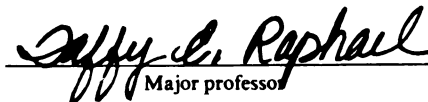This is to certify that the

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Exploring a Second Language Student's
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Collaborative Case Study Analysis

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Cynthia H. Brock

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EXPLORING A SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENT'S LITERACY LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES: A COLLABORATIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

By

Cynthia H. Brock

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING A SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENT'S LITERACY LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES: A COLLABORATIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

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Cynthia H. Brock

The population of second language learners served by U. S. schools is
steadily and rapidly increasing while the number of qualified bilingual teachers
is on the decline. As a result, regular education teachers must strive to meet
effectively the educational needs of this rapidly growing segment of our school
population. Moreover, many scholars have argued that diverse children in all
facets of our U. S. school systems have been and remain underserved. To that
end, this investigation is a case study of the literacy learning opportunities of a
fifth-grade Hmong child who came to the U. S. from Thailand in 1993. Deng
was one of 25 students in a mainstream urban classroom in the midwest during
the 1994-95 academic year.

Because Deng had only been in the U. S. for a short period of time and
English was a new language for him, I was concerned about his opportunities
for literacy learning in a classroom where English was the medium of
instruction. Drawing on the work of several current scholars, I argue that
students' learning opportunities relate to the nature and quality of their
interactions with others in specific classroom contexts. Moreover, the quality of
those interactions plays a crucial role in determining whether or not children

have access to the discursive practices in their classroom communities. I examined Deng's literacy learning opportunities in the context of a tradebook unit pertaining to the text *Maniac Magee* asking the following questions: (1) What was available for students to learn? (2) How do/would I know what students were learning? and (3) When did Deng appear to have opportunities to learn literacy?

This work is dedicated to my parents,

Everett and Colleen Brock,

with love and appreciation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to many people for their support throughout graduate school and the process of completing this work. I thank my parents, Everett and Colleen Brock, and my eight brothers and sisters for their love and encouragement. I dedicate this work to my parents to thank them for a lifetime of unconditional love and support.

My dissertation committee members have offered invaluable guidance and support with this work. I offer special thanks to my advisor, mentor, and friend, Taffy Raphael. I am honored to have had the opportunity to work with her throughout graduate school; she is a model scholar and a gifted mentor. I appreciate the innumerable hours she has spent expertly and thoughtfully guiding me through graduate school and all aspects of the dissertation process. I also offer special thanks to my mentor and friend, Jim Gavelek, for the countless hours he spent teaching me about language, literacy and theory. He has made a tremendous impact on my learning throughout graduate school, and he has significantly guided and challenged my thinking throughout this dissertation process.

I am also thankful to Linda Anderson for her support throughout graduate school and with my dissertation work. I learned much about educational

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Deng Moua[1], his mother, Vue and I sat talking in the front room of Deng's apartment in an urban midwest community. Vue, a high school senior fluent in Hmong and English, translated as Deng's mother spoke in her native language of Hmong to describe the Moua family's escape from Laos just 7 years earlier. In an effort to avoid communist government soldiers, Deng, his mother, his three younger siblings and their grandparents traveled at night for a week to reach the Mekong River and their intermediate destination--Ban Vinai, a refugee camp in Thailand. Deng was 6 when his family left Laos and made it to the safety of Thailand where they lived in three different refugee camps over a period of 4 years prior to immigrating to the United States.

The Moua family's personal journey to the United States is unique, but it also represents a larger trend in the United States--the recent influx of immigrants to this country. McKeon (1994) emphasizes that, for many Americans, the thought of immigrants coming to this country often conjures up nostalgic images of Ellis Island and the past. However, according to Walker-Moffat (1995) "more immigrants entered the United States in the 1980s than in any other decade since the beginning of the twentieth century" (p. 53). Moreover, the majority of these new immigrants are not of European descent.

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[1]All names of participants in this study are pseudonyms.

Recent immigrants, like Deng and his family, and not-so-recent immigrants whose cultures and first languages differ from the mainstream in America, make up a large and growing number of children in our public schools (Nieto, 1992; Garcia, 1990; Genesee, 1994). For example, English is not a first language for almost half of the public school students in California (Garcia, 1992). Additionally, the National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS) 1988, report estimates that by the year 2001, minority children will comprise from three-fourths to almost all of the student enrollment in the nation's 15 largest school systems (cited in Cummins, 1994).

An important point, however, is that enrollment of linguistically and culturally diverse students is increasing in many states and cities across the nation in addition to California and large urban centers (Trueba, 1989). In fact, during the 1990-91 school year, 39 states in all regions of the country reported increased numbers of children who do not speak English as their first language (U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, 1992; cited in Fitzgerald, 1995a). Providing a quality education for the children in this large and growing segment of our student population is an issue that must be addressed by educators at all levels across the country.

Given the large and growing numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse children in our public schools, we must ask an important question: How successful are we in our efforts to provide quality learning opportunities for Deng and other diverse children like him? Interestingly, a peculiar paradox exists between the actual documented performance of ethnically and

linguistically diverse children in American schools and many Americans' conceptions of educational opportunity in this country. Wong-Filmore and Meyer (1992) assert that many Americans think that "our society is both egalitarian and democratic, at least in the *opportunities* it offers for social and economic mobility: We believe that our schools offer every child, without regard for race or economic background, the means to rise without limit" (p. 653, emphasis added).

Unfortunately, however, many scholars assert that we, as an educational community, often fail in our efforts to provide quality educational opportunities for all children in our schools--especially children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Fitzgerald, 1995a; Voigt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1993; Trueba, 1989; Walker-Moffat, 1995). This failure is evidenced in a multiplicity of ways such as: (a) lower test scores for non-mainstream children on standardized tests of reading and writing (National Center for Educational Statistics 1990:20, 26-29; reported in Jacob & Jordan, 1993), (b) higher school drop-out rates for diverse children, and (c) over representation of diverse children in remedial programs and lower academic tracks in school systems (Rose, 1989).

Historically, scholars and politicians alike have spent considerable time and money trying to address the dilemma of unequal opportunity in our schools. In the 1960s, the federal government conducted The Coleman Report, at that time the second largest social research study in history, to try to understand minority children's lack of opportunity in American schools and society. In the

1970s a major strand in The Instructional Dimensions Study, a massive federally funded study, was aimed at studying students' *opportunity to learn*. And now in the 1990s, *opportunity to learn* standards are foremost in the minds of many politicians (e.g., the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act," 1994; & the National Governors Association 1993 document, "The Debate on Opportunity-to-Learn Standards") and academics alike (e.g., Porter 1993, 1995).

Scholars such as Erickson and Shultz (1992), argue that we need to reexamine the ways we have sought answers to the problem of unequal learning opportunities for linguistically and culturally diverse students in our schools. Erickson and Shultz (1992) and Pearson (1997) maintain that students' perceptions of their learning experiences have largely been neglected in the research literature. They assert that we must look to the children and their actual experiences in schools if we ever hope to be able to understand their access or lack of access to school learning opportunities. Thus far, according to Erickson and Shultz, "student experience has been treated in partial and incidental ways, as researchers, teacher educators, and policy analysts consider relatively thin slices of classroom life, usually from a single perspectival angle. *None of these slices has been multidimensional enough to capture students' subjective worlds as whole phenomena*" (p. 466, emphasis added). Lee (1994) further contends that, as an educational community, we have been particularly remiss in our efforts to study the learning experiences of Asian American children.

In this investigation, I looked closely at the actual school experiences of Deng, the Hmong child introduced at the beginning of this chapter. I chose to focus my work on Deng's literacy learning because literacy is my area of interest, and English literacy is foundational for second language children's success in this society (Gee, 1990; Hudelson, 1995). Thus, my goal was to closely examine Deng's literacy learning opportunities in his mainstream classroom. In particular, I sought to explore what it meant for Deng to be a part of his classroom literacy community from his perspective as an insider and my perspective as an outsider.

My choice to conduct this study with a second language child in a mainstream classroom was not arbitrary. As a mainstream public school classroom teacher for 9 years, I worked with many children from a wide variety of geographical regions around the world whose first languages were not English. I maintained ongoing concern about these children's learning opportunities in my classroom where the medium of instruction was English. These personal experiences sparked my interest in doing an in-depth investigation into the ways in which Deng experienced school, in general, and literacy learning, in particular.

My personal teaching experiences also reflect a broader national trend and point to the necessity for us, as an educational community, to take seriously our need to explore the learning opportunities of second language children in mainstream classrooms. Unfortunately, the number of qualified bilingual teachers in this country is on the decline (Nieto, 1992). This--and other factors

such as children who speak a wide spectrum of first languages in a given district--means that, increasingly, mainstream teachers are being called upon to serve our rapidly growing population of second language learners (McKeon, 1994; Cummins, 1994). Close examination of Deng's literacy learning opportunities in his mainstream classroom can shed light on ways that mainstream teachers can more effectively work with second language children.

Thus far, in this chapter, I argued that: (a) there is a large and growing population of second language children in our American schools, (b) we, as an educational community, have fallen short in our efforts to provide effective educational experiences for many of these children, and (c) primary responsibility for the education of many second language children falls into the hands of mainstream teachers. Consequently, I asserted that we need to closely examine the educational experiences of second language children in mainstream classrooms in an effort to discern how we can create quality learning opportunities with these children in our classrooms.

A close examination of second language children's learning opportunities in mainstream classrooms requires background knowledge about the process of acquiring English as a second language. While the focus of this dissertation work is not the second language acquisition process, some initial knowledge of the complexity of this process is necessary to foster thoughtful interpretations of Deng's school experiences as they are discussed in the remainder of this work. Lack of such knowledge may predispose the reader to underestimate the significance of Deng's participation in his classroom literacy

lessons. Thus, I draw on literature pertaining to second language acquisition to serve as a backdrop for exploring and interpreting Deng's literacy learning opportunities in his mainstream classroom.

An Initial Background Sketch of the Second Language Acquisition Process with Respect to Deng

Collier (1989) has studied children's rate and degree of achievement in a second language. She conducted an extensive analysis of research studies that examined the length of time it takes second language students to become proficient in English as measured by standardized tests of reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies. She made five generalizations about academic achievement in a second language based on her analysis of the research in second language acquisition.

First, when children receive a quality education in both their first and second languages, it generally takes from 4 to 7 years to reach national norms on standardized tests of reading, social studies, and science. However, students may reach national norms on standardized tests of language and math skills within 2 years. This discrepancy exists because language and math sections of standardized exams typically test the memorization of discrete skills rather that higher level thinking skills that are measured in reading, social studies, and science sections of exams.

Second, when children arrive in the United States between the ages of 8 and 12 with at least 2 years of schooling in their home country, it takes from 5 to 7 years to reach proficiency in English if they are educated exclusively in English after their arrival. Third, young children arriving in the United States

with no schooling in their home country may take 7 to 10 years to achieve proficiency in English as measured by standardized tests in reading, social studies, and science. Fourth, adolescents who come to the United States with no exposure to English and do not receive instruction in their first languages while they are learning English do not have enough years left in high school to become proficient in English. Moreover, academic development is seriously hampered for these children.

Deng falls into Collier's second generalization above. Deng attended school part-time while he and his family lived in refugee camps in Thailand. He had had at least 2 years of schooling prior to coming to the United States at the age of 10. Moreover, he was educated exclusively in English upon arrival to the United States. Thus, it could be expected to take an average of 5 to 7 years for Deng to become proficient enough in English to reach national norms on standardized tests in all academic subjects.

Collier (1989) resolved the issue of defining proficiency by stating that she utilized standardized test scores as her measure of proficiency. She was careful to point out, however, that "standardized tests are extremely limited measures of language proficiency, in that they measure only one language skill, reading, and do not test the student's ability to use the language for any spoken or written communicative function" (p. 518).

McLaughlin (1985) concurs with Collier that standardized reading tests should be interpreted with extreme caution when they are administered to second language children. He suggests that reading ability as measured on

standardized exams draws heavily on a child's prior knowledge and cultural

background. Moreover, second language children's prior knowledge and

cultural backgrounds are often not reflected on standardized exams. In

actuality, a complex set of factors (which include but are not limited to) the

child's prior knowledge, level of proficiency in the first language, prior academic

development in the first language, motivation, self-confidence, affect that

characterizes the second language acquisition experience, continued

academic development in the first language, and so forth, must be taken into

account when contemplating a child's acquisition of a second language.

Cummins (1984) emphasizes that "many educators have a very confused

notion of what it means to be proficient in English" (p. 15). This confused notion

about English proficiency on the part of educators is a serious contributing

factor to second language children's academic failure. For Cummins, the key to

educators' confused notions about the English proficiency of second language

learners relates to educators' assumptions that second language children's

competent face-to-face communication skills are representative of their

academic abilities in their second language. He states:

> There is little doubt that many second language students can develop a
>
> relatively high degree of English communicative skills within about two
>
> years of exposure to English-speaking peers, television, and schooling.
>
> However, extrapolating from the considerable English proficiency that
>
> language minority students display in face-to-face communication to their

overall proficiency in English, we risk creating academic deficits in these students (p. 5).

Cummins emphasizes that face-to-face communication is often replete with overt contextual clues such as gestures, tone of voice, and so forth; whereas, complex academic skills are less frequently couched in overt contextual clues and require much greater and different cognitive ability in the second language. By the fourth grade, most uses of language in school fall into the category of providing less context clues and being more cognitively demanding (Collier, 1989).

The primary data sources for this study were collected in the spring of Deng's fifth grade year in school--just under 2 years after his arrival to the United States. Consequently, drawing on the research data above, it could be assumed that he was becoming competent with face-to-face communication in English, but still in the initial stages of learning English well enough to use it in the complex academic tasks in which he could be expected to engage in a fifth grade American classroom.

An Overview of the Study

I focused my investigation within one of Deng's literacy units of study in his fifth-grade classroom, examining the general question: What literacy learning opportunities did Deng, his classmates, and his teacher construct through their discursive practices in the context of a thematic unit based on the text *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1990)? I developed two more focused analytic questions as I addressed the question above: (1) What was the general

literacy content covered during lessons, how was it covered and what were the rules/norms of engagement during the lessons? and (2) Did Deng have/display access to those rules/norms and the content of the lessons? If so, how/why? If not, why not?

I explored Deng's classroom literacy learning opportunities from an interpretive perspective that takes into account culture, history and immediate contexts. Thus, while I closely examined Deng's literacy learning within the context of a single thematic unit, I contextualized my work in his classroom experiences across the academic year, his earlier school experiences, his membership in Hmong culture, and his experiences as an immigrant to the United States.

The case study I developed exploring issues related to Deng's literacy learning opportunities is detailed in the remaining 5 chapters. I begin chapter 2 by describing the sociocultural theoretical perspective and research literature that I drew upon to design and interpret this case study. In chapter 3, I present the research methods I used in the study. In chapters 4 and 5, I present the findings of my study, examining both my perspectives and my sense of Deng's perspectives on whole-group lessons and small-group activities within the focus thematic unit of study. In chapter 6, I discuss the data from chapters 4 and 5 in terms of their relevance for understanding the literacy learning opportunities that were constructed within the context of the focus unit and their implications for literacy education.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

My concern with the literacy learning opportunities of children who speak English as their second language initially led me to two areas of research. The first area of research relates to literacy itself: how it has been defined, studied, and taught. This area is critical because our definition of what counts as literacy learning influences what is taught, and what is taught relates directly to the potential for second language children to develop competency in English (Gee, 1990). The second area of research focuses on the notion of opportunity. I explore how different scholars have conceptualized and studied opportunity. Moreover, I examine the ramifications of this work for children's learning, in general, and their literacy learning, in particular.

Thus, in the first part of this chapter, I examine ways that literacy and opportunity have been studied historically, setting the context for understanding both what we have learned within the research community as well as some of the limitations we currently face in our work. In the latter part of the chapter, I discuss sociohistorical theory for its potential to serve as a framework to address some of the limitations we have experienced in our attempts to create better access to literacy learning opportunities for second language children. The study I present in chapters 3 through 6 describes the classroom where I focused my work and the major participants in the study as I saw them contextualized within the historical framework of the literature I describe here and through the lens of sociohistorical theory.

Literacy

The focus of my dissertation work is Deng's literacy learning

opportunities within the context of an intradisciplinary literacy unit based on the

trade book *Maniac Magee*. In chapters 4 and 5 I argue that both the content of

the unit and the manner in which the class engaged in the unit influenced

Deng's literacy learning opportunities. Moreover, I maintain that both the

content of the unit and the class' engagement with the unit were significantly

shaped by Mrs. Weber's design, conception and implementation of the unit and

reflected her conception of what counts as literacy.

Mrs. Weber had taught for 30 years in the district where I conducted my

dissertation work. Consequently, she taught during a long span of time when

there have been significant changes in the field of literacy. The overview of

literacy across the past 30 years provides a framework within which I

contextualize Mrs. Weber's literacy instruction, discussed in chapter 3. I focus

on three major historical trends in literacy research: (1) information processing

approaches (e.g., Gough 1971; Rumelhart, 1977), (2) cognitive approaches

(e.g., Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Brown, 1981), and (3) sociocultural

approaches (e.g., Heath, 1991; Gee, 1990; Scribner, 1984).

Information Processing Approaches to Reading Research

Interestingly, a primary focus on reading comprehension as a research

endeavor did not begin until the mid-1960s even though formal reading

research has been conducted for more than 100 years (Samuels & Kamil, 1991;

Venezky 1991). According to Samuels and Kamil (1991), research conducted

in other fields, such as language research (e.g., Chomsky's transformational grammar & Fillmore's case grammar) and psychological research of mental processes, contributed significantly to the focus of reading comprehension research beginning in the 1960s. In fact, Venezky (1991) asserts that the history of research on reading processes closely parallels the history of cognitive psychology. It is the historical connection between reading and psychology that I trace in this section.

The late 1960s marked a movement away from behaviorism in psychology. Therefore, psychologists began to study human mental functioning rather than solely studying observable stimuli and responses. The advent of computers helped to usher in a psychological focus on the ways that information is processed in the mind. It was during this period that reading researchers such as Gough (1971) and LaBerge and Samuels (1974) developed their information processing/perceptual theory models of the reading process. Both Gough and LaBerge and Samuels asserted that reading is a sequential linear process that evolved from "features to letters, to spelling patterns, to visual word representations to phonological word representations to word meanings to word group meanings" (Rumelhart, 1977, p. 578). These models were called bottom-up models because their designers believed that reading evolved from the simple to the more complex in a linear fashion.

More advanced information processing models of reading were formulated by researchers such as Rumelhart (1977) and Stanovich (1980). The primary difference between these models and the earlier Gough and

LaBerge and Samuels models, was that neither Rumelhart nor Stanovich saw reading as a linear process. For example, Rumelhart suggested that a model of reading must take into account that higher-level perception can affect lower-level perception, and high- and low-level perception can occur simultaneously. To briefly elaborate, a key component of Rumelhart's model was a message center that could process information on different levels (e.g., feature level, letter level, syntactic level, and so forth). Rumelhart suggested that information could be processed from many knowledge structures (e.g., featural knowledge, letter-cluster knowledge, syntactic knowledge) simultaneously. Thus, for researchers such as Rumelhart and Stanovich, reading was an interactive process drawing on higher and lower levels of the process simultaneously.

Cognitive Approaches to Reading Research

The field of psychology continued to delve further into studying the human mind. Reflecting historically in his 1990 book, *Acts of Meaning*, Bruner asserts that cognitive scientists became interested in the dynamic and interpretive nature of mind. In this context, reading researchers began to focus on comprehension. The earlier information processing models revealed a great deal about perception and the processing of specific text, but offered little help understanding how, when and why meaning is actually created during reading. Researchers such as Anderson and Pearson (1984) dealt more with the construction of knowledge rather than the processing of information.

Anderson and Pearson viewed comprehension as central to competent reading. They emphasized that readers' prior knowledge plays a key role in the

ways they interpret and store new information. When readers effectively comprehend, they are able to find a mental home for the new information they read, or they are able to modify their "existing mental home" to incorporate the new information. Thus, Anderson and Pearson focused on characterizing the basic processes of reading comprehension in light of the way that people interpret new information and allow it to enter into and become a part of what they already know.

Anderson and Pearson suggested that schema theory could account for the way that reading competence is learned. The authors defined schemata as "knowledge already stored in memory" (p. 255). A thorough discussion of schema theory must identify the form and substance of schemata. The authors emphasized three key points about schema theory. First, it is necessary to consider the relationships among components of schema. Second, inference plays a key role in schema activation. Finally, knowledge of particular cases, as well as abstract and general instances are both necessary for comprehension.

Ann Brown was another influential cognitive researcher during the 1980s. Like Anderson and Pearson, Brown dealt with the manner in which the mind constructs knowledge. Specifically, Brown examined metacognition, or the way that people monitor and control their own thinking. Brown (1981) stated that her goal was "to demonstrate the complex interaction of many forms of knowledge that take place when students are engaged in a variety of learning activities, including learning from reading" (p. 501).

Brown suggested that a major limitation of most research was "that a majority of studies . . . shared a concentration on product rather than process . . . [not] what they [students] are *actually doing* while studying" (p. 503, emphasis in original). Thus, Brown (1981) dealt with readers as active constructors of knowledge, and she discussed the individual process of learning that reader engage in while studying text (e.g., deletion, super ordination, selection and invention). She asserted that more sophisticated readers are able to apply strategic rules for reading more effectively, especially the more difficult rules. She also emphasized the role of the teacher as someone who could help the learner construct knowledge while studying text.

Social and Cultural Approaches to Reading Research

While the field of reading research made great gains towards developing a more sophisticated understanding of cognition, researchers such as Scribner (1984), Heath (1991), and Gee (1990) have further extended the field by drawing attention to the constitutive role that culture and history must play in a thoughtful discussion of literacy. In doing so, they have furthered our understanding beyond the cognitive processes in which we engage while reading, to a more comprehensive conception of how literacy skills and abilities are developed and acquired.

Heath (1991) argues that behaviorist, information processing, and cognitive theories "have related concepts or structures to individuals by outlining formal characteristics or steps in thinking processes instead of considering the cultural and historical world of the thinker and the thinking

subject as continuous" (p. 16). She draws a clear distinction between the cultural/historical and cognitive/behaviorist traditions. The content of thinking is the focus for researchers working in the cultural/historical tradition. Thinking is seen as an activity that includes motivation, action, and emotion, all of which must be studied as a whole. Cognitive/behaviorist traditions emphasize the function and structure of thinking which is studied as a separate function of the person. Motivation and emotion are seen as sources outside the content of thinking.

For Heath, a fundamental problem with divorcing the content and function of thinking is that doing so makes *transparent* those societal views about language and thinking that influence literacy instruction and research. This approach is less problematic for children from mainstream groups in society because their backgrounds and experiences closely align with typical classroom practices and expectations. Heath asserts, however, that "these sanitized emphases on reading and writing processes . . . didn't take into account the different perspectives of students from different backgrounds" (1991, p. 14).

There are, Heath suggests, important differences in children's language use patterns that must be taken into account by researchers and educators. For example, schools typically expect children to know how to use language to label and describe objects, answer questions to which the teacher already knows the answer, recall past events or information in a predictable order, and engage in interactional patterns such as turn-taking. Heath argues that these

typical expected behaviors "fly in the face of everyday behaviors" for many nonmainstream groups in the United States (p. 15). For example, in many Mexican and African-American communities, adults most frequently ask children yes/no questions and do not ask questions for which the adults already know the answers. Further, speakers often engage in extended story telling. These narratives are often "jointly created by several speakers with frequent interruptions, overlap of turns at talk, and embellishment of details" (p. 15).

Thus, while it may appear at first glance that all children in the United States have equal access to the opportunity to become literate, researchers such as Heath (1991) and Scribner (1984) emphasize that our educational system clearly favors and promotes children in mainstream cultural groups. Differences in discursive practices among various cultural groups create a system (it could be argued that this is oftentimes invisible and unintentional) whereby mainstream children are advantaged and minority children are disadvantaged. According to Gee (1990):

> Presumably all social groups have culturally-based practices that give rise to specific skills in their children. It is just that only a narrow range of these culturally specific home-based skills are rewarded in school, namely those most often found in mainstream homes. . . . Schools do little to give these mainstream skills to children who do not already get them at home, despite the fact that they are an important basis of school success" (p. 29).

Researchers in the field of literacy have moved from considering reading

as a series of detached processes that all people experience in a similar

manner to a realization that it is only by considering literacy learning for specific

children relative to their social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds that it is

possible to promote equal access to opportunities for all children to become

literate in our public schools. Thus, in order to promote meaningful literacy

learning opportunities for all children (especially children from diverse social

and cultural backgrounds) it is crucial to consider literacy and the learning of

literacy within a social and cultural framework. Moreover, it is imperative that

we attend to the social processes which shape different students' literacy

development. A sociocultural theoretical perspective, which is discussed in the

latter part of this chapter, unites both the social and the cultural dimensions of

learning.

Opportunity to Learn

My interest in Deng's opportunities to learn literacy also led me to

explore literature pertaining to *opportunity* to see how others have

conceptualized and studied children's learning opportunities. I discovered that

opportunity to learn is a construct that has existed in the literature since the

1960s. Moreover, the history of the research on *opportunity to learn* has

interesting parallels to the history of literacy research. That is, while early

studies on *opportunity to learn* have made significant contributions to our

evolving understanding of the need to foster learning opportunities for diverse

learners, they did not provide information about the social and cultural factors that shape the construction of learning opportunities in classrooms.

While children's opportunities in schools have undoubtedly been discussed and debated for as long as there have been schools, many scholars (e.g., Arehart, 1979; Berliner, 1990; Garner, 1978) attribute the relatively recent conception of the construct of *opportunity to learn* to John Carroll and his 1963 Model of School Learning. In his 1963 seminal work, Carroll argued that educators need "a schematic design or conceptual model of factors affecting success in school learning and of the way they interact" (p. 723). He designed a model of school learning in an effort to achieve this objective.

Carroll's model focused on *time* as the central component for student learning. One of his basic assumptions was that "learning proceeds as a linear function of time" (p. 729). He divided time into two major categories: time needed in learning and time spent in learning. According to Carroll, the variables *aptitude, ability to understand instruction,* and *quality of instruction* related to time needed in learning. The variables *time allowed for learning* and *perseverance* (on the part of the student) related to time spent in learning. *Opportunity* was another name that Carroll gave to the variable *time allowed for learning.* Thus, for Carroll, measuring students' *opportunity to learn* was a fairly straight-forward endeavor which consisted of measuring the amount of time that students were allowed to engage in learning tasks.

The Coleman Report of the 1960s

Meanwhile, on the political scene at the time, a massive study entitled the *Equality of Educational Opportunity Report* (often referred to as The Coleman Report) was commissioned by the U.S. Office of Education under section 402 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Coleman, 1966). The Coleman Report was designed to explore how race, religion and national origin influenced educational opportunities in all levels of the public educational system in the United States. The 737 page *Coleman Report* addressed four broad areas: (1) racial and ethnic segregation in the public schools, (2) the extent to which schools offered equal educational opportunities to students (in terms such as available resources, nature of curriculum, characteristics and backgrounds of teachers, etc.), (3) student learning (as measured on standardized achievement tests), and (4) relationships between students' achievement and the schools they attended.

The project was a large scale survey; questionnaires were sent to teachers, students, principles, and superintendents. Additionally, standardized tests were administered to hundreds of thousands of students so that results could be compared by schools, states, and regions. According to Mosteller and Moynihan (1972), the *Coleman Report* was the second largest social science research project ever conducted up to that point in time. As an example of the scope of the project, over 570,000 children were tested, 60,000 teachers were involved in the project, and information was gathered from over 4,000 schools. While the initial objectives for the project were controversial, the results of the

work (which were considered ambiguous by some) did indicate that "there was a lack of availability of equal educational opportunities" for all children in the United States (Mosteller & Moynihan, 1972, p. 5).

The Coleman Report demonstrated that many children in the United States did not receive equal opportunities to quality education. By implementing a "large-scale one-shot survey" those conducting the study were able to compare survey responses and students' test scores to document that children in some schools and regions were systematically less successful than others (Mosteller & Moynihan, 1972, p. 4). And, it was overwhelmingly the children from poor and minority communities who were less successful on the exams. Hence, *opportunity*, as defined by The Coleman Report was primarily conceptualized as a comparison of children's abilities to perform on standardized tests, availability of resources, nature of curriculum, and so forth. Further, since The Coleman Report drew heavily on self-report surveys, results from categories included on the surveys such as available resources, nature of curriculum, characteristics and backgrounds of teachers also served to help define students' opportunities.

The Instructional Dimensions Study of the 1970s

In the decade following *The Coleman Report*, researchers (e.g. Lewy, 1972), linked the construct *opportunity to learn* to a relationship between curriculum and performance on outcome measures such as class exams and standardized tests. However, *time* (as originally introduced by Carroll) remained a central component in different definitions of *opportunity to learn*. As

an example, I discuss a massive study, The Instructional Dimensions Study,
part of an even larger study--The Compensatory Education Study--that was
commissioned by the U. S. Congress in the Education Amendments of 1974
and funded by the National Institute of Education (Poyner, 1977). This study
was one of the most extensive large-scale efforts to formally assess *opportunity
to learn*.

The Instructional Dimensions Study focused on five constructs:
individualization, opportunity, motivators, instructional events, and teacher
background (Poyner, 1977). I give a very brief overview of the study and then
focus specifically on the opportunity construct in the study. The study was a 19
month study that involved 90 schools in 14 school districts, with approximately
200 classroom teachers, 170 compensatory education teachers, and 4,300
students. The study focus was children's first and third grade reading and math
performance.

According to Poyner (1977), the *opportunity to learn* portion of the study
was defined according to two dimensions: amount of time and curriculum
overlap. Amount of time measured *opportunity to learn* in terms of: (a)
available time for learning, (b) class size, (c) classroom stability of enrollment,
and (d) student attentiveness to learning tasks. Peterson (1977) described this
dimension as the quantitative dimension. Curriculum overlap was defined as
the relationship between what was taught and what was assessed on the tests
used to measure student learning. This, according to Peterson (1977), was the
qualitative dimension.

Comparisons Across Early Work on Opportunity to Learn

There were both commonalities and differences across early conceptions of *opportunity to learn*. Carroll's work focused specifically on events and situations that occur in actual classroom settings. That is, Carroll was concerned with issues such as the amount of time that was available for teaching and learning and the actual time that students spent on academic tasks. The Coleman Report, on the other hand, defined *opportunity* primarily in terms external to actual classroom practice such as available resources and nature of curriculum. The Instructional Dimensions Study combined some elements from both earlier *opportunity to learn* projects. Time was conceptualized in a more sophisticated manner which included factors such as student attentiveness, class size and classroom stability, and so forth. Additionally, designers of this latter investigation were interested in the overlap between what was taught and what was assessed on standardized tests.

While all of these earlier conceptions of *opportunity to learn* were important because they drew attention to the need to attend to the notion of *opportunity* and the ways in which many poor and minority children were not being effectively educated in American schools, conceptions of *opportunity* represented detached and decontextualized general principles for evaluating existing conditions relative to *opportunity*. Further, all three conceptions of *opportunity* were essentialist accounts of the meaning or identity of the concept *opportunity*. That is, these conceptions of *opportunity* represented idealized statements about the key principles that ought to constitute *opportunity*.

Interestingly, these conceptions paralleled earlier conceptions of literacy. That is, much like literacy, the function and structure of opportunity was studied in a decontextualized manner mostly separate from the individuals in the situations under study.

Renewed Interest in *Opportunity to Learn* in the 1990s

Opportunity to learn was a prominent issue in the 1960s and 1970s and is again gaining prominence in the 1990s. I draw on the work of Porter (1993, 1995) as a basis for speculating about renewed interest in *opportunity to learn*. Then, I discuss present conceptions about how the construct *opportunity to learn* is currently being defined.

Porter (1993) points out that there have been major political efforts aimed at curriculum reform in each of the decades since the 1960s that have significantly influenced education. Undoubtedly, the civil rights concerns in the 1960s intensified efforts to push for equality of educational opportunity for all students. In the 1970s, President Johnson's "Great Society" pushed for "equity-motivated efforts to guarantee basic skills for all students" (p. 24). The 1983 government study, *A Nation at Risk,* caused considerable alarm and resulted in a shift in focus from educational equity to increasing educational standards. Why, then, has the pendulum apparently swung back towards a concern for educational opportunity in the 1990s?

Porter (1993) suggests that there has been considerable talk about the development of a national test for all U. S. students. While the development of such a test is currently on hold, many are concerned with the ethics of high

stakes testing unless all students have had a fair opportunity to learn the concepts they would be expected to know for the exams. So, given the current interest in educational opportunity, how is the construct *opportunity to learn* currently being defined? There are, of course, no simple answers to this question; however, there are some general trends in the ways that different researchers and politicians define *opportunity to learn*.

Current Political and Academic Conceptions of *Opportunity to Learn*

Presently, *opportunity to learn* is primarily discussed as *opportunity to learn* standards by researchers and politicians (e.g., Porter, 1995; Traiman, 1993). Several prominent government documents (e.g., the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act," 1994; & the National Governors Association 1993 document, "The Debate on *Opportunity to learn* Standards) define *opportunity to learn* standards broadly as principles that should guide the actions of states and school districts. For example, The National Governor's Association defined *opportunity to learn* standards "in terms of the factors, elements, or conditions of teaching and learning that are necessary for all students to have a fair opportunity to achieve high performance standards" (Traiman, 1993, p. 13). Thus, the National Governor's Association defined several broad principles for states to consider when developing their own unique sets of standards.

As a brief, but important, aside, one reason that different government agencies and school districts seem particularly interested in developing *opportunity to learn* standards is that the development of such standards is

linked to potential Goals 2000 funding. That is, states without standards in place will not be eligible to receive federal funding (Porter, 1995).

As an example of the types of *opportunity to learn* standards developed by individual states, I introduce the following 8 elements that the state of California included in its definition of *opportunity to learn*:

(1) access to an enriched, rigorous, and relevant curriculum, (2) access to a high-quality differentiated curriculum, (3) additional support for students with special needs and staff development for teachers, (4) access to technology, (5) access to a safe learning environment, (6) access to well-coordinated student and family support services, (7) fairly distributed resources, and (8) a coherent federal, state, and local policy environment (Traiman, 1993, p. 18).

The above examples illustrate that, following earlier conceptions of *opportunity to learn*, government agencies continue to define *opportunity to learn* as broad prescriptive procedural statements that provide no specific guidance about what might actually constitute effective learning in real classrooms. Political conceptions of *opportunity* still represent idealized statements about key principles (albeit, different key principles in some cases) that ought to constitute *opportunity*.

I now draw on the work of academics including Porter (1993), Guthrie and Gambrell (1994), and Tuyay, Jennings, and Dixon (1995) to provide a glimpse of various ways that researchers currently conceptualize *opportunity to learn*. Porter (1993) suggests that a thorough definition of *opportunity to learn*

must include: (1) information about the enacted curriculum (i.e., the actual content that children experience in school rather than the traditional definition of opportunity as amount of instructional time available to students), (2) effective pedagogy, and (3) the use of instructionally embedded resources (i.e., not just the availability of resources, but emphasis must be placed on the ways in which they are used in classrooms with children).

Guthrie and Gambrell (1994) established a set of guidelines that constitute *opportunity to learn* in reading and language arts. The three general guidelines they established include conditions related to: (1) curriculum and instruction, (2) administrative leadership, and (3) teachers' professionalism (p. 5). Within that set of 3 broad guidelines, they developed 16 narrower guidelines that relate specifically to reading and language arts. I present one of their sixteen specific guidelines to serve as an example of the guidelines they developed.

Guideline #1: Reading and Language Arts instruction should enable students to personalize literacy by creating contexts in which students use literacy to extend their experiences of observing the natural world, participating in social interchange, and forming their own viewpoints (p. 5).

The work of Porter and Guthrie and Gambrell focuses more specifically on what should actually occur in classroom contexts relative to teachers and students than the examples from the government documents previously discussed. Porter's work, in particular, seems to point the academic community

in a useful direction by emphasizing the central role that the "goings on" in actual classrooms must play in a discussion about *opportunity*. However, even the work of these academics is designed as general prescriptions for practice. That is, what should count as *opportunity* is listed and prescribed by individuals in positions of power and authority within the broader educational/political system but not grounded in the actual experiences of teachers and learners in public schools. The following research, however, takes a very different tact on the notion of *opportunity*.

Tuyay, Jennings and Dixon (1995) explore conceptions of *opportunity* within the context of actual classroom practice. Tuyay et al. examine the manner in which "opportunities" are coconstructed between participants engaged in interactions around a classroom writing project. For these scholars, an *opportunity to learn* "offers the student a chance to interact with information and to make sense of it--in other words, to make connections between his or her prior knowledge and the incorporation of the new information" (1995, p. 6). A key feature that sets this work apart from other conceptions of *opportunity* is that Tuyay et al. look to children and their actual experiences in schools as they contemplate *opportunity*. That is, they carefully explore the nature of teachers' and students' interactions as they construct knowledge together in the classroom. For Tuyay et al., learning opportunities are constituted through these interactions, they do not exist apart from them.

I concur with these scholars and other scholars such as Erickson and Shultz (1992) who argue that we must study goings on in actual classroom

settings in order to understand how to facilitate better learning opportunities for all children. However, in addition to moving our work into the classroom, it may also be worthwhile to reframe the nature of the questions we ask about *opportunity*. That is, perhaps we have not been asking the most useful kinds of questions. Rather than asking essentialist questions (i.e. "What counts as opportunity?") it may be worthwhile to ask Foucauldian (e.g., 1972 & 1978) function-related questions (i.e., "What counts as an opportunity for this particular child in this specific context?"). I briefly discuss why this shift in questions might be worth considering below.

Actually, it seems rather odd **not** to ask essentialist questions. In fact. Bové (1990) suggests that these questions seem both "natural" and necessary; however, he asserts further, "their very 'normalcy' gives them a troubling power to shape thought and to hinder the posing of other questions" (p. 53). Further, the unquestioned endorsement of essentialist questions "impl[ies] a norm of judgment: meaning and essence are better and more important than a discussion of 'how things work' or 'where they come from" (p. 53).

Both the essentialist question, "What is *opportunity to learn*?" and potential answers to this question are fraught with problems. The nature of the question presupposes that there is an entity called *opportunity* that can be identified, labeled and discerned. As my earlier discussion of the concept *opportunity* revealed, this has been done historically by creating lists of idealistic principles that constitute *opportunity*. However, the many different principles that have constituted definitions of *opportunity* over the years reveal

that *opportunity* has been conceptualized as an abstract concept with ever-changing definitions. Further, Foucault argues that a preoccupation with abstract utopian schemes or first principles to define concepts (such as decontextualized lists of criteria that constitute *opportunity*) blinds us to the concrete functioning of such concepts in actual contexts (Rabinow, 1984). These blind spots are problematic because they go unexamined.

Thus, it is not possible to come up with a list of criteria that represents a true definition for *opportunity*. Attempting to do so, in fact, obscures important issues in immediate contexts. Furthermore, the futility of developing ever more decontextualized definitions of *opportunity* as an abstract concept may be worth pondering for a variety of additional reasons. For example, being caught up in a system where posing essentialist questions is taken for granted as what one does confines the limits of what can be discussed and how it can be discussed. It also sets limits and parameters based on abstractions rather than specific contexts. That is, essentialist questions and the responses they evoke are often cast ahistorically and neglect the specifics of immediate context and culture.

Considerable time, effort and money has gone into the development and maintenance of decontextualized principles that constitute *opportunity to learn*. Fewer resources have been used to examine the opportunities of the diverse children that our schools fail to serve. Changing essentialist questions to function-related questions may shift our focus by changing what we examine and how we see. And, perhaps a shift in focus will lead us to useful

educational alternatives for the children who are traditionally marginalized in our classrooms.

My review of the literature pertaining to *opportunity to learn* has led me to believe that the construct *opportunity to learn* carries a great deal of conceptual baggage because of the history of its use in psychology and education. Shotter (1993) argues that it is sometimes advantageous to avoid particular terms or phrases because the history of their use and meaning can cloud current use of the term or phrase. Consequently, when I use the term *opportunity* in the remainder of my work, I refer to the term as it is typically used in everyday conversation, not the psychological construct *opportunity to learn*.

Theoretical Framework: Sociocultural Theory In the previous section, I drew on the work of many scholars (e.g., Heath, 1991; Gee, 1990) to argue that language and culture must play a central role in the study of student literacy learning. A shortcoming of most work pertaining to opportunity, however, is that it has been conceptualized from a decontextualized perspective. In this section, I examine the tenets of sociocultural theory in terms of the theory's focus and its potential to provide a powerful perspective from which to explore a second language child's literacy learning opportunities. I chose to frame and interpret my work from a sociocultural perspective because it takes into account the social, cultural and historical dimensions of knowledge and learning. Framing my work from a sociocultural perspective enables me to take into account Deng's social, cultural and historical background when studying the ways in

which he, his teacher, and his peers constructed opportunities during his classroom literacy unit.

According to Wertsch (1985), there are 3 major lines of thought in a Vygotskian sociocultural theoretical perspective. First, in order to understand a psychological phenomenon such as literacy learning, it is necessary to understand its origin and the processes by which it is acquired. Vygotsky (1978) referred to this as genetic or developmental analysis. Second, for Vygotsky, mind is social in nature. That is, mind is constituted through social interactions with others. Third, human action is mediated by signs and tools--primarily psychological tools such as language. The facilitation of language use in our sociocultural environment is the way we make sense or meaning. In the following sections I discuss each of these three lines of thought and ways in which these lines of thought link directly to my dissertation work.

Genetic Analyses

Vygotsky suggested that genetic analysis must be considered using four different lenses: phylogenesis, sociocultural history, ontogenesis and microgenesis (Wertsch, 1985). Phylogeny refers to the development of humans as a species and the subsequent distinctions between the human species and other species. While the phylogenetic level is not the focus of my work, the questions I ask relative to Deng's literacy learning opportunities relate uniquely to humans, who are distinguished by intergenerational learning that is based in language.

Sociocultural history refers to the developmental shifts or changes that occur within the human species in particular contexts across time. Central to this lens is the notion that in order to understand individuals' psychological development, the individuals and the activities in which they engage must be situated both culturally and historically. Emphasis on this level in my study led me to contextualize the study relative to several important and relevant background issues. First, I sought to understand the social and political climate of American schooling with respect to literacy instruction in terms of changes in the ways we have defined literacy and literacy instruction over time. Second, I sought to understand the cultural and historical background of the Hmong people with respect to the ways in which politics and economics have occasioned massive resettlement of the Hmong people from Laos to refugee camps in Thailand to first world countries such as the United States and the subsequent impact that this resettlement has had on Hmong children's schooling and lives.

Ontogeny refers to the development of the individual. Ontogeny shifts the focus from cultural and historical situatedness to the development of the individual across time. Thus, in my study, not only did I closely examine Deng in class for four weeks during the focus literacy unit; I also strove to understand his history as a learner over an extended period of time. That is, I interviewed Deng and his mother about Deng's earliest school experiences in refugee camps in Thailand. Additionally, I interviewed Deng's American teachers, prior to and including, his fifth grade teacher Mrs. Weber. Finally, I spent the

academic year studying Deng as a learner in multiple contexts and subjects during his fifth grade year, and I continued to work with Deng the next year as I helped him with his homework at home during sixth grade.

Microgenesis, the narrowest angle lens for studying development, refers to "the short-term formation of a psychological process" within an individual or group of individuals (Wertsch, 1985, p. 55). The focus of my dissertation is the microgenetic level; that is, I focus specifically on Deng's literacy learning in the context of a 4-week trade book unit based on the text *Maniac Magee*. However, as briefly indicated above, I couch my discussion at the microgenetic level in multiple layers of context at the ontogenetic and cultural historical levels. I elaborate on the ways in which I couched my work in each of these levels in chapter 3. All of these levels of analysis serve as a backdrop for a close-up analysis of Deng's literacy learning within the target unit in chapters 4 and 5.

Social Origins of Mind

The second major line of thought refers to Vygotsky's notion that mind originates through social interactions (Wertsch, 1985). Vygotsky (1978) posited that higher psychological processes, such as those involved in reading and writing, take place interpsychologically (i.e., within social interactions) and then over time take place intrapsychologically (i.e., are appropriated within the individual). For Vygotsky, "...every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, *between* people (*interpsychological*), and then *inside* the child

(*intrapsychological*)" (p. 57). Vygotsky terms this notion his general genetic law of cultural development (1978).

The Vygotsky Space (Harré, 1984; adapted by Gavelek & Raphael, 1996) serves as a graphic representation of Vygotsky's general genetic law of cultural development. That is, it represents how learning occurs from the interpsychological plane to the intrapsychological plane. The Vygotsky Space (see Figure 1 below) consists of four quadrants and two axes. Learning occurs as individuals engage in a clockwise, sequential. cyclical and interactive process from quadrants 1 through 4. In quadrant 1, people engage with others in their social environment. The figure suggests that individuals appropriate information from their social environments, transform it in their own unique ways, publicly express their thinking (often through writing or talking) and then engage in social interactions again. This process is iterative and recursive. In short, learning occurs as a result of this continual and interactive process of engaging in social interactions, internalizing, transforming, and publicly expressing ideas.

The vertical axis labeled Public/Private represents a continuum between completely public and very private. This axis characterizes "the degree to which any cognitive activity is visible and thus available for observation" (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996, p. 185). The horizontal axis labeled Individual/Social represents a continuum (from the social world to the individual's private world) of an individual's realization of some learning event. Thus, Public/Private refers to the nature of the *activity* in which people engage, and Individual/Social refers

to the *people* involved in the activity. Quadrant 1 (Q1) is the social sphere;

quadrant 3 (Q3) is the personal sphere. Quadrant 2 (Q2) represents a transition

between social and private, and quadrant 4 (Q4) represents a transition

between individual and public.

For the purposes of my dissertation, I am particularly interested in the first

and fourth quadrants; that is, I carefully examine the nature of social interactions

as depicted in the first quadrant and the role that publication (i.e., making

thinking public through activities such as writing and talking in the fourth

quadrant) play in Deng's literacy learning. Social interactions are central to

learning because that which an individual experiences in the social sphere

(quadrant 1) makes possible that which is available for the individual to

Public

Conventionalization

Q4   Q1

Publication

Individual   **Social**

Appropriation

Q3   Q2

Transformation

Private
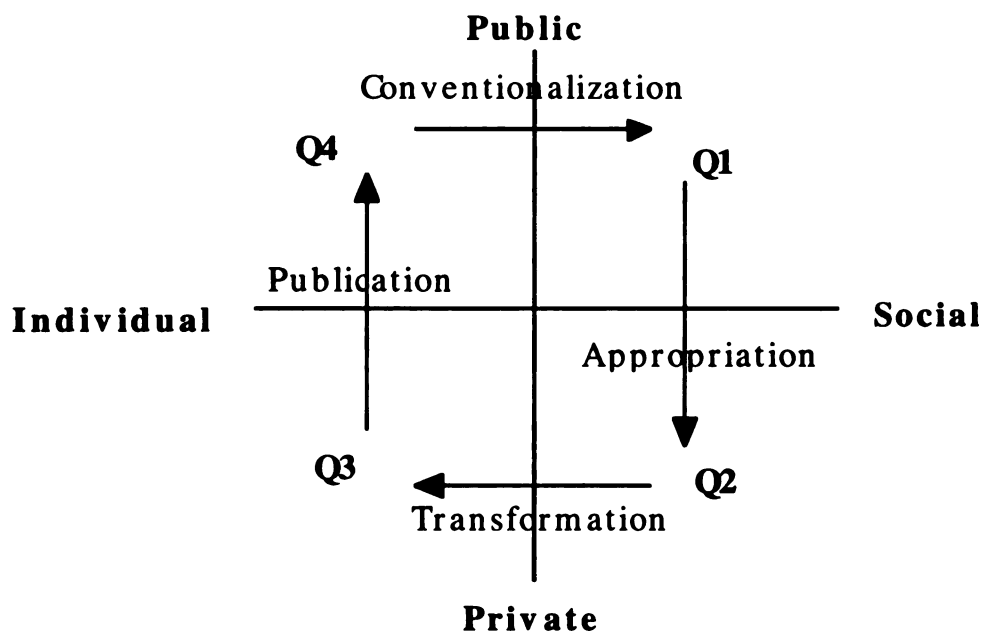
Figure 1. The Vygotsky Space (adapted from Gavelek & Raphael,

1996).

appropriate and transform. Also central to learning, however, is the opportunity for publication in the fourth quadrant. Shotter (1993) argues that "what we call 'thoughts' are only given form as we talk and write" (p. 380). Finally, interactions around that writing and talking are also central to learning. It is through such interactions that teachers and students can strive for intersubjectivity (i.e., an understanding of one another's perspectives, positions & thinking).

Gavelek and Raphael (1996) emphasize that "the Vygotsky Space underscores the complexity of learning and the different entry points a teacher has to observe and make decisions about formal intervention or informal guidance" (p. 190). Certainly, teachers' educational decisions with respect to quadrants 1 and 4 play a central role in student learning. First, the nature and quality of social interactions shapes what gets talked about, thought about and learned. Second, teachers must decide that it is important for students to have the opportunity to express their thinking publicly through writing and talking. Next, teachers must make decisions about how students might publicly express their thinking and the ways(s) that teachers and others can provide feedback to students when they do so in order to negotiate understandings.

Feedback that occurs after people make their thinking public in quadrant 4 plays a central role in learning (Wiggins, 1993). For Wiggins, there is an important distinction between guidance and feedback. "Guidance gives direction; feedback tells me whether I am on course. Guidance tells me the most likely ways to achieve my goal; feedback tells me whether I am on track or

off track in a way that enables me to self-adjust" (p. 184). Wiggins asserts that

feedback must be continuous, explicit, and immediate. Further, "successful

performance of complex tasks [such as literacy learning] is possible only if

students learn through the effective use of more timely, frequent, and helpful

feedback" (Wiggins, 1993, p. 187).

<u>Semiotic Mediation</u>

The third major line of thought refers to semiotic mediation, or mediation

through the use of signs and symbols. While Vygotsky talked about other

semiotic systems, he considered language to be the most important semiotic

tool. Vygotsky asserted that it is the semiotic mediation with others--not simply

social interactions, but language-based social interactions--that shape mind

(Vygotsky, 1978). Consequently, the use of discourse in the context of

interactions, and the various analytical ways of looking at that discourse,

become central when considering the development of mind.

Thus far, I have argued that learning is facilitated through language use

in our sociocultural environment; however, I have said little about how learning

is facilitated through language use. Wertsch (1991) argues that Bakhtin

extends Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective through his exploration of ways in

which semiotic systems in general, and language (both written and spoken) in

particular, can serve as a means for mediating human activity. I focus next on

some of Bakhtin's ideas that are particularly germane to an explanation of how

learning is facilitated through language use.

Dialogicality, voice, and utterance are key concepts that underscore Bakhtin's beliefs about semiotic mediation and relate directly to the learning opportunities that individuals construct through conversational exchanges (Wertsch, 1991). Dialogicality, the central notion in Bakhtin's work, refers to "the ways in which one speaker's concrete utterances come into contact with . . .the utterances of another" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 54). For Bakhtin, understanding occurs when speakers can effectively orient themselves with respect to one another in conversations. Thus, the nature of conversational engagements shape the learning opportunities that are constructed between conversants.

Bakhtin's ideas about the dialogic nature of understanding have significant implications for working with second language children. His work suggests that it is not sufficient to merely attempt to impart literacy skills to students. Students' opportunities to develop complex understandings are primarily shaped by what teachers understand about their thinking, and the ways that teachers incorporate that understanding into their situated use of language with children.

The concepts of voice and utterance are also central to Bakhtin's ideas about the role of language in constructing meaningful learning opportunities. Voice relates to point of view and applies to written as well as spoken language. Voice "is concerned with the broader issues of a speaking subject's perspective, conceptual horizon, intention, and world view" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 51). The concept of voice relates to a speaker or writer's perspective--what a speaker or writer brings to a conversation and how that in turn shapes the

nature of the conversation. Erickson and Shultz (1992) argue that students' voices--especially the voices of ethnic and linguistic minority students--are conspicuously absent from "contemporary discourse in education" (p. 482). For Erickson and Shultz, it is only by seriously attending to students' perspectives that we can understand their experiences in school and thereby improve their learning opportunities.

Utterance refers to Bakhtin's notion that meaning does not reside in words; rather, it resides in *the ways in which words are used by individuals in particular contexts*. Thus, the ways we use words in classrooms significantly impacts both what students learn and how they learn in classroom contexts. I draw on the work of Gee (1990), Delpit (1988) and de la luz Reyes (1992) to extend Bakhtin's notion of utterance specifically as it relates to second language learners.

Gee argues that a primary responsibility of mainstream teachers is to enculturate second language students into a set mainstream discourse practices. Socializing students into a set of discourse practices, however, involves considering a host of complex issues such as: (a) ethical and moral ramifications of doing so, (b) the roles that power issues and social practices might play in such endeavors, and (c) why and how educators may want to help second language students become part of the mainstream discourse community.

A key argument for helping second language learners enter the mainstream discourse community is that doing so gives them access to

opportunities in society that may not otherwise be available to them. By not teaching children mainstream discourse practices, they are denied opportunities for full participation in mainstream society. Educators, in effect, act as gatekeepers to children's potential access to influential economic, political and social positions in society (Au, 1993).

According to Gee (1990), merely teaching children the skills of reading and writing is not enough to help them become truly literate members of the mainstream culture. Gee suggests that "literacy does not reside somewhere in the individual brain"; rather, literacy is deeply related to social practices and cannot be separated from them (p. 42). Literacy practices involve much more than merely the mechanical skills of decoding words and producing written text: "They also involve ways of talking, interacting, thinking, valuing and believing" (p. 43). In short, then, we must help our students understand these ways of talking, interacting, thinking, valuing and believing in the mainstream discourse community; it is by doing so that we create learning opportunities with second language students.

In a slightly different, but related argument, Delpit (1988) and de la luz Reyes (1992) contend that linguistically and culturally diverse children must be explicitly taught the language practices, skills and conventions of the mainstream community. Oftentimes, they argue, children from diverse backgrounds learn patterns and styles of interacting that differ from the mainstream. Unless children are explicitly taught mainstream language skills and practices, they don't have access to conversations within the culture of

power. This limits their access to positions of power within the mainstream community.

Thus, for Gee, literacy is much more than a set of isolated reading and writing skills; being literate involves knowing how to **use** language in different contexts. Such knowledge can only be effectively taught and learned through students' engagement in meaningful social practices. Delpit (1988) and de la luz Reyes (1992) contend further that these language practices must be explicitly taught to second language children. These arguments have important implications for my work with Deng. In order to understand Deng's literacy learning experiences, I must carefully attend to the social practices that constitute those experiences (Gee) and the manner in which those experiences are taught and learned in Deng's classroom (Delpit & de la luz Reyes).

In this section, I have outlined the three themes that are central to Vygotsky's sociocultural conception of human mental development. First, Vygotsky's social historical theory serves as a valuable framework for conceptualizing students' learning opportunities because it takes into account the social, cultural, and historical situatedness of learning. Second, social interactions play a central role in the development of thought for Vygotsky. And finally, it is through semiotic mediation that mind is shaped and developed. For explanatory purposes, I discussed each of these themes separately; however, in actuality, these themes are intimately intertwined and interrelated. In the remainder of this section I introduce the concept of intersubjectivity and point to intersubjectivity as a goal in effective semiotically-mediated social interactions.

Intersubjectivity

In general, intersubjectivity refers to the process of developing shared understandings between people; more specifically, however, Wertsch suggests that intersubjectivity exists when people who are engaged in conversations "share some aspect of their situation definitions" (1985, p. 159). I use the concept of intersubjectivity here to articulate a conception of student learning that draws connections between the three themes mentioned above, beginning with the first theme.

Genetic analysis refers to the central role that our location in time and place plays in our capacity to think and understand our thinking and the thinking of others. Also important to genetic analysis is an examination of the development of thinking and activities across time. With respect to my dissertation work, and as I explain further in chapters 3 through 6, Deng and I come from vastly different cultures and have very different conceptions of what it means to go to school, the value of doing so, and how students and teachers should act in school. Striving to achieve intersubjectivity (i.e., an understanding of how the other conceives of school) was problematic for us because our perceptions of school are very different. The process in which we have engaged as we strove to understand one another's perspectives can be further explained by drawing on Vygotsky's second and third themes.

The second theme relates to the role that social interaction plays in shaping mind. To return to the example above, because Deng and I often experienced linguistic and cultural barriers, I enlisted the help of Vue to act as a

linguistic and cultural mediator. Because Vue was Hmong, had lived in Laos and Thailand, but he had also lived in the United States for eight years, he could help Deng and I understand one another as we engaged in conversational encounters. I draw on my earlier discussion of the Vygotsky Space to further illustrate this point. In conversations between Deng, Vue, and I, we shared our thoughts and impressions about Deng's experiences in his fifth grade classroom. In those conversations, we appropriated and transformed the content of the conversations in our own unique ways. As we made our thoughts public again (the fourth quadrant) we often continued to discuss, debate and refine our own thinking and one another's thinking. This is the process of internalization discussed by Vygotsky. Internalization is the iterative process of appropriating and transforming social experiences to individual ones.

The manner in which this process of internalization occurs relates to the third theme (semiotic mediation) and to intersubjectivity. Semiotic mediation refers to the ways in which semiotic tools, such as language, are used to mediate thinking. The speakers' perspectives (i.e., Bakhtin's concept of voice) influence both what gets said and heard by others. Utterance refers to the ways in which people use words in conversations. Norms for speaking and writing can vary tremendously between different cultures and speech communities. Oftentimes these norms are invisible to the members of communities. Articulating these norms and making them explicit can facilitate communication between people of different speech communities. Finally, dialogicality refers to the extent to which speakers can orient themselves to one another. With

respect to Deng, Vue, and I, it was because Vue was facile with the linguistic and cultural tools of both Hmong and English that we were often able to understand one another in conversational exchanges.

Thus, themes one and two emphasize **that** culture, history, and social interactions play a central role in facilitating thinking. Theme three emphasizes **how** conversants interact to facilitate thinking and knowing. Intersubjectivity links the three themes. The extent to which conversants can understand the other (in terms of culture, perspective, position, and ways of interacting) when engaging in social interactions indicates the extent to which intersubjectivity can be created in the context of conversational exchanges.

It is crucial, however, to make some important points about intersubjectivity. First, it is never possible to achieve complete intersubjectivity because it is never possible to completely enter into the world of the other. Shotter (1993) emphasizes that communication "... is a process in which people, who occupy different positions in a discourse, attempt to influence each other's behavior in some way. And because people can never wholly occupy another's place (without losing their own), two speakers can never completely understand each other; they remain only partially satisfied with each other's replies; each utterance occasions a further response" (p. 164).

Second, striving for intersubjectivity does not mean striving for agreement; rather, striving for intersubjectivity means trying to understand how others make sense of the world. This may or may not foster agreement. Matusov (1996) argues that "... intersubjectivity as a coordination of individual

contributions in joint activity more accurately captures the dialectic relationship between understanding and misunderstanding in joint activity than does intersubjectivity as sharing" (p. 29). Thus, intersubjectivity is about coordinating understandings of actions, activities or ideas - not about "getting things right" or "agreeing that things mean the same thing".

The notion of intersubjectivity is important to my dissertation work because in this work I have sought to understand Deng and his perceptions of his literacy learning. Additionally, in a broader educational sense, striving to develop intersubjectivity facilitates learning because it requires that all participants in conversations (e.g., teachers, researchers, & students) try to understand one another. This notion of striving to understand the other is especially important with second language children since they often enter school with backgrounds vastly different from their teachers and many of their peers. Also, the more that educators and students understand one another's backgrounds and perspectives the more effectively they can create learning opportunities together.

Concluding Comments

I draw on the literature reviewed in this chapter for the design, construction, and interpretation of my dissertation project. Deng's literacy learning is the focus of my work. The review of literature in the field of literacy allows me to contextualize Mrs. Weber's literacy instruction in the broader field of literacy. Moreover, the current scholarly focus of literacy as deeply rooted in social and cultural practices influenced my decision to design chapters 4 and 5

as detailed explorations of the social practices in which Deng, his peers, and his teacher engaged during the unit pertaining to *Maniac Magee*.

My examination of the construct *opportunity to learn* helped me to understand that opportunity has typically been conceptualized as a decontextualized entity existing apart from immediate interactions between people in complex socially, historically, and culturally shaped contexts. In general, this realization pointed to the need to explore opportunity from a sociocultural perspective. In particular, it led me to carefully explore the social interactions in Deng's classroom with an eye toward understanding how those interactions influenced the construction of literacy learning opportunities between Deng, his peers, and his teacher. The literature on *opportunity to learn* (which provided important background information about opportunity), my understanding of sociocultural theory, and my close examination of the construction of Deng's literacy learning opportunities serve as the foundation for the context-bound model of opportunity that I present in chapter 6.

Sociocultural theory is the foundation for my entire dissertation project. The notion that culture, history, and semiotically mediated social interactions shape our thinking, learning, and understandings resonated with my personal beliefs and experiences prior to engaging in this project and has further extended my thinking about the social nature of human thinking and learning. I elaborate on this latter point in chapter 6. I drew on the three tenets of sociocultural theory as outlined in this chapter in the design of this investigation

--which is articulated in chapter 3--and in the process of data collection and

analysis--which is discussed in chapters 3 through 6.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEXT AND METHODS

In chapter 2, I described the Vygotskian sociocultural theoretical perspective that I used to frame my study of Deng's literacy learning opportunities within the trade book unit based on the adolescent novel *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1990). I suggested that an important strength of this theoretical perspective is that it grounds issues in social, cultural and historical contexts. Thus, framing my work from this perspective enables me to take Deng's social, cultural and historical situatedness into account when studying the ways that he, his peers, and his teacher constructed literacy learning opportunities in the context of the focus literacy unit. In this chapter, I foreground the first line of thought in sociocultural theory--genetic analysis--and use it to frame my discussion of the context and methods involved in this investigation.

In the beginning of this chapter, I explain how I use three different lenses (i.e., cultural history, ontogenesis, & microgenesis) to frame my work. The analyses I discuss in chapters 4 and 5 pertain specifically to the microgenetic level; however, the information I discuss at the ontogenetic and cultural historical levels in this chapter serves as important background for those analyses.

Cultural history refers to the developmental shifts or changes that occur within the human species in particular contexts across time. At this level in my investigation, I explore background information that pertains to Deng's cultural

and historical situatedness as a refugee from Laos. Ontogeny refers to the development of the individual within the human species. At this level of my study, I show particular interest in the history of Deng's school experiences in the United States and Thailand. This broader contextual information at the cultural historical and ontogenetic levels serves as a backdrop against which I interpret Deng's literacy learning opportunities at the microgenetic level in the target tradebook unit in chapters 4 and 5. Microgenesis refers to the development of psychological processes that occur over a relatively short period of time. In this dissertation, I study Deng's literacy learning opportunities in the context of an intradisciplinary unit (see Lipson, Wixon, Valencia, & Peters, 1993) based on the text *Maniac Magee*.

Figure 2 depicts each of the three domains just described and the contexts and data sources pertinent to each level with respect to my study. I focus primarily on contexts and methods pertinent to the microgenetic level in the remainder of this chapter; however, I couch my discussion of background information at the cultural historical and ontogenetic levels within the broader discussion of contexts and methods at the microgenetic level. First, I discuss how I selected the focus teacher, classroom, and case study student for my investigation. Then, I describe the school, classroom, and participants involved in the study. Finally, I describe data sources, procedures, and analyses relevant to my work.

SOCIOCULTURAL HISTORY
History of the Hmong in China,
Laos, Thailand, and the US

ONTOGENESIS
Thailand & the US: The politics
and culture of Deng's schooling in
different contexts

MICROGENESIS
Analyses of 5 *Maniac*
Magee lessons and 5
viewing sessions

FOCUS
Field notes, Video tapes, & Audio tapes
Deng's home & Mrs. Weber's classroom
Interviews: Deng, Vue & Mrs. Weber
Deng's work samples

Fieldnotes: Mrs. Weber's classroom 1994-95 school year;
Interviews: Deng, Mrs. Weber, Deng's mom, Deng's
former U.S. teachers, United Nations representative in Laos,
U.S Exams: District, State and National

Field notes: Refugee camps Thailand/Laos trip; Interviews: Deng,
Deng's mom, Vue; U. S. diplomats in Thailand & Laos; United
Nations representative in Laos; Joint
Volunteer Agency representative
in Thailand

Figure 2. A microgenetic analysis of Deng's literacy learning opportunities
situated within ontogenetic and cultural historical contexts.

Selecting the Teacher, Classroom and Case Study Student

I used the following criteria to select a target classroom for my dissertation: (a) it should be in a nearby urban setting, (b) it should contain linguistic and culturally diverse learners, (c) the classroom teacher should interested in and willing to participate in the study, and she should use trade books or a combination of trade books and a basal reading program.

As I sought a location for my study, I began to observe several teachers who were part of a staff development research project focused on alternative assessments in literacy instruction. I observed and took field notes in three classrooms during the Fall of 1994. After spending time in all three classrooms, I felt that Mrs. Weber's classroom best met my criteria listed above, so I asked her permission to conduct my study in her room, and she granted it.

The focal student for my study had to meet the following criteria: (a) the student should be present in a classroom that met the criteria listed above, (b) be a recent immigrant to the United States (i.e., within the previous 2 to 3 years), (c) have English as a second or, other than first, language, (d) have a first language and primary cultural background other than American middle class. Deng, a student in Mrs. Weber's classroom, fit the criteria that I had developed. In addition, I was intrigued by Deng because I noticed that he was shy, quiet and reserved. As a classroom teacher, I've often found it difficult to understand the thinking and learning of diverse children who are quiet and shy. I felt that trying to determine ways to understand Deng's thinking and learning may inform my work and others' work with children like him.

The Focus School

This study was primarily situated at Oakland Elementary School in an urban midwestern community.[2] Oakland Elementary is one of 34 elementary schools in the district. Oakland is located in the northern region of the district near a large private suburban golf course community. The K - 5 school is a single level building housing 20 classroom teachers, 2 special education teachers, 1 librarian, 1 reading specialist, approximately 450 children, 1 principal, and numerous support staff members such as assistants, secretaries, and janitors. Approximately one-half of the students in the school are Caucasian, a quarter African American and the remaining quarter Hispanic and Asian, with Hispanic children outnumbering Asian children about two to one

The economic backgrounds of the children attending the school varied considerably. Students attending the school were drawn from two distinct neighborhoods; some students, like Deng and his siblings, were bussed from relatively poor neighborhoods in the downtown urban area; others came from the middle to upper middle class neighborhoods surrounding the school. During the Spring of 1995, slightly under two-thirds of the school population received free lunch while only 4% of the students received reduced cost lunch.

Key Participants: Mrs. Weber, Deng, and Vue

Mrs. Weber was the teacher in the target classroom. She was in her early 50s and had been a teacher with the Oakland School District for 30 years.

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[2] Information in this section was obtained from the 1994-95 Annual Report from the district of which Oakland School is a part.

She taught across a span of time when there were major changes taking place in the field of literacy which undoubtedly influenced her instructional approaches and decisions over the years[3].

Mrs. Weber taught all but one year at Oakland Elementary; she was hired at Oakland when it first opened as a new school in the 1960s. While she taught several different grade levels, most of her experience was with fifth graders. She had a reputation for being an excellent teacher in her school and in her district. Two of her hobbies include traveling and art. Mrs. Weber had earned a master's degree at a nearby university in the course of her teaching career, and she voluntarily signed up for workshops, classes and participation in university-based research projects.

During the 1994-95 school year, Mrs. Weber volunteered to participate in a literacy assessment project, a university-school collaborative research project for which I was a research assistant. Mrs. Weber created an intradisciplinary thematic unit based on the adolescent novel *Maniac Magee* during the workshops she attended as part of the assessment project (see Appendix A). The activities and interactions within this unit are the basis for my dissertation work. Thus, Mrs. Weber's involvement on the literacy assessment project significantly influenced her instruction, in general, and her planning of the unit pertaining to *Maniac Magee*, in particular.

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[3] Refer to the section in chapter 2 that addresses shifts in the field of literacy instruction over the past 30 years.

The focal student in my research was Deng Moua. He lived with his mother, a younger brother and two younger sisters at the time of my dissertation work. Deng's mother and father are divorced, and his father lives in central California. No one in Deng's family spoke English prior to coming to the United States; Hmong is the family's first language. Deng reports that he speaks the following languages: Hmong, Lao, Thai, and English. Deng was born in Laos, fled Laos with his family at the age of six, and lived in three different refugee camps in Thailand prior to coming to the midwest in 1994.

A complex network of interrelated factors at the microgenetic, ontogenetic, and cultural historical levels influence human learning. The interplay between these multiple layers of context must be taken into account in interpretations of learning at the microgenetic level. Thus, I highlight factors at the cultural historical and ontogenetic levels that served as a backdrop for my interpretations at the microgenetic level in chapters 4 and 5.

There are a host of complex economic, political and social factors that caused many Hmong, like the Moua family, to leave Laos for Thailand and resettle in first-world countries such as the United States. I touch on but a few pertinent issues here that help to shed light on some of the Moua family's possible reasons for leaving their homeland. The Hmong originated in southwest China; however, many Hmong left China in the 1800s because of intense persecution there and fled to Burma, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand, with the largest concentration of Hmong fleeing to the mountainous regions of Northern Laos (Chan, 1994).

There are well over 60 different ethnic groups in Laos, and the Hmong--

one of the minority groups--tended to remain fairly isolated from most majority

and other ethnic groups (Walker-Moffat, 1995). In the mountain regions where

they lived, the Hmong typically engaged in slash-and-burn agriculture to grow

two primary crops: rice and poppies (Interview with Frank Edmonton, diplomat

with the American Embassy in Vientienne, Laos, 1/19/96).

The lives of most Hmong in Laos were forever changed when they

became involved with the Americans during the Vietnam War. The CIA enlisted

the help of many Hmong--led by the Hmong General Vang Pao--in a "Secret

War" to fight against the communists in North Vietnam and to attempt to prevent

a communist takeover in Laos (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993). The CIA was not

successful on either count. When the Americans left Laos, and the communists

gained control, not surprisingly, those Hmong who sided with the Americans

during the war suffered persecution, torture, and death at the hands of the new

government. Many Hmong fled Laos for refugee camps in Thailand. Others

remained in the hills of their mountainous homelands to continue fighting

soldiers in the new communist regime.

One of the questions I asked the various different officials I interviewed

while in Thailand and Laos in January of 1996, was why Hmong people, like

the Moua family, were still leaving Laos for Thailand as late as the late 1980s

and why many Hmong people were still being resettled from refugee camps in

Thailand to first-world countries even into the 1990s when the Vietnam War had

ended 20 years before. Not surprisingly, there are many and varied complex

reasons why the Hmong people's lives are still being seriously impacted by the aftermath of the Vietnam War. I touch on but a few of them here.

First, many Hmong did not want to leave their homeland in Laos. Therefore, some of them attempted to stay and survive in Laos. Due to continuous danger from the still-communist government in Laos, some Hmong chose to leave Laos as late as the 1980s. Others who did escape to refugee camps in Thailand shortly after the war hoped for the opportunity to return to Laos sometime in the future. Some families lived in refugee camps for more than twelve years hoping to be able to return home. Still others stayed in Thai refugee camps hoping that the Thai government would eventually allow them to live permanently in Thailand so that they would not have to resettle in a third country (Interview, Dan Simon, diplomat with the American Embassy, Bangkok, Thailand, 1/10/96). [4]

According to Nancy Cummins, an administrator with the Joint Volunteer Agency (JVA) in charge of refugee resettlement in Thailand, the United States government felt a special responsibility to the Hmong people for their invaluable support and tremendous sacrifices during the Vietnam War, and has continued to allow many Hmong people who so choose to resettle in the United States (Interview, Bangkok, Thailand, 1/10/96). However, opportunities for resettlement are coming to a close for the remaining Hmong in Thai refugee

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[4]According to Simon, there were so many refugees over such a long period of time in Thailand from nearby war-torn countries that the Thai government was adamant that they either resettle in a third country or repatriate to their homelands.

camps. Both Edmonton (Interview, Vientienne, Laos, 1/19/96) and Simon (Interview, Bangkok, Thailand, 1/10/96) asserted that the remaining Hmong people in Thai refugee camps are being pressured by the Thai government to make a decision to either resettle to a third country or repatriate to Laos.

Thus, Deng and his family, like many other Hmong from Laos, were caught up in a complex social, political, and economic web of circumstances that brought about their exodus from Laos to Thai refugee camps and eventually to the United States. Although I asked Mrs. Moua about her family's decision to leave Laos for Thailand and the United States, she chose primarily to discuss details about the experience of leaving Laos and living in Thailand-- not the reasons for leaving Laos.

Mrs. Moua stated that Deng attended school sporadically and part time during the four years he and his family lived in refugee camps in Thailand. Instruction in refugee camp schools was in Thai. Dr. Phyllis Smith, an employee for the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) in Southeast Asia, and a former educational coordinator in one of the refugee camps in which Deng and his family lived, reported that children in the camps only attended school half-days. Further, students were instructed in three subjects: reading, Thai language, and math. Rote memorization of isolated skills was the focus of instruction (Interview, Vientienne, Laos, 1/19/1996). In separate interviews, both Deng and Dr. Smith emphasized that teachers were very strict and physical punishment was common when children misbehaved and/or did not have lessons memorized.

After moving to the midwest, Deng's family lived in a small, old apartment complex in the downtown area of the city, and the children were bussed to Oakland school. The apartment complex was in an area of town that had a reputation for being somewhat dangerous and undesirable. Many other Hmong refugee families also lived in the apartment complex where Deng and his family resided.

Deng arrived at Oakland School in the United States 40 days before the end of the 1993-94, school year and was placed in third grade. He attended a mainstream class half-days in fourth grade and an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) pull-out program for the remainder of each day. The primary focus of Deng's ESL program was survival and conversational English. At his mother's request, Deng remained in his mainstream classroom all day during his fifth-grade year. Thus, Deng received ESL instruction for just over a year before being transitioned full-time into a mainstream classroom where the medium of instruction was solely in English and there were no special provisions made for Deng's developing proficiency in English.

As briefly mentioned in chapter 1, Collier (1989) asserts that it typically takes second language children from four to seven years to reach proficiency in English if they receive a quality education in both English and their first language. Deng never received formal schooling in Hmong, his first language, nor Lao, his second language. Further, his limited school experiences in refugee camps in Thailand prior to coming to the United States were in Thai, which was his third language. Collier's work suggests that a student like Deng

undoubtedly did not have the English proficiency or support necessary to function successfully in his fifth-grade mainstream classroom.

When Deng came to the midwest community where his family settled, he did not have the option of being placed in a bilingual program because a Hmong bilingual program did not exist in Deng's school district. Even if such a program had existed, however, it is questionable whether Deng's mother would have enrolled him in it. Mrs. Moua wanted her children to be in mainstream English classrooms[5] as soon as possible because she felt that her children would learn English faster in such classrooms (Interview, 2/1/96).

Deng appeared to be well-liked by teachers and students at Oakland Elementary School. Deng's fourth-grade teacher, Mr. Garcia, stated that he enjoyed having Deng in class and that Deng got along with his peers well, but had difficulty academically because he did not know English very well (Interview, 6/2/95). Mrs. Jones, the Chapter I reading teacher at Oakland School, worked with Deng weekly during fifth grade.[6] Mrs. Jones also spoke highly of Deng. She said that he was a diligent worker who put forth a great deal of effort as a student. According to Mrs. Jones, Deng was fairly good at sounding words out, but often experienced difficulty with comprehension. She felt that this was the case because he did not know a lot of English words (Interview, 6/1/95).

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[5]Mrs. Moua did not use this terminology; however, she stated that she wanted her children in "typical" American classrooms where English was the medium of instruction.
[6]Mrs. Weber initiated this reading help for Deng. She approached Mrs. Jones and they made the arrangements for Deng to receive this additional reading assistance.

Deng was also well-liked by Mrs. Weber and his fifth-grade classmates.

Mrs. Weber had pizza parties after school every quarter for the children who

were regularly responsible for turning in their work and behaving appropriately

in the classroom. According to Mrs. Weber, Deng was always qualified for and

invited to the quarterly pizza parties. Deng and his classmates played

basketball daily at noon recess during the Spring of 1995. Deng stated that he

loved basketball, and I observed that he was regularly the first or second pick

when the children were choosing basketball teams at lunch recess each day.

According to Mrs. Weber, even though Deng struggled to learn English,

he was a very diligent student. He always turned in his homework on time and

regularly solicited the help of Mrs. Weber or his peers when he did not

understand assignments. Mrs. Weber stated that Deng's lack of English

proficiency was the primary reason he struggled academically.

Vue was another important participant in my study. He was a high school

senior in Deng's school district. Vue is a member of a Hmong family who also

immigrated from Laos via Thailand; they had lived in the United States 8 years.

Vue was fluent in both Hmong and English. I met Vue and his family through a

mutual American friend who had known them for many years. I explained my

study to Vue and he agreed to work with me as a translator when I went to

Deng's house to talk with him about his literacy learning during the Winter of

1995 and the Spring of 1996.

The Classroom

In this section, I present general overview of Mrs. Weber's students, classroom, and program of studies. Then, I talk specifically about the focus unit pertaining to *Maniac Magee*.

There were an average of 23 children in Mrs. Weber's fifth-grade classroom during 1994-95 academic school year. The class was fairly evenly divided between boys and girls and was comprised of the following ethnic groups: African American, Asian, Caucasian and Hispanic. Approximately one-half of the children in the class were Caucasian, a quarter African American, and the remainder Hispanic and Asian.

The students in Mrs. Weber's classroom sat at 7 large tables in small groups ranging in size from 3 to 5 children. Typically, the students worked at their tables in small groups that were changed periodically by Mrs. Weber throughout the year; however, at times during large-group lessons, the children made a semi-circle around the teacher with their chairs to the front of the classroom. This arrangement occurred daily during the large-group reading lessons that my dissertation study focused on. This arrangement also occurred periodically during large-group lessons in other subjects such as math and social studies. Figure 3 provides an overview of the classroom layout during large group lessons when students worked at the front of the classroom in a horse-shoe-shaped cluster around Mrs. Weber.

Mrs. Weber sometimes used the chalkboard and/or the overhead

projector located in the front of the classroom during whole-group lessons.

There were large bulletin boards located on two walls of the classroom that

contained both the students' work and illustrations/items the teacher bought

and/or created. These bulletin boards were changed continuously throughout

the year as the class engaged in different units of study. For example, when the

class studied North American explorers, student projects on that topic were
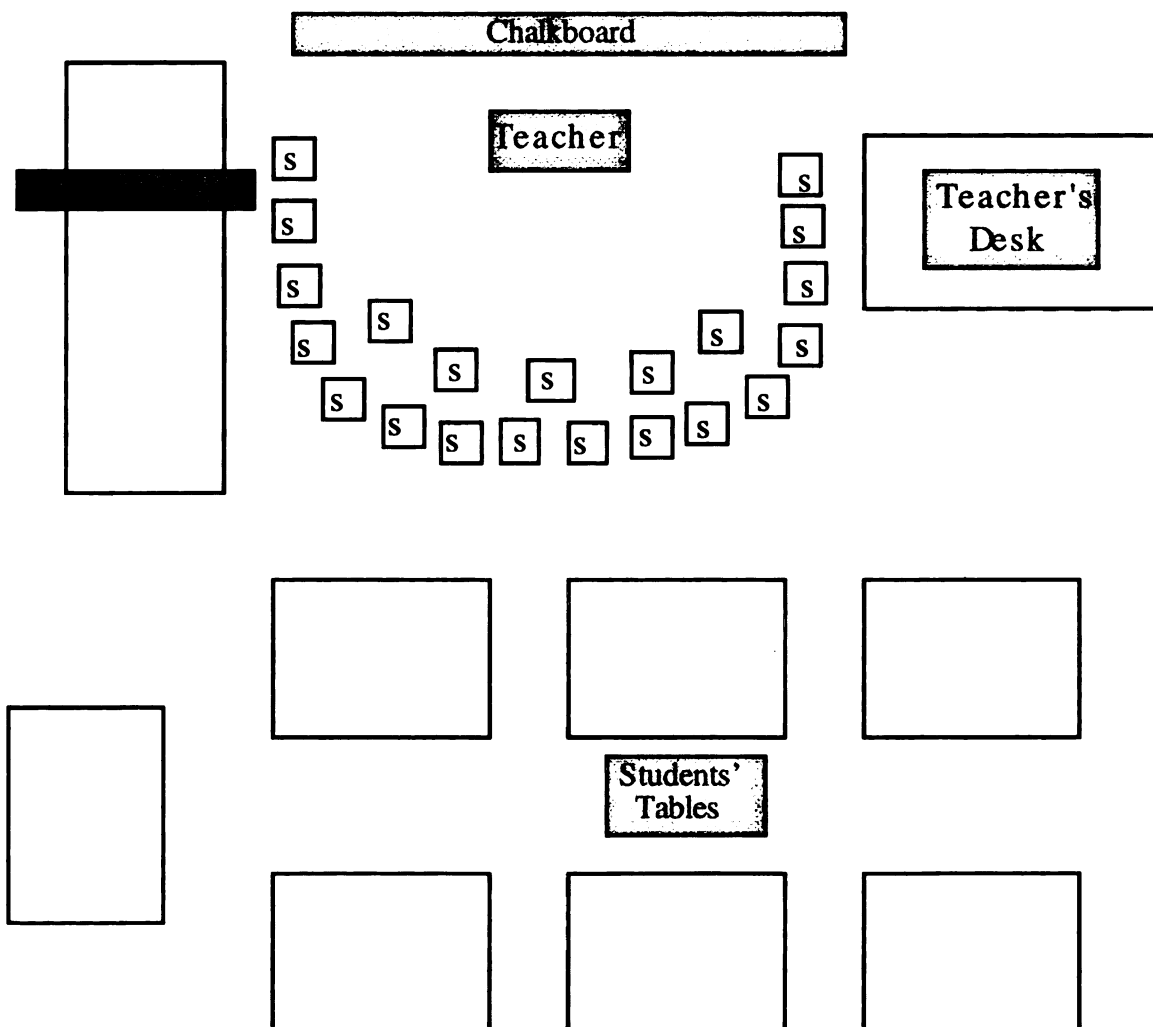
Figure 3. Seating arrangement for all whole-group *Maniac Magee* lessons.

displayed on the bulletin boards and throughout the room. When the class engaged in an interdisciplinary thematic unit on Japan, decorations in the room and student work sample displays were changed to depict that particular theme.

Mrs. Weber had primary responsibility for teaching the following subjects to her students: reading, writing, spelling, math, social studies, art, and music. Mrs. Weber's teaching partner (the other fifth-grade teacher in the building) taught science to both fifth-grade classes and Mrs. Weber taught social studies to both fifth-grade classes. While most subjects were typically taught as discrete subjects, Mrs. Weber, her teaching partner, their local university student-teaching interns, and both classrooms of fifth-graders engaged in an extensive and comprehensive eight week interdisciplinary thematic unit on Japan during the winter in which they integrated all subjects except math.

Mrs. Weber alternated between using basals and trade books across the year during reading. She used the district-adopted basal when using a basal reader. She and her students read the following trade books at different times across the year: *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (O'Dell, 1960), *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (O'Brien, 1971), *A Jar of Dreams* (Uchida, 1981), *The Happiest Ending* (Uchida, 1985), *and Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1990). When asked about her reading program, Mrs. Weber stated that she opted to alternate between trade books and basals because her students really enjoyed reading trade books, but she wanted to make sure that they learned some of the skills emphasized in the basals (Interview, 5/30/95). Further, Mrs. Weber indicated

that the district's new basals were quite good and had some stories that the children found to be interesting.

Twenty-one children in Mrs. Weber's class participated in the unit pertaining to *Maniac Magee*; two children were in a special education pull-out program daily during reading time. There were 18 *Maniac Magee* lessons between May 9, 1995, and June 9, 1995. The class met daily in a large group for these reading lessons. For all large group reading lessons the children took their chairs to an area in the front of the room and made a semi-circle around the teacher (see Figure 3). In addition to participating in the 18 large-group lessons, children worked in small groups of 3 to 4 students 6 times during the unit.

Data Sources, Procedures and Data Analysis

In my study, I closely examine 5 of 18 video taped lessons related to the *Maniac Magee* text and 5 video taped viewing sessions pertaining to the 5 target lessons (See Erickson & Shultz, 1982, for a detailed description of this method of analysis). I describe both the lessons and the viewing sessions below; however, first I establish a context for my close analysis of the target lessons and viewing sessions. I begin by discussing the broader ethnographic work from which the target lessons and tapes are drawn. Then I discuss data sources, procedures, and analyses pertinent to the overall study.

According to Erickson (1992), microanalysis is the close study of interactions in specific contexts. Erickson argues, however, that microanalysis must be couched in a broader context of ethnographic work. He contends that

combining ethnographic fieldwork with microanalysis "leads the researcher to attend not only to information that is available 'on the screen' but to information that comes from beyond the screen, from wider participant observation and from social research more generally" (p. 206). Erickson's assertions are consistent with the sociocultural framework that I use in this investigation; that is, from a sociocultural perspective, the researcher must couch and interpret her work in a broader social and historical context. Thus, while the focus of my work is a close analysis of five video taped lessons and five video taped viewing sessions that correspond to those lessons, I describe the broader context of fieldwork from which these tapes were drawn and interpreted.

First, I did fieldwork in the target classroom across the entire 1994-95 school year. Field notes were taken an average of 2 to 3 times per month from October through February. Visitations increased from 2 to 3 times per week during March and April to daily during May and June. While Mrs. Weber's literacy instruction was the focus of fieldwork, I spent time in the target classroom different days and times across the school day including all academic subjects, lunch, recess, field trips and special evening events such as fifth-grade graduation and the Oakland Elementary Spring Carnival. Additionally, as previously mentioned, I interviewed Mr. Garcia, Deng's fourth-grade teacher, and Mrs. Jones, his Chapter I reading teacher, at Oakland Elementary School.

Second, in an attempt to learn more about Deng and his social and cultural background, I visited refugee camps in Thailand and Laos where I

interviewed Hmong people living in the camps. Additionally, I interviewed officials in Thailand and Laos who worked with Hmong refugees in many different capacities (e.g., one U. S. Embassy diplomat in Thailand and one in Laos; a repatriation officer for the UNHCR in Southeast Asia; and an administrator for the JVA in Thailand). Finally, with the help of Vue translating, I interviewed Deng and his mother about their escape from Laos, their life in refugee camps in Thailand, Deng's school experiences in Thailand and the United States, and the family's transition to the United States. The ethnographic work briefly described above allows me to couch the close analyses of five literacy lessons in the broader context of Deng's life and school experiences.

Table 1 is a chronological overview of the major phases of my dissertation work. During the Fall of 1994, I began fieldwork in Mrs. Weber's classroom and conducted initial interviews Deng and Mrs. Weber. From January through April of 1996, I spent increased amounts of time in Mrs. Weber's classroom and began tutoring Deng at his home. The target tradebook unit occurred during May and June of 1995. I engaged in ongoing data analysis from July through December of 1995. In January of 1996, I traveled to Thailand and Laos to gather background data on the Hmong. In the Winter and Spring of 1996, Deng and Vue helped my analyze the video tapes of the lessons pertaining to the *Maniac Magee* text, and I tutored Deng weekly.

Table 1

Timeline for Dissertation Study

1994	
October - December	• Classroom visitations every week or two primarily during reading • Initial interviews with Mrs. Weber & Deng
1995	
January - February	• Classroom visitations every week or two primarily during reading • Ongoing discussions with Deng & Mrs. Weber
March - April	• Classroom visitations for half days twice weekly-across all subjects (audio- & video taping, field notes) • Ongoing informal discussions with Deng & Mrs. Weber • Initiate and maintain contact with Deng's family • Begin interactive journal writing with Deng at his home
May - June Target Tradebook Unit based on the Text *Maniac Magee*	• Classroom observations daily during *Maniac Magee* trade book unit (audio- & video taping, field notes) • Continue informal discussions with Deng & Mrs. Weber • Maintain contact with Deng's family • Continue interactive journal writing with Deng at his home • Initial data analysis
July - December	• Catalogue data • Data analysis • Initial drafting of chapters
1996	
January	• Visit refugee camps in Thailand & Laos similar to the camps where Deng lived • Interview officials who work for UNHCR, The State Department, and JVA • Enlist help of Vue & reestablish contact with Deng's family
February - March	• Engage in viewing sessions over selected Maniac Magee video taped lessons with Deng and Vue

Data Sources and Procedures

In this subsection, I present an overview of the major data sources in my work. Then, I discuss selected data sources in more detail. Data sources included (1) audio tapes and video tapes of whole-class literacy instruction and events during the trade book unit based on *Maniac Magee*; (2) field notes, (3) the teacher's detailed lesson plans of the unit, (4) all of Deng's written work pertaining to the unit (e.g., journals entries, assignments, etc.), (5) audio- and video taped conversations of the peer collaboration that occurred between Deng and the peers who worked with him in small groups during the unit, (6) notes and audio taped recordings of home visits made to Deng's home, (7) interviews (both formal and informal) conducted with Deng, his mother and Mrs. Weber, (8) videotapes of viewing sessions (as per Erickson & Shultz, 1982) of whole-group lessons and small-group activities based on *Maniac Magee* and conducted with Deng, Vue and me in Deng's home, (9) interviews with officials in Thailand and Laos mentioned above, and (10) field notes from visits to refugee camps in Thailand and Laos.

Interviews. My goal for interviews with Mrs. Weber, Deng, and Deng's mother was to have semistructured conversations. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992) with "structured interviews you are confident of getting comparable data across subjects, but you lose the opportunity to understand how the subjects themselves structure the topic at hand" (p. 97). Since my goal was not to get comparable data across subjects, but rather to learn about participants' perspectives, I opted to conduct semistructured interviews. Thus, I

did not begin my study with formal interview protocols. However, I did create

sets of questions that I wanted to discuss with Deng, his teacher, and his

mother.

I created a fairly extensive list of different types of questions that I

considered important to address over the course of the dissertation

investigation. The initial list was modified as I engaged in the study and

additional questions and issues not anticipated became salient. The questions

listed in Appendix B were not asked in chronological order at any specific

interview with Mrs. Weber, Deng or his mother; rather, I used the list as an

informal set of prompts of potentially important topics to consider when

engaging in conversations with them. As much as possible during interviews

and informal conversations I strove to follow the lead of the informants in the

conversations in order to ascertain how they made sense of their experiences.

I interviewed Mrs. Weber twice--once at the beginning and once at the

end of the study--and talked with her on a regular basis informally throughout

the study. The goals of the interviews were to elicit accounts of Mrs. Weber's

perceptions of Deng's literacy learning opportunities and her attitudes towards

and ideas about literacy instruction, assessment, and working with second

language learners.

I talked with Deng informally on an ongoing basis during the study. Our

discussions focused on his understandings of and perceptions of classroom

events and activities and his literacy learning. I interviewed Deng's mother

during the Spring of 1996 with the help of Vue and sought information

pertaining to Deng's school experiences in American classrooms, background information about Deng and his family, and Deng's educational experiences in Thailand prior to coming to the United States. I felt that this background information would help me interpret Deng's school experiences. However, interviewing Deng's mother and getting to know his family proved to be much more difficult than I had initially anticipated.

Spradley (1988) suggests that working with "informants is the hallmark of ethnographic field work" (p. 41). He further addresses the complexities of developing personal relationships with informants, saying that these relationships are both important and necessary; however, it is sometimes difficult to establish trust with informants. This was especially true with Deng and his family. I speculate that our different cultural and linguistic backgrounds played a central role in the length of time it took Deng and his family to begin to trust me. I did not sense a break-through in our relationship until the Spring of 1996 when Vue regularly accompanied me to Deng's house and served as interpreter and cultural mediator.

An interview with Nancy Cummins, of the JVA in Thailand[7], shed some light on potential reasons it may have taken so long to gain the trust of Deng and his family. The Hmong in Southeast Asia are a close-knit group of people whose social organization involves membership in clans. Clan members

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[7]The Joint Volunteer Agency in Thailand is the primary agency responsible for refugee resettlement from the refugee camps in Thailand to first world countries such as the United States, Canada and France.

typically feel a strong sense of responsibility, commitment and trust towards other clan members; however, clan members do not always feel this sense of trust towards outsiders--sometimes for good reason. The example below illustrates this point.

In order to resettle to third countries from camps in Thailand, the Hmong (and other refugees) were interviewed by teams of interviewers from the JVA. These interviews played an important role in resettlement opportunities. Saying the "wrong" things during these interviews could impact resettlement opportunities. As a concrete example, polygamy is a common practice among the Hmong (Chan, 1994); however, it is illegal in the United States, and immigrants are not allowed to bring more than one wife to the United States. Thus, the Hmong had to figure how to get around the prohibition of bringing multiple wives to America, such as declaring some wives as sisters, and so forth. Thus, many Hmong became guarded about what they said to outsiders-- particularly Americans, who could play a central role in their resettlement opportunities. Cummins speculated that this tendency of some Hmong to be skeptical of Americans (and often for good reason) may have carried over to their interactions with Americans in the United States (Interview, 1/10/96).

My interviews with officials in Thailand and Laos tended to be more structured than with Deng and his mother. I sought specific information about Hmong people's experiences in Thailand and Laos. Knowing that I would not have opportunities for follow-up discussions, I needed to make sure that I asked all the questions I had during the one interview I had with each official. While

talking with officials in Thailand and Laos, I asked 3 broad categories of questions about: (a) the lives and living conditions/circumstances of the Hmong in the refugee camps in Thailand and the educational opportunities for children and adults in the camps, (b) the living conditions in Laos before, during and after the Vietnam War and Hmong involvement in the Vietnam War, and (c) the Hmong exodus to Thailand and their subsequent transition to and resettlement in third countries.

Audio tapes and videotapes. Audio tapes were made of all literacy lessons and interviews with the teacher, Deng, his mother, and officials in Thailand and Laos in order to supplement participant observation records and for further data analysis. Portions of the tapes from literacy lessons and interviews were catalogued and transcribed. Tapes of interviews with Mrs. Weber and all tapes of tutoring Deng at his home were professionally transcribed. Video tapes were made of all literacy lessons during the *Maniac Magee* unit to permit detailed analyses of the interactions of participants (i.e., teacher & students, students & students) and the classroom instruction. I watched, rewatched and catalogued all video tapes so that I could determine themes and trends in the data.

Field notes. I observed Mrs. Weber and her students during classroom lessons and activities. I took written notes about the instruction and student interactions during classroom literacy activities and during the other subjects across the year. Field notes served as a way to document the events in the classroom and trace my questions and inferences relative to what occurred in

the classroom. They also served as a way to maintain informal ongoing analysis of my data.

After taking initial field notes in Mrs. Weber's class each time I was in her room, I went home at a later time and elaborated on the field notes by adding additional thoughts and ideas relative to what I saw and interpreted in Mrs. Weber's classroom. I gave copies of all of my field notes to Mrs. Weber on a continuous and ongoing basis. These field notes often served as a stimulus for conversation about events and circumstances in Mrs. Weber's classroom.

Table 2 gives an overview of field notes taken in her classroom during the 1994-95 school year. Shaded regions in the fourth column represent field notes taken during lessons pertaining to the *Maniac Magee* text.

Work Samples. I collected samples of Deng's written work during the spring term of 1995. While most copies of work I collected pertained to literacy lessons, I also collected work from all the different subjects that I observed across the term. All of Deng's written work pertaining to the unit created for *Maniac Magee* was collected and copied. I used the written work samples to describe Deng's progress in and response to his literacy instruction.

Data Analysis Procedures

I began informal data analysis as I collected and catalogued data. Once all data for the unit were collected, I watched the entire corpus of video tapes over the unit (i.e., 18 lessons) pertaining to *Maniac Magee* and took ongoing analytic field notes as I watched the lessons. In particular, I addressed the following questions as I watched the lessons: (1) What was available in the

Table 2

Dissertation Data Source Table of Field Notes for the 1994-95 School Year in

Mrs. Weber's Classroom

Date of Field notes	Subjects:	Date of Field notes:	Subjects:
1. 10/18/94	Reading	24. 5/9/95	*Maniac Magee*
2. 10/25/94	Reading	25. 5/10/95	*Maniac Magee*
3. 11/4/94	Art	26. 5/11/95	*Maniac Magee*
4. 11/11/94	Reading	27. 5/12/95	*Maniac Magee*
5. 1/19/95	Reading	28. 5/15/95	*Maniac Magee*
6. 1/27/95	Reading	29. 5/16/95	District Reading Tests
7. 2/3/95	Reading	30. 5/17/95	District Reading Tests
8. 2/10/95	Reading	31. 5/18/95	Art
9. 3/3/95	Reading, Social St.	32. 5/19/95	District Reading Tests
10. 3/6/95	Spelling, Reading, Math, Social St.	33. 5/22/95	*Maniac Magee*
11. 3/8/95	Social St.	34. 5/23/95	*Maniac Magee*, Deng's house
12. 3/9/95	Field trip	35. 5/24/95	Safety Picnic
13. 3/16/95	Social St., Spelling	36. 5/25/95	*Maniac Magee*
14. 3/21/95	Social St., Reading	37. 5/26/95	*Maniac Magee*, Spelling
15. 3/24/95	Reading, Music, Recess, Spelling, Social St.	38. 5/28/95	Reflections
16. 3/28/95	Reading	39. 5/30/95	*Maniac Magee*, Recess
17. 3/29/95	Deng's Conference	40. 5/31/95	*Maniac Magee*, Math, Science
18. 3/31/95	Reading	41. 6/1/95	*Maniac Magee*, Recess
19. 4/4/95	Reading, Social St.	42. 6/2/95	*Maniac Magee*, Recess
20. 4/13/95	Deng's house	43. 6/5/95	*Maniac Magee*, Recess
21. 4/27/95	Reading	44. 6/6/95	*Maniac Magee*, Recess, Deng's house
22. 5/4/95	Reading	45. 6/7/95	*Maniac Magee*
22. 5/5/95	Reading	46. 6/8/95	*Maniac Magee*, Deng's house
23. 5/8/95	Reading	47. 6/9/95	*Maniac Magee*

environment for students to learn? (2) How do/would I know what students were learning? (3) When did Deng appear to have opportunities to learn literacy and why did I think that? (4) Where are "pieces" in the data? and (5) How did these "pieces" appear to connect to other pieces? Next, I systematically studied all field notes taken during the unit, teacher interviews, and tutoring sessions in Deng's home from the spring of 1995. I studied the interviews to get a sense of Mrs. Weber's goals and views pertaining to the unit. I studied the transcripts of tutoring sessions with Deng because I knew that we regularly discussed characters and events in the *Maniac Magee* text as we worked at Deng's house.

Using the procedures above, I began to address my first analytic research question (i.e. What were the apparent "rules" which governed what it was possible to talk and write about and how it was possible to do so in the context of Deng's literacy unit?). However, while I had a general sense of the interactions that occurred during lessons, I wanted to look more specifically at the nature of those interactions because of the central role that those interactions play in student learning opportunities. According to Florio-Ruane (1989) by analyzing classroom talk "--its organization and patterns of participation--researchers find that the classroom's hidden curriculum or normative nature is intimately entwined with academic learning" (p. 12). Thus, I chose a subset of 5 of the 18 video taped lessons to examine closely to see who contributed to the classroom conversations, how they contributed, and the patterns of interaction that occurred during conversations. I chose the five focus

video taped lessons to represent a range of factors: time (i.e., from the beginning, middle, and end of the unit), type of lesson (i.e., 3 whole-class & 2 small-group), and instructional activities (i.e., teacher-led lessons and discussions, student-led discussions, and cooperative activities such as creating character maps).

Also, after studying my available data, it became clear to me that it would not be possible to address my second analytic research question (i.e., Deng's access to classroom literacy content and practices) given the data sources I had already collected. First, Deng never once voluntarily spoke during any of the 18 whole-group reading lessons. Second, Deng and his classmates produced little actual written work during the course of the unit. Finally, Deng was rarely called upon during whole-group lessons. Thus, because Deng did little actual writing or talking during much of the unit, the data I had collected did not give me a window in to Deng's thinking about and understandings of the literacy unit or the discursive practices associated with the unit.8

Additionally, during the four-week unit, I observed Deng in interactions during two primary settings: the whole-class discussions led by Mrs. Weber and the small-group discussions during which students worked cooperatively without direct teacher guidance. While watching the video tapes of the lessons,

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8 I was also concerned about this issue during data collection in the Spring of 1995. I attempted to work through this problem by doing things such as having Deng engage in interactive journal writing with me from week to week during the focus tradebook unit; however, this did not prove to be successful--perhaps because we only wrote weekly back and forth to one another when I tutored Deng at his home and perhaps because Deng was still struggling to write and speak in English. Thus, writing in an informal journal in English did not necessarily give Deng an adequate forum to express his thoughts, ideas and confusions.

I noticed that Deng interacted in very different ways in these two settings. In the large group, Deng said virtually nothing, while in the small group he raised questions, talked with his peers, and in general, seemed to participate in observable ways. Because of these obvious differences in participation, I became interested in understanding the nature of interactions in each of these two contexts and the manner in which these two contexts supported, facilitated, or possibility inhibited opportunities for Deng to learn about both literacy skills and processes as well as about the content studied within the unit. To engage in this analysis, I turned to an important analytic tool: the viewing session (Erickson & Shultz, 1982).

Erickson and Shultz (1982) suggest that a carefully and thoughtfully conducted viewing session provides an important means for analyzing a set of data from both the insider's (i.e., Deng's) and outsider's (i.e., my) perspective. In effect, the participants in the original activities being viewed become researchers too by joining with the researcher to analyze and interpret the data. These viewing sessions are not simulated recalls. The insiders are not asked to try to remember what they were thinking or feeling or to remember the impact of particular events. Instead, the insiders are asked to describe what they see on videotapes--to stop the tapes at any points where they sense confusion, conflict, tension, or points of interest and to discuss what they think is happening at these points.

Thus, the viewing sessions served as an important analytical tool because they enabled me to get a sense of Deng's perspectives on his own

school experiences. Erickson and Shultz (1992) assert that "what has been

most conspicuously absent from the recent research literature . . . is the first-

person voice of the student. On the topic of student experience, students

themselves are the ultimate insiders and experts" (p. 480). The viewing

sessions provided a source of insight into the video taped lessons in the target

unit from the insider whose voice I was most interested in throughout the

research: Deng's.

Table 3 illustrates the dates of viewing sessions conducted with Deng

Table 3

Overview of Focus Viewing Sessions and Lessons for the Unit

Pertaining to the *Maniac Magee* Text

VIEWING SESSION DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION		
Date of Viewing Session	Date of Lesson	Type of Lesson
1. 2/06/1996	5/22/1995	Whole-group
2. 2/13/1996	5/30/1995	Small-group
3. 2/29/1996	5/10/1995	Whole-group
4. 3/05/1996	6/09/1995	Small-group
5. 3/14/1996	6/05/1995	Whole-group

and Vue in the order in which they were conducted. Additionally, the table indicates the types of lessons that were viewed during the sessions. I chose to alternate between analyzing whole-group and small-group lessons during the viewing sessions because I was particularly interested in Deng's interpretations of his experiences within these different participation structures.

To ensure that Deng would be comfortable talking during the viewing session and to make sure that language itself would not preclude his involvement in the data analysis, I enlisted Vue who agreed to help bridge the language and culture gap that Deng and I sometimes experienced. Deng, Vue, and I focused our analyses on video tapes of three whole-group lessons and two small-group activities. In summary, the data set analyzed in this study focused on five lessons within a single intradisciplinary language arts unit based on the novel *Maniac Magee*.

Each viewing session was conducted at Deng's house. Prior to showing a tape of a lesson, I told Deng that he was in control of the manner in which we viewed the lesson. I started the lesson and told him that he could stop the tape at any point during the lesson that he chose. I suggested that he might want to stop the lesson if (a) he was reminded of something else when an event occurred, (b) he found something particularly interesting or intriguing, (c) he found something to be confusing or (d) he had any other reason to stop the tape. When he stopped the tape to make comments or ask questions, I used probing questions to try to get a sense of his thinking. My goal with the viewing sessions was to understand how Deng interpreted classroom practices and

literacy activities and why he chose to stop the tape at the points he selected.

Deng was invited to speak in English or Hmong during these sessions. All

Hmong comments were translated by Vue during the ongoing discussion.

Table 4 provides an overview of all lessons and viewing sessions

pertaining to the unit over the text *Maniac Magee*. Additionally, the table

indicates the dates and types of specific lessons--whole-group and/or small-

group, and data sources available for all lessons and viewing sessions.

Shaded regions indicate lessons for which viewing sessions were conducted.

Viewing sessions were analyzed in the following manner. First, I

transcribed all English portions of the viewing sessions. Second, I watched and

rewatched video tapes of the viewing sessions to study the manner in which the

participants interacted. Next, I carefully examined, catalogued, and categorized

the times when the tape was stopped during viewing sessions to get a sense of

Deng's reasons for stopping the lessons and his thinking about the lessons at

those points in time. Finally, I studied the nature of Deng's and Vue's

responses to my probing questions during the times that the video tape was

stopped and during the follow-up conversations after viewing sessions.

I was interested in comparing Deng's responses to the lessons during

the viewing sessions and the actual events in the lessons themselves.

Therefore, I analyzed each lesson with respect to who spoke, the nature of what

was discussed, and the content discussed. I identified who spoke during each

Table 4

Data Analysis Source Chart for Lessons Pertaining to *Maniac Magee* Unit

Dates of Lessons:	Field notes	Audio taped	Video taped	Whole-Group	Small-Group	Viewing Sessions
1. 5/9/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
2. 5/10/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
3. 5/11/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
4. 5/12/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
5. 5/15/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Journal Yes	
6. 5/22/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
7. 5/23/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
8. 5/25/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Journal Yes	
9. 5/26/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
10. 5/30/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Journal Yes	Yes
11. 5/31/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Discuss Yes	
12. 6/1/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deng ill Yes	
13. 6/2/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
14. 6/5/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
15. 6/6/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
16. 6/7/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
17. 6/8/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
18. 6/9/95	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Discuss Yes	Yes

of the five target lessons. I also counted the number of turns taken by each speaker and made a chart so that I could discern patterns of oral contributions to the conversation. I searched for patterns regarding who gained and held the conversational floor and how the conversational floor was gained and by whom. I noticed that conversations during whole-group lessons seemed to cluster around particular topics, so I identified the nature and quantity of central topics within whole-group lessons.

I present my findings from these analyses in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 is structured around the target whole-group lessons, and chapter 5 is structured around the target small-group lessons. In each chapter I present my analyses of the lessons or activities within each participation structure, and then I present my interpretation of Deng's analyses of the lessons and activities within each participation structure. Finally, I discuss Deng's literacy learning opportunities with respect to each participation structure at the end of each chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHOLE-GROUP LESSONS

The question I address in this study concerns Deng's opportunities to learn literacy through participation in his classroom literacy curriculum. To that end, I analyze the experiences that Deng had during the literature-based thematic unit focused on the text *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1990). I then compare and contrast my take on his experiences in the unit with his interpretation as we engaged in a collaborative analysis. In the first section of this chapter, I overview my take on three whole-group lessons with respect to the general literacy content covered and the rules and norms for engagement during the lessons. In the second section, I present my interpretation of Deng's take on the same three whole-group lessons. In the final section, I discuss dimensions of opportunity that are germane to literacy learning in the context of the three focus whole-group lessons.

The Three Whole-Group Focus Lessons: My Perspective

I start with an overview of the beginning of the May 22, 1995, whole-group lesson as a backdrop against which I address the following questions for the three lessons (i.e., the May 10, 1995; May 22, 1995; & June 5, 1995, lessons): (a) Who spoke during the lessons? (b) What did conversants discuss? and (c) How did conversants engage in the conversations?

On May 22, as was done every day while reading the *Maniac Magee* text, the students in Mrs. Weber's class were seated on chairs in a semi-circle around her in the front of the room. They had been reading the text together for

5 days. They had already read that Maniac (a Caucasian boy) moved in with his feuding aunt and uncle when he was 3 after his parents died in a train wreck. Further, Maniac ran away from his aunt and uncle's home at the age of 12 when he could no longer endure their fighting, making his way to a town called Two-Mills, Pennsylvania. While in Two-Mills, Maniac bumped into Amanda Beale (an African-American girl about his age) and was invited to live with her family when her parents found out that he was homeless.

This 40-minute lesson is typical of most whole-group lessons. As the lessons begin, Mrs. Weber either reminds the children about a key topic or issue they had discussed the previous day, or she prompts them to consider a theme-related issue (e.g., homelessness, loneliness, prejudice). Further, she sometimes identifies curricular goals (e.g., comprehension strategies, literary elements) she plans to discuss for the day.

On May 22, Mrs. Weber began the lesson by indicating three foci for the day: (1) contrasts and conflicts in the story, (2) figures of speech used by the author, and (3) tall tales. She then read aloud as students followed along, turning their pages in unison with her.

Mrs. Weber read about Maniac diligently helping Mrs. Beale with household chores such as doing the dishes, mowing the lawn, walking the dog, cleaning his room, and so forth. After reading several paragraphs, Mrs. Weber stopped reading and asked, "Are those all things that kids have to do within a household?" Several students responded in unison, "Nooo," and the class began a 4- to 5-minute discussion about doing chores at home. During this

conversation, two children made comments about their chores at home, and Mrs. Weber asked each of them a short series of questions that extended and clarified their initial comments. Additionally, Mrs. Weber talked about the importance of children assuming responsibilities around their homes, telling a personal story about doing household chores as a child. The pattern continued throughout the lesson: Mrs. Weber, or a child she selected, read an excerpt from the story; the class discussed the excerpt for several minutes; and she suggested that they continue reading the story.

<u>Who Spoke During the Lessons?</u>

As the brief description above illustrates, whole-group lessons involved a series of ongoing conversations about the story; however, during those conversations, very few children actually spoke. As I mentioned in chapter 3, 22 children typically participated in whole-group lessons. Table 5 gives an overview of the children who spoke and the number of times they spoke during the three target whole-group lessons.[9] This analysis revealed some interesting participation patterns.

First, Mrs. Weber consistently took the most turns--approximately half of the speaking turns during all three whole-group lessons. Second, she frequently asked questions that the children responded to in unison. A third

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[9] I determined the number of speaking turns by looking at the transcripts of each lesson and counting the number of times each person made comments during the lesson. Some turns were longer than others, and this is not reflected in the chart. Additionally, some turns involved either the teacher or children reading the story whereas some turns pertained to actual comments about the story.

pattern reflects the small number of students who actually spoke during these lessons. One girl (Sally), three boys (Dan, Bill, & Chris) and Mrs. Weber were the primary contributors during all three whole-group lessons, accounting for well over three quarters of all comments. The remainder of the comments were primarily unison responses.

Table 5 gives an overview of primary speakers during the lesson. The highlighted boxes with asterisks indicate participants who made the greatest numbers of contributions to the three conversations. While Table 5 illustrates who spoke during the whole-group lessons, it does not shed light on the ways participants engaged in the conversations, nor does it address what conversants discussed during lessons. Students' modes of participation are closely tied to the discussion topics, and both contribute to Deng's and his peers' opportunities to learn. In the next section, I analyze these issues as I explore what was discussed.

What Did Conversants Discuss During the Whole-Group Lessons?

Mrs. Weber had developed a unit plan prior to beginning the unit with her students. She identified homelessness, loneliness, and prejudice as three major themes in the story *Maniac Magee*; tall tales and figures of speech (i.e., simile, metaphor, hyperbole & personification) as literary elements she considered important to the story; prediction, summarization, building prior knowledge and character development as important aspects of comprehension instruction; and conflicts and contrasts as dimensions to the story that were

important to address. She identified 11 activities to draw upon throughout the

unit. (See Appendix A for a copy of her unit.) However, over the course of the

unit, the class engaged in only 3 of these 11 activities: (a) journal writing three

Table 5

Number of Turns Taken by Participants During Whole-Group Lessons

Category	Name	Number of Turns 5/10/95	Number of Turns 5/22/95	Number of Turns 6/5/95
Girls	1. Sally	28*	48*	27*
	2. Lisa	11	0	5
	3. Rashiya	7	absent	absent
	4. Shondra	1	0	0
	5. Reshaun	1	2	3
	6. Yesenia	1	0	0
	7. Kelly	0	1	0
	8. LeShon	0	2	2
	9. Lakisha	0	0	4
	10. Maria	0	0	0
	11. Larissa	0	0	4
Boys	12. Dan	45*	22*	15*
	13. Bill	17*	10*	4*
	14. Chris	7*	18*	16*
	15. Miguel	7	3	4
	16. Cam	5	0	15
	17. Tran	5	1	7
	18. Don	1	absent	absent
	19. Ron	1	5	1
	20. Dusty	0	1	1
	21. Timothy	1	0	5
	22. Deng	0	0	14
Teacher	23. Mrs. Weber	149*	127*	158*
Group Responses	24. Multiple Students	29*	19*	39*

times across the unit, (b) making a character web once during the unit, and (c) discussing aspects of the story in small groups twice during the unit. These were completed in small groups and are the focus of chapter 5.

Although Mrs. Weber had identified specific goals for the unit, the content of the story itself and the manner in which whole-group lessons were structured had the biggest impact on the actual content of the lessons. I return to my discussion of the May 22, lesson and a description of how Mrs. Weber typically began lessons to lay the initial groundwork to validate this assertion. Recall that Mrs. Weber typically begins lessons by reminding the children about a topic or issue they have discussed or by identifying a theme-related issue pertaining to the story. On May 22, Mrs. Weber told the class that they would focus on contrasts and conflicts during the lesson, stating:

> Thanks to the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Beale, he [Maniac] has an address. As we read today and as we look for all the parts of speech and figures of speech and everything else, I would like you to keep in mind the different contrasts in this story. And we are going to start jotting some of those things down because right now you know a lot of contrasts that you see, and remember a contrast is a difference between two things (Lesson transcript, 5/22/95).

However, despite identifying contrasts and conflicts as important dimensions to discuss that day, neither Mrs. Weber nor the students talked about contrasts or conflicts until the very end of the lesson when the class constructed 2 charts--one on contrasts and one on conflicts. Thus, while Mrs.

Weber began and ended the lesson focusing on two dimensions of the story that she deemed important according to her unit plan, the content of most of it was not driven by the dimensions of contrasts and conflicts. Rather, most of the lesson could be characterized as a series of topic-centered episodes focused on events or characters in the story. The whole-group lessons for May 10, and June 5, 1995, were also composed of a series of topic-centered episodes.

Topic-centered episodes are usually bounded at the beginning and end when Mrs. Weber reads an excerpt from the text or chooses a child to read an excerpt from the text. Once a segment of text is read, the teacher usually asks the class a question pertaining to some aspect of the text, and the class engages in a 2- to 5-minute conversation until either the teacher returns to the text or selects a child to read. Thus, four features typically characterize topic-centered episodes: (a) episodes are bounded by excerpts from the text, (b) the teacher usually starts the discussion by asking a question pertaining to the text just read; the remainder of the conversation relates to the teacher's question and/or the text just read, (c) there is a notable shift in the manner of interacting between episodes (i.e., from reading the text aloud to asking and answering questions to reading the text again), and (d) there is a distinct and notable shift in topics from episode to episode. Columns 3 through 6 in Table 6 give an overview of each feature just mentioned with respect to the three focus whole-group lessons. The dark shaded boxes with an "X" indicate that the feature exists for the corresponding topic-centered episode identified in column 2. The

lightly shaded boxes with an "Xv" in column 5 indicate that a variation of the feature exists for corresponding episodes identified in column 2.

I address three areas in the remainder of this subsection. First, I discuss overall patterns that Table 6 reveals about topic-centered episodes with respect to each of the four features identified above. Next, I present selected excerpts from transcripts of the three focus lessons to serve as concrete illustrations of the patterns I identify. Finally, I draw on excerpts from the lesson transcripts to illustrate an episode that stands in contrast to a "typical" topic-centered episode.

A pattern revealed in the third column is that the beginnings and endings of lessons are the only times lessons are not bounded at both ends by excerpts read aloud from the text. This deviation from the typical pattern makes sense because Mrs. Weber's lessons often begin with a discussion about the current lesson focus or comments about connections to previous discussions and end with a recap of what has been discussed or an overview of what might happen in the story.

Notice in the fourth column that Mrs. Weber initiated the conversation with questions 26 times during the 36 episodes. Even though she didn't initiate the conversation the remaining 10 times, Mrs. Weber controlled the content of the episodes in other ways in 5 of the remaining 10 episodes. For example, during the fifth episode on May 22, and the third and fifth episodes on June 5, Mrs. Weber selected students to read from the text and then assisted them as they read aloud by helping them to pronounce words and showing them how to read with fluency and expression.

Table 6

Features of Topic-Centered Episodes for Three Target Whole-Group Lessons

LESSON DATE	EPISODE NUMBER	Bounded by Text Excerpt	Teacher Asks 1st Question	Open Conversation	Distinct Topic & Topic Shift
5/10/95	1			X	X
	2		X	X	X
	3	X	X	X	X
	4	X	X	X	X
	5	X	X	X	X
	6	X	X	X	X
	7	X	X	X	X
	8	X	X	X	X
	9	X	X	Xv	X
	10	X	X	Xv	X
	11	X	X	Xv	X
	12	X	X	Xv	X
5/22/95	1				X
	2	X	X	X	X
	3	X		X	X
	4	X	X	X	X
	5	X			X
	6	X	X	X	X
	7	X	X	Xv	X
	8	X	X		X
	9	X		X	X
	10			X	X
	11				X
6/5/95	1		X	X	X
	2		X	Xv	X
	3	X			X
	4	X		X	X
	5	X			X
	6	X	X	Xv	X
	7	X	X		X
	8	X	X	X	X
	9	X		X	X
	10	X	X	X	X
	11	X	X	X	X
	12	X	X	Xv	X
	13		X	X	X

Mrs. Weber did not initially direct the flow of the conversation during the remaining 5 episodes; rather, the flow of the conversation was directed by two of the students (i.e., Sally & Chris) who typically contributed to the conversation. Sally made four comments about the text that initiated the conversational segments of 3 topic-centered episodes on May 22, and 1 episode on June 5, and Chris asked a question once that initiated the conversational segment of the fourth topic-centered episode on June 5. Thus, Mrs. Weber initiated the flow of the conversation during 31 of the 36 episodes and two students initiated the flow of the conversation during the remaining 5 episodes. This finding is significant because it reveals that Mrs. Weber's concerns and questions, rather than the children's, initially framed the content discussed within the topic-centered episodes.

A typical pattern is illustrated in the fifth column: (a) text segment read, (b) conversation, (c) next text segment read. This pattern occurs in 21 of the 36 episodes. A common variation on this pattern is when a segment of text is read, there is a brief conversation, another segment of text is read, there is another brief conversation, then a segment of text is read again, with the same general topic being discussed throughout this pattern variation. This pattern variation occurred in 8 episodes. Thus, either the original pattern or the variation on the original pattern occurred during 29 of the 36 episodes.

The defining feature of the topic-centered episodes is a distinct shift in topics from episode to episode. Each episode centers around some aspect of the text. With the possible exception of the first topic-centered episode for each

lesson, most episodes focus on some aspect of the text read or to be read. I highlight the first two episodes for the May 10 lesson to illustrate these points.

During the first topic-centered episode for that date, Mrs. Weber reminded the students that they had discussed the themes of prejudice, loneliness, and homelessness the pervious day and that they should keep those themes in mind as they read the text. Thus, this episode was indirectly related to the text. During the second episode on May 10, Mrs. Weber told the students that they would "read about the birth of a legend" (i.e., how Maniac came to be a legend, Lesson transcript, 5/10/95). She then asked the students if they knew any legends. During the remainder of that episode, the students discussed legends they knew about, and then Mrs. Weber began reading about Maniac--the legend. The topics for the remaining episodes for that date are closely linked to the different segments of text that were read that day.

An interesting feature of how the topics within each episode are linked to segments of text is illustrated by students' discussions of familiar legends: The teacher frequently connects text-related topics to her life or the lives of the children. Additionally, sometimes children relate topics from the text to their own lives. Table 7 presents an overview of the numbers of times that the teacher relates the topic being discussed within a topic-centered episode to her life or the lives of the children and the number of times that the children relate the text topic to their own lives during the 3 focus whole-group lessons. As Table 7 illustrates, these connections form an important characteristic of the

topics discussed during the episodes. Also, over half of those textual connections occur when the teacher connects the students' lives to the text.

I use excerpts from the tenth topic-centered episode during the May 10, whole-group lesson to further illustrate features of the topic-centered episodes. The entire 2-to 3-minute episode centers on Maniac's first encounter with Amanda Beale and his persistent attempts to convince her to loan him one of her books. This was a distinct topic that differed from the preceding episode and the one that follows.

The teacher chose Tran to read at the beginning of the episode and Lisa to read at the end of the episode, bounding the episode on both ends by excerpts from the text. After Tran read a text segment where Maniac pleads with Amanda to borrow one of her books, Mrs. Weber asked, "Who does she, who does he sound like right now? You just heard it." This illustrates the second feature of the topic-centered episodes: Mrs. Weber initiated the conversation after Tran read the text by asking a framing question. Sally responded to her

Table 7

Number of Times Text Related to Lives of Conversants During

Topic-Centered Episodes

Date	Times Teacher Relates Text to Own Life	Times Teacher Relates Text to Students' Lives	Times Students Relate Text to Own Lives	Total
5/10/95	3	7	3	13
5/22/95	2	7	3	12
6/5/95	1	3	3	7

question, "A beggar." Miguel said, "Oh, like Thomas Raccoon!" Mrs. Weber affirmed Miguel's response and reminded the students that like Thomas Raccoon (a character in a book that the teacher had recently read aloud to the class), Maniac was being persistent. Mrs. Weber then asked Tran to continue reading. Tran read about Amanda tossing a book towards Maniac that "came flapping [at him] like a wounded duck" (Spinelli, 1990, p. 13). Later in that same episode, the following discussion ensued:

Mrs. Weber:	Well, he got his book. Does persistence pay off?
Dan:	Yeah.
Unison response:	Yeah.
Teacher:	Sometimes.
Dan:	Many times.
Teacher:	How many of you are persistent with your parents? How many of you are persistent with your teacher? How many of you know that if I say, "No," it sticks? How many feel you can work around that? How do you try to work around it?
Several students:	Negotiating!
Dan:	Negotiate and talking with (overlapping speech with Sally)
Sally:	With my parents, I might like every once, like they say, "No," I might ask them again, then I stop.

This episode was a variation on the "typical" pattern of text - conversation - text, because Mrs. Weber asked Tran to continue reading in the middle of the episode; however, the theme of persistence was the central topic across the entire episode. During this episode Mrs. Weber asked the children to relate the notion of persistence to a character (i.e., Thomas Raccoon) in another book they had read aloud and discussed together, and she asked them to think about whether or not they were ever persistent with people in their lives such as their parents and her. Finally, Sally related the conversation to her own life and her interactions with her parents.

While most topic-centered episodes proceed in a manner similar to the pattern discussed above, there are a few times when episodes do not follow the pattern. For example, occasionally, Mrs. Weber chooses a child to read aloud who has difficulty doing so. When this occurs, Mrs. Weber provides a great deal of assistance to the struggling child and there is little or no conversation about the actual text. For example, on June 5, Mrs. Weber asked Deng to read aloud from the text, and this was difficult for him.

In the story, the class read that Maniac accepted a dare from several kids, agreeing to enter Mr. Finsterwald's back yard and stay for 10 minutes. Finsterwald hated kids and was terribly mean to them. All kids in the neighborhood, except Maniac, were terrified of him. Mrs. Weber had just read that a child named Russell was going to time Maniac's stay in the Finsterwald's yard. Russell was Maniac's friend and, as such, was very nervous about Maniac attempting this feat. After she read from the text, Mrs. Weber asked

Deng to read. She began by pronouncing the word "Russell" for Deng and he started reading the word she had just helped him to pronounce.

Deng:	Russell his
Mrs. Weber:	throat
Deng:	throat too dry to speak rai
Mrs. Weber:	Raised his hand
Deng:	raised his hand for, from 10 minutes, 15 kid and
Mrs. Weber:	possibly
Deng:	possibly the universe
Mrs. Weber:	held their breath
Deng:	held their breath. The only sound made inside their
Mrs. Weber:	heads
Deng:	head
Mrs. Weber:	heads
Deng:	heads
Mrs. Weber:	Um hum

As this episode continued, Mrs. Weber helped Deng with most of the words in the few sentences that he actually read. There was no discussion about the content of the text read and little actual text read. Rather, Mrs. Weber's focus was helping Deng to pronounce the words in the text. She provided a great deal of assistance--even to the point of making sure that he pronounced the "s" on the word, heads. This episode was one of the only times Deng ever spoke aloud during any of the 18 whole-group lessons in the unit,

and this was not by his choice; he never voluntarily spoke aloud in the whole group.

This episode stands in stark contrast to typical topic-centered episodes where the teacher or a child read the text and then the class engaged in a conversation about the content of the text read and made connections between the text and their lives. Episodes such as this were rare. For example, during the 3 focus whole-group lessons there was only one other time when Mrs. Weber selected a child to read aloud who had difficulty doing so, and in that case she also helped the child pronounce the words in the text.

In summary, there were four distinct features that characterized topic-centered episodes: (a) episodes were bounded by excerpts from the text, (b) the teacher usually started the discussion segment of the episode by asking a question pertaining to the text just read, (c) a notable shift in the manner of interacting between episodes occurred (i.e., from reading the text aloud to asking and answering questions to reading the text again), and (d) distinct and notable shift in topics were seen from episode to episode. Conversations during the topic-centered episodes focused on the content of the story, (especially in terms of characters in the story and story events) and connections between the content of the story and the personal lives of the teacher and students. These topic-centered episodes are important because it is during the conversations embedded within the episodes that most lesson content is covered.

In the preceding section, I primarily discussed the structure of whole-group lessons and the ways in which the structure (i.e., topic-centered episodes) influenced the content of lessons. In the next section, I focus on the manner in which conversants engaged in talk during the conversational segments of the topic-centered episodes.

How Did Conversants Engage in the Conversations?

Issues such as how conversations are structured and who is sanctioned to speak affect who has access to the conversation, what gets discussed, and who influences the ongoing discussion. Access to and influence upon conversations impacts students' learning opportunities.

After studying the 18 whole-group video taped lessons and carefully watching and rewatching the 3 focus whole-group lessons, I make the following assertions to characterize conversants' engagement in conversations during the lessons:

- The teacher asked many questions and they were almost always addressed to the student "audience" in general; rarely did she address a question directly to a specific child. Thus, anyone could assume the "conversational floor".

- Mrs. Weber usually asked known-answer questions about events, characters in the text, or both.

- Often, students responded to the teacher's questions by speaking without raising their hands; sometimes, however, they raised their hands and the teacher called on them.

- Conversations occurred in a typical I-R-E (initiate-respond-evaluate) pattern during lessons (Cazden, 1988).

- Conversants usually "displayed" knowledge about the text, connections between the text and their lives, or both, during lessons rather than raising issues, questions or concerns.

I drew on data from the three focus whole-group lessons to confirm or refute my assertions about the manner in which conversants engaged in conversations. First, I explain how I used the data to examine the first assumptions, then I discuss how I drew on the data to explore the final two assertions. I focus on a subset of Mrs. Weber's questions within topic-centered episodes to study my assertions pertaining to teacher questions. Recall that one of the defining features of topic-centered episodes was when Mrs. Weber asked the initial question after a segment of text had been read by her or by a student chosen to read aloud. To address my first three assertions, I carefully examined all 26 of Mrs. Weber's initial questions across the 3 whole-group focus lessons.

As I rewatched the video taped lessons and examined the 26 teacher questions I asked myself 3 questions: (1) To whom does Mrs. Weber address her initial questions? (2) Does Mrs. Weber primarily ask known-answer questions? and (3) How do the children respond to Mrs. Weber's questions? With respect to the first question, I examine whether Mrs. Weber calls on anyone directly after asking each question, or if she directs her question to a particular student. In all 26 cases, Mrs. Weber did not appear to direct her questions to

any particular child; that is not to say, however, that she never directed a question to a particular child. While she did ask direct questions to several students over the course of the 3 focus lessons, it was not typical to address a question to a particular child directly. This analysis confirmed my first assumption: The conversational floor tended to be open following Mrs. Weber's questions.

As I studied the 26 initial teacher questions, I asked the second question: whether the teacher's questions were directly related to the segments of text the class read, and if questions were "known-answer" questions about events or characters in the story. I suspected that Mrs. Weber asked the children literal questions to which there are answers directly "in" the text, and I wanted to look carefully at the data to see if this was the case.

All 26 questions that Mrs. Weber asked were directly related to the text read in class; however, not all of the questions were literal, known-answer, questions. Rather, the 26 initial questions she asked fell into four categories: (a) 6 literal questions based on knowledge of the text that the class had previously read (i.e., "Who does she, who does he sound like right now? You just heard it," Lesson transcript, 5/10/95), (b) 6 questions that required the students to connect some aspect of the text to their own lives (i.e., "Do you know any legends?" Lesson transcript, 5/10/95), (c) 10 inferential questions that required the students to answer based on knowledge of the text and/or personal background knowledge (i.e., "How would anybody get a name like Maniac?" Lesson transcript, 5/10/95), and (d) 4 prediction questions that required the

students to guess about something they had not yet read (i.e., "Put your book to your chest. Why would she be carrying books?" Lesson transcript, 5/10/95).[10]

This analysis revealed that my first assumption was incomplete. The types of questions Mrs. Weber asked the children were more complex than I had realized. This finding suggests that children's opportunities to learn in this context are partially predicated on their abilities to make complex connections between their background knowledge and information inferred from the text.

My third question was how children responded to the teacher's questions; that is, can the students just respond openly and at will? Is it necessary for them to raise their hands and be acknowledged by the teacher? Is a combination of both approaches sanctioned by the teacher? My sense is that the latter approach is the norm in the classroom. From previous analyses, I already knew that the teacher rarely calls directly on a child to respond. This means that "gaining the floor" is primarily the responsibility of the child.

Table 8 gives an overview of how students responded to the teacher's initial questions at the beginning of topic-centered episodes. I briefly describe several potentially confusing features of Table 8, then I discuss the patterns revealed. First, note that sometimes there are two names side-by-side in the column entitled "Student Respondent". When there was overlapping speech between several students during a response, I listed both individuals involved the overlapping speech. Second, the column labeled "Unsure" indicates that

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[10] Typically, prediction questions were preceded with the teacher command, "Put your book to your chest."

the child's image was not captured on the tape, so I could not tell from the video

tape whether a hand was raised and acknowledged.

As Table 8 illustrates, almost a third of the responses were responses in

unison where the children spoke in groups without raising their hands. One-

third of the responses were made by Sally, seven of the nine times without

raising her hand. The remaining third of the responses were divided among six

children. Chris and Dan, two of the children identified earlier as students who

Table 8

Manner in Which Students Responded to Teacher's Initial Questions During

Topic-Centered Episodes

DATE	EPISODE	STUDENT RESPONDENT	RESPONSE		
			Raised Hand?	Unsure?	Just Spoke?
5/10/95	2	Chris	X		
	3	Sally/Bill	X(Bill)		X(Sally)
	4	Dan			X
	5	Sally			X
	6	Unison/Sally			X
	7	Miguel	X		
	8	Miguel		?	
	9	Reshaun	X		
	10	Sally/Miguel	X(Miguel)		X(Sally)
	11	Sally			X
	12	Sally			X
5/22/95	2	Unison			X
	4	Sally	X		
	6	Rusty		?	
	7	Unison			X
	8	Sally/Dan			X
	9	Chris			X
6/5/95	1	Sally		?	
	2	Unison			X
	6	Unison			X
	7	Chris			X
	8	Unison			X
	10	Unison			X
	11	Unison			X
	12	Unison			X
	13	Bill	X		

contribute most to the overall large group discussions, usually spoke without raising their hands. The remaining children typically raised their hands to be acknowledged by the teacher before responding to her questions. An interesting pattern emerges from this analysis. Unsolicited responses to the teacher's questions were a fairly common occurrence; however, unsolicited responses were primarily given when the children responded to the teacher's questions in unison, or they were given by students such as Sally, Dan and Chris who typically did most of the talking during whole-group lessons. Children less likely to talk during whole-group lessons also appeared less likely to respond to the teacher's questions without direct permission to do so.

Gaining the floor to respond to the teacher's questions seems an important issue with respect to opportunity. First, when children express their thoughts and ideas, they are made public so that children can receive feedback from their peers and the teacher. Second, the ideas on the conversational floor are the ones that have the potential to influence the nature and flow of the conversation. Undoubtedly, receiving feedback and influencing the flow of the conversation both influence learning opportunities.

The final two assertions I wondered about pertained to: (a) whether or not conversations occurred in a typical I-R-E (initiate-respond-evaluate) pattern during lessons (Cazden, 1988), and (b) whether or not conversants usually "displayed" knowledge about the text and/or connections between the text and their lives during lessons rather than raising issues, questions or concerns during whole-group lessons.

To explore these assertions, I decided to look closely at several topic-centered episodes during each of the three target whole-group lessons to check for patterns both within and across lessons. First, I selected topic-centered episodes in the middle of lessons rather than at the beginning or end of lessons because episodes at the beginning and end of lessons tended to consist largely of either introductory or summary comments made by the teacher, and I wanted to examine episodes where there were conversational exchanges between the teacher and students. Second, I chose episodes that were typical (i.e., they had four common features: (1) they were bounded by excerpts from the text, (2) they started with a teacher-initiated question, (3) they reflected a shift in topics from episode to episode, and (4) they revealed a notable difference in the manner of interacting between episodes.

With these conditions in place, I chose to focus on episodes six and seven for the May 10, lesson; episodes four and six for the May 22, lesson; and episodes six and seven for the June 6, lesson. I discuss how I addressed my assertion pertaining to the I-R-E pattern first, then I discuss the ways that knowledge and information were shared during conversations.

Once I chose the target episodes, I read through the transcripts and labeled each response in the target episodes as an initiation, response, or evaluation. Then I counted the number of times the teacher and the students initiated, responded to or evaluated comments. This information is reported in Table 9. The shaded regions in the chart indicate the greatest number of responses in a particular category.

Several observations are worth noting about both the process of completing this analysis and the information contained in Table 9. First, there were many variations in the I-R-E pattern. Sometimes the teacher initiated a comment and several students responded before the teacher made an evaluative comment or perhaps just moved on to another initiating comment without evaluating the previous comments. Second, sometimes several categories of comments were included in one individual's turn. Third, sometimes the nature of the individual's comment made it difficult to discern which particular label (i.e., I, R, or E) was most appropriate in the given context.

I include an excerpt from the seventh topic-centered episode on May 10, to illustrate these points and the manner in which I labeled comments. In this episode, the class discussed how Maniac had run away from the home of his feuding aunt and uncle and was now homeless. They discussed options for

Table 9

Types of Responses by Different Participants During Six Selected

Topic-Centered Episodes

DATE	TYPE OF RESPONSE	TEACHER	STUDENTS
5/10/95	Initiate	13	2
	Respond	3	22
	Evaluate	15	1
5/22/95	Initiate	5	0
	Respond	2	9
	Evaluate	4	0
6/5/95	Initiate	5	2
	Respond	4	16
	Evaluate	9	0

where he might have found food and shelter. They suggested that he might have slept on a park bench, in a tunnel, under a bridge, and so forth. Mrs. Weber made the comment that their responses revealed that they were not from the country, and then Sally suggested that perhaps Maniac could sleep in a barn. Mrs. Weber responded:

> Mrs. Weber: Sure, in any of the outer buildings on a farm. I would usually go to a place where I might find farm animals. Why?
>
> Miguel: For food?
>
> Mrs. Weber: Well, maybe for food, but more than food.
>
> Chris: Um, but, I don't know what to call a horse's bedroom really. A trailer? A horse's trailer?
>
> Mrs. Weber: Maybe a horse trailer. Okay, why else?

The conversation continued until Lisa suggested that someone might want to find a place next to an animal in order to stay warm from the animal's body heat, and Mrs. Weber responded, "That's right!"

I labeled Mrs. Weber's first comment above as both an evaluation and an initiation. She suggested that Sally's comment was on track (i.e., "Sure") and then elaborated on why her comment made sense. Then Mrs. Weber asked a question to initiate further comments and ideas from the students. Thus, there was both an evaluation and an initiation in Mrs. Weber's turn. Miguel and Chris both responded to Mrs. Weber's original initiation. Mrs. Weber evaluated each of their responses as viable, but, clearly, they were not the responses she was

seeking. She continued to initiate additional comments until Lisa commented about an animal's body heat, and Mrs. Weber affirmed that this was the response she was seeking. The conversation then moved on to a different, but related, topic.

As the segment of conversation above indicates, and as Cazden (1988) has reported in her work, the I-R-E pattern is not always rigidly in place for conversants. Yet, it is clear from the conversational excerpt above and Table 9 that Mrs. Weber initiated most of the responses during the episodes examined for the three focus whole-group lessons. In fact, Mrs. Weber initiated 23 of the 27 comments in the target episodes; the students responded 47 times to Mrs. Weber's 9 times; and the students made evaluative comments once while Mrs. Weber made 28 evaluations in the target episodes. Clearly, Mrs. Weber did most of the initiating and evaluating, and the students did most of the responding during these target episodes.

The issue of who initiates, responds to, and evaluates comments within conversations is important with respect to opportunity. The fact that the I-R-E pattern is in place means that the students primarily respond to the teacher's issues, concerns, and questions pertaining to the text rather than their own. This, of course, is not a problem if the teacher's concerns and questions are similar to the students' concerns and questions. It could be a problem, however, if students have different concerns and questions, but feel, either implicitly or explicitly, that they must respond to the teacher's concerns and questions.

I turn now to the final assertion I sought to explore: whether conversants primarily "displayed" knowledge about the text, connections between the text and their lives, or both during whole-group lessons. I returned to the previous analysis to address this issue. For this analysis, I examined the nature of the students' responses and the manner in which they initiated conversations (even though they did so infrequently) during the same target episodes examined above.

The nature and quantity of students' responses during the six target episodes fell into three categories: (1) 10 evaluative comments about a character or event in the story (i.e., referring to Maniac, Chris said, "He's just too lazy to!" Lesson transcript, 5/22/95), (2) 32 comments that reflected a child's suggestion or idea based on the child's background knowledge or knowledge of characters or events in the story (i.e., referring to Maniac running away from his aunt & uncle's home Dan said, "I know it would be real, real bad for you growing up in that kind of house, but going out on the streets and eating out a dumpster and stuff..." Lesson transcript, 5/10/95), and (3) 2 "Yes/No" comments that either affirmed or contradicted someone else's idea. None of the student responses were questions to the teacher or the class about what she might have meant by her questions, nor did the students respond to the teacher by asking her to clarify something in the text.

As already indicated in the previous analysis, students only initiated topics in the conversation four times across all six target episode segments. Even the nature of these initiations was more to share information than to raise

questions or issues about issues pertaining to the story. For example, on June 5, Sally made the statement, "And you know you can really see that he's [Maniac's] really being nice cause he's doing this all for the boys' education." This comment drew responses from the teacher and several students, but clearly, Sally was stating something she knew about the story with her comment. In a similar vein, on that same day, Greg made the following initiating comment, "I know what he's [Maniac's] afraid of." After the teacher asked Greg to address the issue he posed, Greg responded that Maniac was afraid of being rejected.

Analysis of these 6 topic-centered episodes reveals that the students primarily used their turns during the conversation to articulate what they knew or understood about the events or characters in the text and/or connections they made between their lives and the text. They did not use their turns in the conversations to raise questions or clarify confusions about the text or characters in the story. This could reflect that the students did not have questions or confusions about the story. Alternatively, it could reflect that the students did not view whole-group lessons as a forum for raising questions or displaying confusion about the story.

As with the previous questions and analyses, the issue just addressed seems relevant to students' learning opportunities. If the primary function of the conversations during the topic-centered episodes was to display knowledge, then those children who had knowledge to display would have the opportunity to engage in the conversations, and those children who had questions or

concerns about the text would have little opportunity to receive help in addressing their questions or concerns.

Three Whole-Group Focus Lessons: A Collaborative Analysis

My outsider perspective helped me to analyze patterns of interactions in the three whole-group lessons. However, such analyses are limited in terms of insiders' perspectives: what students themselves may have experienced and, in turn, what their experiences may have created in terms of literacy learning opportunities. Thus, I engaged in a collaborative analysis with Deng, using the viewing session (Erickson & Shultz, 1982) as our analytic tool. Deng, Vue, and I watched and analyzed the target whole-group and small-group lessons. Deng's interpretations of the lessons could help me understand the degree to which he felt he had access to the literacy contend and rules and norms for engagement during the lessons. In this section, I present my interpretation of Deng's take on the three focus whole-group lessons.

I begin with a brief overview of each whole-group viewing session. Then, looking across the three viewing sessions, I identify five features--based on Deng's analyses of the lessons--common to all sessions. I draw on discussion excerpts from the three viewing sessions and corresponding lesson transcripts to elaborate on these features. These excerpts provide a more detailed account of Deng's thinking and understanding than does the general overview analysis of the three viewing sessions. Finally, I draw on the March 14, 1996, viewing session (based on the June 5, 1995, whole-group lesson) to compare Deng's interpretation of the lesson with the lesson structure Mrs. Weber enacted.

<u>Overview of Three Viewing Sessions for Whole-Group Lessons</u>

Deng, Vue and I got together at Deng's family's apartment five different evenings during the months of February and March of 1996, to view five different lessons (i.e., three whole-group lessons and two small-group activities) pertaining to the *Maniac Magee* text. I focus only on the three whole-group lessons in this section. On the evening of February 6, 1996, we watched the first lesson (i.e., the lesson for May 22, 1995, which was 40 minutes long). Deng controlled of the manner in which we watched the lesson. I said that he could stop the lesson to make comments or ask questions at any points he chose. I also mentioned that he could choose to speak in Hmong, English, or both when he commented on the lesson, and Vue agreed to translate whenever Deng spoke in Hmong. When Deng stopped the tape to make comments or ask questions, I asked probing questions to gain a sense of how he interpreted the lesson he watched.

After watching the lesson with Deng and Vue, I transcribed the audio tape of the viewing session and watched the video tape of the viewing session multiple times to study how Deng analyzed the lesson he watched with Vue and me. I began by noting the times and reasons he stopped the video tape of the lesson. This information is depicted on Table 10.

There were seven different categories of topics or issues discussed when the tape was stopped. The first category includes procedural questions (coded as "P") or comments such as "How much longer is this lesson?" or "What was that bell for that we heard in the background of the lesson?" or, more commonly,

Table 10

Overview of Times that the Video Taped Lesson for May 22, 1995 was Stopped

Number of Stop	Request by	Topic or Issue Discussed	Code
1.	Deng	Procedural question	P
2.	Deng	discussed story event	U
3.	Vue	Vue checks Deng's understanding	Cw
4.	Vue	Vue checks Deng's understanding	U
5.	Deng	Deng answers teacher's question	Ce
6.	Deng	Deng confused about discussion	Cd
7.	Vue	Vue checks Deng's understanding	Ca
8.	Deng	Deng confused about discussion	Cd
9.	Deng	Deng confused about discussion	Cd
10.	Deng	Deng confused about a word	Cw
11.	Deng	Procedural question	P
12.	Deng	Deng confused about a word	Cw
13.	Deng	Procedural comment	P
14.	Deng	Comment about story discussion	U
15.	Deng	Deng confused about story event	Ce
16.	Deng	Comment about story discussion	U
17.	Deng	Deng confused about activity	Ca
18.	Deng	Deng confused about activity	Ca
19.	Deng	Procedural question	P
20.	Deng	Procedural question	P
21.	Deng	Deng confused about discussion	Cd
22.	Deng	Deng confused about discussion	Cc
23.	Deng	Deng confused about word	Cw
24.	Cindy	Cindy checks Deng's understanding	Cw
25.	Deng	Deng confused about discussion	Cd
26.	Deng	Deng comments about confusion	Cd
27.	Deng	Deng confused about character	Cc
28.	Deng	Deng confused about character	Cc

Note:

a. Code Key:
P = *Procedural* question/comment
U = Something Deng *understood*, remembered, related to or did
Ca = Deng *confused* about a class *activity*
Cc = Deng *confused* about a *character* in the story
Cd = Deng *confused* about the class *discussion*
Ce = Deng *confused* about an *event* in the story
Cw = Deng *confused* about a particular *word*

b. Highlighting in the last 2 columns indicates when Deng is confused about something

"Vong, stop talking!" Deng made such comments (usually in Hmong) when his younger brother, Vong, interrupted the viewing sessions. Thus, procedural questions or comments were not directly related to the content of the lessons or Deng's interpretations of the content of the lessons.

The second category (coded as "U") relates to something that Deng understood, did, related to, or remembered. For example, as we watched the tape of the May 22, lesson, Mrs. Weber read aloud that Maniac went to church with the Beale family. Apparently, the congregation at the Beale's family church said "Hallelujah!" and "Amen!" quite frequently. Deng stopped the tape of the lesson and mentioned that when he and his family go to church, "They close their eyes and pray and say amen, too" (Viewing session transcript, 2/6/1996, Vue's English translation of Deng's Hmong comment).

Categories three through seven represent topics or issues that confuse Deng. As Table 10 indicates, Deng primarily chose to stop the lesson when he was confused. He was confused about something 19 of the 28 times the tape was stopped. Deng made procedural comments or asked procedure-related questions 5 times, and he shared something he understood 4 times.

The other two viewing sessions over whole-group lessons proceeded in a manner similar to that of February 6, 1996. We engaged in the second whole-group viewing session on February 29, 1996. Deng, Vue and I watched the 40-minute whole-group lesson for May 10, 1995, during this viewing session. After engaging in the viewing session with Deng and Vue, I again transcribed the

Table 11

Overview of Times that the Video Taped Lesson for June 10, 1995, was Stopped

Number of Stop	Request by	Topic or Issue Discussed	Code
1.	Deng	Confused about a word	Cw
2.	Deng	Confused about story	Cs
3.	Deng	Comment about teacher's question	U
4.	Deng	Confused about question teacher asked	Cd
5.	Deng	Comment about teacher's question	U
6.	Deng	Comment about teacher's question	U
7.	Deng	Procedural question	P
8.	Vue	Checking Deng's understanding	Cc
9.	Deng	Confused about character's action	Cc
10.	Deng	Comment about character in story	U
11.	Deng	Confused about character in story	Cc
12.	Deng	Comment about story	U
13.	Deng	Confused about word	Cw
14.	Vue	Procedural	P
15.	Deng	Procedural	P
16.	Deng	Procedural	P
17.	Deng	Procedural	P
18.	Cindy	Checking Deng's understanding	Cd
19.	Deng	Comment about class discussion	U
20.	Deng	Comment about story	U
21.	Deng	Confused about discussion	Cd
22.	Deng	Confused about a word	Cw
23.	Deng	Confused about a character in the story	Cc
24.	Deng	Confused about a character in the story	Cc
25.	Deng	Confused about an event in the story	Ce
26.	Deng	Confused about a word	Cw
27.	Deng	Confused about a word	Cw
28.	Deng	Confused about class discussion	Cd
29.	Deng?	Procedural	P
30.	Deng	Procedural	P
31.	Deng	Procedural	P

a. **Code Key:**
P = *procedural* question/comment
U = Something Deng *understood*, remembered, related to or did
Ca = Deng *confused* about a class *activity*
Cc = Deng *confused* about a *character* in the story
Cd = Deng *confused* about the class *discussion*
Ce = Deng *confused* about an *event* in the story
Cw = Deng *confused* about a particular *word*
Cs = Deng *confused* about the *story*

b. Highlighting in last two columns indicates when Deng is confused about something

audio tape and watched and rewatched the video tape of the viewing session. Table 11 depicts the times and reasons that the June 10, 1995, lesson was stopped.

A similar pattern of times and reasons Deng stopped the previous lesson holds true for the May 10 lesson. The tape was stopped for procedural questions or concerns 8 times. Deng understood something 7 of the times the tape was stopped, and Deng was confused about something 16 of the times the tape was stopped.

We conducted the final whole-group viewing session at Deng's house on March 14, 1996. The focus lesson for this viewing session was the June 5, 1995, whole-group lesson. This viewing session was somewhat shorter than the two previous viewing sessions even thought the lesson for June 5, 1995, was 52 minutes long rather than the 40 minutes of the two prior lessons. We decided to cut the viewing session short because Deng had been ill and still was not feeling well that evening. Consequently, the viewing session for the whole-group lesson for June 5, 1996, only covered approximately 20 minutes of the 52 minute lesson. We followed the same routine as described above when engaging in this viewing session. Again, Table 12 reveals a similar pattern of times and reasons Deng stopped the tape for the previous lessons occurred for this shorter viewing session.

The categories in Table 12 are the same as described for Tables 12 and 13 above with two exceptions. While watching the last lesson, neither Deng, Vue, nor I stopped the lesson for procedural issues or questions, so there is no

category for procedural related issues. Additionally, Deng was not confused

about any activities during the 20 minutes of the lesson that he watched so

there is not a category for that topic. Vue stopped the lesson once, and Deng

stopped the lesson 9 times during the segment watched. Deng stopped the

lesson 8 times because he was confused about either a word, character, or

event in the story, or the class discussion.

Table 12

Overview of Viewing Session on March 14, 1996

Viewing Session (3/14/96) for Maniac Lesson on 6/5/95			
Number of Stop	Request by	Topic or Issue Discussed	Code
1.	Vue	Something Deng understood (John McNab)	U
2.	Deng	Confused about class discussion	Cd
3.	Deng	Confused about class discussion	Cd
4.	Deng	Confused about event in story	Ce
5.	Deng	Confused about a character in the story	Cc
6.	Deng	Confused about a word	Cw
7.	Deng	Something Deng understood in story	U
8.	Deng	Confused about event in the story	Ce
9.	Deng	Confused about event in the story	Ce
10.	Deng	Confused about event in the story	Ce

a. Code Key:
P   = *procedural* question/comment
U   = Something Deng *understood*, remembered, related to or did
Ca = Deng *confused* about a class *activity*
Cc = Deng *confused* about a *character* in the story
Cd = Deng *confused* about the class *discussion*
Ce = Deng *confused* about an *event* in the story
Cw = Deng *confused* about a particular *word*

b. Highlighting of the last two columns indicates when Deng was confused about something

Five Common Features Across the Three Viewing Sessions: Taking a Closer Look

Deng's analyses across all three viewing sessions illustrate that he was confused about much of what occurred during the whole-group lessons. In this subsection, I examine the five features of lessons about which he expressed confusion (i.e., class activities & discussions, events & characters in the story, particular words from the story, or class discussions). I draw on discussion excerpts from the three viewing sessions and corresponding lesson transcripts to give a more detailed account of Deng's thinking and my interpretation of his thinking about the events he identified as confusing.

I use the May 22, 1995, lesson (and corresponding viewing session on February 6, 1996) to illustrate Deng's confusions about the word "contrast" which was a central concept in that lesson. I chose the first episode (The Contrast/Conflict Episode) because of its significance since Mrs. Weber had stated that her primary goal for the lesson was to focus on the themes of conflict and contrast in the story. This viewing session illustrates how Deng's confusion about a central word in the lesson significantly impacted his understanding of the lesson.

The second example from the May 22, lesson (The Hand Scene Episode) illustrates how Deng's confusion about an activity in which the class engaged reflects a deeper confusion about racism in America. I chose to highlight this particular episode because it is the most unique whole-group activity in which the class engaged.

The third example (Finsterwald and the Movies) from the May 10, lesson and the corresponding viewing session of February 29, 1996, is the final topic-centered episode of the May 10, lesson. The example illustrates Deng's confusion about a class discussion in which the author compares children's aversion to a character named Finsterwald in the *Maniac Magee* story with a typical American adult's aversion to attending a matinee movie attended by a large number of loud and unsupervised children.

The fourth and fifth examples are drawn from the June 5, lesson and the corresponding viewing session that was conducted on March 14, 1996. Both examples come from the fourth topic-centered episode (Finsterwald's Backyard) which illustrates Deng's confusion about the character Finsterwald and a daring event in the story. Maniac entered Finsterwald's backyard, stayed there for 10 minutes, and, much to the surprise of the 15 child spectators in the story, left the yard unharmed. Deng's comments about this event during the viewing session made it clear that he didn't understand the event.

The Contrast/Conflict Episode. The excerpt below is from the final 6-minute topic-centered episode on May 22, when the class was in the process of constructing two charts together: On one chart the students identified the conflicts that had occurred in the story to that point, and on the other chart they identified different contrasts in the story. Mrs. Weber led the discussion and wrote down the children's suggestions on the charts during the discussion. The students had just mentioned that the author contrasted *black* and *white*. Mrs.

Weber wrote "black vs. white" on the chart, and the discussion proceeded as follows:

Mrs. Weber:	I don't know why I put versus. I guess because one opposes the other or one is on the opposite end of the other. What else did we see contrasted in the story? What was he [Maniac] without for so long?
Sally:	House
Bill:	(laughing) Chicken pox

Bill's comment had nothing to do with the ongoing conversation and was largely ignored by everyone including the teacher. The teacher followed up on Sally's comment.

Mrs. Weber:	**Homes versus**, what's the opposite of having a home?
Unison response:	Homeless, **homelessness**
Dan:	He was without parents for a while
Mrs. Weber:	Okay.
Sally:	Still, I mean they're [referring to the Beale family] still not his real parents but
Dan:	But they're [i.e., Mr. and Mrs. Beale] like parents
Mrs. Weber:	so we could have **parents**
Chris	Legal, not legal, but guardians
Mrs. Weber:	**and none.** What are some of the other contrasts that you saw in the story? Let's start bringing some

of these out. This story is a combination of two types

of genre.

Several features of this conversation both made it typical and illustrate

the way discussions proceeded during whole-group *Maniac* lessons. First, the

usual contributors (Sally, Dan, Chris and Mrs. Weber) spoke during this

segment. Second, Mrs. Weber asked questions to the student audience in

general rather than addressing her questions to any particular child; thus, the

conversational floor was seemingly open to anyone who might like to respond.

Further, no one raised his or her hand to be called on by the teacher during this

excerpt; instead, the usual contributors took turns making and building upon

one another's comments. As was typical, Sally responded to Mrs. Weber's first

query. The students responded in unison to Mrs. Weber's second query.

A particularly interesting feature of this excerpt is that at least two levels

of conversation seem to occur at the same time. On one level, the teacher's

goal was to get the children to identify various different contrasts so that she

could list them on the charts. While this event occurred, Dan, Chris and Sally

carried on a second level of conversation--a more in-depth discussion about

homelessness and parents as these concepts applied directly to Maniac. Dan

suggested that Maniac was without parents for awhile. Sally emphasized that

the Beales (the African-American family who "adopted" Maniac) were not his

real parents, but Dan argued that they were *like* parents. Chris began to

suggest that the Beales were legal guardians, but caught himself, and asserted

instead that they were just guardians, since they had not legally adopted

Maniac.

Mrs. Weber drew two contrasts (e.g., home/homelessness & parents/no

parents) from the children's second level of conversation which illustrated their

rather sophisticated understanding of the nuances of character relationships in

the story. As with the rest of the lesson, this conversational segment flowed

smoothly as participants contributed to and built upon others' ideas. The

children participating in this exchange knew at least two important kinds of

information in order to participate effectively in the conversation. First, they

understood **what** was going on in the story. They knew about the characters

and their relationships and they could step back and discern broad categories

of contrasts in the story. Additionally, the children knew **how** to engage in a

conversation in this classroom. They knew that when their teacher asked

general questions it was acceptable (and perhaps even expected) that children

jump into the conversation to offer their ideas. Finally, these contributors

appeared comfortable contributing to the conversation during the lesson, given

the large number of turns they took during the lesson (see Table 5).

From my perspective as an outside observer, this lesson segment

appeared an excellent opportunity to promote student learning and

understanding about the theme of contrasts in *Maniac Magee*; however, since

most children did not talk during this lesson segment or engage in some type of

individual writing activity, it is difficult to know how most students made sense of

this and other parts of the lesson. In fact, understanding how Deng made sense

of *Maniac* lessons was especially problematic since he volunteered no comments during this lesson; therefore, Deng's analyses during the viewing session on February 6, played a crucial role in understanding his interpretation of the lesson.

Deng, Vue, and I were almost at the end of the viewing session for the May 22 lesson as we watched the class engage in the final topic-centered episode. Mrs. Weber had begun the lesson with an introduction to the dimensions of contrast and conflict. Further, the class had discussed contrasts and conflicts in this final episode as they constructed large contrast and conflict charts together. They had already identified and discussed the contrast between Maniac's inside name at the Beales' house (Jeffrey) and his outside name in the community (Maniac), and they had identified and discussed contrasts between black and white. During the viewing session, Deng stopped the video tape of the lesson slightly **before** the conversational segment described earlier in this section and **after** the class had already generated the name and color contrasts Mrs. Weber had listed on the chart. Deng asked, "What are they say?" I responded that I was not sure what he was referring to and asked if he would like us to rewind the tape so that I could try to discern what he was asking. We rewound the tape, and I heard Mrs. Weber saying, "Are there any other contrasts that we've run across?" Then I said:

Cindy: Oh, contrasts? [To Deng] Do you know what contrasts are?

Vue: Contractions or contrasts?

Cindy: (Carefully enunciating) Contrast. (Looking at Deng) Do

you, do you know what a contrast is?

Deng: [Spoke in Hmong to Vue.]

Vue: He said, he said, like a race or something?

Cindy: (Confused) Like a race?

Vue: Yeah.

Cindy: You mean like trying to run fast or something? Oh, oh, oh

contests!

Deng: Yeah. Deng then began talking in Hmong to Vue.

Vue: Not contests, contrasts.

Cindy: (To Deng) You thought she said contests?

Deng: Yeah.

Cindy: Oh, okay.

Deng then asked if a *contrast* is something you "sign your name to." I

said that I suspected he was referring to a *contract*. We talked about the

definition of *contract*, and I mentioned that the word *contract* is different from

contrast. Then we discussed the definition of the word *contrast* and talked

about how Mrs. Weber used the word in class. The excerpt above illustrates

that Deng was very confused about the word *contrast* which was one of the

central concepts discussed at the beginning and end of the lesson. It was only

by giving Deng an opportunity to express his concerns and confusions and

taking time to discuss them that Deng was able to make sense of the word

contrast and the role that the word played in the discussion and whole-group activity of making the chart during the lesson.

The Hand Scene Episode. One of the places Deng stopped the video tape of the May 22 lesson was to discuss a class activity that he had found to be confusing. The episode occurred during the eighth topic-centered episode of the lesson. Before I discuss the viewing session, I briefly describe what had occurred in the story and what happened during this lesson segment.

Maniac was unofficially adopted by the Beale family in Two Mills, Pennsylvania. In Two Mills all the black families lived on the east side of the city and all the white families lived on the west side of the city (see Figure 4). Since Maniac (a Caucasian boy) lived with the Beales (an African American family) on the East End, he looked different from those around him. Maniac was perceptive and noticed those around him and the ways they described themselves. Mrs. Weber read the excerpt below about Maniac's perceptions of those around him:

> Maniac loved the colors of the East End, the people colors. For the life of
>
> him, he couldn't figure why these East Enders called themselves black.
>
> He kept looking and looking, and the colors he found were gingersnap
>
> and light fudge and dark fudge and acorn and butter rum and cinnamon
>
> and burnt orange. But never licorice, which, to him, was real black
>
> (Spinelli, 1990, p. 51).

Mrs. Weber paused shortly after reading the above segment and said,

I want to stop there for a minute and I want to go back to the colors. That

was a significant passage in that the author wants you to know that

Maniac didn't see the ultimate of contrasts--black and white. He couldn't

figure out why blacks called themselves black. He looked at skin tones

and he said, 'I see cinnamon.' What do you think about when you think

about cinnamon? (Transcript, 5/22/1995).

The class discussed Spinelli's use of descriptive words for colors and how

Two Mills, Pennsylvania

**West
End**

[White]

Hector Street

**East
End**

[Black]

□ **Beale's
House**
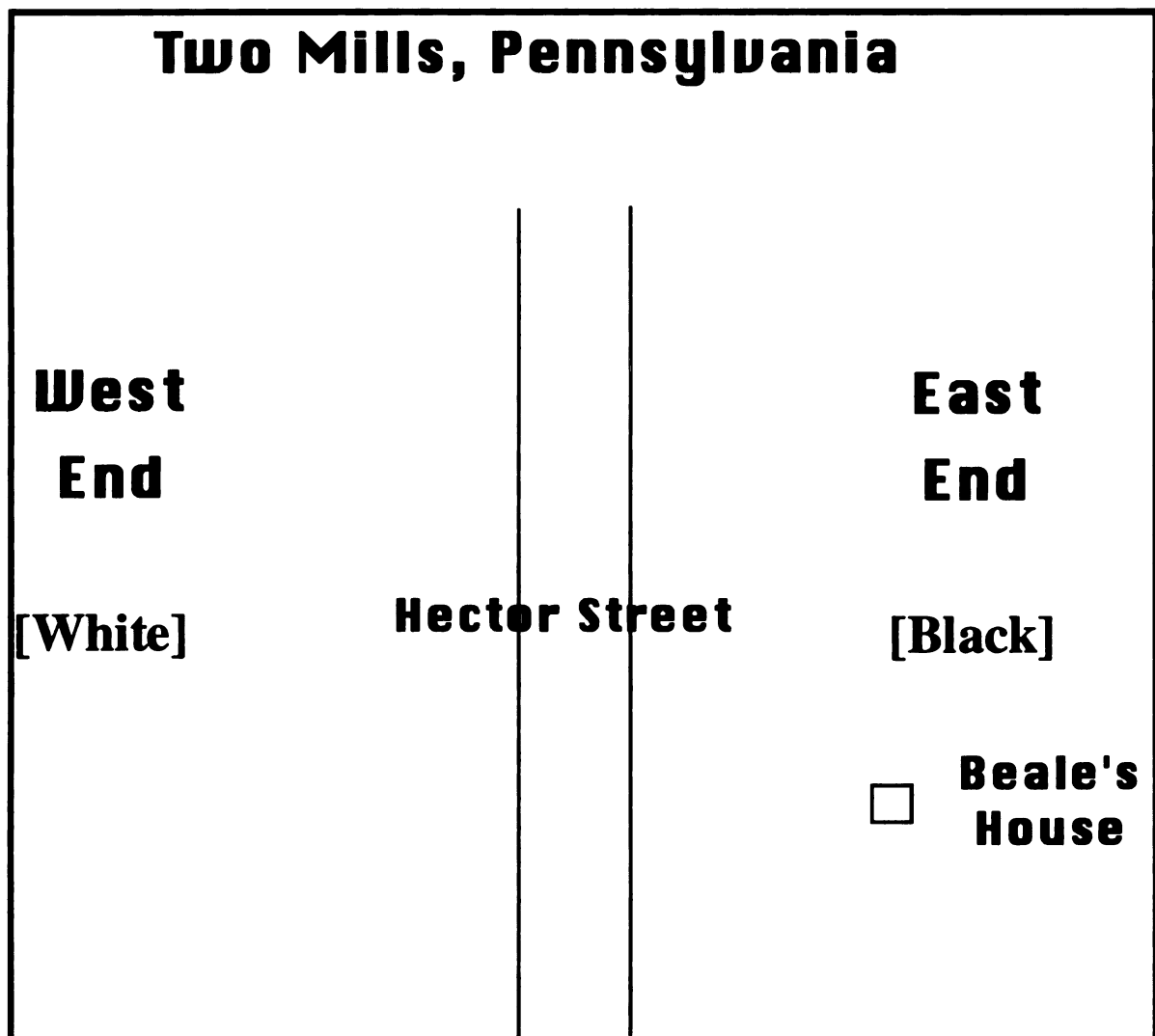
Figure 4. Overview of Two Mills, Pennsylvania in *Maniac Magee.*

some of those words (e.g., cinnamon, acorn, etc.) made them feel. Then the teacher said, "I want you to put your hands out right here" (Transcript, 5/22/ 1995). She told the children that she wanted to look at all the different shades of their hands.

The children and the teacher moved off of their chairs into the center of the circle and began to hold out their hands. Because the class was ethnically diverse with African-American, Hispanic, Caucasian and Asian children, there was a stunning array of different colored hands in the center of the circle. One child, Bill, said, "Oh cool, it goes from light to dark." Then the class discussed the colors of their own hands. They talked about butterscotch, cinnamon, flan, and so forth. Mrs. Weber talked about the beauty of variations and closed this discussion segment by suggesting, "I have the feeling that the author wants you to know that Maniac spends time looking at the person rather than at the skin tone" (Transcript, 5/22/95).

Interestingly, during the viewing session with Deng, Vue and me, Deng stopped the video tape of the May 22 lesson at the beginning of the Hand Scene segment and asked:

Deng: What is she mean put your hand out?

Deng and Vue spoke in Hmong so that Vue could clarify what Deng was asking, and then the following discussion ensued:

Vue: She, she mentioned something about like put your hand out and stuff like that, and he doesn't understand. He wants to know what it means.

Cindy: (Looking at Deng) What does it mean for, are you asking what does it mean to put your hand out, or why is she asking you to do it?

Deng: Why is she asking?

Cindy: Ohhh. Good question, why is she asking the kids to do it? Can I, Could I let you watch it for the next couple of minutes and then you can tell me why, why, what you think about that and then we can talk about it a little bit?

Deng: Yeah.

We resumed playing the video tape of the lesson. After the discussion segment of The Hand Scene was over, we continued our earlier conversation. I asked Deng why he thought the teacher asked the children to hold out their hands.

Deng: Because the teacher want to know the black and the white people their hands, what color are their hands

Cindy: Are there any other reasons?

Deng: Because the teacher want to know what color the kids in the classroom are?

Deng and Vue then began speaking in Hmong, and a few minutes later Deng added that the teacher wanted the black people and the white people to be friends and not fight. I asked Deng if he thought of that idea by himself or if Vue helped him think of it, and Vue responded, "Actually, I just gave him some ideas. He knows that too, but I just gave him some ideas" (Transcript, 2/6/1996).

This viewing session exchange around the Hand Scene is fascinating for a variety of reasons. First, Deng identified this activity as confusing. It wasn't clear to him why Mrs. Weber wanted the children to look at and discuss the different shades of their hands. Even after viewing the entire discussion segment, Deng believed that Mrs. Weber asked the children to engage in the activity so that she could see the colors of their hands. Recall earlier that during the lesson, Mrs. Weber asked the children to put their hands in the center of the circle so that she could "see the colors of their hands." Deng seemed to interpret her use of the word "see" literally; he thought she really wanted to just "look at" the different colors of children's hands. Thus, Deng made a literal reading of episode; however, others (including the teacher, Vue and me) saw the incident figuratively; that is, those individuals privy to a particular way of schooling (i.e., the expectation that one thinks figuratively about "texts") knew that the activity wasn't about the teacher seeing colors.

One potential explanation for Deng's interpretation of the Hand Scene Episode may be that he is not familiar with the issue of racism in America—particularly the story of racism between blacks and whites. Consequently, his take on racism may be significantly different from those children who know about racism in America. A key point is that the cultural cues that children draw on to make sense of texts can vary significantly and have a tremendous impact on the ways in which they read texts—including the actual books they read and the class interactions around those books. Whatever the interpretation brought to bear on Deng's take on the Hand Scene Episode, however, this difference in

"seeing" or interpreting school-related events could signal a crucial difference between second language children such as Deng being "in" the system and knowing what's intended and participating on the margins.

Finsterwald and the movies: Deng's confusion about a class discussion. The May 10 lesson was the second lesson related to *Maniac Magee*. In the final topic-centered episode of the May 10 lesson, the readers in Mrs. Weber's class were introduced to the Finsterwald character. Mrs. Weber had chosen Sally to read prior to the final topic-centered episode. She read about how the children in Two Mills, Pennsylvania, were terrified of Finsterwald, and the following discussion ensued:

Sally:	This, of course, was the infamous address of Finsterwald. Kids stayed away from Finsterwald the way old people stayed away from Saturday afternoon matinees at a $2.00 movie.
Mrs. Weber:	Why do adults do that? Why do adults avoid $2.00 matinees at the movies?
Sally:	Cause kids are there.
Mrs. Weber:	Tons of kids, and what are kids at the movies?
Several students in unison:	Loud and obnoxious!
Mrs. Weber:	Loud and obnoxious! That's right. Okay. (Signaling Sally to continue reading.)

Mrs. Weber appeared to interject the question "Why do adults do that?"

because she suspected that children might need help understanding Spinelli's

analogy. Sally, however, knew that the reason adults might avoid matinees

was because many children attend them. Mrs. Weber then pushed the class for

a more specific answer. The students who responded, "Loud and obnoxious!"

obviously knew how large groups of unsupervised children can sometimes act

at movie theaters.

During the viewing session at Deng's house on February 29, 1996, Deng

stopped the tape of the lesson after the above interactions transpired during the

May 10 lesson and said:

Deng:	What is she mean?
Vue:	(Said something in Hmong.)
Cindy:	Oh, oh, so what does she mean, "Why do adults stay away from a $2.00 movie?" Because, (brief pause) You want to take a guess?
Deng:	(Said something in Hmong to Vue and Vue replied. They spoke back and forth several times.)
Deng:	That it is no good?
Cindy:	Have you been to a movie before, like a matinee movie? Like you go to a theater to see a movie?
Deng:	Yeah, but not here, in Thailand.

Even though Deng had heard and watched Mrs. Weber and some of his

peers discuss why adults might not go to a $2.00 afternoon matinee, he still did

not understand the analogy Spinelli made between adults avoiding afternoon movies and children wanting to stay away from Finsterwald's backyard. In fact, understanding that rather complex analogy would require first that Deng understand how many American adults would find attending an afternoon matinee with lots of unsupervised noisy children absolutely intolerable. Then, he would need to make the connection that the author was suggesting that most children in the story *Maniac Magee* would also find entering Finsterwald's backyard equally intolerable.

Thus, while in this particular case, Mrs. Weber identified an analogy in the story that Deng, and possibly others, found confusing, even the brief class discussion did not clarify this analogy for Deng. Understanding analogies such as these requires sophisticated cultural knowledge about attending movies in this culture (i.e., who attends particular movies and why they may do so), relationships between adults and kids in various activities (like matinees), how authors sometimes use particular situations to make comparisons to other situations, and so forth. Even after I explained the issue of $2.00 matinees to Deng in more detail during the viewing session, I wasn't convinced that he thoroughly understood the analogy between movies and Finsterwald's backyard. Clearly, knowing about the word movies or even matinee is not sufficient to make the conceptual leap necessary to understand analogies that

require readers to understand complex cultural practices associated with particular words or concepts.[11]

Finsterwald's backyard: Deng's confusion about a character and event in the story. The fourth and fifth examples below are drawn from the June 5, lesson and the corresponding viewing session on March 14, 1996. The fourth example came from the text the teacher read between the third and fourth topic-centered episodes, and the fifth example came from the text the teacher read between the fifth and sixth topic-centered episodes. Both examples relate to Finsterwald and his backyard.

Recall that in the story *Maniac Magee*, Maniac was homeless because his parents had been killed and he ran away from his feuding aunt and uncle's house. Over the course of the story, Maniac lived with many different people such as the Beale family, an old man named Greyson, and the McNab family. At this point in the story, Maniac lived with the McNabs. The McNab's lifestyle and their household were both deplorable. There were several unclean and undisciplined children of various ages with a drunken father and no mother. The house was always filthy and unsanitary. The two youngest McNab children were twins named Russell and Piper. Not surprisingly, Russell and Piper did not attend school regularly and their father did little to encourage them to attend school. Maniac was a good influence on the boys and got them to attend school by bribing them. He primarily bribed them to go to school by getting

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[11] Vue and I took Deng and Vong to a Saturday afternoon matinee several weekends after this discussion so they could experience attending a matinee in the United States.

them pizza on Fridays, but the boys were tiring of this particular bribe and decided to request something else. In the excerpt below Chris, Mrs. Weber and Bill discussed Mr. McNab, and then Mrs. Weber resumed reading:

Mrs. Weber: What was his [referring to Mr. McNab] big thing?

Chris: Drinking beer.

Bill: (overlapping speech) Drinking beer and going out.

Mrs. Weber: Drinking beer, and do your homework. He never sat

                down and said, "What can I help you with?" (Mrs. Weber

                resumed reading from the text.) "And so when Maniac

                tried to cut the next pizza deal, Russell answered, "No!"

                "No?" echoed Maniac who had been afraid it would come

                to this. "No," said Russell. "We want something else."

                "Oh?" said Maniac. "What's that?" They told him, if he

                wanted another week's worth of school out of them, he'd

                have to enter Finsterwald's backyard and stay there for

                ten minutes. Piper shuttered at the very thought. When

                Maniac casually answered, "Okay, it's a deal," Piper ran

                shrieking from the house.

As Deng, Vue, and I watched this part of the lesson during the March 14, 1996, viewing session, Deng stopped the tape of the lesson when the teacher mentioned Finsterwald's name and the following discussion ensued:

Deng: Who are Finster?

Cindy: I'm sorry? (I wasn't sure what Deng was asking.)

Deng: Finster.

Cindy: Who is Finsterwald?

Deng: Yeah.

Cindy: Um, Finsterwald was um, he was that man that lived in the

            neighborhood, and he was very mean. Do, do you know

            what **mean** is?

Deng: Yeah.

Cindy: Can you tell, can you tell us?

Deng: Like bad people?

I continued explaining more about Finsterwald, how he was a scary man who was feared by all the children in the neighborhood. I then asked Deng why Maniac was going to go in Finsterwald's backyard. He responded, "To try what happen?" I was intrigued by Deng's comments for several reasons. First, I had expected that Deng already knew who Finsterwald was since Spinelli had included him in the story from the very beginning. Also, Deng, Vue, and I had discussed Finsterwald at an earlier viewing session on February 29. Thus, even though Finsterwald was not a new character in the story and we had talked about him before, Deng was still not sure who he was or how he fit into the story.

Second, Deng chose to stop the lesson at a place other than where the teacher structured the topic-centered episode. This led me to wonder how many other times Deng had questions or confusions about the story that might

not have matched the times the teacher stopped reading the text to discuss the story. I explore this issue in the next section of the paper.

Finally, I suspected that Deng wasn't clear as to why Maniac was going to spend 10 minutes in the dreaded Finsterwald's backyard. We continued watching the lesson and Deng stopped the tape a few minutes later to ask if Maniac was currently living with the McNabs. I asked him to speculate as to whether or not he thought Maniac lived with the McNabs, and he said that he suspected that Maniac did live with them because he remembered hearing the teacher read about Maniac, Russell, and Piper playing in the basement of the McNab's home. I then asked Deng why he thought that Maniac went into Finsterwald's backyard, and he said:

Deng:	To try to see what happen.
Cindy:	To see what would happen?
Deng:	Yeah.
Cindy:	Did, who wanted him to be there? Did he want to be there or did somebody else want him to be there?
Deng:	Think somebody else.
Cindy:	Do you, do you know who it was?
Deng:	Russell.
Cindy:	Russell and Piper?
Deng:	Yeah.
Cindy:	What, and why did they want him to go there?
Deng:	To try

Cindy: and see what would happen?

Deng: Yeah.

The discussion above led me to believe that Deng understood some of the particulars about the event in the story where Maniac spent 10 minutes in Finsterwald's back yard. Deng knew that Maniac lived with Russell and Piper and that they wanted him to enter into Finsterwald's backyard. I suspect, however, that Deng did not understand the nuances of the event. I question whether Deng understood that Maniac spent 10 minutes in Finsterwald's backyard on a dare in order to bribe Russell and Piper to go to school. Also, I suspect that Deng did not understand why Russell and Piper might ask Maniac to engage in such a feat in the first place. The author alluded to the fact that Russell and Piper were elevated in the eyes of their friends (15 children from the neighborhood watched this daring feat) because they had the power to get Maniac to what any other child in that context would consider unthinkable-- actually enter and spend time in Finsterwald's backyard. These points help illustrate how understanding the nuances of character's actions and the events in which they participate requires a great deal of knowledge about the culture where the story is situated; that is, it is possible to take for granted the extensive cultural knowledge required to make sense of stories.

Deng's Structure for the June 5, 1995, Lesson.

I have described the organizational structure across the whole-group lessons where lessons are parsed into topic-centered episodes with four common features. I argued that Mrs. Weber controls the structure and the flow

of the lessons. She controls the beginning and ending of topic-centered episodes by deciding who reads and how long text will be read before a discussion ensues. Further, she controls the major topics discussed during the episodes by her initiating questions at the beginning of episodes. I wondered if Deng would have structured the discussions around the text in a way similar to Mrs. Weber's, so I examined the points at which he stopped the video tape to see if they coincided with Mrs. Weber's lesson structure.

As I studied the transcript and video tape of the viewing session with Deng and Vue, I noticed that Deng often stopped the video tape in the middle of a text segment being read aloud to ask questions about things that confused him. Thus, he stopped the tape of the lesson at different times than Mrs. Weber. This indicates that his structure for the lesson would have differed from Mrs. Weber's. I examined the times that Deng stopped the June 5 lesson to get a clearer sense of when and why he decided that text reading should stop so questions, and commentary could occur.

Deng stopped the tape **between** topic-centered episodes six times and **during** the conversational parts of topic-centered episodes three times. Below I give a brief overview of the times and reasons Deng stopped the tape during the viewing session. The first time Deng stopped the tape he asked about Mrs. Weber's long explanation about some children in the midwest who were removed from their home by the state because of neglect. This discussion occurred in conjunction with the class discussion about the horrible state of affairs at the McNab household in the story.

Deng asked about specific words or characters being read about in the text the next three times he stopped the tape. For example, Mrs. Weber read aloud about "volcano season" in Mexico, and Deng wondered what that meant. In the story, Maniac tried to get Russell and Piper to reconsider their plan to run away to Mexico, so he told them that this time of the year was volcano season in Mexico and, therefore, it wouldn't be a good time to go there.

Deng stopped the tape the fourth time because he was confused about the character named Finsterwald. The next time he stopped the tape he asked about the definition of the word *alley*. The next two times Deng stopped the tape as Mrs. Weber or a child read to ask whether Maniac lived with the McNabs, and if Finsterwald hurt Maniac when Maniac spent 10 minutes standing in his backyard.

Deng stopped the tape three other times to ask for clarification about the conversations that occurred within two different topic-centered episodes. The fact that Deng frequently stopped the lesson tape during the reading **between** topic-centered episodes means that Deng's structure for the whole-group lessons differed from Mrs. Weber's structure. It is clear that Deng parsed the segments of the topic-centered episodes differently from Mrs. Weber because Deng frequently asked questions between topic-centered episodes as the text was being read. Deng's analysis of the lesson reveals that there were many times he was confused about the text that were not addressed by the teacher or his peers. Undoubtedly, if Deng had had more control over topics and the

structure of whole-group lessons, he would have had more opportunities to air

his confusions **during** the actual lessons.

Dimensions of Contextual Knowledge Pertinent to Deng's Literacy Learning Opportunities in the Whole-Group Context

I begin this section with a discussion of what I mean by context in the

subtitle above. Then I draw on the previous analyses in this chapter to

articulate three dimensions of contextual knowledge that were relevant to

Deng's literacy learning opportunities within whole-group lessons. I define and

describe each dimension of contextual knowledge by using specific examples

from the data to identify anchor points on a continuum from high to low.

As I argued in chapter 2, from a sociocultural perspective, opportunity

must be conceptualized relative to particular social, historical and cultural

contexts. Thus, context shapes and influences opportunities. Context does not

refer merely to physical setting; rather, drawing on Erickson and Shultz (1977),

"contexts are constituted by what people are doing and where and when they

are doing it" (p. 148). Context refers to "people in interaction", and therefore,

contexts are temporal, dynamic and continuously evolving (Erickson & Shultz,

1977, p. 148). Citing Mehan, et al., Erickson and Shultz further suggest that

social contexts consist of shared situation definitions, and they exist within "the

social actions persons take on the basis of these" shared situation definitions (p.

148).

An interesting issue arises, however, when considering another point

identified by Erickson and Shultz (1997). They suggest that competence within

social contexts can vary due to factors such as participants' cultural

backgrounds and developmental levels, for example. This implies that situation definitions are not necessarily **equally** shared, understood, or acted upon by all participants. Rather, similar situation definitions may be shared by a majority of participants--so there is a consensus about the situation definitions and social actions that constitute the context--or, some participants may be in positions whereby they have more say about which situation definitions and social actions carry the most weight in constructing the context, or both. That is to say, while contexts involve dynamic, evolving, and temporal interactions, some participants may have more say about how the interactions between participants constitute context. Additionally, even if participants typically share an understanding of situation definitions based on appropriate behaviors to display in a given context, the meaning of those behaviors may vary from participant to participant within the context. Further, participants new to a particular context may not understand the established norms of the context. All of the above points are shaped by characteristics of individual participants and the broader social, historical, and cultural settings within which immediate contexts are constructed. This brief discussion of context serves as a backdrop against which I discuss dimensions of contextual knowledge pertinent to whole-group lessons during the unit on *Maniac Magee.*

In order to be viable participants in Deng's whole-group reading lessons, students needed textual knowledge of Maniac Magee, knowledge of American culture, and knowledge of whole-group interactional norms. These features represent important dimensions of contextual knowledge in the whole-group

setting. The first two dimensions relate to the central research question

addressed in chapter 4 pertaining to what was discussed during whole-group

lessons. The third dimension relates to another key research question

pertaining to how conversants engaged in whole-group conversations. I

discuss these dimensions of contextual knowledge as continuums below

because I argue that this type of knowledge is not something that participants

had or did not have; rather, different participants displayed varying degrees of

contextual knowledge for each of these dimensions.

<u>Dimension One: Textual Knowledge</u>

$$\longleftrightarrow$$

Displays understanding of   Does not display
genre, plot, characters,   understanding of genre, plot,
and story events   characters, and story events
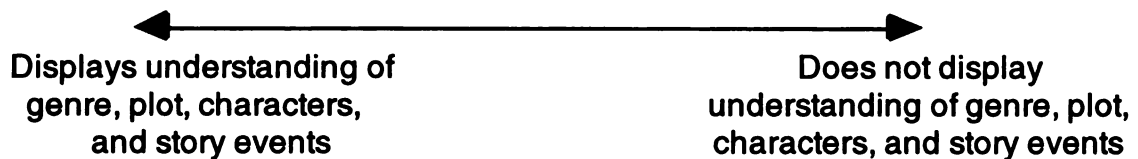
First, knowledge of the *Maniac Magee* text was an important dimension

in whole-group lessons. I refer here to knowledge of the genre of a tall tale,

knowledge of the characters and events in the story, knowledge of the words

and literary elements the author used to tell the story, and so forth. The more

children knew and understood about the text, the greater their opportunity to

make sense of the class discussions and contribute their ideas to the

discussion. While both issues just mentioned are important, the latter issue is

particularly relevant to this context since most turns during conversations

involved displaying knowledge either of the text, connections between

children's lives and the text, or both. For example, the analyses pertaining to

topic-centered episodes illustrated by Table 6 showed that most of the discussion during lessons was driven by the content of the story. Additionally, Table 7 illustrated the many times story content was related to the lives of class participants. I draw on transcript data from this chapter to discuss high and low anchor points relative to this dimension that illustrate greater and lesser displays of understanding about the text.

Recall the discussion of the Contrast/Conflict episode from the latter half of chapter 4. Towards the end of the May 22 lesson the class constructed charts to identify contrasts and conflicts in the story. The class discussed the contrast of home versus homelessness as this contrast pertained to Maniac. Within that broader discussion, Sally, Dan, and Chris revealed their understanding of how to use events and characters in the story to discuss contrasts and conflicts. For example, as the class discussed the broader categories of home versus homelessness, Sally, Dan and Chris added specific examples from their literal and inferential interpretations of the text that reflected nuanced understandings of characters, character relationships, and story events. They understood that the Beales were like parents to Maniac because they treated Maniac with love and respect, but they were not his real parents. Further, while the Beales were like guardians because they took care of Maniac and encouraged him to live with them, the author never wrote that the Beales officially adopted Maniac, so Chris argued that they were not Maniac's official legal guardians. Thus, Sally, Dan, and Chris would rate towards the high end of the continuum with respect to their demonstrated understanding of characters and events in this example

and their use of textual knowledge to engage in a discussion about contrasts in the story.

Deng, on the other hand, did not even get to the point of discussing specific characters and events because he did not understand the concept of contrast. Recall that Deng thought contrasts were "like a race or something" (contests) and "something you sign your name to" (a contract). So, with respect to the same contrast/conflict episode, Deng's demonstrated ability to engage in the conversation and display an understanding of textual knowledge would be towards the lower end of the continuum. It was not possible for him to use story content to engage in a discussion about contrasts because he did not understand the nature of the activity in which the class was engaged.

It would be incorrect, however, to assume that Deng had no textual knowledge about Maniac, the Beale family, and Maniac's plight as a homeless child. What he understood about the text remains a question. However, analyses pertaining to Tables 10, 11 and 12 do illustrate that Deng stated he was often confused about story events, characters, discussions, and so forth during whole-group lessons. It seems reasonable to assume, then, that Deng may not have a clear understanding of the events and characters discussed in the excerpt above. Thus, while the level and depth of Deng's understanding of aspects of the story pertaining to this episode remains in question, it is clear that he could not engage in the discussion introduced by the teacher in a way that demonstrated his understanding of the text.

Dimension Two: Knowledge of American Culture

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←――――――――――――――――――――――→

Displays understanding of	Does not display understanding
racism, homelessness, predjudice	of racism, homelessness, prejudice
and other aspects of American culture	and other aspects of American culture

Second, background knowledge about American culture with respect to

issues discussed in the text such as racism (i.e., particularly racial issues

between African Americans and Caucasians in this culture), prejudice, and

homelessness is an important dimension of this context. The more children

knew and could draw on this kind of background knowledge, the better they

could understand the events in the story and the ways in which the students and

teacher discussed the events during the topic-centered episodes.

I draw on the "Finsterwald and the Movies" excerpts to discuss

Dimension Two. Recall that during the May 10, whole-class lesson, Sally read

the following excerpt from the *Maniac Magee* text: "This, of course, was the

infamous address of Finsterwald. Kids stayed away from Finsterwald the way

old people stayed away from Saturday afternoon matinees at a $2.00 movie"

(Lesson transcript, 510/1995). Mrs. Weber asked the class why adults avoided

$2.00 matinees and Sally responded, "Cause kids are there" (Lesson transcript,

510/1995). Mrs. Weber then asked the class how kids typically act at afternoon

matinees and many students responded in unison, "Loud and obnoxious!"

Sally and the students who responded aloud to Mrs. Weber

demonstrated that they knew most American adults would really not enjoy

watching an afternoon movie with lots of loud, unruly children. By understanding this information about movie viewing in American culture and by knowing how to "read" analogies, the children could then infer from Spinelli's analogy that venturing into Finsterwald's backyard was definitely not something that children in the story would want to do. Sally and her peers would rate high on the continuum for Dimension Two in terms of their ability to demonstrate knowledge of aspects of American culture necessary to help them interpret the *Maniac Magee* text.

Deng, on the other hand, did not demonstrate that he understood why American adults would not want to attend an inexpensive afternoon matinee. As Deng watched the May 10 lesson during the viewing session on February 29, 1996, he stopped the video tape after the discussion mentioned above and asked why adults would want to stay away from a $2.00 movie. I asked him to speculate and he suggested that perhaps the movie was not good. Recall further that Deng said he had never been to a movie in the United States. Deng would rate on the other end of the continuum with respect to his demonstrated knowledge of American culture in this situation when compared with his peers mentioned above.

Conceptualizing Deng's and his peer's contextual knowledge on the continuum above could be problematic because it could imply that knowledge exists within individuals and they either "have it" or "do not have it" to various different degrees. I use the explanations beneath either end of the continuum, however, to show that my assertions about Deng and his peers are based on

their demonstrated engagement in situated action. I do not argue that knowledge is either present or absent within the individual to varying different degrees. Drawing on Gill (1993, p. 3), I argue instead that knowledge is "relational and participatory." Thus, in the specific examples above, individuals can have relatively more or less situated experiences with American matinees on which to draw to interpret Spinelli's analogy.

It would be problematic, in fact, to suggest that Deng has little or no experience with "movies." Deng stated that he had seen movies in Thailand. Additionally, his family regularly watched videos of movies on their VCR at home. What is at issue here is not Deng's understanding of the generic and decontextualized notion of "movie", but his experiences with the social practices (Garrison, 1995) associated with viewing matinees in America. This does not mean that Deng has a deficit with respect to his knowledge of movies; rather, he does not have the requisite experiences upon which to draw to interpret Spinelli's analogy in the same ways his mainstream American peers interpreted the analogy.

Dimension Three: Knowledge about Interactional Norms in Whole-Group

| Demonstrates successful engagement in whole-group lessons | Does not demonstrate successful engagement in whole-group lessons |
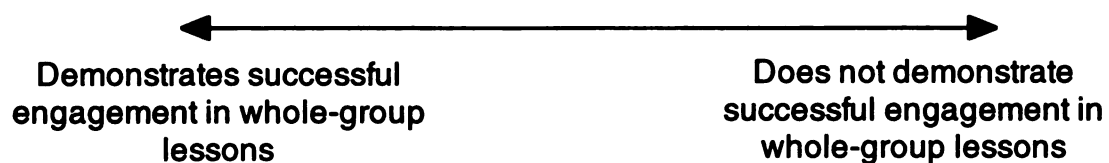
I base my assertions about students' displayed understanding of whole-group interactional norms on my previous analyses of participants' engagement

in whole-group interactions; that is, I draw on students' actions and spoken and written words to discuss my interpretation of their engagement in interactional norms. The ends of the continuum above represent the students' actions relative to interactional norms in the whole group. These actions, according to Gill (1993), "are the *stuff* out of which learners, classrooms, and curricula are formed. The real, the concrete, is seen to be the interrelational quality and patterns existing among and constituting such abstract entities as persons, objects and institutions" (p. 6).

Elsewhere in this chapter I have illustrated that a central interactional norm in whole-group discussions was the use of the conversational floor to display knowledge about the text and/or connections between the text and participants' lives. Further, I asserted that this knowledge could be displayed in a variety of different ways. For example, as illustrated in Table 8, some students just spoke without raising their hands to address the questions that Mrs. Weber often posed. However, students could also raise their hands to be acknowledged by the teacher in order to attain the conversational floor. Another important conversational norm was that student silence was sanctioned; that is, children could choose whether or not they wished to participate orally in the ongoing conversation. The teacher did not call on students who did not raise their hands. Therefore, the onus of responsibility to participate orally in whole-group lessons was on the child.

Interestingly, however, students were required to demonstrate participation and attentiveness through their physical actions even if they chose

not to speak.[12] For example, Mrs. Weber went to great lengths to make sure that she could see each child during the lessons. At the beginning of lessons, Mrs. Weber asked children to move to different locations if she could not see their faces. If a child shifted locations during a lesson, the teacher sometimes stopped the lesson to ask the child to move into her line of vision. Additionally, side conversations with peers during whole-group discussions were not permitted. Nor was it acceptable to engage in activities not sanctioned at the immediate time by the teacher. For example, when the class read from the text, the children were required to have the open text in front of them and their eyes on the text. When the class engaged in discussion, all the children had to demonstrate physical presence in the conversation by not reading ahead in the story or appearing to do anything other than attend to the speaker. Presumably, these accouterments of silent participation demonstrated engagement on the part of students in this context.

I draw on the same episode to illustrate how Sally, Dan, and Chris demonstrated successful engagement in whole-group conversations. Mrs. Weber introduced the notions of home versus homelessness and parents versus no parents. Sally, Dan and Chris further developed these contrasts by introducing examples from the story and American culture. As was typical, Mrs. Weber asked questions of the group and the conversational floor was left open for anyone to respond. Sally, Dan and Chris all interjected ideas and build

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[12]Table 5 illustrates that very few children actually chose to speak during whole-group lessons.

upon one another's comments during this conversational segment and none of them raised their hands to be acknowledged by the teacher. Further, Sally, Dan, and Chris showed appropriate participation in the conversation through their nonverbal behavior as well; they all appeared to attend to the person speaking. Sally, Dan, and Chris demonstrated successful engagement in the whole-group lesson relative to the conversational norms for this lesson; therefore, they rank on the high end of the continuum for this dimension.

Because silence was an acceptable way to participate in whole-group lessons, Deng's silence during all 18 whole-group lessons could be considered successful engagement in the conversation particularly since his physical behavior during lessons met the criteria for purported engagement; that is, he attended to the person speaking, and he appeared to follow along in his text when students or the teacher read. However, because Deng only chose silence as a way to participate, it is clear that he did not demonstrate the ability to use the whole range of conversational norms sanctioned in the whole-group setting. Thus, he would not rank as high on the continuum above as Sally, Dan, and Chris in his demonstrated ability to employ a wide range of acceptable engagement strategies during whole-group lessons.

Further regarding the issue of silent participation, it was not possible to know whether Deng and other silent students were intellectually engaged in ongoing whole-group conversations. However, when Deng's silence is coupled with his reported confusion of whole-group lessons during viewing sessions, it seems reasonable to assume that his lack of overt engagement was

often due to confusion about the class discussion, story events and characters, and so forth.

While Deng's silence was undoubtedly often due to confusion, this was not always the case. For example, during the viewing session on February 29, 1996, (of the whole-group lesson on May 10, 1995) Deng reported that he could have responded aloud to one of Mrs. Weber's questions to the class, but he chose not to say anything. During the lesson the class discussed the fact that Maniac was a legend. Mrs. Weber then asked the students if they knew any legends. The following conversation ensued during the February 29, viewing session pertaining to this lesson excerpt:

Vue: He say, um, he know what she was talking about. He wants to, you know, answer like answer about you know. Like, she said that Abraham Lincoln was a legend, right? So you know, he wants to say answer about like think of something like tell the teacher like, but he was too shy. He was too shy to say it because he was too shy. He did know what she was talking about.

Cindy: But he did know what she was talking about?

Vue: Yeah, he was going to say but he keep it all inside.

Later during our February 29, conversation, Deng said that the legend he thought of was Weon Fieshong, a famous Chinese martial artist. In this instance, when Mrs. Weber asked a question and the conversational floor was open, Deng stated that he could have responded but chose not to because he

was too shy. Deng demonstrated, thus, that engagement involves much more than just understanding the norms of the conversation, it also involves being comfortable enough in the context to choose to engage.

Concluding Comments

In the first part of this chapter, I presented an overview of my take on three whole-group lessons with respect to the general literacy content covered and the rules and norms for engagement during the lessons. In the second section, I presented my interpretation of Deng's take on the same three whole-group lessons. In the final section, I discussed dimensions of opportunity that are germane to literacy learning in the context of the three focus whole-group lessons. In particular, I argued that textual knowledge, knowledge about American culture, and knowledge about whole-group interactional norms were important dimensions of contextual knowledge pertinent to whole-group lessons during the unit on *Maniac Magee*. The following chapter is similar to this chapter in structure; however, I shift my focus from whole-group lessons to small-group activities.

CHAPTER FIVE

SMALL-GROUP ACTIVITIES

In chapter 5, I continue to explore Deng's literacy learning opportunities, however, I shift the focus of study from large-group lessons to small-group activities. I structure chapter 5 similar to chapter 4, first discussing my "take" on the two focus small-group activities (i.e., May 30, 1995, & June 9, 1995) with respect to the general literacy content covered during each activity and the rules and norms for engagement during the activities. (i.e., who spoke, what they discussed, & how they engaged in the conversations). Then, I present my interpretation of Deng's "take" on the same two lessons. Finally, I discuss dimensions of opportunity that are germane to literacy learning in the context of the two focus small-group activities.

The Two Small-Group Focus Activities: My Perspective

In the beginning of this section, I present an overview of the general nature of small-group activities during the language arts unit based on the text *Maniac Magee*, and I discuss how each of the two focus small-group activities fit within that context. Then, I give a brief overview of each of the two small-group activities that are the focus of this chapter. I use this background information as a backdrop against which I address the following questions: (a) Who spoke during the activities? (b) What did conversants discuss? and (c) How did conversants engage in the conversations?

Mrs. Weber's students engaged in small-group activities six times across the course of the unit pertaining to *Maniac Magee*. Students wrote in their

journals during four of the small-group activities; two activities involved discussions. Three journal-related activities involved writing fairly short predictions about topics such as what adventures Maniac might have next or what might happen next in the story.[13] The students always sat in small groups for journal writing and could talk with one another about their ideas before and during their writing. These activities typically lasted 10 to 12 minutes. In contrast, the fourth journal-related activity (May 30, 1995) involved creating a character map of a central character in the story named Greyson. This small-group journal activity, lasting approximately 25 minutes, was much longer and more complex than the other three journal assignments.

The first of the two discussion-related activities lasted approximately 12 minutes. On May 31, 1995, the class had engaged in a typical whole-group lesson (see chapter 4), and Mrs. Weber was called out of the room the last few minutes of the lesson. Prior to leaving, she asked the students to assemble in their small groups, finish reading the last two pages of the chapter they were reading together, and then discuss any aspects of the story they had read that day. In contrast, the other discussion-related small group activity (June 9, 1995) was longer and more structured by the teacher. Mrs. Weber gave the children about 34 minutes to engage in a summary discussion of *Maniac Magee*. She asked them to discuss their impressions of such issues as homelessness, racism, and loneliness in the book. Thus, the two small-group activities of focus

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[13] On two occasions, Mrs. Weber suggested that the children write three to four sentences.

represent a discussion-related activity and a journal activity. Each is a longer, more complex small-group activity in its respective category of small-group activities.

The teacher did not assign formal roles to the children for their small group work. She had, however, spent considerable time during the year teaching the children to work together in small groups. For example, the children had recently worked in small groups for a period of several weeks to create an Explorer's Project. An important component of the project was daily self- and group evaluation of their participation in small peer groups. During this project the class regularly discussed their ongoing evaluations and they discussed how to work effectively with peers in small groups. Thus, while the teacher did not focus specifically on how to work effectively in small groups in the unit pertaining to *Maniac Magee*, the example above illustrates that the children had spent time during the school year learning how to work with peers in small groups.

Small-Group Activity for May 30, 1995

The small-group activity for May 30, 1995, was structured very differently from the whole-group lessons described in chapter 4. For the first 2 to 3 minutes of the 25 minute activity, Mrs. Weber described the children's task for the day. They were to design a character map of Greyson, a character recently introduced into the story. In the story, Maniac had just left the Beale household because the Beales were being vandalized for allowing a white boy to live with them in their black neighborhood; Maniac loved the Beales too much to see

anything bad happen to them, so he ran away. After living alone at the zoo for a while, Maniac was "adopted" by an old man named Greyson who worked at a local baseball park.

After modeling what she wanted the children to do by drawing a beginning sketch of a character map on the chalkboard, Mrs. Weber asked the children to include five adjectives on their character maps to describe Greyson's personality. The children were instructed to find at least two pieces of evidence from the story to support their choice of adjectives. The students worked in groups of three or four. Deng worked with two other boys, Tran and Chris (see Figure 5).

Small-Group Maniac Magee Activity for June 9, 1995

June 9 was the last day of the school year. The class had just finished reading the *Maniac Magee* story on June 8. Prior to beginning the Discussion Activity, Mrs. Weber told the children that she wanted them to have a chance to think about, reflect on, and talk about the story they had just finished (Lesson transcript, June 9, 1995). Consequently, this final small-group activity was a chance for the children to summarize and evaluate their experiences with the story. Mrs. Weber gave the children the following directions for their small-group discussions:

> When you get together and discuss in your small groups today, these are
>
> the areas that I want you to discuss. You will have to decide, and each of
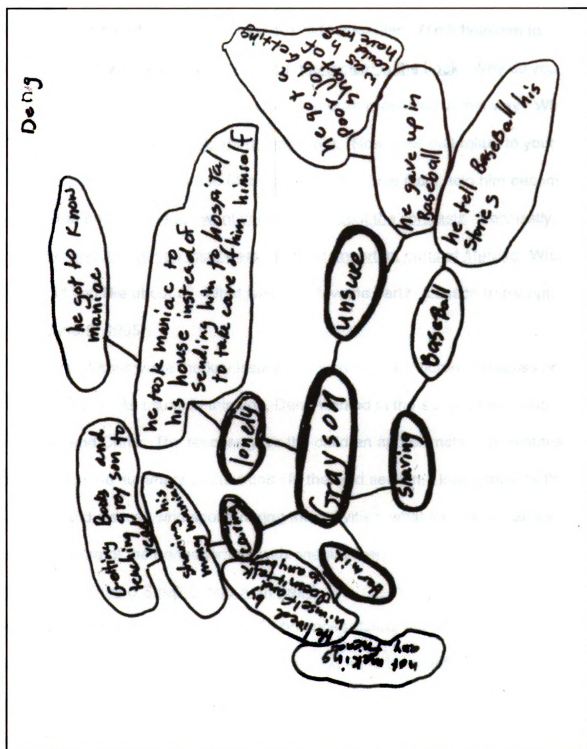
Figure 5. Deng's character map.

you need to talk about it. <u>Talk about the homelessness in the book.</u>[14]

Talk about what the homelessness did for Maniac. Did it help him to

become what he was? <u>Talk about the racism in the book</u>. Why do you

think Jerry Spinelli wanted us to see racism presented in this way? What

was the racism? <u>Think about loneliness</u>. How does that relate to your

life? How did it relate to Maniac's life? And how did it help him become

what he was?...<u>And I want you to think about the contrasts</u>. Very lastly, ...

<u>tell about what you think were the most important parts of *Maniac*</u>. What

did you like about it? What was your favorite part? (Lesson transcript,

June 9, 1995).

Mrs. Weber wrote the key issues she wanted the children to discuss on

the chalkboard. As usual, in this unit, Deng worked in the same small group

with Tran and Chris. The teacher gave the children approximately 34 minutes

to engage in the summary discussions. In the next section, I look across both

activities and discuss who spoke during the activities, what they talked about

and the nature of their engagement with one another.

<u>Who Spoke During Small-Group Activities?</u>

Table 13 gives an overview of who spoke during the two small-group

activities. I determined the number of speaking turns by counting the number of

times each person made comments during each small-group activity. Table 13

does not reveal information about the nature or complexity of the comments

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[14]Key issues the teacher wanted the children to discuss are underlined.

made, but it does reveal some interesting patterns about the number of contributions made by each conversant. First, predictably, three boys in the group contributed more than did either adult present in the classroom. Mrs. Weber contributed a bit on both days, while I made a few contributions during the second activity. Mrs. Weber tended to circulate during small group time to offer support and guidance to each group as well as to monitor behavior.

Tran spoke almost 50% of the time. Averages across both small group activities reveal that Chris spoke just over 30% of the time, and Deng spoke just under 20% of the time. Interestingly, patterns for the amount of contributions varied considerably for each child when compared to their number of contributions during large-group lessons. (Refer to Table 5 for an overview of number of contributions during whole-group lessons.) For example, Tran rarely, if ever, spoke during whole-group lessons, but contributed most during small-group activities. Chris, one of the four children in the large group who consistently contributed the most during whole-group lessons, contributed considerably less than Tran did during small-group activities. Deng rarely

Table 13

Number of Turns Taken by Participants During Two Small-Group Activities

Category	Name	Number of Turns 5/30/95	Number of Turns 6/9/95	Total
Boys	1. Tran	76	149	225
	2. Chris	52	103	155
	3. Deng	23	67	90
Adults	4. Mrs. Weber	8	2	10
	5. Cindy	0	3	3

spoke, and never voluntarily, during whole-group lessons, but he took almost 20% of the speaking turns during small-group activities. This brief overview begins to indicate that there were significant differences in who spoke and how much they spoke when amount of talk during small-group activities was compared with amount of talk during large group lessons. It does not, however, provide much information about **how** the talk was different. In the following subsection I focus on **what** was discussed during each small-group activity, and in the final section I discuss how participants interacted. Because the nature of the conversations and the topics discussed influenced one another, however, there will be some overlap in the next two sections.

What Did Conversants Discuss During Small-Group Activities?

The topics discussed varied considerably among the two small-group activities, perhaps because the nature of the activities was quite different. For example, in the May 30, 1995, activity, (hereafter, the Character Map Activity) Mrs. Weber gave the students a specific **structure** for creating their character maps (i.e., the students were to include five adjectives that described Greyson, drawing on evidence from the story to support their choices). However, the students had flexibility to determine which adjectives they chose and which **content** from the story they drew on to support their choices. In the June 9, 1995, small-group activity, (hereafter, the Discussion Activity) Mrs. Weber was more specific about the **content** of the story she wanted the students to discuss (i.e., the themes of homelessness, racism, loneliness, etc.). However, she did not give specific guidelines about the **structure** of the children's conversations

other than reminding them to discuss all three themes. The Character Map

Activity involved creating a written product that was limited in scope; that is, it

focused on only a single aspect of the story. The Discussion Activity, in contrast,

involved looking across the entire story. Thus, given the differences in the

nature of the two small-group activities, I discuss the topics covered in each

activity separately. I begin with the character map activity.

The Character Map Activity. Most of the talk during the Character Map

Activity revolved around the text and the assignment; however, there were two

brief instances during the activity when the talk focused on other issues. One

"other issue" was when someone in a group next to the boys accused Tran,

Chris, and Deng of copying some ideas and the boys defended themselves

against this accusation. The second instance of talk not related to the

assignment occurred during the last minute or so when the boys finished before

the time was up and began chatting about things such as the group that

accused them of cheating. Because almost all of the talk in the group focused

on the text and the assignment, I limit my discussion here to those topics.

The topics discussed during the Character Map Activity seemed to follow

a pattern closely aligned with the assignment itself; that is, first someone posed

a character trait about Greyson for the group to consider. If there were no

responses to the idea, it was usually because someone posed an alternative.

Once the group agreed on a particular character trait, they typically discussed

the relative merits of the idea and then moved to the text itself to discuss

evidence from the text to support the particular adjective they were discussing at

the time. Table 14 gives a brief overview of the adjective suggestions made, the

name of the individual who made each suggestion, whether or not there was

uptake by the group on the suggestion, and the discussion of evidence from the

text relative to those suggestions that the group considered.

I use an excerpt from the boys' discussion to illustrate the two categories

of topics discussed (i.e., the posing of adjectives and the evidence from the text

Table 14

Topics Discussed During the Character Map Activity, May 30, 1996

Adjective Posed	Uptake	Evidence Discussed from the Text
1. Greyson as *lonely* (?)	Yes	• Lives alone in a one room apartment • Chose to take care of Maniac rather than send him elsewhere
2. Greyson as *caring* (Chris)	Yes	• Gave Maniac a place to stay at the baseball field • Spent his own money to take care of Maniac • Shared his food and clothes with Maniac • Let Maniac teach him to read
3. Greyson as *energetic* (Chris)	No	
4. Greyson as a *hermit* (Tran)	Yes	• Didn't talk to people very much • Lived alone and rarely spent time with others
5. Greyson as someone who *shares* (Deng & Tran)	Yes	• Shared his clothes, money, and food with Maniac
6. Greyson as *liking* (Deng)	No	
7. Greyson as *unsure* of himself (Mrs. Weber)	Yes	• Gave up baseball • Got a poor job as a maintenance man at a baseball park

to support the adjective suggestions). Prior to the excerpt below, the boys had

just finished discussing the adjective "lonely" and the evidence from the text to

support this adjective. Then, Chris made the following suggestion:

Chris: Caring. That's another good adjective for him [referring to

Greyson].

Tran: Okay, let's see if// What's what's another word to describe him?

Chris: Caring.

Deng: Caring, Maniac

Tran: Caring?

Deng: Yeah.

Tran: Okay, so write down caring.

Chris: Caring, okay caring, what shall we do about caring?

Tran: Evidence, he's

Chris: (overlapping speech) He took Maniac and to the baseball room

and fixed him up

Tran: I know, and / but he got, he didn't have to spend his own money

for him. He could have left him

Chris: (overlapping speech) Yeah

At the beginning of the above excerpt, Chris suggested the adjective

"caring" as the next adjective for the group to consider. For some reason, Tran

did not comment on Chris's suggestion, but asked instead if anyone had any

ideas for another adjective.[15] Both Chris and Deng reiterated Chris's idea and

Tran responded with a question about the word caring. When Deng responded

affirmatively, Tran suggested that the boys write the word down on their papers.

Apparently, the fact that both Chris and Deng endorsed the suggestion "caring"

led Tran to suggest that the boys should include that adjective. Interestingly,

Tran's suggestion to "write down caring" reveals some important information

about his position in the group. The nature of his interactions across both small-

group activities indicates that he was the leader in the group and often made

final decisions and directed the other boys' behavior.[16]

After deciding that they would include the adjective "caring" on their

character maps, the boys then began to discuss evidence from the text to

support their decision. Chris suggested that Greyson gave Maniac a place to

live at the baseball park and that he took care of Maniac. Tran said that

Greyson spent his own money on Maniac even though he didn't really have to

do so. The boys continued to discuss several other examples of evidence

before they settled on two pieces of evidence to include on their maps. Then,

Chris posed another adjective for the group's consideration. Thus, as illustrated

by Table 14, and the excerpt above, there were two general categories of topics

discussed during the Character Map Activity: (a) the boys introduced adjectives

relative to Greyson's character for the group to consider, and (b) the boys

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[15]It appeared on tape as if Tran was still writing on his character map as Chris made the "caring" suggestion. I suspect that perhaps Tran was just concentrating on his writing and didn't hear Chris' suggestion.

discussed examples from the text to support the adjectives they chose to include on their maps.

The Discussion Activity. The topics covered during the Discussion Activity fell into two broad categories: topics pertaining to and unrelated to the assignment. Most of the topics pertaining to the assignment were discussed during the first half of the activity where most of the unrelated topics were discussed during the latter half of the activity. I begin with and focus on an overview of topics the boys discussed that pertained to the assignment. Next, I briefly address the unrelated topics that the boys discussed.

As with the Character Map Activity, the manner in which Mrs. Weber explained the Discussion Activity assignment structured the topics discussed; that is, the boys systematically discussed each topic Mrs. Weber listed on the chalkboard in the order listed. They discussed the assigned topics in three ways: (a) they drew on examples from the text to discuss the topics; (b) they made connections between their own lives and the assigned topics by using examples directly related to their lives or by expressing personal opinions; or (c) they made connections between the assigned discussion topics and events or situations not directly related to their lives or the text. Thus, the assigned discussion topics and the order of the topics framed the first part of the June 9 discussion. Examples from the text, the boys' lives, and outside sources were also topics discussed. Table 15 gives an overview of the topics discussed

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[16]I address this issue in more depth in the section on the nature of interactions between participants in the small groups.

during the first part of the Discussion Activity. The three sub-categories under the section "Topics and Ideas the Boys Drew on to Discuss Assigned Topics" correspond to a, b, and c mentioned immediately above.

The numbers on the chart represent the number of times that different examples were discussed or connections were made within each category. For example, when discussing "homelessness," the boys mentioned five examples from the text, made three different connections to their own lives, and did not make any connections to outside events or situations. The excerpt below on loneliness exemplifies how the boys drew on different ideas and experiences to

Table 15

Topics Discussed During the Discussion Activity

Assigned Discussion Topics	Topics/Ideas Drawn on to Discuss Assigned Topics		
	a. Examples from the Text	b. Personal Connections	c. Outside Connections
1. Homelessness	5	3	0
2. Racism	4	5	4
3. Loneliness	3	2	1
4. Tall Tales	6	3	2
5. Realistic Fiction	3	10	10
6. Contrasts	10	6	0
7. Favorites	5	8	0
8. Life Changes	0	3	3
TOTALS:	36	40	20

discuss the topics assigned by the teacher. Prior to this excerpt, the boys had discussed homelessness and racism. In the first comment below, Tran suggests that Maniac visited both the East End (the black side of town) and the West End (the white side of town). Further, through Maniac's positive efforts, he helped to bring the town together. After making his summary statement about racism in the text, Tran indicated that the boys ought to move on to the topic of loneliness.

Tran:	But, I think after Maniac visited both sides, I think they did fine, in racism. He can bring 'em together. Okay, loneliness.
Chris:	What about it?
Tran:	What do you think about it?
Chris:	Well, loneliness isn't that good. You need somebody.
Tran:	What do you think Deng?
Chris:	(Singing the Beatles tune) Help, I need somebody. Help.
Tran:	(Ignoring Chris) Deng, do you think Maniac felt lonely?
Deng:	Yeah. He want, he want some people to be, to be friend wi with him.
Tran:	Yeah. Yep. He wanted lots of friends and he made lots of friends.
Chris:	And he really wanted someone to call him home.
Tran:	Uh hum. Okay, tall tales. Tall tales.

Tran initiated the brief discussion about loneliness above by asking the boys what they thought about loneliness. Chris suggested that loneliness isn't good (a personal opinion). Tran then asked Deng what he thought, while Chris sang a few words from a familiar Beatles' song (a connection to an outside event). After Tran reiterated his question to Deng, Deng replied that he thought Maniac was lonely (personal opinion), and that Maniac wanted people to be friends with him (example from the text). Tran reiterated Deng's comment, and then Chris suggested that Maniac "really wanted someone to call him home" (example from the text). After that brief exchange about loneliness, the boys moved on to the next topic. This excerpt illustrates that the boys clearly "covered" the topic (i.e., they discussed loneliness); however, the level of engagement and depth of coverage was minimal. In this excerpt, the boys seemed to be "getting through the assignment" rather than personally engaging with the material in an in-depth and meaningful manner.

While some of the boys' discussions about other assigned topics were richer (this will be evident in later analyses), the boys did actually get through the assignment in a much shorter time than that allotted by the teacher.[17] The first hint of a breakdown in the assigned structure of the task occurred about 13 minutes into the conversation when the boys began talking about favorite characters in the story. Tran suggested that one of his favorite characters was Maniac, and Chris said that his favorite character was John McNab. John

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[17]Mrs. Weber told the children that they would have one-half hour for the assignment. The actual assignment lasted about 34 minutes.

McNab was a deplorable character in the story; he was a racist, a bigot, had very poor manners, and so forth. Tran asked Chris if he liked John McNab because he wanted to be like him. Tran and Chris then engaged in a series of put downs by calling one another names such as "nerd," "dweeb" and "dork." Later in the conversation, Chris mentioned that he was "just kidding" when he said that John McNab was his favorite character.

Even though the above breakdown in the formal structure of the assignment occurred, the boys spent some more time talking congenially about the topics assigned by the teacher. For example, they discussed how the book had changed them, and they talked more about their favorite characters. However, most of the last 15 minutes of the allotted time to discuss the book was devoted to the topics of basketball, girls, and guns--in that order. Further, much of the conversation occurred through the use of put downs and challenges between Chris and Tran. Deng also contributed to the conversation (especially when the boys discussed basketball); however, he said less than the other two boys. Finally, Tran and Deng often sided together and against Chris.

Now, having presented an overview of the topics discussed during both focus small-group activities, I move to a more in-depth discussion of how the boys engaged in talk during the two small-group activities. I limit my focus to the entire small-group activity for May 30, 1995, and the first half of the small-group activity on June 9, 1995. While the boys interactions during the second half of

the June 9 activity were interesting, they are unrelated to the *Maniac Magee* text.

How Conversants Engaged in Conversations During the Small-Group Activities

As argued in chapter 2, language (e.g., oral, written, gestures) plays a central role in learning. Since oral language, in general, plays an important role in learning, the ways in which it is constructed among conversants undoubtedly influences their opportunities to learn through talk. Consequently, examining conversants' construction of oral language can be a useful way to explore their learning and learning opportunities.

After watching Deng, Tran and Chris engage in small-group activities and after studying audio tapes, videotapes, and transcripts of their interactions, I would characterize the ways they interacted in three assertions:

1. Tran often controlled access to the conversational floor and the flow of the conversation during small-group activities.

2. Deng's role in the small-group conversations primarily involved seeking help, asking for clarification, or seeking approval.

3. Tran often acted as Deng's advocate.

Assertion 1: Tran often controlled access to the conversational floor and the conversational flow. I drew on the audio tapes, video tapes and transcripts mentioned above to study each of my hunches. I begin with the first hunch. In the previous section I already established that both the Character Map Activity and the Discussion Activity proceeded according to the structure of the assignment given by Mrs. Weber. The topics and the order in which the topics

were discussed was implicitly controlled by Mrs. Weber; however, the boys controlled the manner in which they moved from topic to topic.

The person(s) controlling the movement between topics undoubtedly played a central role in controlling the conversational floor and the flow of the conversation. Consequently, I decided to examine the junctures between topics the boys discussed to determine the following: (a) who decided when an "old" topic was finished and a "new" topic should begin, and (b) who asked questions or made statements to direct the flow of the conversation about the "new" topic under consideration. I examine the junctures between topics for each small-group activity below, beginning with the Character Map Activity.

Tran, Chris, and Deng discussed five major topics during the Character Map Activity (i.e., loneliness, caring, hermit, sharing, and unsure--the five adjectives they chose to describe Greyson). Thus, there were four junctures between topics. Identifying who concluded a previous topic was usually straightforward. Typically, one of the boys announced that they were finished with an "old" topic and ready to move on. Identifying when a "new" topic was introduced was usually equally straightforward. One caveat here, however, is that I only discuss topics for which there was uptake by the group. Finally, identifying who asked a question or made a statement that directed the conversation was usually quite straightforward. Once a new topic was sanctioned for discussion, questions or statements that directed the group's conversation typically followed. Table 16 gives an overview of who controlled

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the conversational floor and the flow of the conversation during junctures
between topics.

As Table 16 indicates, Tran usually controlled the shifts between topics
during the activity. Further, Tran directed the flow of the conversation more than
Chris. Also interesting is the fact that, even though the teacher contributed very
little to this overall small-group conversation, her contributions were significant.
The boys opted to include her final suggestion of "unsure" in their character
map. Finally, while Deng did participate verbally in this activity, his participation
did not involve directing the flow of the conversation or controlling the
conversational floor between junctures in discussion topics.

The excerpt below provides an example of the conversation that
occurred during the juncture between the third and fourth topics (i.e., hermit,
sharing).   Prior to the excerpt below, the boys had just decided to write that
Greyson "rarely made friends" under the "Hermit" category. Then Tran said,

Table 16

Flow of the Conversation at Junctures Between Topics During the Character

Map Activity, May 30, 1995

Junctures between Topics	Concluded "Old" Topic	Introduced "New" Topic	Directed Conversation
Topics 1 & 2	Chris	Chris	Tran
Topics 2 & 3	Tran	Tran	Chris
Topics 3 & 4	Tran	Tran	Tran
Topics 4 & 5	Tran	Mrs. Weber	Mrs. Weber

"Okay," which signaled a move to the next topic for the group.

Tran: Okay

Deng: Number four.

Tran: (Telling Deng how to write on his character map, and then

                showing Deng what he meant.) Hey Deng, do it up in the

                corner. Yeah, you should do it like this. I do mine up in

                the corner.

Teacher: (General announcement to the class.) You have about

                seven minutes.

Tran: What's another word? Sharing, right?

Deng: Sharing.

Tran: He's sharing, right?

At the beginning of the above excerpt, Tran assisted Deng with his

character map after he signaled that the group should move to the next topic.

Then Tran suggested that the group consider the word sharing as another word

to describe Greyson. Interestingly, Deng had already introduced the word

"sharing" into the conversation earlier, but he used it when the group was

discussing Greyson as a caring person. At that time, Deng had suggested that

Greyson shared many things with Maniac. After suggesting the word sharing in

the segment above, Tran then asked the question, "He's sharing, right?" Tran's

question directed the next segment of conversation as the boys discussed the

food, clothes, money, and so forth that Greyson had shared with Maniac.

There were 7 junctures between topics during the June 9 Discussion Activity. When the boys discussed homelessness, racism, loneliness, tall tales, realistic fiction, contrasts, favorites, and how the story changed them. I followed the same procedures described above to determine when "old" topics were concluded and "new" topics were introduced and to determine who directed the conversation. As Table 17 indicates, Tran assumed control of the conversation more often than anyone else.

Tran controlled or directed talk during junctures between topics in the conversation 15 of 21 possible times, Chris did so 3 times, Mrs. Weber twice, and Deng once. Clearly, Tran played the major role in orchestrating movement between topics in the Discussion Activity as well as the Character Map activity.

Table 17

Flow of the Conversation at Junctures Between Topics During the Discussion Activity, June 9, 1995

Junctures Between Topics	Concluded "Old" Topic	Introduced "New" Topic	Directed Conversation
Topics 1 & 2	Tran	Tran	Tran
Topics 2 & 3	Tran	Tran	Chris
Topics 3 & 4	Tran	Tran	Deng
Topics 4 & 5	Tran	Tran	Tran
Topics 5 & 6	Chris	Tran	Tran
Topics 6 & 7	Tran	Tran	Chris
Topics 7 & 8	Mrs. Weber	Mrs. Weber	Tran

The excerpt below illustrates how Tran controlled the flow of the conversation between junctures in topics during the Discussion Activity. Prior to the excerpt below, the boys had been discussing homelessness. Tran felt that the boys had covered the topic well enough, so he said, "Okay, that part solves it." Then he introduced racism--the next topic listed on the chalkboard:

Tran: See, okay, homelessness, okay, that part solves it. Okay, racism. I mean, why don't they just get together instead of making stuff up about each other? I mean, racism is bad.

Chris: Yeah, Fishbelly's bad.

Tran: I know. Because people, they don't know about each other so just, they just make stuff up about each other. I mean, what do you think about racism Deng?

Deng: Wh what is that mean?

Tran: What?

Deng: What is that mean? What is racism?

In Tran's first comment above, he ended the discussion of the previous topic (i.e., homelessness), introduced the next topic (i.e., racism), asked a question about racism in the text, and made a statement about racism. Thus, he controlled the movement between topics, and he began to direct the conversation about the next topic. Chris's response about "Fishbelly" refers to the derogatory name that Mars Bar (an African American character in the story)

often called Maniac before he and Maniac became friends.[18] In his next comment, Tran continued to control the flow of the conversation by explicitly inviting Deng into the conversation. At that point Tran and Chris found out that Deng did not understand the term racism. In the subsequent talk, Tran and Chris explained racism to Deng.[19]

Careful examination of the junctures between topics during both small-group activities leads me to believe that Tran did, in fact, play a major role in controlling the conversational floor and the flow of the conversation during the activities. I argue in the two subsequent sections that Tran's leadership role in the conversations had a significant impact on Deng's learning opportunities during the activities. The manner in which Tran controlled the conversational floor and the flow of the conversations reflected sensitivity to and concern for Deng and his understanding of what the boys were discussing.

Assertion 2: Deng's role primarily involved seeking help, asking for clarification, or seeking approval. As I studied the data pertaining to the small-group activities it appeared as though Deng frequently sought help, clarification, or approval during the activities. In order to check this assertion, I examined Deng's comments during both focus small-group activities. I examined Deng's comments during the entire activity for May 30, 1995, and the first half of the activity for June 9, 1995.

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[18]A plausible interpretation of Chris' comment given the context of the conversation is that Chris was suggesting that it really wasn't very appropriate for Mars Bar to call Maniac "Fishbelly."
[19]I discuss the boys' explanation of racism to Deng later in this chapter.

I determined the categories in which Deng's comments fell by studying all of Deng's comments in the context of the ongoing discussions during both activities. I identified the categories for classification that made sense given the context of Deng's specific comments within the each conversation. I classified Deng's comments into the following categories: (1) seeking help, clarification or approval, (2) making suggestions or sharing ideas, (3) agreeing with or confirming someone else's ideas, (4) attempting to gain the conversational floor, and (5) clarifying something he already stated. Table 18 indicates the number of comments in each category and the percentage of time comments fell into particular categories.

The results of this analysis surprised me. Most of Deng's comments did not involve seeking help, clarification, or approval as I had anticipated; rather, the majority of Deng's comments involved making suggestions and/or sharing ideas. I wondered why seeking help, clarification, or approval seemed like such an important category to me when considering Deng's comments overall, so I returned to the transcripts of the activities and looked at the times that he sought help, clarification, or approval. I was intrigued by the types of issues on which Deng sought clarification. I was intrigued, too, by Tran and Chris's responses to his queries for help and clarification. I return to the very end of the last transcript segment from the Discussion Activity that I introduced in the section above to illustrate why I was fascinated by the boys' interactions around one of Deng's confusions.

The end of the June 9 transcript segment introduced in the section above

ended with Deng's questions, "What is that mean? What is racism?" Prior to

Deng's questions, Tran had directly asked Deng what he thought about racism

in the story *Maniac Magee*. Tran and Chris launched into the following rather

long explanation of racism to address Deng's questions about the meaning of

racism:

Deng:	What is that mean? What is racism?
Tran:	It means when people don't like another person.
Chris:	It's like when a person
Tran:	(overlapping Chris' comment) like, let's, okay
Chris:	(overlapping Tran's comment) when a white person and a black person don't get along.

Table 18

Comments Made by Deng During Small-Group Activities

CATEGORY	NUMBER OF COMMENTS	PERCENT OF COMMENTS
1. Seeking help, clarification or approval	7	13%
2. Making suggestions and/or sharing ideas	23	43%
3. Agreeing with/confirming someone else's idea	10	19%
4. Attempting to gain the conversational floor	9	17%
5. Clarifying something already mentioned	4	8%
Totals:	53	100%

Tran: Or another culture.

Chris: Yeah, yeah, or another culture. But it's mainly white and

                black. And a white person doesn't like a black person

                because that person's black.

Tran and Chris had suggested that racism was when people from

different cultures did not like each other. Further, Chris asserted that racism

usually occurred between blacks and whites. After having defined racism for

Deng, Tran sought Deng's input about what they had just said. Chris, however,

was not finished talking about racism as primarily a conflict between blacks and

whites.

Tran: Yeah, what do you think about that Deng?

Chris: A white person thinks, you know, a black person is not as

                good as them.

Tran: Yeah, what do you think Deng?

Deng: I think Amanda don't like

Tran: I mean, do you think it's good, bad?

Deng: No, is ba, bad.

Tran: Yeah, it's bad, right Deng? It's / okay, racism is bad. And

                Maniac, and Maniac, Maniac had to go through lots of

                racism through his, where he was.

Above, Tran asked Deng's opinion about racism, and then when Deng

started to draw a character from the text into his explanation (i.e., Amanda

Beale), Tran clarified that he just wanted to know, in general, whether Deng

thought racism was good or bad. When Deng answered (appropriately from Tran's perspective), Tran began to tie the issue of racism back to the text; he suggested that Maniac had to deal with lots of racism in the book. Below, Chris began to mention some of the racist characters with whom Maniac interacted such as Mars Bar (a teenage African American male), John McNab (a teenage Caucasian male), and Greyson (an elderly Caucasian male).

Chris: With Mars Bar and John McNab.

Tran: And everybody else, but

Chris: (overlapping speech) I don't know about Greyson, though, was he

Tran: (overlapping speech) But I think after Maniac visited both sides, I think they did fine on racism. He can bring 'em together. Okay, loneliness.

Tran closed the explanation of racism by suggesting the Maniac interacted with racist and nonracist people from the East End of town (i.e., the Black side) and the West End of town (i.e., the White side), and Maniac was able to bring the two sides together.

Clearly, Tran and Chris took Deng's confusion about racism seriously. They defined racism, scaffolded Deng's understanding of racism by drawing him into the conversation and making it clear that racism is a bad thing, and they related racism back to the characters in the story they were reading. Given the boys' extensive and earnest attempt to help Deng understand important issues in the story such as racism, I can see why the category "seeking help,

clarification or approval" seemed such an important one for Deng in the small-group lessons. Even though Deng made a fewer number of comments to seek help or clarification, the category was an important one relative to his opportunity to learn about the story.

Another finding from this analysis which I found particularly interesting was that almost half of Deng's comments involved making suggestions or sharing ideas. Often, the ideas that Deng shared or the suggestions that he made were in direct response to Tran's questions. As I suggested earlier, Tran played an important role in inviting Deng into the conversation and making it clear that he valued Deng's ideas, opinions and thoughts. The excerpt below illustrates how Tran expertly brought Deng into the conversation, elicited his opinions and ideas, and gently nudged and guided his thinking:

Tran: Anything else why you liked the book? Or homelessness or whatever? (Looking directly at Deng) What do you think about Maniac?

Deng: I think, I think Maniac want to be like the best family.

Tran: He wants the best family?

Deng: Yeah.

Tran: Oh, that's good.

Deng: And he want to have mother and dad and sister and brother.

Through his questions, Tran got Deng to express his understanding of Maniac's loneliness: Maniac desperately wanted to be a part of a loving and

caring family. Not only did Tran elicit Deng's understanding that Maniac wanted a family, his next question pushed Deng to think about what happened at the end of the story that the class had just read the previous day.

Tran: Do you think he got the best family?

Deng: No.

Tran: The Beales?

Deng: Yeah, yeah.

One way to interpret Tran's question above is that he was puzzled by Deng's response that Maniac did not get the best family. When Mrs. Weber read the ending of the story the previous day, she read that Amanda Beale and Mars Bar found Maniac at the zoo where he had been living, and Amanda insisted that Maniac come back to live with the Beale family. Maniac agreed. Maniac loved the Beale family, and they loved him. Further, Maniac would have a mother, father, two sisters and a brother at the Beale household. Undoubtedly, Tran was confused by Deng's negative comment given that the class had just learned the day before that Maniac would have a family again. Tran's question may have prompted Deng to change his response to "Yeah, yeah." In other words, because of Tran's question Deng may have realized that Maniac would indeed live with a good family. Tran continued to question Deng:

Tran: Oh, okay. Do you think they're the best family for Maniac?

Chris: Nobody's the best family.

Deng: Maniac / no, maybe Greyson.

Tran: Yeah, Greyson. Maybe if Greyson, maybe had kids, that'd be another song.

Deng: Yeah.

Deng's response to Tran's probing question was quite sophisticated. Earlier in the story, Maniac was "adopted" by Greyson, an elderly gentleman, and lived with him until Greyson died. Maniac and Greyson were like family and loved one another. Recall that Tran, Chris, and Deng had made a character map of Greyson several weeks earlier. Deng's suggestion that Greyson would be a good family for Maniac was clever given the context of the story. Tran suggested that Greyson would even be a better family for Maniac if he had kids (presumably so Maniac would have siblings). Deng agreed with Tran's suggestion.

I began this subsection with my second assertion--that most of Deng's speaking turns involved seeking help, clarification or approval from Tran and Chris. From carefully examining the data I learned that, in fact, most of Deng's speaking turns involved making suggestions or sharing ideas. Further, most of Deng's suggestions and ideas were prompted by Tran's questions. Therefore, Tran's role as a leader who was concerned about Deng's thoughts and ideas undoubtedly influenced Deng's involvement in (and his learning during) the small-group conversations. Additionally, I learned that even though most of Deng's speaking turns did not involve seeking help, clarification or approval, many of the times he did seek help and clarification, Tran and Chris took his questions seriously and provided extensive guidance.

<u>Assertion 3: Tran often acted as Deng's advocate.</u> As I studied the data pertaining to the three boys' interactions during small-group activities, I noticed that Tran often served as Deng's advocate in three primary ways. First, Tran explicitly invited Deng into the conversation 11 times across both small-group activities. The June 9 excerpt illustrates how Tran often invited Deng into the conversation (i.e., "What do you think about that Deng? What do you think Deng?"). Tran's explicit invitations to Deng stand in marked contrast to the ways in which Chris and Deng interacted. Tran never explicitly invited Chris to join the conversation as he regularly invited Deng.

A second way that Tran supported Deng was by acknowledging and supporting the ideas that Deng contributed to the conversation. Tran explicitly acknowledged Deng's ideas 10 times across the two small-group activities. Sometimes Tran positively acknowledged Deng's ideas even when they didn't really "fit" with the conversation or activity. For example, on May 30, the boys were trying to determine different descriptive words to include on their character maps about Greyson. Towards the end to the lesson, they had already listed four words to describe Greyson and two pieces of evidence for each word, and they were trying to think of a final descriptive word when the following discussion ensued:

Tran:	Yeah, one more. Okay, how about ///// okay
Deng:	Liking
Tran:	What?
Deng:	Liking

Tran: Liking. He liked people. Well, how about if we rephrase

that to, we, we could turn it

Mrs. Weber: Almost done?

Even though "liking" really wasn't a very helpful word to describe Greyson, Tran tried to figure out a way to draw on Deng's suggestion. Mrs. Weber walked up just as Tran was commenting on Deng's idea and the conversation took a different turn. Thus, Tran's efforts to acknowledge Deng's ideas served as one important way that he acted as Deng's advocate.

A third way that Tran acted as Deng's advocate was by directly assisting Deng. Overall, Tran provided explicit direct assistance to Deng five times during the two small-group target activities. Tran directly assisted Deng with his written work and in the context of oral conversations. For example, Tran helped Deng decide what to write on his character map during the May 30 activity, and he showed him how to place his ideas on paper. The long excerpt above where Tran and Chris defined racism for Deng illustrates how both Tran and Chris directly assisted him during oral conversations. Tran not only invited Deng into the conversation about racism, but both Tran and Chris explicitly tried to help him understand racism.

The excerpt below further illustrates how Tran provided specific assistance to Deng and acted as his advocate. Additionally, it exemplifies the leadership role that Tran assumed during small-group activities both in his interactions with Chris and Deng.

At the point below in the Character Map Activity discussion, the boys had already decided on the adjectives "caring" and "sharing" to describe Greyson. Chris suggested the word "energetic" for a third adjective, but Tran suggested the word "hermit" instead. The boys wrote the word "hermit" on their character maps and the following discussion took place:

Tran: Okay, come on and give me evidence. Okay, he lived by himself and didn't talk to people

Chris: He lives by himself

Tran: You should write he lived, because he doesn't any more.

Chris: Yes he does, huh?

Note that Tran corrected Chris's use of the word "lives." Tran suggested that Chris should write "lived" because the situation occurred in the past. At this point in the discussion a girl from a nearby group accused the boys of copying, so Tran's comment below is directed at her, not to the members of his own group.

Tran: I'm not copying, I've got a word you don't even know. Geez!

Chris continued with the discussion about "lives" and explained why he thought the word should be "lives" instead of "lived."

Chris: He lives by him, he still lives by himself because of Maniac, Maniac lives in baseball room

Tran: I know but

Chris: Whatever, it looks right.

Eight second pause as the boys write on their character maps

Chris: Greyson lived by himself

Tran   Uh hum

Deng   (Showing his character map to Tran) Is that right?

Apparently, Chris decided to take Tran's suggestion and change "lives"

to "lived" as he mentioned "lived" in his comment above and he wrote a "d" over

the "s" he had written on his character map. Also, in the last line of the excerpt,

Deng showed his work to Tran and asked for his approval.

This excerpt illustrates the leadership role that Tran assumed in the

discussion. Tran convinced the boys that they should use the word "hermit"

even though Chris had suggested a different word. Further, Tran corrected

Chris's use to the word "lives," and even though Chris tried to justify his use of

the word "lives," after some protest, he decided to follow Tran's suggestion and

write "lived." Finally, Deng showed Tran his work for Tran's approval to which

Tran responded, "Yeah, that's good, Deng."

The above excerpt also sheds light on the nature of Chris's participation

in the conversation. Chris often offered suggestions to the small group.

Sometimes the boys took his suggestions, other times, as with the examples

above, they didn't. Additionally, Chris did not just passively accept Tran's

suggestions; he often challenged Tran's critiques of his ideas and he

sometimes questioned ideas Tran presented to the group for consideration.

Finally, Deng's brief question above also reflects another common

occurrence; most of his comments during the conversation were directed

specifically to Tran. In fact, even the boys' locations at their table reflected the

manner in which they tended to interact. They sat at a hexagonal-shaped table

with Chris on one side of the table and Tran and Deng side-by-side on the other

side of the table. Figure 6 shows where Deng, Tran and Chris sat during most

of the activity.[20] On the video tape of the Character Map Activity, Tran can be

seen providing Deng with direct and explicit assistance about what information

to write on the character map and where to write the information.

In this section, I have presented my "take" on three questions with respect

to the Character Map Activity and the Discussion Activity in which Deng, Tran,

and Chris took part: (1) Who spoke during the activities? (2) What did

conversants speak about? and (3) How did conversants interact during the

activities. I learned that Tran assumed a leadership role in the group and spoke

about half of the time. Chris took about 30% of the speaking turns, and Deng
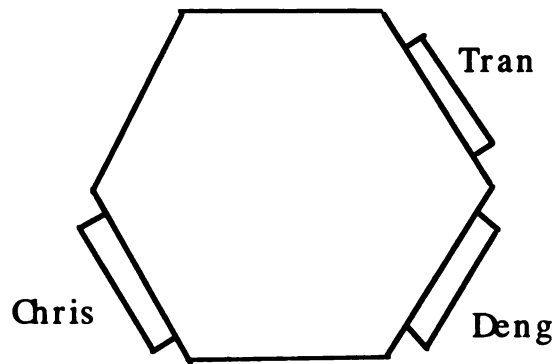
Figure 6. Seating locations during Character Map Activity.

[20]Towards the end of the activity Chris got up, picked up his chair, and moved next to Tran on the right. I believe that Chris made this move because of the conflict with the neighboring group about copying.

took about 20% of the speaking turns. The boys typically discussed the text-related topics suggested by the teacher. In doing so, they also introduced topics into the conversation about their own lives and experiences. Sometimes, however, (as during the latter half of the Discussion Activity), the boys conversation veered from the "official" topics pertaining to the book. Finally, Tran played a central role in Deng's involvement in the conversations during small-group work by explicitly inviting him into the conversation many times. Further, he acknowledged Deng's contributions to the conversation and provided him with explicit assistance.

Two Small-Group Focus Activities: A Collaborative Analysis

In this section, I discuss my interpretation of Deng's analyses of the same two small-group activities, drawing on discussion excerpts from the viewing sessions and corresponding small-group activities. Then I compare and contrast Deng's interpretations of the two small-group activities with one another and the whole-group lessons discussed in chapter 4.

Viewing Session Discussion About the Character Map Activity

On February 13, 1996, Deng, Vue, and I sat in the living room of the Moua family's apartment and watched a video tape of the Character Map Activity. This was the second of 5 viewing sessions over both whole-group lessons and small-group activities.[21] The Character Map Activity was 24

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[21]See Table 6 in chapter 3 for an overview of the dates and sequence of all five focus lessons and the corresponding viewing sessions.

minutes long. The viewing session pertaining to the Character Map Activity was approximately 46 minutes long.

As with all other viewing sessions, at the beginning of this viewing session I suggested that Deng could stop the video tape at any time to make comments, reminding him that he might find something to be particularly interesting, exciting, confusing, and so forth. I further reminded him that he could speak in English or Hmong while commenting during the viewing session. Vue agreed to translate anything Deng said in Hmong during the ongoing conversation. Table 19 gives an overview of the times the video tape of the small-group activity was stopped.

Deng stopped the tape the first time and commented on his appearance on tape; he said that he looked tired that day. Vue stopped the tape the second and third times. The second time Vue mentioned that he couldn't understand

Table 19

Times that Deng Stopped the Video Taped Lesson of the Character Map

Activity, May 30, 1995

Number of Stop	Interruption initiated by	Topic or Issue Discussed	Code
1.	Deng	Procedural comment: Deng's demeanor on tape	P
2.	Vue	Procedural comment: tape quality	P
3.	Vue	Asked Deng what he was doing	U
4.	Cindy	Checks Deng's understanding of activity/story	U
5.	Vue	Checks Deng's understanding of story	U, Cc

a. Code Key:
P = *Procedural* question/comment
U = Something Deng *understood* that he remembered, related to or did
Cc = Deng *confused* about a *character* in the story

something that was said on tape; however, he didn't want to stop and rewind the tape, so we continued with the session. Next, Vue asked Deng what he was talking about on tape. Deng said that he was asking Tran if he should write something about Greyson on his character map. I stopped the tape the fourth time about 14 minutes into the lesson. Deng had not been stopping the video tape, and I wondered if he knew what was happening during the activity. He did. He explained that the boys were talking about how Greyson shared things like his food and clothes with Maniac. Vue stopped the tape the fifth time several minutes later. Vue asked Deng what he was doing at that time during the activity. Deng explained that the boys were talking about Greyson and Maniac. When I probed further after Vue's initial question, Deng said something about Greyson living at the zoo, which was not accurate. Thus, I coded this stop as U because he knew the boys were discussing Greyson and Maniac, and Cc because Deng was confused about where the character Greyson lived.

As we continued the viewing session, I was both surprised and perplexed that Deng chose to stop the 24 minute small-group activity tape only once compared to the 40 minute whole-group lesson tape that he had stopped 24 times the previous week. So, as soon as the tape was over I asked Deng about this issue.

Cindy: (To Deng.) Could I ask you some questions?

Deng: Yeah.

Cindy:	Now, I noticed that, um, remember last time you watched a video, the one with the hands in it? Do you remember that?
Deng:	Yeah.
Cindy:	Um, it seems like you were asking . . . to stop the video a lot, but this time you didn't. Can can you tell me why you didn't? Why did you want to stop a lot the other time but not this time?
Deng:	Because the other time, I don't understand.
Cindy:	The other time you didn't understand?
Deng:	Yeah.
Cindy:	Oh, you were asking us to stop because you didn't understand?
Deng:	Yeah.
Cindy:	But what happened this time?
Deng:	I understand.

As Deng's comments illustrate, his "reading" of this small-group video taped activity was very different from his "reading" of the whole-group lesson the week before. In the latter viewing session, he felt that he understood the "text" he was reading. In other words, he **said** (and **demonstrated** by the manner in which he chose to control the viewing session) that he understood what was happening in the small-group activity, whereas, there was much that he was confused about in the May 22, 1995, whole-group lesson the week before. I

was curious as to why **he** felt that he understood the small-group activity so much better than the whole-group lesson so I probed further.

Cindy: So this time you understood? Can you tell me why you understood this time and not last time?

Deng: Because me and Chris and Tran talking.

I continued to ask Deng probing questions about his different perceptions of the whole-group lesson the previous week and the small-group activity. In the remainder of this section, I present an overview of our 13 minute discussion where he explained why he felt that he understood the small group Character Map Activity better than the whole-group lesson for May 22, 1995.

Deng's comments about the differences in his understanding between the small-group activity and the whole-group lesson fell into three categories: (1) he found his peers in the small group to be helpful, (2) he emphasized what was problematic in whole group interactions, and (3) he discussed some personal characteristics that made interacting in the large group difficult for him.

Most of Deng's comments related to what he found helpful about the small group. For example, I asked Deng what the teacher wanted the boys to do in the small-group activity and he said that she wanted them to learn about Maniac and Greyson.

Cindy: So, what she wanted you to do was to learn about Maniac and Greyson and talk about them? Why did she have you do it in groups, I wonder.

Deng:	Um, because maybe if you don't know one of the group
	know.
Cindy:	Ohh, so maybe somebody in the group doesn't know and
	then people in the group can help each other?

As the two excerpts above indicate, Deng felt that talking with his peers was useful. He emphasized that in small groups he and his peers could help one another if someone did not understand something; that is, they all three actively participated in the activity, rather than his other experiences of primarily listening. Additionally, Deng said that the boys told him what was happening in the story, and they further explained the assignment to him as they worked on it.

I wondered about Deng's reasons for interacting differently in the small group as compared to the large group.[22] I made the following observation:

Cindy:	Actually, I noticed something interesting. I noticed that in
	the big group you didn't raise your hand to ask questions,
	but in that little group you did ask questions.
Deng:	Yeah.
Cindy:	You did? What kinds of questions did you ask them?
Deng:	About what they doing.
Cindy:	About what they were doing?
Deng:	Yeah.

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[22]Recall from chapter 4 that Deng never voluntarily spoke during whole-group lessons; however, as indicated in the first section of this chapter, Deng took almost one-fifth of the speaking turns during small-group activities.

Cindy: Did you ask any other kinds of questions?

Deng: Yes, but I forgot.

Cindy: But you forgot? Okay. How come you asked questions in that little group but not in the big group?

Deng did not respond right away, and Vue spoke briefly in Hmong. Then Deng said:

Deng: Because we are friends.

Cindy: Oh, you're friends with the two boys?

Deng and Vue again spoke briefly in Hmong. I asked Vue what he had said to Deng and Vue replied, "I was asking him, like, it seemed like, he still shy to work in groups, but he said, no, that he participate more 'cuz they kind of like friendly with him and stuff like that, you know."[23]

Thus, Deng emphasized the helpful manner in which he and his peers interacted. He felt comfortable interacting with Chris and Tran--the boys were his friends; further, they didn't "talk too fast" or use "hard" words. In the whole group, in contrast, Deng said that the teacher often talked too fast and used words he did not understand. Further, he felt uncomfortable making comments in the large group because he felt that he did not know English very well and he also described himself as shy with others.

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[23]I asked Vue this question because I wondered if Vue had suggested that Deng tell me that he and his peers were friends. I wasn't sure whether Vue had merely translated my question in Hmong, or whether he had suggested an answer to my question or both. Spending many hours in the classroom and out on the playground observing the boys play together leads me to suspect that Deng could have made the statement on his own, but I can not be certain since I do not speak Hmong.

<u>Viewing Session Pertaining to the Small-Group Discussion Activity</u>

The viewing session pertaining to the Discussion Activity was conducted on March 5, 1996; it was the fourth of the five viewing sessions, and was conducted like all the others. Although the actual small-group Discussion Activity for June 9, was approximately 34 minutes long, we only watched slightly over half of the activity for two reasons. First, recall that the boys began to talk about topics other than the *Maniac Magee* text during the latter half of the Discussion Activity. When Deng saw this on tape, he said that since the boys were finished talking about *Maniac Magee*, he did not want to watch the remainder of the video tape. Second, at about that same time, the Moua family's pastor came to visit, so we turned off the video tape and packed all the equipment. Thus, the actual viewing session was approximately 52 minutes long, and we watched approximately 18 minutes of the Discussion Activity. Table 20 below gives an overview of the times the video taped lesson was stopped during the viewing session.

I briefly overview the times that Vue and I stopped the tape twice and once, respectively. Then I examine the times Deng stopped the tape in more detail. The first time Vue stopped the tape he asked Deng if he understood Mrs. Weber's directions for the Discussion Activity. He said he did. The second time Vue stopped the tape he asked Deng why Maniac did not want to go back to live with Amanda at the end of the book. Deng explained that Maniac really did want to live with Amanda and her family. He was correct. I stopped the tape

once to ask why Deng was laughing as he watched the tape. Deng said he was

laughing because Tran had bumped his head on something.

Deng stopped the tape 10 times over the course of the viewing session.

Five of the times he stopped the video tape to ask procedural questions that did

not pertain to the content of the lesson. For example, once at the beginning of

the tape he asked me whether or not we had ever watched this tape. I told him

Table 20

Times that Deng Stopped the Video Taped Lesson of the Discussion Activity,

June 9, 1995

Number of Stop	Stop initiated by	Topic or Issue Discussed	Code
1.	Vue	Checking Deng's understanding (T's directions)	U
2.	Deng	Procedural (which tape is this?)	P
3.	Deng	Deng confused about discussion	Cd
4.	Deng	Procedural	U
5.	Vue	Checking Deng's understanding about Amanda	U
6.	Deng	Deng confused about discussion	Cd
7.	Deng	Deng disagreed with something Chris said	D
8.	Deng	Procedural (Does Vue wear shorts to school)	P
9.	Deng	Deng confused about a character	Cc
10.	Deng	Deng disagrees with something Chris said	D
11.	Deng	Procedural (Why are the boys off topic?)	P
12.	Cindy	Procedural	P
13.	Deng	Procedural (Deng wanted to stop the session)	P

a. **Code Key:**
D = Deng disagrees with something said by someone else
P = *Procedural* question/comment not related to the lesson or subject
U = Something Deng *understood* that he remembered, related to or did
Ca = Deng *confused* about a class *activity*
Cc = Deng *confused* about a *character* in the story
Cd = Deng *confused* about the class *discussion*
Ce = Deng *confused* about an *event* in the story
Cw = Deng *confused* about a particular *word*

that we had not. Another time he asked Vue if he ever wears shorts to school.[24]

Yet another time Deng asked why Tran and Chris quit talking about Maniac and

started discussing basketball.

Two of the five remaining times Deng stopped the tape he disagreed with

something Chris said on the tape. One disagreement that occurred towards the

end of the viewing session pertained to which basketball team would be the

champions during 1995; the second disagreement pertained to the text.

One of the topics the boys discussed in their small group was their

favorite parts of the story. When Tran asked the boys who their favorite

character was, Chris said that he liked John McNab and his family. When Deng

heard this on tape during the March 5, 1996, viewing session, he stopped the

tape and said:

> Deng: Is not true.
>
> Cindy: What?
>
> Deng: I say, Chris say the McNab family is best family. It not true.

Deng's response to Chris' comment was both interesting and revealing.

First, Deng realized that Chris had clearly not picked a "good" character or

family as his favorite family. John McNab, an older Caucasian teenager, was

mean and racist. His father was an alcoholic, no mother was present, and their

home was filthy and unsanitary. Second, I question whether Deng understood

that Chris was being sarcastic when he made that comment during the activity.

_____

[24]Chris and Tran each had shorts on the day of June 9. This was the last day of school and it was already quite hot outside.

Tran's response to Chris (i.e., "Why Chris, cause you want to be like him?") was made with a sarcastic tone. Thus, undoubtedly, Tran knew that Chris did not really mean what he had said. Deng, in contrast, replied earnestly that Chris was wrong about John and the McNab family--they were really not "good" people.

Deng's response to Chris's comment during the viewing session was intriguing to me for two reasons. First, it may indicate Deng's lack of understanding when sarcasm is used amongst conversants, as in the situation described. Second, during lessons or activities, Deng never openly disagreed with anyone about the content of the story; yet, in a situation removed from the immediate context, Deng overtly disagreed with Chris. Tran and Chris disagreed frequently. Thus, even though Deng frequently saw Tran and Chris disagree, he chose not to do so, except within the viewing sessions. In addition to stopping the tape to disagree, Deng stopped the tape three times at points of confusion in the group discussion.

The first time that Deng stopped the tape was toward the beginning of the discussion when he was confused about homelessness:

Tran:	Yeah, and would someone / and who would like to contribute to homelessness? What do you think about homelessness, Deng?
Chris:	It stunk.
Tran:	Yeahh, I mean, I don't want to go live in a granger [the manger in American Bison pen] or something.

Chris: Yeah, I don't want to go live in an American Bison pen. I'd

miss my bed every night.

It is not surprising that Deng might find the above conversation confusing.

Understanding it would require a great deal of background knowledge about

zoos in America as well as Maniac's temporary home in the story. When

Maniac did not have anyone to live with, he made his home the American Bison

pen at the local zoo. In order to understand Tran and Chris's conversation,

Deng would have to know what a zoo is, that a pen is a fence to keep animals in

an enclosed area, and that an American Bison is a large animal that eats lots of

hay which is typically fed to it in a large manger which might make a relatively

comfortable place for a homeless boy to sleep.

The second time that Deng stopped the tape due to confusion related to

a comment that Chris made during the discussion. In the actual small-group

activity, Tran and Deng spoke about Maniac wanting to have a good family.

When Tran asked Deng if the Beales were the best family for Maniac, Chris

responded, "Nobody's the best family." During the viewing session, Deng

responded that he did, in fact, think the Beales were a "good" family. He was

confused about Chris' comment.

The third time that Deng was confused about something during the

viewing session, the following discussion ensued:

Deng: Can I ask a question?

Cindy: Yeah.

Deng:	You know Russell? Russell and yeah, do they family is nice?
Cindy:	Well, Russell and Piper, do you know that their last name is?

Deng nodded that he did not know.

Cindy:	McNab.
Deng:	Okay. (Deng smiled as if he "got it.")
Cindy:	They're John McNab's little brothers.

We continued to discuss the McNab family and Deng knew that John McNab was not a "nice" character, that the McNabs lived in a filthy home, and so forth. Interestingly, even though Deng wasn't sure that Russell and Piper were John McNab's brothers, once I mentioned the McNab name, Deng definitely knew the family to which I referred.

Comparisons Between Small-Group Activities and Across Large- and Small Group Lessons and Activities

Now that I have presented an overview of the two small-group viewing sessions, I look across them to compare and contrast them with one another and the whole-group lessons discussed in chapter 4. A striking similarity across both small-group viewing sessions is that, unlike his difficulties in the whole-group viewing sessions, Deng rarely suggested that he was confused. Further, the numbers of times Deng indicated confusion during each different type of participation structure differed markedly. Table 21 gives an overview of the length of each lesson for which Deng engaged in a viewing session, and the corresponding number of times that Deng indicated being confused during the

lesson or activity. The highlighted rows in Table 21 indicate that Deng was

confused once during a 24 minute small-group activity and 3 times during an 18

minute segment of a small-group activity as compared to 19 and 16 times

during two 40 minute whole-group lessons and 8 times during a third 20 minute

whole-group lesson.

Another distinct similarity across both small-group activities is that Deng

participated actively by speaking and writing during small-group activities,

whereas, he listened passively during large-group lessons. Deng explained

that he chose to interact more in small groups because he was more

comfortable in that setting. That is, he was friends with Tran and Chris, they

helped him when he did not understand something, they used words that he

could understand, and so forth. In contrast, in the large group, he was often

unfamiliar with the words Mrs. Weber used, uncomfortable with his level of

Table 21

Number of Times Deng Indicated Confusion During Viewing Sessions for

Whole-Group and Small-Group Activities

Date of Lesson/Activity	Nature of Lesson/Activity	Length of Lesson/Activity in Minutes	Number of times Deng is Confused
1. 5/22/95	Whole-group	40	19
2. 5/30/95	Small-group	24	1
3. 5/10/95	Whole-group	40	16
4. 6/9/95	Small-group	18*	3
5. 6/5/95	Whole-group	20*	8

*Actual lessons/activities were longer, but we only watched the lessons/
activities for the amount of time indicated.

English proficiency, and too shy to speak in front of so many people.

An interesting difference between the two small-group viewing sessions was that Deng stopped the first 24 minute small-group Character Map Activity only once, but he stopped the 18 minute segment of the Discussion Activity 10 times. He suggested that he was confused once during the Character Map Activity and 3 times during the Discussion Activity, so clearly, he did not suggest that he was confused very much during either activity. I speculate that he stopped the tape more during the second small-group activity because he was more comfortable commenting on what he saw and thought. This was our fourth viewing session together and Vue and I had recently taken Deng and his brother to a Saturday afternoon matinee movie. I suspect that Deng was more comfortable "just chatting" during the viewing sessions by this point since Deng, Vue, and I were all getting to know one another. For example, during the Discussion Activity, Deng asked a lot of questions that really did not pertain to Maniac Magee such as when he asked Vue if he ever wears shorts to school when we saw Tran and Chris in shorts on the video tape.

Dimensions of Contextual Knowledge that are Relevant to Deng's Literacy Learning Opportunities in Small-Group Activities

In this section, I explore dimensions of contextual knowledge that were salient in small-group activities in comparison to whole-group lessons. In particular, I examine the features of the small-group interactions that best capture the ways that contexts were constructed between members of Deng's small group. First, I briefly reiterate key features of the definition of "context" that I draw on for this work. Then I use analyses in this chapter and chapter 4 to

illustrate two dimensions of contextual knowledge that were relevant to Deng's

literacy learning opportunities within small-group activities. I define and

describe each dimension of contextual knowledge by using specific examples

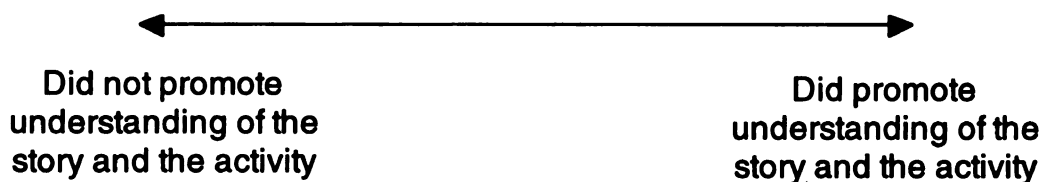from the data to identify anchor points on a continuum from high to low.

Recall from chapter 4 that opportunity must be conceptualized with

respect to social, historical and cultural contexts when considered from a

sociocultural perspective. Further, drawing on Erickson and Shultz (1977), I

suggested that context refers to much more than physical setting--it refers to   (a)

the temporal and dynamic interactions constructed between people, (b) the

meanings and overlap in meanings that people ascribe to those interactions,

and (c) the actions people take based on those overlapping meanings. Finally,

competence (i.e., shared understanding of meanings ascribed to actions and

interactions) within contexts can vary depending upon people's cultural and

linguistic backgrounds, developmental levels, and so forth. Thus, people's

interactions within jointly constructed contexts and understandings of contexts

do not necessarily carry equal weight. Some participants in contexts have more

input into the ways in which contexts get constructed.

Deng's small-group context varied significantly from whole-class lessons.

Students needed knowledge of the *Maniac Magee* text, knowledge of American

culture, and knowledge about whole-group interactional norms in order to

participate successfully in whole-group lessons. In Deng's small group,

however, knowledge of the text and American culture were not prerequisites to

successful interactions within the group. In fact, an important dimension of

contextual knowledge in the small group was that it was acceptable to reveal confusions about the story and American culture. Further, the nature of the interpersonal interactions amongst the boys influenced the understandings constructed as the boys worked through assigned tasks in their small group. Thus, the other important dimension of contextual knowledge related to the nature of interpersonal interactions between the boys.

In the remainder of this chapter, I focus first on this latter dimension (i.e., the nature of interpersonal interactions) and then discuss the dimension pertaining to knowledge revelations. Both dimensions are derived from data pertaining to central research questions addressed in this chapter (i.e., What was discussed during small-group activities? & How did conversants engage in small-group conversations?). My discussion of the nature of Deng's interactions in relation to the dimensions pertains to the other key research question addressed in this study (i.e., Did Deng have/display access to the rules, norms, and content discussed in the small group context?).

Dimension One: Interpersonal Interactions

| Did not promote understanding of the story and the activity | Did promote understanding of the story and the activity |

The nature of the relationship between the boys influenced their interactions in the small group. Tran was the leader of the group and acted as Deng's advocate. Tables 16 and 17 suggest that Tran acted as group leader by

primarily controlling the flow of the conversation and the conversational floor during both small-group focus activities. Further, Tran's support of Deng made it possible for him to gain access to and influence the boys' conversations about features of the story such as characters, character relationships, and story events.

One example of Tran's support and Deng's conversational influence occurred during the Discussion Activity when Tran directly asked Deng what he thought about racism in *Maniac Magee*. Deng responded by asking, "What is racism?" Both Tran and Chris provided their own definitions of racism to Deng. However, Tran's response to Deng's query did not stop there. He then asked Deng to respond to the definitions that he and Chris had just shared by asking, "What do you think about that, Deng?" Deng responded that he thought racism was "bad", and Tran affirmed his "correct" response. Tran and Chris responded to Deng's confusion about racism by defining racism. However, Tran continued to support Deng and act as his advocate by checking his understanding of racism. It seemed important to Tran that he and Chris share their definitions with Deng, but also that he understood the definitions. Additionally, because Tran explicitly included Deng in the conversation, and because Deng responded openly to Tran's question, both boys' contributions shaped the flow of the conversation to clarify Deng's confusion about racism.

Deng's analyses of and comments pertaining to small-group activities during viewing sessions further verified that the nature of the boys' interactions during small-group activities promoted his understanding of the story. For

example, Tables 19 and 20 illustrate that Deng rarely ever stopped video tapes of small-group activities to express confusion. Further, when I asked Deng why he rarely stopped video tapes of small-group activities to express confusion, he indicated that he "understood" during small-group activities "because me [i.e., Deng] and Chris and Tran talking" (Viewing session excerpt, 2/13/95).

Deng's involvement in the conversations also influenced the nature and direction of the small-group tasks themselves. For example, when the boys created their character map of Greyson, Deng suggested the word "sharing" which later became one of the main descriptive words on the boys' character map. Clearly, Deng gained from the conversations, but he also positively contributed to them as well, and his contributions were valued--especially by Tran. In fact, Table 18 illustrates that over 40% of Deng's contributions to the small-group conversations involved making suggestions and/or sharing ideas. Deng's participation in the small-group activities, and Tran's support of Deng in the small-group conversations positively influenced his learning opportunities. Thus, Deng would rate at the high end of the continuum for Dimension One; the interpersonal interactions between Deng and his peers did promote Deng's understanding of the story and the small-group activities pertaining to the story.

In contrast, Deng would rate at the low end of the continuum with respect to the manner in which interpersonal interactions promoted his understanding of the story during whole-group lessons. First, Deng did not interact verbally during whole-group lessons. This, in and of itself, however does not indicate that others' interactions in the whole-group did not help Deng understand the

story. However, Deng's silence during whole-group lessons coupled with the confusion he displayed during viewing sessions of whole-group lessons (see Tables 10-12) illustrates that interactions between conversants during whole-group lessons rarely promoted his understanding of the story.

Dimension Two: Knowledge Revelations

<--->

Not okay to reveal	Okay to reveal
confusions about the	confusions about the
story or assignment	story or the assignment

This second dimension is closely related to the first. Deng's behavior during whole-group lessons, small-group activities, and viewing sessions illustrates that he saw the small-groups as a place to talk, express confusion and explicitly interact with his peers. In whole-group lessons, Deng remained silent. He frequently stopped the video tapes during viewing sessions of whole-group lessons to express confusion. During viewing sessions pertaining to small groups, on the other hand, Deng rarely stopped the video tapes to express confusion. Table 21 depicts the profound differences between Deng's perceptions of his understandings during whole-group lessons and small-group activities. Clearly, Deng felt that he understood the nature of interactions and activities during small-group activities and that he often did not understand interactions and activities during whole-group lessons.

As indicated above, an important reason Deng "understood" during small-group activities was that he often asked his peers for explanations on

occasions when he did not understand some aspect of the story, assignment, or their conversation. For example, when the boys discussed "racism," Deng asked them to define the term because he did not know what it meant. Table 18 portrays the nature of Deng's comments during the two focus small-group activities. Almost one-sixth of Deng's overall comments during both activities involved seeking help, clarification, or approval. Thus, the fact that seeking help and displaying confusion in the small-group was acceptable undoubtedly influenced Deng's literacy learning opportunities in that context.

With respect to knowledge revelations in the small-group setting, Deng ranks on the high end of the continuum; that is, Deng perceived the small group as a context for displaying confusion and seeking clarification. However, Deng would rank on the low end of the continuum with respect to knowledge revelations in whole-group lessons. This is understandable given the manner in which conversants constructed whole-group interactions. The whole group was not a context where expressing confusion was sanctioned. Further, Deng, himself, stated that he was shy and uncomfortable talking in the whole-group setting partly due to his perceived lack of facility with English.

Concluding Comments for this Chapter

Given the above discussion regarding dimensions of contextual knowledge pertinent to Deng's literacy learning opportunities, the notion of opportunity relates to: (a) intersubjectivity relative to situation definitions, appropriate behaviors within social situations, and the meanings participants ascribe to the situations and behaviors, (b) access to knowledge about the ways

that participants in social occasions construct shared situation definitions and

learn appropriate behaviors, and (c) participants' personal response,

engagement, and choice to actively and overtly participate in social contexts.[25]

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[25]This does not mean that participants must choose to write and talk within a context. Participants can be active silent participants in social encounters.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

I began chapter 1 with a story about Deng and his family's journey from Laos to the United States. Their journey was a long and arduous one that took unexpected twists and turns. In some ways, that journey parallels the journey Deng and I made as we engaged in this two-year-long research project together: this journey was also long and arduous, and it evolved in unexpected ways that neither of us anticipated when it began. Chapter 6 is a retrospective look back at the journey that Deng and I made together (with the help of many other people) and it reflects my interpretation of what we learned from the experience. It is also a look ahead at what we might share with others-- including teachers and researchers--about what we learned. In the following section, I highlight salient features of our research experience within the framework of sociocultural theory--the theoretical lens I used to guide this investigation. Then I discuss pedagogical implications of the study for literacy instruction, in general, and for second language learners, in particular. I conclude this chapter by discussing limitations of the current study and exploring questions and issues for future research.

Interpreting Deng's Literacy Learning Opportunities

In this section I discuss how I drew on different levels of genetic analysis to interpret Deng's literacy learning opportunities at the microgenetic level. I also examine how social interactions and semiotic mediation differed in whole-group and small-group participation structures and impacted the ways that

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Deng, his teacher and his peers constructed literacy learning opportunities.

Then, I present a conceptual learning opportunity model derived from the

empirical data in this investigation and key tenets of sociocultural theory. I use

the model to highlight and explore different contextual features of Deng's

literacy learning opportunities in the unit pertaining to *Maniac Magee* and

suggest that the model can be a useful tool for exploring students' learning

opportunities in other contexts.

Genetic Analysis

In chapter 2, I drew on the work of Wertsch (1985) and others who

suggest that genetic analysis refers to the central role that location in time and

place plays in the development of human thinking and learning. Additionally,

however, cognition is shaped by interactions in specific contexts (Vygotsky,

1978; Wertsch, 1985). Therefore, to understand others' learning, it is important

to examine interactions within the multiple layers of contexts that shape human

thinking and learning. Vygotsky argued that phylogenesis, cultural history,

ontogenesis, and microgenesis influence human learning; I discussed the latter

three domains in this work. Moreover, while ontogeny and cultural history were

not the focus of my dissertation work, the background information I learned

about Deng at these contextual levels influenced my analyses at the

microgenetic level in at least two important ways: (1) it influenced the nature of

our interactions as we worked together to understand and interpret his learning

opportunities; and (2) it gave me valuable background information on which to

base my interpretations at the microgenetic level. Goodnow (1993) advocates

attending to information gained at more macro levels in investigations. She argues that integrating micro- and macro analytic levels can lead to more comprehensive analyses of phenomena.

Influences on interactions. Learning about Deng's social and cultural background as a Hmong immigrant from Laos, the history of his school experiences in Thailand and the United States, and his school experience across the year in Mrs. Weber's fifth grade classroom helped to promote intersubjectivity, or shared understandings, between us. The sense of understanding that developed between us was important because my goal for this work was to study Deng's literacy learning opportunities; consequently, I needed to understand his thinking and learning to discern the ways in which he constructed learning opportunities with others in his classroom community.

Striving to develop intersubjectivity with Deng was a complex and difficult undertaking that influenced, and was influenced by our interactions on both interpersonal and cognitive levels. Our difficulties understanding one another could undoubtedly be attributed to our different linguistic, cultural, and social worlds. My analytic work with Deng was enhanced by: (a) my trip to Thailand and Laos which included visits to a Hmong refugee camp and interviews with individuals who had worked extensively with the Hmong for many years in Southeast Asia, and (b) my visits to Deng's home to tutor him during both years of the study. These experiences opened the door to interviews and informal interactions with his family and other members of the local Hmong community.

My experiences in Southeast Asia gave Deng, Vue, and me common ground on which to interact when I returned to the United States and began to engage in viewing sessions with Deng and Vue. For example, I met Vue's grandparents at the Hmong camp that I visited in Thailand and brought pictures and an audio taped message back to the United States for Vue and his family from Vue's grandparents. Deng, Vue, and I also talked about the common places we visited in Thailand and some or our experiences while there. Undoubtedly, our positive interpersonal interactions influenced our conversations and negotiations of understandings during viewing sessions pertaining to the *Maniac Magee* text over the next few months.

Two examples illustrate how our relationship influenced both the nature of our interactions and Deng's perceptions about his role as a coresearcher on my dissertation project. After Deng, Vue, and I had engaged in several viewing sessions during the winter of 1996, Deng gave me a Valentine's Day gift--a booklet of coupons--that he made at school. On each page he listed the various things for which I could redeem coupons. For example, one coupon stated that I could help Deng with his homework for an hour. Another coupon stated that it was good for Deng watching one hour of a video taped lesson of *Maniac Magee* with Vue and me (see Figure 7). Deng's gift to me was important because it indicates that he valued our relationship and that he was a willing coparticipant on the research project.

As another example, Deng wanted to continue the research process even after we finished the viewing sessions over the *Maniac Magee* text. He checked out a copy of *Maniac Magee* from his middle school library and said that he would reread the story orally into a tape recorder if I would loan him one of my tape recorders and give him blank audio tapes. I suggested that in
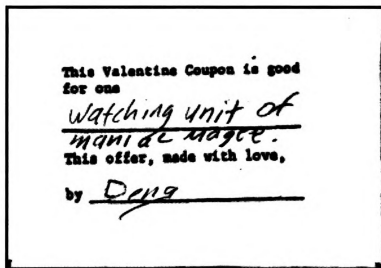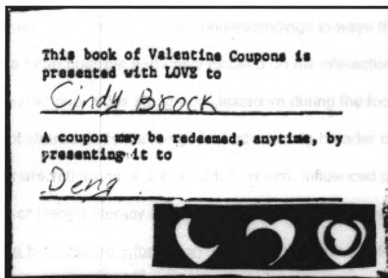

Figure 7. Deng's Valentine's Day gift.

addition to reading the story aloud, he might comment on the story as he read. He agreed to do so. One Saturday morning several weeks later he called me at 9:00 a.m., told me that he had finished the first audio tape, and asked how I wanted him to label the tape for future reference (Field notes, 4/14/96). Clearly, Deng took his role as a researcher seriously! I believe that my attention to Deng, his family, and his cultural background as a Hmong immigrant, influenced our ability to develop shared understandings in ways that might not otherwise have been possible had I only focused on his interactions with others at the microgenetic level in his fifth grade classroom during the focus unit. This development of shared understandings and attention to broader contextual features within which the unit was embedded, in turn, influenced my interpretations of Deng's literacy learning at the microgenetic level.

Valuable background information. Learning about the history of Deng's social, cultural, and school experiences not only influenced the relationship we established, it also gave me valuable background information to draw upon as I studied Deng's literacy learning in the context of the four-week literature unit. For example, my interviews with Mr. Garcia, Deng's fourth grade teacher at Oakland School, and Mrs. Jones, Deng's Title I reading teacher at Oakland Elementary, gave me valuable background information about Deng's history as a student. I learned from these teachers that Deng was also a responsible and diligent student with them, but that he rarely spoke unless he was in one-on-one situations with them or working with peers.

Mrs. Jones mentioned teaching Deng to sound words out phonetically, but she said that he often experienced difficulty comprehending what he read. I found this to be true in my interactions with him pertaining to the *Maniac Magee* text. As an example from chapter 4, Deng could pronounce the word "alley" but he did not know what the word meant. Knowing such information influenced decisions I made about interacting with Deng. I was cautious about assuming he understood and interpreted things he read, saw, or heard in the same ways I understood and interpreted them. Consequently, I often asked him to tell me about things in his own words to see how he made sense of text, experiences, or ideas pertaining the unit[26].

My discussions with Deng, his mother and Dr. Smith, (the United Nations administrator in Southeast Asia) helped me to understand Deng's school experiences in Thailand prior to coming to the United States. In Thailand, Deng learned that an important point of school was memorizing facts that the teacher deemed important. Further, not knowing something could result in physical punishment. This background, coupled with the practice of students using the whole-group forum during *Maniac Magee* lessons to display knowledge, likely led Deng to believe that publicly displaying confusion during lessons was not a sanctioned school practice.

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[26] When Deng, Vue, and I were interacting together, Deng also had the option to explain his thinking in Hmong. Vue translated Deng's Hmong comments for me. Having the option to express his thinking in Hmong was important to Deng because, at times, Deng did not know the English words he needed to express his thoughts and ideas.

Attending to the broader context of Deng's life and history influenced

both the relationship we developed as coinvestigators and the background

knowledge I drew upon to make interpretations at the microgenetic level. In the

following section, I examine ways in which transactions between Deng and

others in his classroom community influenced the literacy learning opportunities

they constructed.

The Social Origins of Mind and Semiotic Mediation

Vygotsky's second theme refers to the role of social interaction in

shaping mind. The Vygotsky Space discussed in chapter 2 (see Figure 1 on

page 38), is a visual representation of the process by which mind originates in

the social sphere. Recall that quadrant 1 represents the social space in which

individuals interact. Individuals appropriate and transform their thoughts about

those interactions in unique ways--as depicted in quadrants 3 and 4. As

individuals make their thoughts public again (quadrant 4) they can continue to

discuss, debate and refine their own thinking and this, in turn, has the potential

to influence the thinking of others. This process--internalization--is the iterative

process of appropriating and transforming social experiences to individual

ones.

The manner in which internalization occurs closely relates to the third

theme --semiotic mediation--or, the ways that semiotic tools, such as language,

are used by individuals to mediate thinking. Speakers' perspectives, the ways

in which speakers orient themselves with respect to one another, and the ways

that words are used in particular conversations and contexts influence what

gets said, heard, and learned by others (Wertsch, 1991). Thus, theme two--the

social origins of mind--emphasizes that social interactions play a central role in

facilitating thinking, and theme three--semiotic mediation--emphasizes how

psychological tools, such as language, facilitate thinking and knowing. I draw

on both themes to look across the analyses discussed in chapters 4 and 5 and

address the questions: (1) How were literacy learning opportunities constructed

differently by Deng, his teacher, and his peers as a result of the semiotically

mediated social interactions that occurred in the whole-group and small-group

contexts? and (2) What did Deng appear to learn in the two different contexts?

How were learning opportunities constructed? Clearly, according to

Deng, his learning opportunities differed in the context of the whole-group and

small-group lessons. Deng felt that he knew what was going on in the small-

group activities, whereas, he was often confused during large-group lessons.

He also indicated that he had more access to the lesson activities in the small

group and he was more comfortable talking and interacting with his small peer

group.

Deng's knowledge of and access to classroom discursive practices and

information varied depending upon the nature of the participants' interactions in

whole- and small groups. This only became apparent, however, by attending to

Deng's perceptions of his experiences in each of these participation

structures. Sometimes it may appear as if students are actively and

meaningfully engaged in learning activities when, in fact, they are not (Bloome,

1986). For example, at first glance, the Hand Scene Episode discussed in

chapter 4, was a powerful activity to facilitate understanding of complex racial issues for some students such as Sally and Dan; however, it was not a powerful learning experience for Deng. Without talking to Deng or reading something he had written about the activity, it could incorrectly be assumed that Deng both understood and learned from the activity. He followed his teacher's directions and participated overtly like everyone else; however, his comments during the viewing session pertaining to that episode made it clear that his interpretation of the episode markedly differed from Mrs. Weber's learning goals for the lesson. Thus, seemingly powerful activities such as the Hand Scene Episode can be deceptive when educators make inferences about the learning of second language children without actually getting a window into their thinking through their writing and talking.

In terms of the Vygotsky Space, opportunity for publication through writing or talking was crucial to facilitate Deng's learning. For Deng, the manner in which the whole-group lessons were structured prevented him from making his thinking public so that he could receive feedback from others to clarify his confusions. Clearly, it might be argued, Deng *could have* asked questions during the whole group lessons. After all, some of his peers did. However, Deng felt insecure about his English proficiency. Additionally, he described himself as shy, and he had not learned to publicly display confusion in school in Thailand. For him, the whole-group forum in Mrs. Weber's class was not a comfortable place to make his thinking and confusion public. As a result, Deng

did not get the feedback he needed to make sense of the activities that occurred during whole-group lessons.

This was not the case, however, in the small group activities. On the contrary, Deng continually interacted with his peers in these activities. The small group setting was a forum where Deng felt comfortable making his thinking, ideas, and confusions public. He actively sought assistance from his peers when he was confused; he also contributed important ideas to the work they did together. In the small group, Deng received the continuous, explicit, and immediate feedback about his thinking that Wiggins (1993) argues is most important to facilitate learning when students are engaged in complex academic tasks.

While Deng's perceptions of his access to and knowledge about classroom discursive practices and textual information are crucial for educators to consider, two issues are worth pondering with respect to Deng's participation in small groups. Undoubtedly, the small-group activities worked for Deng because Mrs. Weber spent considerable time and effort teaching her children to participate effectively in groups. Also, as indicated in chapter 5, Tran acted as Deng's advocate during small-group activities by seeking Deng's opinions and offering him help and suggestions while they worked. It was the nature of the children's interactions within the small group that facilitated Deng's knowledge of and access to discursive practices in the classroom and the textual information that he needed in order to understand the story and the activities in which he and his peers engaged.

Deng made it quite clear that he felt he understood much more during small-group activities than whole-group lessons. An important question to ponder, however, is: What does Deng think it means to "understand," and further, how might Deng's conception of "understanding" relate to others' conceptions of understanding? Barnes (1976) distinguishes between the notion of students "hav[ing] ideas of their own or only remember[ing] what they have been told" (cited in Florio-Ruane, 1989, p. 13). When students "have ideas of their own," they actually "take part in the formulating of knowledge" (Barnes, 1976, pp. 14 - 15, cited in Florio-Ruane, 1989, p. 13-14). Conversely, when students are merely asked to "remember what they are told" they act mainly as receivers of knowledge. In small-group activities, Deng actively took part in the formulation of knowledge. This was not the case, however, in large group lessons.

Analyses of Deng's participation and contributions during small-group activities revealed that over 40% of Deng's contributions involved making suggestions and/or sharing ideas. Deng's other contributions included confirming others' ideas, attempting to gain the floor, seeking help, and clarifying others' ideas, respectively (see Table 18). In small-group activities, then, Deng did play a role in shaping the conversations and helping to formulate knowledge rather than merely acting as a receiver of knowledge. As illustrated in Tables 16 and 17, however, Tran, not Deng, played the major role in orchestrating the flow of conversations and the formulation of knowledge in small-group activities.

Deng never voluntarily spoke in large-group lessons, thus, he did not overtly contribute to the shaping of the conversations or the formulation of community knowledge in that context. Further, the analyses shown in Tables 10-12 indicate that he was often confused during whole-group lessons. Consequently, he did not demonstrate that he developed or had his own ideas in the whole-group setting, nor did he appear to be in a position to be able to act as receiver of someone else's knowledge. Thus, drawing on Barnes (1976), if understanding involves both remembering what others have told you, and having, formulating and expressing your own unique ideas, it is unlikely that Deng understood very much during whole-group lessons on either count.

Clearly, social mediation played a crucial role in Deng's learning. He felt that he understood when he had a chance to interact with and ask questions of his peers in his small group and engage in supportive negotiations during activities. Despite these data, it would be a mistake to assume that second language children should only (or primarily) have opportunities to learn in small groups. There is nothing inherently positive or negative about small groups or large groups; rather, it is *the nature of the language-based social interactions* that occur within the groups that shapes what gets talked about, thought about and, subsequently learned.

Comparisons between Tables 10, 11, and 12 in chapter 4 and Tables 19 and 20 in chapter 5 illustrate that Deng believed he understood more in small-group as compared to whole-group conversations. Clearly, however, there were times when Deng was confused during small-group conversations.

Recall, for example, from chapter 5 that at one point in the boys' discussion on June 9, 1995, Chris sarcastically said that John McNab and his family were his favorite characters. In actuality, John McNab and his family were some of the least desirable characters in the story. Tran recognized the sarcastic nature of this comment and responded sarcastically. During the viewing session on March 5, 1996, Deng, on the other hand, did not recognize that Chris was just joking about John McNab being his favorite character. Deng interpreted Chris's comment literally and explicitly disagreed with Chris. Clearly, this social interaction was a source of misunderstanding and confusion for Deng. However, neither Chris nor Tran recognized it at the time, and consequently, neither of the boys helped Deng to understand their use of sarcasm in the conversation.

Educators, students and researchers must carefully and continually examine, monitor, and adjust the nature of interactions that occur in all the various participation structures used in the classroom throughout the day with respect to the specific children that are being served in classrooms. Florio-Ruane (1989) argues that teachers

> do have direct influence on the social contexts of instruction in their classrooms. Teachers and students communicate with one another within the temporal, spatial, normative, and material boundaries of the classroom. How they organize that communication greatly determines the learning which takes place in school (p. 10).

In the remainder of this section, I explore what Deng learned in small-group activities and whole-group lessons.

What did Deng learn? The data presented in chapters 4 and 5 shed light on the nature of Deng's learning in whole-group lessons and small-group activities and illustrate that Deng appeared to learn more in small-group activities than whole-group lessons. For example, in the small group discussions on May 30, and June 9, 1995, among other things, Deng learned about responding personally to text, character development, and reading comprehension. I draw on the following data sources to support my assertions about Deng's literacy learning during the small-group activities: (1) the actual character map produced by the boys (see Figure 5 on page 160), (2) audio tapes and video tapes of the boys' interactions and discussions on May 30, and June 9, 1995, and (3) Deng's perceptions of his understanding during the viewing sessions corresponding to the May 30, and June 9, 1995, small-group activities.

As illustrated in Table 14 and the subsequent discussion of the table, Deng and his peers responded personally to the text by identifying, discussing and debating different character traits that described Greyson. Deng also learned about complex character relationships as he and his peers talked. For example, in chapter 5 when Tran and Chris suggested that the Beale family was the best family for Maniac, Deng asserted that Greyson and Maniac also made a good family. Deng's assertion was reasonable because Maniac had been very happy when he lived with Greyson. His assertion also revealed his

understanding that Maniac and the old man, Greyson, cared for one another like father and son. Finally, Deng learned important reading comprehension skills such as: (1) making predictions about potential character traits and then drawing on events in the story to confirm or disconfirm them (See Table 14 & subsequent discussion) , (2) developing English vocabulary (i.e., words such as lonely, hermit, unsure) in a meaningful context (See Table 14 & subsequent discussion), and (3) monitoring his understanding of the story content and the ongoing discussion by asking questions and clarifying confusions as the boys talked (see Table 18).

The children engaged in 18 whole-group lessons (lasting an average of 40 minutes each) and 6 small-group activities (lasting an average of approximately 15 minutes each). Because children spent so much time in whole groups, these groups were the primary venue for instruction and learning. The following are some of the overall unit goals Mrs. Weber discussed at length with her children during whole-group lessons: (a) social issues such as racism, prejudice and homelessness, (b) literary issues such as the genre of the tall tale and Spinelli's use of figures of speech in the text, and (c) comprehension abilities such as predicting, summarizing, and drawing on prior knowledge to interpret text (see Appendix A).

While Mrs. Weber's goals seem both reasonable and important, unfortunately, lack of empirical evidence pertaining specifically to Deng makes it difficult to discern Deng's learning during whole-group lessons. While all whole-group lessons were audio- and video taped, Deng never voluntarily

spoke during whole-group lessons. Additionally, written work was not required during or after whole-group lessons. Thus, there was virtually no spoken or written evidence to draw upon to make inferences about Deng's learning during the whole-group lessons. This lack of evidence was problematic for me as a researcher interested in his literacy learning opportunities, but was also problematic for Mrs. Weber. Since there were no written or spoken indicators of what Deng understood and what he was confused about, Mrs. Weber could not help Deng because she did not realize that he needed help.

The viewing sessions corresponding to the whole-group lessons, however, can shed some light on Deng's learning during those lessons (see Tables 10, 11, & 12). Taken together, the 3 focus whole-group lessons lasted 100 minutes. During the 3 viewing sessions pertaining to these lessons, Deng indicated that he was confused a total of 43 times. Deng's confusion indicates that undoubtedly he did not learn a lot in that context. That is not to say, however, that he did not learn anything. During the three viewing sessions pertaining to the whole-group lessons, Deng indicated that he understood something a total of 13 times. I elaborate on the times he did indicate he learned something during whole-group lessons.

Table 22 provides a brief overview of the times Deng indicated that he understood something during the 3 viewing sessions. As illustrated in the first column, Deng's understanding pertaining to the story fell into 3 general categories: (1) literal understanding of characters or events, (2) ability to relate

the story to his or his peers' personal lives, and (3) the ability to make

predictions while reading.

While Mrs. Weber sought to have her children understand social issues,

the genre of tall tales, figures of speech, and so forth, most of Deng's

understanding (i.e., 9 of the times he said he understood something) centered

around merely identifying characters and events in the story. Thus, Deng's

Table 22

Overview of What Deng Understood During 3 Whole-Group Lessons

Category of Deng's Understanding	Date & Number of Stop	What Deng Understood
Literal Understanding of Character or Event	2/6/96: #2	That Maniac moved in with Amanda's family
	2/6/96: #16	That Maniac went to Amanda's church
	2/29/96: #3	That Maniac was a legend
	2/29/96: #5	That he knows who Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan are
	2/29/96: #10	Why Maniac was not in school
	2/29/96: #19	Why Amanda takes all of her books to school every day
	2/29/96: #20	That Amanda's siblings wrote on the wall with crayon
	3/14/96: #1	That John McNab lives in a dirty house
	3/14/96: #7	That Maniac lived with Russell and Piper for awhile
Relates Story to Student(s)' Lives	2/6/96: #4	Why Mrs. Weber asked the class about helping their parents with jobs around the house
	2/6/96: #14	That some of his own church experiences are similar to Amanda's in the story
	2/29/96: #6	That he sometimes gets angry with friends and family like the characters in the story
Employs Reading Strategy: Making Predictions	2/29/96: #12	How to make a prediction about what Maniac might do once he became homeless (i.e., move in with a foster family)

learning during whole group lessons seemed to involve basic understandings of several story events and recognition of some of the main characters in the story.

The second category pertains to Deng's ability to relate the story to his life or the lives of his peers. Deng indicated three times that he understood the discussion the teacher was leading *about* the story as it related to the lives of the children. For example, the class read that Maniac helped Mrs. Beale with various household jobs, and Mrs. Weber asked the children if they, too, helped around the house. Deng indicated that he did.

The third category pertains to Deng's use of prediction. One of Mrs. Weber's comprehension goals was to encourage the children to make predictions while reading. The ability to successfully predict and then confirm or disconfirm predictions while reading may not be too challenging for many children at the fifth grade level; however, it is undoubtedly more difficult to make predictions successfully in a relatively new language. The ability to make predictions was the only strategy Deng overtly demonstrated that he was able to do during the 3 whole-group viewing sessions. This occurred during the viewing session on February 29, 1996. In the video taped whole-group lesson, the teacher had just read that Maniac was homeless. Deng stopped the tape of the lesson and predicted that perhaps Maniac would now move in with a foster family. This instance indicated that he did appropriate at least one comprehension goal his teacher sought to have him learn.

In the first part of this chapter I drew on the 3 tenets of sociocultural theory and empirical evidence from earlier chapters to interpret Deng's literacy learning opportunities. I draw on key features of this discussion to present a learning opportunity model in the following section.

Key Contextual Features Pertaining to Deng's Literacy Learning Opportunities:
A Model

Transactions between (a) Deng's personal response and engagement during the lessons, (b) the roles of the primary mediating agents within the community (i.e., Mrs. Weber & Deng's peers), and (c) Deng's access to the dynamically evolving knowledge domain within the unit pertaining to *Maniac Magee*, significantly impacted Deng's learning opportunities during whole-group lessons and small-group activities. These three features comprise the
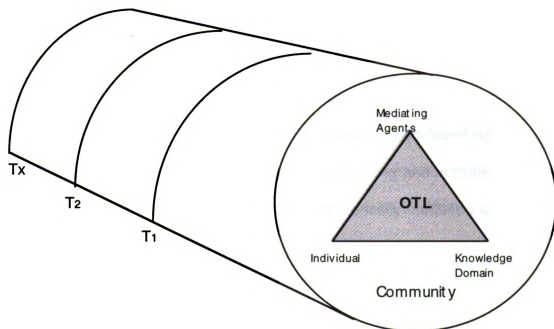

Figure 8. A theoretical model of learning opportunity.

core of a learning opportunity model. I briefly discuss the three features and interconnections between them, and then I describe each of the 3 features in more depth illustrating how optimal contributions of each feature could maximize Deng's (or any student's) learning opportunities. I then use the model to discuss an effective learning opportunity for Deng and argue that the model can be a useful heuristic for conceptualizing learning opportunities for other children in other contexts.

The circle and triangle portion in the front of Figure 8[27] indicate that individual participants, mediating agents, and the dynamically evolving knowledge domain transact together within the classroom community to constitute the activities in the community. My choice of the word transact is both intentional and significant. Rosenblatt (1994) argues that the term interaction implies a separation between the knower, the known, and the process of knowing. Moreover, "interaction" can imply the notion of "independent entities" acting upon one another (p. 1058). The term "transaction," on the other hand, implies that the knower, the known, and the process of knowing mutually constitute one another. This notion of "transaction" is consistent with a sociocultural theoretical perspective whereby learning and activities are conceived of as being constituted through semiotically-mediated social interactions.

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[27] The front portion of Figure 8 is adapted from diagrams developed by James R. Gavelek and introduced in the Spring 1995 doctoral seminar at Michigan State University entitled "Language, Literacy, and Learning."

The tunnel portion of Figure 8 containing the "T1 to Tx" markings illustrates that the evolving knowledge domain and the individuals have histories that change and develop across time. In Figure 8, "T" portrays productive and noticeable changes in individuals' conceptual growth across time. Conceptual growth is maximized, I argue, when individuals and mediating agents engage in effective transactions as they coconstruct knowledge domains within the community. Maximal learning opportunities (i.e., effective transactions between all three contextual features) are illustrated by full shading within the triangle in the figure; that is, when individuals and mediating agents engage in effective transactions as they construct richly developing knowledge domains, conceptual transformation occurs, and learning opportunities for individuals are maximized.

The model is built upon, and relates closely to, the three themes of sociocultural theory drawn on for this overall investigation. The front portion of the model (i.e., the circle and triangle portion) relates to themes 2 and 3; that is, the central role that semiotically mediated interactions play in the development of mind in immediate contexts. Moreover, since the front portion of the figure represents transactions in the immediate context it also represents microgenesis. Our social and cultural histories are comprised of countless moments at the immediate microgenetic level. Microgenetic moments shape and are shaped by our social and cultural histories.

The tunnel portion of the model represents ontogenesis, cultural history, and phylogenesis, the remaining domains of genetic development. These

domains merit consideration when contemplating learning opportunities because the actors in the immediate context, as well as the semiotic tools they employ, have histories that frame and shape the nature of the transactions that occur in the immediate context. I discuss each of the features in the front portion of the model below. I begin with the role of the knowledge domain; then I discuss the role of the mediating agents, and finally, the role of the individual in the model. For the purposes of discussion, I tease these features apart for further elaboration; however, in actuality, the features are intimately intertwined and mutually constitute one another.

The Role of the Knowledge Domain in the Model

An important feature of Figure 8 is the notion that as people and activities vary across time, new and different knowledge gets created. Thus, the knowledge domain is not a monolithic entity; rather, it represents a series of unique and dynamically evolving processes. This notion particularly relates to quadrants 2 and 3 of the Vygotsky Space as depicted in chapter 2. The social interactions depicted in quadrant 1 of the Vygotsky Space serve as the intellectual grist which individuals then uniquely appropriate and transform as depicted in quadrants 2 and 3 of the Vygotsky Space. Thus, people transacting with one another in the social sphere continuously revise and invent knowledge.

The manner in which the dynamically constructed knowledge domain evolves is worth considering because individuals in a community may have differential access to the knowledge domain as it is being constructed. For

example, as illustrated in chapter 4, students such as Sally and Dan had greater access to the developing knowledge domain in whole-group lessons than Deng. Moreover, individuals' contributions to the construction of the knowledge domain and the community's response to those contributions may vary. Additionally, participants most likely develop knowledge in a given community if they have a hand in constructing it and if the construction and use of the knowledge involves the development of critical and creative thought.

The aforementioned factors contribute to the manner in which the knowledge domain evolves and their consideration raises important questions such as: What constitutes an effectively structured knowledge domain? for whom? and under what conditions? These questions are important because the more effectively the knowledge domain is constructed, the greater an individual's learning opportunities. The questions also point to the need to address the transactions that occur between mediating agents and individuals (the remaining 2 features of the model) as they create knowledge.

The Role of Mediating Agents in the Model

The role of the more capable other or mediating agent is central for Vygotsky (Wertsch, 1985). Vygotsky was particularly concerned with children's potential development--that which children could do with the assistance of a more capable other--rather than their actual development--that which they could do on their own at a particular point in time (Vygotsky, 1978). For Vygotsky, focusing on what children can become provides a more dynamic means for facilitating learning, and it is through collaboration with a mediating agent that a

children's learning potential evolves. While Vygotsky did argue that mediating agents play an important role in children's learning potential, he did not articulate specifically what that role might look like (Wertsch, 1994); however, other scholars (e.g., Lave, 1996) have addressed this issue.

Traditional cognitive theories of learning purport that learning occurs when the mediating agent transmits knowledge to students (Lave, 1996). When considered from a sociocultural perspective, however, an effective mediating agent enters into a conversation with students whereby students are invited into a "powerful identity-changing community of practice" (1996, p. 159). Thus, the traditional boundaries between the mediating agent and the students become blurred as all conversants are transformed in the process of the ongoing conversation. Teacher and students embrace the role of learner as the mediating agent strives to learn about and from the students to facilitate their entrance into the community, and the students learn what it means to participate in a particular community of practice. Moreover, the community of practice itself is a dynamically evolving entity.

In this investigation, the mediating agents within the classroom facilitated Deng's access to the different participation structures in the literacy community. For example, while many members of whole-group lessons played different roles in jointly constructing the lessons, as illustrated in the first section of chapter 4, Mrs. Weber played a central role in orchestrating interactions in whole-group lessons. Because whole-group lessons served as a forum to display knowledge, and Mrs. Weber did not realize the extent to which Deng

was confused during the lessons, she did not have sufficient knowledge about Deng's needs to facilitate his entrance into the community.

Deng's small-group peers (particularly Tran), on the other hand, served as more powerful mediating agents than did his classroom teacher. They engaged in ongoing conversations with him during small-group activities and regularly sought to clarify and explain confusing ideas and concepts to him. Additionally, in the give-and-take of conversation between the boys there was uptake on Deng's ideas at times; thus, he was not always in the role of student. Further, because Deng felt he could express confusion in the small group, he played an important role in helping to orchestrate his access to the small group community.

The Role of the Individual in the Model

Not surprisingly, from a sociocultural perspective, individual agency is not merely a property of the individual; rather, individual agency "extends beyond the skin" in two important ways (Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993, p. 337). First, recall from earlier discussions of the Vygotsky Space that all learning--including the role of agency--originates in social interactions with others (i.e., quadrant 1 of the Vygotsky Space). Thus, our ability to act on our own behalf is shaped and reshaped by myriad interactions with others such as parents, extended relatives, siblings, teachers, peers, and so forth. Second, agency is shaped by our use of cultural tools (primarily language-used-in-action), and these cultural tools and their use are "tied to historical, cultural, and institutional settings" (Wertsch et al., 1993, p. 337).

Conceptualizing agency from an individual psychological perspective

rather than a sociocultural perspective has serious implications for educators

working with second language children such as Deng. Lave argues that when

theories place the onus of responsibility for learning squarely on individual

agency they " blame marginalized people for being marginal" (p. 149). People

function in social networks that greatly influence and shape the manner in

which they act and interact. For example, Deng was the same person

physically in both small groups and large groups during the unit pertaining to

Maniac Magee; however, the different structures of the groups, the individuals

within the groups, and the sanctioned manner of interacting within each group

significantly influenced his choice of actions. This, in turn, influenced his

learning opportunities in each context.

Using the Learning Opportunity Model to Discuss an Empirical Example of Deng's Learning

My analyses and interpretation of Deng's analyses of the whole- and

small-group contexts--discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6--illustrate that the small

group was a more effective learning context for Deng. In this section, I draw on

the model presented above and the discussion segment highlighted in chapter 5

between Tran, Deng, and Chris, about the best family for Maniac to serve as an

example of an effective learning opportunity for Deng. Using the three features

of the model presented above, I highlight key aspects of the transactions

between Deng and Tran as they worked together to construct knowledge[28]. I

begin by focusing on Tran's role as mediator, then I discuss Deng's role and the

knowledge that the boys constructed together.

The best family discussion on June 9, 1995, began when Tran explicitly

invited Deng into the conversation by asking him what he thought about Maniac

Table 23

Best Family Conversational Excerpt with Commentary, June 9, 1995

Small-Group Conversational Statements	Analytical Comments
1. Tran: He wants the best family?	**Tran requests** clarification.
2. Deng: Yeah.	*Deng confirms.*
3. Tran: Oh, that's good.	**Tran affirms** Deng's response.
4. Deng: And he want to have mother and dad and sister and brother.	*Deng elaborates* on what he means by "best family" for Maniac.
5. Tran: Do you think he got the best family?	**Tran seeks** Deng's opinion.
6. Deng: No.	
7. Tran: The Beales?	**Tran poses suggestion** for Deng to consider.
8. Deng: Yeah, yeah.	*Deng quickly agrees* with Tran's suggestion.
9. Tran: Oh, okay. Do you think they're the best family for Maniac?	**Tran asks** for clarification.
10. Chris: Nobody's the best family.	
11. Deng: Maniac / no, maybe Greyson.	*Deng poses alternative* to Tran's suggestion. (That perhaps explains his response in line 6.)
12. Tran: Yeah, Greyson. Maybe if Greyson, maybe had kids, that'd be another song.	**Tran affirms** Deng's alternative suggestion and **extends** Deng's idea.
13. Deng: Yeah	

[28] Key segments of Tran's comments are bolded so they may be easily identified as I discuss ways in which Tran's comments functioned in the conversation with Deng. Key segments of Deng's comments are italicized and underlined so they may be easily identified as I discuss ways that Deng's comments functioned in the conversation.

(see Table 23). Deng introduced the idea of Maniac wanting a best family, and Tran responded by asking a clarifying question. I present the boys' comments below with a brief commentary pertaining to the comments.

The mediator. In the brief exchange above, Tran explicitly invites Deng into the conversation, seeks his opinion, affirms his different responses, offers alternative considerations, and in line 12 further extends Deng's already good idea. Clearly, as illustrated in this excerpt, Tran does not assume the role of transmitter of knowledge. Rather, Tran embraced the role of learner and facilitator as he sought to understand, affirm, support, and extend Deng's thoughts and ideas. Recall from discussions in earlier chapters that Deng described himself as shy and insecure about his English proficiency. Moreover, in his early school experiences, Deng had been socialized to see school as a place where students display memorized knowledge rather than discuss and debate ideas. Tran was especially perceptive to recognize and act on the need to carefully orchestrate Deng's involvement in small-group conversations.

Additionally, as discussed in chapter 5, in the broader context of the Discussion Activity, Tran assumed the position of leader in the group. This is important because Tran did know more about *Maniac Magee* , and he also had insider knowledge of mainstream American culture. Thus, without support and guidance from an insider Deng would not have the same learning opportunities in the small group. In Deng's case, because he was learning about American

culture and learning English, there were many instances when he did not even realize what he needed to know[29].

Recall from chapter 5 that the conversational norms of the small-group made it a place where Deng actively and explicitly contributed to the ongoing dynamics of the context. Deng's involvement in the small-group context was facilitated by the nature of the relationship between the boys; while Tran was the leader of the group, he also acted as Deng's advocate. Consequently, Deng had ongoing input into the formation of the small-group community. Also, the small-group was a place where expressing confusion was sanctioned. As a result, the boys often worked through issues and events that Deng found confusing relative to the story. Furthermore, during the viewing session on February 13, 1996, Deng stated he was comfortable interacting in the small group. Thus, the social network the boys created in their small groups significantly influenced and shaped the manner in which Deng chose to act and interact with them.

The individual. Notice the range of ways in which Deng interacts in the excerpt above. He (1) confirms, (2) poses new ideas, (3) elaborates upon existing ideas, and (4) agrees when Tran correctly interprets his ideas. Deng was an active contributor to and shaper of the conversation. He did not act merely as a receiver of knowledge during the conversational exchange. The

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[29] The "Hand Scene" described in chapter 4 is an example of this point. Deng did not understand the American school story of racism, and he did not realize that this was important background information to be able to interpret the Hand Scene Episode. It is not surprising that a Hmong child, new to the United States, would not understand this complex American issue.

small-group context was a site where it was okay to try out ideas. When Deng tried out the idea of Greyson and Maniac making a good family, Tran agreed and extended the conversation by suggesting that it would even be better if Greyson had other kids. This excerpt, and the extended analyses of small-group interactions in chapter 5, help to illustrate that all participants in the evolving contexts played important roles in shaping the ways that Deng participated in the small- and large-group activities. As Wertsch et al. (1993) suggest, individual agency "extends beyond the skin" and is constituted through broader social and cultural influences.

The knowledge. A central tenet of sociocultural theory is that powerful learning experiences can occur through effective semiotically-mediated social interactions. The social interactions are not ends in and of themselves; rather, it is through effective social interactions that individuals can come to think in new, different, creative and powerful ways. An important indicator of effectiveness is the extent to which conversants can understand the perspectives of the other. Another important indicator of effectiveness is whether the thoughts and ideas under construction might be considered unique and viable by members in the community of practice.

In the short excerpt above, Deng demonstrates knowledge of the content of the story *Maniac Magee,* and he demonstrates knowledge about how to effectively interact in his small-group community. Deng knew that Greyson and Maniac had been a wonderful family before Greyson died. This is an important aspect of the story that neither Tran nor Chris had considered. Through Deng's

choice to share this information with the group and Tran's acknowledgment of the value of the idea, and his extension of it, the boys were able to consider an important idea that they might not have considered. Thus, as illustrated in this instance, <u>both</u> Deng and Tran contributed to the evolving body of knowledge the boys were in the process of creating together. However, the knowledge they created together can not be separated from the ways in which they created it. It was partly because Deng was comfortable with his peers, knew he was a valued member of the group, and knew it was okay to pose suggestions and ideas for the groups' consideration that he chose to share his opinion about Greyson so that everyone in the group could consider a viable alternative suggestion to the idea of the Beale family being the best family for Maniac.

<u>The Learning Opportunity Model: Some Concluding Comments.</u>

I used the conceptual model presented above as a lens to highlight and explore different contextual features of Deng's literacy learning opportunities in the unit pertaining to *Maniac Magee.* While acknowledging that conceptual models frame experiences in particular ways and, thus, may limit interpretations of experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994), I suggest that the model could be a useful tool for exploring students' learning opportunities in other contexts. An important feature of the model is that it ties the notion of opportunity to specific contexts; that is, opportunity or lack of opportunity can not exist apart from specific contexts and social practices.

Pedagogical Implications

Findings from this study suggest that Deng's literacy learning opportunities were related to his knowledge of and access to classroom discursive practices and his knowledge of the *Maniac Magee* text. Further, Deng's ability to gain this knowledge varied greatly depending on the nature of the interactions that occurred within different participation structures, including whole-group teacher-guided lessons and student facilitated small-groups.

Whole-group lessons dominated the unit. Deng experienced difficulty gaining access to the conversation and gaining the textual knowledge he needed to successfully participate in these lessons. For example, the pace of lessons was often quick and the teacher and students often used vocabulary that was unfamiliar to Deng. Additionally, Deng was often confused about events, characters, and discussions pertaining to the story. Thus, while whole-group lessons were effective for some students, they were not for Deng. Conversely, Deng often reported and demonstrated that he understood a great deal more when interacting with peers in small groups where he had many more opportunities to participate and ask questions.

This investigation sheds light on the central role that the nature of interactions within classroom participation structures can play in fostering educational opportunities for second-language learners. In particular, different participation structures can afford different opportunities for engaging in interactions that may promote or inhibit learning. While small-group activities afforded opportunities for the most meaningful interactions for Deng, this would

not necessarily had to have been the case. For example, the Hand Scene Episode activity discussed in chapter 4 could have been a meaningful learning experience for Deng if he had had the chance to write and/or talk about his conceptions of the activity and receive feedback from his peers and/or Mrs. Weber. The Hand Scene Episode occurred towards the end of the class period. Mrs. Weber might have asked the children to write about the purposes of the activity and what they learned from engaging in the activity in their journals. This writing would have alerted her to the fact that Deng did not understand the activity.

This investigation also confirms the crucial role of meaningful situated language use in the construction of literacy learning opportunities for second language learners like Deng. In order for Deng to make sense of classroom events he needed to be able to interact on an ongoing basis with others (e.g., Tran) who served the role of mediator with respect to classroom practices. Additionally, this study suggests that opportunities are constructed within interactions between individuals, and as such, they are dynamic, complex and highly contextualized for specific students.

In chapter 2, I argued that our lack of ability to effectively address the issue of unequal opportunity for many children in our schools is related to the ways we raise questions and frame issues pertaining to educational opportunity. Specifically, I drew on the work and ideas of others (e.g., Foucault, 1972; Bové, 1990) and the empirical case discussed in this study to suggest that, perhaps, by changing the nature of the questions we ask about what

"happens or does not happen in schools" we can arrive at different, and potentially more helpful, tentative answers to the complex and important issues surrounding educational opportunities for linguistically and culturally diverse children in our public schools (Wong Filmore & Meyer, 1992, p. 653).

In summary, educators must carefully consider the learning opportunities they create with children. Educators must: (1) make sure that children have chances to engage in meaningful and challenging activities that allow them to "formulate knowledge rather than merely receive knowledge" (Barnes, 1976, pp. 14 - 15, cited in Florio-Ruane, 1989, p. 13-14), (2) provide children with many and varied opportunities to make their thinking public in supportive contexts through such venues as writing, talking, and role playing, and (3) give and receive meaningful and helpful feedback that promotes learning.

Limitations and Future Directions of the Study

It has been informative to study Deng's literacy learning opportunities with him using an interpretive approach and a sociocultural theoretical framework. This work illustrates that opportunities are not out there somewhere to be found; rather, they are constructed through interactions between people. Further, different participation structures can facilitate different types of interactions which, in turn, can significantly impact the ways in which opportunities are created between people. While different participation structures lend themselves to different types of interactions, it is important to carefully attend to the nature of interactions within participation structures. It is not the participation structures, per se, that ought to be the focus of our concern,

but the nature of the interactions that occur within them. Interactions that promote intersubjectivity, or an understanding of the other, facilitate the creation of learning opportunities. Striving to understand the other is especially important with second language children since they often enter school with cultural and linguistic backgrounds that differ from their teachers and many of their peers.

Working with second language children as a teacher or a researcher is a complex undertaking that can be confusing for both the child and the educator because of language and cultural barriers. My work may have been stronger if I could speak Hmong fluently and had a deeper understanding of Hmong culture. Thus, one limitation of my study is the potential miscommunications that may have occurred between Deng and me at the conceptual level. However, suggesting that only researchers who speak the languages of informants can work with them may be problematic. Since there are far more children who speak different languages in schools than there are educational researchers who speak those languages, important work with diverse children could be neglected.

Thus, as researchers, we need to recognize the potential limitations of working with children whose first languages and cultures differ from ours, while at the same time increasing our efforts to identify and modify methods (e.g., using viewing sessions with an interpreter) to insure that second language children gain the attention they deserve in educational research community. Valdes' (1992) asserts that endeavors to learn about and promote literacy

development for second-language learners "must be carried out by mainstream researchers as well as minority researchers and viewed as a legitimate focus of activity " (p. 128).

Another potential limitation of this study is the format of conducting a detailed analysis of only one child's learning in the context of the entire classroom. Focusing solely on Deng's literacy learning opportunities could potentially cast Mrs. Weber and her instruction in a negative light, when, in fact, there was evidence of high engagement and literacy learning on the part of other children in the class (e.g., refer to discussion about Sally, Chris, & Dan in chapter 4). Thus, it is important not to assume that the experiences of a single child represent those of the broader classroom group.

There are several potentially interesting areas for further work relative to this investigation. First, although I sought information about Deng's social, cultural and historical background, my analyses were primarily limited to the microgenetic level. Conducting analyses at other genetic levels could provide deeper insights into Deng's thinking and learning which, in turn, could provide valuable information about working with him and other second language learners in mainstream classroom settings. For example, further studying the local Hmong community and using that knowledge to both interpret and inform Hmong children's experiences in mainstream classrooms may positively impact their learning.

Second, further exploring the role of interpreters in both the research process and in the school learning experiences of second language children

may be a worthwhile endeavor. Mainstream teachers and their second

language children must often rely on interpreters to communicate. Sometimes

interpreters are other children who speak English and a second language.

Other times, interpreters may be classroom assistants or parents.

Understanding the roles that these interpreters can and might play in

educational endeavors could facilitate learning opportunities for second

language children. In my study, understanding Vue's role in helping Deng

interpret the tapes of the lessons during the viewing sessions may shed light on

Deng's thinking and the nature of interactions that may have promoted Deng's

learning.

The Power of Literacy and *the Land of Opportunity:* Drawing on Deng's Experiences to Rethink Popular Myths

Drawing on Harvey Graff, Gee (1990) argues that popular conceptions of

literacy imbue those who are literate (i.e., those who can read & write) with

almost limitless power. For example, the ability to read and write influences and

determines individuals' productivity, wealth, ability to maintain and preserve a

democracy, and so forth. Graff calls this popular conception of the powerful

effects of literacy "the literacy myth" (cited in Gee, 1990, p. 32). Gee argues

convincingly that

> ...contrary to the literacy myth, *nothing* follows from literacy or schooling.
>
> Much follows, however, from what comes *with* literacy and schooling,
>
> what literacy and schooling come wrapped up in, namely the attitudes ,
>
> values, norms and beliefs (at once social, cultural & political) that always
>
> accompany literacy and schooling (p. 42, emphasis in original).

It is not literacy (i.e., the ability to read & write) per se, but the **practices** associated with being enculturated into the *use of* spoken, written and enacted language *in particular ways* that shape individual's abilities to choose various ways of being in society. And these **practices** are social through and through. It follows, then, that we as educators and researchers, ought not to conceive of literacy as a set of discrete skills to memorize and master. Rather, in our classrooms, we must carefully attend to the oftentimes tacit ways that we teach our children to use reading, writing and speaking. This point is particularly salient when working with second language children. In order to function in the circles of economic, political, and social power in this country, individuals must understand the attitudes, values, norms and beliefs with which language is used in those circles. And, these attitudes , values, norms and beliefs are taught and learned in and through social interactions.

Gee's conception of literacy parallels the conception of opportunity that I put forth in this work. I have argued here that opportunities do not exist out there for us or others to seize and harness. Rather, opportunities are created between individuals through particular types of interactions in specific contexts. Like literacy, learning opportunities are social through and through.

Those who perpetuate the common conception that America is the land of opportunity and anyone who works hard enough can achieve financial and social success, place the onus of responsibility for making it squarely on the shoulders of the individual. By spot-lighting the individual, the functioning of social institutions, such as schools, often goes unexamined. If the power of

literacy learning opportunities exists in social practices, and social institutions such as schools are one of the primary institutions where these practices are taught and learned, it is imperative that we critically attend to the structure of the institutions and the nature of the social practices that occur there.

By working as a coresearcher with me on my dissertation project, Deng was socialized into a particular way of using language and envisioning his own future educational plans and opportunities. For example, through our interactions he learned to articulate and justify his beliefs about his own learning experiences. He learned about the value of his native language as we used both Hmong and English to discern his conceptions of his literacy learning in his fifth grade classroom. He learned, too, that his thoughts and ideas can count as very important to others, and he demonstrated an understanding of the importance of documenting this thinking and learning. (For example, recall the tape recorder experience I mentioned earlier in this chapter whereby Deng decided to record his reading aloud and thinking as he reread the text *Maniac Magee*). Moreover, he learned about the importance of college (although it did not seem quite clear to him why anyone would keep going to school until the twenty-second grade!) and that dissertations are an important venue in our educational system to express the thinking and learning that occurs on research projects such as ours.

On several occasions, after our formal dissertation research was completed, Deng made reference to his future plans to go to college and do a dissertation of his own someday. For example, on Saturday, March 23, 1996,

Deng and his two younger sisters came to my house so that we could use my computer to work on several of his school projects (i.e., a report on Nebraska & a diorama about the Inupiat Indians). During our time together that morning, I showed Deng a draft of a conference paper that I was writing about our research together, my boxes of dissertation tapes and notebooks, and a copy of a friend's completed dissertation so that he could see a finished document. The excerpt from my field notes on that day illustrates his response to the dissertation materials I had shown him.

> As we were talking he [Deng] said that he wanted to get his Ph.D. too when he gets older. We have talked about this in the past. Today, he told me that the only problem with getting his Ph.D. is that he isn't sure what he will write his dissertation about. I told him that this isn't something he has to worry about right now--that there will be plenty of time for him to think about that as he gets older (Field notes, March 23, 1996)!

Shortly before the end of Deng's sixth grade school year, his mother remarried and Deng's family moved to an eastern state. I received a letter from Deng postmarked July 10, 1996. In that letter, Deng told me of his plans to go to college: "CINDY WHEN I GOING TO COLLEGE I WILL GO TO MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY" (Letter from Deng, 7/10/96, capitals in original).

Our dissertation research experiences together are now a part of Deng's history. With respect to the Learning Opportunity Model I introduced earlier in this chapter (see Figure 8), these experiences become part of the tunnel portion

of the model; that is, this dissertation experience was one of many experiences that make up the history of Deng's conceptual growth across time. Importantly, however, this experience--as well as countless others--have the potential to positively impact Deng's future. Further drawing on the Learning Opportunity Model I introduced in this chapter, Deng (represented by the individual in the model) will have a hand in shaping his own future educational opportunities; however, the influence of those experiences and opportunities will also be shaped by the teachers and peers (i.e., the mediating agents in the model) Deng encounters as he continues his journey through the American educational system.

Whether Deng continues to see college and a Ph.D. as a viable alternative in his life will partly depend on the remainder of his school learning experiences as he completes middle school and high school. Thus, Deng's future learning opportunities are not solely in his hands: to a great extent, they will be shaped by the nature of the interactions within the social institutions (e.g., home, school, & community) of which he will be a part. With respect to the educational systems within which he will participate, my hope is that his current and future teachers recognize and take seriously their awesome responsibility to help socialize Deng in to the literacy practices that will enable him to have the choice to participate in social, economic and political circles of power in this country.

MANIAC MAGEE

1. Brainstorm - KWL (Know, Want to Know, Learned)

    A.   Homelessness

    B.   Loneliness

    C   Prejudice

2. Study Cover - With the title Maniac Magee, what do you think the book will be about?

3. Maniac's goal is finding a home and happiness.

    Homes: Parents, Aunt and Uncle, Beales, buffaloes,

    equipment room with Grayson, McNabs, buffaloes, Beales

Dimensions:

I.   Social Issues:

    Racism

    Prejudice

    Integration

    Brainstorm definition and best outcome.   Problem solving.

II. Literary:

    1.   Genre - Tall Tale

    Draw on past folk tale writing. Pull out characteristics of tall tale as a whole class chart assignment. Ongoing.

    Assess: From Innovations, Maniac Magee - a model for writing. Write a tall tale. Use edit sheet #50 from Highmeadow.

Characteristics:

1. Magical power contained in person or animal

2. Usually deals with history or legend

3. Humor

4. Exaggeration

5. Make fun of a region or type of person

6. Animals that act human

7. Strong man character

2. Figures of Speech: Comparisons - Likenesses/Differences

Similes

Metaphors

Hyperboles

Personification

III. Comprehension

1. Predictions: Oral, written, (individual and in pairs)

Character predictions: McNab's homelife (causes)

Mars Bar - foe to friend

Plot Predictions

2. Summarize:

Text: Chapter Webbing - 5 main ideas

3. Characters:

Maniac - hopes and fears, ordinary to legend

Moves from/to 1. Innocence

2. Awareness (Wants to die)

3. Activist - 2 kinds: Risk taker

<u>Assess:</u> Character Webs (Adjectives, Evidence, Results)

McNab, Mars Bar, Beales, Amanda, twins,

Grayson (illiterate)

What do each of the following think about MM?

Amanda, Mrs. Beale, John McNab, Mars Bar

IV. <u>Building Prior Knowledge:</u>

Homelessness

Loneliness

Racism

Prejudice

Integration

<u>Conflict</u>:

Parents killed in trolley accident

Warring aunt and uncle

Ignorance - Hate

Homelessness - Nurturing environment

<u>Contrasts:</u>

Black - White

Finsterwald's backyard - typical

McNab's Home - Beale's Home

Exaggerated - Normal

Prejudice - Racial Harmony

Ignorance/Hatred - Human Acceptance

West - East

Bravery - Fear (trestle)

Maniac - Ordinary Jefferey

Author's Technique

Narrator is the storyteller (author)

Natural Conversation:

1.   Incomplete sentences

2.   Dialogue natural - street talk

3.   Event's jump - no natural flow

Modern Day Tall Tale

Exaggerated feats of courage - skill

1.   Homeruns

2.   Run on tracks

Search for home

Legendary figure

Good vs. evil

Realistic Fiction

Homeless

Loneliness

Racial prejudice

ACTIVITIES:

1. Partner's cued retelling

2. Group predictions - individual write - validate at end of reading.

3. Read/Stop/Write/Predict/Read to Validate

4. Jigsaw Story Map - #163 - With individual chapters. Characters, setting, problem, goal resolution

5. Panel of Experts - #102 - Groups of 4. Take notes on reader, groups come up with 4 questions. Facilitator, MC, Judge, Quizzer

6. 1 minute sharing

7. Pass around paragraph - Groups of 4.

    1. Topic Sentence

    2. Detail

    3. Detail

    4. Concluding detail

8. Roving reporter - Interview character.

JOURNAL:

1. Summarize - evaluate themes, class discussion

2. Setting purpose

3. Predictions

4. Response to selections, characters

5. Compare Characters

6. Forces of good/evil

7. Contrasts - Ideas, people, forces of nature

8. Character dialogue

9. Retelling

10. Compile questions - Do answers in group. Share/Steal. No Y/N, T/F questions.

11. Personal reflections

12. Value of negotiating

LEGACY OF MANIAC MAGEE: "And sometimes the girl holding one end of the rope is from the West side of Hector, and the girl on the other end is from the East side."

Initial Interview Questions to Ask Informants

I. Activity or lesson level questions

    1. What are the teacher's purposes and goals for the activity?

    2. What are the students' purposes and goals for the activity?

    3. What counts as successful completion of this activity?

    4. How is learning determined for this lesson

        -by teacher?

        -by students?

    5. Who chose this activity and who chose the way of engaging in it?

    6. How do you feel about doing the activity in general? Each part of the activity?

    7. If you are not/were not sure how to do the activity, what would/did you do?

    8. If you did/might need help on the activity, to whom would/did you turn for help?

    9. What would/might your parents/siblings think of this activity? Why do you think they would feel that way?

    10. How would you gauge the difficulty level of this activity? On what basis do you make that assessment?

    11. Was there any particular aspect of the activity that was more or less difficult that any other part of the activity?

II. Classroom level questions

1. (Ask teacher and case study students.) What are proper ways of acting/thinking in this classroom? Who determines "proper" and how was it determined?

2. (Ask teacher and case study students.) How would you describe this classroom? Why?

3. (Ask students.) Choose one or two other classrooms you have been in...Why did you choose those particular classrooms? How would you describe this classroom relative to those classrooms? Why?

4. (Ask students.)What are your responsibilities in your classroom? Your teacher's responsibilities? Your peer's responsibilities?

5. (Ask teacher.) Choose one or two other classes you have had in the past. How would you describe this group of children relative to those children?

6. (Ask teacher.) What do you see as your responsibilities relative the operation of the classroom? What do you see as the students' responsibilities? Their parents' responsibilities?

III. Person (teacher and students) level questions

1. Personal/relationship related questions to ask each case study student:

a. What are your interests/fears/concerns relative to particular activities*, the classroom in general, school in general?

b. What do/did you think about and care about relative to particular activities, the classroom in general, school in general?

c. Tell me about your teacher.

d. Tell me about your relationship with your teacher.

e. If you could choose several classmates to tell me about, who would you choose? Why? What would you say about them? What would they say about you? Why?

f. When is school fun/not fun? Interesting/not interesting? (What counts as fun and interesting?)

2. Literacy/learning related questions to ask each case study student:

a. How do you know if you've learned something?

b. What counts as learning for you? For your teacher? For your parents?

c. Tell me your feelings in general about reading, writing, speaking, listening? When/where do you do each of these things the most? The least? (What counts as a lot and a little to you?)

d. Describe a typical reading lesson in your classroom.

e. Describe a typical writing lesson in your classroom.

f. Describe a reading lesson (then a writing lesson) in which you think you learned a lot and then tell why.

g. Describe a reading lesson (then a writing lesson) in which you do not think you learned very much and then tell why.

h. Compare your reading class/writing class this year with your reading/writing class from a different grade. What are the similarities and differences?

i. What are your goals for yourself in reading and writing? Your parent's goals for you? Your teacher's goals for you?

3. Personal/relationship related questions to ask Mrs. Weber:

a. What are your interests/fears/concerns relative to particular activities you ask your children to engage in?

b. What do/did you think about and care about relative to particular activities you ask your children to engage in, the classroom in general?

c. Tell me about each case study child.

d. Tell me about your relationship with each case study child.

4. Literacy/learning questions to ask Mrs. Weber:

a. What are the different literacy activities you do in your classroom in terms of reading, writing, speaking, and listening? Please be very specific regarding topics covered, titles of books used, etc. What kinds of writing do your students do? How do you deal with skills?

b. What are your goals for your literacy program?

c. How do you decide what types of novels/basal stories you will use? Do you make connections between stories or across subjects?

d. Where do you get materials (books, etc.) you're using and how difficult is it to get materials?

e. How do you formally and informally assess your children's progress in literacy?

f. What things have really influenced the kinds of decisions you make in your teaching (e.g., books, classes, peers, workshops, etc.)?

g. How would you describe each case study child's opportunity to learn in literacy in general? In a specific lesson? (Choose one of two recent lessons to discuss in-depth.)

h. What are the specific types of things that influence each child's opportunities? What constitutes a literacy opportunity for each case study student?

IV. Family/Community Level questions (for Deng's family)

1. Please tell me about Deng's school background. What schools has he attended? Where have they been located?

2. How would you describe his school experiences during each year he has been in school? (Ask for a description at each grade level.)

3. What languages do the different people in you family speak? Read? Write?

4. What was school like for you?

5. How would you compare your school experiences to Deng's?

6. Ask some specific questions about particular activities that Deng has done in school recently. Try to get at their evaluation of the activity in terms of value, Deng's learning, etc.

7. What are your goals for Deng educationally?

8. What have Deng's teachers done that has been helpful to you and to him?

9. What are some things that Deng's teachers could do to be that would be helpful for him?

10. How would you describe a typical day in school for Deng?

11. Is Deng successful in school? How do you determine success in school?

12. What are the types of things that help Deng to be successful in school?

--That you do?

--That the teacher does?

--That Deng does?

--That other students do?

13. What are the types of things that hinder Deng's success in school?

--That you do?

--That the teacher does?

--That Deng does?

--That other students do?

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