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Peggy Sue Rittenhouse

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Major professor

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MAKING SENSE: LITERACY LEARNING IN A FIRST-GRADE DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

By

Peggy S. Rittenhouse

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ABSTRACT

MAKING SENSE: LITERACY LEARNING IN A FIRST-GRADE DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

By

Peggy S. Rittenhouse

This study sought to understand the literacy teaching and learning in one first-grade, reform-oriented classroom. Classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and samples of student work, gathered over a period of 15 weeks, were used as means to collect data. Data was analyzed using methods from qualitative research.

Findings from the study indicated that the literacy instruction in the classroom--in which the language arts were taught in a more holistic manner, in which students' ideas were made part of the curriculum, in which talk among students was actively encouraged as a means to foster literacy learning, and in which the teacher shared authority of knowing with students-- seemed to support students' learning of literacy and their disposition to use literacy for their own purposes.

An unintended consequence of the literacy teaching and learning in this classroom seemed to be the development of a kind of school literacy discourse different from other, more traditional, school literacy discourses. This different literacy discourse appeared to result in some children experiencing difficulties in knowing how to engage in more traditional school literacy discourses.

To My Favorite Teachers

You taught me to stand up for what I know,
even when no one else sees the lion in the yard.
You taught me to love reading, to view the world with wonder,
and to always keep learning.
Your taught me about courage and dreams and determination,
and that life, though changed by hardships
and heartaches, does go on, and can be good again.
You taught me well.

Thanks, Mom and Dad.
All my love.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Ms. Murray and her first-grade students for allowing me to be a part of their classroom. Without their willingness to let me observe their work and talk with them about that work, this study would not have been possible. I would also like to thank the members of my committee for their support throughout this process. Dr. Cheryl Rosaen, committee chair, Dr. Suzanne Wilson, Dr. Lauren Young, and Dr. Penelope Peterson provided me opportunities to talk about my emerging ideas, then pushed me to think about and explore those ideas more deeply. Their comments and suggestions did much to help me clarify my thinking. My deepest appreciation to you all.

In addition to my official committee, I would like to thank the members of my "kitchen committee." Bonnie & Mick and Angie & Scott provided good conversation and good food as only good friends can. Thanks also to Helene and Deb for always being there when I needed to talk. Now that I'm finished, our long distance phone bills ought to go down, but they probably won't. To others of my friends and family who took such an interest in what I was doing, many thanks for your support and encouragement throughout this process.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the financial support for this study, made possible through my participation in the Education Policy and Practice Study at Michigan State University. My thanks to the principal investigators for the opportunity they provided me to be a part of the EPPS project and to all the "EPPSers" for the intellectual climate that helped nurture my thinking.

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INTRODUCTION

When I began thinking about this study, I knew I wanted to consider the political and moral implications of literacy instruction in schools. I had been doing quite a bit of reading of feminist and critical theorists' ideas about education, and what they said resonated with me. As a teacher working with Hispanic students in south Texas during the mid and late 1980s, I had come to believe that some of the education policies the state mandated didn't seem in students' best interests. For example, like many states, Texas at that time had a mandated state-level test of basic skills given to children in odd-numbered grades. For students just learning English as a second language (ESL), the first cycle of that test (be it given in third grade or fifth grade or so on) could be taken in Spanish; all subsequent tests, however, were to be taken in English. This didn't mesh with what I knew about second language acquisition.

Research in second language acquisition indicated it took most ESL learners about seven years to acquire near-native fluency in their new language. Assuming ESL students in my district began first grade in the United States (which wasn't necessarily true), they were allowed to take the state-mandated test in Spanish of their third grade year, but were required to take the test in English during their fifth grade year. In short, under optimal conditions, ESL students would not even have had five full years to learn English before being required to use it to demonstrate their academic competence. Further, since the tests were given to all Texas students, native English speakers included, the results of the tests

were used by some legislators to compare districts across the state (a separate issue in its own right).

Now, some of the students in my district spoke less Spanish than I did (and that's not much!), and for them, this testing policy likely wasn't a problem. But for the children learning English as a second language, this policy, in my opinion, created a barrier that kept many students from demonstrating their competence. What they knew academically couldn't easily be made known because of language differences. It didn't--and still doesn't--make sense. That was my introduction to the politics of literacy, and, I suspect, an underlying influence in my interest in feminist and critical theories of education.

Which brings me back to this study. In thinking about the study, I assumed issues of voice, position, and power would likely be present in any educational setting, because of my own experiences as a teacher and the reading I had done in graduate school, but I didn't realize they might be present in unintended ways. I don't mean to imply that I thought there would be an "evil empire" attitude by some unknown "they" whose goal was to oppress poor, minority, and/or female children. I did wonder if I might find some more or less overt instances of the political implications of literacy (like a phonics-first debate among staff, perhaps). What I found was much more subtle, and I think more along the lines of what Heath (1983) found in her study of language learning in three communities. Heath helped us understand the different ways children learn about language and how to use it, and what can happen when what children know doesn't match what schools often expect.

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This study helped me better understand the ways in which a reform-oriented approach to literacy instruction can support children's literacy growth. It also helped clarify the importance of teachers' knowledge and beliefs about literacy, learners, and learning in the shaping of literacy instruction. Finally, the study shed light on some of the unintended consequences that can arise when the literacy discourse children engage in within their classroom differs from a more traditional literacy discourse often associated with schools. This issue of unintended consequences is one I have been concerned about, both from my own experiences as a teacher and from my research and reading. Much like the history of systemic educational reform, changes in instruction at the classroom level seem to both improve some aspects of learning and lead to difficulties in other aspects, as I will discuss in chapters three and four. These unintended consequences do not grow out of a desire to do harm; indeed, they often are the result of trying to do good. Yet, harm can result because of underlying (and often hidden) issues of voice, position, and power that are present in any cultural setting (Delpit, 1988). Because of my own interest in improving education, my past experiences as a teacher of nonmainstream[1]

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[1]The terms "mainstream" and "nonmainstream" can be used to describe a wide range of raced, classed, and/or gendered characteristics. Heath (1983), for example, describes mainstreamers as "people who see themselves as being in 'the main stream of things'" (p. 236). She includes within her description both black and white individuals. I do not agree with this. Ellis Cose (1993) has documented stories of many black individuals some might describe as "successful" or as "mainstreamers," but who do not see themselves as part of what they feel is the white-dominated mainstream. In this study, I use the term "mainstream" to describe

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students in a state trying to improve education, and my deepening understanding of the unintended consequences associated with improving education, I designed this study to examine the school literacy experiences of nonmainstream children with a reform-oriented teacher.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the research literature that frames the study and describe the study's rationale. In Chapter 2, I describe issues related to methodology and introduce the reader to the school, teacher and students with whom I was privileged to work. I think of Chapters Three and Four as my "stepping in" chapters. They are the places where I examine the literacy teaching and learning as I understood it from the teacher's perspective (Chapter 3) and the students' perspectives (Chapter 4). In these chapters, I bring to the foreground issues of literacy as they relate to the ideas of community and discourse. In Chapter 5, I "step back" and examine issues of voice, position, and power as I understood them to be present in this first-grade classroom, then conclude with a discussion of the study's implications.

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individuals raised in middle-class settings with the potential to access the middle-class culture of power (Delpit, 1988). I use "nonmainstream" to describe people of color and/or from backgrounds where English is not the primary language spoken in the home and/or from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Finally, although I use the terms "mainstream" and "nonmainstream," I am uncomfortable doing so. These terms tend to create a sense of "other," an idea that traditionally has not necessarily meant an equal or neutral sense of "different." Historically, "other" has been used to imply an assignment of value, with "other" being less valued than whatever the other is different from.

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CHAPTER 1

DISCOURSES, LITERACY, AND LEARNING

Young children learn about the world in an "up close and personal" way. They touch and feel and taste, and when necessary, ask 'Why?" of the older people in their lives. But formal schooling marks a transition in most children's lives. Where once they learned about the world by observing, touching, and tasting, at school, they are more likely to learn by listening to the teacher or by reading a book. How they learn and what they learn becomes more organized, more structured, more analytic. This is as true for learning about language as it is for other subjects.

While most children come to school already knowing how to use oral language to request, entertain, and inform others, when they begin their schooling, these same children often must learn how to transform oral language into written language. Letters of the alphabet, phonics, capitalization, punctuation--all this must be learned in order for children to communicate in the written language schools prefer. But these aspects of school-related language are not all children must learn. They also must learn how and when to use certain kinds of language, as well as the norms for conversational interactions. In short, children must learn a new discourse.

The Purpose of This Study

This study sought to add to the body of knowledge regarding nonmainstream children's school literacy experiences by examining the ways in which a particular classroom discourse supported or did

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not support the literacy learning of children. Further, because aspects of the literacy instruction and physical and emotional space of the classroom appeared, from my perspective, to resonate with reform-oriented ideas about literacy and the social nature of learning, this study also sought to examine ways in which these children

- were/were not able to express themselves within the community,
- saw themselves in relation to others within the classroom, and
- were able to exercise ownership over their learning.

The knowledge gained from this kind of examination may shed light on the kinds of literacy instructional practices that help nonmainstream children develop a critical awareness of literacy. Further, knowledge gained from this study raises new questions about the kinds of literacy instruction schools provide nonmainstream students.

Questions Guiding This Study

Three questions guided this study:

1) What are the school literacy experiences of nonmainstream students in classrooms where the literacy instruction is reflective of current understandings about literacy teaching and learning?
2) What are nonmainstream students' perceptions of school literacy, and how do school literacy experiences shape nonmainstream students' perceptions of themselves as literate

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3) How do school literacy experiences shape what nonmainstream students are *able to do* with their literacy abilities, and what they are *disposed to do*, given their knowledge and beliefs about literacy?

Discourses and Literacy

The term "discourse" refers to the particular ways in which language, thoughts, and actions are used to identify members of particular groups (Gee, 1991). If you are a member of a "teenage group," you talk, dress, and act in ways that are different from other groups, like "parent" or "teacher." People can belong to more than one discourse group, but they must remember to dress, act, and communicate in ways that are appropriate for the particular group. To do otherwise would mark you as not a member of the group.

Primary and Secondary Discourses

In addition to the multiple discourse groups to which one can belong, discourses can also be thought of in terms of their relationship to the person using the discourse. Children learn their first discourse among intimates within their family setting; all other discourses, which involve interactions with non intimates (though these discourses can also include family members), are learned after this. The first discourse has been referred to as the primary discourse (Gee, 1991, p. 7), while others are secondary

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discourses (Gee, 1991, p. 8). For school children, who have already acquired their primary discourse, school requires the learning of a new secondary discourse. Even if children have learned other secondary discourses (e.g., preschool, church, their neighborhood), the discourse of school will be new because the ways of being, thinking, and acting required in school differ from those of other discourses.

Mismatches Between Home and School Discourses

Acquiring a school discourse is easier for some children than for others. For some children, the primary discourse they learned at home shares features of the secondary discourse of school. For other children, there may be very little overlap of features between the primary and secondary discourses. This is because of differences among primary discourses and the influence particular primary discourses may have on the secondary discourse of school.

While some features of a primary discourse may be common to all children (for example, the use of American English), other features differ depending on, among other things, geographic factors. Children growing up in south Texas may learn about hurricanes, citrus, and Mexico as part of their primary discourse, while children in North Dakota may learn about blizzards, wheat, and Canada as part of their primary discourse. Further, children in south Texas may learn words and phrases influenced by the Spanish heritage of the area, while North Dakota children may learn words and phrases reminiscent of the Norwegian heritage of the area. Thus, if a child from North Dakota moved to South Texas, s/he likely would not have

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the kind of background knowledge about hurricanes, for example, that the school might assume. Compounding these geographic differences among primary discourses are cultural and social factors.

Heath's (1983) study of three communities provides us with a rich description of the influence of culture on the language and literacy learned and used by different cultural groups. Children growing up in white working-class Roadville learned that stories are factual accounts of real events; attempts to create fictional accounts of those events were viewed as lying. They learned to see print as a means of entertainment or learning, and book-reading as performance.

Children growing up in black working-class Trackton acquired a different understanding of language and literacy. They learned that questions are requests for information, with the answers known to the person being asked the question, but not known by the person asking the question. Trackton children also learned that stories do not need obvious beginnings or endings and that a story's facts can be hidden by creative embellishment.

In contrast to children from Roadville or Trackton, middle-class black and white children growing up in Maintown acquired different knowledge about literacy. Their rooms were filled with books and items representing characters from those books. They learned that information within books could be discussed in other contexts. Thus, after reading a story about a dog, these children could make connections to that story when they encountered real dogs on the street.

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While each of these communities fostered children's development of oral and written language ability, only the language and literacy knowledge of children from Maintown meshed well with the culture of the school. For example, many Trackton children used a way of speaking in which they dropped the final consonants from words, "*test* became *tess*, *build* became *bill*" (Heath, 1983, p. 277, emphasis in original). Roadville children also spoke in ways that differed from the ways their teachers expected. For example, these students "often dropped the unstressed first syllable of words (*across* → '*cross*) or the *d* in the sequence *-ndle* (*bundle* → *bun'l*)" (Heath, 1983, p. 278, emphasis in original). Further, both groups of children seemed not to understand the underlying directive of questions like "Will you get the door?" When Heath helped teachers learn about the different kinds of literacy knowledge children bring to school and about ways to help parents work with their children to promote school literacy, teachers were able to make explicit their expectations or change their instruction in ways that better supported nonmainstreamers' learning.

Michaels (1981) has also identified cultural differences with regard to literacy. In her study of sharing time, Michaels found that the narrative oral-story-telling style of Deena, a first-grade African American girl, differed from the story style of her white teacher. While the teacher expected stories to have a clear beginning, middle, and end, Deena's story was topic associative in nature. That is, in the culture in which Deena learned to use language, telling stories involved loosely connecting one part of a story to another, based on their common link to a core idea. The

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teacher thought Deena's story was a collection of unrelated events and kept admonishing Deena to talk about only one thing. What Michaels makes clear in her study is the mismatch between the teacher's knowledge and expectations of a story and Deena's knowledge and expectations of a story.

Both Heath's and Michaels' studies document differences in knowledge about literacy between white and African American individuals. Their studies (as well as those of Au, 1993; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill, 1991; and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) clearly dispel notions that children from nonmainstream backgrounds are somehow deficient with regard to knowledge of literacy. Rather, these studies demonstrate that people from different cultural backgrounds do acquire extensive knowledge of literacy and language, although the knowledge they acquire might not be the same kind of knowledge individuals in other cultural groups acquire. As a result, the primary discourse knowledge some students bring to school may differ significantly from the school discourse they are expected to master. Trying to learn the secondary discourse by drawing on knowledge gained in their primary discourse may not be helpful; it might, in fact, cause these students difficulty. This is an issue to which I will return in Chapter 3.

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From Discourses to Literacy . . .

What is literacy? What does it mean to be literate? Attempts to answer these questions stretch far back in time. In his discussion of the development of Western literacy, Venezky (1991) tells us "...the modern terms 'literate' and 'illiterate' both derive from the Latin *literatus...* " (p. 49). During the early part of the Middle Ages, a literatus was a person who could read, write, and possibly speak Latin. After 1300, however, literatus came to mean a person who had minimal ability to read in the vernacular. While Latin is no longer the requisite language of literacy, today's common definition of literacy as "the ability to read and write" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1983) appears little changed since the Middle Ages.

For those concerned with elementary education in the United States, however, defining literacy seems more problematic. How might this kind of literacy be developed? Does literacy include oral language (to allow for discussion of text among a group for example), or is literacy limited to silent interaction with written language? Should literacy education be concerned only with learning how to read and write Standard English[1], or should literacy in other languages or English dialects also be fostered? Should literacy education focus on teaching students to read and write at a "functional level," or should it focus on "critical" literacy (ideas I

[1] Though the term "Standard English" is used by many people to describe a kind of English they believe does/should exist in United States, no such standard form truly exists in the day to day lives of Americans. For the purposes of this study, I will use the term to describe the type of English that is taught in school or is referred to in dictionaries and handbooks of English language use.

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will discuss later in this chapter)? Does literacy deal only with issues related to disciplines associated with reading and writing, or does literacy encompass other disciplines like science and mathematics?

Questions like these currently confront policy makers and educators trying to shape literacy instruction for public-school children in the United States. While there are many ways of viewing literacy (Resnick and Resnick, 1977; Stedman and Kaestle, 1991; Venezky, 1991), in the remainder of this section, I will focus on two perspectives: cognitive and political. Each provides insights into the problems and potentials associated with various views of literacy and literacy instruction.

A Cognitive Perspective on Literacy

From a cognitive perspective, literacy can be viewed as the ability to read and write. But what do reading and writing look like? How can we recognize these actions when we see them? Attempts to narrowly define the term literacy from a cognitive perspective have led to a variety of ways to determine who is literate. At one time, the determination of a person's literacy abilities was left up to the individual's self report by asking, "Are you able to read and write?" Asking individuals to self-report, however, is problematic. First, there is no clear definition of what is meant by read and write; different individuals may have different interpretations about the terms (Stedman and Kaestle, 1991). Thus, they may report that they are literate when in fact they are not, or may say they are not literate when in fact they are. The second problem with this

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definition is its literate/illiterate dichotomy (Stedman and Kaestle, 1991; Venezky, 1991). For example, the definition does not recognize the literacy possessed by individuals who might be able to read but not write. Nor does this definition recognize degrees of difference between a person who can read and write at an elementary level and a person who can read and write at a sixth grade level. Thus, "the ability to read and write" offers us an unclear picture of literacy.

Another way to define literacy is to link it to years of formal schooling. During the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps coined the term "functional literacy" and defined it as three or more years of schooling (Stedman and Kaestle, 1991). Over time, the number of years of schooling associated with being functionally literate has increased. By 1970, for example, high school completion was considered by some to be the necessary minimum to be considered functionally literate (Stedman and Kaestle, 1991). Linking years of formal schooling to literacy removes some of the variability in how "the ability to read and write" is interpreted and establishes an "outside" standard against which to measure literacy.

However, using schooling as an indicator of literacy is still problematic. The two are not synonymous; simply being in a classroom for a specified number of years does not guarantee that a person is able to read and write. Linking schooling to literacy also overlooks the fact that many people learn to read and write, become literate, without benefit of formal schooling (Scribner and Cole, 1981; Venezky, 1991). Additionally, describing literacy in terms of schooling still does not address the either/or nature of the

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definition. As such, it again fails to take into account those persons who may have some degree of literacy. For example, if eight years of schooling is the standard for being considered functionally literate, what about the person who has six years of schooling? Is that person completely illiterate, or only somewhat so?

Linking literacy to scores on functional-literacy tests represents a third approach to defining literacy. Tests of literacy ability are used both in school and out. School-based tests of literacy have not traditionally been used specifically to determine "who is literate." Rather, these tests have served an accountability function (Johnston, 1984), providing a way for schools to demonstrate that they are doing what the public expects them to do. Nevertheless, school-based testing does purport to estimate the "grade-level" reading and writing ability of students, in essence deciding who is literate (i.e., those "at" or "above" grade-level) and who is not (i.e., those "below" grade level). Many school-based tests are designed to evaluate decoding and comprehension skills found in basal reading texts (Shannon, 1989). Other tests, (e.g., minimum competency tests) mandated by state law (Brown, 1991), require students to demonstrate mastery of certain "basic" skills in order to be considered literate.

Clearly, describing literacy as the ability to read and write is ambiguous. Attempts to define literacy based on evidence of years-of-schooling or skills and tasks mastered help focus a broader definition, but do not take into account the various literacy abilities different individuals possess. Recognizing the need for a term like "functional" to capture the literacy abilities that lie between

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"literate" and "illiterate" is a move toward understanding that literacy can not be defined as an either/or dichotomy. Implicit in the term "functional" is the idea that literacy may better be addressed as an ability that develops along a continuum, rather than as the presence or absence of skills.

The term "emergent," which Sulzby and Teale (1991) define as "the reading and writing behaviors that precede and develop into conventional literacy" (p. 728), addresses this continuum. Rather than expressing literacy in terms of skills possessed or different levels of ability, "emergent" carries with it the connotation of literacy as a process unfolding over time, and one that has the potential to be continually improved upon.

What is striking about these terms is their implicit notion of context. Individuals do not acquire literacy for the sake of literacy. Instead, literacy is a tool that is used, in home, work, or other settings, for purposes of our own making or of those of the institutions of the society within which we live. In essence, what these terms point to is the inadequacy of the "ability to read and write" definition of literacy to describe how literacy is used. That is not to say that knowing the skills or strategies of reading and writing are not important. They are. Defining literacy in terms of the acquisition of reading and writing skills reflects what we have learned about the processes of reading and writing. However, the historic definition of literacy pays little attention to the fact that literacy is a "social achievement" (Scribner, 1984, p. 7).

Thus, any definition of literacy that ignores contexts and purposes limits our comprehension of the nature of literacy. Once

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we understand that literacy is linked to human institutions and societies, and that the purposes for which literacy is used can shift over time, a new perspective about literacy emerges.

A Political Perspective on Literacy

Examining literacy from a political perspective requires critically examining the purposes for which literacy is used. For example, literacy can be viewed as a continuum of the reading and writing abilities of a particular group of individuals (e.g., citizens of a country). Viewed in this way, some members of the group might be perceived as not having any literacy ability (those we would consider illiterate) while others might be perceived as having some degree of ability (the functionally literate) and still others would be perceived as having a high degree of literacy (those who possess critical literacy). A political view of literacy compels us to ask why this continuum exists. Why is it acceptable for some individuals to have little or no literacy ability, while others have the ability to use literacy to reflect critically on social issues? What purpose is served by this array of literacy practices within a particular group?

Stuckey (1991) believes the purposes of literacy are tied to issues of economics, privilege, and power. Differing kinds of literacy ability ensure that only certain people will be qualified to hold jobs of power. As a result, the level of literacy practice in a society is often blamed for societal problems, when in fact it is the structure of the society that is at fault. Mismatches in literacy practices can be used as a diversion to draw society's attention

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away from larger social and economic questions. Those who possess a level of functional literacy that qualifies them only for low-paying, low-status jobs can be dismissed by society as individuals who could do better if they would only acquire additional literacy skills.

But literacy does not have to serve as a screen, masking social problems and inequality. It can also serve to empower people (Freire, 1970/1992) if those who read text with a critical eye separate what has been written from the biases of the writers who created the text (Olson and Astington, 1993). Examining facts and ideas in light of their merit. and then examining how authors use those facts and ideas, increases readers' abilities to act upon their world, rather than being subject to the "authority" of the text.

Thus, in order to describe more fully what literacy "is," a definition of literacy should encompass listening, speaking, and the ways of being people use as they communicate (Gee, 1991). Further, a definition of literacy should recognize different literacy practices across cultural and social boundaries (Delpit, 1988; Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981) and provide a means for individuals to cross those boundaries in order to acquire and use different literacy practices. Finally, a definition of literacy should acknowledge the political dimension of literacy so that the links among literacy practices and the power and privilege within a social context are made visible (Delpit, 1992; Freire, 1970/1992; Olson and Astington, 1993). In short, a definition of literacy must take into account the idea of primary and secondary discourses. Assuming for a moment that all

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of this is a given, a question still remains; how does an individual go about acquiring a secondary discourse?

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Acquiring secondary discourses is a two-part process. First, an individual needs to learn about the rules and structural guidelines of a discourse formally (as in school). This helps the individual understand how a discourse "works." But knowing how a discourse works isn't enough. In order to sound like an expert member of a discourse group, an individual must also be able to use the secondary discourse fluently. This second part of the process is addressed through natural interactions with more knowledgeable users of the discourse. Over time, a novice should be able to move from exercising little control over a secondary discourse to exercising a high degree of control over the discourse. However, this is not always the case.

Delpit (1988) asserts that "rules" for power exist within cultures, and that those rules are based on the cultural norms of *those who already have* the power. However, those with the power are often least aware that they have it, and may not even be aware that rules for participating in the power do in fact exist, though they likely would recognize instantly when those rules were broken. This is what makes acquiring and using literacy political.

People who have acquired the rules of power are those who have grown up in the culture which dictates what the rules of power will be. These people haven't had to consciously learn the rules of power because they have been exposed to them from birth, simply by

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participating in the daily rituals of their culture. Delpit argues that making those rules explicit for examination and practice by individuals not from the culture of power may make their acquisition of power easier and more successful. But this is difficult to do because these rules have been acquired in such a subtle, unobtrusive manner that people who have acquired the rules seldom realize that they have in fact done so, and likely would be hard pressed to verbalize the rules if asked to do so.

Delpit's notion of the rules of the culture of power raise questions about Gee's ideas regarding the acquisition of multiple discourses. How can a person fully acquire new discourses if that person does not have access to the rules of power for those discourses? And how can those raised in different discourses teach others about the rules of those discourses when the insiders are least likely to recognize that rules do in fact exist? Finally, even if one did learn another discourse without being aware of the rules of power within the discourse, would that person have the metaknowledge needed to critique that discourse (Gee, 1991)? Taken together, Gee's and Delpit's ideas present an interesting problem: How can anyone fully acquire a different discourse if those within the discourse can't inform newcomers of the rules, because they themselves are unaware of the existence of the rules for gaining power in the discourse, or won't make the rules explicit, because that would change existing power relationships? Unless a way can be found to solve this problem, it would seem that people would be unable to acquire full control over any discourse other than the one within which they were raised, a point of concern that Delpit

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(1992) also raises. The work of hooks and Ellsworth provide insights into possible solutions to this problem.

hooks (1984) describes the relationship between those with power and those without it as one based on a "center" and a "margin" of a "main body" (p. ix) with the ones holding power being located at the center of the body and those without the power being located at the margin. hooks believes that those at the margin know about the ways of both the margin and the center because the survival of those at the margin depends on their understanding of how the center works and its power over those at the margin.

hooks' notion provides a way of partially resolving the problem hinted at in Delpit and Gee because her idea acknowledges that those at the margin can learn about the center to one degree or another and work to join the center, even when those at the center might be actively working against this. Although Delpit wants those at the margins to be able to move to the center, relying on those within a culture to explicate the rules for outsiders may not always be possible. hook's idea about the margin having to understand the center in order to survive provides an additional means of access to the center. The collective knowledge those at the margin acquire about those at the center can serve as a powerful reservoir individuals can draw from and add to in order to understand how the center works, providing the means for those at the margin to enter and work within the center.

Ellsworth (1989) believes that unless those in power, even those in power who subscribe to critical theoretical views of pedagogy, acknowledge their power and are willing to talk about it

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with those not in power, attempts to change the power structure within education will not succeed. Ellsworth argues that members of the dominant group must be willing to interact with members of oppressed groups in order for both to learn more about each other.

Ellsworth provides a way for those in the center to reposition themselves at the margin (in essence, the margin becomes the center and the center becomes the margin). This is an important aspect of literacy for it begins to open up the traditional definition of literacy; deliberate repositioning allows for the multiple layers of literacy to be exposed and highlights why it is not enough to say that literacy is the ability to read and write.

By asking that individuals consider both the margin and center, Ellsworth and hooks provide a way of redefining literacy in ways that closely align with Gee's definition. Like Gee, Ellsworth and hooks acknowledge multiple contexts (discourses); yet their discussion of what can be learned by deliberately repositioning one's self at different points along the center and margin adds a new dimension to Gee's definition. Awareness of one's own position with regard to literacy, as well as an awareness of others' positions, hints strongly of another dimension of literacy, that of Freire's notion of praxis, reflection and action on the world with the goal of transforming it (1970/1992, p. 119), a dimension I believe is necessary in order to be fully literate.

Including reflection and action components is important because it is through reflection and action that one can become aware of issues like voice, position, and power that are inherent in literacy. In the next section, I describe what I mean by these three

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Issues of Voice, Position, and Power

In order for students to develop full and powerful control over a variety of literacy discourses, they need to have an understanding of voice, position, and power associated with literacy discourses. In this section, I examine each of these issues.

Voice. Voice is often thought of as the presence of an author in a piece of text (the personal style of the author as evidenced through the author's use of language, tone, etc.). While this as a component of voice, what I mean by the term is something more. As I use it, the concept of voice includes the idea that a person recognizes that she or he has something to say and can say it. Voice is not something that one person can give to another; voice is something that exists in all of us. As Macedo says, " [Voice] is not a gift. Voice is a human right. It is a democratic right" (1994, p. 4). Although voice exists in all of us, it is not always heard by others, either because we believe or have been told that what we have to say is "not important enough," or because we choose not to assert our voices. When this is the case, however, voice is still there; it is just quiet, though I suspect it often is articulated through some form of passive or active nonverbal resistance.

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Position. The second concept that is necessary to consider is that of position. The literal definition of position is "a place or location...the appropriate place" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1983). In order to think about and use your own and others' discourses, a person needs to understand where those discourses exist. That is, discourses need to be understood within the larger social context and in relation to other, different discourses. This is particularly important with regard to the discourse perceived to be the discourse of power within a particular setting. Whatever the accepted discourse, it is the one accorded privilege within a social context; it is the discourse of the center. Understanding that one's discourse is either the "accepted" one (the one at the center) or an "unaccepted" one (among those at the margins) allows a person to recognize the various perspectives (or positions) from which the world may be viewed.

Often, those at the margins (minorities, women, "illiterates") understand that they are in fact at the margin, while those at the center (whites, members of the middle-class, males) often fail to see that they are at the center. While this lack of recognition may be (and often is) unintentional, based on the unexamined assumption that "the way I view the world is the way everyone views the world," the result is a lack of understanding that other perspectives exist or that a particular perspective may be oppressive to others (Delpit, 1988; McIntosh, 1988). By understanding that different discourses occupy different positions, a person can consciously decide to reposition a particular discourse in order to think about it differently in relation to other discourses. For example, by placing

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the Standard English discourse at the margin and Black English Vernacular at the center, a person could view both differently and learn something about each, and about power relations within American society as well.

Power. One further issue central to the literacy described above is that of power. As indicated in the previous section on position, when a particular discourse is afforded the central position within a social context, that discourse becomes a privileged discourse, relative to other discourses, and those who have mastered that discourse are privileged at the expense of those who have not mastered the discourse, as Gee (1990) makes clear.

> Mainstream dominant Discourses...and in particular school-based Discourses, privilege [those] who have mastered them and do significant harm to others. They involve us in foolish views about other human beings and their Discourses. They foreshorten our view of human nature, human diversity and the capacities for human change and development. They render us complicit with a denial of 'goods', including full human worth, to other humans, including many children. They imply that some children--including many black, Chicano, native American and other children who disproportionately fail in school--*mean* less than other children. (p. 191, emphasis in original)

Generally, the power bestowed on a particular discourse is given by those already fluent in that particular discourse. Thus, those who are fluent in the standard discourse are most likely to be

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the ones who achieve political and economic power within the discourse, while those who do not or can not speak the discourse of power are often times denied access to the political and economic advantages the standard discourse provides. While many (perhaps most) people who are fluent in and derive benefits from a privileged discourse are unaware that there is a close relationship between a particular discourse and political and economic power, that relationship is present nevertheless. Unless and until those who benefit from this relationship acknowledge not only the disadvantage that relationship may cause for others, but the advantage the relationship creates for themselves, the issue of power and its relationship to discourse will remain hidden from view (McIntosh, 1988).

Understanding that voice, position, and power are inherently part of the political aspects of literacy sheds a different light on the ways in which literacy can shape people's lives, at both an individual level and societal level. Literacy has traditionally been assumed to be a means for improving one's life, and more broadly, of improving those societies in which there is a high percentage of literate individuals. An important component of this assumption is the idea that literacy is an independent object that can be "added on" to a person's life or mixed into a society's context to make life better. Thus, by adding more literacy, people or societies weak ("deficient") in literacy will be made better. However, this traditional assumption may not be completely valid (Graff, 1979). The literacy-as-ingredient view fails to take into account the embeddedness of literacy within a variety of contexts or to

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So, what does all of this have to do with children in school? Perhaps not much if the children are learning a literacy based on a more traditional definition; perhaps a great deal if they are learning a different kind of literacy. For children whose ideas about literacy are different from those who have acquired a privileged literacy discourse, simply "adding on" aspects of the privileged discourse may not be enough to help children understand the relationships between the discourse of power and other kinds of literacy discourse. In the next section, I examine why this is so.

Differences Among School Literacy Discourses

The body of knowledge about literacy has expanded in recent years, (Calkins, 1983; Gough, 1971; Graves, 1983; Hillocks, 1986; LaBerge and Samuels, 1974; Moll, 1990; Wixson and Peters, 1984) causing those interested in literacy education to reexamine traditional literacy instruction (Allington, 1991; Brown, 1991; Macedo, 1994). That instruction has been criticized on the grounds that it reduces literacy to a series of fragmented skills. Although supposedly hierarchical in nature, these skills can appear to be unrelated. Further, the hierarchical approach often requires children to master certain skills before moving on to others (Allington, 1991). The result is that children often have little or no holistic understanding of literacy, nor do they see connections among literacy and knowledge generally. In addition, children are provided few, if any, opportunities to construct their own meanings from

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Moreover, current understandings about learning suggest three points to consider with regard to a discourse for literacy instruction. First, literacy instruction should consider the social and constructive nature of thinking and learning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1991). Second, literacy instruction should consider children's knowledge of literacy acquired outside of school settings. Finally, literacy instruction should consider the different discourses teachers and students bring with them to school (Au, 1980, 1993; Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981; Moll, 1990).

Further, those interested in literacy from a critical theory of education perspective view traditional approaches to literacy instruction within the larger framework of the political purposes of schooling. Some of those critics believe that this traditional literacy instruction contributes to the reproduction of social inequality within American society (Freire, 1970/1992; Gee, 1990; Macedo, 1994). They argue that instruction needs to change in ways that will help students understand the political nature of literacy. Changes would also help students acquire the kind of literacy that will provide them the means to change society, making it more equitable for marginalized groups.

Classrooms in which teachers are trying to help their students become meaning makers with regard to literacy may serve as sites where issues of voice, position, and power are explored by students. For example, Delpit (1988) describes the teaching of Martha Demientieff, a Native Alaskan teacher, who actively points out the

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Thus, in classrooms where teachers are trying to align their practice in light of current understandings about literacy education, the discourse for learning may be quite different from previous school discourses. This issue, and its implications, will be explored in more detail in later chapters. Before turning to the remainder of the study, however, I first describe my vision of what appropriate literacy instruction "looks like," in light of the issues I have outlined above.

A Final Note

My reading of the research in preparation for this study, my experiences as an elementary teacher, and my work with preservice teachers tutoring young children struggling with reading, as well as my experiences as a learner, have all shaped the way in which I think about literacy instruction, teaching and learning. That thinking, in turn, influenced what I saw and experienced in this study and the way in which I interpreted my data. While my perspective was the result of a coming together of various and complex influences, that perspective was also a beginning one. Like all learners, I, too, have a zone of proximal development, and the understandings with which I began this study evolved as a result of the study. The voices,

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actions and experiences (as I interpreted them) of the first-grade students and their teacher helped me push at the boundaries of my own intellectual development. Below I discuss the values and assumptions I brought to the study, since they have the potential to influence what I, as the researcher, see in a classroom under study.

Literacy Instruction Considered

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, literacy can be defined in a variety of ways, and how teachers define literacy influences the ways in which they create an instructional program for students. In addition, teachers have knowledge and beliefs about learners and learning. These ideas about literacy, learners, and learning come from a variety of sources. Teachers' own experiences as learners and the knowledge accumulated through years of teaching practice shape their understanding (Clandinin, 1985; Cole, 1990; Lortie, 1975). Knowledge gained through coursework, staff development, and professional reading also adds to teachers' understanding. The explicit and implicit theories about literacy, learners, and learning that emerge from the confluence of these knowledge sources frame teachers' thinking about their instructional programs.

Because all teachers bring to the classroom a unique mix of experiences and learning, no two literacy instructional programs are exactly the same. However, there are four components common to any literacy instructional program: curriculum content, instructional methods, use of physical space, and classroom community. In some ways, these components are analogous to the components used to build a house. Every house, for example, has structural elements

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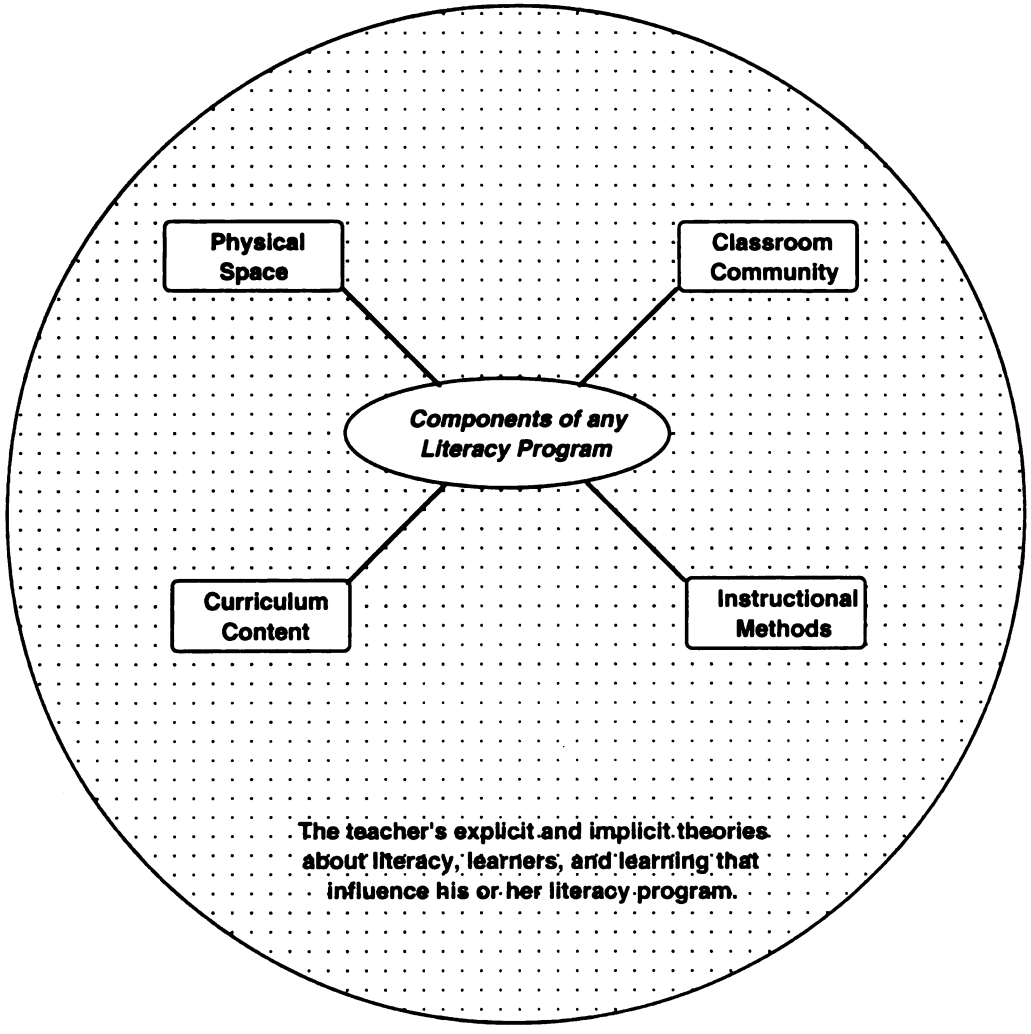
(roof, walls, floors), plumbing fixtures, and an electrical system. Not every house looks the same, however, because of choices about materials that can be made within each of these component categories. So it is with literacy instruction. For each of the component categories, there exists a variety of ways in which teachers can implement a particular component within their instructional program. What influences teachers' choices about the components are their knowledge and beliefs about literacy, learners, and learning (see Figure 1).



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In this section, I explicate the theories and ideas about literacy programs that I brought to the study. First, I define and describe my thinking about each of the four components. I then discuss my ideas about learners and learning that have shaped my views about those components. Having discussed my ideas about literacy earlier in the chapter, I will not revisit them here and refer the reader to pages 12-27 for that discussion. In the third section, I present a hypothetical "typical day" sketch in order to illustrate what literacy instruction might "look like" in my classroom. Throughout the sketch, I point out how each of the components informs my instruction, and the ways in which my own theories and beliefs about literacy, learners, and learning shape those components. In the final section, I step back to describe how these components would come together to create an environment that fosters students' understandings of discourse, voice, power, and position.

Components of a Literacy Instructional Program

All teachers, whether they realize it or not, build their literacy programs around four components: the curriculum content, the instructional methods teachers use to teach that content, the ways in which teachers arrange the physical space for learning, and the kind of classroom community teachers foster among and with their students. In this section, I define and describe how I use these terms.

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Curriculum. This term refers to what will be learned. As I use the term, this would include "knowledge about content and content processes" and "knowledge about how to apply or use content and content processes." For example, students might know what context clues are (knowing about content), but they must also learn how to use context clues to decode unknown words, determine literal or figurative meaning of words, or construct an understanding of the tone of a piece of text (knowledge about how to apply or use content and content processes).

Additionally, curriculum would include helping students develop certain dispositions towards content areas (such as a curiosity to know how things work or a desire to read), as well as an attitude that values content areas. This does not mean every student has to develop a deep affection for every content area learned about in school. There are, however, too many students who "hate math" or "hate writing" because they don't see the value of this content for their own lives.

Curriculum also refers to metacognitive knowledge used to monitor thinking about content and about how, when, to what extent, and for what purpose one uses content or content processes. For example, knowledge of the writing process would enable a writer to be *aware* of issues like tone and word choice and know how to apply them in a piece of writing. Metacognitive knowledge would enable that writer to *consider the appropriateness* of a particular tone and word choice when writing for a specific audience and to notice when a particular tone might not be appropriate.

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While curriculum concerns itself with "knowing what" and "knowing how" with regard to content, with fostering a disposition toward that content, and with the ability to monitor one's thinking about the content, curriculum does not exist free of influences. Indeed, curriculum is influenced by who decides what should be learned. Some curriculum comes from generally agreed upon ideas about what students should know, although problems do arise when individuals cannot agree on which particular aspects of that curriculum to teach.

For example, most people in the United States would agree that students need to become familiar with great literature. The problem arises in deciding what literature is "great." Does that refer only (or mostly) to works written prior to 1950 by white males from a Western European tradition, or does it include a more global representation, including works written since 1950 or those by women and people of color? Most Americans would also agree that students should learn about the democratic process, but there might be wide disagreement about how to depict that process. Is an amendment against flag burning an example of protecting the constitution or of assaulting it?

Further, there is the issue of who makes the decisions about what is to be learned. Textbooks publishers, state boards of education, local school boards, parents, administrators, teachers, and students all have the potential to influence what is taught in the classroom. I will use the term curriculum to refer to the "what" of content, process, and metacognitive knowledge that actually is put forth to be learned in a classroom. A curriculum may come from

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textbooks, state and district guidelines, the teacher, parents and students, but it is still a distinctive subset of all possible curriculum unique to a particular classroom.

Instructional methods. The phrase "instructional methods" refers to how curriculum content is taught. Instructional methods can range from unguided, pure discovery of content by students themselves to the teacher's direct transmission of content to students, or to some combination of methods. On the surface, it may appear a teacher lacks a coherent vision for instruction if he or she uses widely different methods in teaching, but this may not be the case. Different instructional methods are better suited for different kinds of learning, and a teacher may deliberately select one instructional method over another to better support learning of particular content.

For example, a teacher may use the method of telling the class something because that is the quickest way to convey a small but important piece of information students need in order to construct meaning as they discuss a topic. To understand why a teacher uses a particular method, one needs to understand the underlying purpose of the learning. As with the word "curriculum," I use the phrase "instructional methods" to refer to the distinctive combination of methods used by a teacher in a particular classroom, not to the full range of methods available.

Physical space. Physical space refers to the actual classroom, the furnishings and materials in it, and the ways in

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which those materials and furniture are arranged within the classroom. As with instructional methods, the kinds and arrangement of furniture found in a classroom may or may not provide clues to the kind of learning environment present there. For example, a room filled with individual desks may indicate a teacher sees learning as an individual endeavor, or it may mean there is no money for tables. A room filled with tables may mean a teacher encourages students to work together, or it may mean a teacher has inherited another teacher's furniture. Only after spending time in a classroom watching to see if desks or students are ever clustered together, or if talk is heard among students sitting together at tables, might one begin to form some ideas about students' opportunities for learning.

In addition to the ways in which materials and furniture are arranged within a classroom, my use of the phrase "physical space" also refers to the empty spaces that result from particular arrangements of furniture. For example, if a teacher uses rectangular tables, one of the empty spaces that results is the area underneath the tables, and a teacher may or may not allow students to use this space. Other empty spaces may be large enough for the class to sit together on the floor or for only two people to sit together comfortably in a corner nook while reading.

Classroom community. When teachers and teacher educators talk about classroom community, they often mean the kind of classroom environment in which students work and share with one another in order to support one another's learning. Additionally,

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it is an environment in which the teacher moves about the classroom interacting with small groups or individuals, rather than standing at the front of the room lecturing (Short, 1990). This is one way of conceptualizing classroom community, but it is not how I define the phrase. When I speak of a classroom community, I mean the group of people who make up a class of learners and teacher and the norms, beliefs, and distribution of authority within that setting. This opens up the concept to include classrooms that are not necessarily communal in nature. Just as there are towns and neighborhoods in which citizens do not interact much with one another, there are classrooms in which students work quietly by themselves at their individual seats and in which the teacher does most of the talking. Yet, these gatherings of individuals are still considered communities.

The kind of classroom community that develops among teacher and students depends on the norms, beliefs, and distribution of authority within that classroom. Classrooms in which students are free to talk without first being acknowledged by the teacher are of a different nature than are classrooms in which the teacher initiates, regulates, and sanctions talk among students. Classrooms in which competition is de-emphasized and cooperation emphasized will have a different "feel" than classrooms in which the reverse is true. It is therefore important for teachers to explore their norms, beliefs, and views about authority and to consider the ways in which those beliefs and norms interact with the other components described above.

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Together, the curriculum, instructional methods, physical space of the classroom, and sense of community within the classroom are important elements of the literacy terrain in which teachers and students move about, but these elements are only part of that terrain. The literacy terrain students are invited to explore is also dependent on teachers' ideas and beliefs about learners and learning. This is so because teachers' beliefs about learners and learning shape their ideas about curriculum, instructional methods, and the physical and emotional arrangements of classrooms. To illustrate how teachers' ideas and beliefs about learning and learners shape curriculum, instructional methods, and the physical and emotional space of the classroom, I will describe how my ideas and beliefs have shaped my own classroom instruction. I begin by examining my own beliefs and ideas about learners and learning.

Ideas and Beliefs about Learners and Learning

I believe individuals learn by constructing their knowledge about the world in social settings, and that talk plays an important role in learning. According to Vygotsky (1978), talk is a tool humans use to interact with others about thoughts and ideas. Talking helps make visible others' thought processes and reveals to others (and ourselves) our own thoughts. In making thoughts visible through talk in classrooms, students are able to "see" different ways of thinking. As students internalize those ways of thinking, they become part of the students' own ways of thinking.

Further, social situations provide opportunities for students to learn more with others than they might on their own. Working with

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a more knowledgeable peer or with an adult, students can extend their ability to think about ideas because the peer or adult can help "fill in the gaps" in the children's thinking. This happens, for example, when an adult asks a child questions that help the child build on his or her knowledge or tap into knowledge the child doesn't realize he or she has. Further, the adult or peer can often provide a child a piece of the knowledge puzzle, as it were, to help the child construct an understanding. Providing assistance through scaffolding or supplying needed information are ways of helping the child move beyond his or her independent ability level to a level of ability supported by assistance (Cazden, 1983). Vygotsky referred to the area bounded by the child's independent ability level and the assisted ability level as the "zone of proximal development" (1978, p. 86).

The zone of proximal development is an important idea because it suggests that children who are provided assistance from a more knowledgeable peer or adult can learn to do more than what their developmental level might indicate. By this, I do not mean to imply that children should be pushed to do more cognitively than they are able. Rather, the notion of the zone of proximal development suggests that children's literacy growth and development might be better supported through the use of assisted learning experiences. The concept of the zone of proximal development and the idea that learning is social in nature influence the way I think about curriculum, instruction, my classroom setup and the kind of classroom community I would create.

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For example, since I believe learning is enhanced when students are able to construct their understandings through social interactions, I would draw from a curriculum and use instructional methods designed to foster social interactions among students. To support that kind of curriculum and instruction, I would arrange furniture and empty spaces to encourage students to talk with one another. Further, since I view learning as a social process and acknowledge that children can learn from one another, I would foster a sense of community in which all students, as well as the teacher, were seen as knowledgeable. Thus, the authority for knowing would not rest solely with me or the textbooks. The case for thinking about curriculum, instructional methods, the physical setting, and classroom community in this way is applicable to literacy learning, especially in light of research on children's language acquisition.

At one time, it was generally believed that the environment played the most significant role in children's language learning (Lindfors, 1991; Skinner, 1957). Beginning in the late 1950s, a different view began to emerge. Children were seen as being born with specific understandings about language structures common to all human languages (Chomsky, 1957; Lindfors, 1991). More current research indicates this internal capacity for language does not mean children are born knowing the content of language (Lindfors, 1991). Rather, it seems children are driven to be active constructors of language knowledge, using an innate problem-solving ability to look for patterns, draw inferences, and make decisions about the structure of the language they will eventually acquire (Donaldson, 1979; Lindfors, 1991; Slobin, 1979).

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Children are now seen as active participants in socially situated language learning experiences (Lindfors, 1991; Morrow, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). That is, not only do children actively seek out the words and grammar of their native language by hearing and seeing that language in use, they also learn how to use that language in different social settings and for different social purposes. My literacy instruction would be informed by these ideas and my decision to draw from a curriculum and mix of instructional methods that encouraged children to work and talk together would be reinforced.

Likewise, my creation of a classroom community in which all members were seen as knowledgeable would be reinforced by my views regarding the value of children's literacy knowledge acquired at home. Research by Au (1980), Heath (1983), Michaels (1981), and others has helped me understand and value the knowledge children develop about language before they come to school. While that knowledge might be different from my own, I recognize that it has enabled my students to communicate their needs and desires quite well.

My understanding would help me create an environment in which students were not empty vessels waiting to be filled, but active, knowledgeable learners, as their ability to learn a highly abstract concept like language demonstrates. Further, my understanding about learners and the kinds of knowledge they bring with them to the classroom would help me look for their strengths, rather than for their deficits, in learning. I would then plan

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Understanding the range of knowledge children bring with them to school, and looking for strengths rather than deficits would also allow me to see the diversity among my learners differently. Without my understanding of the varied cultural and linguistic knowledge children bring with them to school, I might, for example, view a child who spoke only Spanish as unable to learn in my classroom because of a language "deficit." Because I think about language, culture, and home literacy experiences as I do, I instead view that same child as someone who already knows a great deal about the functions of language, and I can use that knowledge to help the child acquire English.

Finally, because I view these cultural and linguistic variations as strengths, not weaknesses, I also have a broad view about the kinds of literacy that should be allowed in schools. I do not advocate requiring children to leave their home language at home. Instead, I would invite children to bring that knowledge with them and as a class, we would use the variety within our classroom to examine larger issues about discourse. Children whose parents speak only Spanish should, I believe be allowed to write in Spanish as needed. If my class were writing Mother's Day cards, for example, I certainly would expect a child whose mother spoke Spanish to write the card in Spanish. To do otherwise would unnecessarily create a barrier between parent and child.

Inviting in all languages and dialects does not mean, however, that I would not teach English. I fully recognize the value of

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learning the kind of English that provides access to more schooling and most jobs. I certainly want my students to be able to use English in ways that will provide them a range of choices as they further their education and join the work force. However, I would create within my classroom the kind of literacy community in which students would learn that they could acquire the kind of English valued by schools and the larger society and at the same time, maintain their home language or dialect.

In light of my ideas about literacy, learners, and learning, how would I bring together the four components of curriculum, instructional methods, use of the physical space, and community to create a literacy instructional program within my classroom? In the next section, I present a vignette of what my instruction might look like, given my ideas and beliefs.

Stepping into my Classroom

Stepping into my classroom, the first thing you likely would notice would be the sound of children talking, to me and to their peers. You might also notice children scattered about the room, some sitting together in groups at tables, others on the floor, working in various-sized groups or alone. If you moved about the room and looked at the children's work, you might see that they were researching and writing about some aspect of state history in preparation for sharing with the class their "movie[2]" depicting a particular ethnic group's settlement of the state.

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If you listened to some of the conversations, you might hear questions like "Why do you think so?" or "How do you know?" You might also hear students or me explaining to others our thinking about an idea or procedure. If you were to watch me, you would see me moving about the room, stopping to ask students questions or answer questions students asked of me. What you might not realize is that the talk, the nature of that talk, the social gathering of the students, and my roving would be reflections of a deliberate effort on my part to create an instructional program based on my beliefs about the ways in which children learn language and about my role as a teacher in supporting students' language learning.

Using an instructional approach in which students work together in groups and talk with one another about their work reflects my belief that children learn, and learn how to use, language by being provided opportunities to actually utilize it in different kinds of settings and for different purposes. Working together would provide my students the chance to negotiate what they would do to complete the assignment, resolve conflicts among students with differing ideas, and explain and clarify their ideas about the content to one another. As the students wrote their scripts, they would likely discuss how to phrase their commentary in ways that helped their audience understand the important points. Providing students opportunities to talk would support their

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pictures of the ethnic group's milestones in the settlement of the state. When completed, the scrolls would be wound around cardboard cylinders on which paper towels once were rolled and "shown" on cardboard-box-screens by rolling the paper from one cylinder to the other.

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As the children discussed important points about their particular settler groups, they would be listening to others' ideas about the content, possibly clarifying any points of confusion they had about the content, and perhaps seeing the content in new ways. Thus, the group work would provide windows into each others' thinking about the content. Additionally, this kind of interaction among students would reflect the sense of community, in which students would share the authority for knowing, that I fostered among students.

If you had asked me about my roving, I would have told you this was an assessment aspect of my instructional methodology that provided me information about any misconceptions I might need to clarify. Rather than depending on a show of hands or a short answer response from students to check their understanding of concepts, my listening in on their conversations would allow me to hear their thinking about the concept. Thus, I would have a better sense of where a student's understanding broke down. I could then build on that understanding by asking a question that could scaffold or extend the student's thinking within his or her zone of proximal development.

If you continued to visit in my classroom, you might see me teach a lesson on the use of the comma to set off the name of a person being addressed in a piece of writing. I probably would write my favorite sentence for this lesson, "Let's eat Grandma," on the board, then ask the children to tell me what it meant. At first, many

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might say it was a statement directed at Grandma for she and the unknown speaker to get something to eat. At some point in the discussion, someone might realize (or I would suggest) that the sentence could have another meaning--Grandma was on the menu! The class and I would then talk about how we could use language and its related conventions to help readers understand what we meant, in this case, how a comma could change a sentence from sinister to safe.

You might also observe my students playing some teacher-made language games. I would have designed these games to help the children understand the different informal and formal ways in which they could use language when writing or speaking to others. As you watched, you would see a student select a card on which was written a sentence or phrase. The student would read the phrase, then select from a choice of three the audience to which he or she might address that phrase. For example, a card might have the phrase "Hey there!" and a statement reading, "This phrase might be a way to greet (a) the president of the United States, (B) your best friend, or (C) your parents." Other cards might ask students to consider word choice in writing for a particular audience. For example, a card might read, "When talking with your parents about a raise in your allowance which word might be a better choice to use in the sentence "I _____ a raise in my allowance." (A) request, (B) demand, (C) need.

The games would have been designed to help the children understand that some choices are clearly inappropriate (as in demanding a raise in an allowance!), while other choices might

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depend on the context in which the comment was made. For example, a child might say to a parent "Hey there!" in one context, but if the child were late for dinner, he or she likely would not use that phrase. During our reading groups, you might have observed my students and me take time to discuss the author's use of particular words to create a mental image of the setting or to suggest a certain mood.

You might have observed time during the day in which everyone, including the teacher, "Dropped Everything and Read" (known to the class as DEAR time). During writing workshop, you might have observed my students writing, reading, and talking with others about their compositions. You might have seen some students come to me insisting they had to use "be" verbs in their writing. You would have watched as I invited them to analyze their textbooks and library books for "is," "am" and "was," then discuss their findings.

What you would have seen during the lesson on commas, the language games, our reading groups, and writing workshop was my deliberate attempt to help students learn not only how to read and write, but more subtle aspects of how language is used and enhanced by things like commas and word choice. I would have explained to you that I had tried to develop a curriculum in which students learned specific content knowledge (for example, learning about commas and be verbs, as well as learning the skills and strategies that would enable the students to know when and how to use commas and be verbs), metaknowledge about the content (as with the language games and peer discussion during writers' workshop) and knowledge about the process associated with the content area (as

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with the process of writing during writers' workshop). I would also have shared my belief that knowing how to read and write without also developing a desire to do so was only part of a person's learning. Thus, my curriculum included many opportunities to develop that desire through the use of writers' workshop and DEAR time.

You would also have seen reflected in my classroom practice a curriculum derived from a variety of sources such as textbooks, curriculum guides, my own ideas, students' interests, and from students' needs, based on my analysis of their work. The lesson on commas, for example, likely came from the curriculum guide for language arts. The lesson on "be" verbs likely came from my examination of students' writing, while the language games were the result of conversations I had with fellow teachers. I would have told you I crafted this particular mix of curriculum because I believe doing so provides a better opportunity for students to develop their content knowledge and to foster within them positive dispositions and attitudes toward content.

After the children were gone for the day, you might have asked me about the physical arrangement of my classroom. Because I believe the physical space of the classroom can support children's learning (Jewell and Zintz, 1990; Morrow and Tracey, 1996), I would have explained how, after repeated requests to my principal, I replaced individual desks with tables that seated six. The various nooks and crannies were the result of my constant reconsideration of how to use existing bookcases, tables, my desk, and an empty refrigerator box to create within my classroom open "public" spaces,

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as well as relatively secluded "private" areas designed to draw children to those areas. I did so because I believe children need a variety of public and private spaces within which individuals and small groups could work, while still being easily viewed by me.

Our conversation might have turned to the ways in which I structured my literacy instruction. I would have told you that I merged skills instruction (as in the comma lesson, or the discussion on the author's use of language) with application through the use of writer's workshop or novel reading groups. Both of these components of my instruction gave me a way to restructure time in ways that provided students extended opportunities to read books and write compositions of their choosing. Additionally, I would have pointed out the various centers through which students rotated during the week. It was here that I placed reinforcement activities like the language games. Since several students were at each center at the same time, these kinds of games could be worked on in small groups, creating places to extend children's opportunities to talk and learn together.

You might have noticed that the library corner was a center children were encouraged to visit each day. You likely would ask why I had the children read silently for twenty minutes of class time. I would have explained that the classroom library and daily time for silent reading reflect my belief that children improve as readers and develop a desire to read by having much time each day to read silently and for pleasure (Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding, 1985; Lamme, 1981; Morrow, 1997; Spiegel, 1981).

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If you had asked about other subject areas like social studies, I would have explained how I tried to integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking into the content areas because doing so helped the children better learn the content. Further, I believe this kind of integration reflects a more authentic way of using literacy processes outside of school. For example, before buying a car, a consumer might spend time researching repair records and consumer ratings in order to narrow the list of prospective purchases. That person might talk with friends and coworkers about the cars these individuals own. Before talking with different dealers, a prospective buyer likely would calculate how much money could be spent on a car and might spend several weekends visiting car lots looking at different models and colors of cars. While several school-related "content areas" would be included in the search for a new car (math, science, language arts, research skills, and art, for example) no consumer would think about his or her quest in this way.

Inviting children to integrate several content areas would help them make connections between discrete content areas and would provide them opportunities to learn in ways that more closely resemble learning in out-of-school contexts (Dewey, 1902/1956; Walmsley, 1994). Further, this kind of integration would have provided all my students an opportunity to participate and learn content. For example, my class might have several limited English proficient (LEP) students. Talking with one another, listening to more proficient English speakers read or tell about information from different texts, and acting out and drawing important scenes about settlers' experiences would provide LEP students the kinds of

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comprehensible input (Krashen, 1983) and support within their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) that could help these students develop their own conceptual understanding of the content.

I would also have explained to you the ways in which integrating different content areas helped me create spaces for teaching state-mandated objectives about informational text or descriptive writing that helped make literacy something that extended well beyond "the language arts block." I would have explained to you how different writing genres could be easily incorporated into content areas, giving students time for personal writing and me time to teach mandated skills. For example, the research on ethnic groups' settlement in our state provided opportunities for students to read, summarize, and make oral presentations about informational text, all state-mandated requirements for elementary students.

As we talked, I likely would have explained how I saw my instructional program supporting students' understanding and acquisition of various discourses. Since I recognized that every child brought to the classroom his or her own primary discourse acquired at home, inviting students to talk with one another would provide opportunities for every child to hear the different ways in which language can be used to accomplish the same purpose. I would have pointed out how the language games, study of commas and "be" verbs, and learning to read and write a variety of genres also helped students acquire a secondary discourse valued by schools. Since I believe students gain control over different discourses by actually using them (through interactions with one another and me) and by

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learning about their structure and norms (by examining conventions of grammar, the way authors create mood or tension, and how word choice impacts a message), I would have explained how the curriculum in my classroom was designed to help students do this by focusing on content, processes, dispositions and metacognitive knowledge about literacy and other subject areas.

As we talked, you might have asked again about the noise level, wondering if all that talk among students was really necessary. I would have reminded you that I believe talk among students and with me is an important means of learning. In addition, I would have explained to you my belief that a classroom in which students were encouraged, even expected, to talk with one another provided them a discourse space in which to develop their voices and their sense of themselves as meaning makers. As students negotiated with one another about their ideas for the social studies movie and while playing the language games, they would have been speaking to one another as knowledgeable individuals.

When in doubt about something, students would have spoken first with each other to figure out what to do or what a correct response might be. They would have done this because my students already knew, that if they came to me for help, I likely would respond by asking them if they had tried to solve the problem together. If not, I would have sent the students back to their group for help. Only after discussing the problem with their group, and failing to resolve it, could students come to me for help. Asking students to try for themselves is one instructional approach I used to help students see themselves as learners in their own right.

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Further, encouraging students to solve problems with help from one another reflected my belief that I wasn't the only authority for knowing in the classroom. The ways in which I helped students learn and my stance toward them as people who were capable of learning for themselves reflected my desire that students see themselves as having power and control over their learning. I would have assured you that I recognized elementary students weren't ready for total control, but to the extent possible, I wanted students to share with me the authority for knowing.

As we concluded our conversation, I would have reminded you that the activities, methods of instruction, and content you observed and we discussed were a result of the ways in which I brought together components of a literacy instructional program, shaped by my beliefs about literacy, learners, and learning. Taken together, those beliefs and components represented my enactment of a literacy program designed to address issues of discourse, voice, position, and power so that all my students could develop their literacy abilities to the fullest.

Summary

The above scenario was my vision of appropriate literacy instruction at the beginning of this study. It was a vision influenced by my belief that there are four components every teacher addresses when planning literacy instruction. All teachers teach a curriculum, the "what" that children learn about literacy. This curriculum may come solely from a textbook, or it may come from some degree of blending ideas from texts, district guidelines, and the teacher's own

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experiences about what should be learned. Teachers also make decisions about the kind of instructional methods they will use to teach the curriculum. In addition to these components, I also believe all teachers have ideas about the kind of physical arrangement they will use in their classrooms, as well as ideas about the kind of classroom community they wish to create for or with their students.

Finally, I believe the kinds of literacy teaching and learning that take place in classrooms depend on teachers' ideas and beliefs about learners and learning. Further, those ideas and beliefs influence teachers' thinking about the curriculum, instructional methods, physical layout, and emotional tone of their classroom. In some cases, the ideas, beliefs, and decisions teachers make about these components are deliberate ones, the result of thinking, reading, and reflecting on their practice. In other cases, these decisions may be "default" decisions, unconsciously made as a result of a teacher's own experiences as a learner (Lortie, 1975).

In the chapters that follow, I will explore one first-grade classroom and the literacy teaching and learning that took place there. Though my focus is on the children and what they were learning, that learning was influenced by the decisions their teacher made regarding her literacy instructional program. Thus, I will spend some time describing her program before examining what the children said and did with regard to their literacy learning. In the last chapter, I will revisit the teacher's literacy program in light of what I learned during the study and reflect on my current understanding of what an appropriate literacy program should be.

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CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

> A culturally oriented cognitive psychology does not dismiss folk psychology as mere superstition, something only for the anthropological connoisseur of quaint folkways. I have long argued that explaining what children *do* is not enough; the new agenda is to determine what they *think* they are doing and what their reasons are for doing it.
>
> Bruner, 1996, p. 49 (emphasis in original)

I agree with Bruner that knowing what individuals do in classrooms is not enough to help us understand the complexities of teaching and learning; we also need to understand the reasons for those actions, as teachers and students perceive them to be. In this study, I tried to understand the literacy teaching and learning in one first-grade classroom by focusing on what the teacher and children had to say about what they were doing. Three basic questions guided this study:

1) What are the school literacy experiences of nonmainstream students in classrooms where the literacy instruction is reflective of current understandings about literacy teaching and learning?

2) What are nonmainstream students' perceptions of school literacy, and how do school literacy experiences shape nonmainstream students' perceptions of themselves as literate individuals? What do these students know and believe about literacy?

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3) How do school literacy experiences shape what nonmainstream students are *able to do* with their literacy abilities, and what they are *disposed to do*, given their knowledge and beliefs about literacy?

I drew on qualitative research methods, including classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and the collection of artifacts, as a way to gather information that might better inform my understanding of what the participants in my study did, and their underlying reasons for doing so. In this chapter, I describe the setting, participants, and methodology I used to gather and analyze my data. I begin with the setting and participants.

The School Setting for This Study

I wanted to conduct my study at Burnside Elementary for two reasons. First, Burnside was a school not unlike those in which I had taught. The student population was composed largely of nonmainstream students from lower socioeconomic and nonwhite backgrounds. Further, although Burnside might not be considered an "inner-city" school similar to those found in major metropolitan areas, it was an urban school, located at the fringe of the downtown area, in an area of the community not sought out by middle-class families. Because of their economic and racial and ethnic backgrounds, the children who attended Burnside were not unlike those Anyon (1981) and Oakes (1985, 1988) have described as not receiving the same kinds of education as children from mainstream backgrounds.

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Second, I had been an observer in Ms. Murray's classroom (the teacher in whose room my study took place) the previous year as part of another study, and I was drawn to her teaching practice and ways of interacting with students. Since I was interested in better understanding nonmainstream students' literacy learning experiences, especially in classrooms where instruction seemed to incorporate reform-oriented ideas, I felt the context of this school and Ms. Murray's classroom would provide me an opportunity to think more deeply about these issues.

At the time this study began, Burnside Elementary was a K-5 school with an enrollment of approximately 275 students. The school is located at the edge of the downtown area of Mapleton, a mid-size city located in the upper midwest. Burnside is a neighborhood school; most of the children enrolled here live in the area immediately surrounding the school and so walk to school. The neighborhood in which Burnside is located has seen better days. Many of the older homes evolved from owner-occupied single-family dwellings into multi-unit apartments, first for soldiers returning from World War II and more recently for lower income families. At one time in the neighborhood's recent history, several homes in the area had been seized and boarded up by the city during drug raids in the area. However, the neighborhood is changing. Home owners in the area have formed a corporation to purchase houses seized during drug raids and concerted efforts to rebuild the neighborhood are underway.

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Burnside Elementary's Student Population

According to Ms. Murray, the teacher in whose classroom my study took place, the student population at Burnside is highly transient, comes overwhelmingly from families at the lower end of the economic spectrum, and is quite racially and ethnically diverse. Because most of the families in the neighborhood are from the lower end of the economic scale, Burnside is one of three schools in the district with the highest number of low-income families. While Ms. Murray acknowledged there were a few families in the area whose income could be considered middle-class (Murray interview 3/16/93), according to information obtained from an interview done with a previous principal (Underwood interview, 11/14/91), approximately 80% of the student body qualifies for the federal school lunch program.

Ms. Murray told me that she felt her first-grade classroom reflected the racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity of the school at large. Many of these children, according to Ms. Murray, were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and had not had the kinds of experiences she believed children from middle-class backgrounds had. She cited the nearby university as an example. Students at Burnside had recently taken a trip to the university and Ms. Murray "was really shocked" at the number of students who weren't even aware that the university was down the road. At the same time, she acknowledged that many lower income students at Burnside did have "Nintendo and they wear the expensive sneakers and those kinds of things. But then at the same time, there are some of them not even eating regularly" (Murray interview 3/16/93). Ms.

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The Participants of the Study

Ms. Murray, First-Grade Teacher

Denise Murray is an African American woman, who, at the time of this study, was in her mid to late thirties. Her bachelor's degree was in elementary education, with minors in social studies and fine arts. In the year prior to this study, Ms. Murray had taken coursework toward her master's degree in child development, but was considering switching to a literacy master's program.

When Ms. Murray agreed to participate in my study, she was in her sixth year at Burnside. Prior to that, she had worked for eight years in a neighboring school district in the reading helping-teacher program. That work experience provided Ms. Murray with extensive training in reading assessment. When asked about her knowledge of reading in an interview conducted prior to this study, she replied, "I think in the reading area, I know an awful lot. I probably know a lot more than I ever use here at Burnside because there's no call for it. I have been trained to do reading assessment, and I don't really do that now, other than what I do for my own students" (Murray interview, 3/16/93).

Ms. Murray was involved in her state's teacher education association, co-chairing committees and attending her organization's state and national conferences. In 1993, she presented an overview on racism and sexism at one of the state

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conferences and served as her region's representative at her national association's annual convention. In addition, she had served on different state-level education committees.

Further, Ms. Murray was active in committee work at Burnside. She worked with other K-3 teachers to restructure the lower elementary curriculum to take into account children's developmental needs and abilities. She also served as a member of her campus' school choice committee, designing brochures and meeting with parents about the schools-of-choice program in her district.

The First-Graders

Before introducing the children, I would like to comment on my methods for reporting what they had to say to me and each other. I inserted words in the transcripts, as designated by brackets, only when I felt it helped to clarify the children's meaning, but I did not translate their comments into standard English. Since I chose to come to the children for their perspective, I don't feel comfortable making them come to me by changing how they speak. To do so implies they don't speak "correctly," and that their views can't become official until expressed in middle-class ways, a notion I reject. In choosing this stance, I am well aware of the debate over nonmainstream children needing to learn standard English. However, as an outsider conducting research, and not the students' teacher, I do not feel it is my place to make changes to student comments, beyond those that help clarify meaning.

There were a total of twenty-one children in Ms. Murray's classroom. The race and gender makeup of the class is shown in

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Table 1 below. The student population of this classroom was very stable during the time of my study, with one European-American girl moving out and another moving in.

Table 1 - Classroom Demographics

	African American	Hispanic American	European American	TOTAL
Number of Males	4	2	7	13
Number of Females	4	1	3	8
TOTAL	8	3	10	21

Of the twenty-one children in the classroom at the time the study began, three were never considered to be a part of the study because their parents either did not return a permission form or did not give permission for their child to be included. One student, whose parent did give permission for her to participate in the study, moved away in the early stages of the study. Nor did I consider or observe a student who enrolled in the class late in the study.

Of the remaining eighteen students, four were removed from consideration as focus students because their parents either did not give permission for the child to be interviewed or required that interviews not be audio taped. One other student, who left the classroom each day for extended periods of time in order to receive special education services, was also not considered for the study.

Thus, from the original pool of twenty-one students, a pool of thirteen possible students remained. Three of the thirteen were not included because they appeared to me to have a great deal of trouble

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getting their work done and seemed not very interested in the learning opportunities offered them. While talking with these students might have yielded insights into what I perceived as their resistance to learning, I wanted to focus on children who did appear to be engaged. I recognize this decision shaped my study in certain ways and not others, but I felt talking with children who were participating would be more productive for me at this time.

This left ten students for me to follow more closely. I interviewed each of these children and found that two (Jaime and Pedro) would not talk with me at all in a formal interview setting. One other, Edward, at first seemed willing to talk to me, but as the study progressed, his willingness varied greatly, so I decided not to follow him. This left seven children, three girls and four boys. Since I had originally planned to interview six children, I decided to talk with all the girls and three of the boys. These six students represented a mix of African-American and European-American individuals and a balance of boys and girls. Additionally, several of the students were table mates, and I thought including them as a group might provide me information about the kind of talk students engaged in with one another while they worked.

Mimi and Chelsea were table mates who seemed to interact well together. Ms. Murray described Mimi as very capable and Chelsea as an average student. The third girl was Keesha. She sat with Jaime and Pedro at a table near Mimi and Chelsea. Ms. Murray saw Keesha as a very capable student, on par with Mimi. I was immediately drawn to Keesha because she was so talkative and curious about what I was doing. No matter what question I asked,

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Keesha usually was willing to talk with me about it. Robert, Rondell, and Samuel were also table mates. They seemed to be good friends and often talked while they worked. Table 2 outlines demographic and interview data for each of these children. Following the table, I introduce each of the six children.

Table 2 - Overview of the Six Focus Children

Child Interviewed	Race or Ethnicity	F/M	Age at Time Study Began	Number of Times Interviewed
Keesha Adams	African American	F	6 yr. 4 mo.	4
Chelsea Byers	African American	F	6 yr. 9 mo.	6
Mimi Davidson	African American	F	6 yr. 0 mo.	6
Samuel Johnson	European American	M	6 yr. 10 mo.	5
Rondell Keith	African American	M	6 yr. 10 mo.	6
Robert Scott	European American	M	6 yr. 4 mo.	6

Keesha Adams

Six-year-old Keesha Adams lived with her aunt and two cousins. According to Keesha, she had a father who did not live with the family, and a stepfather, with whom she kept in touch through letter writing. At home, Keesha liked to read and reported that when her grandmother came to visit, Keesha read to her (citing The Cat in the Hat and One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish, both by Dr. Seuss, as examples). When I asked Keesha if she had books at home,

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she replied, "Yep! I got two bags with a whole bunch of books" (Keesha interview, 5/2/95). I asked Keesha if anyone read bedtime stories with her, and Keesha said she did not like bedtime stories because, "I'm not a little kid" (Keesha interview, 5/2/95). I asked if bedtime stories were only for little kids, and she said yes. When I asked Keesha who in her classroom was a good reader, she quickly identified Ms. Murray, herself, Mimi and two other students.

Ms. Murray felt Keesha was a good student who was very capable of helping others. In fact, Ms. Murray seemed to depend on Keesha to help the two Hispanic boys (both of whom were limited English speakers, according to Ms. Murray) with their work. Keesha seemed to get along well with the boys and with other students in the class. However, Chelsea seemed to think Keesha was a little rough around the edges. When I asked Chelsea if Keesha was a friend of hers, Chelsea made a face and said, "No, because, like, when she got a hole in her outfit, she's always got to show her drawers" (Chelsea interview, 5/25/95). While I never saw Keesha engage in this kind of display, she could at times be full of energy and seemed to prefer moving from one spot to another, rather than staying in one place. My impression of Keesha was that she was bright and eager to learn, and that she possessed an independent spirit. That spirit seemed to give her a confidence to try different things (as when she talked to me with such ease).

Chelsea Byers

Chelsea Byers was the youngest of five children. She had two older stepbrothers, a stepsister, and a "real" brother (as she

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described him). She enjoyed riding her bike and playing basketball with friends when not in school. When I asked her if she had books at her home, Chelsea said, "A whole bunch of them" and named Beauty and the Beast and The Jungle Book as examples (Chelsea interview, 3/15/95).

Chelsea had only been in Ms. Murray's room about a month when I began my study. She moved to Burnside from another school in the district just after Christmas. According to Chelsea, she was learning more things in Ms. Murray's room than she had at her previous school. For example, Chelsea felt spelling was one area in which she was improving. At her old school, according to Chelsea, "all they did was put words up on the board and then let us write them" (Chelsea interview, 5/12/95). In Ms. Murray's room, she also did that "sometimes," but students also had many chances to write.

Chelsea mentioned stories that she was able to make up and the letters of apology, or as she said, "we learn to write sorry letters by ourselves" (Chelsea interview, 5/12/95). Chelsea also thought she was learning how to read better at Burnside because Ms. Murray would help them with the "hard words," instead of making students sound out every word as teachers at Chelsea's old school had done. Finally, Chelsea also seemed to be learning to behave more appropriately at Burnside. When I asked if there was anything else she was learning at Burnside, she said, "Ah...not to fight. I used to beat up people at my other school" (Chelsea interview, 5/12/95). I must say that I never saw Chelsea act in a belligerent manner toward her peers. Further, other students seemed to like Chelsea as I often saw her talking and working with others.

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Mimi Davidson

Mimi Davidson was the younger of two sisters in her family. At the time of the study, Mimi reported that her mother was in school learning to be a police officer. Her father had recently lost his job and was also in school, taking courses in mechanics, according to Mimi. Mimi's fifteen-year-old sister would have been in ninth grade, but Mimi reported she was not currently in school. At home, Mimi liked playing with her friends and watching television, especially cartoons. She also liked to read and reported she had many books at her house. I asked if Mimi liked to write or draw pictures at home. She didn't.

Ms. Murray spoke highly of Mimi as a student, and Mimi did seem able to complete any task assigned her easily and well. Based on interviews with my focus children, Mimi seemed to viewed by other students as the best reader in the class, and seemed to recognize this about herself as well. Further, many students thought Mimi was a good writer, both because she wrote stories and because she had good handwriting. Mimi seemed to get along well with everyone in the class. She named Samuel (introduced below) as her best friend.

Samuel Johnson

Samuel Johnson, age 6, was the middle child of three children. His older sister was seven and his younger brother four at the time this study began. Samuel, his siblings, and his mother lived together, but I am not sure his father lived with the family. When I asked Samuel what he liked to do, he mentioned calling his father on

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After school, Samuel went to a baby-sitter, where he stayed until his mother came for him after work. When they went home, Samuel liked to play Nintendo with his friends, watch television, or play with toys. When I asked if he liked to read books, he said yes, and mentioned books about sharks, snakes, spiders, and birds. I asked if he looked at the pictures or read the words, thinking he might be looking at the pictures, and Samuel said he did both. Then he proceeded to tell me what he had learned. I asked if anyone else in his family read, and he said his sister read the same books he did. His mom read books "with lots of pages but no pictures" (Samuel interview, 4/25/95). Samuel also said he liked to write stories, including "spooky" ones, some about Santa Claus, and some about Easter. He also enjoyed drawing pictures of monsters and animals.

Ms. Murray thought of Samuel as a good student. He often talked to Robert and Rondell while he worked, but always completed assignments on time. Robert and Rondell both seemed to turn to Samuel when they needed help. When Samuel needed help or feedback for his stories, he turned to Rondell and Robert, sometimes walking over to Mimi's table to confer with her. It appeared to me that Samuel was also liked by other students in the class, and he seemed to be a student others would come to for help.

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Rondell Keith

Seven-year-old Rondell was the youngest of four children and the only one still living at home with his mother. When he was with friends, Rondell liked to ride his bike, play Power Rangers, or a game he called "Witches Night." According to Rondell, this game was based on a story he wrote at school (see Chapter 4). When not with friends, Rondell played his Sega game or watched television.

When I asked Rondell if he ever read at home, he said yes and told me he had "a whole bunch" of books at home. Some were upstairs in his room and some were downstairs in the main living area. He also said he and his mother went to their local library. According to Rondell, his mother liked to read scary books, but when I asked him to tell me more about that, he could not recall any book titles. According to him, however, he knew his mother read scary books because he had seen her reading them.

At school, Rondell could be moody. Sometimes he worked steadily on his tasks, talking with Samuel and Robert as he did so; other times, Ms. Murray had to remind him to stay on task. She felt he was capable, but didn't always have the self-direction he needed to get his work done. On one occasion when I was in the room, Rondell was under his table, not working and Ms. Murray told him he needed to decide how to behave or he would not get to go out for recess. Rondell seemed to be a popular boy in class. Other students would stop by and talk with him on their way to the games or books.

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Robert Scott

Six-year-old Robert was the oldest of three boys and lived at home with his mother, father, and brothers. When he was at home, Robert liked to play with his younger brothers or ride his two wheeler bike. He also enjoyed playing with his friends on his swing or with different toys he had. He also enjoyed watching television on occasion. Robert did have books at home and liked to look at or read them, since he could read "a little bit" (Robert interview, 3/15/95). Robert told me he had Cat in the Hat books, rhyming books, and music books as well at home. When I asked him to tell me more about the music books, he said one was about a cricket and it made a noise when the book was opened. Based on his further description, it sounded to me like Robert was describing Eric Carle's The Very Quiet Cricket. Robert also liked to write stories and had written a book about a good witch and a bad witch.

At school, Robert was very talkative and on more than one occasion, I heard Ms. Murray remind him to talk more quietly. Ms. Murray felt Robert was behind some of the other students developmentally, but she felt he would catch up with as the year went by. For example, she felt he didn't have good control over his handwriting, but toward the middle of March, I heard her tell Robert, "I am thrilled with your writing. Remember how it looked at the beginning of school?" Robert replied, "I'm a good writer." and continued writing (field notes, 3/1/95).

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Data Collection

I began my study during the winter. Over a period of fifteen weeks[1], I observed in the classroom twenty-seven times, with my observations ranging from one hour to the entire school day. Generally, I stayed three hours during the morning when the students were engaged in literacy-related tasks.

While observing, I often sat at the back of the room, taking notes and audio-taping classroom interactions. At other times, I moved around the room talking with different children about their work, gathering approximately five hours of informal conversations on audio tape using a recorder strapped to my waist.

About three weeks after I began my general observations in the classroom, I selected the six children described above to follow more closely. These children sat at different tables: table 1--Mimi Davidson and Chelsea Byers; table 2--Rondell Keith, Samuel Johnson, and Robert Scott; and table 3--Keesha Adams (see Figure 2).

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[1] There were three weeks in that 15-week time frame when I did not observe at all because of university and school-district spring breaks, and because I attended the annual convention of the American Educational Research Association.


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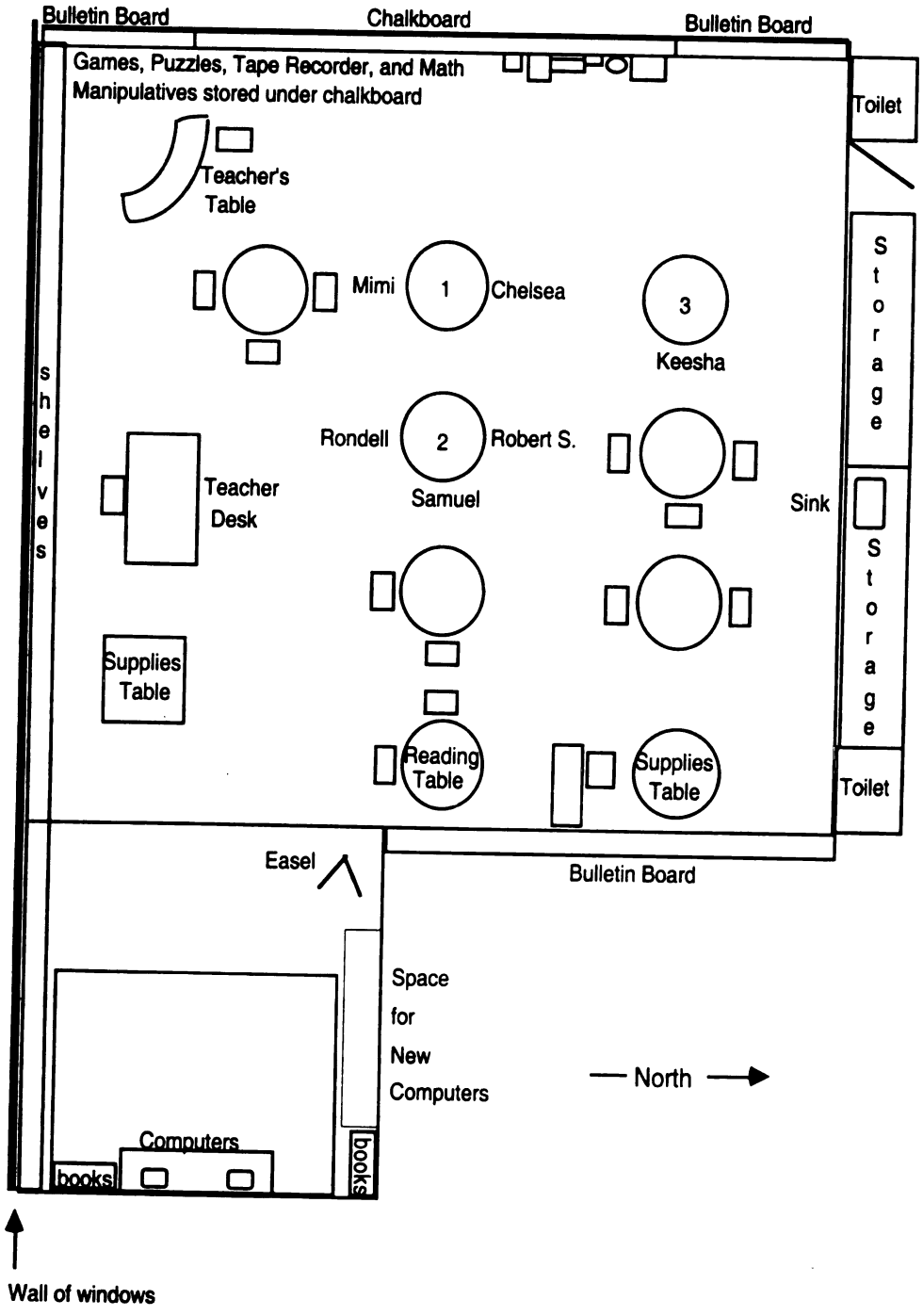

Figure 2-Classroom Seating Arrangement

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I selected the children I did in part because I was interested in what the children at each table might say to one another about the literacy-related tasks they were working on, as well as to get a general sense for the kinds of children's classroom talk. To collect conversations between these students, I placed remote microphones at the tables at different times. I always asked the children for permission before doing so, and if a child said no, I did not place a microphone at that table that day. In addition to collecting samples of student conversations, I also collected samples of the six students' work over time, including the students' journals, worksheets, and projects done with a fifth-grade class.

Finally, I interviewed each child several times over the course of the study, between four to six times each. These interviews took place wherever we could find an unoccupied area, ranging from the library to the speech teacher's room when she wasn't in. When every available space was claimed, we (on occasion) sat in the hallway. During the first interview, I asked background questions as a way to learn about the children's families, interests, and so on. Questions in later interviews generally related to literacy and about the students' perceptions of the classroom's learning environment. However, during one interview (after a substitute had been in charge of the class one day) I did ask students about that day, and on another occasion, I asked the children about work they did with their fifth-grade buddies.

At times, my interview questions were predetermined and were asked of each child. For example, I asked all the children for general background information. I also asked about literacy issues (e.g., to

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tell me what reading was). Other times, I tried to "follow the child's lead" when asking question. For example, in talking with Robert about writing at home, I learned he wrote "sweet" stories, but since I had no idea what those were, I asked him to explain them. He described them as stories that were "not mean" and said he was writing one about a princess and an angel (Robert interview, 6/6/95). It was also by following Keesha's conversational lead that I learned she had been sent to the office the day the substitute teacher was present, an incident described in Chapter 4. I also asked different questions depending on what a particular individual or group of children were doing. Although I had parental permission to speak with the children, I always asked the children's permission to speak with them before each interview. I did not talk with children when they declined to be interviewed.

Since I was interested in trying to understand how the students made sense of their literacy learning, I also needed to develop a sense of Ms. Murray's intentions. I interviewed Ms. Murray twice over the course of the study. I also drew on an interview I conducted with her the year prior to my study, as well as on two interviews of Ms. Murray conducted by another research assistant two years prior to my study. I also spoke informally with Ms. Murray over the course of my study in regard to the instruction and activities I observed, as well as about students.

The first day I was in the classroom, Ms. Murray introduced me to the class. During my first two weeks in the classroom, I concentrated on getting to know the children and establishing a routine that I hoped would help both the students and Ms. Murray feel

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more comfortable with my presence. For example, I always tried to arrive and set up my equipment as quietly as possible. I sat at the back of the room where I seemed to be out of the flow of classroom traffic. During those early weeks, I did take field notes, and after the first day, audio-taped the general classroom interactions. I did not mingle with the students as much then as I later did.

I recorded my field notes using a laptop computer. I felt comfortable using the laptop to record my field notes, and was generally able to type quickly (though not accurately!) enough to keep up with the classroom action. I did find that I needed to take some traditional paper and pencil notes as well. For example, when Ms. Murray had the children work on a mathematics problem, I usually wrote the arithmetic sentences or geometric figures by hand, labeling each with a reference date. In this way, I was able to more accurately record the chalkboard placement of these tasks.

For my computer notes, I created a document template containing a three-column table. Each day, I copied that template into a new document, and named the document using the date of the observation. I recorded the time I began taking notes in the left-hand column of the table and additional reference times every ten minutes or so, though I was not always precise about this. I kept verbal descriptions and direct quotations of students' and teacher's comments in the middle column of the table, and I used the right-hand column of the table to record my own comments and questions. Because of the way I set up my note-taking table, I was able to place my reflective comments near the descriptive comments to which the reflections referred. (See Figure 3 for sample field notes).

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8:57	I s a a a I v n t v n a a h a p t s M t a
9:05	K T t t s c n a s n n c s h s

Time	Classroom Observation	My Comments
8:57	Malcolm comes to T and shows her his "hug" sentence--Hug a jet. T asks if you can hug a jet and sends Malcolm back to his desk to create another sentence. Malcolm comes back with another sentence "hug a <inaudible>" T tells Malcolm that doesn't make sense. She asks him what hug means, "Tell me Malcolm what does it mean to hug? What am I doing when I hug? If you told someone to go over and hug Robert, what would that person do?" Malcolm says it would make Robert feel better." T says "yes, but what are they doing? What are they using to do it?" T asks Malcolm what arms are and asks what they have to do with hugging. Malcolm says they are arms and are twisted around a person. T keeps probing to get Malcolm to describe a hug. She then tells him she heard him say "hug me" and says "That is a sentence. You gave me a sentence." Malcolm remains at the reading table looking in the air. He is not writing. Malcolm then gets up and goes to his desk.	Okay, I thought this activity was a creative writing activity that also helped kids make connections between the words they were learning and being able to use them in sentences. But the instance with Malcolm makes me wonder if this isn't also about the T finding out what background knowledge the Ss have about the words they are learning. this activity is also a chance for Ss to talk about text with each other and with the teacher. As I look around the room, I hear lots of talk about the activity. Ss are asking each other how to spell words and are reading their sentences to one another.
9:05	Keesha is coming back to show T what she is doing. This is the fourth time in the past few minutes that she has done this. She asked the T if "u" was the only letter that could "go in the middle" then showed T her words, then asked if she and Jaime could get another piece of paper. As I watch her now, I see her moving her chair closer to Jaime's and talking to him. Jaime seems involved in what she is saying as he is watching her and responding. He seems more talkative than I remember him being in the past. Keesha calls T over to her table and asks if every word has to start with a capital letter. T says every sentence has to start with a capital. Chelsea asks T how to spell a word and T tells her to sound it out.	

Figure 3-Sample Field-Note Entry (From 3/9/95)

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Data Analysis

Each time I observed, I tried to capture the feel of the entire room and also move in more closely on a child or group of children. For example, I sometimes sat at one table, listening and talking to the children. On another occasion, after reviewing my interviews with students about reading, and learning that Mimi was perceived by everyone to be a good reader, I decided to "track" interactions Mimi had with other students. So, instead of writing descriptive field notes, I sketched the seating arrangement, noting which students came to Mimi and to whom she went. As soon after the observation as I was able, I listened to that day's tape and tried to fill in gaps in my written field notes. I tried to not make generalizations while I was still in the field. Instead, I read my field notes and interview data to try and decide what areas I might still need to explore.

Once I began more formal data analysis, I read my field notes and interview data multiple times to better understand what had happened or to look for patterns within the data. For example, I read each day's field notes and identified literacy-related activities that occurred each day. I described these activities as literacy-related because they required students to write, read, think about spelling, and encouraged them to talk. This helped me identify areas Ms. Murray seemed to concentrate on in her instruction.

For my initial analysis of the students' interviews, I read each student's interviews several times, then grouped by topic what they had to say. Generally these topics reflected the questions I asked (for example, "What is reading?"). Other topic groupings included:

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students' personal background information, impressions of students' learning in Ms. Murray's classroom, reading related comments, and the role of talk in learning, among others. I asked about these particular issues as a way to gather information related to my larger research questions.

Once I had the students' interview data grouped by a particular topic, I created a new electronic document and literally "cut and pasted" relevant pieces from each student's interview data into the new document. In this way, I was able to examine the interview data from two perspectives. First I could examine one student's original set of interviews, as a way to become more familiar with that particular student. Second, I could examine the data by topic and gain a broad overview of what multiple students had to say about a particular topic.

As with individual student interviews, I read my reorganized data many times and it was then that more fine-tuned categories began to emerge from what the students had to say. For example, when I asked "What have you learned this year?" students' responses included information about how to read, how to spell, and so on. I used these larger ideas (how to spell, how to read) as categories under which I grouped individual comments (See Table 3).

Table 3 - Categories that Emerged from Student Responses

How to Spell	How to Read	How to Write	Handwriting	Classroom Behavior
Sound out words	Sound out words	Letters of apology	Take your time	Active listening
Ask the teacher for help	Look at pictures	Ask others for story ideas	Write nicely	Be respectful
	Ask for help	Get story ideas from own head		Talk quietly
	Read a great deal	How to spell		Raise your hand
	read silently	Sound out words		
	Select own books	Ask for help		
	Phonics	Write often		
	Read to others			

The larger ideas students mentioned (how to spell, how to read) are located in the shaded row along the top. Beneath each column heading are comments students made about the larger ideas. By categorizing students' comments according to what they said, I was able to better understand what students had to say about their learning and then compare that to what I observed the students doing. I did this same kind of reading, categorizing, and rearranging of data with Ms. Murray's interviews as well.

Once I had organized my data by categories, I was able to compare information from Ms. Murray's interview with student interviews and my own field note observations. This helped me test my assertions by finding support for them among a variety of data sources. On the other hand, this process also sent me back to look more closely at the data when my assertions were not confirmed by multiple data. This happened, for example, when I read and reread

my field notes and developed a hunch that these students would be able to talk about writing as a communicative process, since I had observed students writing for a variety of purposes. Instead, their comments about writing dealt more with issues like handwriting, spelling, and neatness. Students' comments made me rethink the relationship between what I was seeing and what they were saying.

Finally, in addition to the multiple readings I did in order to make sense of my data, I also did very close reading of text, drawing on methods from discourse analysis, as a way to help me better understand what Ms. Murray and the students were telling me. For example, when Keesha told me about her experience with the substitute, I at first thought it was an instance of a student not doing what the substitute wanted. But in rereading Keesha's comments more carefully, I came to see what happened to her very differently. Looking closely at what the children said helped me gain a deeper understanding of their school literacy experiences in this classroom and helped me think differently about school literacy experiences and how they shape children's perceptions of themselves, issues addressed in my larger research questions.

One Final Note

The following chapters represent the product of my data analysis. One final note before turning to those chapters. Some students are more prominently displayed in my writing than are others. As I analyzed and thought about what the students had to say, and about what they did, I began to realize that certain students helped me better present a panoramic view of this classroom, while

others helped better demonstrate specific issues. Thus, Mimi and Keesha, for example, may be dealt with in a more in-depth manner than Samuel because their experiences highlight specific issues of concern to me. Samuel, Chelsea, Rondell, and Robert, on the other hand, help tell an overall story of this classroom. Each of these students, however, was important to this study, for each person's experiences and comments helped me gain a better understanding of the potential and problems that may confront other students who learn about literacy through a discourse similar to the one in which Ms. Murray and her students engaged.

While the children upon whom I focused helped me to consider issues that may be of importance to other students, I also am aware that, as with any attempt to capture a sense of classroom life, the children I focused on for this study, and the things that I attended to while focusing on them, helped me understand this classroom in ways that likely would have differed if I had focused on other children or other aspects of classroom life. I acknowledge that this study reflects my own knowledge and beliefs about learners, learning, and teaching and that my knowledge and beliefs, as well as what the children chose to share with me, have shaped my interpretations of the data.

CHAPTER 3

A FIRST-GRADE LITERACY COMMUNITY

When children come to school as first graders, they bring with them knowledge about language and literacy. Some of this knowledge may have been acquired in kindergarten or preschool. Much of it, however, comes from home. Research on emergent literacy (Bissex, 1980; Sulzby and Teale, 1991; Teale and Sulzby, 1986; Wells, 1986, 1990), for example, has helped us understand that even very young children begin the process of becoming literate within their home and community settings.

From birth, most children are surrounded by talk, learning that language is a tool for communicating ideas (Dudley-Marling and Searle, 1991; Heath, 1983; Wells, 1986). Children are surrounded by written language as well (Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Environmental print[1] and written text used by families (e.g., grocery lists, notes and letters to friends and family, and school- or business-related correspondence) convey a similar message to children: language is a tool for communicating. Because of these kinds of literacy experiences, most children enter school already knowing something about language and literacy.

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[1]Environmental print is defined as the print that surrounds us in daily life. Examples include brand names on cereal boxes, fast food names on billboards, text found on traffic signs, and so on.

Differences in Students' Language Knowledge . . .

Although many children do know something about language and literacy before they walk into a first-grade classroom, *what* they know may vary considerably due to social and cultural differences. For example, when thirsty, most children likely know how to ask for a cold soft drink. But while a child from North Dakota may learn to ask for "pop," a child from New York may ask for "soda," and a child from Texas may ask for "coke." Within their own cultural or familial contexts, each child would likely be understood. In a different context, however, the child from Texas might find herself with a Coca-Cola®, when what she really wanted was a Dr. Pepper®! These cultural differences are easily spotted, but other, more subtle, differences often are not, as the work of Heath (1983) and Michaels (1981) makes clear. What children know about language and literacy will vary, simply because each child's experience with language and literacy differs.

While different children may come to school knowing language and literacy in different ways, what is common to most children--regardless of their experiences--is the understanding that language is used for communication. Further, for most children, learning a language and how to be literate happens in the natural context of daily use. Most parents talk to their children in the course of getting ready for the day or when the child is reprimanded. Young children see and hear adults and older children talk to one another in a variety of "genuine" conversations. By that I mean these conversations usually occur between two or more participants, they are based on a shared language system, and they have a degree of

intersubjectivity. That is, all the participants know what the others are talking about, or when they do not know, they know to ask for clarification (Pappas, Kieffer, and Levstik, 1990). It is through these kinds of conversations that children come to understand that conversations are ways to communicate information, to entertain, or to persuade. In short, children learn about language by using it and hearing it being used for real purposes. Once they begin their school careers, however, all children must construct new understandings about language and literacy. How well they do so depends in large part on what they already know, what their teachers know about language differences among children, and to what degree teachers use that knowledge to help all students learn the standardized forms of the language taught in schools.

. . . and What Schools Value

Traditionally, elementary schools have been places where students learned the "nuts and bolts" of language and literacy, including the conventions of written language and the standard ways of using language. For example, while most first graders are able to put together individual sounds to make words, they lack an awareness that these sounds are the building blocks for spoken language, phonemic awareness (Adams, 1990; Stahl, 1992; Yopp, 1992). When asked, many first graders may not be able to identify those individual sounds or divide them into discrete units. This ability, however, can be taught, and when so done, appears to support children's growth as readers, and in turn, be further developed by students' increasing ability to read (Blachman, 1987; Yopp, 1992).

In addition to learning about the individual sounds in spoken language, school is also the place where children often learn how those sounds are represented in written language (i. e., phonics). Some children may learn phonics using methods based on a whole language philosophy (Freppon and Dahl, 1991; Gaskins, Gaskins, and Gaskins, 1991; Trachtenburg, 1990). Others may learn phonics using methods derived from a skills-based philosophy (Clymer, 1963; Groff, 1986). Still others may learn phonics using a combination of philosophical approaches (Stahl, 1992).

Learning about sounds and how they are represented are not the only aspects of language children learn at school. They must also learn how to use the standard mechanic and usage guidelines of the language as well. For example, children must learn the conventional spelling of words and where and how to look up unknown words using a dictionary. They learn the mechanics of punctuation and how to use punctuation in both their reading and writing. Children also must learn how to use language in standard ways, for example, rephrasing a sentence so as not to use double negatives--even though double negatives might be commonplace in a child's home language use. Children from nonmainstream backgrounds often have additional issues like dialect differences and interaction patterns for oral language use with which to contend (Au, 1993; Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981). Even children whose knowledge of language more closely resembles the kind of knowledge valued by schools are likely to encounter new ideas and ways of thinking about language.

At school, then, the focus of language learning covers a range of "nuts and bolts." Students learn concrete tasks such as printing

the letters of the alphabet to highly abstract tasks like analyzing sounds and translating them into written representations. They learn how and when to use punctuation, as well as how to rephrase thoughts and ideas expressed in an informal register into more formal registers depending on one's purpose. School is the place where students not only use language but study it, developing a meta-awareness about language. And, as Gee (1991) points out, this kind of meta-awareness is essential for individuals if they are to exercise full and powerful control over their discourse.

Thus, the issue is not should schools focus on this meta-awareness. Each of these concepts and abilities is important and has a place in helping children develop their literate abilities. However, these concepts and abilities do not by themselves represent the whole of being literate. While schools also focus on other aspects of language (for communication or reading for pleasure), these aspects may not receive the same degree of attention (especially in the early years) as the "nuts and bolts" aspects of language often do. Thus, schools may send inadvertent and unintended messages to children about "what counts" as legitimate language knowledge. By valuing aspects of language that may (often) differ from what a child has learned of and about language at home, most children, when they first enter school, are confronted by a very different literacy terrain than that with which they are familiar (See Figure 4).

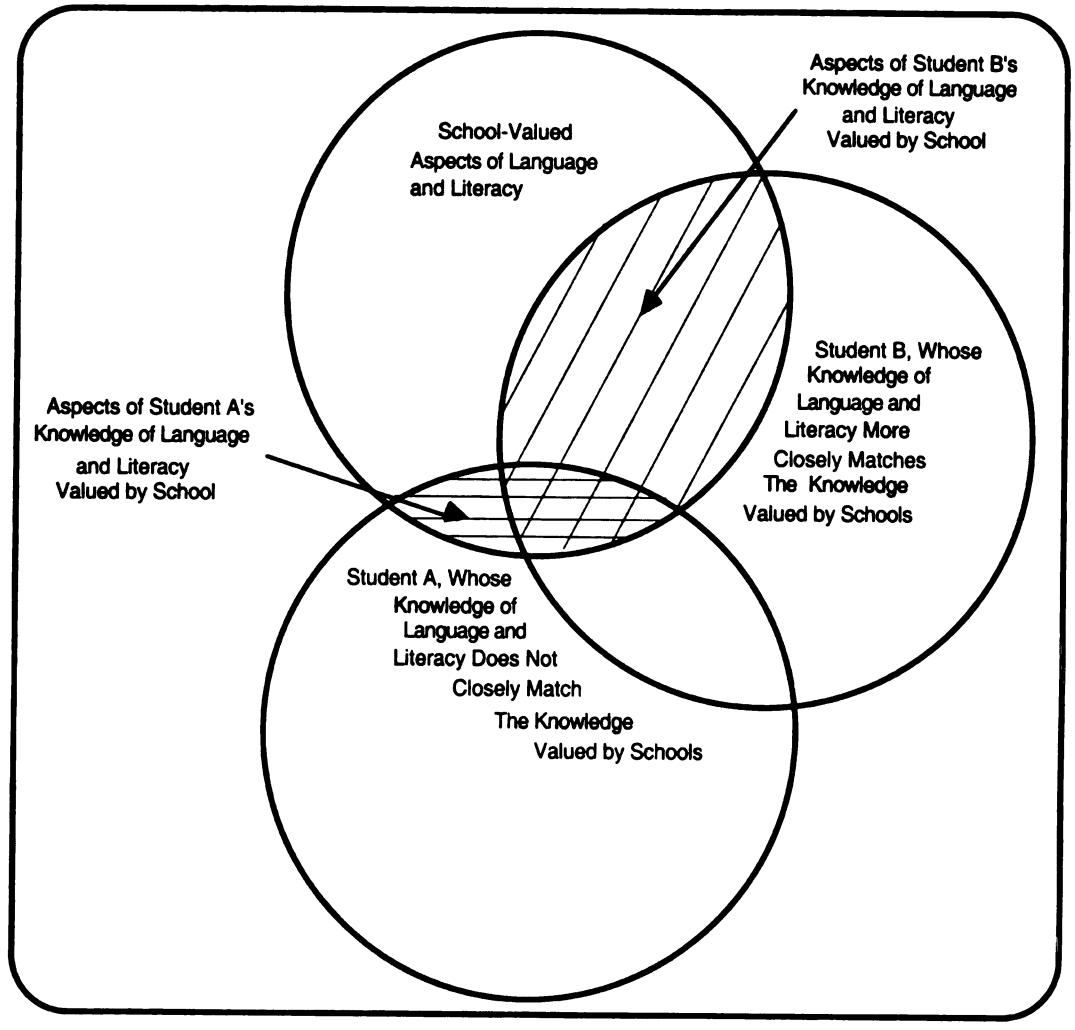

Figure 4-Match/Mismatch of Language and Literacy Knowledge

Upon coming to school, Student 'A,' may find that her use of language (for example, while at school, asking when the class will go to "dinner") is quite different from the language of school (where students and teachers go to "lunch"). Student 'A' may also find that her style of answering a question while someone else simultaneously answers that same question (much like the native Hawaiian children in Au's 1980 study) is not what is expected at school. In fact, Student 'A" may find that what she knows about language bears little resemblance to what her teacher seems to expect.

Student 'B,' on the other hand, may find the area of shared literacy aspects between home and school to be much greater. Perhaps she comes from a home where both parents are high school teachers and the language interactions they have taught Student 'B' are more in line with what her teacher expects at school. Student 'B' may still encounter new ideas about language, however, as she learns about phonics based on her teacher's whole-language philosophy. While what they know about language is different, both Student 'A' and Student 'B' encounter aspects of school literacy that are new and unlike what they have learned at home. Thus, each must begin to redefine who she is as a literate being within the new and larger literacy terrain of school. How well students do this, and how well schools help students master this new discourse, has implications for their future school success, as will be seen in the discussions of Mimi's and Keesha's literacy experiences later in this study.

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The Literacy Terrain of One First-Grade Classroom

In this chapter, I examine the classroom literacy terrain, for it was within this physical and emotional space that Ms. Murray and her students developed their own vision of a literate community. Drawing on my own observational field notes, I first sketch a representative morning vignette to provide an overview of the classroom's literacy terrain, and to examine ways in which the terrain of this classroom community resembled and differed from the terrain often associated with school. I do so by drawing on interviews with Ms. Murray, my own insights, and my reading of literacy-education literature.

Taken together, Ms. Murray's insights and my own provide a framework for understanding this particular classroom's literacy terrain, and provide a beginning step in helping me answer my first research question: What are the school literacy experiences of nonmainstream students in classrooms where the literacy instruction is reflective of current understandings about literacy teaching and learning? Further, looking closely at the classroom literacy terrain provides a context for my own understanding of these particular nonmainstream students' literacy experiences and of their sense of position within the literacy terrain of their first-grade classroom. Charting the terrain within which these students moved, and recognizing how they saw themselves positioned in relation to it serves as a starting point for exploring literacy problems and potentials the children encountered. Those encounters will be discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

The following vignette describes a typical morning at the end of February. The morning's instruction consisted up of a wide range of literacy-related activities, not an unusual morning in that regard. Ms. Murray and her students engaged in many different literacy activities, some of which were not that different from those found in many other classrooms, others of which were. Taken together, the literacy activities members of this class participated in and the interactions among students and between students and teacher resulted in a terrain filled with different kinds of literacy "nooks and crannies," including the mechanics of reading and writing as well as the purposes for which reading and writing can be used, for these first-grade students to explore. My description of the morning's activities is presented in italicized text. Occasionally, I interject my own commentary (notated in regular text) as a way to guide the reader through the actions described within the vignette.

Stepping Inside a First-Grade Literacy Community

The air outside is cold and crisp this morning in late February. It's 8:20 and Burnside Elementary School is relatively quiet. Ms. Murray's first-floor classroom is also quiet , and I am able to settle in before the students arrive. Then, as the 8:30 bell rings, students stream into the classroom. They talk animatedly with one another as they remove chairs from the tops of several round tables scattered about the room and prepare for the day ahead. Ms. Murray reminds those with money for the school bank to

bring their money to her[2]*. After the students take care of their banking, Ms. Murray calls for a "red light," her signal that she wants the class quiet and looking at her. The students quickly settle down, sit at their tables, and look at their teacher.*

"We have an assembly at nine o'clock," she tells them, "and we haven't finished watching our movie about Rumpelstiltskin. I also need to take attendance and lunch count, so right now I'll let you finish watching the movie and then we'll get ready to go to the assembly."

"Yes!" shouts Robert as Rondell walks up to Ms. Murray to show her his new book, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, by Eric Carle. He also asks if he might read it to the class. Ms. Murray tells him he may, handing back the book and telling Rondell to hold onto the book until then. Talking with Rondell about the book reminds Ms. Murray about the upcoming reading activities during March and she addresses the class.

"Next week starts March and March, every year, is reading month. That means we have a ton of activities to do for that month." She then tells the class about this year's theme--Jog your mind, Read!--and outlines several

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[2]A local bank has "adopted" the school and helped the students set up a savings bank. Older students interviewed for positions within the bank (e.g., teller) and ran the operation. While I was in the building, I saw those of Ms. Murray's students with money to deposit leave the classroom to take care of their banking business. I also observed "tellers" coming in to the classroom to double check that everyone who wanted to make deposits had had an opportunity to do so.

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activities including mystery readers, a storyteller day, activities on St. Patrick's Day, and a school-wide read-a-thon. She also tells them about a reading contest, complete with prizes. While some students seem uninterested in what Ms. Murray is outlining, most are listening carefully and "ooh" and "ah" appropriately, especially about the prizes.

Then Ms. Murray moves to the television and VCR, begins the movie, and takes care of the morning bookkeeping while students turn their attention to what is happening on the screen. At nine o'clock, the principal announces over the public address system that K-3 students should go to the RIF (Reading is Fundamental) assembly.

We already see in this vignette the various literacy activities in this classroom. For example, talk is a key cultural component of the classroom. A variety of literacy experiences are also present in this classroom: Rondell's sharing of text, the movie rendition of a traditional tale, and the activities for "Reading Month." Further, "real life" experiences are incorporated into the lessons within this classroom, as the school bank activity exemplifies. These issues--the role of talk within the literacy community, the variety of literacy experiences within which the students engage, and the incorporation of authentic purposes for literacy--were not only present in this particular vignette. Rather, they appeared throughout my time in this classroom.

At 9:40 the students come back, and Ms. Murray asks them if they can tell her about the books they heard read aloud to them. Some say no, but most are eager to share and

together the class remembers the books, including a story from Mexico, Abuela, by Arthur Dorros; and a Native American tale, The Rough-Faced Girl, by Rafe Martin.

Once everyone is seated, Ms. Murray goes to the front of the room, and holding up a box with books in it, tells the class the principal has brought them some new books to read. The box contains six copies each of different beginners' biographies of African Americans, including one called Elijah McCoy, written by Garnet Nelson Jackson. Ms. Murray describes the books as being about, "people that you normally don't hear about, who were very, very important in our lives, who made all our lives better. I've taken a look at the words, and if you take one of the books and practice it, I think you'll be able to read them. They'll be here for you to share. This morning our journal entry is going to be about one of the people out of here, Elijah McCoy, who you might not hear about. If it wasn't for him, our machines that operate wouldn't operate very well because they wouldn't have a way of oiling them efficiently, and he invented a piece of equipment that oils machinery. So, he is very important."

Ms. Murray places the box of books on the floor under the chalkboard at the front of the room, then gives the class their first assignment, "This morning, I would like for you to draw scenes from one of the stories that you heard that you really, really liked and we'll put your names on them and send them to our reader. After you draw your picture, I'll

come around and you can tell which story it is and I'll help you get it spelled."

Brandee announces she liked all the stories, and Ms. Murray says she liked them all, too. As Ms. Murray passes out drawing paper to each of the three or four students seated at one of six round tables in the room, most students begin working right away. Some students work quietly by themselves; others busily talk with their peers about the pictures they intend to draw.

Too soon, Tommy announces, "I'm almost done!"

Ms. Murray goes to Tommy and, after looking at his picture, contradicts his assessment, "Tommy, I want you to think about what you heard. One figure is not a scene from the story. You put some background with it." She moves on, checking with other students, and Tommy returns to his work.

The class continues working. Brandee reports that she is doing the Rough-Faced Girl. A moment later Brandee asks, "Is she White or Black?"

Ms. Murray tells Brandee the main character is Native American, saying, " [one of the custodians] is Native American; what color is he?"

Before Brandee can answer, another student informs Ms. Murray, "He's mixed!"

Brandee replies, "Well, I'll just color him light brown."

Note several aspects of Ms. Murray's literacy instruction. She often provided opportunities for her first-graders to demonstrate

their knowledge by drawing pictures. As emergent and early readers and writers, many of these students were better able to express themselves through drawing. Additionally, drawing provided a format for students to talk with one another and extend their understanding through shared interactions with others. As Ms. Murray walked about the classroom, she reminded them of the work she wanted to see.

"I will not accept one little picture of somebody. I want to see background. Where does the story take place? Who were the characters in the story?" As the students work, Ms. Murray goes the front of the room and writes the day's journal entry on the chalkboard (see Figure 5).

Good Morning.
This is Black History month.
Today we honor Elijah McCoy.
Elijah was an inventor.
Mr. McCoy invented lubricators
(a way to oil machines).

Figure 5-Journal Entry for the Day

Ms. Murray tells the class that when they finish their drawing, they are to copy the journal entry into their Black History Month Journal. She reads the entry to them and explains what a lubricator is. As the children begin working, the noise level rises and falls as they talk with

one another while working. Some are talking about their drawing; others talk about different topics.

Brandee is still interested in the color of the different characters. She asks her table peers about Abuela's skin color. Ms. Murray overhears Brandee and points out to her the four students in the class who are Hispanic. Then Ms. Murray tells Brandee that Abuela is Hispanic like the four students. She asks Brandee what she thinks that might mean. Brandee replies she thought Abuela was Black.

At this, Malcolm, an African-American student, announces "I'm Hispanic and so is my whole family!"

Keesha quickly responds, "No!" and pointing to her outstretched palm, says, "Your hand is the same as mine!"

As Ms. Murray walks by Malcolm's table, he asks what she is and Ms. Murray replies, "A human being, but if the government wants to keep track of me, they call me African-American." With that, she smiles at Malcolm and moves on.

She stops when a student asks for help spelling the title of the book for which a picture has been drawn. "Listen to the sounds," says Ms. Murray. She says the title slowly and carefully, but without losing the sense of a complete word being said. "What do you hear?" As the child identifies sounds in the word, Ms. Murray says, "Good!" and walks on. As other students ask for help, she repeats the process, helping those who have trouble hearing the sounds.

As students begin finishing their drawings and journal entries, Ms. Murray points to the spelling word list on the chalkboard (see Figure 6).

bat
cat
fat
hat
rat
sat

Figure 6-Spelling Words on the Chalkboard

Note that Ms. Murray mixes more traditional school tasks (such as copying from the board and lists of spelling words) with tasks that are more in line with reform-oriented instruction. Students often wrote in Ms. Murray's classroom. Sometimes, as in the vignette, they copied what their teacher had written. Other times, students wrote about topics of their choice. Further, learning a list of spelling words coexisted with students' use of invented spelling. This blending of old and new was an essential part of Ms. Murray's teaching and exemplified what I came to describe as Ms. Murray's mediation of various continua (for example, skills instruction and holistic learning; teacher-directed instruction and student-directed instruction and so on). These continua will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

As Ms. Murray points to the list of spelling words, she tells the class, "We are going to make chain words. What that means is--"

Tommy interrupts her saying, "I know what to do!"

Ms. Murray focuses her attention on him, saying, "Tommy, you are being rude, and I don't like it." Tommy falls silent and looks at his teacher.

A student comments that the chain is like a bracelet. Ms. Murray agrees, but says it will be a chain instead of a bracelet. She tells them, "You write a word in the middle of the paper, big enough to see. The paper will look like this. You'll write the word 'bat' on a piece of paper. On another slip of paper, I'm going to write the word 'cat.' To make the chain, we have to hook them together, like this. You will end up with a chain of six words. Then take them home and study them."

After completing the instructions, Ms. Murray hands out the strips of paper along with some tape to fasten them into links, and students begin working. As they do, Ms. Murray walks about the room telling those who are working they may go outside for a break. Finally, only she and one student, who wandered about the room while others worked, remain. When he asks if it is time to go outside, Ms. Murray asks what he thinks. He says he thinks it is, and Ms. Murray talks to him about doing his work and not bothering others. Then they leave the room for recess. I pack my bags then

leave, turning out the light and closing the door behind me as I do so.

The literacy terrain of this first-grade classroom was quite varied. Instruction in the grammar and mechanics of writing occurred along with instruction in the process and purposes for writing. Many links between reading, writing, listening, and speaking were made as well. I describe this richness and variety as the "nooks and crannies" of the terrain, and have come to see this particular terrain as one in which children were able to wander about and explore those nooks and crannies, rather than stay on one predetermined path outlined by their teacher. In the next section, I examine in more detail the literacy terrain of this first-grade classroom, and point to those features that both seemed to support and seemed to cause problems for the children as they developed their literacy abilities.

Reflecting on the Classroom Literacy Terrain

At first glance, a visitor to this classroom might not think these first graders are doing much literacy learning. After all, the children were not divided into three ability-based reading groups, no one read from a basal reading textbook, and no dittos were completed. Further, Ms. Murray did little lecture-like talking with the class. Yet reading groups and teacher-dominated talk are what many (most) of us remember from our own days in elementary classrooms. What's going on here? Ms. Murray's instructional

approach reflects her belief in a particular kind of classroom community, as well as her beliefs about curriculum and instruction[3].

In the remainder of this chapter, I examine the ways in which Ms. Murray created a particular learning environment for her students, informed by her perspective of developmentally-appropriate practice for learners and learning. I begin by describing the classroom community, for it was upon this foundation the learning environment was based. Then, I examine the literacy learning offered students in this classroom and discuss the ways in which Ms. Murray mediated that learning in light of larger, and often differing, philosophies and beliefs regarding curriculum and instruction. Understanding the kind of community and literacy learning Ms. Murray offered her students provides a context for better comprehending students' experiences as they moved about this particular terrain.

Developing a Sense of Community

Walking into a classroom can provide an observer clues as to the kind of learning environment that may be present. Sometimes those clues may seem quite evident. Student desks arranged in straight rows, all facing the teacher's desk (placed strategically at the center front of the room) implies a very different sense about acceptable learning behavior and classroom norms than does a room where the teacher's desk is off to the side and student desks are

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[3] I use the term "curriculum" to refer to *what* was taught in Ms. Murray's classroom and the term "instruction" to refer to *how* that content was taught.

clustered together, facing each other. While the first arrangement often conveys a sense that students should work quietly by themselves and look first to their teacher for help, the second arrangement often conveys the idea that students should work together and support one another's learning.

A second way learning environments can be shaped is through the emotional tone or climate in the classroom. Classrooms with little talk can convey a message that learning is best done by one's own interaction with the material to be learned, while a classroom where talk is present can convey the idea that learning is a social endeavor. In this section, I examine the physical and emotional aspects of Ms. Murray's classroom in order to better understand the ways in which that environment supported the literacy learning within it.

Physical support for a community of learners. As the vignette above described, Ms. Murray's students often talked with one another as they worked and learned. In large part, their ability to do so was supported by the physical arrangement of the classroom. Ms. Murray arranged her classroom (see Figure 7) in ways that seemed to deliberately invite talk and cooperation among students.

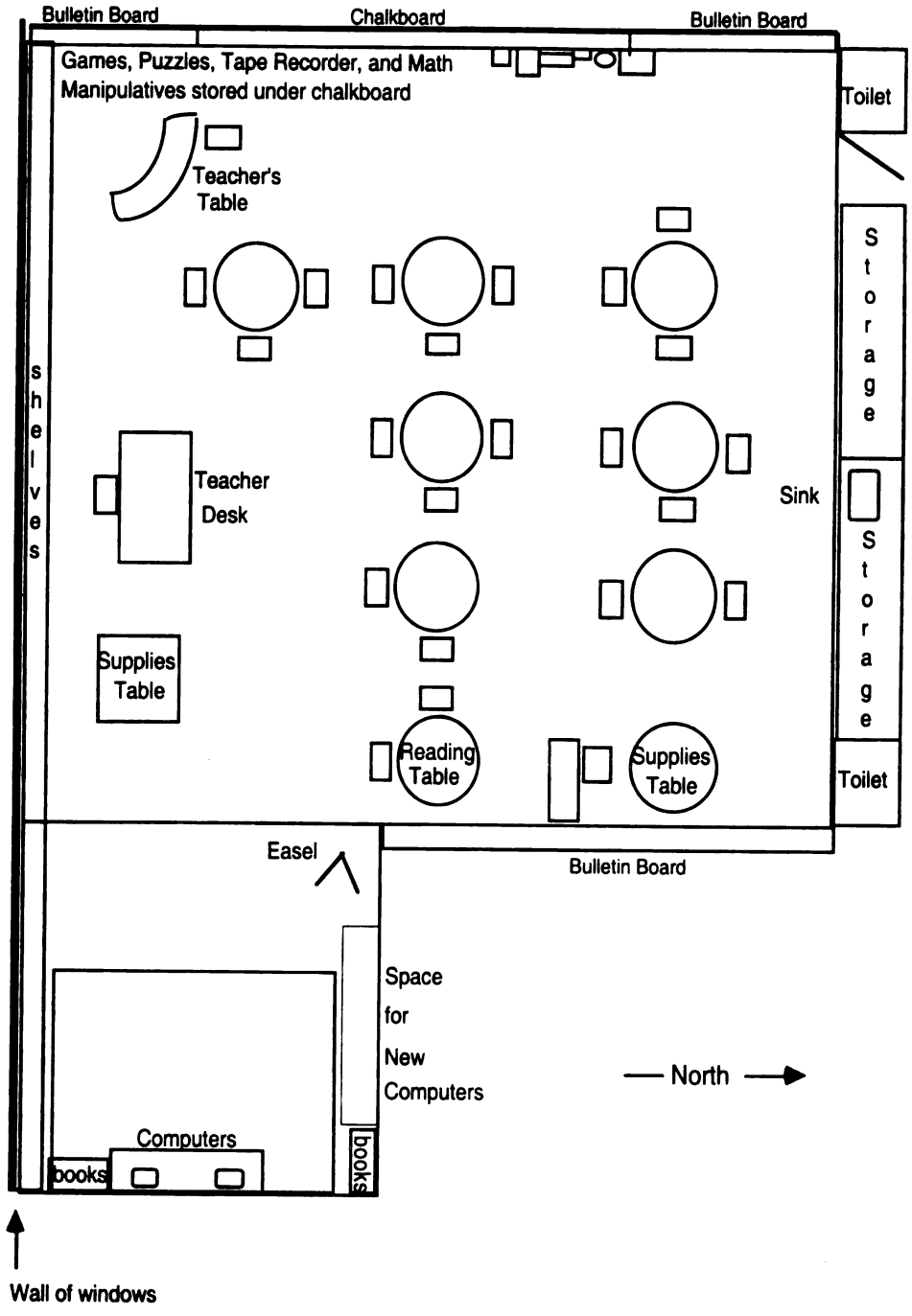

Figure 7-Diagram of Ms. Murray's Classroom

Ms. Murray's students sat in groups of three at round tables. She seated boys and girls together at most tables, though a few tables were "boys only." I believe this was more a result of the boys outnumbering the girls in the classroom, rather than a desire by the boys to separate themselves from the girls, or from Ms. Murray deliberately isolating them. I often saw the boys at all-boy tables talk to, and sometimes get up and go over to, girls seated near them.

Students were encouraged to talk with one another, though on occasion Ms. Murray would tell students to work without talking. This usually happened only when students took a spelling test or had been rowdy and needed time to quiet down. According to the children I spoke with, Ms. Murray told students they were free to talk quietly with their table mates and with students sitting at tables immediately adjacent to their own. In practice, however, I noticed students moving about the room talking with peers at distant tables. I never heard Ms. Murray tell students to return to their seats because of this, nor did I hear her tell any students they weren't to talk to distant classmates.

Students' location within a seating arrangement can sometimes indicate who has preferential access to the teacher, and thus the learning (Rist, 1970). While Ms. Murray's classroom did have a defined "front" where Ms. Murray often wrote on the board or from which she addressed the class, all students seemed to have a clear view of the board and teacher. For those who did not, moving one's chair in order to better see was an acceptable and encouraged behavior. Further, Ms. Murray tended to not stay at the front of the room. Instead, she often roamed about the room, stopping at each

table to talk with students. Thus, there did not seem to be a permanent "T" arrangement to the room that allowed only students in the front row or center column to have preferential access to the teacher.

However, certain students did seem to have an advantage with regard to their proximity to the chalkboard. During the three months I observed in the classroom, students' seating assignments did not change. That meant that some students always sat closer to the chalkboard. For the most part, these were students who were not disruptive and who were described by Ms. Murray as capable students. Other, less capable (according to Ms. Murray) or more disruptive (based on my observations) students tended to sit at tables further removed from the unofficial front of the room. The notable exceptions to this were two Hispanic boys who seemed to struggle with many learning tasks. They sat with Keesha, one of my focus students, at the front table nearest the door to the hallway.

The close proximity of some students to the chalkboard meant these students may have been able to rely more on it as a learning aid. For example, when Ms. Murray wrote "Good Morning" messages on the chalkboard, students sitting at the front could more easily point to a specific word if they needed help spelling that word. Students seated further from the chalkboard, while able to read what was written there, weren't as able to "zero in" on a targeted word. I often saw students from more distant tables get up and go to the chalkboard to better focus on a particular word while they were writing.

The table and seating arrangements were not the only feature of the classroom that physically supported a talk-filled and cooperative environment. There were large areas of the room where numerous children could gather, and they often did so. For example, when children finished their morning work, they were encouraged to play folder games that reinforced reading skills (e. g., short vowels, compound words), work on puzzles (The Lion King puzzle was especially popular during my time in the classroom), play with math manipulatives or checkers, and read together. I often observed a mix of boys and girls moving to the front of the room to play games or go to the back of the room in the carpeted reading nook to read books. Some children chose to read by themselves next to another child (much like young children engaging in parallel play), while others chose to read a book together, and still others chose to read a book to a small group of children (as if in imitation of their teacher reading aloud to the class).

The groups of students tended to be quite fluid, and during the times I observed, I saw no students being overtly excluded from a group by the others. That does not mean students never "picked on" other students. At times, usually when Ms. Murray stepped out of the classroom for a moment, I would hear a student start a game of "Who's Got Cooties?" or "Who's Better at_____, Boys or Girls?" These games spread across the room like wildfire, but they always stopped instantly the moment Ms. Murray reentered the classroom.

An emotional space for learning. In addition to the physical arrangement of the classroom, Ms. Murray created an emotional space that supported her students' learning. Ms. Murray spoke to her students in a warm, friendly manner. She seldom raised her voice with students (in reviewing my field notes, I found only two instances where she spoke harshly to the class), and she spoke to them in a way that struck me as being respectful of them as people. I never heard Ms. Murray "put down" a student in front of others, and when disciplinary measures for called for, she did so quietly (usually by taking that child out into the hallway) and in ways that did not appear to attack the dignity of the child being reprimanded.

This seemed to be a deliberate stance Ms. Murray took with her students, as her retelling of a disciplinary event indicated, "I think even when I call children on some inappropriate behaviors, we are able to leave at the end of the day still being friends, or still respecting what one another did. I think that just happened [with a student]. I don't think that person went home feeling totally wiped out by what I did. That person went home saying, 'Ok I'll come back tomorrow, and we'll start all over again.' That's what I always do. We start fresh the next day. I don't let anything carry over" (Murray interview, 4/8/94).

Ms. Murray also encouraged her students to treat one another in the same respectful manner. For example, she often talked with them about respecting each other, one of the building goals at Burnside. According to Ms. Murray, "It is in our mission statement that you will respect others, and we set about teaching respect to

everyone in the whole building. You will see me get pretty upset with children who aren't respecting other children, their space, their rights. We all have rights and if you are going to do something to someone and it's disrespectful, I'm going to call you on it" (Murray interview, 4/8/94).

The issue of personal rights seemed an important one to Ms. Murray. She reminded her students that each of them had the right to tell others when they wanted to be left alone, and she supported that choice. When one first-grade girl came to Ms. Murray asking if she could work with another girl, Ms. Murray replied, "No, because she has chosen to work by herself and that's okay" (field notes, 2/21/95). Ms. Murray also reminded the class that there were certain rights they did not have, "You have no right to tell someone their work is no good" (field notes 3/9/95).

In addition to rights, Ms. Murray also talked with her students about personal responsibility and how this responsibility was a form of respect. She reminded Malcolm he needed to control his wiggling because future teachers might misinterpret his actions as not showing respect (field notes, 3/9/95). During sharing time, when the entire class was gathered together in a small circle on the floor at the front of the room, Ms. Murray elaborated on this idea of responsibility as respect.

She recounted for the class a recent incident at a local high school where a teacher and student there had been involved in a scuffle. Ms. Murray talked with her own students about the choices both the teacher and student had made, saying each had had a chance to be responsible and not say anything that would make the other

person mad, but that neither had done so. My impression of her comments was that Ms. Murray was trying to help her class understand that neither the teacher nor the student had taken the responsibility to choose NOT to act, as if their lack of responsibility was a form of disrespect toward the other. These kinds of issues likely are not often raised in first grade classrooms, yet, Ms. Murray's willingness to discuss them candidly, indicates a classroom climate of acceptance and openness.

In summary, this was a classroom where talk was encouraged, and where students and teacher worked together. While Ms. Murray was clearly "in charge," she encouraged her students to help each other, in essence sharing the authority for knowing among all those in the room. Further, this was a classroom in which students' voices could be heard, where students could bring to the conversational table a variety of topics to explore and wonder about as a group.

Mediating the Ends of the Continuum

In addition to the physical and emotional climate of classrooms, teachers themselves influence, or mediate, what is taught and how it is taught (Parker and McDaniel, 1992, p. 97). Like all teachers, Ms. Murray brought her own knowledge and beliefs about teaching, learning, and learners with her into the classroom, and what she knew and believed mediated what and how she taught. In looking closely at Ms. Murray's knowledge and beliefs about curriculum, instruction, and learners, I came to understand that Ms. Murray brought together many philosophies. Because some of these philosophies were quite different one from another, I also saw

tensions in the ways Ms. Murray approached teaching, learning, and learners in her classroom. In this section, I examine Ms. Murray's beliefs and attitudes and explore some of the tensions I noticed.

Students and standards. Ms. Murray's instructional practices were influenced by her developmental perspective[4] on teaching and learning. For her, what to teach depended as much on what the children were ready to do as on what curriculum guides said should be taught. During an interview in March, I showed Ms. Murray a continuum representing two different approaches for thinking about what to teach. One end of the continuum represented a curriculum that emerges from the students' own needs. The other end of the continuum represented a curriculum designed to transmit a collected body of knowledge to students. My intent in showing Ms. Murray this continuum was to prompt a conversation about where Ms. Murray might place herself in one of the classic conversations in education: the question of whether instruction should be curriculum centered or child centered (Dewey, 1902/1956).

Underpinning a more curriculum-oriented approach is the belief that all children should be provided an opportunity to learn from a common, rigorous curriculum emphasizing the certain core subject areas (Bloom, 1987; Hutchins, 1936). A commonly heard argument in favor of this approach is that a society needs all its

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[4]According to Bredekamp (1987), the term "developmentally appropriate" refers to those practices that take into account the age appropriateness and individual appropriateness of activities made available to children and that take into account the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive needs of children (pp. 2, 3).

citizens to have a common base of knowledge in order for that society to continue to exist (Hirsch, 1987; Ravitch, 1985). A more child-centered approach to instruction grows out of the belief that education should acknowledge the particular needs of the children (Montessori, 1972; Neill, 1960; Pestalozzi, 1900). Others believe in a balanced approach to education that takes into account both an agreed-upon curriculum and the particular needs of the children (Dewey, 1902/1956). Figure 8 below shows where Ms. Murray placed herself with regard to the issue of the origin of instruction.

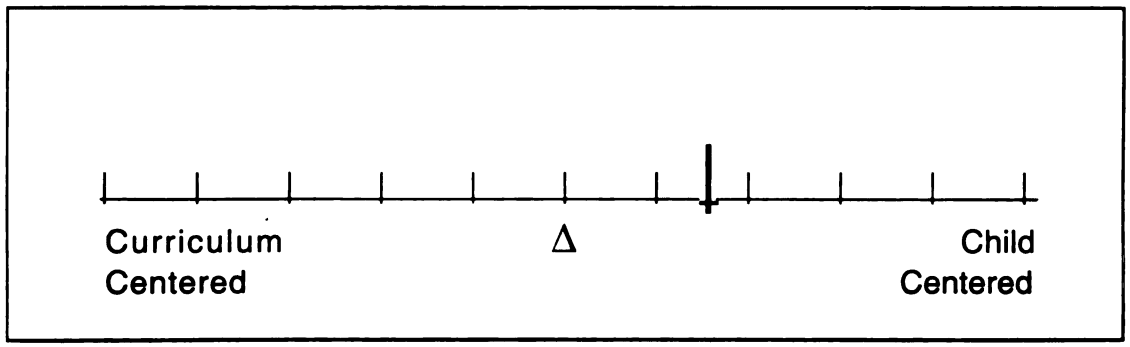

Figure 8-Approaches for Thinking about "What to Teach"

As the bold hash mark indicates, Ms. Murray placed herself slightly beyond the halfway mark toward a child-centered approach. Ms. Murray acknowledged she looked at her curriculum guides, but she weighed that information against what she believed about students needs. She elaborated on her placement by giving me an example, based on the wide range in ages of students in her class. At the time this study began, for instance, the students I focused on ranged in age from 6 years, 0 months to 6 years, 10 months. Ms. Murray felt some of the children who wouldn't celebrate birthdays

until near the end of the school year were not as developmentally ready to handle some first-grade work as were others. She explained that because of the age variations and resulting developmental differences, there was a "big range in which children will learn" in her classroom (Murray interview 3/29/95).

Age was not the only criteria Ms. Murray kept in mind as she planned instruction. She also considered the prior literacy experiences of her students. For example, Ms. Murray told me that during March, when the school celebrated reading month, she got a note from Gabe's mother stating they had no books in their home. In contrast, Mimi and Keesha each reported to me that they had many books at their homes.

The same range of experiences seemed to also exist with regard to students' writing experience. According to Ms. Murray, Pedro began the year not able to write the letters of the alphabet. She then elaborated, "He could not even pick his pencil up and put the symbols on the paper. Now, that's not a fear anymore. He readily picks his pencil up and gets the symbols down. Now getting him to understand that those symbols have a message or meaning, is really more difficult for him, and it may take him another year to understand that idea" (Murray interview, 4/5/95). Keesha, on the other hand, seemed to know about the meaning-making purpose of putting letters together to form words, sentences, and ideas as she reported to me that she often wrote letters to her father, who was not living in her home.

In light of this range of literacy experience, Ms. Murray felt asking all students to do a year's worth of first-grade work made

little sense. Ms. Murray did not hold a deficit view of some of her students based on their socioeconomic backgrounds. Rather, she recognized that some students started in quite different places with regard to their knowledge of literacy than did others. For children who came to school with less extensive literacy knowledge, it made little sense to her to expect those children to be at the same place at the end of the year as other children. The learning burden would simply be too great.

As a result of the age and experience differences among her students, Ms. Murray believed it made little sense to have all students engage in first-grade activities as set forth by some curriculum guide. Instead, her goal was to help each student grow as much as possible over the school year. She recalled having a discussion about this very issue during a faculty meeting in which teachers discussed curriculum goals for each grade level. During that discussion, Ms. Murray reported she had insisted that teachers needed to recognize not only where students were at the end of the year, but from where they had started as well.

Multiple and official languages for learning. In talking with Ms. Murray, I was able to gain insights into her thinking about the nature of learning and the many ways she fostered learning. I have already discussed how the physical arrangement of the classroom fostered an atmosphere of talk, and talk seemed an important component of Ms. Murray's views about learning. She believed her students learned from hearing one another talk about

the tasks they were engaged in and cited several examples of students who helped others in this way.

According to Ms. Murray, Keesha often helped Jaime and Pedro, two students whose first language was Spanish, with their tasks. Keesha appeared to foster the boys' learning in two ways. First, she would talk through the task and explain what to do in ways that Jaime and Pedro could understand. Second, she reinforced their learning when they accomplished a task in a manner that differed from the way she had done it. For example, Ms. Murray described how Keesha would "represent" Jaime and Pedro by going to another group of students, explaining what the boys had done, and gaining confirmation that others had accomplished a task in the same way.

Ms. Murray also encouraged other ways of learning and demonstrating learning. She often had students draw pictures of favorite parts of stories. This extended into other content areas as well. In February, as the class read about African American inventors, Ms. Murray had students draw pictures of the inventors and their inventions, collecting the drawings in personal booklets the students eventually took home. Ms. Murray's students were also able to use drawing as a way to learn in other classes.

During a unit on seasons, the science teacher (who also taught first grade) had Ms. Murray's students draw pictures of the changing seasons as viewed from the scene outside their classroom window. These scenes and accompanying captions became the students' personal books about the seasons. The reading specialist also had students draw pictures describing how they made pine cone bird feeders after reading a story about wild birds. Toward the end of the

year, the reading specialist, the fifth-grade teacher, and Ms. Murray worked together to create a unit in which the fifth-grade and first-grade students collaborated in the writing of original poems. Drawing was also a part of this assignment.

Of course, reading and writing were also vehicles for learning. Ms. Murray read a variety of genres to her class, including poetry, informational text about bears, biographies about African-American inventors, narrative favorites like Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you See? by Bill Martin, Jr. and The Napping House, by Audrey Wood. The class wrote almost every day, incorporating a mix of teacher-directed writing activities and students' personal journal or story writing.

Teacher-directed writing included letters of apology to staff members when students had misbehaved, a get-well letter for the reading teacher on the occasion of her car accident, informational text about Native Americans and African-Americans, short answers in response to mathematics problems of the day, creative narratives, content-area writing in response to spelling, English, and reading assignments, and journal writing in response to a teacher prompt. Students also wrote on topics of their choosing, and the genres chosen reflected those students learned from the teacher-directed writing assignments. A more in-depth discussion of student writing follows in Chapter 4.

Ms. Murray's students also engaged in cross-age reading and writing activities with a fifth-grade class at Burnside. Early in the year, the two classes completed an in-depth study of Native

Americans of Michigan. During the time of my study, the classes worked together to create their own books of original poetry.

Other means for learning and demonstrating learning included the use of drama, manipulatives, music, and games. For example, in April, the class presented a play about Earth Day for a neighboring first-grade class. During one of my observations, I watched as two groups of students used unifix cubes to see who could make the longest "train." Each group engaged in a great deal of counting and estimating before they tired of the game and moved on to something else. The music teacher often used songs to promote learning. Many days I listened to a joyful rendition of Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault. This song recounts the adventures of the alphabet letters. Games also helped the children learn. During free time, I observed many students playing different reading-related file-folder games[5], as well as commercial games like checkers or puzzles.

Overall, Ms. Murray's students were provided an array of ways to learn and demonstrate their learning. However, toward the end of the school year, I noticed more emphasis on pencil and paper kinds of tasks, as well as on students working by themselves. For example, I noticed students completing more phonics ditto pages, as well as a

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[5]These folder games consisted of commercially produced skill-related board games that the teacher could color, cut out and paste to file folders, hence the name "file folder games." The skills reinforced through these kinds of games are generally decoding or comprehension related. For example, a game might require students to identify the long and short vowel sounds of different words to locate rhyming pairs of words. These games do not require a great deal of time and can be used in centers or as extension activities for students who have completed other assignments.

comprehension page about a short story they read. While this kind of work did not dominate children's work, there did seem to be a subtle shift toward more "school-like" tasks.

Unfortunately, I did not think too much about this at the time, so I did not ask Ms. Murray about it. In looking over our interviews, however, I did find comments that seemed to shed light on her actions. According to Ms. Murray, at least one of the second grade teachers was quite traditional. Ms. Murray mentioned that during one faculty meeting, the second grade teachers had complained about the "holes" they had to fill in some of the children's knowledge. Ms. Murray related how she had explained to them the idea of developmentally appropriate instruction and helping children make a year's worth of growth, regardless of the point at which they may have started.

Ms. Murray also described moving to second grade as a "rude awakening" (Murray interview, 4/5/95). It wasn't until the children moved on to third grade that things "opened up" and the students were able to do much more "fun stuff" (Murray interview 4/5/95). Neither of the second grade teachers took their students to camp at a nearby nature center, an activity both the first and third grade teachers participated in, and one to which Ms. Murray said "everybody's been invited to go" (Murray interview, 4/5/95).

It may well be that Ms. Murray was trying to prepare her students for more traditional tasks or was trying to fill some "holes" before they moved on to second grade. It may also have been that Ms. Murray was trying to document her students' learning in "traditional ways" that the second grade teachers would

acknowledge. Whatever the reason, toward the end of the year, Ms. Murray's students encountered convergent, traditional type tasks in addition to more open-ended ones.

Teacher- and student-directed instruction. While Ms. Murray offered her students multiple ways to learn and show their learning, she also supported them by providing different kinds of assistance for that learning. In some cases, students engaged in tasks that were more teacher-directed in nature; in other cases, students exercised more control over their learning.

By student-directed, I mean learning experiences that students have more or less control over. They are able to make choices about what they read and write, and about how they will accomplish a task. In Ms. Murray's classroom, for example, students were often encouraged to write, but they were free to choose what they would write about. Students were also able to read books of their own choosing. Additionally, students were generally able to seek assistance from peers they chose, rather than only going to the teacher or a predetermined helper.

However, student-directed does not mean students are entirely free to decide what they will learn and how they will learn it. Rather, I see student-directed learning encompassing some degree of negotiation between teacher and student about what will be learned, as well as a gradual release of control over the decision-making power about learning from the teacher to the student over a period of time. In short, this kind of learning is more democratic, and there is an increased likelihood that students will be engaged in their

learning, and that students are more likely to see the worth of that learning in their lives (Brown, 1991; Shor, 1992). Teacher-directed learning, on the other hand, is less likely to go to the students to find out what they are interested in, and is more likely to revolve around what the teacher believes students need or would enjoy. In short, there is little negotiation between teacher and student about learning tasks or approaches.

As with other issues, I asked Ms. Murray to locate herself in terms of teacher-directedness and student-directedness of tasks and activities. Ms. Murray placed herself in the middle of the continuum, as Figure 9 shows.

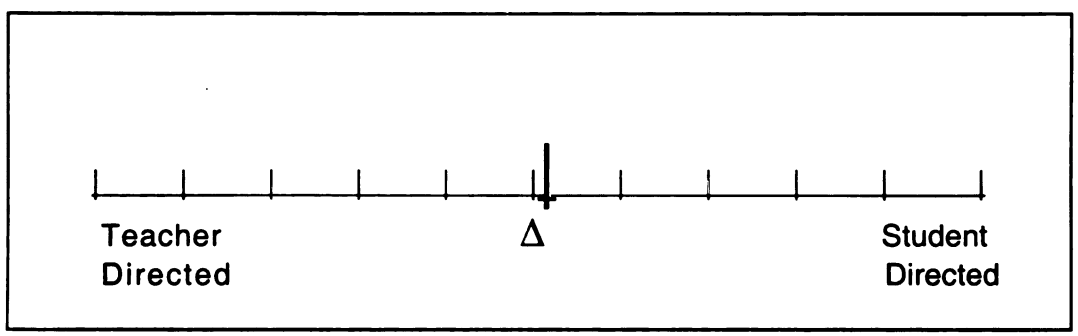

Figure 9-Teacher Directed or Student Directed Teaching

Ms. Murray placed herself in the middle of the continuum, explaining, "I'm in the middle with that. There are things that I'm definitely going to do that I think are going to be fun to do, and they usually are. But even the things that I choose to do, I allow students to have their input" (Murray interview, 3/29/95). Her description of the activities she selects for her students to do as "fun" indicates Ms. Murray does try to keep in mind the interests of her students, but

her comment also hints strongly that she makes most of the instructional decisions. While still clearly in charge ("I allow"), Ms. Murray is open to the idea that students should have input into their learning.

Ms. Murray's next comments shed light on how she views the ways in which her students influence the learning in this classroom, "They may change the way I teach the lesson, totally. It may be my idea, but just by working with them may change everything I'm about to do. I'm really flexible" (Murray interview, 3/29/95). Unfortunately, I did not realize at the time the importance of talking with Ms. Murray about how the day's actual activities might have differed from what she had planned so I am unable to identify instances where her instruction was influenced by students.

Ms. Murray did describe how she did things differently at Burnside than she had done in another, wealthy school, indicating it was due in part because of "the type of children" she worked with at Burnside. Though she did not directly say so, my sense in listening to her comments was that Ms. Murray was not disparaging her students. Rather, she seemed to be conveying the idea that she took into account her students and their wide range of abilities in order to create a more meaningful learning experience. If that meant changing her instructional plans, she did so.

The Good Morning Message was an example of a teacher-directed task. Sometimes, as in the earlier vignette, students were directed to copy a message Ms. Murray wrote. Other times, they copied and added to one of Ms. Murray's Good Morning Messages. Other teacher-directed tasks included learning a common list of

spelling words, learning sentence structure by placing mixed-up sentences in correct word order, and phonics exercises Ms. Murray did with the class. The purpose of these teacher-directed activities seemed to be to provided all students with common understandings about literacy, as well as to introduce students to the mechanical aspects of literacy.

Over time, however, the control of some literacy tasks shifted from Ms. Murray to the students, as when Ms. Murray had the class write letters to others. Like many students, Ms. Murray's sometimes behaved less than well while in the lunchroom. At those times, Ms. Murray required her students to write a letter of apology to the offended party. At the beginning of the year, Ms. Murray had students copy a form letter she generated, but over time, she turned the task of generating their letters over to the students, "I have written it on the board. Well, today we took it another step. I told them, 'you write the letter to Ms. Johnson (the principal)[6]. I'll give you the opener, now what can you remember and come up with?' It was okay if they helped each other. I don't care if kids help each other. They learn from each other. They learn those secrets that help others succeed, those who already know them. So, I want them to use whatever is around" (Murray interview, 3/29/95).

Thus, gradually over the course of the year, students took more control for their own writing. Where early in the year, Ms. Murray provided the whole class a letter of apology for each student to copy, toward the end of the school year, Ms. Murray was providing minimal support and direction, generally by supplying words she

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[6]Samples of these letters of apology can be found in Chapter Four.

knew the students might need or by telling them what couldn't be in their letters. The same shift was present in students' journal writing. Where earlier, Ms. Murray had written Good Morning Messages for students to copy or had told them what topic to write about, toward the end of the year, students' journal writing reflected many entries of topics generated by the students themselves.

Literacy skills and literacy process. Ms. Murray's beliefs about learning and learners were reflected in the many ways in which her students could both gain entrée into literate activities and develop their literacy knowledge. For example, watching a movie version of Rumpelstiltskin provided the children with visual and aural background information that could support their understanding of other traditional tales told to them during the RIF assembly. For those students whose prior knowledge of this genre potentially did not match that assumed by the larger school discourse, the movie provided an opportunity for them to acquire an understanding of "traditional tale" schemas--by exposure to the story grammar, figurative language, and stock phrases (e. g., "once upon a time") common to this type of literature. That is, the movie version provided the kind of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1983) useful to non- and emergent-readers.

Trying to read a story version of Rumpelstiltskin likely would have made heavy demands on many students' decoding and comprehension skills. The movie version, while still visual, required no specialized knowledge of the reading code. Thus, more

children were potentially able to make meaning from this story in particular, and about the genre of traditional tales in general.

Ms. Murray also fostered students' individual literacy development by encouraging them to draw pictures in response to stories they heard, read, or wrote. For example, after returning from the previously described RIF assembly, Ms. Murray asked her students to draw pictures of their favorite scenes from the stories they heard. In doing so, students engaged in a kind of retelling (Morrow, 1985). These retellings can potentially provide teachers insight into the ways in which their students comprehend text. Because many of these first-graders were not yet facile writers, drawing provided a means for them to "reconstruct the concepts and ideas being presented in the curriculum" (Gallas, 1994 , p. 118).

Further, drawing provided students not yet facile with the mechanical and sound-symbol knowledge necessary to easily and quickly write extended text, the means to elaborate much more in their retellings. For example, in the vignette presented earlier in this chapter, Ms. Murray asked students to retell their favorite part of a story, including characters and setting, through the use of drawing. She encouraged them to create detailed renderings, rather than a picture of only one person (see vignette, page 93), though not all students did so, as Tommy's "I'm almost done!" comment in the vignette revealed.

Student drawings also provided Ms. Murray an opportunity to "follow the children's own expressive interests while also using the artistic process as an integral part of the identification and expansion of their knowledge in different areas" (Gallas, 1994, p.

132). Ms. Murray appeared to do just this, when, in response to Tommy's "I'm almost done!" comment in the vignette, Ms. Murray replied, "Tommy, I want you to think about what you heard. One figure is not a scene from the story. You put some background with it" (field notes, 2/23/95).

Her comment indicates Ms. Murray intended the assignment as an opportunity for her students to reflect on the stories ("Tommy, I want you to think about what you heard.") and construct personal understanding of the story by creating a concrete and elaborated representation of that understanding ("You put some background with it."). She reiterated the idea that students were to think about the stories in a more analytic way when, after looking at other students' drawings, she reminded the class that she would not accept "one little picture of somebody. I want to see background. Where does the story take place? Who were the characters in the story?" (field notes, 2/23/95). In Tommy's case, the process of thinking about the stories seemed more individual in nature.

For Brandee, however, the construction of understanding was more social in nature, as evidenced in the following segment from the earlier vignette. The class had been working on their drawings when Brandee, who was working on The Rough-Faced Girl, asked, "Is she White or Black?" Ms. Murray told Brandee the main character was Native American, saying, " [one of the custodians] is Native American; what color is he?" Before Brandee could answer, another student informed Ms. Murray, "He's mixed!" and Brandee replied, "Well, I'll just color him light brown" (field notes, 2/23/95).

By pointing out to Brandee the custodian's ethnicity and asking her to think about his skin tone, Ms. Murray supported Brandee's understanding of the character in the book. The school-context connection Ms. Murray helped Brandee make also modeled for Brandee the ways in which readers use prior knowledge to aid their understanding of text. Later, Brandee returned to the issue of color, asking her table peers about the skin color of an Hispanic character from a different book. Ms. Murray overheard Brandee and again used the social context of school (pointing out to her the four students in the class who were Hispanic) to help Brandee draw on her prior knowledge as a way to better comprehend the story.

In thinking about the ways in which drawing helped students construct understandings about literacy, I was struck by the ways in which drawing served as a language for learning (Edwards, Gandini, and Forman, 1993; Gallas, 1994). Using conventional written text would have involved printing, a laborious activity for some, and, when words were unknown, writing also involved time spent thinking about spelling or what word to use. For some students, drawing is the preferred method for conveying ideas. While learning to express ideas in writing is certainly a goal most teachers would have for their students, young children or those struggling with written language expression may be motivated to develop their written language abilities if provided opportunities to use drawing and other visual arts as a way to demonstrate and extend their understanding (Clyde, 1994; Hoyt, 1992).

In describing why she used drawing in her instruction, Ms. Murray seemed to acknowledge the difficulties writing posed for

some students, along with their preference for drawing "I try to use all the skills. Everybody's not good at writing and answering questions. Someone might be a great drawer. Maybe you can answer my question by drawing. I don't just do all writing and reading" (Murray interview, 3/29/95).

In addition to providing a means of assessing students' story comprehension, drawing scenes provided students opportunities to talk about and deepen their understanding of those same stories. Brandee chose to draw a picture of Abuela, the grandmother in a tale from Mexico. Yet Brandee didn't have a clear understanding of what Abuela looked liked. She asked her peers and teacher what color to use and, with her teacher's help, extended her knowledge of race and ethnicity. In so doing, Brandee seemed to acknowledge the importance of understanding characters within the context of the setting.

Another aspect of Ms. Murray's instruction was her integration of the language arts: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Students in Ms. Murray's room often wrote or drew pictures about text they read or listened to. Toward the end of the school year, Mimi shared with me a book the class had written early in the year after hearing Ms. Murray read Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do You See? by Bill Martin, Jr. In the book written by the class, students had used the pattern in Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do You See? and applied it to school items. So, one page read "White glue, white glue, what do you see? I see a yellow crayon looking at me" (Mimi's book, undated).

On other occasions, students copied journal entries from the board and elaborated on them in some way. For example, during the month of February, students copied entries about African-Americans and their contributions to American society into their Black History Month Journals. Once this was done, students were encouraged to draw pictures depicting that person and his or her contribution. Additionally, toward the end of the month, when the principal brought in a set of beginning biographies about significant African Americans for the class to use, Ms. Murray encouraged her students to read more about the people they were including in their journals.

The integration of language arts was also evident in the amount of student talk heard in this classroom. Ms. Murray felt talk was an important factor in her students' learning, saying, "I've seen students get up and walk over to what's going on, to hear what's going on. You learn from oral language. Why would you hush somebody up?" (Murray interview, 3/29/95).

As she continued to talk, Ms. Murray explained why she felt student talk was so important, "It's okay to tell somebody, 'remember she said do this,' and to explain it back. Students need to hear [what others have to say] and [see what they have done]." Her comments highlight two purposes she saw present in student talk. First, student talk provided an opportunity for these first graders to acquire the secondary discourse of school. That is, talking with one another helped students learn certain aspects of "how to do school." As first-graders, these students were learning a secondary discourse that not only included content area knowledge, but the ways of acting within the school discourse as well. Hearing a peer

reiterate the teacher's directions for a task or activity might help another student better understand not only what needed to be accomplished, but how to accomplish it according to the discourse patterns of the school. Further, the act of explaining carried the potential for helping the student doing the clarifying. After all, in order to offer an explanation, the speaker had to understand (to a greater or lesser degree) what it was the teacher wanted done, internalize that information, and find the appropriate words to convey the message to someone else. Thus, the student providing help was gaining a deeper understanding of the discourse norms of school.

At the same time these first graders were learning the school discourse of their particular classroom, they were also learning to participate in the larger discourse of schools generally; they were learning how to engage in an ongoing conversation (Bloome and Egan-Robertson, 1993). In this sense, student talk about school tasks was a link both to the past and to the future. In this sense, the conversations Ms. Murray's students had among themselves were shaped by past conversations others had had and which would, at some future point, shape others conversations as well. Bakhtin describes this idea of current conversations building on past ones as dialogic and multivocal. From his perspective, no conversations stand alone; they are all connected to what has been (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986).

For the first graders in Ms. Murray's classroom, this idea of interconnectedness was an important one. In helping her students acquire a literacy discourse that differed from the more traditional

discourse about literacy, Ms. Murray not only provided opportunities for her students to develop a more empowering kind of literacy, she also created conditions that caused problems for her students. Because the discourse they were learning differed from the literacy discourse others had learned, Ms. Murray's students at times found themselves at odds with what others seemed to know and believe about literacy, an issue examined in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Second, student talk provided opportunities for Ms. Murray's students to develop and extend their cognitive understanding of the educational tasks within which they engaged. Their talk helped make visible the different kinds of thinking other students engaged in as they worked on learning tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, students were provided opportunities to learn about the different viewpoints of their classmates, and to learn about the different ways in which students thought about problems and issues. Further, learning about each others' ways of thinking about problems helped foster a supportive environment for student learning among peers. As an example, Ms. Murray commented, "I heard Keesha today. She came over and wanted a clarification on something, and I answered her. Before she got all the way back over to her table, she said, 'Jaime, you were right. That was the right way to do it.' So, she's reinforcing for them. Mimi is probably doing the same thing with Samuel. Samuel's her friend, so I believe that's going on there" (Murray interview, 3/29/95). Not only was Keesha's comment reinforcing for Jaime, it also validated for Keesha Jaime's way of thinking about a problem and it provided an opportunity for other students to see Jaime as a knowledgeable person. Thus, student talk

helped extend students' knowing by making visible others ways of thinking and by creating a climate of shared knowing, issues to which I will return in Chapter 4.

In addition to her comments, the arrangement of Ms. Murray's classroom also seemed to reflect her belief in the importance of student talk. All students sat at round tables and were encouraged to talk to their table mates, as well as to their peers sitting near them, while working. Seldom did I hear Ms. Murray tell her students to be quiet. In fact, I asked her about this after I heard a substitute teacher tell the class to be quiet. Ms. Murray readily admitted that was not a comment she often made. The only times I heard Ms. Murray request quiet from her students occurred when she was giving them important directions (as when she reviewed tornado safety procedures) or when the class had misbehaved while under the supervision of others (like the lunchroom aide) and Ms. Murray was reprimanding them.

While students often talked with one another about the work they were doing (as when Brandee asked for help with Abuela's skin color, Keesha validated Jaime's work, or students talked together to solve a mathematics problem of the day), they also engaged in talk not specifically related to the task at hand. This talk was more like the "talk-around-the-edges" Dudley-Marling and Searle (1991, p. 71) describe. That is, this was talk about events in one's life, or about one's future, or simply about the latest movie releases (as when Disney's The Lion King (Hahn, 1994) was released on home video).

While not directly task related, talk-around-the-edges is still important for it provides students opportunities to deepen their

understanding of how language works (Dudley-Marling and Searle, 1991). For example, one day Chelsea recounted the story of her dog chasing her around the yard and knocking her over. In order to tell her story, Chelsea had to draw on her knowledge of narrative storytelling and mood setting. She also had to anticipate questions her listeners might ask and incorporate them as she spoke so her audience could follow her storyline.

On another occasion, Mimi and Chelsea talked about being famous cartoonists. In order to do so, they had to draw on their knowledge of how to keep conversational partners engaged and how to maintain a degree of intersubjectivity.

Finally, the integration of language arts was not limited to the language arts areas; it extended across content areas as well. The first graders wrote several stories about social science issues, as when they put together books about Native Americans with a class of fifth-graders and when they presented a play about Arbor Day. Though the students studied science with a different teacher and that work was beyond the scope of my study, I did see evidence of much writing about science in looking through students portfolios. For example, they wrote booklets about the changing seasons and about trees. Students also wrote about mathematics, as when Ms. Murray asked them to describe in their journals how to solve a problem of the day.

Ms. Murray's instruction also reflected aspects of a holistic approach to teaching and learning literacy. By that, I mean students were much more likely to read trade books than controlled-vocabulary stories (though these were also available for students to

read). Students were also more likely to write what for them were extended pieces of text, rather than compose sentences using a prescribed list of spelling words (though on occasion, they did this as well).

When I asked Ms. Murray to place herself on a continuum representing different approaches to teaching literacy, she placed herself a little more than two-thirds of the way toward a literature-based approach, as shown in Figure 10 below.

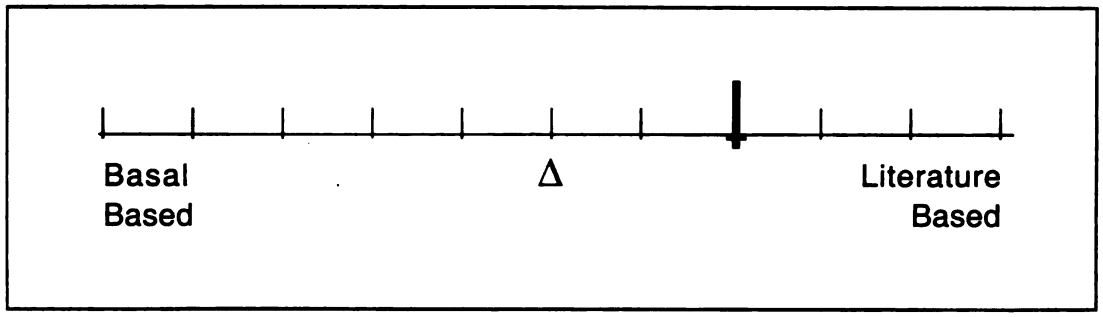

Figure 10-Approaches to Literacy Instruction

As can be seen in Figure 10, one end of the continuum represents a basal approach based on a sequential hierarchy of reading skills to be mastered while the other end represents more of a literature-based approach like that advocated by many whole language supporters[7]. Like others, (e. g., Throne, 1994), Ms. Murray recognized an either/or approach did not take into account the

[7]I recognize my depiction of the skills/whole language debate is somewhat awkward. In talking with Ms. Murray about this issue, I was trying to avoid negative or positive connotations. For example, ditto sheets, skills instruction, and the like are seen by some as always "bad," whereas reading a "real book" is always "good." In truth, however, sometimes skills instruction is "good," and giving a child a "real book" may be "bad." It depends in great part on how the materials are used and on their underlying purpose.

complexity of the classroom. Children, after all, do not come neatly packaged with care instructions proclaiming them "phonics only" or "whole language preferred."

Classrooms are complex interchanges where individuals' approaches to learning intersect with societal ideas about formal instruction; where student background knowledge merges with teacher expectations; and where learner interests must often yield to mandated curricula. In an interview conducted prior to this study, Ms. Murray acknowledged part of this complexity and her response to it, "Well, some kids need phonics, and some kids can't learn that way. I've seen children from either side of the economic spectrum who can't work one way or the other. I think you do need to offer something for the child in what they can learn in. That's basically where I am" (Murray interview 3/16/93).

In addition to her belief that not all children needed the same learning experiences, Murray also acknowledged that she did not believe there was only one way for students to acquire specific skills, "I do feel that some students need some skills instruction, but I don't think necessarily it has to come from a basal text. I don't believe it has to come from the basal. I think it can come from a multitude of other places. If the basal is what you have, I guess you've got to use it, but there are so many other things out there. So, I wouldn't just use that basal" (Murray interview 3/29/95).

For example, the Mapleton School District provided teachers with two instructional reading programs, a synthentic-phonics program, and a basal reading textbook series. Ms. Murray did not care for the basal series, and would have preferred a series

published by another company. In her opinion, the district's basal did not have many stories relevant to the lives of her students. She had spoken with other minority teachers in her building about the lack of multiple perspectives in the text, and according to Ms. Murray, they agreed that this was an area in which the text was lacking. Ms. Murray appeared to address this issue, as when she brought in multicultural literature for the class to read.

Trade books[8] were an additional source of instructional materials Ms. Murray drew on to help her students develop their reading abilities. In her previous position as a reading teacher with another district, Ms. Murray had used primarily trade books, something she said she "would just as soon do" (Murray interview, 3/16/93) at Burnside as well.

Ms. Murray felt supported in her use of trade books by her district's reading department, but as she put it, "The Board of Education [thinks the basal] is the Bible" (Murray interview, 3/16/93). And while Ms. Murray believed the basal could fit into her instructional program, she did not let it shape that instruction. Phonics-based readers, traditional basals, and trade books all had their place in Ms. Murray's classroom, for as she said, "there's a whole ton of [materials] one can use to teach reading" (Murray interview, 3/16/93).

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[8]According to Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown (1996), trade books are books "primarily for the purposes of entertainment and information" (p. 3). They are sometimes also referred to as 'real books,' or 'library books.' As can likely be surmised, unlike textbooks, trade books are not intended only for school settings.

Using a variety of methods and tasks also appeared in Ms. Murray's spelling instruction. During the time I observed in her classroom, for example, Ms. Murray provided students with lists of spelling words. These lists centered around a particular word family, or rime[9] pattern, as in the -at pattern in the earlier vignette. Each of the words in the list (bat, cat, fat, hat, rat, and sat) were based on a different onset attached to the -at rime. Understanding onset and rime patterns appears to promote students' reading and writing ability by helping them attend to word patterns (Stahl, 1992) and apply that knowledge in decoding unknown words (Johns and Lenski, 1997).

At the same time, Ms. Murray encouraged her students to use invented spelling[10]. Sometimes she would say a word slowly, as she did in the vignette presented earlier in this chapter. Recall that when a student came to her for help spelling the title of the story for which a picture had been drawn, Ms. Murray replied, "Listen to the sounds" then she said the title word slowly enough for the student to hear the sounds that made up the word and asked, "what do you hear?" so that students could listen closely for the sounds in the word. Encouraging students to listen for the sounds in spoken language is a strategy that can help them develop phonemic

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[9]An onset is that part of a syllable that occurs before the vowel. Rimes are the vowel and all that follows it (Stahl, 1992). So, in 'meat,' the onset is 'm' and the rime is 'eat.'

[10]Invented spelling occurs when children spell words according to the sounds they hear. Thus a child might spell 'cat' "kt" because she hears the /k/ and /t/ sounds but not the /a/ sound. Invented spelling provides a window into a child's phonemic awareness, an awareness that seems to play a strong role in learning to read (Adams, 1990; Stahl, 1992).

awareness and conventional spelling ability (Stahl, 1992; Yopp, 1992).

At still other times, Ms. Murray helped the class generate a common word list, which she would write on the chalkboard. This collection of words provided opportunities for students to expand their print vocabularies using words drawn from their listening vocabularies[11]. For some, the expansion might result from the simple act of putting a label on a concept already known. For others, the expansion might result from the learning of a new word and concept.

Ms. Murray also encouraged students to turn to other sources for help. Sometimes this meant asking a peer for help with harder words. Sometimes Ms. Murray would tell students how to spell really difficult words, or in the case of Mimi, demonstrate how to use a dictionary as a resource. Ms. Murray related how she had done this, "When I was a going over her story with her, I got the dictionary, and we looked up a word. She spelled 'ordinary,' and she was really close to the correct spelling. I said to her, 'You know, here's another way that you can help yourself.' After I showed it to her she said, 'Wow. That's really neat. I can use this?' I said, 'Sure. I'm going to leave it out on the table, and you can go and get it whenever you think you need to check your spelling.'"

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[11]The term "print vocabulary" refers to words a person has a conceptual understanding of and can recognize or generate using the conventions of written language. "Listening vocabulary" refers to words a person has a conceptual understanding of and can recognize when he or she hears them in spoken language.

Thus, Ms. Murray's students were provided opportunities to learn about words and spelling in variety of ways, sometimes by analyzing words using sound or sound-symbol knowledge, sometimes by direct instruction, and sometimes by turning to other sources.

Summary

This, then, was the literacy terrain within which Ms. Murray's students moved. The terrain was a complex one, based on a developmental perspective of learning, and holistic in its approach. Ms. Murray's placement of herself along the different continua, as well as her comments with regard to the positions she chose, left me with the impression that Ms. Murray was not only aware of, but actively mediating the complexity within her classroom.

Ms. Murray seemed to take into account issues regarding learning, learners, and literacy education as she planned instruction, and the terrain she and her students explored was filled with a variety of literacy nooks and crannies as a result. As I step back to get an overall sense of what I learned about this terrain, I am most struck by Ms. Murray's efforts to create an environment that would support all the learners in the classroom, as they gained competence as literate beings, and as they continued to develop a sense of themselves as individuals living in a complex world. In the next chapter, I examine the ways in which this literacy terrain supported and caused problems for students.

CHAPTER 4

LEARNING ABOUT DISCOURSES AND LITERACY

In Chapter 3, I examined the community and instructional support Ms. Murray offered her students from the perspective of a teacher and literacy researcher. In this chapter, I shift my focus from understanding the literacy *instruction* offered students to understanding the literacy *learning*, as Keesha, Mimi, Chelsea, Robert, Rondell, and Samuel described and demonstrated it[1]. In so doing, I am aware that teaching and learning are in reality tightly interwoven and not easily unraveled one from the other.

Focusing on the learning from the children's perspective helps me begin to answer my second and third research questions--understanding children's perceptions of their literacy learning, the ways in which school experiences shape those perceptions, and what these students are able to do with literacy. Further, examining literacy from the children's perceptions also provides a way for me to view their experiences in ways that illuminate issues of power, voice, and position (as described in Chapter 1) that I might not have seen from the perspective of a teacher.

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[1] Throughout the chapter, the children's comments and writing samples will appear in differing degrees. As I have thought about these first graders and their contributions to my learning, I have come to think of them metaphorically as "actors" in the production called "my study." While Keesha, for example, seems to have a larger "role" than does Chelsea, that does not mean Chelsea's contribution to my understanding is "minor." While Chelsea does make fewer "entrances" than does Keesha, they are important ones for helping me think about issues.

For my analysis, I have drawn on a variety of data sources, including multiple interviews with each child, and informal discussions with the children while they worked and played. The informal discussions were of two kinds. First, as I moved about the classroom, I would stop and talk with the children about what they were doing. I was able to record these conversations by wearing a small recorder connected to a broadcaster's microphone attached to my collar. Second, tape recorders placed at the students' tables recorded conversations among the children without the intrusion of my physical presence[2]. In addition, I drew on field notes and tape recordings taken during my classroom observations. Finally, I also drew on samples of students' work to inform my analysis.

In reading and thinking about my data, the broad issues of community and literacy again emerged. That these issues are the same as those I explored in Chapter 3 should not be surprising. After all, Ms. Murray emphasized a sense of community within the classroom and an attitude of caring among students. Further, since learning about literacy was a large part of these first-graders' school experience, it seems logical they would attend to that. Additionally, since I was interested in issues regarding literacy, my interview questions and the children's comments reflect that.

However, as I analyzed and thought about the data, I came to understand that for the children in this particular classroom, community and literacy learning were not separate issues. Rather,

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[2] See Chapter Two for a more complete discussion of my use of these various methods for recording conversations and for my thoughts as to the benefits and drawbacks of using each of these recording methods.

children in this classroom were members of a particular discourse community that strongly influenced their understanding of literacy. In this chapter, I first review the idea of a discourse, then examine the ways in which this discourse mediated students' literacy learning, using writing as an example. Second, I examine the ways in which the discourse mediated students' development of voice, sense of position, and control of a particular kind of literacy. Finally, I explore the ways in which this discourse did not fit other discourses of schooling, resulting in problematic consequences for the children.

Discourses, Literacy, and Learning

As I described in Chapter 1, Gee (1991) provides a way of thinking about literacy as more than reading and writing. For him, literacy is the control of uses of language in discourses other than the discourse one first learned as a child. Gee describes the term discourse as the particular ways in which language, thoughts, and actions are used to identify members of particular groups (1991, p. 3). Thus, if you are a member of an "accountant group," you will talk, dress, and act in ways that are different from other groups, like "teacher." People can belong to more that one discourse group, but must remember to dress, act, and communicate in ways that are appropriate for the group currently being joined. To do otherwise would mark you as "not a member" of the group.

As described in Chapter 3, the community in this classroom was a cooperative, talk-filled one in which children could request help from and provide help for their peers. Because of these kinds of interactions among students, the children had opportunities to

broaden their own understandings of the world and the different perspectives others had about the world. Further, in using what they knew of the world to help them learn more about it, children expanded their personal knowledge, narrowing the gap as it were between their own knowledge and the knowledge schools often value. For example, Samuel, Rondell, and Robert extended their understanding of writing--gaining control over the conventions of print, developing voice, crafting mood, and so on when they drew on their personal knowledge to write "spooky stories," a topic to which I will return later in this chapter.

Even the "talk-around-the-edges" (discussed in Chapter 3) helped students use their own prior knowledge to develop their understanding of the purposes and ways in which oral language "worked." As a result, this was a classroom in which students were able to draw upon their own experiences as they worked to construct their understanding of the larger curriculum of school.

Gaining Control of a Discourse for Learning

According to Rogoff (1990), "The value of cooperative classroom learning, in which peers work together on academic tasks and provide one another with motivation, guidance, and feedback (Damon, 1984; Slavin, 1987), also suggests that in circumstances in which children have practice in interaction, they may be very helpful to one another" (pp. 169, 170). Students in Ms. Murray's classroom interacted with one another regularly, and Ms. Murray encouraged them to do so in ways that were respectful, such as using active listening, helping but not giving answers, sharing and so on. This

caring, supportive interaction style was important to the children's growing understanding of literacy. In this section, I examine the ways in which this particular classroom discourse mediated students' learning as they engaged in writing tasks.

A Discourse of Pooled Knowledge

Ms. Murray encouraged her students to write every day, and often she asked them to select the topics they were going to write about. From the beginning of the school year up until the end of March, most of the students' writing had been on sheets of "first grade paper." These individual, unbound sheets of paper were what the students had been using to copy down, or write in response to, the "Good Morning Message."

During the last week of March, Ms. Murray gave each student a large-ruled, spiral notebook to be used as a personal writing journal. This was pretty exciting for some of the students, though Keesha, for one, wasn't convinced she would be able to keep her journal. In talking with her about the new journals, Keesha felt sure the class would have to give back their journals at the end of the year. Earlier in the year, Keesha had seen Ms. Murray tear pages out of a spiral notebook and give the notebook to Mimi. Mimi was going to miss school for a week while her family vacationed. Ms. Murray had removed pages from her own spiral notebook and given the notebook to Mimi so Mimi could keep a journal of her trip. Ms. Murray did that, she said, because Mimi's mother thought Mimi should have school work to do and Ms. Murray didn't want Mimi to do many worksheets. Because of what she had seen, Keesha thought the writing journals

would somehow be recycled for next year's class. Once Keesha found out she did in fact get to keep her journal, she seemed very pleased.

On the day the students were first going to write in their new journals, Ms. Murray had the class brainstorm a variety of topics about which to write. That day, as well as on other occasions, I did observe that some students chose to write about a topic generated by the whole group. Other times, students wrote about topics of Ms. Murray's choosing, as when they copied down the "Good Morning" message, or wrote in response to a prompt like "What's at the end of the rainbow?" Still other times, students came up with their own topics. Mimi, for example, often wrote about her friends, what she was planning to do later in the day or week, or why she liked her teacher. Students also generated ideas for writing by talking with one another. For example, Samuel told me that Robert, Rondell, and he often talked to each other as they thought of topics for their writing, "Um, lemme think. First we think about [our stories] and we tell each other [about them]. Then we all write" (Samuel interview 4/25/95).

In addition to helping each other think of story ideas, Robert, Rondell, and Samuel turned to one another for help with spelling or the mechanics of writing. Because these boys were beginning writers, their spelling and conventions-of-writing abilities had not yet been over learned to the point that calling up a word and writing it down conventionally was an automatic process. Depending on one another for the conventions of school-valued literacy increased the available pool of information each of the boys had to work with. What Samuel didn't know, Robert or Rondell might. As Samuel noted,

"Sometimes Rondell needs a word, and it's on my paper, and I let him copy."

I do not mean to imply that Robert, Rondell, and Samuel were overly concerned with the conventions of writing. They did use inventive spelling; they left off punctuation at the ends of sentences, and so on. However, these boys were also developing both an understanding of conventional text and a pool of knowledge about text, and having each other to draw on for help when needed helped them further their ability to gain control over the conventions of writing. In this regard, their use of the discourse helped Robert, Rondell, and Samuel tap into a much larger "database" of knowledge than any one of the boys possessed separately. Like the "funds of knowledge" the adults of Moll's (1990) studies tapped into, Robert, Rondell, and Samuel were able to extend their writing abilities because they had the resources of each other at hand from which to draw.

In addition to talking about ideas for stories and helping one another with the conventions of writing, Rondell, Robert, and Samuel talked about the "stuff" that went into their stories. Doing so helped them elaborate on their initial ideas, but it also helped them create place holders for those ideas.

Rondell	We were thinking of the stuff for our stories.
R	And so, why do you need to talk as you think about stuff for your stories?
Rondell	Because it gives us, we remember our stories.
R	So, if you talk to each other about your story while you're thinking, it helps you remember your story?

Rondell Um-hm.

(Rondell interview 4/25/95)

As first graders still learning the mechanics of writing and spelling, the boys could more quickly think of ideas to write about than they could capture those ideas on paper. Sharing stories with each other increased the chances that if one of the boys forgot his story before he could write it down, he could turn to the other two for help.

Supporting One Another's Learning

Working with others was also a way for students to extend their own understanding about the things they were learning. Talking with her students even helped Ms. Murray clarify her understanding, as can be seen in the segment below. In February, the class attended an assembly and listened to a story teller recount several traditional tales. When they returned to the room, Ms. Murray asked them to draw a scene from their favorite story.

Murray I would like you to draw a scene from one of the stories you really, really liked. I liked all of them; it would be really hard for me because they were all very, very good.

Tommy I liked only one.

Brandee I liked all of them.

Murray I did too, Brandee. If you want to divide your paper into four, and draw a little scene from each, that's fine. It's up to you. Actually she did five, I think.

Student No, four!

Murray (Murmuring to herself the different titles as if counting) Why did I think there were five?

As the students worked, Brandee wondered what color to use as she drew the Rough-Faced Girl, and she asked those around her for help.

Brandee Is she white or black?

Student White.

The help Brandee got from this student wasn't accurate since The Rough-Faced Girl is a traditional Native American tale. Ms. Murray joined the conversation at this point, as if to help them think more about Brandee's question.

Murray The Rough-Faced Girl? She's Native American.

Brandee White?

Murray Is she?

Student Blood color.

Brandee still seemed to wonder if the color white would work, but the tone in her voice had a much more questioning quality to it than did her earlier question, "Is she white or black?" It was as if Brandee was trying to think about what Ms. Murray's comment might mean. Meanwhile, another student appeared to somewhat understand what the additional information Ms. Murray had provided ("She's Native American") meant. While there are a variety of interpretations one could make about the student's comment "blood

color," my sense in listening to the audio tape of this segment was that the student was suggesting a reddish-brown color, rather than alluding to any stereotypical notions about Native Americans.

Regardless of the student's intent, Ms. Murray seemed to think she needed to provide the students additional support, as she clarified her earlier information by asking them to consider a person they knew.

Murray	The custodian is Native American. What color is he?
Student	He's mixed.
Brandee	Oh. Well, I'll just color her light brown.

(field notes 2/23/95)

The school custodian was a person very familiar to the class. They often waved to him and said "Hi" when he came in the room or they passed him in the hallway and they saw him daily in the lunchroom. At least one student presumed to know the custodian well enough to comment on his background ("He's mixed!"). For Brandee, the connection to the custodian allowed her to select a color that she felt was appropriate. Her "Oh" had a sense of "now I get it," and her decision about which color to use seemed to me to be spoken with more assurance than her earlier comments.

As I thought about this exchange among the students, I perceived it to be an example of the group helping to support Brandee's understanding of the Rough-Faced Girl's identity. Brandee's knowledge about this character and this story appeared to deepen as she moved from considering the character as white (as

was implied in her first choice of color) to light brown. This kind of knowledge could help Brandee better understand the nuances in traditional tales commonly found in many cultures. As a variant of the Cinderella tale (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown, 1996), The Rough-Faced Girl (Martin, 1992) shared similarities with other tales of this kind, yet it also differed due to cultural variations. Understanding the Rough-Faced Girl's ethnicity may have offered an opportunity for Brandee to consider the similarities and differences of this variation of a classic tale in comparison to other versions with which she might have been familiar.

A Discourse for Trying Out New Ideas

Finally, talking together was a way to support one another's efforts as authors learning the craft of writing. Writers gain better control over their discourse as they move beyond conventions to add flavor and their own unique touches to text. In the segment below, Samuel's comments indicate that he, Robert, and Rondell seemed to be developing control over their discourse. The boys often read their stories to each other, getting one another's feedback about what they had written. Here, Samuel's describes what happened when he showed Rondell and Robert the "spooky handwriting" he was using in one of his scary stories.

R	And sometimes you're writing in spooky handwriting. Do you talk to Robert and Rondell about writing in spooky handwriting?
Samuel	Yeah.
R	And what do they say?

Samuel They get scared, and sometimes they shiver. Sometimes I get shivery.

(Samuel interview 4/25/95)

Rondell and Robert supported Samuel's use of this mood-creating device by shivering appreciatively and making comments about how scared the writing made them feel as they read the text. For Samuel, talking to his peers appeared to support the development of his craft as a writer. The response he received from his friends (shivering and getting scared) seemed, from my perspective, to help him think about what he did as a writer in relation to his audience.

Samuel seemed to use Robert and Rondell as sounding boards to try out a new idea before making it part of his writer's toolbox. Their discourse allowed Samuel to visualize his thinking about how to make his writing more appealing to his audience. Robert and Rondell's response validated Samuel's thinking about his writing. In *talking about* language, rather than just *using* language, the boys engaged in a consideration of language as a entity to be studied in its own right. Their conversation provided an opportunity for the boys to develop a metalinguistic awareness about writing and to gain more control over this secondary discourse.

I doubt that Rondell and Robert were truly scared by Samuel's spooky handwriting, but their reactions to his idea likely validated Samuel's attempt at establishing mood. Further, talking with one another helped these boys see the ways in which they could be resources for one another, so that they were not totally dependent on their teacher as a source of knowing. Each served as a sounding

board for the others' ideas, and as a source of information about spelling, mechanics, and style. Finally, talking with each other helped the boys get new ideas for their own writing. I am not sure who introduced scary stories to the group, but each of the boys wrote several of these stories, ranging from dragons and witches to blood vampires and monsters with 101 eyes.

Gaining Control of a Discourse for Living

While schools are charged with helping the next generation acquire the knowledge and thinking skills they will need to perpetuate the society to which they belong, schools also play a role in students' socialization as members of that society. The discourse community to which these first graders belonged supported their development as functioning members of a larger group. In this section, I describe how engaging in the discourse of this particular classroom helped students learn more about literacy and how to use it to make sense of the world around them.

"We Talk About Stuff That Happened Around Us"

Having opportunities to talk with one another as they worked provided the children a way of thinking about the world beyond their classroom. In the following interview segment, for example, Samuel related an incident that occurred at an elementary school near his home.

Samuel We talk about stuff that happened around us. I live by Glenn Road School, and I talk about the time a

> kid brung in a knife, and sometimes they tell on someone else.
>
> (Samuel interview 4/25/95)

Although Samuel did not say any more about the student with the knife, what he did say indicated he was concerned about the issue and about how to react to it. For students aware of others bringing weapons to school, the decision to tell or not poses many ethical and practical dilemmas and can have real consequences. Being able to discuss this topic with his friends provided a way for Samuel to begin exploring the range of possibilities open to him if he were ever in the know about a situation like the one at Glenn Road School. Whatever his reasons for sharing what he knew, the discourse community of his classroom enabled Samuel to bring to the conversational table a topic of concern to him. The physical structure and sense of community present in this classroom provided a context supportive of talking about and making sense of the world's sometimes scary nature.

"We Talk About Stuff That Never Happened"

The classroom discourse community also supported students' efforts to think about themselves in the world beyond their classroom. Mimi and Chelsea used talk to explore not only the space beyond their classroom, but a point in time as well.

R	Do you find it helpful to sit at a table with your friends?
Mimi	Yeah, someone to talk to sometimes.
R	What kinds of things do you talk about?

Mimi Uh, we talk about stuff that never happened, like we are famous, we rent limos.

R Really, what are you famous for?

Mimi Well, we made something like a cartoon.

(Mimi interview 3/15/95)

This idea of being adult was one Mimi explored further in her journal writing (see Figure 11).

When I grow up.
I will have kids.
I will get a job.

Figure 11-Mimi's Journal (circa 5/16/95)

For Mimi and Chelsea, the classroom discourse nurtured a creative interaction with their world. It also provided a way for the girls to project themselves into a different time and place. That is, the discourse of this classroom made visible the girls' visions of the possible and ways of thinking about themselves at a future point in time. By imagining themselves as famous and able to "rent limos," Mimi and Chelsea were linking their present lives to future ones, providing them a window through which to view their own futures. While they might not become famous cartoonists, the discourse of this classroom helped Mimi and Chelsea imagine themselves as

successful adults, able, in Mimi's case, to juggle the demands of family and career.

The discourse in this classroom community mediated students' learning about literacy by fostering a shared pool from which students could draw and to which students could contribute different kinds of knowledge about literacy (Moll, 1990). Since each of the students brought with them knowledge about literacy and language from home (Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981) and since the knowledge each brought was likely different, given the different backgrounds of the students, the pool of knowledge this community of learners created was informed and enlarged by the diversity of the students' individual knowledge. Much as yeast helps a dough to rise and increase, the discourse of this community extended both individual student's learning of and ability to use literacy, as well as the community's conception of literacy (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Having examined *how* the discourse mediated students' learning about literacy, in the next section I shift my focus to examine more closely *what* literacy knowledge Keesha, Mimi, Chelsea, Robert, Rondell, and Samuel demonstrated through that discourse.

Shared Knowing and Individual Ideas About Literacy

The students in Ms. Murray's classroom demonstrated an understanding of literacy that ranged from learning the alphabet (as Pedro was doing), to more nuanced uses of literacy present in Samuel's spooky stories. Just as the students' classroom discourse echoed and built on themes of community and learning present in Ms. Murray's instruction, so to did their understandings about literacy

reflect and grow out of their teacher's mediation of differing philosophies and beliefs about literacy. Below, I examine what this particular group of children had to say and could do with regard to reading and writing.

The "How" of Reading, Rather than the "What"

Early studies of young (approximately 5 to 7 years in age) children's perceptions of reading described children as having unclear or no ideas about how to read (Denny and Weintraub, 1963), uncertain notions of the purposes for reading (Downing, 1970; Reid, 1966), and misperceptions of their abilities to read (Mason, 1967). These early studies paint a picture of children as quite without "real" knowledge of reading, as Mason's (1967) conclusion implies, "one of the first steps in learning to read seems to be the realization that one doesn't already know how" (p. 122). In contrast, more recent studies, informed by ideas about emergent literacy (Teale and Sulzby, 1986), suggest children do have understandings about reading and that what they know is very much influenced by what they have experienced (Bissex, 1980; Dahl and Freppon, 1995; Harste, Burke, and Woodward, 1981; Michel, 1990, 1994). For example, when my twin nephews were two, I observed one of them (who is read to regularly) sit down and "read" a book aloud to himself, even though he was not decoding text in the conventional way. His behaviors, however, including holding the book as if reading (though upside down) and turning the pages (though not always left to right or one at a time) indicated to me his emerging understanding about reading.

Strategies for reading text. In thinking about what Keesha, Mimi, Chelsea, Robert, Rondell, and Samuel had to say about reading, I found they had several strategies to help them read text. For example, phonetic decoding was a strategy identified by most of the students. Keesha and Samuel described the process as "sounding out," while Robert described it in terms of spelling, saying, "you just got to spell in the words and then you know how to read" (Robert interview 5/2/95). Keesha and Robert demonstrated what they meant by saying the names of letters in words then blending the sounds together. Students' use of decoding makes sense since Ms. Murray included phonics instruction in her teaching of reading. Students were encouraged to listen for sounds (like short and long vowels) in words they read, both on phonics worksheets and in "real" stories.

Students also used picture clues to help them figure out words and to help them understand what the words said. As Keesha said, "whatever the picture is doing that's what the words say" (Keesha interview 5/2/95). Mimi also talked about the role of pictures, but when I asked her if looking at the pictures was reading, she said no but that looking at the pictures "helps you a little bit [because] the words describe the pictures" (Mimi interview 5/3/95). Samuel described a more arithmetic approach to using the pictures and the words, saying, "if you add the pictures and the words up, you might get it; you might know how to read" (Samuel interview 5/12/95).

Implicit in the students' understanding of the supportive nature of pictures to the text is an awareness of their role as readers making meaning from text. Mimi articulated this idea when

I asked her my "What is reading?" question, "[Reading] is something that you like to work at. You like to relate the pictures and who wrote it and talk a little bit about it" (Mimi interview 5/3/95). The idea that they had to interact with the text, the pictures, or both paints a picture of these students as understanding that reading is an interactive process between the reader and text, whose endpoint is the making of meaning (Wixson and Peters, 1984; Rosenblatt, 1978).

Another strategy students used to identify unknown words was asking for help from others, either Ms. Murray or a peer. Sometimes that peer was someone at their table; more often it was Mimi. Keesha, Chelsea, Robert, Rondell, and Samuel all said Mimi with a good reader and someone they went to for help. Mimi, on the other hand, only named Ms. Murray as someone she would go to for help. When I asked if there were any children she could ask, she hesitated, then said no. I don't think Mimi was being arrogant in her remark. Rather, I think she understood, that in this particular community, she was a very good reader. While other students might very well have been able to help her, she and her peers might not have seen themselves in this way. As Chelsea, Mimi's table mate, said, when describing Mimi's reading ability, "she can read hard books, [the] kind of books Ms. Murray will read" (Chelsea interview 5/2/95). At first glance, Mimi's reluctance to turn to her peers seems a contradiction of my earlier claim that students in this classroom pooled their knowledge and supported one another's learning. However, I do not believe this was a contradiction. While I did not ask Mimi directly why she did not turn to her peers for help, my hunch is that both she

and the other students likely saw her as much more like Ms. Murray in her reading abilities than like her peers. If so, Mimi and her peers may have felt the class had little to offer Mimi, even if their knowledge had been pooled.

Strategies for improving as a reader. In addition to the strategies these students had for reading text, I also found they had a variety of strategies for becoming better readers. One was persistence. For Robert, becoming a better reader meant, "try, try, try, then you get better and better and better" (Robert interview 6/6/95). Ms. Murray often stopped to tell Robert how well he was doing and how much he had grown. These kinds of comments, as well as the cooperative community within which Robert and his peers worked, may well have fostered in him the willingness to persist with learning to read.

The persistence theme was echoed in Chelsea's comments about choosing books to read. According to Chelsea, Ms. Murray brought in a wide variety of books for the children to read, "She gets hard books in for people who know how to read real good, and the people who doesn't know how to read real good, they get to read them kind of books, too. And she brings in easy books so people can read" (Chelsea interview 5/12/95). Having a wide variety of reading material helped the students develop an understanding of what they are able to read at a particular point in time, as well as enticed them to keep reading by making available interesting text for future points in time. According to Chelsea, Ms. Murray told the class they could try any of the books and if they found that a book was too hard,

they could "just get another book" (Chelsea interview 5/25/95). Robert talked about how he liked being able to read both "hard" and "easy" books and how, in so doing, he had discovered that sometimes easy books turned out to be hard and vice versa. Like Chelsea, when he had misjudged the difficulty of a book, Robert simply put it back and chose another.

Roller and Fielding (1992) discuss the importance of having a mix of difficulty in the books available for students to read and of the importance for creating within the classroom a norm that it is perfectly acceptable for everyone to be able to read any of those books. Doing so provides students a context for learning how to choose books that they can handle. Not only does this help students learn how to select books, it can also help them see the tracks of their growth as readers. What was once "too hard" becomes "just right," and what was once "just right" becomes "too easy" (Ohlhausen and Jepsen, 1992).

In addition to the persistence idea, all the students realized they simply needed to practice if they wanted to improve as readers, or, as Rondell said, "Reading, reading, reading, reading, reeaaad, read, read, read" (Rondell interview 6/6/95). Rondell's comment highlights an important difference in the instruction of good and poor readers--the amount of time students have to actually engage in the reading of real text (Allington, 1980; Allington, 1983; Collins, 1986; Leinhardt, Zigmond, and Cooley, 1981). The reading Ms. Murray's students did helped them develop automatic recognition of words, enabling them to spend more of their cognitive attention on

comprehending what they were reading (LaBerge and Samuels, 1974; Samuel and Kamil, 1984).

In comprehending, the students were then able to connect with text. When I asked Robert how being able to read made him feel, he replied "happy, sad, and mad, 'cause sometimes [books] talk about sad stuff, mad stuff, and happy stuff" (Robert interview 6/6/95). Finally, the students felt they had many options for how to "read, read, read" (Rondell interview 6/6/95). They described how they read silently at their tables or in the library corner, read to one another, and read to Ms. Murray, using both trade books and writing generated by their teacher, their peers, and themselves.

Handwriting or Story Writing

Ms. Murray's students wrote every day. As described in Chapter 3, sometimes that writing was copying into their journals a "Good Morning" message; other times it was writing in response to a prompt or about a topic of their own choosing. As with reading, the students learned many things about writing. I begin by describing some of the purposes for which students wrote, and present samples of student work that demonstrates those purposes. Then, I examine those samples for evidence of what Ms. Murray's students knew about writing.

Communicative purposes of writing. Ms. Murray's students learned that writing had a variety of communicative purposes. They used it to demonstrate learning, as when they researched Native Americans of Michigan with their fifth-grade partners and wrote

books about what they learned. On another occasion, Ms. Murray had students "show what they know" in a very different way. One day at the end of April, Ms. Murray was not at school. While she was gone, the class had apparently gotten themselves in trouble. The next day, upon her return, Ms. Murray had students write in their journals what had happened. Mimi's version (reproduced as written by Mimi) is shown below (see Figure 12).

4-28-95

Mimi

We were in the class
room when Mrs. X came
in. Eveyone was out
of ~~thier~~ their seats. And
there was lots of
noice. Most of them
went to the office.
Then we went to
Mrs. Y's class.
Then we came back
to the classroom
and finih our work.
And that's what happed.

Figure 12-Mimi's Report of What Happened

This journal entry clearly addresses the purpose for which it was written. There is a clear sense of structure that outlines what happened and when, as well as an overall sense of beginning and end. I will return to this piece of writing shortly to examine it further for evidence of what Mimi knows about writing.

Students also had an opportunity to learn that writing could be used to express remorse. Toward the end of March, the class misbehaved in the lunchroom, and the principal sent them to the library instead of outside to play. When Ms. Murray and the class returned to the room, she told them to write letters of apology to Mrs. Johnson. Ms. Murray wrote the principal's name and the word "sorry" on the board, then told the class, "You may not write 'I am so, so, so sorry'" (field notes 3/29/95). Students could use one "so" and had to explain why they were sorry (see Figure 13).

Robert's Original Letter	Conventional Format of Robert's Letter
Dear Mrs. Johnson, I am sorry dekis I den dab from the lunch room. luv Robert S.	*Dear Mrs. Johnson,* *I am sorry because I been bad* *from the lunchroom.* *love Robert S.*

* * * * * * * * *

Keesha's Original Letter	Conventional Format of Keesha's Letter
Dear Mrs. Johnson, I am sorry for making all of the noise and I am sorry for letten the class fight and in the lutromm I will never let the class fight. Keesha 3-29-95	*Dear Mrs. Johnson,* *I am sorry for making all of the noise and I am sorry for letting the class fight and in the lunchroom* *I will never let the class fight.* *Keesha 3-29-95*

Figure 13-Robert's and Keesha's Letters of Apology

Robert later used his knowledge of writing letters of apology when he and his friend Rondell had a fight (see Figure 14).

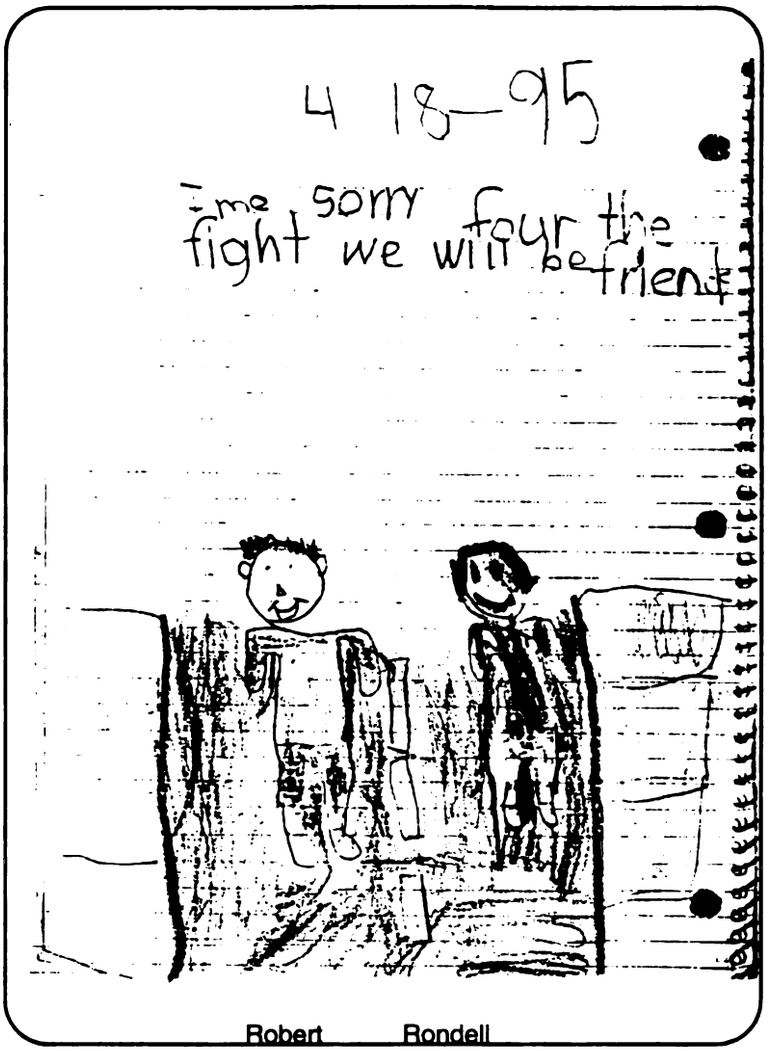

Figure 14-Robert's Letter of Apology to Rondell

As with Mimi's journal entry, Robert's and Keesha's letters clearly addressed the purpose for which they were written. I will also return to these letters in the following section to discuss what the letters reveal about Robert's and Keesha's knowledge of writing.

Finally, students also wrote to express their creativity. As mentioned earlier, Robert, Rondell, and Samuel often chose to write scary stories. The scary story in Figure 15 below was written by Rondell, and was his first entry in his writing journal.

Rondell's Original Story	Conventional Transcription
the whis niot	*the witches night*
3-31-95	*3-31-95*
one niot win I wus in	*one night when I was in*
bed I see sum whis	*bed I see some witches*
I wus os afad	*I was so afraid*
I rad down the sar	*I ran down the stairs*
ad the whis fold	*and the witches followed*
me down the sar	*me down the stairs*
ad I ur the whis	*and I heard the witches*
tr me nito a	*turn me into a*
dagne ad the	*dragon and the*
(end of story)	(end of story)

Figure 15-Rondell's First Journal Entry

What students knew about writing. In looking at the kinds of writing students did in this classroom, I found they wrote for many different purposes. As evidenced by the samples above, Keesha, Chelsea, Mimi, Robert, Rondell, and Samuel were aware of and could write creative stories, a variety of letters (I saw examples of apologies, friendship, and get well letters), and informational pieces (whether for research reports or behavior reports).

In addition to learning about different purposes for writing, students also learned about the conventions of writing through tasks that were much more teacher-directed than the above writing samples. For example, the Good Morning Messages students copied from the chalkboard provided them models of the conventions of

writing (paragraphs, capitalization, punctuation). Traditional spelling activities like the common set of spelling words were also part of the writing instruction, and students were often directed to use each spelling word in a sentence. Finally, students also learned about correct sentence structure by rearranging words in mixed-up sentences. For example, when given the scrambled sentence "test. Today we take a," students were expected to rewrite it so that it made sense "Today we take a test." Ms. Murray usually asked the class what clues they could look for to help them know how to reorder the words, and students were able to tell her they looked for capital letters and punctuation marks.

Students' writing samples also indicate these students knew how to write for a variety of purposes. Mimi's description of what happened the day Ms. Murray was absent (see Figure 12) has a clear beginning, middle, and end. The events flow logically and she makes clear the passage of time by telling which teachers either came into the room or the students left to go see. Rondell's story also conveys a very logical sequence of events. His sentences are long and convey a sense of cause and effect. Finally, Rondell makes good use of inventive spelling to use exactly the words he wants to use (witches, afraid, dragon).

Each of the student examples has a strong sense of content and organization. Further, each contains sentences that really say something and that move the action along. Each piece also has a sense of the author about it; though the styles are different, each author's voices comes through clearly.

What students said they were learning. The students in Ms. Murray's classroom wrote extended pieces of text for a variety of purposes, yet when they talked about writing, they mostly talked about their ability to print letters nicely, to use periods and capital letters, and so on. When I asked if they had improved as writers, I got comments similar to Robert's, "Yep. I make D's better, A's better, E's better" (Robert interview 6/6/95). Even Mimi, who seemed to have such a good understanding about reading as meaning making, said, when asked if she had improved as a writer, yes, she was learning to take her time and not rush.

These comments could be interpreted as the students not fully understanding just what it was they were learning, or that I hadn't phrased my question well enough. However, I think something else is at work here. In Chapter 3, I discussed the differences in what children know about language and literacy prior to coming to school and what they learn at school. At school, first graders do tend to engage in learning activities that focus on phonics, grammar, handwriting. This was true in Ms. Murray's room as well. Although students in this class engaged in a great deal of "real" reading and "real" writing, they also copied Good Morning Messages from the chalkboard, wrote sentences using a predetermined list of spelling words, and completed English usage exercises. So, even though I saw evidence of students engaging in the craft or process of writing, they chose to tell me about the more mechanical aspects of writing. I suspect this was so because these aspects were markers of their transition from nonreaders and nonwriters to "real" readers and "real" writers. Further, helping children with handwriting is

something many parents do at home; if this were the case with Ms. Murray's students, this parental influence likely would have reinforced the students' sense of conventional handwriting being an important part of writing.

In stepping back to think about what Keesha, Mimi, Chelsea, Robert, Rondell, and Robert knew about literacy, I saw some of the same issues in the ways they described their learning present in the ways Ms. Murray described her teaching. That this was so makes sense. Student learning is after all influenced by the teaching they encounter (Dahl and Freppon, 1995). For example, Ms. Murray's students tended to talk about the more mechanical aspects of learning to read and write, yet they were also able to talk about or demonstrate an understanding of literacy as meaning making and communication.

This reflected Ms. Murray's use of phonics as well as literature, of direct instruction in spelling and conventions of writing as well as student-generated writing. So, in addition to learning about the more mechanical aspects of reading and writing common to many first grade classrooms, these students were also able to talk about text, both their own and others, and draw on one another as resources as they extended their knowledge about and ability to use literacy.

Encountering Different Discourses

Up to this point, I have described what students said and could do with regard to literacy and showed how the sense of community and literacy learning came together to create a particular discourse

within the classroom, one built on ideas of respect, cooperation, and shared knowing among and between students and teacher. However, this was not the only discourse Ms. Murray's students encountered. Another, different discourse also influenced the children's understandings.

This discourse was a traditional discourse common in many schools: teaching is telling, silence is learning; life is a meritocracy so students must compete to get ahead; and choice is the province of grownups. Within the context of schools, it is a discourse of power and position (refer to Chapter 1 for a discussion of issues of position and power with regard to discourse), and it manifested itself in different ways in the experiences of Ms. Murray's students. In this section, I explore the ways in which this "other" discourse shaped student experiences, both within and beyond their classroom. I begin in the classroom.

A Community of Shared Knowing, But Some Know Better

Ms. Murray stressed with her students ideas of respect, active listening, and cooperation. She modeled the sharing of responsibility with her students, actively encouraged them make choices about their own learning, and supported their efforts to help each other learn as well. When I think of Ms. Murray's classroom, the words that come to my mind are democratic, noncompetitive, caring, and egalitarian. However, as I reviewed students' comments about literacy, themselves, and their peers, I began to see that even in this classroom issues of position and power were present, and that they were present through the subtle manifestation of the other

discourse, described above. While never officially, and rarely overtly, addressed, evidence that this discourse existed was present in conversations I had with the children about literacy.

In reviewing what students had to say about reading and writing, I was struck by the fact that every single child I talked with identified Mimi as being a good reader and writer. For some, including Mimi herself, Mimi was second in line only to Ms. Murray. It was as if Mimi became a benchmark against which the other children measured themselves. This seemed particularly true for Keesha. During our last interview, I asked Keesha if she thought she had gotten better at reading during her first-grade year.

R Okay. Do you think you're getting better at reading?

Keesha Um, not that good. Because I don't know every word like Mimi do. Mimi, she knows a lot.

Later in the conversation, I asked the same question about writing.

Keesha I don't know how to write that good like Mimi do. Mimi, she can write better than me.

(Keesha interview 6/6/95)

Now, it could be that Keesha recognized she still had much to learn and that Mimi represented a goal toward which Keesha was striving. But in looking closely at my questions and the words Keesha used to respond to them, I'm not convinced Keesha saw Mimi's literacy abilities as something to which she, too, could aspire.

To begin with, my questions in no way referred to Mimi. In fact, prior to asking Keesha if she felt she was getting better as a

reader, I asked her what she had learned during the year, and she answered without hesitation that she had learned to read books. Yet when I asked if she felt she was getting better at reading and writing, it was as if Keesha shifted gears, changing the focus from herself to Mimi. As I think about why this was so, I wonder if my use of the word "better" somehow implied a comparison to others--in this case, Mimi. Ironically, I used the word "better," rather than "improving," because I thought "better" would be more easily understood by first graders.

I am bothered by Keesha's comments downplaying herself in comparison to Mimi for two reasons. First, I am concerned that Keesha seemed to have already begun to compare herself to her classroom peers, even though competition was not an overt (or covert, as far as I could determine) part of Ms. Murray's classroom practice. In fact, the physical and emotional tone of this classroom seemed very much in line with the kind of classrooms found to be supportive of students' conceptions of themselves as learners (Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1984; Stipek, 1988). Second, Keesha was a student who *could* read, who *could* write stories, and who was willing and able to help her fellow students. Ms. Murray shared with Keesha on several occasions her opinion of Keesha as a reader and writer, with comments like, "You're not only a reader; you're a bona fide writer! My goodness, I'm impressed" (field notes 3/1/95). And Keesha even seemed to recognize her abilities on occasion. In an earlier interview, when I asked Keesha what made a person a good writer, she said, "Mimi writes good, she do her work good, she helps people a lot, *like me*" (Keesha interview 5/2/95, emphasis added).

Yet, when I asked Keesha to talk about how she had improved over the year, in essence inviting her to brag about herself, Keesha's immediate comment was one in which she compared herself unfavorably to Mimi. In fact, her comments came close to bragging about Mimi. It wasn't enough that Mimi was better than Keesha; Mimi knew "a lot;" she knew "every word." Keesha's comparison of herself to Mimi seemed to foster a lowered expectation for her own success in school. Why? It was as if the discourse that was supposed to support Keesha's growth as a literate person did not have enough impact to mitigate against other influences (including the more traditional discourse of school, as well as society's tendency to identify "the best" and downplay the accomplishments of everyone else). Thus, Keesha may not have been able to view herself as "able" and instead seemed to develop an ability-stratification mentality more common to a school discourse that emphasized competition and comparison among students.

Different Discourses in the Same Building

I also saw evidence of the influence of this discourse-of-comparison on Keesha when she shared with me an experience she had with the Burnside School librarian. In relating how she would describe reading to a kindergarten child, Keesha quickly replied, "Reading is, how you can read is to tell the kindergartner that if they don't know how to read, they can look at the picture and whatever the picture is doing that's what the words say. But if it don't have pictures, I can't read books like that. And we can't get them from the library either" (Keesha interview 5/2/95).

Keesha's comment, "And we can't get them from the library either" intrigued me, as it hinted strongly of a boundary beyond which Keesha and her friends could not go in selecting books to read. I asked Keesha to explain what she meant by her comments, and she said,

> Yesterday, at the library, my friend got a fat book, and it didn't have no pictures in it, and it was hard to read. But my other friend got one that was easy to read because it had pictures, and it was fat. Then Ms. Page, our library teacher, took my friend's book away because hers didn't have no pictures, and it wasn't easy to read, and she can't read that. When I went over to the shelf over there, I said, "Ms. Page, can I pick a book from here?" She said, "Yea, but not a fat book, because if you do, I'm gonna take it away. You get one more I'm gonna take that one away, too." She said, "Get a skinny one."
>
> (Keesha interview 5/2/95)

The librarian's goal in telling these first graders they could not have pictureless books likely was to reduce the girls' frustration with reading by limiting their choices to books they could read easily. Since many picture books are intended for beginning readers, I suspect the librarian was trying to be helpful. However, her "you can't" message had the potential for being misinterpreted to mean something very different.

"Can't" carries two connotations with it. The first is a negation of permission, derived from the interchangeable use of

"can" for "may." While many teachers still admonish their students on the 'proper' use of "may" and "can," Webster's Dictionary of English Usage (1989, referred to hereafter as WDEU) provides support for the interchangability, especially in oral language use. WDEU is even more clear about the negations "can't" and "mayn't." Both are used to express denied permission. It is this connotation, denying permission, I suspect the librarian intended when she told Keesha and her friends they could only select books with pictures. As a novice reader (based on my observations of her reading), Keesha did not yet have the ability to fluently read and comprehend books such as those in the Goosebumps[3] series, for example.

The potential problem with the librarian telling Keesha and her friends they did not have permission to get "fat books" arises from understanding the second connotation of "can't." According to WDEU, "can" commonly is used to mean "knowing how," or, as the American Heritage Dictionary (1983) defines it, "[possessing] a capacity or skill" (p. 101). Thus, "can't" conveys a sense of "not knowing how" or "not possessing a capacity or skill." Historically, these two uses of "can't" have been part of a school discourse with an ominous message for some children. For example, the research literature is filled with lack-of-ability-terms like "deficient," "disadvantaged," and "deprived," used by researchers to describe nonmainstream children[4]. In turn, these messages are used to justify the

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[3]A series of beginning- to intermediate-level scary stories popular at the time this study began.

[4]See for example, Flores (1992). This "lack of ability" message is not new. Gould (1981) documents the long history of white, male researchers "proving" the inferiority of women and people of color.

institutional denying of permission for nonmainstream students to participate fully in school.

Numerous studies document the differential access to education afforded nonmainstream students as a result of these restrictive views (Anyon, 1981; Jencks, et al., 1972; Oakes, 1985; Rist, 1970). The result of this "I deny you permission because you are not able, and because you are not able, I deny you permission" message is a cycle of lowered expectations and outcomes for many nonmainstream students. In light of these messages, how long might it be until Keesha, who already seemed to view herself as less able when compared to Mimi, transforms an externally imposed *can't* (the librarian denying Keesha permission) into an internally imposed *can't* (I don't know how; I don't possess the capacity or skill)? The question is not as hypothetical as it might sound; much research documents girls' declining sense of themselves as capable academically as they move through school (American Association of University Women, 1992; Sadker and Sadker, 1994).

These comments (however benign, even helpful, the librarian intended them to be) are important to consider for one additional reason; they contradicted the discourse of Keesha's classroom. In talking with Chelsea, one of Keesha's peers, I learned Ms. Murray brought in a variety of books for her students to read.

Chelsea She gets hard books in for people who know how to read real good and the people who doesn't know how to read real good, they get to read them kind of books too. And she brings in easy books so people can read.

R And anybody can read any of those books?

Chelsea Yea.

(Chelsea interview 5/12/95)

Providing books of varying difficulty for students to read is an important ingredient in helping children develop their abilities as readers. Roller and Fielding (1992) suggest that allowing children to "read" books beyond their current reading level can promote students' knowledge and make easier their future interactions with difficult text. Ohlhausen and Jepsen (1992) state that encouraging children to make choices about the texts they read helps promote students' growth as independent learners. Ohlhausen and Jepsen suggest students be allowed to experience a range of books--"too easy," "just right," and "too hard" (p. 34). Reading easy books encourages fluent reading and provides practice with personal reading strategies.

Periodically trying out books that are too hard helps children see their growth as books that were once "too hard" become "just right," and eventually, "too easy." Keesha described this process as she talked about her reading across the year, "I learned how to read easy books and after I read a lot of easy books that I know, then I got hard books that I know" (Keesha interview 5/12/95). Thus, even if Keesha was not internalizing a "can't" message, she still bumped into a different discourse that may have caused her problems because of the mixed messages she received. There was no question bumping into a different discourse caused Keesha problems the day a substitute was in charge of the classroom.

Encountering a Traditional School Discourse

In early April, Ms. Murray was absent from school. This was not a new occurrence, as she was quite active in both the local and state levels of her teachers' organization and often had to attend meetings during the school day. My intent that day was to interview individual students since I knew ahead of time that Ms. Murray would be gone.

Pedro and the substitute. I changed my plan to interview students and decided to observe them instead, when I saw the substitute teacher taking Pedro out into the hall. According to my field notes, "8:35AM. Pedro and Jaime are sitting quietly and Keesha is talking. Just after I come in, the substitute pulls Pedro out of the room and disciplines him. Wow! I haven't seen Pedro get in trouble before" (field notes 4/4/95). Later that same morning, as the substitute teacher left the classroom so the music teacher could work with the students, I heard the substitute say to Pedro, "Excuse me, we don't copy Keesha's or Jaime's papers," then observed her taking Pedro's paper from him (field notes 4/4/95).

Pedro was a very quiet boy who hardly ever spoke, even when Ms. Murray explicitly told the class they were free to talk with one another as they worked. According to Ms. Murray, Pedro was an English-as-a-Second-Language student and was one of the boys Keesha often helped. She did so by sharing her work with Jaime and Pedro, talking about it and helping them complete their work, without actually giving them the answer. Because of my teaching experience working with Hispanic students, I was drawn to Pedro

and thought we might get along well. In fact, I initially thought he might be one of my focus students. I was wrong! He was so quiet I couldn't coax anything out of him. I wasn't even able to speak with him enough to know how fluent in English he might be.

I couldn't imagine what Pedro had done to get himself in trouble with the substitute teacher. After I completed my observation, I made a note to talk with students about this day, as it seemed quite different from a typical day I was used to seeing. Rather than the "gentle simmer" of talk and activity that was the norm for these students when Ms. Murray was present, their talk and interactions with one another seemed more like that of a boiling pot threatening to spill over at any moment.

The next day, I came back to interview students about what I had seen. It was then I learned seven students had gotten their names on "the bad list," as Ms. Murray described it to the class. She told the class she would talk with those seven, whom she did not single out or mention by name, because, "some people who got their name on the list usually don't get in trouble." While she never said who the seven students were, I wondered if one of those seven might have been Pedro. I was surprised to hear how badly the class had behaved, as they usually were on task and self-controlled with Ms. Murray. Occasionally she did have to reprimand students or send someone to "time out," but never had I witnessed her writing names on the board or creating a "bad list."

While I wasn't close enough to the substitute or to Pedro to see what exactly he did that caused her to take away his paper, in thinking about the experience, I suspect Pedro was discussing and/or

checking his work with Keesha and Jaime. If that was the case, that kind of behavior would have been well within the norms for this classroom. Unfortunately, I do not have Pedro's account of the incident. The next day, when I asked him to tell me what happened the day the sub was in the room, he said he didn't know. Since I had seen Pedro go out into the hallway, and I had observed the substitute taking away his paper, I thought he might share if I asked him explicitly, "Did anyone get in trouble?" His answer was no.

As I've thought about what happened to Pedro that day, I've wondered if the substitute teacher might have been concerned about working at Burnside. As an urban school, Burnside might have brought forth stereotypical images of what the children would be like. As I considered that possibility, I remembered a comment one of Ms. Murray's colleagues made to me during my first week in the school, "when some teachers come to the 'real world' here at Burnside, they don't know what to do and are put off by the kids'" (field notes 2/23/95).

I've rejected the possibility that the substitute was concerned about working with Burnside children, or that she was "out to get" Pedro because her manner toward the other boys and girls didn't strike me as harsh or hostile. Nor do I think the substitute was being overly firm as a way to keep order--something I saw substitutes do in buildings where I taught. I am well aware why substitutes often take a firm hand. After all, being a substitute is hard work, and it has been my experience that the substitutes who are called back are those who don't cause trouble for the principal.

Rather, I suspect Pedro's experience is another instance of the discourse of Ms. Murray's classroom bumping into a different discourse. In many classrooms, children working together and talking with one another is still not the norm. What was acceptable in the discourse of this first grade classroom might be seen as cheating in the discourse of other classrooms. I suspect the substitute assumed Ms. Murray's classroom operated on that same kind of "default" discourse and felt Pedro was trying to "get away" with something. It would be expected, then, for her to stop Pedro from cheating. A clash of discourses also seemed to be the case with Keesha and the substitute.

Keesha and the substitute. When I asked Keesha to tell me about the day the substitute teacher was in the classroom, and how it had been different from or similar to a day when Ms. Murray was present, Keesha had plenty to say.

> [The substitute] erased the whole problem of the day yesterday. And I told her we wasn't supposed to erase the problem of the day. You supposed to leave the problem of the day up there but just erase the things so you can put a different color problem of the day up there; don't erase the part that says 'problem of the day.' She didn't hear me, so she just erased the whole thing.
>
> (Keesha interview 4/5/95)

At first glance, Keesha's comments could be interpreted in a couple of different ways: as a child who was being disrespectful of an "outsider" adult who was not privy to the classroom norms, or as

a child who was so used to a particular routine that she couldn't accept it when someone did something a different way (much like children do when a grandparent, for example, puts peanut butter on both pieces of bread, rather than on only one slice, as dad always does). But viewed from Keesha's perspective, her comments illustrate the collaborative norm of her discourse community. Ms. Murray had, on many occasions, erased only parts of the board while leaving other, recurring phrases, specifically, the "Problem of the Day" phrase. Keesha may in fact have been trying to save the substitute some time or effort since she likely knew the phrase "Problem of the Day" was a phrase that was more or less a permanent part of the chalkboard.

If Keesha's attempt was an effort to provide some "need to know" information to the substitute, then her talk was in line with the norms of this classroom. Helping those who didn't know how to do something was a theme constantly stressed by Ms. Murray. Later in our conversation, this theme emerged as Keesha described an incident where she and Jaime had tried to help another boy, sitting at a nearby table, with his work.

> Me and Jaime was all done with our problem of the day 'cause I helped him with it, [so we] was helping Marcus and the substitute made us go back to our seats. She didn't know we was up talking to Marcus trying to help him. So, then I told the substitute I was trying to help Marcus 'cause, we're not supposed to help each other unless it's people at our table or next to us, like the brown table, [where Marcus sits].
>
> (Keesha interview 4/5/95)

In this segment of dialogue, Keesha described what happened when she and Jaime, who had each finished their problem of the day activity, went to the table next to them to help Marcus, who was still working on the problem of the day. Yet the substitute made Keesha and Jaime go back to their seats. Keesha then tried to explain to the substitute what they were doing. Keesha's comment, "She didn't know we was up talking to Marcus *trying to help him* (emphasis added)," provides insight into why Keesha told the substitute what she and Jaime were doing.

From Keesha's perspective, the substitute wasn't aware of the two students' motive, nor with the fact that what they were doing was acceptable in this classroom. Keesha was giving the substitute the information she needed to see that what the children were doing was permissible, "we're not supposed to help each other unless it's only, unless people don't know at our table or next to us, like the brown table." From Keesha's point of view, it was okay to talk to Marcus about the work. In short, Keesha was acting based on what she knew about the learning discourse in this classroom.

As an outsider to the classroom culture, the substitute did not know this. Instead, she seemed to draw on another discourse, one that had children staying in their seats and working quietly. In fact, while I observed that day, I heard the substitute say just this to the class.

Keesha and I continued to talk about the similarities and differences in the ways the class operated when the substitute and Ms. Murray were in charge. At the conclusion of our interview, as I was thanking Keesha for talking with me and was just reaching to

turn off the tape recorder before walking down to the classroom with Keesha, she suddenly spoke again.

Keesha	But sometime I, I don't, I have to practice my Ss and Zs--
R	In here? How come?
Keesha	Like in the office we come from yesterday cause the substitute sent me down to the office, me and T'Meka, and we had to write our name down--
R	Why?
Keesha	--and stuff and then we had to practice our letters in our name.
R	How come you and T'Meka had to go to the office?
Keesha	Cause she forgot how to get the soap out at the sink. I was gonna help her get the soap out, cause she didn't know how to get the soap out, so I had to push that thing for her and turn the water on for her cause she had already rubbed her hands--
R	Mm hm. Mm hm.
Keesha	--and when you, in that sink, when you push, you push the water down it stays down by itself but with the other faucet, when you push it and you let it go, it don't stay on.
R	Is there a sink in the bathroom?
Keesha	Mm hm.
R	Oh, okay, so T'Meka forgot how to get the soap out and push down the faucet, so you were helping her--

Keesha Yeah, that's it. On the thing that you push, it says push, but T'Meka didn't know how to do it. She thought you push it up like that.

R Oh, and so what did the substitute say to you?

Keesha She told us to go down to the office from playin'. She collected our papers and told us to go down to the office. I said, "I know our way down to the office." So then she took us all the way down, and then we had to do our work down there.

R So the substitute thought you were playing instead of helping T'Meka. Okay. And so you had to do your work down in the office.

Keesha 'Cause the substitute told the secretary that we were playing in the bathroom, but we wasn't.

(Keesha interview 4/5/95)

Keesha's comments could again be interpreted as two little girls getting in trouble for playing in the bathroom. Yet, from Keesha's perspective this was not the case. Through her description of what happened, themes common to this classroom again emerged. First, helping one another was the norm in this classroom. According to Keesha's account, she provided T'Meka some needed assistance. Helping others was something Keesha often did; she was even encouraged to do so by Ms. Murray. Ms. Murray commented to me early in the study that Keesha often helped Pedro and Jaime with their work, and that she was good at it because she helped them do the work on their own, rather than simply doing the work for them.

A second classroom norm, that of helping those near you, also

seemed to influence Keesha's actions. T'Meka sat at a neighboring table to Keesha; to ask Keesha for help was well within the established classroom pattern. Further, Keesha's comments in this conversation indicate *she* thought she was helping, even if it might not have looked that way to the substitute. According to Keesha, the substitute told the girls, "to go down to the office from *playin'*" (emphasis added).

Finally, Keesha's actions of operating the faucet demonstrated a third classroom norm. I had on several occasions observed a second person operating the faucet of the large classroom sink while students washed their hands after an art project or before going to lunch. In fact, Ms. Murray asked students to do this, or did it herself, on several occasions. Keesha's comment, "Yeah, that's it, on the thing that you push, it says push, but she didn't know how to do it. She thought you push it up like that," indicates that Keesha recognized T'Meka might be having trouble getting the faucet to work, especially since one faucet required being pushed down while another required being pushed up. Having two people at the sink, one operating the faucet and the other washing up likely made sense to Keesha, especially since that was the way things were done in this classroom.

Summary

The students in Ms. Murray's classroom did learn about literacy, both its conventions, as well as a form of literacy discourse, in this particular classroom. Working together allowed students to pool their knowledge about literacy, and act as

resources for one another when a correct spelling or a writing convention was needed. Further, students were able to support one another's learning and help each other deepen their understanding about the things they were learning. Additionally, students were able to try out new ideas as authors by sharing their stories with their peers and getting feedback. However, learning about the conventions of literacy was not the only lesson these students helped one another acquire. They also learned how to use language and literacy for different purposes: communicating with others (as with the letters of apology or the descriptions of what happened while Ms. Murray was gone), demonstrating learning (as with the reports produced with the fifth-graders), creative expression (through story and poetry writing) and as a way to make sense of their own lives, both in the present and in possible futures.

Just as the classroom discourse and sense of community helped support students' literacy learning, so to did the kind of instruction Ms. Murray provided them. Ms. Murray's encouraging her students to use different strategies while reading (sounding out, looking at pictures, and asking peers or teacher for help), as well as her asking them what they thought provided students opportunities to think about the metacognitive aspects of reading. In addition, because of the nurturing and supportive classroom environment, students were encouraged to continue to improve as readers. There were no restrictions on what particular students could try to read, for example, nor were they forced to stay with a particular book if it proved to difficult. Finally, the classroom structure provided much time and many resources for students to interact with text.

Students wrote every day and were encouraged to read a variety of books.

However, students also encountered some problems as a result of the discourse in which they engaged. Keesha and Pedro found themselves in trouble with the substitute for doing things that were perfectly acceptable within their classroom community. Keesha heard mixed messages with regard to her ability to read different kinds of text. In none of these instances did I get the sense that the children understood, even vaguely, what had happened. Thus, important lessons about the discourse of this particular classroom seemed to be missing: that this discourse wasn't necessarily like other discourses, and that students needed to be able to engage in different kinds of discourse across different settings. The absence of these lessons raises questions about the ethics of this kind of classroom discourse, an issue discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

REVISITING APPROPRIATE LITERACY INSTRUCTION

In Chapter 1, I discussed different definitions of literacy and ways of thinking about literacy and discourse. I also outlined those theories I believe teachers draw upon as they develop their visions of appropriate literacy instruction. I then described the ways in which those theories informed decisions teachers made about four components of their instructional program: curriculum, instructional methods, the physical space of the classroom, and the sense of classroom community. I also discussed my values and assumptions about literacy instructional programs that I held at the beginning of the study in order to make clear the lens through which I viewed this classroom.

In this chapter, I revisit Ms. Murray's literacy instructional program using the instructional frame introduced in Chapter 1, then discuss the ways in which those features influenced students' literacy development. In the final section, I return to my initial research questions, and drawing on what I learned from Ms. Murray and her students, describe what I have learned about the kind of literacy instructional program I now believe would better foster the literacy abilities for both mainstream and nonmainstream children.

Revisiting a Literacy Instructional Program

Present in Ms. Murray's instructional program were several key features which supported students' acquisition of literacy abilities and the development of their sense of voice, power, and position

with regard to literacy. However, there were certain elements of that instructional program which, if more explicitly addressed, had the potential to enhance students' control over the literacy abilities they were acquiring and increase their awareness of and response to the different discourses they encountered at school. In this section, I discuss those important features and describe the potential and problems encountered by students as a result of the features.

Important Features of the Literacy Instruction

In any classroom, there are certain features of the instructional program that stand out, even to the casual observer. Some classrooms are marked by their complete silence, stark walls, or rows of desks. In other classrooms, observers immediately notice the clutter, the high levels of student talk, or the rudeness of students' behavior toward one another. In still other classrooms, observers are struck by the collegial interactions among students and teacher, the abundance of reading materials or student work on display, and the nature of class discussions.

As I observed in Ms. Murray's classroom, I began to see how three features played important roles in students' literacy learning. The first feature was the way in which Ms. Murray addressed the component of physical space to create opportunities for students to extend their literacy learning. The second feature dealt with the component of instructional methods. In Ms. Murray's classroom, the high level of student talk, among students and between students and teacher, provided an important way for students to learn. The third feature addressed the particular kind of classroom community Ms.

Murray fostered. In her classroom, Ms. Murray shared the authority for knowing by encouraging students to look to themselves as knowledgeable individuals.

While each feature added a distinctive aspect to the classroom community, together they created a classroom climate in which students were able to exercise voice and power and to claim positions as knowers and users of literacy. I begin with a discussion of each feature, then discuss the ways in which this particular combination extended students' literacy learning.

Use of Physical Space

Ms. Murray used the physical space of the classroom to create an environment that actively invited children to talk, listen, read and write together. Table mates interacted with each other both about their work and while they worked. For example, Keesha's proximity and willingness to talk with Jaime and Pedro helped support their learning. Robert, Rondell, and Samuel could turn to each other for ideas and commentary about their writing. Additionally, students sitting at neighboring tables could easily turn and ask one another questions or comment on their peers' ideas. Those sitting near Mimi, for instance, often went to her for help with spelling or reading. Brandee's neighboring peers helped her develop a better understanding of race as they discussed a character's skin color while drawing pictures of their favorite stories.

The arrangement of the space and items within it also provided opportunities for students to see connections between reading and

writing, and between literacy and other content areas. For example, multiple copies of the beginning biographies of African Americans were located at the front of the room, near the morning message describing those same individuals. As children went to the chalkboard to look at the morning message, the near proximity of the books created an opportunity for the children to browse through them and to see the ways in which the topics they were writing about could also be read about. Opportunities to make connections between written language and oral language were also available as children revisited stories and brainstormed lists generated by the class and recorded on large sheets of paper hung about the room.

The manner in which Ms. Murray utilized the physical space, and the ways in which students seemed to make use of the arrangement, have reinforced for me the importance of physical space as part of the learning environment. Beyond merely providing students an inviting place in which to learn, the arrangement of the furniture and empty spaces and the easy access to books and artifacts from prior activities (such as the charts of brainstormed ideas or the messages written on the chalkboard) created a reference zone students could tap into. Students didn't have to remember how to spell every word, retrieve past information, or depend on only themselves for ideas. This allowed them to quickly access needed information and get back to the learning task at hand.

Student Talk as an Instructional Method

A second feature of Ms. Murray's classroom was the amount and kind of student talk fostered. Ms. Murray actively encouraged her

students to talk with one another. If students came to her with a question, she would often direct them to figure out the answer by talking with other students. This emphasis on talk grew out of her belief that students learned academic content by talking with one another about that content. The result was a classroom in which children were not only encouraged, but expected, to turn to one another for support with spelling, story ideas, reading, math story problems and the like.

In some ways, the opportunities for talk within the classroom resembled an intranet system in which children could access information from one another in a variety of ways. Sometimes the talk was as public as a message posted to a bulletin board, as when Brandee and her peers co-constructed their understanding about race and color after the RIF assembly. Other times the talk was more like private email correspondence between individuals, as when Chelsea asked Mimi for help with spelling or when Ms. Murray showed Mimi how to use the dictionary.

While talk provided access to knowledge within the classroom, it also provided students opportunities to learn how to use language for a variety of purposes and to see the various ways in which the same purpose could be accomplished through different kinds of talk. During free time, for example, some individuals moved fluidly among a group of children playing checkers to a group putting together a puzzle to still another group constructing a "snake" of unifix cubes. Opportunities to talk with different children for different purposes provided students practice in the kinds of conversation often found outside of school. While most children do talk with family and

friends outside of school for serious and more casual reasons, classrooms often bring together children from different backgrounds and different social interaction styles. Thus, children at school can encounter a variety of conversational interactions for accomplishing the same purpose.

For example, an older sister who joined in a game with her younger siblings without asking their permission, and regardless of their feelings in the matter, might find herself in the middle of a fight, but it likely wouldn't result in permanent banishment from the family. The same kind of behavior at school likely would result in other students ostracizing the girl, especially if her behavior continued over time. Learning how to negotiate entry into a group without forcing one's way in, inviting in an outsider, and talking with peers about ideas are important discourse skills outside of school. I leave this study more convinced than ever of the need to encourage children to talk with one another in order to learn. Classrooms in which children have multiple opportunities to engage in a wide variety of social interactions have the potential to help children learn different discourse patterns and how to move more easily between discourses. I also leave the study with a deeper understanding of the teacher's role in facilitating this kind of learning, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

A Community of Shared Knowing

The third important feature of Ms. Murray's literacy instruction was the manner in which she encouraged students to view themselves as knowledgeable readers, writers, and problem

solvers. When a student came to her for help, Ms. Murray might provide an answer if she felt the question was difficult. If the question were one Ms. Murray felt the child could figure out, she often provided scaffolding by asking the student what he or she thought might help. If the child couldn't say or didn't know, Ms. Murray would ask a more specific question designed to help the child recognize which strategies might be helpful.

For example, if a child were reading and came to a word he or she did not know, that child might ask Ms. Murray for help. Instead of telling the child what the word meant, Ms. Murray might respond with "What can you do if you don't know what a word means?" If that didn't help, she might say, "You could look at_____" and encourage the child to fill in the blank. Often, Ms. Murray would suggest the child talk with another student. Turning a child's request for help back to the child shifted the authority for knowing from Ms. Murray only, to everyone in the classroom. This shared authority changed the character of knowledge from being a commodity passed from one person (the teacher or textbook authors) to another to something students could construct for themselves. They controlled knowledge, not the other way around. The result was students who saw themselves and others as knowledgeable. Thus, Chelsea would ask Mimi for help, Robert and Samuel were qualified to give editorial feedback to Rondell, and Brandee could depend on her peers for help understanding a character's ethnicity.

Even those students Ms. Murray considered weak academically were encouraged to work together. When three boys came to her for help with a math problem of the day, she sent them back to figure it

out together (one of the boys then came to me for help, telling me they weren't smart enough to solve the problem because they were just little boys). But Ms. Murray didn't send the boys away completely unsupported. She stopped at their table, asked probing questions, helped them identify important points in the problem, and congratulated them for their problem-solving abilities when they figured out the problem. They beamed. The result of this shared authority for knowing was a sense of "I can do this" among students in the classroom. They were willing to try, knowing they had each other and Ms. Murray to turn to if needed.

Another result of Ms. Murray's belief that students learn to solve problems for themselves was a reduced sense of a hierarchy among the class as to who was smart and who wasn't. In some classrooms it is very clear who the smart students are--the Eagle reading group has all the stars, while the Buzzard group doesn't. I recall in my own teaching experience a boy who, on the first day of school, told me he was "stupid," and that he knew this because last year's teacher had told him so. The rest of the class confirmed that the teacher had indeed let everyone know this boy was stupid. Even after two years in my classroom as both a fourth and fifth grader, this boy still saw himself as stupid, though I used every opportunity to convince him that I knew he wasn't.

Classrooms in which some students are viewed as smart while others aren't, create devastating and long-lasting consequences for children. In my literacy classes with preservice teachers, we talk about this issue. I ask students to reflect on negative experiences they had in school, and for those who choose to share their stories,

the pain of being labeled stupid is what they remember. It is a pain that lasts into adulthood, and for some of my students, their negative experiences are the driving force in their desire to become teachers. They want to create classrooms in which children are not subjected to the kinds of negative experiences they encountered.

For the most part, Ms. Murray's students saw themselves and each other as readers and writers, as evidenced by the long list of student names they gave me when I asked who among them were good readers and writers. None of the students described themselves as stupid, though Keesha did seem to see herself as less capable than Mimi. Although I began this study believing it was important for a teacher to see his or her students as knowledgeable individuals, I leave the study with a new understanding that simply holding this belief isn't enough. Teachers need to put that belief into action by providing many opportunities for students to work together to solve problems, to the point that doing so is commonplace. I wish I had been more aggressive about creating ongoing situations in which my "stupid" student could have had opportunities to solve for himself, or with a small group of others, a variety of learning problems. If I had done so to the point that this kind of learning was commonplace, my student might have come to see himself as knowledgeable.

Ms. Murray's use of the physical space, her emphasis on student talk, and her attitude of sharing the authority for knowing with students helped to create a classroom community in which students were able to learn much more than a functional kind of literacy. They also came to see themselves as able to exercise control over

that literacy. In the next section, I describe the ways in which students development of voice and power led to that sense of control.

Voice and Power in a Classroom Community

Ms. Murray's first graders had a great deal to say as they talked with one another, as they wrote in their journals and as they spoke with me about their experiences in Ms. Murray's classroom. They were willing to try "fat books," to write stories with a sense of structure, or to help peers with their work. Even when the first-graders worked with their fifth-grade buddies to write poetry, they saw themselves as having something to contribute, and several first-graders expressed exasperation with older students who didn't want to listen to what Ms. Murray's students had to say. In short, these first graders felt comfortable expressing their opinions and ideas through talk, reading, and writing; they were finding their voices as members of the literacy community.

Part of that voice was expressed through the first graders' willingness to use literacy for their own purposes. Robert's letter of apology to Rondell reflected an understanding that words could be used to heal and make personal relationships better. His "we will be friends" contained within it the desire to reassure and the conviction to maintain a friendship. This willingness to use literacy is an important, but often missing, aspect of becoming literate. "They know how to read, but they don't read" is a common complaint voiced by many teachers and parents about children. The literacy instruction Ms. Murray provided her students, composed of a mix of

skills and application and of teacher-generated tasks and student-generated tasks, offered students opportunities to develop not only the tools, but the desire, to use literacy.

In addition to believing they had something to say, and feeling confident enough to say it, Ms. Murray's students also exercised power over their literacy. Every day they had opportunities not only to learn about but to use the conventions of literacy and discourse valued by schools. They developed power over the writing process, from brainstorming topics to peer editing to the publication of final drafts. When reading, these students knew how to sound out unknown words and how to look at surrounding text and pictures for clues to meaning. If that failed, students knew they could ask a friend for help. Students felt comfortable "tasting" a variety of text, from easy joke books to "fat" books with few pictures, as well as a variety of genres covering both fiction and nonfiction. Students also knew it was perfectly acceptable to put down a book that proved for the moment to be too difficult or that didn't really appeal to them.

The idea that they can make these kinds of decisions about text isn't something all students know. I recall telling my class of fourth-grade remedial readers (most of whom were reading at a first-grade level) they could skip parts of a book or stop reading it entirely if they found it unappealing. Several of my students told me they didn't know it was "okay" to do that. They thought once they selected a book, they had to finish it. While this seems a tiny detail for those of us who are used to making choices about our reading, for beginning readers it is an important idea. When students feel they

are in control of their own reading and writing, a change occurs in the relationship between the reader and the text. Power shifts from the text to the reader. With that power comes the responsibility of engaging with the text to construct meaning. To do that, readers and writers need strategies, something these first graders were also learning about.

Knowing how to write rough drafts, figure out the meaning of text, sound out a word while reading, or draw a picture before writing were all strategies that enabled the first-graders to take control of their own literacy. While some students tried to use the strategy of immediately going to the teacher for help, Ms. Murray regularly encouraged them to try again on their own or ask a peer for help. In so doing, she was helping them develop the knowledge and disposition for being independent readers and writers. When needed, however, she was there to help students. As Ms. Murray moved about the room, she would remind students about strategies, ask probing questions, give hints, and provide the answer when necessary.

Learning about different strategies and learning how to use them helps students become strategic readers and writers. Good readers and writers have at their disposal a variety of strategies to draw on as they construct meaning from text, while poorer readers and writers tend to have only a few. By turning students' requests for help around and asking them what they might do to solve a problem, Ms. Murray provided opportunities for the first-graders to not only learn about literacy strategies but learn to make their own decisions about when to apply them. Further, asking students what they might do helps keep the array of strategies in front of students,

reminding them there are often multiple ways to approach problems. This kind of "What can you do?" questioning also provides the kind of scaffolding that helps students internalize and make automatic a way of thinking about text. Once students begin asking themselves "What can I do?" they begin to engage in the kind of metacognitive thinking that helps readers and writers construct their own meaning from text.

The classroom community and literacy terrain Ms. Murray provided students created an environment in which they not only learned how to read and write, but began to develop their voices and power as literate individuals. They were free to actively explore a literacy terrain that extended well beyond a basal reading text, English book, and classroom discourse in which they could only respond to teacher-initiated talk. Instead, these students were encouraged to engage in a range of conversations with both their teacher and their peers. They were encouraged to assume roles as both learners and teachers. They were encouraged to read and write a variety of texts. As a result, they developed a sense of control over and willingness to experiment with their emerging literacy abilities. While the instruction Ms. Murray offered her students held much promise for their literacy learning, there were also unintended problems, and it is to that discussion I now turn.

Problems of Literacy Teaching and Learning

The kind of literacy instruction Ms. Murray's students experienced encouraged them to learn together, talking and interacting with one another about a variety of issues. While this

certainly helped the students see themselves as exercising control over literacy, it also led to problems in different settings. In the lunchroom, the class was continually reprimanded for talking too much. In the library, students found they didn't have the same freedom to choose books as they had in their classroom, and the substitute viewed Keesha's attempts to help T'Meka as play, reprimanding her accordingly.

These problems were the result of the children not recognizing the different kinds of discourse they were encountering. Within the classroom, the discourse norms included freedom of movement, helping one another, much talk, and the right to sample a wide variety of text, but these were not necessarily the norms of other discourses. While the classroom discourse helped students develop their own voices and power with regard to literacy, it seemed less able to help them understand how the discourse of their classroom was positioned with regard to other discourses. As a result, students weren't able to see when the norms they were used to didn't apply in other situations.

As I began analyzing my data, I first thought students had difficulty because Ms. Murray didn't fully address issues of different discourses with her students, but I now believe that was not the case. She did address these issues, but in a very broad sense. For example, her conversations with the class about the walkout at the high school certainly had elements of how different discourse styles are used in different settings embedded within it. But that conversation may have been too abstract or the conditions too removed from the first graders' realm of experiences. Students may

not have been able to make the connection between discourse patterns that led to what happened at the high school and discourse patterns that influenced their getting in trouble in the lunchroom.

If Ms. Murray had incorporated a more explicit and focused examination of different discourses at a level first graders could understand, her students might have been able to see when those difference occurred in their own interactions. For example, when Ms. Murray talked with the class about the problems they had in the lunchroom, she told them that too much talking caused their problem. If she had extended the conversation to include a consideration of what "too much talking" looked like in the classroom, compared to the cafeteria, the students might have been able to grasp the idea that what was appropriate with Ms. Murray wasn't always so with others.

Ms. Murray's students encountered many different teachers over the course of a day or a week. They went to the library where the librarian had one set of expectations. Once a week, the reading teacher came to the room with her set of expectations, as did the music teacher. In many instances, I heard the teacher in charge remind the class to "behave," but never did I hear Ms. Murray or other teachers discuss what "behave" might look in different settings. Helping the students understand that Ms. Murray's definition of "quiet" might be noisier than another teacher's definition could have provided the students insights into the different norms under which different discourses operate.

Revisiting Beginning Questions

When I began this study, I wanted to better understand children's perceptions of their literacy learning. While I have gained insights into children's experiences with literacy, I also leave with a deeper appreciation for the role of the teacher in creating a literacy environment in which children can use reading and writing, listening and speaking for a variety of purposes and in a variety of ways. In this final section, I revisit my initial research questions and describe my current thinking about the kind of literacy teaching and learning I believe better benefits mainstream and nonmainstream learners. I begin by considering instruction.

Instruction and Students' Literacy Learning

The first question guiding this study focused attention on the kind of instruction offered students.

1. What are the school literacy experiences of nonmainstream students in classrooms where the literacy instruction is reflective of current understandings about literacy teaching and learning?

The literacy instruction that occurred in this first-grade classroom provided students opportunities to engage in a wide range of reading, writing, and speaking experiences. It fostered students' sense of themselves as literate individuals and encouraged among students a willingness to experiment with literacy for different purposes. This kind of instruction does not occur in a vacuum. It is shaped by a teacher's beliefs and theories about curriculum,

learning, and learners, as well as by his or her beliefs about the ways in which teacher and students should interact. This study has helped me reflect on the role of the teacher and the necessity of understanding one's own beliefs in creating instructional programs within the classroom.

The Role of the Teacher

As I think about the literacy abilities students in Ms. Murray's classroom seemed to be developing, I am struck by the ways in which Ms. Murray's beliefs about learners and learning shaped the literacy opportunities to which the students had access. At first glance, this seems so obvious as to not need pointing out. Teachers' beliefs (whether or not those beliefs are consciously acknowledged) shape the instructional programs teachers create for their students. For teachers whose beliefs seem at odds (as when a teacher creates a seating arrangement that encourages student talk but then constantly admonishes students to be quiet), the opportunities students have for literacy learning may be hampered.

Ms. Murray seemed able to clearly articulate her beliefs about learning, learners, and how to teach literacy, and those beliefs were well reflected in the literacy instruction she created for her first graders. For example, Ms. Murray knew she tended to draw from both her knowledge of her children's abilities and from the district curriculum guides to create the kind of content that would help her students grow. She also seemed to strike a balance in her instructional approach, sometimes being quite directive, while at other times letting students make choices for themselves.

As I think about the role Ms. Murray played in her students' literacy learning, I keep coming back to the idea of informed and ongoing decision making. Like pilots who make inflight course corrections in order to land at the appropriate place, teachers who constantly monitor both what their students are able to do and what they need to know are more likely to foster those students' literacy learning. Ms. Murray seemed to me to be a teacher who was monitoring her students' abilities, and who was willing and able to make "midcourse corrections" when needed in order to keep her students on track as literacy learners.

Ms. Murray did not seem to me to be throwing together a random and mismatched collection of "good ideas" she had acquired in different places. Instead, the decisions she made about what should go into her literacy instructional program seemed to grow out of a deliberate putting together of components that would mutually support students' learning. For example, Ms. Murray did incorporate some direct phonics instruction into her curriculum, while at the same time encouraging her students to read a wide variety of trade books. She had students learn a prescribed list of spelling words, while encouraging them to use phonetic spelling in their writing.

At first glance, Ms. Murray's instructional methods might seem like the unlikely melding of a skills approach with a whole language approach. But that isn't the sense I got. My sense was that Ms. Murray was creating a literacy instructional program that required not only the right mix of "ingredients," but careful attention to the timing of the addition of certain "ingredients." Phonics instruction, provided at strategic points, provided students the tools they needed

to continue growing as readers. Phonetic spelling, combined with the acquisition of a core of known words provided students with the tools they needed to become more fluent writers.

This kind of thinking about literacy instruction seems to me to be quite subtle and much more "behind the scenes" than traditional ideas about the role of the teacher as giver of information. It means teachers are at once creating the conditions for students' literacy learning, while at the same time participating in students' literacy learning. In order to do so, teachers need to be able to analyze and assess what their students are doing and what they need. Ms. Murray talked about this in terms of the developmental appropriateness of what took place in her classroom. She recognized that not all her students would learn all the first grade objectives. However, she did think all her students could make a year's worth of progress. She also seemed aware of where each of her students were and pointed out to them the growth they had made during the year. This dual role of acting and directing also implies a strong degree of intentionality on the part of the teacher.

By intentionality, I mean that teachers have a strong "big picture" understanding about where it is they want their students to "go" and act in ways that will help students get there. This does not mean, however, that teachers ignore the needs and abilities of their students, nor does it imply teachers go forth without regard to district and state curriculum requirements. The kind of intentionality I see teachers needing to engage in assumes that teachers have a good mental picture of the kind of literacy they wish their students to acquire, are constantly monitoring what their

students are able to do, are sensitive to aspects of literacy instruction their students need guidance with, and can plan instruction in ways that helps students continue to grow.

In Ms. Murray's classroom, writing letters of apology exemplified the way in which Ms. Murray balanced the needs of students with her goal for them to be independent learners. Ms. Murray knew at the beginning of the year that her students couldn't write these kinds of letters without help from her, so she wrote the letters and had students copy them. This provided a model for them. Gradually, Ms. Murray turned control over to the students for writing these kinds of letters.

This kind of intentionality also recognizes that the ultimate goal of teaching is to develop independent learners. For this to happen, teachers need to share the authority for knowing with the class, while recognizing that this sharing may need time to grow. Just as most parents are there to guide and support their children when the training wheels first come off the bike, the teacher who is intentional about literacy instruction analyzes what students can do, what degree of control they can handle, and plans instruction designed to increase the control students exercise over their learning. Like parents of beginning bike riders, intentional teachers let go as they sense their students have control. In a first-grade classroom, this letting go and sharing will likely look very different than in twelfth-grade classroom. While the entire process of schooling is one of shifting control for learning from the teacher to the student, at each grade level there is also a shift from more

teacher control at the beginning of the year to more student control by the end of the year.

I don't mean to imply that I began this study not realizing teachers needed to have a sense of where they were going or a desire to release control to students over time. What I have learned is just how important it is to keep in the foreground one's overarching vision. As a teacher educator, I leave this study with an increased understanding of how important it is for teachers to examine what they know and believe about learners and learning. Since those beliefs shape instruction, teachers need ongoing opportunities to articulate what they are doing and why they are doing it. As a teacher educator, I need to find ways of helping my students learn to see the importance of knowing what they believe and how their beliefs shape what they plan to do in the classroom. It is not enough that preservice teachers graduate with basic understanding of the various instructional approaches for teaching literacy. They need to leave with a beginning sense of their personal theories about curriculum, learners, language, and the politics of the classroom, then develop an initial plan for the kind of literacy program they want to create in their own classrooms, given their sets of beliefs.

Understanding one's beliefs and creating instruction based on them can be difficult. Most of my education students indicate they want to provide the kind of instruction that helps children acquire skills and strategies to become effective readers and writers. But my students also seem fearful of not covering everything "they" expect. When I press for more information as to who "they" are, students respond by naming the principal, next year's teacher,

parents, the school board, and the state. This desire to provide children meaningful instruction, coupled with a fear of leaving something out, can result in a "crazy quilt" of ideas about instructional programs.

For example, my students read an article by Clymer (1963) regarding the usefulness of phonics generalizations. In the article, Clymer reported his findings regarding the usefulness of common phonics generalizations, calculated by "dividing the number of words pronounced as the generalization claimed by the total number of words to which the generalization could be expected to apply" (p. 254). Of the 45 generalizations described, only 18 were useful 75 percent or more of the time. Many generalizations were useful less than 50 percent of the time, with several useful less than 20 percent of the time. Several students thought it would be appropriate to teach all the generalizations anyway. When I asked the class if they would consider a birth control method whose effectiveness was no better than 20 percent, everyone said no. When I asked why they would teach a generalization useful only 20 percent of the time, they claimed it would at least give students a generalization to try. When I asked how that thinking meshed with their desire to provide instruction that helped students become effective readers, the preservice teachers couldn't really say.

This kind of response from students, combined with what I learned from observing Ms. Murray, has reinforced for me the need to help my own students better articulate the connections between their emerging theories about learners and learning and the kind of literacy instructional program they would create. This seems

especially important now that literacy (and specifically reading) instruction is once again in the spotlight. As more and more states and districts mandate phonics-only instructional approaches for teaching reading, teachers who advocate a more holistic literacy instructional program must to be able to clearly and forcefully rebut critics of such an approach.

One approach I and other teacher-educators could use to help novices examine their emerging theories would be to have students read vignettes of actual classroom practice, then describe the underlying beliefs about curriculum, instructional methods, use of physical space, and teacher-student interactions that seem to undergird the practice. Students could identify ways in which the beliefs and practice meshed or did not mesh, offer suggestions for bringing the two into better alignment, and describe ways in which the vignettes were or were not in line with their own ideas about instruction.

A final class project might be to have students write papers in which they described their beliefs for each of the four areas above, then create a vignette of what their literacy instructional practice would look like, given those beliefs. Inservice teachers, too, might benefit from opportunities to examine their practice in light of their underlying beliefs. Teacher study groups, or even pairs of teachers could, using the four components outlined above, describe their beliefs and examine their practice in light of those beliefs. The result likely would be instruction that is more consistent and supportive of children's literacy learning.

Students' Perceptions of Their Literacy Learning

The second and third questions guiding this study were concerned with students' perceptions of their learning, and of themselves as users of literacy:

2. What are nonmainstream students' perceptions of school literacy, and how do school literacy experiences shape nonmainstream students' perceptions of themselves as literate individuals? What do these students know and believe about literacy?

3. How do school literacy experiences shape what nonmainstream students are *able to do* with their literacy abilities, and what they are *disposed to do*, given their knowledge and beliefs about literacy?

In Ms. Murray's classroom, students believed they were learning to read and write. Chelsea, for example, compared her learning in Ms. Murray's room with that she experienced at another school, and believed she was learning more in Ms. Murray's room. Other students felt they were learning to do things they could not do in kindergarten. Several children felt they had actually learned to read in Ms. Murray's room, while others realized they were reading more difficult books than they had in kindergarten. As writers, most felt they were able to use bigger words, had nicer handwriting, and were writing more in Ms. Murray's room than they had before.

Ms. Murray's students also used talk as a way to construct meaning and make sense of their world. They were actively

developing control over the kind of discourse valued by school as they solved problems together, as they reviewed one another's work and as they discussed books. These students were members of a literacy community, discussing issues in much the way adult members of a literacy community might talk about characterization or an author's technique. While their conversations certainly weren't as complex as adult readers and writers' conversations might be, Ms. Murray's students were engaging in a kind of literacy apprenticeship that fostered their disposition toward literacy.

At the same time, Ms. Murray's students seemed to have not yet learned how to "read" different situations and adjust their discourse pattern accordingly. Part of going to school is learning how to interact with different people and most students reach a point where they have a good idea about the kind of interactions different teachers value. As first graders, Ms. Murray's students may not yet have learned this, as their troubles in the lunchroom, library, and with the substitute seem to indicate. Thus, they may not have realized that the kind of discourse permitted by Ms. Murray was not universal within Burnside. The concern for teachers who foster among their students the kind of discourse present in Ms. Murray's classroom is not whether or not to do so, but how to help students navigate among different discourses. After all, it does little good to help students gain control over a more empowering discourse if, at the end of the school year, they are told not to use it with next year's teacher.

One way to help students learn to navigate among different discourses would be for teachers to encourage students to pay

attention to signals the other person might be sending about the kind of discourse expected. For example, most children can "read" their parents' moods and adjust their talk accordingly. Thus a child might respectfully request, but not beg for, candy while in the checkout line one day because the parent seems in a no-nonsense mood. On another day, the child might pull out all the stops and beg, plead, and whine because the parent's mood indicates these tactics will work. Now, I'm not advocating teachers help students learn how to manipulate mom or dad, but I am suggesting teachers could engage students in metacognitive reflection about situations in which the students have had both success and problems using language to achieve certain goals. Students might then become more aware of the ways they already pay attention to context, even though they may not be conscious of the fact they do so.

Teachers could even draw on examples from their own classrooms to help students develop this kind of understanding. For example, a teacher might help students understand the ways in which behavior at an assembly differs from the day-to-day behavior allowed in the classroom and explore the underlying reasons for those differences. I recall an instance from my own teaching experience in which I hadn't gotten much sleep one weekend because of a teacher-recruitment trip I had participated in for my district. On Monday morning, I alerted my students to the fact that I was extremely tired and irritable and that the high level of talk normal for our classroom needed to be turned down a bit. I could simply have told the class to "be quiet today," and left it at that, but I explained the logic behind my request: an increased likelihood of

students being reprimanded for what was normally acceptable behavior. Then I helped students find a noise level that was tolerable for me while permitting them to continue talking. Teachers might even point out to students times the teachers have adjusted their own discourse because of context. Helping students pay attention to issues of context and to discourse signals of those around them, as well as helping them learn that everyone uses different discourse for different purposes, likely would help students better navigate between discourses.

I and other teacher educators can help preservice and inservice teachers develop an understanding of the importance of student talk and problems associated with a classroom discourse that encourages student talk in various ways. First, we can demonstrate the benefits of student talk by asking teachers to listen carefully to the kinds of talk that occur when students are provided opportunities to do so. Encouraging talk among students in our own courses or among teachers in study groups can help teachers see the value of talk in their own learning. This understanding can then be applied to an appreciation of the value of student talk. However, helping teachers understand and learn how to teach about different discourses can be problematic.

Encouraging student talk is a topic I read about as I evaluate materials to use in my own classes. Much of what I read describes the importance of student talk in learning and discusses ways to promote student talk in the classroom, but there is very little discussion of the issue of discourse differences and how to help children learn about them. Yet, a teacher who tries to help students

understand the value of different discourses and their appropriateness in certain settings may be open to criticism for not teaching "standard English."

Teacher educators can help preservice and inservice teachers learn how to teach students about language differences in ways that don't make them vulnerable to this kind of criticism. When I discuss this issue in my own classes, I use my own southern dialect and accent as an example. When we discuss standard English, I exaggerate my southern drawl as I remind students that the "standard English" I learned might not be the "standard English" they learned. I share with my classes how I tried to minimize my southern accent during job interviews because some people associate that kind of accent with a lack of intelligence. I explain how I try to sound more "Southern" when I go home to visit my family so I'm not accused of having "gone Yankee" and how I try to tone down that same accent when I return north. I also stop and explain to my classes what I mean by terms like "ya'll" and "fixin' to." While humorous, the examples taken from my own life seem to help my students see that "standard" is a relative term and that each of us uses different discourses depending on the situation.

Helping teachers develop games in which children decide what kind of language might be appropriate for certain settings could also help students learn about this issue. My own elementary students enjoyed playing games in which they had to decide what kind of language, for example, might be appropriate to use when talking with the principal. Teachers could be encouraged to tape record themselves in different settings and analyze the different

discourses they use in a day, then discuss how they knew to switch between those discourses.

In addition to learning about different discourses, I would like to see every student develop the kinds of perceptions about and dispositions toward literacy that Ms. Murray's students did. Many students don't, however, because they are introduced to a literacy based on fill-in-the blank worksheets or contrived stories. This is especially true for nonmainstream learners. Too often, nonmainstream students receive a kind of education that reduces content to isolated pieces of information that seem unrelated one to the other. Poor and/or minority students, as well as those enrolled in less academically challenging tracks at school, tend to receive an education that overly focuses on facts at the expense of making connections across different content areas and understanding broad themes (Anyon, 1981; Oakes, 1985). Students served by remedial education, who are disproportionally from minority backgrounds, often encounter literacy instruction that is segmented into discrete skills in an attempt make the learning task more concrete and understandable (Allington, 1991). The problem with education that focuses only on facts or that reduces learning to a series of subskills is that it becomes an empty shell of what the content matter really is.

Literacy is not just the decoding or encoding of words. It is not simply the finding or stating of a main idea. Literacy is a complex interaction of the reader/writer with the text, embedded within a particular context. Students who are only provided opportunities to explore the fundamental mechanics of literacy

rightly walk away from it thinking literacy has little connection to their lives. That is not to say students should not be provided the tools for acquiring the literacy of power. All students should have a working command of spelling and sentence construction. Doing so allows them to use literacy in ways that will be recognized and accepted by those like employers or college admissions committees with the power to make decisions about the users.

At the same time students are learning literacy conventions, they need encouragement to use what they are learning to read and write a range of texts of their own choosing and to engage in the kinds of discourse valued by mainstream American society, as well as other segments of our society. In this way, students can not only develop an understanding about language, but can develop a desire to use language for their own purposes, whatever those may be, and to move more easily among a wide variety of discourses within American society.

Summary

This study sought to add to the body of knowledge regarding nonmainstream children's school literacy learning by examining the ways in which a particular classroom discourse did or did not support first-grade students' literacy learning. Findings from the study indicated that the literacy instruction in the first-grade classroom--in which the language arts were taught in a more holistic manner, in which students' ideas were made part of the curriculum, in which talk among students was actively encouraged as a means to foster literacy learning, and in which the teacher

shared authority for knowing with the students-- supported students' learning of literacy and their disposition to use literacy for their own purposes.

An unintended consequence of the literacy teaching and learning in this classroom seemed to be the development of a kind of school literacy discourse different from other, more traditional, school literacy discourses. The acquisition of this "different" literacy discourse appeared to result in some children experiencing difficulties in knowing how to engage in more traditional school literacy discourses. The study concluded with suggestions for ways in which teachers and teacher educators might help children develop knowledge about different discourses and how to think about and engage in those different discourses. Helping children understand these differences, and learn to navigate among them holds the potential to foster their abilities to use literacy in more powerful ways, ways in which their voices can be heard, and their position as knowers of literacy made clear. Children like Keesha, Mimi, Chelsea, Robert, Rondell, and Samuel deserve no less.

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