerns and issues from a different point of view. However, the above stated purposes are not mutually exclusive within the context of a real discussion.

Analysis of transcripts on March 3 and 17 reveal that Michael asked students probing questions at different times for different purposes. In the first example, Michael appeared to ask probing questions in an effort to help students sort out alternative points of view about the text. During the March 3 cross-aged discussion, students discussed Song of the Trees. During the preparation seminar, I had provided Michael and his peers with a set of questions to guide the cross-aged discussions. He expanded upon the set showing how he had learned to use questions to develop the literacy activities as he asked younger students to expand upon their previous responses.

172 Michael: I need everybody's attention. Hey um, Matt you can sit right there. Alright. Alright, Mr. Anderson said um that he has a good contract with the Logan family trees. What do you suppose he meant by that?

- 173 Students: Money!
- 174 Michael: He meant money?
- 175 Sandy: He probably meant that he was gon' make a lot of profit out of the trees.
- 176 Michael: What else do you think he meant by 'dat? Can I have some more input? What do you ... what do you suppose not just money, I mean money and what else? Do you think that maybe he had a contract with somebody else, and he was gon' make a lot of money than what he offered the family for their trees?

The question Michael asked the students in turn 172 was a question we developed in the preparation seminar. The content of the question was such that the fourth- and fifth-graders might offer a response based upon their opinions, beliefs, or interpretations about what Mr. Anderson meant when he told the Logan family that his contract was a good offer. All students seemed to agree that the underlying meaning of "good contract" in this situation was "money." Sandy elaborated as she stated that Anderson would probably make a profit from the trees. Since Sandy offered another point of view, Michael sought to get more information or to have the students elaborate upon what they meant by the word money, just as Sandy had done. Thus, Michael initiated a probing question in an effort to receive "more input" from other students in his group. In addition to asking the students probing questions, Michael modeled how they might respond by sharing his thinking with them (i.e., turn 176). That is, after asking the students for more input, he asked another probing question in the form of offering his opinion about the situation -- that Mr. Anderson had intentions of making a big profit off of the Logan family's trees.

On March 17, the students continued to discuss Song of the Trees. The literacy activity for the session included several procedures: (a) the students

would select a character they liked or disliked, (b) write a description about that character, and (c) talk about why they liked or disliked the character they selected. Analysis of the transcript showed that Michael initiated a question to encourage students in his group to ask their peers probing questions about the character they selected to write about. Simultaneously, he sought information to develop his understanding about why students made their choices.

- 177 Michael: So who wants to talk first guys? You wanna read yours first? Alright Sandy.
- 178 Sandy: I read this page?
- 179 Michael: Yea, just ... yea we gonna we gon' everybody listen to Sandy so we can ask her questions you know and have a conversation about what she thinks about hers? Alright you wanna, um ... alright go 'head Sandy.
- 180 Sandy: [inaudible]he couldn't run that fast. He was always eatin', and he um, and I asked him why he like corn bread. And what other foods he like.
- 181 Michael: What made you pick um him ?
- 182 Sandy: Because he was um he was just funny.
- 183 Michael: He was funny? You like funny people?
- 184 Daniel: Who did she pick?
- 185 Michael: Christopher, um she picked Christopher John. Alright, who's next?

Notice how Michael asked Sandy a probing question, and how the information was shared as a result of the probe. First, in turn 177, Michael called the students' attention to Sandy. Michael made an open-ended request, inviting the students to make a contribution to Sandy's description of her character. He continued by modeling what he wanted the students to do by asking Sandy why she had chosen her particular character (i.e., turn 181). Sandy's response to

Michael's probing question was given in such a way that he was able to ask her yet another probing question (i.e., turn 183), which would tell Michael something about Sandy -- she likes people who are funny.

As the discussion continued, other instances emerged where Michael initiated more elaborate probing questions. In the next example, he asked James about the reasons behind his response.

186 James: My person is Little Man. He is real funny. I like the part where he hit Mr. Anderson with a big old stick in the leg. And Mr. Anderson yelled A-h-h-h-h! and Little Man laughed he-he-ha-ha macaroni ... [inaudible].

187 Michael: Is that the only reason you like Little Man?

188 James: No.

189 Michael: 'Cause he's bad?

190 James: Yea.

191 Michael: Um .. that's the only reason you like 'em?

192 James: Nope. I just like 'em.

193 Michael: Why you like 'em?

194 James: I just like 'em.

195 Michael: You just like 'em. Does anybody have any questions to ask James about why he likes Little Man?

196 Sandy: In the last sentence he said he-he-ha-ha macaroni?

Note the probing questions Michael asked James. James focused on a part of Song of the Trees that described how Little Man (character) kicked Anderson (character) during the time when he was taking trees from the Logan family's forest. As James talked, he seemed to admire the violence that occurred in the story, and even made a joke about the incident. In Michael's first probing

question (i.e., turn 187), he wanted to understand if his violence (i.e., bad) was James' only reason for liking the Little Man character. After several attempts to encourage James to expand on the character of Little Man, Michael asked other students in the group if they had questions for James (i.e., turn 195). Therefore, Michael initiated two probing questions for different but related purposes; first as an attempt to get more information from James about his character selection; and second, to ask other students in the group to get involved by asking James to talk about his selection and comment.

Asking questions to pose a challenge. Burbules (1993) defines a third type of question as one which proposes a challenge or criticism to the partners engaged in dialogue. A challenge question is not necessarily adversarial, hostile, or unsympathetic. However, the intention or feeling with which it is asked (or perceived to be asked) can influence the type of response one might receive. In Michael's case, he posed challenging questions to the fourth- and fifth-graders as a tool to develop their discussions and patterns of interactions in the group. My analysis of cross-aged discussions on March 17 and April 15 revealed that Michael asked the students challenging questions by building upon their responses. Michael's questions were challenging in a positive sense; they were intended to develop discussions of issues that emerged from the students' responses. Moreover, in the preparation seminar sessions, I modeled asking challenging questions in an effort to prompt their thinking about various issues and topics that emerged through the course of our conversations. In turn, Michael modeled what he had observed in the preparation seminar sessions.

In this section, I continue with the development of the discussion on March 17 which centered on Song of the Trees. Michael had been assisting the

students to interact through probing questions based on various issues that emerged via responses. As the discussion continued, there was a point where he pushed his inquiry of James to develop the discussion, to learn more about what James was saying, and to help James reflect on his own behavior. Below, I present a segment of the discussion where Michael asked James a personally challenging question.

- 197 Michael: 'Cause he said he's just like him.
- 198 Daniel: Just like him for what?
- 199 Michael: Just like 'im...in what ways are you just like him?
- 200 James: Um...bad.
- 201 Michael: You're bad? What kinda bad stuff do you do like him?
- 202 James: At home, I um...at home I do yelling in the basement when my mom is taking a nap.
- 203 Michael: Yelling in the basement?
- 204 James: And I be hittin' my sisters for no reason.
- 205 Michael: Why you hit your sisters for no reason?
- 206 James: Um mm. [negative]

In this dialogue, Michael used James' response to ask him challenging questions about himself. James had identified himself with a character in the story commenting that he liked the character (i.e., Little Man) because he was like him. However, James did not say how he thought he was like Little Man. Therefore, Michael asked James to be more specific (i.e., turn 199). As James answered Michael's questions, he simultaneously provided information which helped Michael understand why he believed that he was like Little Man, emphasizing features of his personality. Further, as James talked about the things he did at

home, Michael challenged him more in an attempt to understand what stood behind James' comment, and perhaps to help James think about why he did the things that he did to his sister, and to help him think about himself and his actions. In this sense, Michael was challenging James to reflect upon moral issues that he faced during conflicts with his sister. Therefore, Michael posed a series of challenging questions to James for three purposes; to develop a dialogue, to learn more about James, and to help James think about himself when he encountered conflicts with his sister.

During a cross-aged discussion on April 15, Michael and the younger students were discussing Journey To Jo'burg. The literacy activity entailed making a selection from the Reading Log Ideas sheet, and writing a response in their reading logs. Students used the reading log entry to develop the discussion. Analysis of the transcript showed that Michael raised challenging questions at two different points during the discussion. The first question focused on helping students reflect upon making connections between one of their parents (i.e., mom) and the parent in the story. Michael raised the question after he read his log entry to the group.

207 Michael: All right. Oh, I'll read what I wrote. I put today we read about the part in the book where they met a girl by the name of Grace McBeth, whatever. They said that their mom never spoke up like she did, 'cause remember she was like, no, it's not your fault. It's their fault. You know. So I said so did that mean that their mom was afraid to speak up and ask questions and why the things they, why things were the way they were. So what do you guys think about that? 'Cause you know how Grace spoke up. They said their mom never spoke up like that. So you think their mom, you know, just sits around, and lets everybody tell her what to do? You think she's like that?

208 Sandy: Maybe.

- 209 Michael: 'Cause Grace say, you know, she's not like that. She's a student and everything, and she, she wants to change a lot of different things. So would you rather your mom be like Grace or be like their mom?

As Michael read his log entry to the students, he explained some of the pieces of the story he was referring to (e.g., 'cause remember she was like, no, it's not your fault). When Michael finished reading, he asked the students what they thought about Naledi and Tiro's mother (i.e., turn 209). Michael raised the question again in turn 211 where he challenged the students to consider whether they would like for their mother to be like Grace (the one who was willing to speak out for what she believed in) or like Naledi and Tiro's mother.

Michael raised another question during the session on April 15 to pose a challenge. In contrast to the previous example, Michael asked the students to consider a significant person in their lives. He raised this question after Zee read her log entry which conveyed why she liked Grace in Journey To Jo'burg.

- 210 Michael: You done? You don't have to write about just words [vocabulary words]. You can write about anything that you read. Done, Zee? Alright. Go ahead.
- 211 Zee: I'm [inaudible]. She is ...
- 212 Michael: Their?
- 213 Zee: She is their new friend. They meet, they met on the bus. She is very nice, kind, and helpful. Grace's mother works in the same place as Naledi's mother. When Naledi and Tiro got on the white bus, Grace stood up for them. Grace is not afraid to speak up.
- 214 Michael: So you like um Grace?
- 215 Zee: Yes.
- 216 Michael: Is there a Grace, do you have a Grace in you life? A good friend like that?
- 217 Zee: No.

218 Michael: You don't have a grace in you life? Someone who's a good friend and will stand up for you ... and your mom's not your Grace?

219 Zee: Yea, my mom is.

Early in the session, Michael encouraged the students to choose a topic to write about which included vocabulary words. In addition, Michael reminded them that they could write about anything that they wanted. Zee decided to write about Grace (character) and included positive qualities of her personality. As Michael listened, he inferred that Zee liked Grace, and made that public to the whole group. Michael's follow-up question posed Zee with a challenge, to make links between the kindness of Grace, and a similar person who might be in her life (i.e., 220). Michael's insight into Zee's response prompted him to challenge the students to make links between important characters in the stories and important people in their own personal lives. This transcript illustrates how he developed a question that was developed from Zee's response.

In this section of chapter 5, I have discussed the first theme in Michael's case -- Reconstructing Meanings of Learner: Asking Questions. Through analysis and interpretation, I provided examples of the various levels of questions that Michael asked, and the purposes behind them. I have demonstrated that he learned about multiple ways of using literature and children's responses to ask questions about text. Michael drew on multiple sources to assist him as a facilitator and co-participant in interacting with the fourth- and fifth-grade students; his knowledge from interacting with his peers and me in the preparation seminar; his knowledge about schooling and teaching as an "apprentice-observer"; and his keen insight from listening to the topics and issues that the younger students raised in his cross-aged discussions about the various pieces of

text. As a facilitator and co-participant in cross-aged literacy activities, Michael's active and consistent participation in the preparation seminar sessions, and his enthusiasm to make his work with the younger students a success is revealed. As a student who had been labeled as a "low-achiever," evidence has been provided to call into question the assumptions behind labeling students as "low-achievers" and to begin reconstructing our perceptions of these students to focus on their strengths and figure out ways to build upon those strengths. In this section, evidence has been provided to portray that Michael learned how to ask questions that were beyond typical literal level questions. His strength in this area needs to be addressed as a vehicle for enhancing his literacy education and development.

Reconstructing Meanings of Literacy: Connecting Oral and Written Language

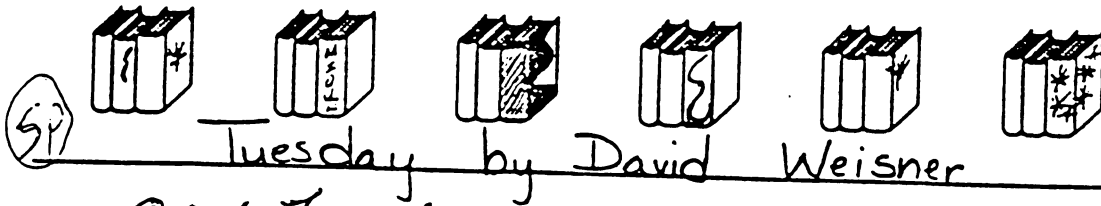
In this section, I draw on data from Michael's reading log responses to illustrate how he made connections between his written responses as a resource to share his ideas with the younger students. Drawing from the literacy activities in the preparation seminar, Michael wrote ideas in his reading log just as he required the younger students to write down their ideas. In addition, he read his response orally to the group just as the younger students read their responses. These were features of modeling that were consistently prevalent in his cross-aged discussion group.

Michael's reading logs were examined for the ideas he shared to stimulate discussion among the younger students. The reading log entries I examined included: (a) two written responses for Tuesday, (b) two responses for Song of the Trees, and (c) three responses for Journey To Jo'burg.

Michael's reading log responses for Tuesday. Michael's reading log entry written on January 25, was written as a creative piece of text about Tuesday. Like the fourth and fifth graders, Michael used the illustrations in the wordless picture book to create a story. The content of his story included two features: (a) interpretations of underlying details in the pictures, and (b) descriptions of what he saw in the pictures (see Figure 7). Michael used the text he created as a tool to develop his discussion with the younger students (McMahon, 1992), and to help the group develop their literary understanding and knowledge about what and how one might engage in literacy learning activities using a text such as Tuesday.

Within his written text, Michael included several interpretations about the illustrations in Tuesday: how the frogs sensed their surroundings (e.g., there was a lot of commotion), how the animals were "frantic" (e.g., they knew that Tuesday was the night that the frogs would ride), and how the lily pads had power (e.g., it [power] was revoked at the end of the story). His interpretations of the story convey how he moved beyond simply commenting on the obvious details, to using his imagination to create meaning from the pictures.

Michael's description of the pictures reflect a narrative style rather than detailing the chronicle of events that the pictures convey. For instance, in his description regarding the journey of the frogs, Michael stated the route, including brief statements about the frogs' mischievous behavior as they traveled on the lily pads. This example of Michael's written response illustrates how he connected reading, writing, and oral language as a tool for sharing his ideas with the younger students. In addition, Michael enacted his role as a facilitator with the younger students by modeling literate behaviors (i.e., reading, writing, oral

NAME MichaelDATE 1-25-94

ON A Tuesday in the pond there was
 a lot of commotion going on. The animals in the pond
 were in a frenzy. Because they knew this was the
 night when the frogs would ride. Then it happened.
 The lily began to rise over the pond. The frogs
 began to ride to the city. "away they
 went going into people homes" Stopping to watch
 T.V. And to play with the dogs. Then they
 went on to see more of the city. Then
 the morning sun came and took the lily's
 power away. The frogs went back to
 the pond.

Figure 7. Michael's first reading log entry for Tuesday.

language) to reenforce some reactions, responses, and behaviors from the younger group members.

Michael's second log entry about Tuesday focused on why he enjoyed the book (see Figure 8). The features of the literature that Michael found personally appealing included humor and the ability to construct a personal literary experience with the story. This written response illustrates how Michael reflected on his engagement with a wordless picture book, and he publicly acknowledged what he learned by talking about it with the fourth and fifth graders. In addition, by reading his written response to the younger students orally, Michael shared responsibility and enacted his role as a co-participant.

It is important to understand Michael's perspective on his experience with Tuesday as we consider alternative literacy learning experiences for students who struggle. Underlying his written comments about engagement with text were implications for exploring a variety of genres to redefine literacy learning experiences for low-achieving students. Michael's comments can assist educators in developing an ideology for low-achieving adolescents that extend beyond traditional experiences of written language (e.g., filling in worksheets). Rather, what seems appropriate would be literature and activities that would enable students to construct personal meanings about text through oral and written language. Through the process of interacting with others, and making connections between written and oral language, the context is set such that low-achieving students might heighten their awareness about the ways in which text can assist them in exploring their academic and literary potential.

Michael's reading log responses for Song of the Trees. Michael wrote two reading log entries for Song of the Trees (e.g., March 3 and 17). For each entry,

Michael



I like Tuesday because it
was a mix of a fun book and you
got to use your own idea for
the story. And in Tuesday you
could make anything you wanted.
plus it was funner

Figure 8. Michael's second log entry for Tuesday.

he focused on David (a character) to explore his reasoning behind protecting the Logan family's forest. Two significant features emerged in both of Michael's log entries: (a) an explanation of David's personality, and (b) raising questions to seek further information about David that was not explained in the text.

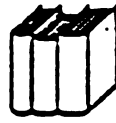
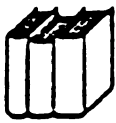
In Michael's log entry for March 3, he explained why he thought David's actions against Anderson and his workers in the forest were aggressive (see Figure 9). According to Michael, David was thoughtful and protective of the environment and his family. It is interesting to note that Michael included a personal reaction to David's actions, stating that if he were in the same situation, he would have accepted the money. His opinion reflects a young teenager's modern day point of view. As Michael ended his log entry, he brought his comment back to David, stating that his assertiveness resulted in keeping his self-respect. This example illustrates how Michael engaged in personal response as he made links between the text and his own beliefs.

Michael's log entry for March 17 also focuses on the character, David, highlighting what Michael learned as a result of reading the text (see Figure 10). Like his entry on March 3, he continued with the theme of David's self-respect. His comment "David was ... not a man you could just puch [push] around" suggests Michael's admiration for David. Michael also raised a question in his March 17 log entry, asking for clarification: "Why he works so far away from home?" The question reflects Michael's contrast between the world of work in modern times versus the political, social, and economic challenges that African-Americans faced in the rural South in the 1930's. A second question was raised as if he were actually asking David: "Why he cared more about his self-respect versus his life?" This question is interesting to note because at the same time that

NAME MichaelDATE 3-4-94

I Think That David
 Cared alot about The trees. And
 his family. Because I Think you would
 have to be real devoted to give
 your life for some Trees. Because had
 it been me I would have took
 The \$100,000 I went on about my
 way. But I guess David got his
 self-respect. But all in all I think
 that they all loved The trees.

Figure 9. Michael's first log entry for Song of the Trees.

NAME MichaelDATE 3-17-94

My character is David
 What I found out about
 David was that he was
 not a man you could just
 push around. But the thing I
 would like to know about
 him is why he works so far
 away from home. I found out
 that you care a lot about
 your self respect like more
 than your life. Why? Well
 that's all but.

Figure 10. Michael's second log entry for Song of the Trees.

Michael seemed to admire David's dignity, he questioned it. It also illustrated how Michael continued to raise questions in his writing as well as in dialogue in the cross-aged group discussions to make sense of what he read.

Michael's reading log responses for Journey To Jo'burg. I examined three of Michael's reading log entries for Journey To Jo'burg where he made inquiries to develop discussions in his group: (a) integrating personal opinions, and (b) asking questions.

Michael's first log entry for Journey to Jo'burg included his personal opinion and what he wanted to see happen in the story (see Figure 11). For instance, one personal opinion reflected on how Michael viewed Naledi and Tiro (characters), stating that they were brave [for trying to help their baby sister]. Michael does not expand upon the actions that motivated Naledi and Tiro to be brave, but rather moves his written response to a different level. His second reaction to the story involved himself, where he placed his world into the world of the text. He suggested that if he were in the same situation as Naledi and Tiro, he would have done whatever he needed to do to save his baby sister or brother. Michael's third reaction in response to the story involved making a prediction about the story. He acknowledged that he hoped that Naledi and Tiro made the long journey to their "Mma" so that their baby sister might live. Here, Michael shows a range of reactions for the characters in his written response (e.g., personal opinion; a sense of concern), continuing to develop and create meaning from the story in lieu of retelling facts.

The second log entry for Journey To Jo'burg included a commentary about the section of the story students read on April 15. His beginning commentary leads into a question (see Figure 12) where he highlights an event in

NAME MichaelDATE 3/25/94

I Think That Nhledi and tiro
are very brave and that they save
there little baby sister alot.

I think I would have done
it for My baby bro or sister.

I hope that they make it

I want them to save there little
sister life.

Figure 11. Michael's first log entry for Journey To Jo'burg.

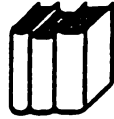
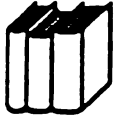
NAME MichaelDATE 4-15-93

Today we reach a part
 in the book when they met a
 girl by the name of Grace Mather.
 They said that their mom never
 spoke up like that so did that
 mean their mom was afraid to
 speak up? And ask why things were the
 way they are.

Figure 12. Michael's second log entry for Journey To Jo'burg.

the story -- when Naledi and Tiro met Grace after arriving in Johannesburg (e.g., they met a girl). The second part of Michael's response "they [Naledi and Tiro] said that there [their] mom never spoke up like that" is related to an observation that Naledi and Tiro made of their mother after they met Grace while they listened to her speak out about the oppression of black people in South Africa. The third part of Michael's response was a question which included two insightful concerns necessary to move the discussion from the literal level to a level of interpretations and comparisons. The question was posed to make the younger students look at the differences between a young South African woman and an older woman who worked as a maid (e.g., "so did that mean there [their] mom was afraid to speak up and ask why things where [were] the way they are.>"). This question that Michael raised is insightful in that it was one that could evolve into an interactive conversation about the opinions that Naledi and Tiro had of their mother, and why the mother chose to exclude herself from political concerns.

The third reading log entry Michael wrote (e.g., April 29) was also in response to Journey To Jo'burg. At the time that the students were completing the text, the citizens of South Africa were electing a new President. Michael decided to include the current event in his group activity for April 29. He asked each student to pretend to be the President of South Africa, and that two years had passed since the election. The content for the log entry was to include the changes that had been made in the country as President over a two year period. Each student wrote the entry, and then shared what changes they had made as President. As the younger students wrote, Michael wrote a response and read it (see Figure 13). He then used his entry to start the discussion.

NAME MichaelDATE 4-29-94

I am the new president
 Michael D Curtis of South Africa,
 I have been president for
 2 year now I have made
 1 million more job for people by
 opening up factory all over South
 Africa to have also stop all the
 killing and protesting. Kids can
 go to any school that they
 want to. And gett tough what ever
 they need.

Figure 13. Michael's third log entry for Journey To Jo'Burg.

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The three themes that emerged from Michael's text were creating employment, stopping the violence in the country, and making all schools accessible to *all* children. The themes regarding violence and unequal schooling were themes which also emerged in Journey To Jo'burg. In the text, the story highlighted the random social violence, and that in segregated schools, blacks were taught "rubbish." Michael's log entry illustrates how he connected an international current event to the literature and his writing. The written text also conveys that Michael viewed all positive changes in a country that was in turmoil.

What Might We Learn From Michael's Case?

Michael's role as facilitator of a cross-aged discussion group was a striking contrast to Teresa. As group facilitator of the cross-aged discussion group, Michael's contributions consisted of asking thoughtful questions, and reading his written log responses to the group. Even though Michael was not as active a participant in his cross-aged group as he was in the preparation seminar, there were several important points to note about his case to help us rethink, redefine and reconstruct literacy learning experiences for older students who find the process difficult.

First, in our initial interview, Michael informed me that he wanted to become a teacher. This program allowed Michael opportunities to develop his understanding about some of the necessary processes, procedures, content, knowledge, skills, and dispositions teachers need in order to assist others to become participants in their own learning. Second, Michael learned to be skillful in asking questions to develop a conversation about text. This point is significant to note because given Michael's history with schooling as an "apprentice

observer” and his experiences with traditional curriculum and teaching, Michael showed a willingness to take risks and venture into non-traditional strategies to engage in literary discussions with younger students. Third, Michael modeled what he expected the younger students to do. Therefore, he moved beyond simply telling students what to do, but showing them how they might proceed with the necessary literacy lessons.

The strategies Michael used to conduct the literacy activities in his small group warrant an advanced dialogue among researchers on reconstructing meanings of literacy learning for low-achieving adolescents. This case study offers means to explore the principles of sociocultural theory, and to delve into deeper understandings about what is necessary to begin reconstructing meanings of learner and literacy for students who struggle with reading, writing and schooling. For instance, the questions Michael asked were not with the intent of leading the fourth- and fifth-grade students to the “right” answer. And given his experiences with schooling and the concept of “apprenticeship of observation” as defined by Lortie (1975), his questions were not those often asked of students who struggle with reading and writing (e.g., Who was the main character? What happened in the story first? Second?) Rather, Michael was able to progressively develop difficult questions for his cross-aged learners through the preparation seminar, and from listening and reacting to the comments made by the younger students. In so doing, he set the potential context in his cross-aged group for stimulating literary understanding among cross-aged peers.

The activities and content of Michael’s cross-aged setting were those that might be developed by a social group. They were very necessary to develop Michael’s higher psychological functions as well as those of other students.

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Social relations were embedded within the very nature of the process of cross-aged interactions, conducted as an exchange between a high school adolescent and six elementary students. This alternative cross-aged setting and the social atmosphere that comprised it offer researchers and teachers a context to develop a forum to discuss the potential of talk, writing and learning for students who find learning to read and write difficult. In addition, the differences in Michael's roles and how he participated in each component of the study offer a perspective to complement the concept of reconstructing meanings of learner and literacy for struggling readers and writers. Michael's case study highlighted the complexity of his capabilities and the ways in which he represented his literacy knowledge. This case study is one that warrants further investigation as to how we might assist low-achieving adolescents to learn how to learn.

CHAPTER 6

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CROSS-AGED LITERACY PROGRAM

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of low-achieving high school adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling as they participated in the Cross-Aged Literacy Program. To develop my understanding of the students' literacy learning experiences, I framed the study in terms of three broad questions: (a) How do the social interactions in an alternative literacy program help us to rethink, reconstruct and redefine literacy learning for adolescents who struggle with reading and writing? (b) What was the nature of participation in the two alternative literacy contexts? (c) How do high school adolescents represent their knowledge about literacy when interacting with fourth and fifth graders?

To explore these questions, I focused on four ninth graders (i.e., Teresa, Michael, Devon, Mark) as they participated in two interrelated components of the Cross-Aged Literacy Program. The first component was the preparation seminar, which was part instructional and part collaborative learning between the four students and me. We participated in this setting together to create a variety of literacy learning activities including reading, writing about, and discussing children's literature. The high school students and I discussed and planned the literacy activities they would conduct with the elementary students. To understand the nature of interactions in their groups, we debriefed their interactions with the younger students. In the second component - the cross-aged discussion groups - Teresa, Michael, Mark, and Devon read, wrote about, and discussed children's literature with fourth and fifth graders in small groups. The high school students facilitated the cross-aged interactions by modeling and

extending the literacy activities and interactions we experienced in the preparation seminar. I was a participant observer in each component of the study, and I collected data in each setting of the program from January through early June, 1994. Data sources included field notes, formal and informal interviews, audiotapes, videotapes, and written documents.

Analysis of the data from the preparation seminar demonstrated that a sense of commitment and responsibility was critical for the students to effectively participate in the instructional component. With both commitment and responsibility, they were able to contribute to the settings in ways that fostered their literacy education (e.g., developing an understanding of connections between reading and writing, reflecting and critiquing the social interactions in small groups). From the second component of the study, I developed two case studies. Data analysis revealed that the two case study students facilitated the literacy activities and social interactions in their individual groups in different ways and for various purposes.

For instance, Teresa was not a regular and consistent participant in the preparation seminar, but she did attend and participate in her cross-aged group discussions. Teresa facilitated the cross-aged literary discussions and drew from her background knowledge and experiences of schooling and teaching. This is not surprising given that Teresa was not familiar with the kinds of discussions and interactions I modeled and promoted in the preparation seminar. At times, the conversations that Teresa facilitated among the students seemed intriguing. However, a close analysis revealed that Teresa was seeking the “right answer” to the open-ended questions she asked. Those questions and ideas tended to be based upon Teresa’s personal challenges which she interwove into various topics

and issues that emerged from the discussions. Given that Teresa was the only individual who knew “the answers” she was seeking, the fourth and fifth graders tended to either guess what was in Teresa’s head or they capitulated to her personal thoughts and opinions. Therefore, Teresa’s cross-age interactions were exemplary of the I-R-E patterns that occur in many classrooms.

In contrast, Michael was an active co-participant in the preparation seminar. Consequently, Michael appeared to have learned strategies to facilitate a cross-aged literary discussion. Michael systematically asked challenging open-ended questions to probe for understanding and to construct meanings from texts. Moreover, he modeled various reading and writing activities by making connections between oral and written language, and sharing ideas to enrich the learning opportunities for all students in his small group. These examples suggest that he had developed an understanding about how to read text, and how to engage with authentic literature. The findings from Michael’s case study suggest that he benefited from the preparation seminar. What he learned about reading, writing, discussing text, and planning literacy activities in the preparation seminar became apparent in his responses and reactions to the younger students. Yet, Michael exhibited instances of “apprenticeship of observations” as well. This is not surprising given the number of years and hours he had had observing teachers. However, Michael was able to integrate traditional and alternative ways of interacting around text. Both Teresa and Michael’s experiences warrant examining our assumptions about literacy learning and acquisition of students labeled as “low-achievers.”

In this chapter, I return to the theoretical framework that underlies this study, exploring the conclusions in terms of the development of students’ literacy

education in an alternative literacy program. I discuss this issue in two areas: (a) rethinking literacy education for high school adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling, and (b) examining the exploratory power of sociocultural theory for literacy learning. Then I explore the theoretical and practical implications for the study. Last, I discuss limitations of the study and suggest questions for future research.

Rethinking Literacy Education For Low-Achieving High School Students

In Chapter 1, I argued that this country can no longer afford to condone the huge numbers of students dropping out of school because they do not succeed in learning how to read and write. When students fail to develop in their literacy education, they are not the only people who fail; educators fail as well. High school adolescents are not completely responsible for learning how to develop their literacy education; we have a responsibility to help them learn how to learn. Helping our low-achieving adolescents succeed in school is the responsibility of a community of leaders including researchers, teachers, administrators, parents, the students, and all others who care about our citizens of tomorrow. This issue demands our attention, and one place we might begin is with the students.

I suggested that decontextualized instructional approaches used with students who read and write poorly is one contributing factor that inhibits success in literacy learning. Much research has been conducted that documents the ineffectiveness of drilling-and-skilling students who find learning to read and write difficult (e.g., Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989). Teresa and Michael had previously participated in pull-out programs such as special education and

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“remedial reading.” Devon and Mark might be characterized as “in school dropouts” where socializing with peers was the main focus of the school day as opposed to participating in academics. At some point during their schooling careers, they had learned that reading and writing meant filling in worksheets (e.g., through language games such as Hang Man), and reading short brief paragraphs to check for comprehension (e.g., as seen in Michael’s highly focused questions about story content). But when low-achieving students reach high school and still struggle with reading, writing, and schooling, as educators we need to *rethink*, so that we might *redefine* what the nature of their literacy education might entail. A dialogue among us is critical for the advancement of struggling readers and writers, because contemporary conceptions of literacy seem to be about the knowledge and skills of the individual (Keller-Cohen, 1993). Such notions make a revealing statement about the central focus that reading and writing occupy in American life today.

Many scholars suggests that literacy learning is enhanced when students have opportunities to engage in natural, meaningful, and purposeful, context-embedded instructional interactions (Wells, 1992). Presently, educators are investigating these assertions by exploring connections between language and learning in goal-oriented literacy instruction with younger children (Pierce & Gilles, 1993). In spite of the research studies which examine contextualized literacy learning for elementary students, we have much to learn about the social nature of literacy for high school adolescents who find learning to read difficult. The findings from this study contribute to the dialogue within the literacy field to develop further understandings about the potential benefits of assisting low-achieving students to participate in their own literacy learning through

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alternative literacy programs.

Teresa had been labeled as Learning Disabled (LD) and diagnosed as dyslexic. Her learning disability was apparent whenever she decided to “take a risk” and read orally in front of her peers and me. But, literacy learning viewed through a sociocultural lens means much more than whether or not students who are frustrated readers and writers can or cannot read fluently. Teresa’s voice and contributions in this program were invaluable in assisting us to *rethink*, so that we can *redefine* what literacy instruction might entail for students who struggle with it. Teresa’s boundaries for literacy learning were extended in this study, where there was the potential to expand her beliefs about herself as a literate being as well as her knowledge, skills, and dispositions about constructing meaning from text and collaborative learning. However, she relied upon her preconceived notions of teaching and schooling, and used multiple frames of reference (e.g., personal experiences) and sources (e.g., older and younger students within small group settings) to assist her in facilitating her cross-aged discussion group. Even though it was apparent that Teresa often moved the students responses in her direction, it was the sociocultural context of the study that provided her with an opportunity to engage in collaborative learning.

One way in which Teresa was able to participate in her own learning was in her role as leader in the cross-aged discussions. To be responsible for the learning of younger students forced her to use her skills, literacy knowledge, and personal frames of reference to develop cross-aged literary discussions with elementary students successfully. A second way in which Teresa was enabled to participate in her own learning was through opportunities to reflect, critique, and discuss what she learned about the nature of interacting with the elementary

students over children's literature. For example, when I initially introduced the high school students to Tuesday (Wiesner, 1991) in the preparation seminar, Teresa assertively explained to her high school peers and me that the role of imagination was significant to constructing meaning from the text. In a debriefing session of the preparation seminar (i.e., February 12) Teresa explained how "reading the pictures" was important for her, because there were no words and she could not "mess up" and did not have to worry about people listening and "laughing" at her when she mispronounced words. These powerful assertions made by Teresa provide insight into how one student viewed her own success in literacy. Teresa's comments are worthy to note for several reasons: (a) she suggested that low-achieving high school students can be successful at literacy learning opportunities when the boundaries are extended to include creative alternatives, and (b) she raised questions with the potential to refute behavioral theories of literacy learning that suggests success depends upon the products of literacy activities (e.g., oral fluency, the ability to answer literacy comprehension questions). In these comments, it is obvious that Teresa had developed some understanding about the significance of meaning making during the act of reading.

Michael was also a low-achieving student, but had not been labeled with a learning disability. Michael participated in a "remedial" reading program in elementary school, and described it as a successful learning experience because he "worked his way out of it." Like Teresa, Michael's contributions to the Cross-Aged Literacy Program were an invaluable resource for helping educators *rethink* the nature of literacy for our low-achieving high school adolescents. First, Michael raised interesting questions both within the preparation seminar,

and in his cross-aged discussion group. The questions he raised in the preparation seminar were often the result of thoughtful reflection to push the thinking of his peers and himself to discuss critical concerns and issues (e.g., text, behavior of younger students, problem-solving strategies). In his work with the younger students, he learned to use questions as a strategy for communicating with them about text. Second, Michael took responsibility for gathering information, both socially and intellectually, about the younger students with whom he worked. Then he shared that information with his peers and me in the preparation seminar.

Sociocultural Theory and Literacy Learning

A sociocultural perspective on language and literacy learning stresses the importance of social interactions among individuals. In this study, the high school students' literacy development was influenced by the social interactions in each component of the program, where oral and written language were tools for communication among all participants. In this section, I discuss the conclusions of this study in relation to the high school students' literacy experiences in three areas: (a) social and cultural contributions to learning, (b) literacy development through social interactions, and (c) learning enhanced through the assistance of others.

Social and Cultural Contributions to Learning

The first assumption of sociocultural theory suggests that higher psychological functions are social and cultural in nature. Two key functions to higher psychological processes that are essential to learning are the use of oral and written language. The high school students in this study had multiple opportunities to engage in dialogue and written language to help them

participate in their own learning. First, they talked with me and with each other about various aspects of the program. This form of communication presented situations such that the students and I were able to develop our understanding about how the patterns of interaction and group dynamics played out in their small groups when they critiqued the voices and actions of the younger students as well as themselves. Also, in the preparation seminar, the students and I read, wrote responses to, and discussed the children's literature that I selected for the program. We listened to each other's suggestions for planning literacy activities to conduct in the cross-aged groups. The nature of the preparation seminar was such that a social and cultural environment was formed over time, building upon the academic strengths that the students brought to the setting, and strengthening their weaknesses for purposes of preparing to help others and thus help themselves.

Like the preparation seminar, the cross-aged discussion group component of this study was a second sociocultural setting to develop students' higher psychological functions through oral and written language. In the preparation seminar setting, the high school students interacted with peers, albeit younger ones, who brought multiple ways of knowing to the setting. The cross-aged groups included a heterogeneous mix of students with respect to ethnicity, culture, gender, and ability. The nature of the literacy activities in the cross-aged component were such that students read different text genres (e.g., wordless picture books, realistic fiction). The various texts that students read required them to think about responding in unique ways, and the end results were contributions from multiple perspectives. Thus, the interactions and group dynamics between the ninth, fifth, and fourth graders was a rich sociocultural

context with resourceful minds working to construct meanings from text. These examples emphasize how various opportunities to enhance learning through oral and written language existed in two sociocultural settings (i.e., preparation seminar, cross-aged discussion group), and how the content of the discussions fostered literacy learning among all group members involved.

Literacy Development Through Social Interactions

The second assumption of sociocultural theory grows out of the first, and suggests that if higher psychological functions are social and cultural in nature, the knowledge that individuals acquire is constructed through interactions among individuals. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that an important feature of knowledge acquisition is through the interactions among individuals within a social context. The process known as internalization is necessary for individuals to reconstruct and negotiate meanings through the social interactions that occur among people. Because of the multiple layers of social and cultural learning opportunities in the Cross-Aged Literacy Program, the various opportunities that existed to interact embodied the second assumption of sociocultural theory.

The preparation seminar exemplified Vygotsky's principle that knowledge is acquired through interactions among individuals. The high school students and I engaged in many social interactions, and the findings of the study illustrated how the students reconstructed meanings to contribute to their own learning and the learning of others. For instance, after I established my expectations for commitment and responsibility to the program, the high school students (with the exception of Teresa) gradually took responsibility for attending and actively participating in the preparation seminar on a regular and consistent basis. Internalization of my expectation fostered commitment and responsibility among

the students in other areas, such as taking responsibility for collaboration where they shared information about the patterns of interaction in their individual groups. If the patterns of interactions they talked about in the preparation seminar involved a dilemma, then the literacy activity emerged into listening and problem-solving where everyone made suggestions to assist each other. As a result of sharing perspectives on problem-solving strategies, the students learned about multiple ways of managing challenges whenever they surfaced.

Similarly, the preparation seminar was a sociocultural setting where knowledge was constructed about children's literature through the interactions among us as well. The experiences of Teresa, Michael, Mark and Devon as they engaged in talk about books with fourth and fifth graders were reconstructed in the preparation seminar where they reflected and critiqued the content of the discussions and the patterns of interactions. As such, they internalized new meanings of talk about books which resulted in multiple perspectives of what counts as literacy learning when interacting with younger students. For example, the high school students enthusiastically talked about the *role of imagination* as significant to making sense of Tuesday, after realizing that the elementary students helped them to see details in the illustrations that they had not previously noticed (i.e., cat, swan, frog swinging on a fence). Moreover, they discussed how they could make the book (i.e., Tuesday) be what they wanted it to be because they could use their own thoughts rather than rely on words written by an author. These comments from high school students who were marginalized suggest that their experiences in interacting with younger students over a wordless picture book helped them learn more about themselves as learners. The preparation seminar was an important social and cultural forum for

them to reflect and share what they learned; where there was a gradual development of their literacy education.

In the case of Teresa, we saw Vygotsky's second assumption of sociocultural theory in literacy learning enacted. As discussed in detail in chapter 4, Teresa did not actively attend and participate in the preparation seminar for various reasons (e.g., extra-curricular activities after school, multiple excuses). Yet, she was always present during the cross-aged discussion settings, and she facilitated and guided the fourth and fifth graders through literary discussions. As such, Teresa engaged in language learning opportunities with the younger students about text, resulting in knowledge construction and negotiation among a small group of diverse learners. One example of how knowledge was constructed and negotiated in Teresa's case was when tensions emerged in her group. Rather than call everyone's attention to Stanley, Teresa decided to embed management and group norms within instructional procedures. Consequently, all students, through implicit interactions, learned Teresa's expectations and group norms.

Teresa constructed and re-negotiated her own knowledge about the text and she engaged in conversations with the fourth and fifth graders in her group. When Teresa and the students in her small group discussed Tuesday (Weisner, 1991), Teresa integrated her personal experiences into the discussion. Recall that the fourth and fifth graders generated ideas for a sequel to Tuesday by calling the names of different animals that might replace the frogs. While the students were thinking of the story in terms of an imaginary fantasy, Teresa was thinking differently as she assertively asked the students about whether or not cats and dogs might be hurt if they fell from the sky. Since Teresa owns a cat and two

dogs, her question suggested that she was thinking in terms of real animals falling from the sky versus animals in a fantasy. Although it was obvious that her question resulted from a mistake and confusion of text genres, the experience opened an opportunity for Teresa to integrate her world into the world of the text.

Michael was fully cognizant of how to initiate literacy activities and tasks based upon what was discussed in the preparation seminar. Moreover, he drew upon his “apprenticeship of observation” background which he had come to know for the past ten years of his schooling career. Michael learned how to ask questions as a strategy for cultivating a literary discussion. He did so by listening to students, and he developed a way of becoming insightful about their responses. This was apparent in both the oral and written literacy strategies Michael used to enhance the social interactions and learning opportunities among the individuals in his group.

The ways in which Michael chose to facilitate his cross-aged discussions is an important case for developing our understanding about how teachers might go about working with students like Michael. Since it was clear that Michael was actively engaged in the preparation seminar, but not in the cross-aged discussion groups, this raised a question about how Michael perceived his role in each component of the study. For example, since I was the “teacher” in the preparation seminar, did Michael see himself as a traditional “student” and therefore participated in student-like ways to make contributions to discussions? If Michael perceived himself as a “student” in the preparation seminar, and a “quasi-teacher” in his cross-aged discussion group, how might teachers go about assisting students to understand themselves as learners in order to continue to be

a part of constructing knowledge within other group situations? These questions are two of many that need to be addressed in order to understand the type of support teachers might provide for helping low-achieving students to learn how to learn in alternative literacy programs.

Learning is Enhanced Through the Assistance of Others

The third assumption of sociocultural theory suggests that learning is fostered through the assistance of more knowledgeable others. Within the preparation seminar, the language opportunities and social interactions among the high school students and me resulted in situations where I worked closely within their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) to support them in literacy learning: (a) the meaning of volunteering to participate in a project, (b) emerging perspectives on what counts as literacy learning, and (c) developing perspectives of what was learned as a result of participating in the overall program. Each of the areas involved social interactions, and oral language was the principle tool for communication among the students and me.

I took opportunities to work with the students to help them understand the significance of their voices in the program. Consistent with a sociocultural perspective, they brought their knowledge of “going through the process of school” to this program which frequently reflected their low motivation and passivity. The visions they had for themselves were in direct conflict with my high expectations of them. This dilemma raised concerns which resulted in my working within their zones of proximal development to establish a conscious sense of commitment and responsibility among all of the high school participants. Also, the nature of the work in the preparation seminar enabled the students to reflect upon what they learned about literacy and patterns of interactions as

discussion leaders of small groups of children. For example, Mark, Michael, and Teresa were especially surprised to learn that the fourth and fifth graders brought out details in the wordless picture book that they did not see initially.

In the cross-aged discussions, the heterogeneous groups were such that the older and younger students' learning was enhanced through the assistance of knowledgeable members of the group. The students brought different social, cultural, and intellectual experiences to the setting, thus each student was knowledgeable about different things. The open-ended nature of opportunities to discuss literature presented the "more knowledgeable others" a chance to assist each other as they talked about books. One such instance occurred when the students in Teresa's group discussed Journey To Jo'burg. Brad, a younger student in Teresa's group, voiced his opinion about the notion of safety in hitchhiking. He made comparisons between hitchhiking in the United States and Johannesburg, South Africa. Cathy, another fifth grader in Teresa's group talked about safety in hitchhiking as well. However, Cathy made comparisons between rural and urban areas in South Africa. The conversation on hitchhiking illustrates how students pushed each other to think about what it means to be safe in different societies.

Although Michael's cross-aged discussions tended to be structured such that he did not encourage the fourth and fifth graders to move beyond the text when engaging in literary talk, instances did occur where the concept of "more knowledgeable other" was reinforced within the group. Michael learned how to ask questions for purposes of teaching and learning, and to stimulate discussions. He drew upon this strategy from the way I modeled asking questions in the preparation seminar, and then using students' responses to probe further. Over

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time, Michael learned to ask questions that served different purposes. In doing so, his questions tended to result in engaging the younger students in higher order thinking skills. Consequently, in asking questions that encouraged the fourth- and fifth-grade students to think deeper, Michael was also in a situation where he had to think more in-depth about issues and topics that emerged from the text.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

Scholars (e.g., Gavelek, 1986; Hiebert, 1992; Wertsch, 1985) who subscribe to a sociocultural theoretical perspective argue that this theory provides a means to better understand literacy learning within social contexts. This study has several theoretical and pedagogical implications. In the following sections, I juxtapose the sociocultural theory with the three broad themes from the findings from this research: reconstructing meanings of schooling, literacy, and student. These themes are not mutually exclusive, but overlap in many respects and for various purposes.

Theoretical implications of reconstructing meanings of schooling. For the past decade, high schools have taken the brunt of criticism in regards to their organizational structure. Many researchers (e.g., Goodlad, 1984; Oakes, 1985) have argued that the structure of high schools and the practice of “tracking” have direct impact on students’ access to knowledge and learning opportunities. This notion is especially true for students who have been labeled as low-achievers at the high school as well as the elementary level. Yet, most of the reform movements and research on pedagogy and literacy instruction for poor readers and writers has been addressed at the elementary level. This study advances the literacy field by addressing those same issues, but focuses on what

we might do to promote more holistic literacy learning experiences for high school adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling. In this study, I created a context in which the structure of the learning environment changed from a transmission model of learning to one in which the high school students were given not only the permission, but the support, to reconstruct their views about what it means to go to school. In doing so, students were also asked to reconstruct their notions of what it means to be a student and what their responsibilities and commitments were within the alternative program.

As educators, we must reconstruct our notions of what school might mean to adolescents who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling. In order to do this, students must be included in the dialogue to understand themselves and the process of schooling. Low-achieving adolescents must play a key role in reconstructing their definitions of schooling. This study assisted the students to reconstruct their notions of schooling by understanding commitment and responsibility. A key element in promoting dialogue about issues regarding schooling was to foster an environment where learning opportunities were created and meanings constructed at various levels. The oral discussions in the preparation seminar at the beginning of the study were a necessary prerequisite for the students to explore their attendance patterns and their patterns of participation in their own learning. In doing so, they began to alter long-standing patterns of NOT attending classes and NOT actively participating in the learning process. The first component of the study -- the preparation seminar -- was a forum for the high school participants to engage in self-reflection and critique of their behaviors. Within the discussions and interactions of the preparation seminar, students identified patterns of their behavior that were inappropriate for

this particular study, and, more generally, inappropriate for settings designed to provide alternative literacy learning experiences. Therefore, this study suggests that a context for learning must support student exploration into what it means to go to school and increase student responsibilities.

Pedagogical implications of reconstructing meanings of schooling. In addition to developing our theoretical understanding of reconstructing meanings of schooling for low-achieving adolescents, this study provides insights into future directions for what must be done to help educators rethink schooling for these students. First, as educators, we must reconsider where we place students in the educational setting. Researchers have provided much evidence to suggest that the practice of “tracking” does not lend equal access to learning opportunities for all students (Oakes, 1985). Moreover, when students are placed in “tracks” the practice limits their possibilities for the future opportunities. The findings from this study suggest that the practice of tracking should be discontinued because it limits the overall potential of low-achievers. Devon, Mark, Michael and Teresa were heterogeneously mixed with respect to academic ability and gender. They assisted each other in the preparation seminar as they struggled with ideas for planning, preparation, and literacy activities. Moreover, the fourth and fifth graders with whom they worked were heterogeneously mixed in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, and ability. The high school students talked about the benefits they received from working with younger children in a cross-aged literacy program. These data suggest that the cross-aged setting provided equal access to literacy learning opportunities and strengthened all of the students’ chances to acquire knowledge from knowledgeable peers as well as content.

A second pedagogical implication is that students need the support of their teachers to begin to reconstruct meanings of schooling. Students and teachers must be given opportunities to explore problems and issues. This study suggests that whenever issues became public, students were encouraged to consider alternatives and then move into generating problem-solving strategies. These strategies helped them to take academic responsibility seriously and to better understand what it meant when they “volunteered to participate” in a program that was designed to give them support, voice, and choices in the schooling process.

Consequently, as the high school participants internalized positive understandings about commitment and responsibility for attending and actively participating in the preparation seminar, they fulfilled their responsibilities in other areas of the study. Students took responsibility for collaborating and critiquing the challenges that occurred in their cross-aged discussion groups, and exercised their roles as leaders and facilitators.

Thus, my role in the preparation seminar and the context served as a colloquium for assisting the students to understand how they might progress in learning about multiple situations and ideas. The pedagogical implications of all these data suggest that in an alternative literacy learning program, teachers must have reasonable yet high expectations for low-achieving students and make them public when attempting to assist students to take different perspectives.

Theoretical implications of reconstructing meanings of literacy.

Sociocultural theory provided a lens for identifying what “counted” as literacy learning activities in the preparation seminar and the cross-aged discussions. The findings from this study suggest that researchers and teachers must develop

theoretical models of literacy instruction that successfully move low-achieving adolescents from a narrow definition of reading and writing to one that promotes critical reflection and critique about issues that moved beyond the literal level of understanding text. Further, findings suggest that the social nature of the study broadened the students' perspectives about learning, noting that they could draw upon the ideas of their peers and the younger students to develop an understanding about what it means to engage in literacy learning activities.

I modeled ways of engaging in literature through discussion, writing, and language play for the high school students. Mark, Michael, Devon and Teresa were placed in positions to not only participate in the literacy activities of the preparation seminar, but they were encouraged to actively participate in critique and reflection of the literature, group dynamics, and the social nature of the preparation seminar. Such moments of reflection were valuable for how the high school students would facilitate the literacy lessons they engaged in with the fourth and fifth graders. Moreover, it is important to note that during times of debriefing in the preparation seminar, the older students were able to see some value in what they learned about literacy through their interactions with the younger students. The high school students discussed how the fourth- and fifth-grade students enabled them to see details in the wordless picture book that they had not noticed prior to working with the younger students. Also, they noted that they learned ways of expanding beyond the text to construct meanings. They described how creating their own words for the picture book, rather than reading the authors' words empowered them to make sense and meaning. Thus, in the story of flying frogs, their "readings" helped to create a text that gave them voice. Further, Teresa displayed her talent and skill in drawing pictures as a

tool for responding and sharing pieces of text. For Teresa, drawing was a tool for expressing her knowledge when she was unable to find the words to say what she needed to say. Michael made connections between written and oral language and modeled how one might use a reading log entry as a tool for talking and sharing ideas in cross-aged literary discussions. In addition, Michael learned about the asking of questions, and how such a procedure impacts conversations about written texts. Students were able to interact with their same aged peers, younger students and me to share their ideas and to seek assistance when needed. These examples suggest that support for literacy learning and language opportunities enabled students to construct sophisticated meanings about what counts as literacy within their context of the alternative program, and therefore broadened their perspectives of literacy and learning.

Pedagogical implications of reconstructing meanings of literacy. Beyond reconstructing meanings of literacy as this theme relates to theoretical implications, there are pedagogical implications as well. First, it is necessary for teachers to be sensitive to the strengths and the frames of reference that low-achieving adolescents bring to the classroom. This means that educators need to be cognizant of both the traditional as well as the non-traditional strengths, and students' traditional as well as their non-traditional frames of reference. When students' views are made public, then teachers will be in positions to respond accordingly. Teachers can encourage and support students' perceptions about literacy learning that are social, cultural, and historical in nature, or they can address issues that might help students develop alternative perspectives or different understandings and thus expand their knowledge about various issues.

In their cross-aged discussion groups, Teresa and Michael drew on their

experiences as apprentice observers (Lortie, 1975) to help them develop their literary discussions. This practice became a challenge for me, for the high school students were drawing upon what they knew as students to “teach” the fourth and fifth graders in their groups. The pedagogical challenge became to encourage and support them in their interactions with the younger students. But at the same time, it was important to help Teresa and Michael learn about alternative strategies for engaging in interactive discussions about text as they actively participated themselves. This struggle called into question Teresa and Michael’s traditional perspectives of what it meant to “teach” and their previous experiences as students of literacy learning. Modeling and then reflecting and critiquing the social nature of discussions in the preparation seminar was fruitful for internalizing alternative pedagogical strategies. Over time, the high school participants developed strategies for integrating their personal background knowledge and experiences into the discussions to make connections with the literature. Teresa was inspired to exercise her skills in drawing as a tool for self-expression and to respond to text. Michael learned to reflect and analyze his literary experiences by discussing the value of using wordless picture books to create stories so that his voice might be heard. Encouraging these students to make intertextual connections resulted in their literate interactions contributing to our understanding about literacy: when provided with alternative opportunities and perspectives, low-achievers can develop comprehension of text and literacy that move beyond literal levels of engagement with texts.

A second pedagogical implication for this study is that it is necessary for teachers to allow low-achieving students to explore literate behaviors for genuine purposes and in more holistic ways. In this study, students who struggled with

reading, writing, and schooling benefitted from receiving literacy instruction that had meaning and purpose. The activities in the preparation seminar served as a tool for students to participate in their own learning by reading, writing about, and discussing the literature. In addition, critique and analysis of the interactions in the preparation seminar were conducted so that students might understand themselves as readers and writers to think about how they might adjust the activities to work with fourth and fifth graders. Thus, the preparation seminar had multiple literacy learning experiences and purposes that were context specific and holistic. These activities in the preparation seminar integrated reading, writing, speaking, listening and thinking skills and they were conducted reflectively and critically.

Theoretical implications of reconstructing meanings of student. The findings from this study suggest that in order for researchers and teachers to broaden approaches to teaching and literacy learning opportunities for low-achieving adolescents, we must reconstruct and broaden our perspectives of what it means to be a student. Students' roles are multifaceted and complex -- not simply because of what they do and learn, but how they learn as well. The multiple and complex ways of learning are not just about the curricula they encounter (e.g., literacy), but the performance of low-achieving students plays a part in what and how knowledge is acquired throughout the learning process. As educators we make judgements about low-achieving students based on these issues, and our judgements and perspectives have some bearing on these students' futures.

In each component of this study, students used oral and written language to reconstruct meanings about their roles, perspectives about schooling and

literacy learning, and group interactions, to plan and prepare for cross-aged literary discussions, and to develop their ideas and ways to talk about children's literature. As the students became active participants in each component of the program, they developed their thinking and alternative views about the purposes of the study, and what it contributed to their literacy education and overall perceptions about learning. In our preparation seminar debriefings. Michael, Devon and Mark acknowledged how they learned the value of planning for the upcoming literacy activities they would conduct with the younger students. They also acknowledged how taking the Cross-Aged Literacy program seriously fostered a sense of commitment and responsibility to help me complete my dissertation. These data suggest that over time, through discussions, planning and studying themselves as literacy learners, these students saw more strengths in themselves, and consequently contributed to my own learning about the capabilities of low-achieving students.

Within their cross-aged discussion groups, Teresa and Michael developed as students by studying and critiquing their roles as participants and facilitators of cross-aged discussions. This component of the research study was a setting for the high school participants to learn how to learn using multiple voices and group interactions as tools for study. All these data show that being a student is complex, and that the participants' behaviors, voices and their overall experiences contributed to how they reconstructed what it means to learn about oneself as well as the literacy content in each component of the study.

Pedagogical implications of reconstructing meanings of student. The findings from this aspect of the broad themes suggest that teachers must help students build upon what they know about being a student to help them become

better students. This means that educators must make use of the knowledge and experiences that students bring to the classroom, and use traditional and non-traditional ways of knowing to assist them to broaden their perspectives about their capabilities. In other words, teachers must create literacy learning opportunities for students to see themselves in different roles as students, and ensure that they successfully do so. Concomitantly, successful literacy learning opportunities for students would help educators to broaden their perspectives about what it means to be a student, and what needs to be done for educators to reconstruct their notions of low-achieving students. In this study, to be a student meant performing in various roles including being a teacher, a partner in learning, and an analyst for understanding the literacy and social nature of activities that were planned for the preparation seminar and the cross-aged discussions. These multiple roles gave the low-achieving students opportunities to successfully participate in their own learning in alternative ways.

Limitations of the Study

This research study is significant for the insights it provides regarding the strengths and capabilities of low-achieving adolescents as they encounter multiple ways of literacy learning. However, it is limited to the procedures and process of literacy instruction and does not address issues of administrative involvement. As the researcher for this study, I fulfilled many different roles (e.g., researcher, teacher, project manager). Several important issues emerged that needed to be addressed while developing a context-based alternative literacy program for adolescents who struggle with literacy and schooling.

The process and procedures for this study required that the high school teachers and students change their daily school schedules. Changing schedules

also meant changing the way students organized their personal time in order to meet the demands of their high school classes. Undoubtedly, making changes in the organizational structures of high school for purposes of providing alternative literacy instruction, experiences and learning opportunities for poor readers and writers raises concerns related to resources (i.e., financial, human, instructional). Possible issues would include the availability of additional teachers to work closely and in small group situations with high school students who struggle with reading, writing, and schooling. Issues of guidance, monitoring, and assessment of progress over time would be a part of the responsibility as teachers worked with students in alternative literacy learning contexts. Changing how students “go to school” so that we might better understand their literacy learning opportunities and experiences was an authentic concern in this study.

Other areas of administrative involvement that we need to explore include systematic and consistent communication between the administrative personnel at the high school and elementary levels. Initially, contacts were made and necessary in order to develop an administrative organizational structure for the Cross-Aged Literacy Program. However, such communication should be maintained throughout the study. Systematic and consistent collaboration was also needed between principals, teachers and the students. In this study, providing feedback and collaborating with the elementary and high school teachers was a part of my responsibility. It was necessary so that the teachers (especially the high school teacher) might be informed and aware of the on-going development and struggles of the students’ literacy education. Suggestions for facilitating communication among all personnel might include a liaison between schools and parent volunteers. Reports of progress and struggles might be

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conducted in monthly seminars where all administrative personnel can discuss their observations.

Finally, the high school students should be given credit for participating in cross-aged literacy programs. To learn more about the procedures and processes for this issue, administrative personnel might consult other subject areas that give students credit for their work that is done off campus. Possibilities include gifted and talented and vocational education (Boyd, 1995).

Suggestions for Future Research

Students' growth and development in alternative literacy learning programs cannot be evaluated by traditional forms of assessment (e.g., standardized tests). This study has assessment implications that were not directly addressed. The methodology, depth, and time period of this research study enabled me to gather multiple data source to access written and oral language and social interactions. Since I argued that researchers and all educators need to reconstruct meanings of literacy for low-achieving adolescents, the multiple data sources I gathered might be useful in helping us to further broaden our definitions of literacy learning for students who struggle. For instance, current research that looks at performance based assessment could be expanded to include the complexity of the social interactions, and the oral and written communication that was prevalent in this study. In addition, systematic and consistent interviews of the students' perceptions about their experiences in alternative literacy learning programs would add to our understanding about how students view learning.

APPENDIX A

FIELD NOTES

Preparation Seminar
February 12, 1994

High School Students Present: Mark, Michael, and Teresa
Meeting Held @: Pizza Hut
Saginaw Street
Lansing, MI.

Key: [P] = Prompt Question asked by Researcher

Today we made history! This is my third consecutive day having some contact with the high school participants in my research study. I am thrilled! Although I did see all students today nor yesterday, it feels good to have had the contact with three out of five for the past two days. Michael and Mark were already at the restaurant when I arrived.

I began our meeting by asking Mark, Michael and Teresa if they knew what I would be doing with the information we collect from this project. Michael said I explained it to them at the beginning when I asked for volunteers and during our interviews. I asked Michael to tell me what I said. He said that I told them that I would be using the information to help people learn about reading, writing, and discussions when older and younger kids do it together (paraphrased). He also said that I told them that I would be presenting this information at conferences I attend, and that they all know that I will be getting a grade for what I do in this project (Teresa's words). I told them that I have to write what's called a dissertation and that it is basically a book. Michael mimicked book along with me and Mark said oh um hm, I heard about that. Mark then said, oh so we're helping you out and you're helping us out. I told them that they are helping me out a lot, and that I need them to help me finish this project. Michael wanted to know how long my dissertation will be. I explained that it's hard to say, that it depends on what I choose to write about and how I choose to write it. I ended up saying though that I doubt if my dissertation will be under 400 hundred pages. Michael then wanted to know what the minimum could be? I said again that it depends. So I then proceeded to tell them what a dissertation is and that I must write one based on the entire project which includes the Prep sem. We talked once again about the significance of the Prep sem (i.e., the interaction between them and me, planning for the activities we do at Verlinden) and why they seriously need to attend each meeting. They said that they understood. Michael said that he and Mark were talking about the Prep sem when they saw me drive into the parking lot. Michael told Mark that they have to start coming because I am getting

“pissed” at them. Mark said yea we gotta start coming. I told him it’s not so much that I’m “pissed” but I become very disappointed when they don’t show up because we need to spend the time together working. Also, when they don’t participate in the Prep sem, the consequences are a lot of confusion when we go to Verlinden. I told them that we need to look at what they consider to be positive or going well in their individual groups, and what they think needs improvement, or what we need to do to make things better. I told them that it’s a lot of work involved in this project and that I know that I’m asking a lot of you and of your time, but I need them basically to do the work on this project. I said that I think that they should know that they are needed and that they are helping me out a great deal.

I told the students that a lot of research of this nature isn’t conducted on high school students. I told them that as a result of their participation in this project, they are adding to the research literature by participating in this project. Michael immediately said, so we can use this as a reference. Mark said um hmm(positive). I said yea.

O. C. - After having said that the students were helping me out a lot and that I need them to make this project work, , I thought about what we talked about in my ENG 872 class. During our first session, Diane Brunner talked about as researchers, we should think about whose getting what out of a research study. I wonder what Michael, Mark, Teresa, Devon and Marty think they’re getting out of this other than getting out of their English I class two days a week?

Michael:

Positive - Students work very fast. Get through stuff quickly. No distractions in group. Kids are smart, can read and write, can write good, can write good for grade level. [P] What do you mean by good? They know what to write and how to write. They write good enough to understand. The kids all like each other (i.e., Michael told a story about kids going to Valentine’s Party with some s/he liked). They like me ‘cause I asked. The kids are outspoken.

What needs improvement - Students need to learn how to speak louder. I tell them to speak up a little bit louder. We all need to express more. There’s a lot more we could tell. I need to give them time to think more.

Mark:

Positive - Everybody is working together. When we read a book, everybody cooperates. Everybody has their own imagination. Everybody had their own thoughts. They’re all their own person. Good kids overall. They think a lot. They helped us to bring out the parts of the book that we didn’t think about. The kids helped us bring out our own imaginations. I like ‘em. This is a little relaxation and it’s fun. This is a whole different world (gets into a discussion about the difference in being a high school student and remembering what it was

like being in elementary school).

What needs improvement - Helping them learn.

Teresa:

Positive: They share their ideas and work together. Not selfish. I like their discussions. I like the ideas they bring out because they are more like mine (i.e., like staying out of school). The kids never have the same idea.

What needs improvement - We need more ideas. Stanley talks too much. He's always jumping in and won't let other students finish what they have to say. He knows everything.

[P] What did you think about my having you read a wordless picture storybook?

I thought it was stupid and corney (Michael). But the kids helped us bring out our imaginations. Teresa said she liked it because she is sick of reading. That's all we ever do is read books without pictures. I liked the book because I liked the illustrations. It was something different. In our classes we can't use our imaginations. You don't have to imagine because the author paints the picture for you. We imagined everything that was going on, what the people would really say. We imagined what the people in the pictures were thinking. We don't get to look at picture books. You don't feel the pressure when you're reading a picture storybook.

APPENDIX B

ANALYTICAL MEMO

Description and Analysis
January 14, 1994

WHAT IS THIS A STUDY OF?

This week was exciting because of two significant events: (1) I conducted a preparation seminar with four of the five high school students as a group (2) We went to Angelou today for the first time and conducted a cross-age discussion. We characterized our first cross-age session as a "Getting To Know You" activity. These events were encouraging, as things went reasonably well. I will describe the Preparation seminar and the Cross-age "Getting To Know You" activity session. In the final part of this memo, I will analyze the literacy occurrences of the preparation seminar and the cross-age session.

PREPARATION SEMINAR

The first "Preparation seminar" was conducted on Tuesday, January 11th during the second hour. Teresa was the only student who "showed up" on Monday afternoon at 3PM. I didn't see think I should keep her and talk about what we would be doing without the rest of the group. So I took her home after waiting for the other students for approximately 20 minutes. Carol agreed to let me pull the students from her second hour class on Tuesday, and that is what I did. All of the students were present. I started the session by telling the students how disappointed I was when they didn't show up for our first meeting as a group on Monday. I had talked with Marty and Michael over the phone on Monday evening to find out what happened to them Monday afternoon. Marty said that he forgot and Michael said he had transportation problems. I talked with them about how important it is for them to meet for the Preparation seminar and that we cannot afford to miss any more meetings. Michael, Devon and Marty were asked if they still wanted to participate in this project. I asked them this pointed question when we met on Tuesday. They were given the opportunity to leave the project without any "hard feelings." I told them that if they wanted to leave, now is the time to do it because I must find other students. They said that they wanted to stay and we proceeded with the activity for the day. This was contextualized within the concept of making a commitment and keeping that commitment. Michael said that his mother talks to him about responsibility and commitment all of the time.

Carol arranged for us to meet in the security guards lounge. The lounge is approximately 75 yds. away from Carol's classroom. The lounge has two sofas,

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and a table with two to three chairs. The ceilings are high. The floor is hard wood without carpet. There are two tall windows in the lounge. The security guard(s) keep snacks on the table with a coffee pot. The coffee pot was half-filled with coffee when we entered the room. The security guard (female) and another man (I assume another security guard or maybe a teacher) was in the lounge when we entered. The female security guard got a cup of coffee and left the room. She sat in her chair located just outside of the lounge. The male gathered his papers and left the room also.

I began by explaining the title of the project and why I'm calling it the Cross-Aged Literacy Program, the two related phases of the project and general procedures (i.e., where we will meet to leave for Angelou, the meetings for the preparation seminar, the activities we will engage in for the preparation seminar and the cross-age literary sessions). We talked about general procedures once we get to Angelou, what materials we will use. I passed out their reading logs and explained to the students what they were about and how we would use them (i.e., writing down thoughts after reading a story or book.)

As I talked with my students, I watched "body language" as well as oral language. At the beginning I felt that Devon wasn't with me. I base this statement on the fact that he was looking around the room and chewing on his finger nails. This doesn't necessarily mean that he wasn't listening to me. After all, we met in a room that he probably hadn't been in before (i.e., the security guards lounge). Teresa seemed proud that she was the only student to show-up on Monday. She made the other students aware of the fact. Michael appeared to be listening as he made eye contact with me and the other members of the group. Marty seemed to be listening to me also as he made eye contact with me as well as the other students whenever someone spoke.

When I showed the students the first book I selected (i.e., **TUESDAY** by David Weisner), I again observed body language as well as oral language. After they browsed through their book for a few minutes, I saw smiles, laughs, and expressions of surprise (probably due to the pictures). I stated that I thought we might use this book as a "fun" book before we began reading more serious books. I asked them for suggestions about what we might do with the books once they went to Angelou to read and write with the fourth/fifth graders. They had a range of reasonable suggestions (i.e., write a sentence about each picture, go around the small-group and have each student state what he or she wants to write about the picture). The contributions were not made by one student, but each student contributed something in some form or another. Marty seemed to be the most reluctant to contribute for some reason(s) which I'm not sure about right now. From studying him during the interview process, he appears to be shy. Perhaps he didn't want to contribute anything during the first meeting because this was the first time that all of the students had met together as a group for the project. I know that they know each other because they are all in Carol's class. Some of them are in other classes together too (i.e., Teresa and Devon have math together during first hour). But I'm not sure, in fact, I have no idea just how much they've interacted or even socialized with each other in school or outside of school related activities.

NOTE: This makes me think and wish that I had met with the five students together as a group at least two times before we started the Preparation seminar this semester. This would have given them and me the opportunity to talk together before starting the planning and preparation phase of our study. Live and Learn!

The one thing that surprised and excited me in a pleasant way during our first meeting of the Preparation seminar was that the students asked about choosing books, implying that they would like to have the opportunity to look at some books and make choices. This was the most exciting part of our first session. They made some suggestions. I told them that I have lots of books and that I will bring some to our prep sessions so that they can look through them. I asked them to think about the fact that if we decide to use something different than what I had originally selected, that the books must be related in some way. The examples I gave them were either by theme or by author. They shook their heads affirmatively.

CROSS-AGE LITERARY ACTIVITY

If everything had moved smoothly as planned, I would have been surprised and ecstatic. However, things didn't move as smoothly as planned and I will describe the dilemmas we encountered on our first adventure to Angelou.

Before leaving to go to Angelou to set-up (i.e., cassette recorders and video camera), I realized that I had forgotten to take the cassette recorders to Angelou the previous day. Therefore, I had to go to Erickson hall to get the cassettes. I left home approximately 8AM. This caused me to lose about a half-hour of my set-up time. When I arrived at Angelou it was almost 8:30AM. I had planned to be there at 8AM. I set up everything except the video camera, which I left in the car because I couldn't bring everything up at once. Incidentally, the video camera had been left in the car all night long. The temperature was around 15 below with the wind chill.

I left Angelou to go to Septima Clark to pick up the students at approximately 8:50AM. They straggled up to me one at a time. Marty arrived first, Devon second, Teresa third. Mark came but I told him that we need to do an interview first, some permission slip paper work, and plus he missed the preparation seminar on Tuesday, so he wouldn't know what we had planned to do. He seemed okay with what I said and left for class. We waited until 9AM for Michael. The second bell had rang to signal that students should be in their second hour class by that time. Michael had not reached us yet. I was getting anxious and very nervous, as we were supposed to be at Angelou at 9AM. At least this was the plan. I waited for Michael for about 2 more minutes. He still hadn't arrived, so we left. I felt very uncomfortable leaving without Michael. But at the same time, I felt that we had to "get moving" because saving as much time as possible during transition and travel is crucial for this project. Saving time is crucial because we will only have so many minutes for "solid engagement" of our literacy activities once we arrive at Angelou. The high school students have to get settled once we arrive. I predict that we will have no more than 30 minutes

of “solid engagement” of literacy activities per session. This means approximately one hour per week with the fourth/ fifth graders. This isn’t a lot of time! But when I am at Septima Clark, and I glance in passing at what seems to be going on in classes, I wonder just how much “solid engagement” of learning and activities is going on?

Anyway, we arrived at Angelou at approximately 9:05, maybe seven minutes after nine. I don’t recall exactly because I was in a frenzy. Jennifer was ready for us. She and her students had rearranged the desks in groups of four as I had asked her if she would do while I went to Septima Clark to pick up the students. Jennifer frequently rearranges her students’ desks. In fact, at the beginning of Fall Semester, she informed me that she rearranges the classroom once a week. Today, she had the students sitting in rows in two different areas of the classroom. Thus, students who weren’t in the first row across, faced the backs of their peers.

When we arrived, I introduced the students to Jennifer first and then the class. I explained how we were going to work today to the whole-class. I originally told the high school students to just sit with a group of students. They were asked to do a “getting to know you” activity in their small groups before they started reading, writing and discussing their books. Jennifer suggested that the students ask questions as a whole-class rather than in small groups. She said that they should get the questions out of the way before they start the literacy activities. I agreed with her and felt that she made an excellent suggestion. I was nervous and wasn’t thinking about the kids and what they might want to know about each other, but that I need to get some data for my study. However, as it turned out, the question and answer session was great! The fourth and fifth graders asked a lot of questions; school related and personal experience. The high school students did a great job of answering their questions. Jennifer asked the high schools students questions related to social issues. She was asking the high school students to give her fourth/fifth graders advice from a “teenagers perspective.” Below, I list some of the questions that Jennifer and her fourth/fifth graders asked the high school students.

NOTE: I am sorry to say that one of the problems I faced during my first day in the field while having the high school and elementary students together was that the video camera failed to work. I think it was because it had been out in my car all night in the cold. Each time I pressed the record button, I got a message in the view finder that said DEW. This was very disappointing. Also, I didn’t audio tape this session either. However, I managed to write down most of the questions that the children and Jennifer asked.

List of questions raised by fourth/fifth graders

- What school did you go to before going to Septima Clark?
- What do you like to do?
- Do you have any boyfriends or girlfriends?
- Did any of you go to Angelou?

- What elementary school did you go to?
- What are your plans for the future?
- What are your hobbies?
- Why are you going to Europe to play baseball? (This question was asked because Marty talked about upcoming events for him in baseball.
- Do you live by yourself?
- Where is your dad?
- What kind of dogs do you have?
- How good are you at Sega?
- What are your likes/dislikes about school?
- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- Have you ever gotten into any really big trouble?
- Have you ever had any major medical surgery? (Teresa talked about her eye surgery, and Devon talked about the 120 stitches he received down his back from falling and breaking a glass table during a “tussle” with his brother.)
- Do you have any teachers that you just hate?

List of questions raised by Jennifer Brody (teacher):

- What is your favorite TV program? What is your favorite book?
- What do you like to do?
- Do you have any plans for the future?
- What advice could you give these young people (fourth/fifth graders), being that you are 14 and 15 years old, what advice would you give them as they grow older?
- What age would you recommend girls start wearing make-up?
- What age would you recommend dating, not dating, but do you think that it's a good idea for fourth and fifth graders to have girlfriends and boyfriends?
- What do you think about boys making sexually degrading comments to girls?
- What colleges do you want to go to?

ANALYSIS OF THE PREPARATION SEMINAR

We began the first meeting of the preparation seminar with my having to challenge the students about responsibility and commitment to themselves as well as the Cross-Age Literacy Project. This was uncomfortable but at the same time it was necessary. It was uncomfortable because of the “mini-lecture” I had to give the students. I don’t know them very well and they don’t know me. I worried about sounding “preachy” and about giving them the impression that I’m the authority figure. It was necessary because I believe that Marty, Devon, Teresa and Michael should realize the seriousness of the project. I feel that the beginning of our first meeting as a group was productive because I sensed that the students got my message. The message I tried to convey was that this project is important to each of us. Everyone involved will learn from this research. They have something to contribute to help me learn from them. What I learn will help others to learn as well. After a 50 minute session, I left feeling like the students

want to do this and that they are anxious to get started and willing to make valuable contributions.

I observed them as they browsed through the first book we plan to use with the younger students. I looked to see what their expressions might be like since the book is a wordless picture book. I didn't exactly know what to expect. They know that they will be using the book with 4th/5th graders, but at the same time they are expected to actively participate in a literacy activity along with the younger students. I was explicit about this with the high school students. I believed that they need to understand that they shouldn't think of themselves as the one's who would be telling the younger students what to do and when to do it. Rather, they should think of themselves as engaging in the reading and writing activities with their 4th/5th grade reading buddies. They seemed to understand and accept what I said.

I opened the planning phase of the preparation seminar up by asking them how might we use Tuesday by David Weisner. As they browsed through the book there were smiles (at the pictures in the book), expressions of confusion (i.e., flying frogs), and questions. Some of the students even said "I like it." Michael raised a question about why was the book ending with a flying pig at the end. I was surprised in a pleasant way to hear Teresa answer him. Her response to Michael was that the author was beginning the next scene or episode. Michael's question and Teresa's response to his question is a literacy event that helps me to begin thinking about what discussion and response might look like with my high school students.

I noticed that Michael looked at me when he asked his question. I didn't have opportunity to respond as Teresa immediately proceeded to answer him. This is interesting to me because first of all, I know that Michael ask questions when I've observed him in his General English class. However, I have yet to see Teresa respond immediately or even answer a question when her teacher openly asks questions in class. I can only remember hearing Teresa speak openly in class only once before we met for her interview. Her response to Michael was direct, specific and to the point. It made sense to me and I believe to Michael as well. After Teresa responded, Michael looked at the picture again and said "Oh!" as if he suddenly understood what was going on in the book.

Having interviewed Teresa, I can speculate as to why she doesn't talk very much in class. First, she says that reading is a struggle for her because of her learning disability. She says that she is dyslexic. Carol, Teresa's English teacher does quite a bit of oral reading in her class. If reading is hard for Teresa and if she doesn't like reading in front of people because of her disability, perhaps she felt comfortable with only a small group of people. Perhaps this was an opportunity for her to speak about something she seemed to know, and feel comfortable and good about herself. After all, the Preparation seminar is a setting where students can take risk in reading, writing, and speaking. Perhaps Teresa felt that I wouldn't pass judgment and her classmates wouldn't laugh or pass judgment about what she said.

Another reason that Teresa felt comfortable speaking immediately and openly was because the textbook is a wordless picture book. Teresa told me that she like to draw. From what she described, she is an artist. Perhaps Tah-Sah was able to make some type of meaningful connection with the picture book. Perhaps, she was thinking about her own talent in drawing, and used her artistic ability and skills to think about an ending or draw a conclusion about why the author moved from pictures of frogs to a picture of a flying pig at the end of the book.

ANALYSIS OF THE CROSS-AGE LITERARY DISCUSSION

What is this a study of? Good question! Jennifer brought a whole new and different perspective to this study through her questions. I want to address social issues related to how and what high school students might learn about themselves when they have opportunities to interact with younger children. However, I wasn't sure what angle to broach the topic. I'm not sure now but, Jennifer's questions helped me to think about my study from a social aspect. High school students have experiences that they might share with younger children to help them face and deal with the struggles of approaching early adolescence. Seemingly, having to broach issues of a social nature for younger students, high school students should reflect about these issues based on their own struggles.

Jennifer asked the high school students some "pointed" questions, forcing them to face their experiences both socially and academically. Her questions forced the students to think about social issues of their lives in terms of gender. I thought that this was rather powerful. For example, the question she asked Teresa about what age would she recommend that they wear make-up was one that Teresa has probably had to consider at some point. Teresa probably has had adults giving her advice about when she should and when she should not wear make-up. Today, she was put in the position and in the "spotlight" of having to answer the question as a mature teenager. When Jennifer asked Teresa this question, and as Teresa contemplated how she would answer (she paused appearing to think first), I wondered how she must have felt having been put in this position. After all, Teresa is a young adolescent too. Jennifer is an adult, I assume in her early thirties. Jennifer wanted her fourth and fifth grade girls to hear what a young teenage female might say about wearing make-up because her girls are maturing fast, and appear anxious to start doing seemingly "grown-up" things. In fact, Jennifer explicitly stated that her students were rather anxious to do things that adults do (i.e., wear make-up and start dating). I wondered if Teresa's perspective about wearing make-up matched Jennifer's (i.e., her 4th/5th grade girls are too young) or if Teresa's thinking about wearing make-up matched the young girls perspective? It wasn't clear to me just what Teresa believed. She said that they should start around sixteen years old. I don't know if she said this because this is what she really believes, or if she said this because she thought this is what Jennifer wanted her to say. At any rate, Jennifer seemed pleased that Teresa didn't say that it was okay for 4th/5th grade girls to wear make-up.

Likewise, Jennifer put Marty and Devon on the spot by asking them about what they think about boys making sexually degrading comments to girls. Marty answered the question in a simple yet direct and appropriate way; "You shouldn't do it." I don't remember what Devon said or even if he answered the question. However, both of these two young men were forced to face their own beliefs and values about appropriate and inappropriate behavior when interacting with females. Perhaps Marty and Devon have made inappropriate comments to young women. Who knows! If they have made inappropriate comments to females in the past, today they were forced to face their past behaviors within the context of being asked by an adult female to give her fourth/fifth grade boys a statement about making inappropriate sexually degrading comments to young girls. I wondered how Devon and Marty felt. I wondered what they struggled with in having to answer this question before a classroom full of boys and girls, from various walks of life, various backgrounds, races and cultures.

What did Jennifer's questions have to do with cross-age literacy activities? A great deal! Jennifer's questions were questions of enlightenment for her fourth/fifth graders. The younger students were given the opportunity to hear these social and gender related issues from a group of older peers (teenagers).

Jennifer's questions were questions that forced the high school students to think! They had to think about their own beliefs, values, culture, and experiences related to the issues Jennifer put on the table. Coupled with reflecting on themselves spontaneously, they had to think about how they might answer Jennifer's questions given that there were two adult females in the classroom at the time. Jennifer is a teacher and I am a teacher/researcher. Jennifer is a woman in a position of authority. I wondered if these issues crossed Devon, Marty and Tah-Sah's minds?

The high school students were given the opportunity to learn about social and gender related issues that fourth/fifth graders think about. This first cross-age literary discussion was embedded within an "experience related context." That is, it appears that the issues Jennifer raised were issues that Teresa, Marty and Devon have undoubtedly had to face at some point. It was goal-embedded because Jennifer wanted her fourth/fifth graders to hear what teenagers had to say about these issues. She wanted them to hear opinions from teenagers because she said when she talks to her students about these issues, they think that she is just being "motherly." Motherly is the word Jennifer used to describe how the students think about her when she has discussions with them about appropriate and inappropriate social behaviors. Her questions helped all of the students, both the elementary and high school students to struggle with issues related to gender and social behavior; what is appropriate behavior and what is inappropriate behavior. This is literacy in a broad sense! This first cross-aged literary activity was about the lives and experiences of the students who participated and contributed to the discussion.

APPENDIX C

Preparation Seminar Lesson Plan #1

Septima Clark High School
February 22, 1994

Book: Song Of The Trees by Mildred D. Taylor

Source: Children's Literature in the Reading Program
Bernice E. Cullinan, Editor

Chapter 9 - Characterization in Literature: Realistic and Historical Fiction
by Dianne Monson

Teaching Idea: Getting to Know a Character in a Book

Pose this problem for students: Suppose you want to know more about a person so you can write a description of him or her. What questions would you ask the person?

*Let students work in small groups to generate questions. The following are some of the possibilities they may suggest:

- Describe yourself. What do you look like? What do you like best about the way you look? What would you like to change about your looks?
- What is your favorite color? What are your favorite clothes? What color don't you like? Why?
- What do you like to do best when nobody else is around? Do you collect anything? Do you have a favorite book? What kinds of jobs do you dislike the most at school? At home?
- Who are your best friends? Why do you like them? Who don't you like? Why?
- How do you feel about brothers and sisters? Do you get along with yours? When you disagree, what is it usually about? Do you like them better as you are getting older?
- If you could go anywhere you choose, where would it be? Why?
- If you could plan one whole day for yourself, what would you do?

***After children have created such a list, they can use it as a resource in getting to know characters in books, pretending to ask the questions of the book character and trying to imagine what the character would answer.**

APPENDIX D

Cross-Aged Literacy Plan #3

**Angelou Elementary School
February 9, 1994**

Theme: Creating Meaning - Tuesday by David Wiesner

- In a picture storybook, authors convey meaning in both the art and the text.
- Narrative art is subtle and interesting

Prompt Question

Each picture in **Tuesday** is a narration of the story. Each picture conveys a message and enhances the meaning of the story.

What does David Wiesner do in this picture storybook (wordless) to help you (the reader) create meaning from this story? How does he use pictures to help convey meaning? Hint: You must look at each picture closely and discuss details (i.e., plot - action, climax, color, mood, setting(s), size of objects in pictures, expressions, character development, accuracy and consistency) you see in the pictures in order to discover how David Wiesner creates meaning through pictures.

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