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HOW YOUNG CHILDREN IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AND
AT RISK CHILDREN DEVELOPED INTO LITERARY
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Joyce A. Urba

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HOW YOUNG CHILDREN IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AND
AT RISK CHILDREN DEVELOPED INTO LITERARY
DISCUSSANTS


By

Joyce A. Urba




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ABSTRACT

THE EVOLUTION OF A LITERATURE DISCUSSION GROUP:
HOW YOUNG CHILDREN IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AND
AT RISK CHILDREN DEVELOPED INTO LITERARY DISCUSSANTS


By

Joyce A. Urba


I conducted this study to explore if it was possible for very young children in special education and young at risk children to develop into literary discussants. This study addresses the need for research to enhance the literacy instructional practices for children within Special Education. Many Special Education students encounter difficulties in literacy (Englert, 1992; Wong, Wong, & Blenkisop,1989). The collaborative discourse with peers in discussion groups could help develop deeper insights in these students with poor comprehension. Also the focus on involving students in self-monitoring and regulating comprehension and response would benefit those with difficulties in metacognition. The literature discussions could be an avenue into the whole literacy experience for children who are frequently non-readers.

Historically, literacy instruction in Special Education has often been characterized by a decontextualized focus on isolated specific skills (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985: Heshusius,

1991). However, Heshusius (1989;1991) and Poplin (1998;1995) have criticized this skills-based and task-analytical approach to instruction. They suggest instead that learning occurs as a social engagement in which multiple plausible responses exist to many questions and problems.

Literature discussion groups may be a particularly powerful means to involve special education students in story discussion and response. These modes correspond to the teaching goals often identified on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) written for special education students, including emphases on text-based goals associated with the active construction and transformation of ideas based on readers' experiences and motivations (e.g., personal experiences, and self-in-situation).

Data analysis of this study revealed that very young children within Special Education were able to develop into discussants of literature. Their participation changed over time, developing from neophytes without the language and processes to hold discussions, into discussion members who had appropriated discursive practices and social processes of discussions unto themselves. As the children appropriated the language and processes her role moved into indirectly supporting the children within the context of their language and conversation.

# DEDICATION

To my prince of a husband
David J. Kinsella

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Personalized and thoughtful response to literature in discussion groups

Indrisano and Paratore (1991) present a model of literacy response to assist students with disabilities in reading and interpreting narrative literature. In their view, readers bring to the narrative text their own prior knowledge and experiences, as well as emotional and developmental differences, that represents a foundation for responding to texts. Rosenblatt (1978) also posited a need for a broader view of literary response that encompassed readers' creative, reflective and oral uses of language. She described an aesthetic response to texts in which readers respond according to their own unique lived-through experiences, attitudes, emotions, perspectives and beliefs. This perspective on literature response is grounded in the assumption that learning is not simply a matter of comprehending or acquiring new information from a book, but requires a period of reconstructing ideas in light of a transaction between the book and the reader, and the interactions among the participants in the social context (see Beach, 1993). Based upon this perspective, teaching strategies have been recommended that promote a more personalized, thoughtful response to text by shifting emphasis from a

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question-answer format to an emphasis on personal

experiences, shared response and mutual discussion

(Barnes, 1992; 1993).

**Facets necessary for effective literature discussion**

**Collaborative talk**   Explanations for why student-based

discussions are effective lies in socio-cultural theory.

Several theorists (Bakhtin,1986; Bruffee, 1986;

Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991) have proposed that

meaning is constructed in the context of social

interactions and collaboration.  Through collaborative

talk about books, children construct meanings and

develop facility in the higher mental activities that

are involved in literate thinking and reading (Chang-

Wells &  Wells, 1993).  As children hear the voices of

other participants, they begin to appropriate the words,

interpretative lived experiences provide a basis for

interpretation that is enriched and extended by the

experiences of other respondents.  Over time, it is

expected that the dialogue carried out in collaboration

with teachers and peers will be internalized and used

for personal purposes as a form of inner dialogue and

intellectual exchange with other authors and readers

(Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992).

   **Acquisition of new language skills**  Another

fundamental facet that is likely to be necessary for

effective literature discussion is that literary

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response requires the acquisition of new *language skills* (see Barnes, 1993); Englert, Tarrant, Mariage, & Oxer, 1994; Gee, 1990; Lemke, 1982. These skills include knowledge of the interpretative strategies and stances to texts used by readers, including those that are (1) text-based (knowledge of genre or story grammar, as well as responses that involve sequencing events, summarizing, and understanding character motivation), (2) reader-based (personal experience, feelings or affect, putting self-in-situation), (3) author-based (understanding author's craft, motive), and (4) context-based (emphasis no turn-taking, social behavior, or group process) (Beach, 1993; McGee, 1992). To become successful, children must have access to these interpretative strategies and the language related to their use, and be motivated to participate in the discourse forms valued by the community. Thus, teachers must model the interpretative strategies associated with literary response, create communities of practice where response can be employed and shared, and apprentice students in the use and regulation of the strategies by scaffolding and supporting their performance in book discussions.

## Benefits of participation in literature discussion

Several studies have been conducted that have examined the benefits of participation in literature

discussion on student performance.

## Grand Conversations

Research by Eeds and Wells (1989) indicates that participation in collaborative discussions can affect participants in unforeseen ways. Teachers admitted that they had not thought of a particular interpretation brought up by a student. Furthermore, with the support from the reading group, children who struggled with reading were able to learn and contribute as full participating members through their social interactions with teachers and peers. The students in the discussion group were active and engaged readers, employing a host of higher-order thinking and comprehension strategies, such as recalling ideas from texts, predicting and confirming predictions, verifying their comprehension, supporting their inferences, evaluating texts, and discussing the author's intent. The students shared their own personal stories or experiences, which in turn, prompted others to remember their own personal histories and share them. The work of Eeds and Wells supports the position (Beach, 1993) that talk in discussion groups can help to confirm, extend or modify an individual's interpretations, leading to a richer and deeper understanding of the text.

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## Book Sharing Sessions

Roller and Beed (1994) conducted book sharing sessions with primary-grade readers. They reported that children were enthusiastic about talking about topics that were important to them, and that child-directed discussions provided a point of entry into the world of literature. Children took unique stances and perspectives on story characters and events that were different from those that were emphasized and valued by adults. Open-ended discussion formats, therefore, offered a unique vantage point for interpretation because there was the potential for meaning making that might be ignored in teacher-directed discussions (see Barnes, 1992,1993; Daiute, 1993; Villaume & Worden, 1993; Villaume et al.,1994).

## Book Club

Finally, a line of research that focused on involving inner-city teachers and their diverse learners in making a personalized and thoughtful response to texts was Book Club (Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995, Raphael & Goatley, 1993; Raphael & McMahon, 1994). In Book Club, students used the "language of response" to respond to texts in written logs in preparation for student-led group discussions. Book Club consisted of four components: (1) Reading Instruction, involving

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teacher directed lessons in vocabulary, comprehension
strategies, genres, their difficulties in metacognition
(Englert, Raphael, Fear & Anderson, 19898; Graham,
Schwartz & MacArthur,1993; Wong, Wong, & Blenkinsop,
1989). Nevertheless, with the increased emphasis on the
use of collaborative discussion groups as a means of
instructing and including diverse groups of students
(Pierce & Gilles, 1993; Rose & Martinez, 1995; Thousand,
Villa & Nevin,1994), it is essential to more closely
examine the character of literature discussions in which
students with mild disabilities are primary
participants.

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## Historic View of literacy instruction in Special Education

Historically, literacy instruction in Special Education has been characterized by a focus on isolated and decontextualized basic skills (Heshusis, 1995) (Allington, 1989) This task-analytical approach (Heshusis, 1991) (Heshusius, 1989) (Poplin, 1988) is primarily teacher-directed with the teacher's voice and the ideas contained in the textbook assuming the authoritative or dominant expression of legitimated meanings in the classroom. The students do not have occasion to focus on inner experiences and bring in personal experience and background knowledge.

(Cazden, 1988) described a type of classroom interaction based upon this model, which she labeled the IRE sequence. She researched classroom discourse and found that teachers generally dominate classroom talk through first, their own initiation (I) of an interaction with a question, followed by a student response (R), and concluding with the teacher's evaluation (E) of the response. Typically, the IRE sequence is focused on the expression or comprehension of a set of facts from a book or text that are elicited

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and evaluated by the teacher through questions. Yet, current researchers suggest a reconceptualization of instruction that recognizes a more active and constructivist view of learners in the knowledge construction process, and that acknowledges a sociocultural perspective.

## Vygotskian Socio-cultural Theory

The sociocultural perspective is based on Vygotsky's (Vygotsky, 1978) theory of learning in which knowledge and understanding are created through dialogic interactions between the members of a community. Vygotsky's theory has three important features or principles that can guide instruction. First, Vygotsky believed that human behavior was inherently socially and culturally organized (Daniels, 1996). That is, higher-ordering thinking and related cognitive processes, such as attention, memory, comprehension, and rational, volitional, goal-directed thought are acquired through social interactions with others. As learners observe the thought processes and hesitations of more skilled problem solvers, they are apprenticed into the particular ways of thinking and knowing valued by the broader culture, as well as into the physical or mental actions that guide and accompany one's cognitive performance. Therefore to understand the mental functions of students requires that

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educational researchers study the social and cultural practices which gave rise to the mental phenomena of concern.

Second, Vygotsky believed that higher mental functions are mediated by signs, the most important of which is language, (Daniels, 1996). Language provides scaffolds and tools that mediate one's cognitive performance. Mediational tools include systems for counting, mnemonic techniques, diagrams, maps, and mechanical drawings, to name but a few. These tools alter the entire flow and structure of mental functions by integrating the learners into a cognitive or social process, and helping them to organize their intellectual activity. To be accepted as a member of a group one must own and operate the discourse, such as the academic discourse of a disciplinary subject used in school, or work-based discourse. Discourses are not mastered through skill instruction but through apprenticeships; with the students acquiring the discourse through scaffolded and supported interactions with others who have already mastered the discourse and related practices. Think alouds, for example, are one teaching technique that allows the students to have access to and insight into the operation of the school

discourse in the situated context of it's use (Gee, 1992).

Third, Vygotsky described the social route to acquisition by stating that function in the child's cultural development appears twice. It appears first on the social plane between people on an interpsychological plane. At this stage, cognitive tasks are performed jointly between the child and the more skilled member, although the more skilled member provides the greater part of the cognitive leadership in organizing the collective cognitive enterprise. Then the activity appears on the psychological plane within the child as an intrapsychological category. At this point, the child has appropriated many of the cognitive actions and inner talk originally demonstrated by the more skilled problem solver, as the social talk that was once jointly constructed by the two participants, is turned inward to direct one's own individual mental and cognitive actions. What was once intermentally and socially constructed, emerges on the intramental plane through the mastery and internalization of social processes.

Linking Vygotsky's belief that the higher mental functions have their roots in social interaction to education is his concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which attempts to explain this social

origin and set of interactions that inform the acquisition process related to the higher mental functions. Vygotsky defines the ZPD as the distance between a child's developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. During the episodes of joint participation and involvement in an activity, the child and skilled problem solver's successive actions are orchestrated as in a dance. What the child is unable to perform, the adult or more capable learner steps in to perform. By closely observing the child, the adult is able to provide the instruction that is matched to the child's evolving states of knowledge. This acquisition process leads to individually controlled performance, important for the student to fully enter the discourse of the school.

Burbules (1993) refers to the zone of proximal development as a state of readiness in which a student will be able to make certain kinds of conceptual connections, but not others. Anything too simple for the student will quickly become boring, but anything too difficult will quickly become overwhelming and demoralizing. An appropriate degree of challenge is an essential aspect of the creation of an effective zone of

proximal development that furthers students' learning because it opens up possibilities for the construction of new knowledge, (Burbules, 1993).

Scaffolding has also been addressed by Burbules (1993). He states that the teacher not only models a process, but intervenes actively to provide just sufficient structure and guidance to allow the student to acquire the strategies effectively. The students are allowed to build up levels of understanding appropriate to their state of readiness. However the support is gradually withdrawn over time (as with a scaffold that is dismantled as a building structure can stand on its own). The student is allowed to develop into an independent and autonomous learner.

Au (1998) suggested that research on school literacy learning conducted from a social constructivist perspective, described above, assumes that students need to engage in authentic literacy activities, not activities contrived for isolated skill practice. Therefore, as stated by Raphael et al.,1995, educators must create classrooms in which students engage in meaningful talk if they are to develop higher level thinking important to success in and out of school. Literature discussions are a means by which students of all ability levels are able to engage in dialogue about literature.

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## Reading Applications

To complement the reading experiences of students, Au (1998) states that the reading of literature should provide students with richer, more interesting and motivating reading experiences. She sees genuine literacy activities, of which literature discussions are one, as central to classroom organization and reading instruction.

Similarly, some have proposed that children who are exposed to only one aspect of a cognitive process e.g., skills or facts, do not have the opportunity to observe all strategies and practices in the entire process. While continuing to work on basic reading skills these children should also be exposed to the reading of literature and then partake in discussions of the literature that has been read to them. This approach may also make it possible for the novice, including young readers and students with reading or learning disabilities to participate in more mature cognitive and reading tasks from the very beginning, provided adjustable and temporary support by the teacher so that they can continue to develop advanced critical literacy and reasoning abilities.

## Literature Discussion

To be part of a literate community children need to

be involved in reading a variety of materials and
responding to those materials (Harste,1989). The power
of students to construct their own meaning and respond
to what they read is becoming the focal point of the use
of literature in classrooms (Jewell & Pratt,1999).
Literature discussions are a means to bring children
into the literate community, while apprenticing them
into the meaning-making and interpretive strategies that
underlie mature reading performance.

Literature discussion is an approach to reading
based on reader-response theory of Rosenblatt (1978)
Rosenblatt's ideas have been an important guide for
teachers and researchers as they have looked for new
avenues and purposes for discourse about literature
involving the students in dialogic interactions about
texts. She describes two stances of reading i.e.
efferent and aesthetic (Rosenblatt, 1978). In an
efferent reading of literature, the reader focuses on
remembering factual information that can be gleaned from
the text. (Eeds & Wells, 1989) describes the efferent
stance in literature classes as the inquisition mode in
which the students' comprehension is evaluated by
teachers, on the basis of how closely their answers
match the textual content.

(Rosenblatt, 1978) contrasts this stance with an
aesthetic stance in which the reader draws upon

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personal feelings and connections while reading.
Readers can connect to books through their feelings,
personal experiences, and literary experiences. An
aesthetic stance allows for the possibility of creating
multiple meanings due to the sharing of the varied
personal responses of the readers. Rather than one
correct answer, multiple interpretations are allowable
and even encouraged.

The use of authentic literature in classrooms is
pivotal in the development of students' aesthetic
responses to texts. An aesthetic response also promotes
students' ownership of literacy and the meaning making
process because students have the liberty to develop
divergent strategic responses to texts. Through this
ownership, interest and involvement in reading becomes
more likely. Thus, educators are encouraged to create
instructional contexts that allow students to makes
explicit connections between literacy activities and
students' own lives and concerns (Au & Raphael, 2000).
Students may be guided to develop these connections
through their participation in literature discussions.

## Research on Literature Discussions

### Upper Elementary Studies

Researchers in literacy education have been looking
for ways to provide students with opportunities to
collaborate in making responses to literature in which

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they are able to focus on their inner experiences and draw upon their personal feelings, experiences and connections. (Eeds & Wells, 1989), for example, investigated literature study groups with upper elementary general education students in fifth and sixth grade. The students met in small groups of five to seven students with an adult group leader twice a week to discuss the passages they had read from a novel of their choice. Eeds and Wells found that these literature study groups afforded the students an opportunity to collaborate, and that within this collaborative setting, students were supported in their efforts to gain a better understanding of the novel. Their responses to the book included personal connections, as well as a wide range of purposes such as interpretations of meaning, inferencing and evaluating text. These results were unlike results obtained when the teacher dominated interactions and focused on the recall of text facts.

Furthermore, Eeds and Wells found that the fifth and sixth grade students collaborated with each other and the adult group leader in building meaning. Not only did the students volunteer their ideas about meaning, they listened to each other and sometimes changed their ideas as a result. This format of responding to literature afforded the students a way to bring in

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personal experiences and encouraged them to be active
readers and contribute by predicting and making
hypotheses and justifications (Eeds, 1989) Based on the
description of Rosenblatt (1978) these students seemed
to be taking an aesthetic stance to reading. They were
able to focus on their own inner experiences, bringing
in their feelings and connecting the ideas to their
personal experiences.

Another line of research that looked at students
making thoughtful and personalized response to texts was
Book Club (Goatley, Brock, & Raphael,1995; Raphael &
Goatley, 1993; Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Raphael,
Goatley, McMahon & Woodman, 1995). The Book Club
program was designed as an alternative approach to
literacy instruction. This research concentrated on
developing student-led discussion groups about
literature with upper elementary general education
students. Book Club consisted of four components--
reading, writing, community share, and instruction--all
of which supported the students in their student-led
discussions (Raphael, Goatley, McMahon & Woodman, 1995).
Students in book club were active participants who
worked collaboratively in responding to literature. The
students brought their personal experiences into the
discussions as well as multiple purposes.

Book Club was based, in part, on Vygotsky's ideas

that a student's use of signs and tools, particularly language, as a basis for the development of higher-order thinking. The participation of students in book discussions required the acquisition of new language and discourse tools related to interpretation, analysis, and communication. Students were expected to become more metacognitive about language in order to analyze books for particular language forms, structures and devices (e.g., "imagery", foreshadowing, plot) that both operated to convey meaning and to create emotional responses among the readers. Likewise, students were expected to acquire additional discourse skills to communicate their opinions about books, and to respond to the opinions of others in ways that provoked deeper conversations about books. Book Club offered apprenticeships into these language and discourse processes by offering multiple instructional sites for students to develop the discourse tools they needed to effectively reason, interpret, communicate, and engage in higher-order thinking (McMahon, Raphael, 1997).

Through the writing component, for example, the students recorded their individual responses to the literature in reading logs. They were encouraged to include multiple responses within the logs including

affective responses to the literature such as personal
feelings. Students were offered a range of language
tools and strategies that they might employ in their
written logs to inform their interpretations of books,
such as character mapping, putting self in situation,
cause effect, understanding multiple perspectives, and
author's purpose, to name but a few.

Using their written logs, students then
participated in student-led discussions. These "Book
Clubs" afforded the students an opportunity to
communicate their interpretative responses for the
benefit of other students, as well as to receive
feedback or questions from peers. In student-led
discussion, students were not constrained to searching
for correct answers but were able to draw upon their
inner experiences and personal feelings. Book Clubs
furthered students' participation in the discourse of
literature response through threaded conversations about
particular topics, with ongoing support and feedback
from their peers in the small groups. In addition, Book
Club incorporated several features of scaffolded
instruction within its instructional framework. A role
assumed by the teacher in Book Club was that of
instructional scaffolder (McMahon, 1997). Initially,
the teacher modeled and supported the students while
they learned what was expected of them as participants

in a discussion of literature, including the social,
comprehension, and literary elements that supported good
conversations about books. Modeling was a key feature
of the instructional component known as Community Share.
Based on Vygotsky's idea that learning occurs first on
an external social plane between individuals, then is
later internalized (Vygotsky, 1978), the Book Club
teachers modeled concepts in a whole-class social
context before the students were expected to internalize
them or employ them in the small group context. The
explicit modeling of the inner thoughts of readers and
writers were included as part of the teachers'
demonstration of new interpretative strategies. At the
same time, teachers remained alert to new interpretative
strategies that were employed or transformed by students
in their Book Club groups. These inventions and
transformations, in turn, were made public by teachers
in the Community Share phase to lead the cognitive
development of other students. Thus, Community Share
was an important instructional phase that was jointly
shaped by the interpretative responses and literacy
practices exercised by both teachers and students. It
served as the foundation for the apprenticeship of
students into the discourse, new interpretative
practices, and mental actions of the various
participants in the Book Club community (Gavelek &

Raphael, 1996).

As the literature discussions progressed throughout the year, the scaffolding support provided by the teachers changed. In some cases, literature responses that were once modeled and guided by teachers was appropriated by students as they grew to understand what was needed to participate in a literature discussion and how to do so. Collaborative dialogue about books that was once mediated by teachers was turned inward by students to mediate their own and others' conversations about books. Students grew to understand elements and characteristics of literature as they began to incorporate these elements into their own discussions. In turn, the teacher was able to withdraw support and allow the students to lead their own discussions. At other times, the teacher constructed more advanced or complex responses to literature based on the emerging intellectual and interpretative maturity of their students. Consequently, the role of teachers entailed a dynamic and recursive approach to assessment and instruction as the teacher simultaneously dismantled certain scaffolds, while building other intellectual scaffolds to mediate students' performance based on a day-by-day or lesson-by-lesson assessment of students'

developmental needs.

In several respects, Vygotsky's work on learning and development formed the basis of the core of the design of the instructional elements of Book Club. First, Book Club was designed to emphasize the language and mental practices of readers engaged in interpretation and response, with written and oral language forming the communication tools and instructional sites to lead students' literacy development (McMahon, Raphael, 1997). Interpretative responses represented sign and symbol systems that might mediate students' literacy performance. To make these symbol systems concretely visible and accessible, teachers used Think Sheets as a form of scaffolding to help students frame their interpretations and responses to books.

Second, Book Club offered several forms of apprenticeship that provided students with developmental opportunities to acquire and practice the language and discourse tools related to response and reasoning, with continuing feedback and support from others. At one level, Book club researchers noted that the Vygotskian perspective on learning did not assume that children would learn naturally on their own, but that a more knowledgeable other needs to guide the learning process

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(McMahon & Raphael, 1997). The teacher and sometimes students would act as the more knowledgeable other, introducing and guiding the learning of the group during an instructional phase known as Community Share. In addition, students directly interacted with each other in applying the discourse and strategies that had been introduced during Community Share in their book cubs when they were encouraged to appropriate and transform interpretative strategies through their participation in the small interactive groups. Therefore, Book Club offered several features of apprenticeship that provided students with access and developmental opportunities to acquire and practice language and discourse tools related to response and reasoning, with continuing feedback and support from others.

In studies of the effectiveness of Book Club, researchers reported that talk in Book Club clarified interpretations and expanded students' concepts about literature. Over each year of a three year study,(Goatley, 1997), Book Club participants showed growth in their perspectives about literature, and confidence in sharing their interpretations with others. The students also demonstrated awareness of multiple purposes for discussing text. Goatley (1997) further noted that Book Club participants increased elaboration in their writing logs which led to extended discussions

during book clubs.

Research in response to literature through literature discussions was also carried on by (Gilles, 1990) Her study focused on special education students. Gilles looked at a group of seventh grade students in special education participating in "literature study circles". She felt that participation in a language-rich environment rather than in one that focused on instruction in isolated skills might reflect students' excitement about books and bring their multiple interpretations to the discussion. Teachers were generally present but the students did direct the discussions. Students recorded their responses to what they were reading in a journal that they then used to guide these student directed literature discussions. Gilles found that through their participation in these literature study circles, seventh grade special education students were able to make connections between what they were reading and their own personal experiences. These students brought their past experiences into the discussions and referred to other books and authors that they had read. Moreover, seventh graders worked as a collaborative group creating meaning together (Gilles, 1990), as they too, listened to each other and made connections between their ideas, the

text, and the ideas of their peers.

## Lower Elementary Studies

The lines of research studies described above speak of the ability of upper elementary and junior high school students to become engaged in discourse about literature through discussion groups. (McGee,1992) wondered if the results of studies with upper elementary students may have been due to the relative sophistication of students in the fifth and sixth grades.

McGee focused her research on less sophisticated first graders in general education. Her research examined the responses of first grade students after they participated in discussions about literature. Discussion group size ranged from five to fourteen students. The teacher read a story to the children and then participated with them in a group discussion of the story. Each discussion was split into two parts. In the first part the teacher was present, although the teacher followed the students' leads and student-initiated topics. In the second half the teacher moderated the discussion by initiating teacher topics (through an interpretative question) as the teachers in the (Eeds & Wells,1989) study had done.

McGee's results paralleled that found by Eeds &

Wells (1989) in their study of students in the fifth and sixth grades. McGee's first graders did construct some simple meanings, shared personal experiences, and connected events to other stories. The students also evaluated characters and events and the story as a whole (McGee, 1992). McGee found the results of her study to be similar to the results of a study by Garrison and Hynds (1991) in which they examined the responses to literature of a group of college readers. Like the college students studied by Garrison and Hynds (1991), first grade students could reflect on the text based on their own personal perspectives. Discussions apparently benefited a wide range of readers across the spectrum of developmental competence, including beginning readers in the first grades. Thus, discussions could emerge from young children.

Talking about literature can be undervalued in the primary grade classroom when students are beginning to learn to read conventionally. Yet this strength and foundation in literature is often ignored in schools. When they enter school their experiences in the classroom often focus primarily on skills work and the mechanical act of learning to read. Based on her research, (McGee, 1995) reported that all students might be capable of responding to literature beyond their reading ability, and that discussions about literature

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should be a priority in early literacy instruction. She argued that as children talk about books they think more deeply about the reading experiences, they listen to each other and collaboratively construct meaning. She believed that this was especially important for young children, since young preschoolers enter school with a great deal of prior experience in reading and responding to literature through book conversations with their parents. Thus, McGee concluded that it was critical for primary grade students to continue to have experiences in responding to literature in ways that expanded their knowledge of stories and books. Literature discussion in small groups could provide further opportunity for young students to engage in talk about stories.

Another study involving literature discussions in the primary grades was conducted by Jewell and Pratt, (1999). These researchers decided to change the way they used literature in their reading programs in younger grades. They aimed to provide young students with authentic opportunities to verbalize their thoughts and feelings about what they had read, consistent with the philosophy of Rosenblatt's reader response theory, through literature discussions.

Jewell and Pratt (1999) introduced literature discussions into second and third grade classrooms. These researchers found that the children learned to

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talk about their respective points of view, but students
often directed all their responses to the teacher.
Through participation in literature discussions over
time, students became less concerned about pleasing the
teacher and expressed more genuine interest in
responding to their peers' ideas.

A second finding from the research was the success
of students in supporting their own and others' opinions
with evidence from the text, or personal experience.
Retellings are a crucial element of discussions (Jewell
and Pratt,1999). Vygotsky (1978), in fact, suggested
that mental functions begin first on a social or
interpsychological plane, where cognitive tasks are
performed jointly by the students, then move on to an
inner or intrapsychological plane, in which the student
has appropriated many cognitive actions and inner talk.
Similarly, in their oral retellings, the students were
not just copying the external reality, (Vygotsky,
(1978), but they had internalized it and transformed it
to reason with others and to accomplish their own
personal purposes. The research demonstrated that
almost every factual recounting was for the purpose of
substantiating a response, either someone else's or
their own. Thus, students were not content with mere
restatements of story facts when they responded in a
discussion. They were driven to prove to others in the

group that their ideas had validity. Furthermore, the students were collaborating, inasmuch as they expressed opinions without hesitation and listened and incorporated others; points of view into their own personal responses. There was interplay between personal response and the shared responses in the group (Jewell & Pratt, 1999). The students spoke amongst themselves about their points of view and asked each other for evidence, support for their opinions and clarifications. Reasoning and communication skills were practiced by students in these small discussion groups in ways that were not employed in solitary or private reading arrangements. This is work in the zone of proximal development in which the students collaborate with more capable peers or are under the guidance of a teacher to perform what they are not able to complete independently.

The researchers felt that one of the most important findings to emerge in their analysis of the discussion transcriptions was the prevalence of inferential reasoning. The students made deductions drawn from information not explicitly stated in the text but provable. The young students also speculated, that is, made inferences that were not exactly provable, but demonstrated a high degree of plausibility in responding

to the story events.

Jewell and Pratt summarized that young children were able to participate in quality student-generated discussions. There was a greater degree of inferential thinking as well as opinion statements. Students were able to demonstrate higher-order thinking and evidentiary reasoning. They made connections between their ideas and interpretations of their peers. Agreements and disagreements arose during the discussions, showing their commitment to their points of view, as well as through their use of supporting evidence. These outcomes provided further support for the important role of literature discussions in a literacy program involving primary grade students.

Literature discussions can also play an important role in supporting the types of dialogue noted by Burbules. Burbules (1993) talks about four types of discourse: discourse as conversation; discourse as inquiry; discourse as debate; discourse as instruction. Burbules notes that although idealized discourse is seen as a relation between two participating people, it can also be used to characterize some forms of group discussions. *Discourse as conversation* is the most widely used discourse in literature conversations as well as in most of the school experience. Burbules

(1993) notes that this form of discourse is known as
including a cooperative, tolerant spirit as well as a
direction toward mutual understanding. Burbules further
states that people primarily engage in discourse as
conversation when interested in understanding the
outlook and experiences of a partner in dialogue.
Through the use of discourse as conversation, literature
discussions involve the participants in understanding
the literature and the ideas of others about the
literature as well as their own ideas. The use of
discourse as conversation also aids the student in
acquiring social characteristics of taking turns and
listening to others, as the partners work cooperatively
and interactively toward a shared understanding.

    *Dialogue as instruction* (Burbules 1993) is
supported through literature discussions. It is a
directive form of teaching, but one that works through
indirect processes of instruction that require the
student to work actively to make conceptual connections
in response to teacher questions. Dialogue as
instruction is used in literature discussion in the
early stages of introducing discussions and
interpretative responses to a group of students.
Initially the teacher will model the discussion
activities and with repeated interaction with the
teacher modeling for them, the students become able to

perform the various functions of a discussion on their

own (Burbules, 1993) (Palincsar and Brown, 1984).

Another aspect of dialogue as instruction is that the

teacher initially scaffolds the students.  The teacher

actively intervenes to provide just enough structure and

guidance to allow the student to participate.  This

support is gradually withdrawn as the discussion

participants take on more and more of the responsibility

of the discussion.

Literature discussion can support *discourse as

inquiry*, a third type of discourse described by Burbules

(1993).  A characteristic of discourse as inquiry is

that it aims toward answering a specific question and

provide an outcome agreeable to all Burbules (1993).

Discourse of inquiry also works towards the resolution o

a specific problem or the resolution of a specific

debate.  Although these characteristics are not primary

goals of literature discussions, the discussions can

support discourse as inquiry.  Inquiry involves the

investigation of alternatives, the weighing and testing

of different potential answers within a dialogical

structure that encourages a range of perspectives and

approaches to the problem at hand.  Literature

discussions provide the means of working collaboratively

and cooperatively with one another, while allowing the

perspectives of all to be heard and evaluated.  Ideas

and insights or the participants can generate new understandings through the process of building ideas upon one another.    These processes can aid the dialogue of inquiry in which participants are trying to resolve a specific problem or reconcile a specific dispute.

Literature discussions through the use of discourse of conversation can give some support to dialogue as debate.  Through *discourse as debate*, participants are pressed to articulate and defend positions as clearly and thoroughly as they can, and in seeing the merits of alternative views (Burbules, 1993).  Discourse as debate aids the participants in being able to clearly state their ideas about the literature and clarify and justify their meanings.  Simultaneously, participants are asked to listen to the views presented by other participants. Work in literature discussions could therefore support discourse as debate in other areas of the school day.

Literature discussions, then, although drawing most heavily on the discourse of conversation, can also support the other three discourses, all of which are important life skills to be learned by students.  The infrequency of these types of discourses in school might warrant attention to alternative instructional frameworks that foster critical reasoning and discourse skills beyond those typically exercised by students in traditional reading groups.   This might be especially

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important to the instruction of students in special
education, who are often provided with instruction that
focuses on factual or rote recall rather than elaborated
thought and critical reasoning.

## Special Education Studies

Much of the research literature on book
discussions have focused on general education students
in elementary and secondary settings. Literature
discussions could be of benefit to young special
education children because it would involve them more
deeply with the textual content and allow them to
explore their own personal relationship with characters,
setting, events, and themes (Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-
Allen, 1998). Giving these students access to
literature discussion groups would provide opportunities
for them to actively participate in an apprenticeship
experience in which they could appropriate social,
cognitive, and linguistic knowledge about themselves and
their world, (Gutierrez & Stone, 1997). Presumably the
children could interact with the teacher and their peers
in the discussions, involving them in actively
constructing and inferencing meanings from the text. The
children would be able to draw upon their background
knowledge and bring in their personal experiences as
they interacted with others in the discussion.

Working with special education and at risk young

children in literature discussion groups has been addressed in a limited manner by only a handful of few researchers. The preponderance of literacy interventions for students with disabilities have focused on component sub skills as the basis of their literacy instruction.

Remedial literacy instruction has often focused on addressing perceived deficits of the students with learning disabilities, based on a bottom-up approach to teaching deficient reading skills. The fundamental assumption of this approach is that students must acquire basic skills before they can grasp higher-order reasoning and comprehension skills.

Likewise, learning activities in remedial contexts are often distinct from the everyday practices of the larger academic community and fragmented into well-defined isolated skills (McDermott, 1993). This approach often rests on the assumption that disabilities are problems possessed by individuals, and that these individuals require specialized educational approaches, in which learning activities are fragmented into well-defined skills, that separate learning from their situational contexts in which the knowledge is to be applied. This has two consequences. First, students with disabilities are often faced with the acquisition of basic skills (e.g., decoding skills) removed from the

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authentic reading and writing texts that might give rise to meaning and transfer. Second, students are often isolated from participation in a diverse literacy community that offers them social support to help them compensate for disabilities. Compensatory practices such as these have cognitive and social consequences that are often unproductive for children (Gutierrez and Stone, 1997).

However, cultural-historical theory suggests that competence is related to children's access to and participation in varying forms of learning activities. This understanding of competence as a socially mediated construct has particular implications for students identified with learning disabilities. Gutierrez and Stone argue that apprenticeship activities accommodate the varying levels of expertise and the changing roles students must assume as they move toward reading competence. The researchers spoke of apprenticeship activities or experiences as those that did not track or fragment and therefore differentiate learning activities or practice for particular members of the group (Gutierrez & Stone, 1997). They researchers further spoke of apprenticeship practices as coparticipation by all in the everyday interactional routines. Rather than classrooms in which there is a preponderance of teacher-centered activities in which knowledge is transmitted

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from teacher to student with little opportunity of joint production of knowledge, shared responsibility for learning affords regular opportunities for students to participate in a variety of roles, situations and activities in which the needs of individuals are recognized and scaffolded. The students move on to more complex roles as they develop new skills (Gutierrez & Stone, 1997). When multiple forms of assistance and participation are readily available, a range of educational opportunities is possible. This attention to both individual and group needs is of particular importance in heterogeneous classrooms attempting to accommodate students with special learning needs.

Stone (1998) addressed the population of children with learning disabilities and found that many of these children experience significant limitations in language comprehension, memory, attention, pragmatics, and /or self-cognitive and communicational demands of scaffolded instruction. He pointed to the concern of some researchers that children with learning disabilities might benefit from a more direct approach to instruction. Due to studies regarding the effectiveness of an interactive approach (Bos and Anders, 1990), Palincsar, Winn, David, Snyder, and Stevens, (1993) and Englert et al. (1994), Stone wrote that students involved with instructional approaches designed

explicitly in terms of the scaffolding metaphor, performed significantly better than their peers involved in a different approach which stressed the more didactic, confirmatory, and factually oriented content.

Addressing the idea of improved student performance through an interactive approach (Goatley, 1997) conducted a study of book discussions with upper-elementary students, including students with mild disabilities. She found that students with mild disabilities did not initially understand how participation in a discussion might occur. Their difficulties involved maintaining conversations, encouraging other members to participate, and attempting to understand the content of responses. Goatley also found that the students with disabilities had particular problems generating multiple interpretations of a text; moving beyond literal interpretations to share personal feelings and experiences; evaluating text; and drawing on other sources.

Goatley's research revealed that students with disabilities required instructional support to advance their thinking, strategy use, and appreciation of and response to literature. This instruction was essential, particularly, for those students not accustomed to engaging in an academic discourse with their peers.

Correspondingly literature instruction needed to focus on aspects related to how to share and what to share during book clubs, as well as offering emphases on multiple literacy areas, such as comprehension, understanding and identifying literary elements, and writing (Raphael & Goatley, 1996).

Goatley believed the instruction provided in book discussions provided a context that supported increased, quality interactions among members of a community. Goatley (1997) stated that language use facilitated their literacy growth. The students grew in their understanding of what and how to share during book discussions. The holistic instruction of Book Club provided the students with a context that supported increased, quality interactions among members of the community. Goatley (1997) found that over time the special education students showed growth in their perspectives about literature, their confidence in sharing their interpretations with others, and their awareness of multiple purposes for discussing ideas. Goatley further stated that the students began to include their personal experiences in their written and oral responses. Their learning needs were quite similar to the needs of all of the students and teachers played an important role in supporting students in the areas where they needed additional instruction or

reinforcement for their continued progress.

Gutierrez and Stone (1997) speak to educational
formats in conventional special education classrooms
unlike that in Goatley's study. They point out that in
many of these traditional special education classrooms
the extent to which responsibility for teaching and
learning is distributed and shared among participants
varies, with many classrooms offering few opportunities
for work to be distributed or shared among students to
promote the development of intellectual leadership.
They further state that in special education classrooms
there is a preponderance of teacher-centered activities
in which knowledge is transmitted from teacher to
student and in which there is infrequent opportunity for
the joint production of knowledge.

Literate students are expected to make connections
to their own past and possible future experiences,
including intertextual connections to other texts they
have read; to draw inferences from what is written (or
not written, that might have been), including the
detection of biases of various kinds; and to evaluate
critically the significance of what they read, giving
justifications for their judgments (Wells, 1997). The
traditional method of literacy teaching, with its
pedagogical emphasis on teacher-directed recitation and

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students' mindless practice of decontextualized

"skills," has been found to be inadequate and as a

result there have been recent attempts to give students

a more active role in the literacy process.

Other researchers are proposing that alternate

literacy instruction be provided for special education

students as well, as did Addison Stone above.  Rueda,

Gallego, and Moll (2000) speak to the idea of the

fundamental value of equity for students with

disabilities.  The researchers found social mediation

and assisted performance to be key elements of learning

and development.  A major goal was to provide responsive

assistance, or assistance that is within the learners'

zone of proximal developments.  The authors found that

social relationships and mediation are defining features

of the experiences of children.  They argue that the

individual differences of children interact with the

social organization of specific activity settings,

rather than a placement in a physical setting.  Learning

is social, and research and interventions related to

learning and development require a focus on not only the

characteristics of the individual but also the student

in interaction within activity settings.

Thus, conception of learning disabilities has begun

to change in recent times.  Reid (1998) concludes that

under the influence of Vygotsky's theory in particular, special education has begun to shift the emphasis from the individual to the sociocultural context of education. In small-group situations, when students have control over their own language structures and the ability to talk from personal experience (rather than being limited to providing known information), their language becomes rich and expressive and allows them to display more highly developed cognitive and linguistic skills than a more traditional model of learning such as IRE.

If new instructional methods are to be designed for special education contexts, then a reconceptualization of the organization of a classroom might be needed. Elements included would be apprenticeship, scaffolding, interactive teaching and discourse and transfer of control to students. Apprenticeship in situated contexts needs to be included. With the help of a more knowledgeable other students are afforded the opportunity to move on to more complex tasks as they develop new skills. Scaffolding of students helps them attain competency of a task that is just out of their range at the beginning of their participation in the task. Students need to be engaged in meaningful talk which is able to be developed through interactive teaching and discourse. Also, transferring control to

the students gives responsibility for learning to the students.

**Apprenticeship in situated context of reading activity**

A pivotal study involving reading and problem learners was that of Reciprocal Teaching by Palincsar and Brown (1984). This research seemed to be efficacious for students with learning disabilities meriting further attention to the instructional techniques that informed this approach. Reciprocal teaching consisted of four strategies (prediction, clarification, summarization, and questioning) that were designed to help students take part in a comprehension dialogue about expository texts, and that furthered their participation as leaders in discussions about text meaning. These four strategies provided an example of a sign or language system that might scaffold and guide students' participation in conversations about expository texts.

In designing reciprocal teaching, Palincsar (1991) adopted a model of instruction that provided for the orderly transfer of control for the strategies from teachers to students. At first, the four strategies were explicitly taught to the students and practiced within actual discussions participate in reading discussions and these strategies were explicitly taught

to the students and practiced within actual discussions
of expository texts that were modeled and guided by
teachers. However, teachers increasingly relinquished
responsibility to students by asking students to act as
leaders and teachers for the group. That is, students
actually led the small group in asking a question about
the text, clarifying unclear concepts and terms,
summarizing the main ideas, and predicting what might
come next. Thus, reciprocal teaching was designed to
offer pivotal roles that ensured that students became
increasingly skilled in using the strategies to maintain
good comprehension, as well as to use the strategies as
part of a group discourse that furthered their own self-
regulation and autonomy as readers. Throughout the
reciprocal teaching procedure, teachers and peers were
expected to provide feedback to other participants,
stepping in to model reading strategies or offer
alternative responses when such support was needed, and
stepping back when students effectively applied
strategies. In contrast to the findings by Goatley that
indicated the difficulty of special education students
in holding a discussion, reciprocal teaching showed that
these students could participate in discussions when
they were provided with the language tools as well as
protocols for holding and leading an effective
discussion.

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In a subsequent study, Palincsar (1991) reported

the hallmarks of the instructional approach that seemed

to distinguish the more effective and less effective

teachers. Evaluation studies of reciprocal teaching

showed that students gained in comprehension performance

as a result of the intervention, and that the

improvements were maintained across a follow-up retest

after eight weeks.  The reading strategies of

summarizing and predicting also resulted in significant

improvements as a result of the scaffolding

intervention.

**The Specific Role of the Teacher in Book Discussions**

These literatures on comprehension and literacy

instruction reveal several pedagogical features that

should be considered in a study of book discussion and

literature response.  There were three key features and

instructional practices that lay at the core of this

dissertation research.

**Scaffolding**  Stone (1998) explained the effectiveness

of the reciprocal teaching by highlighting its

effectiveness in the use of scaffolding.  Teachers and

adults have an important role in scaffolding students'

performance.  By scaffolding, I mean a student is

supported by a more knowledgeable other who actively

intervenes to provide just enough guidance to allow the student to acquire the strategies effectively. Stone (1998) spoke of scaffolding as providing temporary assistance to children as they strive to accomplish a task just out of their competency. The adults provide a scaffold, much like that used by builders in erecting a building. This support allows for the accomplishment of some goal that would otherwise be unattainable for the child to complete. Scaffolding of remedial reading students has proven to be successful, (Stone, 1998).

**Interactive Teaching and Discourse** A second role of teachers is to engage with students in interactive teaching/discourse. Within these studies of literature discussion the role of the teacher varied. In Book Club the teacher is not present in the discussion group but does interact with the whole class, modeling conversation about text and providing instruction in all four of the program's components (Raphael, 1995 #38). During the whole class sessions the teachers in Book Club shared their personal responses and framed discussions with the students to encourage similar contributions (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). The researchers noted that teachers' talk within the whole-class settings appeared to play a crucial role in students' developing the language of talk about text,

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whether the language was about literary elements, authors' craft, response to literature, or understanding and clarification (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). Gavelek and Raphael further noted that the teachers observed the students carefully when they were in student led discussions. In subsequent whole-class settings, the students' ideas then formed the basis for whole-class discussions which were orchestrated by the teachers to extend the student-led discussions. Social settings, such as Book Club, are the means by which students come to acquire and construct new knowledge, new meanings, and new interpretations of text through interactive use of language. Students need leadership from their teachers in making these situations educative and meaningful, as well as multiple opportunities in which to engage in discussions (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996).

In other cases, the teacher was present as a more active participant in the discussion groups studies described by Eeds & Wells (1989) and McGee (1992). The teacher was also present in the study of seventh grade special education students by Gilles. (1990). Although literature discussion groups focus on moving away from teacher dominated interactions and strive toward actively engaging the students in the discussions, the role of the teacher in supporting discourse and the implementation of interpretative strategies remains an

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important one. Eeds & Wells,1995), for example, found
that a teacher's presence in a discussion group
dignified the group and the students' contributions.
They did not find that the group was silenced by the
teachers' presence as some had worried. In fact, they
found that, especially with the young and less
experienced readers, the teacher participants in the
group were able to help the students move the talk
beyond the mere sharing of ideas to develop deeper
insights into stories, characters, and experiences. The
researchers believed that through dialogues with their
peers and with teachers students were able to become
involved in more complex forms of interpretation (Eeds &
Wells1,1995)

**Transfer of Control**

A third function of teachers is the ability to step
back and to divest their responsibility for leading the
intellectual work of the group to students. In their
studies of various forms of teacher guidance in
discussion groups

Reciprocal Teaching addressed transfer of control
from teacher to students. A central feature of
Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Palincsar,
1986, 1991) is a sequence in which the teacher and
students take turns being responsible for carrying out a

set of strategies for summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting successive segments of a text as an aid to ongoing comprehension of the text. In the early stages of the interactions between teacher and students the teacher has the primary responsibility of modeling the strategies and providing highly structured feedback. Slowly though, the teacher shifts control to the students as she encourages them to take more of the responsibility unto themselves.

McGee (1995) similarly describes the teacher's role as one of stepping in and out of the discussion in varying degrees. McGee posits that teachers may step into the discussion and assume a more directive role when they recognize a 'teachable moment' and they are able to support the students and provide them with deeper insights. She found that teachers might also step in to model and encourage active listening. A teacher's thoughtful question or comment may "nudge children's thinking" (McGee, 1995).

## Summary of Good discussions about literature

Results from the studies of responding to literature make it possible to describe good discussions about literature. These discussions include a number of facets applicable to primary grade readers as well as more mature readers in the upper elementary grades and beyond. (McGee, 1995) describes what a good discussion

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or conversation about books includes. Good discussions of books allow students to talk about what a story calls to mind, and to bring in personal experiences (Corcoran, 1987) (McGee, 1995) The students related these personal life experiences to the story situation (Martinez, 1995) McGee states that talk about personal experiences that can be connected to the story can strengthen the understanding of the student.

The work of Eeds & Wells (1989) and Raphael's research with Book Club described the range of purposes that the students utilized in their discussions of literature. Good discussions are recognizable in terms of the opportunities for students to initiate and use different purposes of discussion. These purposes include; author's purpose and character motivation, evaluating the text, placing themselves in the story situation, and extending and relating the story to other stories they have read.

Good discussions about literature also involve more than students sharing their own unique responses. McGee states that while collaborating with their peers the students defend, negotiate meaning, and become aware of and accept multiple interpretations of the story. The students ask each other for clarification and justification and understand

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that their peers may interpret the story differently.

Students also talk directly with one another in a good discussion and introduce topics themselves into the discussion (McGee, 1995) The interactions are no longer dominated by the teacher and structured with the student responding to the teacher's questions within topics controlled by the teacher. The students share their ideas and feelings with the group and respond and comment on the ideas of the others.

This involvement of children is important for special education children. Very often these children are not put in the role of and expert, as they would be in a literature discussion. Children in special education should be allowed to develop metacognition in full, not just as a novice with the teacher or other children as the expert. Literature discussions would allow special education children to take on roles not often afforded them. Through literature discussions special education children would be allowed to construct their own meanings and to bring help to other children participating in the discussions.

## Purpose/Questions

Realizing the importance of engaging students in discussion of literature and the importance of particularly including primary grade students in this

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experience the proposed study will extend the research to primary grade students in special education. Recently, researchers have begun to emphasize the need to extend meaningful activities that use dialogic interactions to students within special education (Englert, 1992; Englert et al., 1994; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Poplin, 1988; 1995). Although researchers have studied literature response with upper elementary students including special education students (Gilles, 1990; Goatley 1997) few researchers have examined literature response with first grade special education students who are nonreaders and nonwriters.

The purpose of this study is to examine the evolution of literature discussions in a primary grade special education classroom in which the teacher is developing a concept of literature response. The research questions this study address are twofold.

How do the students participate in literature discussion groups and how does their participation change as they acquire experience in literature response? For example, are the discussions recognizable as good discussions of literature by the characteristics noted above for good discussions?

What role does the teacher assume in literature discussion groups in supporting the students' developing concepts of literature response?

# CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative study based on the grounded theory procedures and techniques of Strauss & Corbin (1990). I studied over the course of a semester a classroom of primary grade students labeled as special education students and at risk students who were in the process of being test for special education. I observed them as they participated in literature discussions with their teacher, sitting with them at their reading table, but not participating myself in the talk. I wanted to see how this group of children would evolve into full participants of a literature discussion, what their participation would be and how it would change over time. I was also interested in learning what role the teacher would assume in the literature discussion groups and how that role would evolve over time. I examined the discourse that occurred in the discussions by all participants throughout the semester and identified types of participation among the teacher and students as they evolved from discussion neophytes at the onset of the discussion to full participating members when the semester concluded. In this chapter I describe the school context, teacher participants, student participants, materials, procedures, data collection and

data analysis.

**School context**

The target school and classroom were located in an urban area in the Midwest. It was a school where approximately 95% of the students received free or reduced lunch. The school's staff was not particularly an innovative one. Although the principal was supportive of the teacher involved in the study along with her co-teacher, the school was not supportive of their proposed innovative plan of an inclusive classroom, especially the faculty in the lower elementary grades.

The teachers presented their proposal to the School Improvement Team which did support their idea. The teachers had proposed teaming together in an inclusive classroom. Therese was a general education teacher and Kristin, the teacher involved in the study, was a teacher in Special Education. Both teachers would teach in one classroom with Therese having the general education students on her class list and Kristin carrying the special education and at risk children on her class list. All these children would comprise one inclusive classroom in which it was not known who was in special education. Therese's students were first graders and Kristin's students were special education students in Kindergarten, first and second grades. The year prior to the

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implementation of the inclusive classroom all students that were brought to a Student Study Team (SST) due to teachers' concerns and possible testing for Special Education services were placed on Kristin's class list. She and Therese sought to have the students from the very beginning of the school year, to eliminate the disruption that would occur if the students were qualified for special education during the school and therefore required to change classrooms during the school year. The teachers were committed to as little disruption as possible in the lives of these students and this way the students would already be in the classroom where they would receive the Special Education services.

The School Improvement team allowed Kristin and Therese to implement this classroom in the school. The teachers met with resistance though, from the general education teachers in the lower elementary grades. This resistance was evident before the program was implemented and again when the program was started. Up until this point the lower elementary classrooms were limited to 20 students per room. However, when students were recommended by the SST for special education and tested into the program they were then removed from the general education classes and placed in the Special Education classroom. Frequently then, the general education classes would result in a student population of less than

20. With the implementation of Kristin and Therese's proposal these classes would lose few if any students during the year. Some of these teachers made it clear to Kristin, Therese and the principal that they did not support a plan that would have the special education students as well as at risk students already in place in the inclusive classroom before the school year began. With the strong support of the principal and the support of the School Improvement team though, the Inclusive class did get put into place and remains in place to this day.

## Teacher Participants

The participants in this study included one Special Education teacher, Kristin, one General Education teacher, Therese, and 11 students. Kristin was a young woman who had over five years teaching experience at the time of this study, all of it in Special Education in a Resource room in the lower elementary grades and all in the same school district. She received a Bachelor's degree in Special Education Mental Impairment and a Master's degree in Learning Disabilities from a large, local university in Michigan.

During her years of teaching Kristin became increasingly aware of the fact that Reading was the area in which her Special Education students struggled the most. She also felt that Reading was the area of

instruction in which she herself also struggled the most.
Her own desire to continually improve her teaching and
her increasing awareness of the need to help her students
with Reading sparked an interest in searching for
alternate ways to teach Reading.

At this time Kristin was introduced to the Early
Literacy Program, ELP, through Carol Sue Englert, a
professor at Michigan State University who was presenting
the program to Special Education teachers.  Kristin was
among a group of nine teachers in the experimental group
of the project who were given the opportunity to
participate with a group of researchers in designing and
carrying out a curriculum directed at helping primary
grade students with serious deficits in the fundamental
skills of reading and writing.  ELP was attempting to
construct a unified approach to literacy instruction
across the curriculum that would accelerate the
development of these skills (Englert et al. 1995).  The
teachers joined the researchers to jointly develop the
curriculum and then enact it in their classrooms.  They
implemented the ELP curriculum for several hours a day in
their classrooms utilizing activities that were
integrated in thematic units (Englert et al. 1994).  Each
unit was composed of a variety of activities involving
oral literacy and reading and writing activities

(Englert, Raphael et al., 1994). Kristin was also implementing the phonics-based program *Project Read* (Green & Enfield, 1987) as part of her literacy program.

It was at this time, when Kristin became involved in the ELP project implementing it in her Special Education classroom, that she met me while I was working in ELP in the classroom of another Special Education teacher in the district. Kristin became aware of the Literacy Discussion groups that I was introducing into that other ELP classroom. Due to her commitment to improving her teaching of Reading she spoke with me about the Literacy Groups and volunteered to be a control group for a study I was conducting at that time in the other classroom. Following the period of her participation as the control group for the study Kristin and I continued to speak about the Literacy Discussion groups. She subsequently volunteered to participate in the larger scale study of Literature Discussion groups which resulted in this study. This larger scale project involved conducting Literacy Discussion Groups over a six month period in her own ELP classroom.

Prior to her participation Kristin was teaching in a self-contained Special Education Learning Disabilities classroom. Through her involvement in ELP Kristin became aware of another Special Education teacher who incorporated some inclusion into her classroom in another

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building in the district. She and Therese, a teaching colleague also interested in improving her teaching, paid a joint visit to this teacher's classroom. They were excited at what they saw and soon began to seriously plan how they could incorporate inclusion into their teaching, based on what they saw in the other ELP classroom but tailored to fit their own situation in their own building. Prior to the joint visit Therese had noticed what Kristin's students were able to academically achieve and was impressed by it. As a result Kristin and Tracy taught a unit together to all of the students in both classrooms. They felt the joint unit was successful for all the students and after the visit to the other school, they actively pursued developing an inclusive room in their building, the design of which they presented to the principal and School Improvement team, and continue to implement today.

## Student Participants

The students involved in the study included three girls and eight boys. These eleven students were chosen to participate in the study because they were all Special Education students or in the process of being tested for Special Education. They were lower academically than the other students in the inclusive classroom and all would be in Kristin's Reading class. Four of the students were African-American, two were Biracial, two were Hispanic

and three were white.  Nine of the students were in First
grade and two were in Second grade.  Five of the students
had been retained, four in Kindergarten and one in First
grade.  All of the children were at the Pre-Primer
Reading level.

Due to the transiency typical at this school,
students entered and exited Kristin's class throughout
the year.  Students were also pulled from the classroom
throughout the day for special services such as speech
and language, social work, and occupational therapy.
Pull-outs frequently occurred during the time that the
literature discussions took place.  Kristin and I
discussed this situation and it was determined that the
discussions would continue as scheduled.  One purpose was
to observe how literature discussions would operate in an
ordinary classroom under ordinary conditions.

**Table of Student Participants**

**Materials**

The literature books chosen for the discussions were
drawn from a variety of literature for children.  Rich
book talk is described by Martinez and Roser (1995) as
"diverse talk that explores the story world, the messages
that emerge from that world, and the crafting of the
story."  In order to ensure that the children respond to
literature in these diverse ways we attempted to use a
rich array of books for the literature discussions.

Literature was also chosen based on the anticipated

appeal to the particular group of participating students

and the likelihood of the story themes engendering

discussion (Nussbaum & Puckett, 1990; Martinez & Roser

1995; McGee,1995)

**Procedures**

The literature discussions generally occurred once

or twice a week. Kristin and Therese worked together

with all of the students throughout the school day. For

a portion of the morning though, Kristin would work with

about 20 of the students including the 11 students in the

study, in another classroom. There she concentrated on

literacy activities with the students through Reading

centers. There were generally four Reading centers in

the room with Literature discussions as one of the

centers. The student participants worked as a group at

the Literature discussion center while the other students

moved through the centers. The study participants

remained at the Literature discussion center for the

length of time needed for the discussion. Although this

time was not predetermined but open ended, the

discussions averaged 20 - 30 minutes duration.

Kristin began by reading a story to the

students while seated with them at the reading table.

The tape recorder was turned on when the discussion

began. Kristin talked with the students about the purpose

of the discussion. When Kristin determined the students had nothing more to say she would ask them if they should conclude the discussion. Most of the time the students agreed but on occasion they would state that they needed more time and it was provided. At the conclusion the students were allowed to listen to about two minutes of the tape. They were always delighted to hear themselves responding to the story.

I conducted twice weekly classroom observations during this period, seated at the table with Kristin and students. Each discussion was audiotaped by me and 11 of the discussions were transcribed, resulting in a large set of data. I also took field notes documenting what was discussed and the behavior and responses of the students.

## Data collection

Data were collected during the second semester of the school year, from January through June of 1996. I conducted twice weekly classroom observations during this period, seated at the reading table with Kristin and students. Each discussion was audiotaped by me and I transcribed 11 of the discussions, resulting in a large set of data. I also took field notes each time I was present in the class documenting what was discussed and the behavior and responses of the students. Several times throughout the semester I also videotaped the

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discussions. Additionally, the *Slosson Oral Reading Test* (SORT) was individually administered by me to each of the participating students at the start and conclusion of the study. The *Slosson Oral Reading Test* (SORT) (Slosson, 1963) is a test of sight word recognition used in determining a student's reading grade level.

**Data Analysis**

The questions I raised for study concerned the evolution of students and teacher as full participants in literature discussions. My approach to data analysis was based on that suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) for the generation of grounded theory. Through application of the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 101-116) I engaged in continuous coding and analysis of my data. I coded the data according to a list of literary responses, such as self-in-situation, personal experiences, author's intention, character motivation, etc. I also coded the data for procedures such as, student-to-student talk and student-initiated topics.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

## There's a Nightmare in My Closet

## Teacher Participation in Literature Discussion Group

The first focus of the study examined was the nature of teacher's participation in the study groups. There were two major areas considered within this topic: apprenticing the students in the discussion and discursive practices. The following sections describe and illustrate the teacher's participation in the first discussion through the use of dialogue drawn from the discussion transcripts.

Overall, the analyses across the three discussions show the teacher's participation to be one that can be described as reacting to and anticipating growth in the students as they appropriated the discussion processes and discursive practices. Each of the discussions portrayed a shift in her participation as she brought new ideas and strategies into the teaching and learning process. Her participation in the first discussion of January 11 is addressed below.

## Apprenticing Students in the Discussion Process

Kristin spoke briefly with the students about how to proceed with a discussion. She told the students they did not have to raise their hands and they should look and talk to each other as well as listen to each

other.  Her general approach seemed to be an
apprenticeship of the students in the social practices
associated with good discussions on a need-to-know
basis.

In the first discussion, the struggles of the
students to relate and sequence basic facts of the story
was painfully obvious.  Consequently Kristin's attention
was almost entirely directed to supporting their use of
the dscursive practices.  These discusrsive practices
encompassed sequencing the events of the story,
evaluating the story and characters, and as a result of
initial work in this area, justifying their opinions and
evaluation.  Kristin's emphasis in the first discussion
was nearly entirely directed to addressing the need of
the group members to acquire a discourse for talking
about books rather than on the social processes.
Without these discursive practices, discussion could not
take place.

## Apprenticing Students in Discursive Practices

Throughout the months that led up to the first
discussion Kristin and I considered what made a good
discussion.  Kristin therefore approached the
discussions believing that a good discussion was based
upon the use of discursive practices such as author's
intent, character motivation, relating personal

experiences, students talking directly with each other, and students initiating and utilizing a range of discussion categories.

Of all the discursive practices, personal experience had the highest frequency of occurrences (44) with 35 from the students and nine provided by Kristin. In succeeding order of frequency there were 25 total character motivation responses, with Kristin providing 15 moves related to character motivation and the students 10. There were 14 responses involving evaluation of the story and 11 responses involving justification of evaluation. There were no instances of any other discursive practices.

**Evaluation and Justification** In the first discussion Kristin's intention was to concentrate on having the students evaluate the story. Following the reading of the story, Kristin launched into evaluation through her first question: "What do you think about the story?" Though this open-ended question called for the thoughts and feelings of the participating students, Kristin received brief and literal storybook responses such as, "Um, it's a nightmare in my closet" by Tim or Alicia's response of, "When, um, that monster cried."

**Justification** Instead of evaluating the story, students offered basic facts from the story as answers to Kristin's question. In turn, she began to apprentice

the students in what it meant to justify or explain
their ideas. Tim was the first child to respond and 12
exchanges followed this remark, represented below.

Kristin:   What do you think, Tim?
Tim:       Um, it's a nightmare in my closet.
Kristin:   Yeah, what about that story?
           What do you think?
Tim:       It was a good story.
Kristin:   Why was it a good story?
Tim:       Cuz, it was a nightmare in my closet.
Kristin:   And what made it good?
           What did you like best about the story?
Tim:       Um, when two monsters, when the other
           monster came out.
Kristin:   Oh, at the end?
Tim:       Yeah.  And the, and the last one came
           out.
Kristin:   Why did you like that part?
Tim:       Cuz it was a good story.

In this segment of discourse Kristin attempted to
guide Tim, in the expression and justification of his
thoughts.  Four times Kristin tried to prompt him to
elaborate and justify his opinions ("What about the
story?" "Why was it a good story?" "What made it good?"
"Why do you like that part?") Tim was never able to
provide this justification.  For example, when Kristin
first asked his opinion he replied with a basic fact of
the story.  When further prompted by Kristin, "What
about the story?" he answered that it was a good story.
Again Kristin positioned Tim to justify or explain his
ideas.("Why was it a good story?"), but Tim replied with
additional facts from the story.("When the other monster
came out.")  Finally the segment ended with Tim

repeating that the story was good. This example illustrated the difficulty that young students had in expressing and explaining their views which is a basic expectation for participants of discussion groups.

Although Kristin had planned that the early discussions should arise spontaneously among students, she proceeded to ask each student to evaluate the story in a round-robin fashion. Her exchanges with the next three students following Tim were of shorter duration, but each time, she prompted the students to justify and explain their views. Three of the five students stated that they liked the story because it was funny. For example, Alicia commented, "I don't know, um, cuz it was funny", followed by Nathan and Tina who each answered, "Cuz it was funny." This response proved to be a way for several of the students to gain the floor throughout the successive discussions. Roller and Beed (1994) described this type of response as rote and lifeless but serving a purpose for some students because it might allow the quieter and more timid students to enter into the discussions. Similarly, in the example described above, Tina, a quiet six year old, heard Alicia and Nathan respond with, "cuz it was funny", and then utilized this response herself when called upon to respond.

When Kristin reached the fifth and final child,

Roland, the discourse became uniquely different. The previous three students produced short replies as to what part they liked, such as mentioning when the monster was shot or when he cried. Roland, instead, extended the same idea of the monster crying which provoked Kristin to ask for a justification of this idea.

        Kristin:   What do you think, Roland?
        Roland:    He cried cuz he shot the thing and then
                   he broke his heart.
        Kristin:   Maybe he broke his heart!
                   *Why do you think that?*
        Roland:    Because he was sad.

Roland's extension of, "then he broke his heart", was intriguing in it's individuality and brought forth a revoicing of the phrase by Kristin. She then asked for a justification of Roland's statement that he broke his heart. Roland responded by saying that he was sad.

**Character Motivation**  In the first discussion Kristin also began to introduce and scaffold the students to thinking about the motivation behind the characters' actions. As Kristin focused on character motivation she departed from her previous round-robin style. Instead she presented her question to the entire group rather than to individuals. However, once again, it became apparent that the students struggled with story meaning and events.

Kristin:   When the little boy shot the nightmare, why
           did he do that?
    Tim:   Cuz he was makin him mad and wakin him
           up.

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Kristin:    Ah, and why, what else do you think he
            was  doing?
Tim:        Crying.
Kristin:    Remember at the beginning?
Alicia:     Crying and waking up mom and dad.
Kristin:    Yeah, he started crying.
            Um, so the little boy, was he, did he
            like the nightmare at the beginning of
            the story?
            Did the little boy like the nightmare at
            the beginning of the story?
Alicia:     Yeah. (inaudible) in bed.
Kristin:    At the beginning of the story though?
Alicia:     No.
Kristin:    Why, so...
Tim:        Cuz there's two monsters.
```

In this example, Kristin asked the students to infer the character's motivation. The students readily responded to her question.  The first respondent, Tim, provided a reason for the boy's behavior, "he (nightmare) was makin him mad and wakin him up." However, as Kristin proceeded to explore character motivation ("What else do you think he was doing?"), the students resorted to telling facts from the story rather than interpret motivation.  Moreover as their struggles with sequencing story events became apparent Kristin attempted to anchor their comments to a point in time by making four references to the beginning.

Alicia and Tim reversed the story events, offering the following misrepresentations of who cried (nightmare rather than the boy), and time (boy befriended the nightmare at the end of the story rather than at the beginning).

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Tim:        Crying.
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Kristin:    Remember at the beginning?
Alicia:     Crying and waking up mom and dad.

Kristin:    ...Did the little boy like the nightmare
            at the beginning of the story?
Alicia:     Yeah.  (inaudible) in bed.
Kristin:    At the beginning of the story though?
Alicia:     No.
```

This example showed that young readers had great difficulty with comprehension, even when stories were read aloud to them.  This first book discussion also showed that Karen had more success when she tightly scaffolded students' interpretations through the retelling of cause-and-effect events from the story.  In the following example, she taught character motivation as she modeled and guided the students, working to help them link action to effect.

```
Nick:The cork went out.
Kristin:    The cork goes out!
            So what did that cork do when it came out
            of the gun?
Voices:     It shot him!
Kristin:    Yeah.  *So when he started crying, why do
            you suppose he cried?*
Alicia:     Where did he put them at, in his butt?
Kristin:    No, up here.
            See up here by his head?
Tim:        Ouch!  That's hurt.
```

When the provision of character motivation did not occur spontaneously, Kristin attempted to make connections visible and explicit. "So what did that cork do when it came out of the gun?"  "So when he started crying, why do you suppose he cried?"  In response to this persistent scaffolding on the part of Kristin,

several students jointly voiced that when the cork went out, "It shot him!", with Tim finally providing that motivation for the boy's crying with, "That's hurt."

Kristin also scaffolded their performance in other concrete ways. For example, she utilized the book to develop students' understanding. She pointed to the picture that showed the cork aimed at the nightmare's head. When asked for a clarification, she again, used the illustration to point out that the boy aimed at the nightmare's head. With the support of visual scaffolds and illustrations, Tim provided character motivation, explaining that the nightmare cried because it hurt.

The students, guided by Kristin, persisted in discussing how a cork gun is used and that it could hurt somebody through three pages of transcript. Kristin then redirected the discussion back to character motivation after the students agreed that the gun could hurt people. The following example showed that Kristin continued to do the lion's share of the work. She attempted to make the connections and links between cause and effect explicit for the students, building bigger ideas and concepts from their mostly one-word answers.

Kristin:   So we know that if you have a pop gun or a
          cork gun it could hurt somebody, right?
Voices:   Yeah!
Kristin:   OK. Now, do you suppose this boy knows that?
Voices:   Yeah!
Kristin:   Yeah, so when he shot this cork gun at this

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                  nightmare was he trying to hurt it?
Voices:    No.
Kristin:   Was he trying to hurt it?
Voices:    Yes.
Kristin:   Probably!
                  Because did he want that nightmare in his
                  bedroom anymore?
Tina:      No.
Kristin:   No, so was he trying to hurt it?
Tina:      Yeah.
Kristin:   Yeah, what do you suppose he was thinking?
                  When he shot that nightmare.
```

This passage demonstrates Kristin's careful and

thoughtful guidance of the students in supporting their

ability to think about and discuss character motivation.

Kristin worked hard to scaffold their thinking until

they could produce a justification of the idea that the

boy was trying to hurt the monster. What ideas and

inferences they lacked, she provided or prompted.  She

made explicit for them the link between having a cork

gun and the possibility of someone getting hurt.

Striving to connect the character's motivation (e.g. not

wanting the nightmare in his bedroom), and his actions

(shooting the nightmare), Kristin came out and directly

asked the group, "...did he want that nightmare in his

bedroom anymore?"  Several students answered her

together, but seeing the need for additional work in

establishing cause and effect, Kristin then asked,

"...so, was he trying to hurt it?"  Tina's response of,

"Yeah", finally represented the group's beginning

understanding of the boy's inner motivation for shooting

the nightmare.

Kristin persisted in her hard work in guiding students to see a connection between actions and effects later in the discussion as illustrated by the following example.

Kristin:   So when this boy shot the cork at this
           nightmare what did he hope the nightmare
           would do?
Alicia:    Not play with him.
Kristin:   Not play with him and maybe even...
Nick:      Or he won't go back in his bedroom.
Kristin:   Yay, OK!
           So he thought if he shot this cork at the
Voice:     Monster
Kristin:   ...nightmare maybe he wouldn't go back in
           the closet and maybe he'd just go away.
           Is that what happened though?

Perhaps this segment illustrates the emergence of students' anticipation of a cause-effect relationship that had been missing earlier in the discussion. When Kristin asked students to predict the anticipated effect from the stated action of the boy shooting the cork at the nightmare, Alicia responded with the prediction that the nightmare would, "not play with him." Continuing in this work to make connections Kristin revoiced Alicia's reply and began to add more with, "...and maybe even..." when Nathan supplied a second possible effect, "Or he won't go back in his bedroom." At last these two students seemed able to see the connections and provided some possible effects following

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Kristin's careful, hard work, That Kristin was excited
by this development seems to be apparent through her
enthusiastic response, because she immediately said,
"Yay! OK!" Her excitement suggested an appreciation
for this literary breakthrough among her students.
Whether it is possible to attribute the beginnings of an
anticipatory cause-effect relationship of the students
to Kristin's instruction is difficult to tell. Yet
perhaps her work had borne some fruit. The students had
shown glimmers of character motivation in this last
example, whereas earlier in the discussion they
exhibited confusion and an inability to provide a cause-
effect relationship.

## Student Participation in Literature Discussion Groups

A second focus of this study was the participation
of the students in the literature discussion groups. I
studied students' participation to discover whether
their participation had changed overtime. The specific
areas of interest included the occurrence of student
initiated topics, and student to student talk. Sections
of discussion dialogue were examined and analyzed. The
results of this analysis for the first discussion are
found in the following sections.

**Student Initiated Topics**  During the first discussion
the students mostly followed Kristin, responding to her
questions.  However, their first attempts to self-
initiate  topics concerned personal experience.  Most of
their responses focused on the main character's, action
to shoot the nightmare with the consequence that the
nightmare cried.  Tim, for example, mentioned that the
gun, which Kristin further clarified by stating that it
was a cork gun.  At this point Alicia entered the
discussion providing the information that, "you can
shoot animals with it."  For the remaining six and a
half of the eleven page transcript the talk centered on
the personal experiences of students concerning cork
guns.

Personal experience appeared to be an entry point
into the discussion for most of the students.  After
Alicia's introduction of her own personal experience,
the other students brought forth examples and
information related to their own.  Tim's remark that if
someone shot him with a real gun it would hurt, brought
the response from Tina that he would die.  Nathan then
said that he had a pop gun.  Roland added that he also
had a pop gun and that he also had a real gun.

Since this was the topic in which the discussion

was centering Kristin began to speak with the students about guns, specifically pop or cork guns. The following segment about guns represents Kristin's attempts to intervene to highlight gun safety and the students readily picked up on her question. They continued with examples from their own experiences.

Tim:       My aunt bought me a shot gun.
           But I broke it cuz I didn't like shot
           guns.
Roland:    I had a shot gun.
           I broke the back of it off and I should
           of had it.
           I had a...
Kristin:   If you have, if you have a pop gun, or a
           cork gun like this, um, what do you need
           to do with it?
           I mean, what's a safe way to play with
           it?
Tina:      Don't shoot it to the wall.
Kristin:   Yeah, you wouldn't want to shoot anybody
           would you?
Alicia:    And don't point it at nobody!
Kristin:   And don't point at anyone.
Tina:      Yeah, and point it at the wall.

In this segment Kristin acknowledged and validated the student-introduced topic involving their personal experience.  The topic happened to involve guns and she remained on that topic although she confined her remarks to cork guns, not following through at this point with the topic of real guns mentioned by a few.  Being allowed to express their personal experiences and knowledge seemed to have a somewhat liberating effect on the students.  They entered the discussion more freely, and they began to volunteer answers that went beyond

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simple phrases and one-word answers.

The discussion continued with further talk regarding guns hurting people and specifically the cork gun in the book hurting the nightmare. Alicia again sought to introduce her personal experience.

        Alicia:    No, I mean you know what?
                   My brother has a real gun.
        Voice:     (inaudible)
        Kristin:   And did it hurt?
        Alicia:    My brother had a real gun at my uncle's
                   cuz he shoots deers, and he put some sand
                   in it and he shot my sister with the
                   sand.
        Kristin:   Ooh.
                   And I suppose that hurt a lot?
        Alicia:    My mom yelled at him.
        Kristin:   All right.
                   I'm glad she did, that's real dangerous.

Permitted to bring personal experiences to the table allowed for dramatic experiences to come forth as exemplified in Alicia's recounting of her brother shooting her sister with sand. Kristin used this moment as one in which to "teach" the students. She expressed her opinion that she was glad Alicia's mother yelled at her brother, then justified it with the explanation of his action being really dangerous. Throughout the rest of the discussions Kristin continued this practice of stepping in at a moment when she felt it necessary to address a particular social issue.

Although the students were able with minimal success to provide justifications and address character

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motivation, it was through personal experiences that they seemed to seize the initiative rather than simply follow the teacher's lead. Only when students were given the opportunity to share their experiences did they become comfortable in initiating and sustaining talk. They participated readily and frequently. Finally, after sharing many personal experiences, Kristin ended the discussion by telling them that their discussion time had concluded.

**Student to student talk** Before the introduction of literature discussion groups, Kristin discussed the importance of fostering student-to-student conversations. Kristin's commitment to this goal was a driving force in her early efforts to apprentice her students into the discussion practices. Yet the first discussion was dominated by one-line utterances between students and teacher. There was, however, a minimal amount of student-to-student talk. Two examples of this occurred: the first example consisted of seven responses before an utterance by the teacher, and the second consisted of five responses prior to the teacher's utterance. I found it interesting that each of these two examples of student-to-student talk occurred within the context of talk about personal experiences.

The first episode of student talk was related to

the topic of guns.  Tim had just offered his opinion

that being shot by a cork gun would hurt.  Kristin

revoiced and broadcast this idea, which seemed to be the

prompt for other students to address this topic and each

other.

```
Tim:        Ouch!  That's hurt.
Kristin:    It probably hurt, didn't it?
Tim:               (inaudible) shot me with a real gun
            that would really hurt.
Tina:       You would die!
Nick:       Yeah!
            It would go through your, it would go
            through your...
Alicia:     Neck!
Kristin:    It could.
            It could.
Tim:        It couldn't
Roland:     Go through your neck cuz your neck is...
Nick:       It could go through anything.
```

Thus the students began to sustain the conversation

when the topic was of personal relevance or

significance.  This was the first time the students were

listening to, extending and responding to each other.

Another instance of student-to-student talk did arise

later in the discussion.  Although this exchange seemed

prompted once again by Kristin's revoicing of a

student's idea, the student-to-student talk centered on

a clarifying question issued to Roland by Tim.  Again,

the emergence of genuine response among students occurs

in the context of their personal interests and

experiences.

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Alicia:     They're gonna make a fake gun.
Kristin:    Yeah, it is a fake gun isn't it.
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Roland:    No, it is not.
           I had a...


Tim:       A real one?
Roland:    No, a little toy gun.
           And it had a trick and it had sticky
           things and I shot it up in the air and it
           didn't come back down.
```

Roland made the counterclaim that it was not a fake gun. When he began to introduce the idea that he had something, Tim spoke directly to Roland asking him if it was a real gun. Roland replied back directly to Tim and told him that it was a toy gun, and then he explained how it worked.

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Kristin:   It didn't come back down.
Tim:       Yep, I know what he talking about.
           One of things, the sticky thing like that
           you that you shoot at your windows.
           And it stick on there.
```

The literature discussion afforded Tim the opportunity to clarify, explain and extend Roland's statement. Rarely in the traditional curriculum do students with disabilities have opportunities to do so. Hence, discussions seemed to provide the forum for the students to participate in these practices.

Despite her belief in the importance of student-to-student talk in the discussion process, it occurred just twice. Relinquishing control of the discussion to the students is not always easy to enact although the belief in its importance is in place.

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Relinquishing control takes time and it was central to Kristin's participation in all the successive discussions throughout the rest of the semester.

**Use of the book during the discussion phase**

Kristin did not have multiple copies or class sets of books. Consequently there was only one book present when the discussions were held. Kristin established herself as a master of reading books upside down as she would always lay the book on the table in front of the students, so that they could see and read it. The students were involved while she read aloud and were enthralled with the illustrations, frequently pointing to them and commenting about them. Tina enjoyed the illustrations immensely and I frequently noticed that she would light up when she saw many of the pictures and would poke Alicia's arm. Both Tina and Alicia often sat next to each other, and seemed to share their enjoyment and reactions to the story.

When Kristin had concluded the reading of the story she would leave it in front of the students on the table during the ensuing discussion. During the discussion of <u>There's a Nightmare in My Closet</u> there was little overt use of the physical book during the discussion, although it was present the entire time. Kristin at one point did refer to the book when the

students were first talking about the boy shooting the nightmare. She pointed to the cork gun on one of the pages and asked the students if they knew what kind of gun it was pictured. The discussion continued on about how to use the gun and the book was not used again. Perhaps because of the heavy emphasis on personal experience by all of the students during the first discussion, referral to the book was not crucial. As the weeks progressed, the use of the book gained in importance and played a more significant role.

## Bigmama's

The second book discussion was Bigmama's (Donald Crews, 1991). This discussion occurred on March 6, 1996, two months into the study. The percentage of teacher responses to total responses was 45% which was the exact percentage of teacher responses in the initial discussion of There's a Nightmare in my Closet.

One reason for examining this particular discussion was Kristin's introduction of a "seed" on this day. The seed was a metaphor selected by Kristin to scaffold her students' talk. She was continually searching for new ways to support or guide her students. For this lesson she utilized an erasable white tablet board with magic markers to make visible the idea of a seed. She brought the board to the reading table and explained to the students that when they introduced a seed, or an idea

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that could be built upon, she would draw a seed on the board. Each time a student elaborated upon the seed she would draw a root, a part of a stem, a leaf and a flower. As their talk about the seed grew, the drawing would grow, hopefully into a complete plant with roots, stem, leaves and a flower. One of Kristin's goals for introducing the seed metaphor was to help students to develop a focused discussion, with less jumping around and less extraneous talk.

An important factor for including Bigmama's was the arrival of Jose, a new student. Jose had been in a general education second grade classroom up until this date. The basic reason he was moved, as Kristin relayed to me, was that his teacher could get him to do no work. There had been a new student to join the group before Jose. However, by the time Jose entered the group on March 6th, it had met quite a few times. In fact, Bigmama's was the 16th discussion. Meeting together to discuss a book was an established routine and the students had begun to appropriate the social discursive practices as will be described below. For these reasons Jose was the first newcomer to enter the group.

A last factor in the decision to examine Bigmama's was that Alicia seemed to accept new leadership in the group. She had always been an active participant and

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continued to be for the remainder of the semester.
However, it was of note, to find that Alicia also came
forth as a leader and force in Bigmama's.

## Teacher Participation in Literature Discussion Group Apprenticing Students in the Discussion Process

Two months had passed between the first discussion
and that of Bigmama's (Donald Crews, 1991). By this
time the students appeared to be in the process of
appropriating the discussion process and discursive
practices. This movement affected Kristin's
participation and her apprenticeship. Because the
students floundered in the very basics of being able to
give facts of the story, placing them in sequence, and
expressing their feelings and ideas, Kristin had little
opportunity prior to this time to focus on the social
practices of a good discussion. Social practices that
Kristin emphasized throughout the discussions were: one
person talking at a time, eyes on the person talking,
talk only about the book, and it is OK to disagree.
These practices embodied the "how to" of a discussion.
The social practices were differentiated in this study
from cognitive practices or strategies or the "what" or
content of a discussion.

Now, however, Kristin was able to devote time to
apprenticing the students in the "how" of having a

discussion. Two variants of her efforts appeared in
Bigmama's. First, she indirectly guided the students as
opportunities arose and told the students how to
participate. Her attempts to guide the students and fine
tune their appropriation of procedures was evident
throughout the discussion. One example appeared at the
beginning of the talk when Tina pointed to the page in
the book that she liked.

<pre>
Kristin:   OK, so all of you told about lots of
           parts you like in the book.
Tina:      I didn't.
Kristin:   Oh, I'm sorry.
Tina:(pointing to page)
           This one.
Kristin:   (speaking to group) What are you going to
           ask?
           You're not just going to tell us that you
           like a part.
Alicia:    Why did you like it?
Kristin:   Yeah, why did you like it?
           We want to know!
Tina:      Because the uncle came.
</pre>

When Tina indicated a part of the story she liked,
Kristin utilized that moment to gently prod the students
to prompt other student speakers to support and justify
opinions. She asked the group as a whole to think how
to respond when a member had stated that she liked a
particular part, ("What are you going to ask?") Without
directly telling the students to ask a question, she
positioned them to receive and respond to other
students' ideas. Following this she stated simply that
one doesn't just mention what they like, (You are not
just going to tell us...") Thus, Kristin used the

situated context of the discussion to guide the students rather than directly pre-teach these skills. That this coaching strategy was successful seems indicated by the fact that Alicia immediately asked Tina why she liked that story part. The students began to appropriate this request for justification within this and subsequent discussions. Yet, when the students appeared to miss an opportunity Kristin stepped in as a guide and model.

Kristin also directly taught the interactional processes to her students, as seen in an extended episode that appeared in the beginning of the discussion. Jose, new to the class and literature discussions, had been interrupting Kristin. She responded to him, then directly instructed the whole group in one of the conversational facets of holding a discussion.

Kristin:   Jose, you've got to let me talk too, OK?
I hear Alicia talking and Tina talking to
each other and actually looking at each
other when they are talking.
But you know what?
You're doing that when somebody else is
talking and you're talking so quietly
that I don't think Theo can hear it over
here.
I don't think Jeremy can hear right
beside me.
Can you hear what they're talking about?
You can't, can you, because they're doing
it so quietly.
So if you guys want to talk about
something in the book, that's fine. Just
make sure nobody else is talking and make

sure it is loud enough so that we can all hear.

In this episode Kristin had overheard Alicia and Tina talking to each other, rather than addressing the group. Kristin wanted to emphasize the importance of social cohesion and communication in the discourse group. She recognized that her students needed to learn how to access the speaking floor. Not only did she address not talking when someone else is talking, but also the importance of speaking loud enough so that all members could hear. Then Kristin transformed the exchange between Alicia and Tina into an example of good discussion procedures. She spoke to Alicia asking her to broadcast the small exchange with Tina to the larger group.

Kristin:   Alicia, could you say that again real loud.
          You just asked Tina a very, very nice question, but I don't think everybody heard.
          Ask it again.
Alicia:   Tina, what was your bestest picture?
Tina:     When the man said, "Don't leave the babies on the bus."

Kristin validated Alicia's question when she asked her to repeat it to the group. In this way Kristin used the moment-to-moment interactions to teach both the social, linguistic, and cognitive processes underlying book discussions. Kristin used Alicia's question to

teach and model for the entire group. In turn, Tina's appropriate response also demonstrated that students could ask and respond to questions posed by their peers, another important aspect of holding a discussion.

Throughout the discussions, Kristin worked with the students to model, guide and transform the talk within the context of the interactions. For example, when the students were talking about Arthur's personal experience with fishing poles, Alicia addressed Kristin who then guided her to ask others.

Alicia:     Teacher.
Kristin:    You know what, don't ask me.
            Think of somebody else you might want to
            ask something to.
Tim:        *Like me!*
Kristin:    OK. We're going to really try hard today
            to look at other people when we're
            talking.
Arthur:     *Can we look at you too and look at
            others?*
Tina:       What was your favorite part of the book?
Kristin:    *Wait, wait, wait, it's already going on!*
Alicia:     When they took off their socks.
Kristin:    Tina, can you ask Alicia again?
            I don't think everybody heard, and you
            had a really good question.
Tina:       What was your favorite part? (looking at
            Alicia)
Alicia:     When they took off their socks and shoes.
            (laughter)
Ss.:        *WHY! (altogether)*
Alicia:     It was funny! (laughs)
            It might have been stinky! (all laugh)

This episode showed that students were beginning to understand the elements of participating in book discussions. After Kristin's initial response to Alicia not to direct a question to her, Tina took the floor and

asked Alicia for a favorite part of the story. Kristin
affirmed with enthusiasm in her voice that good
discussion procedures were already taking place. Asking
Tina to repeat what she said Kristin 'replayed' the
interaction so that others might observe and learn from
Tina's example. The students further proved they were
taking as their own the procedures of discussion when
they asked in unison "*Why!*", thereby positioning Alicia
to justify why it was her favorite part. Students were
assuming the conversational roles that their teacher had
modeled.

Later when Theo asked a question that no one heard,
Kristin felt the need to directly instruct the students
in how to employ good listening practices. Again she
brought the group together and reviewed a variety of
procedures.

> Kristin:  Theo just asked Tim a really good
>           question, but I don't think everybody
>           heard.
>           We're not keeping our eyes on the person
>           talking.
>           We're really jiggling.
>           Let's all sit back down.
>           Come on.
>           Okay.
>           Get ready.
>           Theo, let's get everybody ready because
>           we're not listening.
>           Nathan, Nathan, hold on.
>           Are we all ready to listen?
> Ss:       Yes, yes.

```
Kristin:   Okay.
           Try it again Theo.
```

Kristin brought a variety of social processes to the attention of the group. Extended student-to-student talk seemed to be the immediate result. Shortly after, the students opened the book and attempted to clarify what items were illustrated in the book. The students discussed the illustrations with no extraneous talk for 17 utterances. Given her continual efforts to nurture the communicative environment for discussions, Kristin reinforced the social processes she had observed, but felt compelled to push for even greater levels of successful discussions. The achievement of group cohesion proved elusive for this group of struggling readers. Students had begun to talk to each other but they needed to talk to the group.

```
Kristin:   You know what?
           Stop!
           Everybody stop.
           I really really like the fact that you're
           looking at each other.
           But you know what's going on?
           We've got a conversation here, we've got
           a conversation here, we've got a
           conversation here.
           I don't like that.
           Because we're supposed to have one big
           conversation.
           You don't have to talk to the person next
           to you.
           You can talk to anybody in our whole
           group.
           How many conversations do we have going
           at one time?
```

```
Ss:        One.
           One.
           One.
```

Thus, students in the discussion of <u>Bigmama's</u> were
talking to each other, a condition entirely absent from
the first discussion of <u>There's a Nightmare in My
Closet</u>. They spoke for an extended period,
demonstrating a beginning adroitness in how to talk and
respond, and extend each other's ideas. Kristin could
now address procedural points since she no longer had to
struggle with the expressive language problems so
evident in the first discussion. After the students
responded that one conversation should be going on at a
time Kristin continued with apprenticing the students
through direct teaching.

```
Kristin:   One.
           So if you're talking just to the person
           beside you nobody else can hear you.
           And you might have something really
           important to tell us that we all want to
           hear.
```

As students began to talk, Kristin immediately
responded when she noticed Theo speaking when others
held the floor.

```
Kristin:   Oh, Theo, stop.
           Do you see Nathan and Alicia already
           talking to each other?
           Then can you talk to them?
           Okay.
           Let's move on to something else.
```

These kids had lots of fun at Big Mama's
house.

While Kristin was talking, Jose, the newcomer,
tried to interrupt.  This prompted Kristin to reteach
the procedure of not interrupting others, which was the
occasion to apprentice Joe in the social processes of
book discussions.

Kristin:    Because you know what?
            You know what, Jose?
            I'm talking right now so you need to
            listen
            to me.
            We're just interrupting each other and I
            think we're being real disrespectful to
            each other.
            Arthur just said, boy our seed hasn't
            grown much, has it?

Following this extended stretch of teacher talk the
students employed the procedures and behaviors that she
addressed.  This discussion was twice the length of
There's a Nightmare in My Closet.  The discussion of
Bigmama's contained 433 utterances, while that of
There's a Nightmare in My Closet had 207 utterances.
The above example occurred just over the halfway mark
and for the remaining half of the discussion Kristin did
not need to address forthrightly the rules and
procedures.  She gently guided them as circumstances
arose as in the following examples.

Arthur:     Had he ever been on a train before?
            He started...

```
Kristin:   Ask that question of somebody, Arthur,
           that's a good question.
Arthur:    Has he ever been on a train before?
```

Arthur repeated his question but not to a

particular member.  Kristin guided again when Tina

questioned her.

```
Tina:(to Kristin) That's probably his family.
Kristin:   Tell somebody else.
Tina:      Alicia, that's probably his family.
```

This time Tina not only repeated her comment but

directed it away from Kristin and to Alicia.  In this

manner, Kristin apprenticed her students in how to

initiate talk with other members of the group.  She

tried to step back from the authoritative stance of the

teacher who receives the questions and comments of the

group.  A little later on Kristin spoke to the fact that

Arthur was not paying attention doing so through this

brief exchange.

```
Kristin:   (to Arthur) Did you hear anything Alicia
           said?
Ted:       Yes.
Arthur:    Yeah.
Ted:       She miss her grandma.
Kristin:   Are you sure?
           Because you were talking right when she
           was talking.
Tina:      One person talk at a time.
```

This was an exchange I particularly enjoyed because

not only did Kristin quietly and gently guide Arthur in

his discussion behavior but little Tina joined in with Kristin in apprenticing the others in the procedure that one person should talk at a time, ("One person talk at a time.")

Kristin's apprenticeship in the discussion procedures was beginning to result in an enhancement in student participation in Bigmama's. The students came to this discussion with a basic grasp of how to hold a discussion. Although some coaching by Kristin remained necessary, she apprenticed the students throughout the overall discussion through questions, rebroadcasting particular interactions, or making slight suggestions. However, even this second approach was not frequently employed. The students had taken control of some of the social practices enabling them to focus on the discursive practices.

## Apprenticing Students in Discursive Practices

Bigmama's by Donald Crews was uniquely different from the other books discussed. It is autobiographical in that Donald Crews, who grew up in Newark, New Jersey, describes one of his childhood summer visits with his family to Bigmama's in Florida. "Bigmama" is what the family called their grandmother. The entire book pictures a little boy and his family engaged in summer activities at Bigmama's house in the country. The book

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ends with an illustration depicting an adult man is depicted looking through a window at the night skyline of a large city. On this final page, the main character states that he sometimes thinks that he might wake up in the morning and be at Bigmama's with the whole summer ahead of him. It is not explicitly stated in the book who this adult is and his connection to the story.

Kristin did substantial work in bringing the students to this point, through careful guidance, but rarely told the students. She utilized her metaphor of a seed to scaffold their performance. The seed was introduced on February 29th, six days prior to the discussion of Bigmama's. She drew upon the metaphor for the third time with this discussion. With each related idea stated by the students that connected to a preceding idea Kristin would draw roots to the seed, then a stem, leaves and a flower. As discussion of a particular topic was deepened and sustained by the participants, the seed grew into a flower.

Early in the discussion of Bigmama's Kristin asked the group to come up with a good seed. The students had been listing parts of the book that they liked to that point. The students managed a few attempts before Tim eventually presented an idea that proved to be a good seed.

```
Kristin:    Now who can come up with a good seed.
            Okay, let's put this book back here for
            just a minute.
            Some of you have reminded me that I
            haven't started making the roots grow out
            of our seed yet.
Nathan:     Me, me, me.
Kristin:    What would be a good seed for our...
Jose:       I like...
Kristin:    No, not something you like.
            We already talked about things that you
            like.
            What would be a good seed for our story
            that we could keep growing as we talk.
Nathan:     They went fishing.
Alicia:     So, Tina, what was your favorite picture
            in this?
Tim:        I know.
            We went to Bigpapa's.
Kristin:    Oh, say it again, Tim.
            Because, the girls were talking over
            here.
            I don't think they heard that.
Tim:        We went to Bigpapa house.
Kristin:    They went to Bigmama's and Bigpapa's
            house.
            I think that's a great seed. (drawing
            seed)
            So let's put our seed in here, so now we
            want to build on things on Tim's seed.
Jose:       The uncle didn't want to pick them up
            with the haystack and the horses.
Kristin:    Yeah, he didn't want to pick them up with
            the horses did he?
Nathan:     Yes!
```

Producing a good seed was challenging. Jose

responded to Kristin's request for a seed with a simple

expression of a part that he liked. Jose, being the new

student, revealed what might be salient to newcomers

about how one participates in a book discussion. For

many students, the nearly formulaic response of "I like"

provided a visible port of entry into the discussion.

Even newcomers could grasp the structure and meaning of
this move.   It provided easy access to the
conversation. In addition, Roller & Beed, (1994) stated
that even adult evaluations of books often begin with "I
really liked..."  Tim's response, however, was deemed a
more promising seed by Kristin.  Although the
grandfather's name of Bigpapa was mentioned the book
title was Bigmama's.  Throughout the story the family
spoke of visiting Bigmama's.  Yet Bigpapa was the term
employed by Tim in his attempt to express his idea.
Kristin revoiced his idea and extended it by inserting
Bigmama to the response.  A seed was drawn on the white
board but the students did not focus their talk around
it.  They continued with what they liked, referring for
the third time to the part when the conductor called out
for the passengers not to leave the babies on the train.
Young students gravitate to humorous parts of a story.
The humor can be another hook into the story as appeared
to be the case in Bigmama's.  The students referred to
the conductor's joke several times in the discussion.
Kristin acknowledged this was a favorite part, then
began to have the students think about the relationships
of the characters leading up to talk about the adult
pictured on the last page.

     Tina:    When the man said,  "Don't leave the
babies on
the bus.

```
Tim:       That was a joke.
Kristin:   That was a joke wasn't it.
           It was funny.
           I saw a lot of you laugh when I read that
           line.
           Did you think that was funny, Jeremy?
           (Jeremy nods)
           That was good.
           I'm confused about something maybe you
           can help me out.
           The whole story was about these kids and
           their mom who wanted to visit.
           And Bigmama was who?
Alicia:    Their mom's mom.
Kristin:   Which means she was what?
Alicia:    The grandma.
Kristin:   She was a grandma.
```

Alicia was able to employ retrospective thinking and drew inferences from the connections and meaning of the text. Realizing that this relationship with Bigmama was understood. Kristin asked the students for help in clarifying relationships and settings. Prior to Bigmama's, discussions were not based on autobiographical material. The connection between Donald Crews as a boy and as an adult on the last page proved to be a difficult concept for the students to grasp. Yet with Kristin's guidance, the students eventually realized the connection and subsequently engaged in a discussion of author's intent.

```
Kristin:   Well help me figure this out.
           I don't understand how the whole thing
           was about the fun things they do at
           Bigmama's house and then at the end here
           we have a man who lives I mean it looks
           like he's living where?
```

```
Arthur:     In the city!
            In the city!
Kristin:    In the city, it looks like he's living in
            the city.
            So he's not here at Bigmama's where she
            lives.
Tim:        Bigpapa.
Nathan:     Bigdada.
Tim:        Bigpapa.
Jose:       That's the mom's wife.
Alicia:     Wife! (laughs)
Kristin:    Well, listen to what it says here, listen
            to what it says.
            Right here on this page it says:
            "The night was jet black except for the
            millions of stars.
            We could hardly sleep thinking about the
            things to come."
            So where are they right now?
```

It appeared that Arthur realized that the adult was now living in the city, "In the city! In the city!" However, the relationship of the adult to the earlier characters in the book was implicit. The students' abilities to engage in inferential reasoning was undeveloped, so Kristin bridged the gap as she sought to help them understand the retrospective technique of flashback. She had to fill in the cognitive gaps to build bridges between the events of the story. She then refocused on the setting by reading from the end of the book, then questioned them as to the setting. Following initial confusion, the students concluded that the family is in Bigmama's backyard.

```
Kristin:    So where are they right now?
```

```
Tim:       In the city.
Alicia:    At home.
Nathan:    At home.
Kristin:   Where are they?
Tina:      Outside.
Kristin:   Where?
Alicia:    Outside in the backyard.
Kristin:   Where?
           Whose backyard?
Alicia:    Bigmama's and Bigpapa's.
Kristin:   So they are still at Bigmama's.
```

Tina understood and identified the setting as outside. Alicia built on that information with the addition of, "Outside in the backyard." She became more precise when questioned by Kristin, labeling the backyard as Bigmama's and Bigpapa's. Working together, the two students and Kristin constructed the setting of the second to last page in the book. All the family is out in Bigmama's backyard gazing at the night sky. Alicia, who was the first to identify Bigmama as the children's grandmother, now worked with others to accurately describe the setting. She was also the first to connect the boy in the story as the grown up on the last page, taking 14 utterances to realize the connection, as shown below.

```
Kristin:   And are these grown up adults or are
           these kids?
Alicia:    Kids.
Ss:        Grown ups.
Kristin:   Kids.
           So that I don't understand why this is,
           that on this page...
Alicia:    That's the dad.
Kristin:   It's not.
           That's not the dad.
```

```
Nathan:     Aw, that's the kid.
Kristin:    What did...
Tim:        The kid.
Kristin:    But he doesn't look like a kid.
Alicia:     He's a dad, he's a dad now.
            He grew up.
```

The difficulty of inferencing was evident by the fact that Tim and Nathan remained confused, in this exchange referring to the adult as a kid. Alicia, however, realized that it was an adult, coming to full realization with her last response that one of the children had grown up.

When provided with the opportunity to draw connections, and when guided by the teacher, special education students were able to draw inferences.

Nevertheless, Kristin's efforts to prompt understanding of the deeper meaning of story events did not immediately prove successful. Subsequent talk returned to basic facts from the story. Four pages of transcript continued in this manner until Kristin grew frustrated and felt the need to intervene again with her metaphor of the seed.

```
Kristin:    That's what our seed needs to grow and
            we haven't been talking much about that
            so our seed hasn't grown much.
            All I keep hearing over and over is I
            like this part and I like that part and
            that's important and that's good to talk
            about but we really have already talked
            about that quite a bit.
```

The students were intrigued by the author's

position in the story as a boy and as an adult. What the teacher desired was difficult for them to understand or achieve. Alicia, Arthur, and Jose continued to question and talk about the author, Donald Crews. Once again, Kristin followed their lead and used their talk about the author, to push them to consider ideas outside the immediate facts of the story.

> Kristin: But I'm wondering why Donald Crews, why do you think he wrote this book?
> Tim: It was a good book.
> Arthur: I liked the book.
> Kristin: *I was thinking maybe even more.*
> *Because sometimes when we write a book*
> *you have a reason for writing it.*
> *Like when you write in your journals you*
> *have a reason for writing what you wrote.*
> Alicia: Because it might happen to him.
> Kristin: Oh my gosh, Alicia, say that again!
> Jeremy he didn't hear I'm sure.

When Kristin asked for author's intention, the talk began with the familiar and comfortable "I like" responses. When students didn't understand the topic question, they fell back upon the language that was comfortable and that provided them some entry to the discussion. Kristin then made an analogy to the students' own journal writing. This connection to their personal lives ("Like when you write in your journals, you have...") seemed to then enable Alicia to provide a reason for why Donald Crews wrote the book, "Because it might happen to him." This breakthrough led the

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students to build together the relationships of the people pictured. Kristin allowed them to direct the discussion, then interjected again the idea of the seed.

```
Kristin:   Oh my gosh!
           Now our plant is growing!
           That was some good things that we're
           talking about now!
           We're really moving here.
           So we talked through that Donald, or that
           this man was remembering the grandma.
           And now, Alicia, wow, she thinks that
           maybe Donald Crews, the author, there's
           his name Donald Crews is writing about...
Tina:      Himself!
```

Besides developing students' abilities to infer relationships and author's intention, Kristin introduced talk about the illustrator. She began by speaking directly to Tim but then included two other students.

```
Kristin:   Tim, this is something else that I have a
           question for you.
           I don't see anything on here usually on
           the front cover is where the author's
           name is,like Donald Crews and it's also
           where the illustrator's name is, Jose.
           Can you see that, Jeremy?
           I'm sorry. (showing him the book)
           There's the author's name.
           I don't see an illustrator's name on
           here.
Tina:      Me either.
Kristin:   What do you suppose that means?
Jose:      Maybe he's the author and the
           illustrator.
Kristin:   Oh, Jose.
           Say that again.
```

Kristin did not preteach the concept of illustrator. Instead she wove thinking about the illustrator into the evolving conversation. She mentioned that usually on the front cover one could find

the names of the author and illustrator. Earlier
Kristin had done the same thing when she told the group
that she was confused about who a character might be,
instead of directly asking them to define a
relationship. In this manner, she took the position of
a participant in the group, modeling her own questions
for the group to consider. Although Tim did not
respond, she later included Jose's name, the new
student. Jose eventually conjectured that the author and
illustrator might be one and the same. Kristin was
thrilled, ("Oh, Jose!") and acknowledged the importance
of his inference by positioning Jose to broadcast his
theory to the group. She gave further reinforcement to
Jose when she continued to talk about his conjecture of
one person being both the author and illustrator.

> Kristin: Jose thinks he may be the author and
> illustrator.
> If that's the case who drew all these
> pictures?

**Student Participation in Literature Discussion Groups**

**Student Initiated Topics** Analysis of There's a
Nightmare in My Closet and Bigmama's suggested that
students were more confident in their use of discussion
responses over time. Whereas in There's a Nightmare in
My Closet there was only one student-initiated topic,
personal experience, there were seven student-initiated
topics in Bigmama's. Without prompting from Kristin,

the students introduced topics and with one exception, extended student talk arose from these student-initiated topics.

Theo opened the discussion by introducing evaluation when he said that he liked, "...that part um, when they didn't get to ride on the tractor."  Jose, the new member, who had no initial instruction in discussions followed Theo's lead and immediately stated a part that he did not like.

| | |
|---|---|
| Theo: | I like the part, I like the part when they um, I like that part um when they didn't get to ride on the tractor. |
| Jose: | I didn't like the part when they wanted to go on the horses. |
| Alicia: | Why? |
| Jose: | With the haystack? |
| Alicia: | Why? |
| Arthur: | Why you didn't like it? |
| Theo: | Yeah, why you didn't like that? |
| Tina: | Why didn't you like it? |
| Jose: | Why, because they always wanted to. |
| Nathan: | When they catch the fish. |
| Theo: | I like when they catch the fish. |
| Alicia: | Why? Why? |
| Tina: | Why? You didn't say nuthin yet. |
| Arthur: | Why you all keep saying why for nothing? |
| Tim: | Because I feel like it. |
| Nathan: | You're supposed to. |

The evaluations by Theo and Jose were not supported or justified by the students.  The formulaic phrases "I liked" and "I didn't like" were a way into the discussions but were not developed across speakers. Roller & Beed,(1994) suggest that formulaic "I likes" or

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unsupported evaluations might be a way for readers with disabilities who are often described as passive, to enter a discussion and display enthusiasm.

What distinguished <u>Bigmama's</u> from the first discussion was the students' assumption of responsive roles that had been previously held by the teacher. After he stated what he did not like, Jose seemed to be caught unawares by the barrage of questions by three members. Alicia was the first to question Jose and request support for his opinion. Tina revoiced Alicia's question, and this persistence finally brought Jose into giving a justification ("because they always wanted to"). Although it is uncertain what Jose meant with his response, he did provide further explanation or justification. It was noteworthy that Jose had been guided to the point of providing this justification solely by other students. Thus, the students who had participated in the prior discussions had appropriated discursive practices associated with justification. They were pushing the thinking and talk of other group members.

There were other examples in the second discussion of the development of discussion practices by students. Alicia, for example, began to demonstrate her ability to step into the practices laid down by her teacher in prior discussions. For example, in the breakout

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conversation between Alicia and Tina that Kristin rebroadcast to the group, Alicia takes up a "teacher" position by saying, "Tina, what was your bestest picture?" Tina's response to Alicia's question referred to a part of the book beloved by the other students as well as herself. It was a part they repeatedly referred to throughout the discussion. Although Tina identified the setting as a bus rather than the train she correctly stated what the conductor had said, "Don't leave no babies on the bus." Tim followed up with the statement that it was a joke.

Another shift occurred in topic initiation related to author's purpose or motivation. Although students had difficulty inferring character motivation in the first discussion, they were able to initiate talk about the author's motivation in Bigmama's. When it had been established that the adult pictured at the end of the book they were reading was the author, Kristin asked "What is he doing?" Several students presented responses that indicated a lack of understanding, such as, "He's going to Bigmama's." Alicia though, initiated the beginning idea of author's intent, "He's might thinking of his grandma."

```
Kristin:   I don't think he's leaving.
           Jeremy, what do you...
Tim:       He's leaving Bigmama!
Kristin:   He's not going to visit Bigmama.
           He's an adult now so what probably
           happened to Bigmama.
```

```
Alicia:    She's dead.
Kristin:   Yeah, she might be dead.
           That happens when you get too old.
Jose:      He might go back to town.
Alicia:    He's might thinking of his grandma.
Kristin:   Ooh!
           Alicia, tell Jose that, I don't know if
           he heard you.
Alicia:    He's might thinking of his grandma.
Jose:      Why?
Tim:       Why?
Kristin:   Why would he be thinking?
Alicia:    Because his grandma's dead.
Kristin:   Maybe because his grandma's dead.
Arthur:    He probably miss his grandma.
```

Alicia demonstrated her comprehension when she stated that Bigmama was dead at the time Donald Crews was an adult. She then showed her incipient understanding of author intent by introducing the idea that Donald Crews as an adult might be thinking of his grandma. Arthur built on Alicia's idea, providing further insight into the author's state of mind when he added that Donald Crews might be missing his grandma. Thus, the group that could not infer the character's motivation in the Nightmare in my Closet were beginning to infer the author's and character's emotions and motivations.

The final part of the discussion spread over several pages of transcript, 34 utterances, and centered around the last two pages of the story book. One page pictured a night sky filled with stars. This illustration seemed to spur Tina into initiating talk

relating the book to one's own life and experiences.

She took the floor and mentioned the school activity the

class had participated in the previous day.

> Alicia:    Maybe he wants to put flowers on his
>            grandma's grave.
> Kristin:   Oh, I think those are good ideas.
> Tina:      We saw stars yesterday.
> Kristin:   Say that again.
>            Tell Theo.
>            I don't think he heard you.
>            She remembered something we did
>            yesterday.
>            Where did we go yesterday?
> Nathan:    The fair.
> Kristin:   To the planetarium.
>            Where we did what?
>            We looked at stars.

Tina initiated the response category of relating

the book to personal experience through an example of

the class trip to the planetarium.  The stars pictured

in the night sky in the book reminded her of the stars

seen very recently in the planetarium.  Kristin invited

her to repeat it, through the technique she employed

with some frequency, asking a student to say something

again because she did not think another student heard it

the first time.  Again, personal experience was a way or

hook into books for the students.  Thus, Kristin tried

to rebroadcast and revoice initiations related to

personal experience.

A second occurrence of student-initiated topics

presented itself while discussing activities in which

the children partook while at Bigmama's. Alicia

initiated the topic of personal experience. The

students had mentioned twice in the very beginning of

the discussion that one summer activity at Bigmama's was

fishing. Alicia now introduced a personal experience of

her own in which fishing was involved, proving that

again experience was a way to connect to books.

```
Arthur:    He miss her!
Kristin:   He misses her, yeah.
Jose;      He loved her.
Alicia:    Teacher, when we went camping it was my
           first time that I caught a fish, but it
           was too little and I had to throw it
           back.
```

In the book Bigmama's the page devoted to the

children fishing in the pond included Donald Crews

yelling, "A FISH! A FISH! I GOT ONE, I GOT ONE!"

Alicia responded to the experience in the book with a

similar personal experience of her own. Alicia's

experience led to a short discussion about personal

experiences about fishing.

**Student-to-Student Talk**  Examination of the

transcripts found multiple examples of student-to-

student talk in the discussion of Bigmama's compared

with the minimal amount found in There's a Nightmare in

My Closet. Ten instances of student-to-student talk

occurred during Bigmama's contrasted to just two in the

first discussion. The length of the student-to-student

passages also differed sharply, as well. Whereas the

first discussion had two examples of student-to-student talk consisting of a chain of seven student responses, and another chain of five student responses, the chains in Bigmama's extended to 20 and 36 student responses in Bigmama's. The average number of utterances for the two exchanges in There's a Nightmare in My Closet was six, while the average for Bigmama's was ten utterances. Although Kristin's percentage of responses in each of the two discussions was identical, (45%) the students' participation had significantly changed. From barely being able to relate basic story facts in There's a Nightmare in My Closet, the students had moved to being full participants in the discussion. They now introduced topics themselves, employed discussion procedures, and talked to each other for extended periods.

The first example of student-to-student talk occurred early when Nathan pointed to a page in the book and said that he liked that part. A small exchange among the students followed.

    Nathan:    (pointing to book) I like this part right
               here.
    Alicia:    When that boy stuck up his hand?
               (looking at book where Nathan is
               pointing)
    Arthur:    I liked the part when he said, "Don't
               leave the babies on the train!"
    Jose:      I liked the part where they said, "That's
               a fall..."

```
Nathan:    Can I see it?
Jose:      I'll show you.
```

Although there had been an earlier segment of
discourse where the students gave many responses without
Kristin intervening, much of it was not connected.
Several students stated what they liked about particular
facets of the book with no comments by other members
directed to what they had said.  But in this segment,
follow up responses and connections did occur.  After
Nathan said that he liked a specific part, Alicia asked
for clarification, "When that boy stuck up his hand?"
Although Arthur and Jose each offered their own examples
of what they liked, Nathan asked Jose if he could see
the part in the book that he liked.  Jose responded that
he would show him the part. Jose's comment showed agency
and ownership of the book and his interpretations.  This
exchanged ended when Kristin dealt with behavior as they
crowded around the book.

A longer example of student-to-student talk
appeared later when Alicia mentioned her personal
experience related to fishing.  Arthur then introduced
his fishing experience with an 11 response chain
occurring.

```
Arthur:    Me and my sister we used to have a
           little, um, a little um, fish..(gesturing
```

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              with arms to show a fishing pole)
Nathan:       Fish tank?
Arthur:       No, fish pole, fishing poles, but I
              (unintelligible) Snoopy.
              My sister she had Miss Piggy.
              I don't know where they at though.
              They probably up in the attic.
              We got a attic at our home.
Alicia:       What, what's in the attic?
Arthur:       Our fishing poles.
              Or my uncle got em, my uncle, the one
              that got em for me.
Jose:         Go check in the attic then.
```

Nathan, Alicia and Jose directed their comments and questions directly to Arthur with each pertaining to something he had mentioned. Nathan tried to scaffold Arthur's talk by supplying the words "fish tank" when Arthur couldn't think of the word fishing poles and was gesturing. Arthur introduced the idea that his poles might be up in the attic and Alicia asked him to clarify what was in the attic. Jose gave evidence that he was following the talk when he told Arthur to go up to the attic and check for the poles. Student-to-student talk that particularly interested me occurred when Kristin gave the floor to Theo to ask a question. The length of the chain was 18 responses, and the students worked together to construct their understanding of what was pictured in the book. One of the illustrations in **Bigmama's** shows many fishing poles leaning against a well and the boy Donald is using a rake to dig worms

from the pile of cane pulp.  Theo asked for

clarification and several students constructed together

what was happening on that page.

> Theo: Do you like that part when the, what's the one when he got that?
> (gesturing movement with arm of raking motion)
> Tim: The worm?
> Theo: No, the rake.
> Alicia: The fishing pole? (Theo makes a face)
> Theo: No, the rake, watch this. (looks through book)
> Alicia: He didn't get no rake!
> Theo: Right here.
> Alicia: Oh, that ain't no rake!
> Theo: What is it?
> Alicia: Is it?
> Arthur: It's a haystack!
> It's a haystack rake!
> You go..(he makes raking motion with his arm)
> Jose: Why?
> Why?
> Arthur: He had to move the haystack to find the worms.
> Tim: Why?
> Why, Theo?
> Why?

Prompted by Theo's question ("Do you like the

part...?"), four of the students worked together

clarifying for Theo and themselves what was occurring on

the page in the book that Theo had brought to their

attention.  They struggled to connect the rake, cane

pulp, and the character's intent to find worms for

fishing.  However, Jose's "Why" question creates a

cognitive space for Arthur to explain, "He had to move

the haystack to find the worms."  These very young,

special education and at-risk students utilized

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discussion procedures to develop their understanding.

Theo's tenacity was evident as he struggled to get his idea and question across to the others. Although he made a face of frustration at Alicia's response, ("The fishing pole?"), he searched through the book to find the picture or word that might help get his meaning across. While he searched, Alicia offered a counterclaim with some emphasis, "He didn't get no rake!"

Alicia's next response proved to be quite interesting and telling. When Theo finally located the picture and pointed to the rake, her immediate response was, "Oh, that ain't no rake!" However, when Theo then asked what it was, Alicia showed the ability to step back and self-evaluate with her next response of, "Is it?! She had listened to Theo, looked at the illustration he had presented as evidence for his idea, and then displayed the maturity to question her own thinking. Arthur brought the ideas together and Jose who was participating in his first discussion seemed to have grasped from the others that one asks others "why?" when an idea was proposed. Although he only said the one word "Why?", the timing of his remark might have meant he was asking why the boy was using the haystack rake. Arthur seemed to have understood the

question that way and completely finished his thought with the explanation that the boy had to move the haystack to find the worms.

This example indicates the dramatic growth the students had made since the first discussion of There's a Nightmare in My Closet.  They were now able to participate in an extended dialogue with the participants jointly constructing understanding and meaning together.  Further, Tim gave evidence at the end of this segment of taking on discussion practices before fully understanding them.  His repeated use of the word "why" does not appear to indicate that he was looking for clarification, as perhaps Jose had done. Particularly since he used Theo's name when it had been Arthur who offered the explanation  Tim seemed to know that a discussion member asked why of another member but had not understood when, how or why that was done. Thus, students stepped into practices to participate in the conversation before they were fully proficient in their meaning and use.

Although this exchange ended when Kristin took the floor to speak about behavior, the students participated in another extended student-to-student exchange a short while later.  Having determined that the adult on the last page was the author Donald Crews, the students were focused on the illustration of him.  The illustration

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appeared to prompt this exchange. After talking about

the seed, Kristin reiterated the conclusion they had

drawn.

> Kristin:  So we talked through that Donald, or that
>           this man was remembering the grandma.
>           And now, Alicia, wow, she thinks that
>           maybe  Donald Crews, the author, there's
>           his
>           name Donald Crews, is writing about...
> Tina:     Himself!
> Kristin:  Himself!
> Arthur:   Is he black?
>           Is he black?
> Kristin:  I don't know, what do you think?
> Tim:      Black!
> Arthur:   Yeah.
> Alicia:   (pointing to picture in book)
>           They're black.
> Theo:     Maybe this may be him.
> Arthur:   Are we everyone, he went on the train
>           before?
> Alicia:   Too many people talking.
> Arthur:   Had he ever been on a train before?
>           He started.
> Kristin:  Ask that question of somebody, Arthur,
>           that's a good question.
> Arthur:   Has he ever been on a train before?
> Nathan:   We're getting off the track.
> Tina:     That's too much people.
> Nathan:   We're getting off track.
> Arthur:   Has he ever been on a train before?
> Tina:     No, yes, no.
> Alicia:   He was on it right here.
>           (looks for picture in book)

Although it differed in form from the previous

example this segment of student-to-student talk also

revealed interesting elements by the students. The

discourse began when Arthur, who is African-American

himself, asked if Donald Crews was black. At this

moment in the discussion I had thought that this

question would lead into more extensive talk on this

point than it did. After Tim and Alicia confirmed that Donald Crews was black, Arthur seemed satisfied and moved to a new idea, posing the question about Donald Crews having been on a train before.

The student-to-student discourse continued following this question but it now dealt with the discussion procedures of not getting off the track and only one person should talk at a time. Although Alicia first mentioned the group's behavior, Nathan and Tina took it up with Nathan repeating it a second time. Nathan had not participated for awhile so the use of this formulaic phrase of getting off track might indicate that the use of this phrase was a way for him to gain entry back into the discussion.

An additional lengthy episode of student talk occurred over three pages of discourse toward the end of the discussion. All of the students except Jeremy participated in this episode, which was precipitated by Alicia's excited exclamation that the illustrator of Bigmama's was Donald Crews. Thirty six responses were made by the students with a few utterances by Kristin. Furthermore, when Kristin participated, her responses did not appear to direct or influence the talk of the students. Read as a whole, one can follow an extended piece of student-to-student talk not directed or guided by responses from Kristin.

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| | |
|---|---|
| Alicia: | Him! |
| | Him! |
| | Him! |
| | Donald Crews! |
| Tina: | That's not his family. |
| Arthur: | That's probably his real family |
| Tim: | That is his family. |
| Kristin: | That's a great idea! |
| | That might be. |
| Tina:(to Kristin) | |
| | That's probably his family. |
| Kristin: | Tell somebody else. |
| Tina: | Alicia, that's probably his family. |
| Nathan; | I didn't hear. |
| Alicia: | That's probably his family. |
| Tina: | He probably drew it because he missed them. |
| Jose; | He probably drew it because he loved them. |
| Alicia: | Or he could be thinking of his mom. |
| Arthur: | He could be thinking of his WHOLE family. |
| Tina: | He could be thinking of... |
| Tim: | He might be worried. |
| | He might be worried. |
| Kristin: | Wait a sec, Tina. |
| Nathan: | He may be thinking about his mama and dad. |
| Arthur: | He might be thinking about his whole family. |
| | Not just his grandma, his WHOLE family. |
| Kristin; | I think you're right. |
| Jose: | I think he loves his... |
| Tina: | He's probably gonna visit his grandma. |
| Jose: | ...his mama or Bigmama because all that fun stuff that they had. |
| Kristin: | Oh, I think that's a great idea. |
| Arthur: | We just said that! |
| Kristin: | I think I'd have to agree with you guys with what you just said. |
| Tina: | They probably live far away so he drew a book about them. |
| Jose: | Being he wanted to, why he wrote about them, he might love her. |
| Alicia: | Why? |
| Tina: | Yeah, why? |
| Jose: | Because being... |
| Alicia: | That's not funny, Tina. |
| Tina: | I'm not laughing. |
| Jose: | It's because he might love her so much. |
| Alicia: | He might miss her a lot. |

```
Kristin:    I think you're right.
Alicia:     Cuz that might have been his great great
            great great grandma.
```

This segment provided further evidence that students were beginning to regulate the group, as well as their own performance. Nathan' statement of "I didn't hear" was a breakthrough for him. He had appropriated the social practices modeled by the teacher and he communicated his expectation that, as a member of the group, he should be able to hear everything said in the discussion. Examples such as, "That's not funny, Tina", and "I'm not laughing" further speak to the students' efforts to regulate their own participation as well as that of other members.

Second, the students provided evidence of their developing cognitive abilities. Instances of inferencing occurred on the part of several of the students. ("That's probably his real family", "He might be worried", and "He may be thinking about his mama and dad".) The students also demonstrated insight into the their Author's Intention. ("He probably drew it because he missed them." and "They probably live far away so he drew a book about them")

Third, students employed the practice of asking other members for justification of their ideas, asking "why" when Jose stated a hypothesis about Author's

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Intention. "Being he wanted to, why he wrote about them, he might love her." Tina's response of, "Yeah why?", might indicate that when she heard Alicia ask why, it dawned on her too that Jose should explain why.

One last instance of student-to-student talk came at the end of the discussion. It is a nice exchange of seven responses in which the students once more worked together to clarify and construct meaning. This episode was prompted by Arthur posing a question about whether there was a grandpa in the book.

| | |
|---|---|
| Arthur: | Was there a grandpa? |
| Tina: | Big Daddy. |
| Nathan: | Big Daddy. |
| Tina: | Big Daddy. |
| Arthur: | Bigpapa. |
| Kristin: | Bigpapa, yes.<br>So that will be the grandpa.<br>Jeremy, is there anything you want to add<br>to our discussion? |
| Alicia: | (looking at book) He's right there. |
| Nathan: | No, that's big, fat...<br>(Arthur, Nathan and Alicia intently look<br>at a picture in the book) |
| Arthur: | That's they, that's they uncle. |
| Alicia: | Uh Uh. |
| Arthur: | Yes, it is. |
| Alicia: | Cuz the kids haven't moved there yet? |
| Tim: | What state is it in? |

Tina and Nathan immediately spoke to Arthur's inquiry with a logical inference that there might be a "Big Daddy", although it was not the term used in the book. Their answers seemed to prompt Arthur who then gave the term of Bigpapa which was used in the book. After Alicia's referral to the book, "He's right there", she and Nathan and Arthur used the book as a tool to

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help them with clarification.

**Use of the Book** This last example and others cited above showed the powerful influence of the illustrations in young children's discussions. The text and pictures of Bigmama's was used throughout the discussion. Barely into the discussion Alicia pulled the book close to herself to find the page where the conductor made his joke. She wanted to show the group as well as tell them her favorite part. Nathan and Arthur looked avidly at the book to where Alicia was pointing as she spoke about her favorite part. The book was passed continuously among the children throughout the entire discussion as they used it to aid them in backing up what they were saying and to help them when they lacked the language as Theo did in the discussion about the haystack rake. In that extended segment of talk about the rake, all the students involved, not only Theo, pointed to the illustrations as they worked to clarify what the implement was and what was occurring in the story.

The book was a beneficial tool used by students and Kristin alike for clarification. It was an advantageous aid in that it afforded discussion and clarification opportunities. Alicia pointed to an illustration when she asked Kristin who a particular person was, with Kristin then pointing to the page as she attempted to

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answer.

    Alicia:     Teacher.
                What was that boy when he grew up?
                What boy was he? (point to the little
                boys in the illustration)
    Kristin:    I don't know that, I don't know that.
                It didn't really tell us a name.
                So it would have to be one of these two
                probably. (pointing to illustration)

Arthur also used the book for clarification when
the students were working through the relationships of
the characters to Bigmama.

    Kristin:    Whose grandma might she be?
    Alicia:     The dad's.
    Arthur:     Him. (pointing to book)

Alicia also used the book to offer a clarification
when Arthur inquired if Donald Crews were black. She
pointed to an illustration of the characters in the
book. All of the extended family members in the story
were drawn as African-Americans, and using the
illustrations as her justification she stated, "They're
black."

Kristin also utilized the book in several ways in
her apprenticeship of the students. Twice she read
directly from it to the students in the midst of the
discussion. She wanted them to realize who were the
people at the end of the story, as they were standing
looking up at the night sky. The characters were dark
shadows outlined in the night sky and not readily
identifiable as the characters pictured throughout the

book.   She reread from the book.

> Kristin:   Well, listen to what it says here, listen
>            to what it says.
>            Right here on this page it says:
>            "The night was jet black except for the
>            millions of stars.
>            We could hardly sleep thinking about the
>            things to come."
>            So where are they right now?

Since there remained some confusion Kristin again
read from the last page where Donald Crews mentioned
that even now he thinks he might wake in the morning and
find himself at Bigmama's.

Since Donald Crews is both author and illustrator
Kristin used the book in discussion of these terms and
to help identify Donald Crews in both roles.   She opened
the talk about these terms by holding up the front of
the book and thinking aloud.

> Kristin:   Tim, this is something else I have a
>            question for you.
>            I don't see anything on here usually on
>            the front cover is where the author's
>            name is, like Donald Crews and it's also
>            where the illustrator's name is, Jose.

Feeling compelled to continuously reach out to
Jeremy and draw him in, Kristin addressed him and turned
the book his way.

> Kristin:   Can you see that, Jeremy?
>            I'm sorry.   (showing him the book)
>            There's the author's name.
>            I don't see an illustrator's name on
>            here.

Tina, who had also been looking at the book as

Kristin mentioned the two terms, replied with, "Me either." The students took the book and looked at it together. Jose suggested that maybe Donald Crews was both the author and illustrator. At this point the students were looking at the book together as the talk continued. In this manner, the use of the book enabled the students and Kristin to work together expressing their ideas and jointly constructing understanding.

## The Birthday Thing

The third book discussion examined was <u>The Birthday Thing</u> (SuAnn and Kevin Kiser, 1989). This final discussion of the study occurred on May 23, 1996. The percentage of teacher responses was 38% compared with 45% for <u>There's a Nightmare in My Closet</u> and <u>Bigmama's</u>.

Kristin continually searched for new ways to support or guide her students. Instead of using the seed metaphor, Kristin now utilized a book discussion poster. She had revised the poster begun in January and had referred to it in each discussion since April 17th. One of Kristin's goals for introducing the poster was for the students to discuss an array of topics. The poster was placed on the window sill next to the discussion table so that it was continually available for the students.

## Teacher Participation in Literature Discussion Group

## Apprenticing Students in Discursive Practices

Early in the discussion of The Birthday Thing

Kristin directed the students to the poster to help them

think about what to say.  Although the discussion began

with participation by Jose, Theo and Arthur, the early

talk did not produce a topic of conversation.

Kristin:  Theo was going to say something.
Arthur:  Right when Jose was talkin.
Theo:    You took my question.
Arthur:  Who?
Theo:    You did.
Arthur:  I didn't say anything.
Kristin:  Well if you can't think of anything to
         talk about what can we look at that might
         help you think of something?

Kristin used an indirect approach, "...what can we

look at..." to prompt the students to use the scaffold

of the poster to support their own talk and

participation.  Later in the discussion Kristin employed

a more direct approach.  After 14 utterances by the

students about what they had given their mothers for

Mother's Day, Kristin steered them toward the poster, to

identify other topics, in a forthright manner.

Kristin:  OK.  Here's what we need to do.
         Look up at the poster, with all those
         different things we can talk about.
Jose:    I could probably my...

>           Kristin:    And think something up and ask somebody
>                       in the group.

Following Kristin's directive, "look up at the
poster", the students briefly discussed the category
fiction/non-fiction.    However, Kristin directed the
students once again to the poster when the talk quickly
shut down.  She asked the students what else they could
talk about, and when no other topic was offered, she
answered her own question by suggesting Self-in-
Situation which was listed on the poster as Relates to
Your Life.

>           Kristin:    OK.  So we talked about if it's a real
>
>                       story,it's a non-fiction story.
>                       But what else on that poster could we
>                       talk about?
>           Jose:       Uh, I don't know.
>           Kristin:    What was this boy's name?
>                       Timothy.
>                       What about if you were Timothy?

The students responded to the suggestion of putting
themselves in Timothy's place by hypothesizing a variety
of situations, such as  "Instead of making her a cookie
dough, I would start getting me a vase...", and, "Make
something, then buy a present and then get some
flowers."  When this talk subsided, Kristin brought the
group back to the poster.

>           Kristin:    He's trying to think of something.
>                       Can that help you think of what you were
>                       going to say, the poster?
>           Jose:       Can we listen to it again?
>           Arthur:     Can you say them?
>           Kristin:    Title, illustrations, author, author's

purpose, characters, setting, problem-
solution...
Arthur:    Is the setting where they are?
Kristin:   Um, hm.
Arthur:    They are in the kitchen.

Kristin's efforts to prompt talk related to another

topic succeeded when Arthur introduced the setting.

However, it is important to note that Jose and Arthur

indicated that they could not read what was written on

the poster. None of the students could read beyond a few

sight words and although they might have recognized the

importance of referring to the poster they could not

read it.  Jose indicated this with his query, "Can we

listen to it again?"  Before she read the day's story,

Kristin would read through the poster to the discussion

members.  By asking to listen to it again, Jose

indicated his need to have Kristin read the list before

he could respond to her request.  Arthur expressed the

same need quite directly with, "Can you say them?"  Once

they had been read aloud, Arthur was then able to

introduce the topic of setting, having first clarified

the meaning.  For the remainder of the discussion

Kristin did not again guide the students to

the poster.  The students talked about setting and

author's intention and a lengthy passage of student-to-

student talk in which they clarified for each other a

particular section of the book.

One of the difficulties faced by the non-readers

was evident was made evident by the questions of Jose
and Arthur.  Yet, when the information was presented to
they orally as well as in written form they were able to
present new topics to the group for discussion.  Thus,
scaffolds must be accessible to be effective.

**Student Participation in Literature Discussion Groups**

**Student Initiated Topics**  Analysis of The Birthday Thing
suggested that the students continued to initiate topics
as they had in There's a Nightmare in My Closet.
However, several topic initiations followed promptings
by Kristin to refer to the topics listed on the poster.
Instances of initiating personal experiences had
occurred at the onset of the discussion.  The students
described what they had given their mothers for
birthdays and Mother's Day such as, "I gave my mom a
vase with a balloon in it..." and, "Me and Alicia had a
good plan but we didn't go, we were going to take our
moms out to eat."  After several of these examples
Kristin directed the students to the poster and they
began to introduce other topics including Author's
Intention and Fiction/Non-Fiction.

    Jose:    I think the author probably wrote it to
                    tell you to get your ma something like
                    that.
    Kristin:  Do you agree, Arthur?
    Jose:    And it's real too.

Arthur introduced setting into the discussion at a later point and a conversation eventually ensued around that topic.

| | |
|---|---|
| Arthur: | Is the setting where they are? |
| Kristin: | Um, hm. |
| Arthur: | They are in the kitchen. |
| Kristin: | Why do you suppose the setting is in the kitchen? |
| Arthur: | Because at first he was in there with his mom, then, then he was in the kitchen all day, the whole book about him in the kitchen.<br>And then he went back to the office. |

Arthur used the book to find the picture of the mother in the room he labeled an office. The mother is pictured, in the beginning of the book, seated at a desk in a den or family room of the house. The computers, phone, books and papers pictured on the desk seemed to lead Arthur to believe she was in an office.

After the students briefly talked about the picture Arthur reintroduced Author's Intention. He built upon Jose's description of a picture he liked.

| | |
|---|---|
| Jose: | I like when he, when he got the dough and start hammering with his elbows. |
| Arthur: | Maybe the, maybe that he did that in his real life.<br>Maybe the author did. |
| Kristin: | Did what? |
| Arthur: | Both of the authors. |
| Kristin: | Um, hm. |
| Arthur: | Maybe they um, maybe they did the same thing when, when, um, maybe that happened to them.<br>When they was young. |
| Kristin: | Jose, please. |
| Arthur: | When they was making a cake, maybe it happened<br>to them and it's about and this happened to the two authors. |

```
Kristin:    I think that's a good, a real good point.
            Did you hear that, Theo?
Theo:       Um, huh.
Kristin:    Cuz you didn't have your eyes on Arthur.
Arthur:     And maybe their sister did come in and
            then the brother and then the daddy.
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In this segment, Arthur worked his way through a logical hypothesis of the intent of the authors in writing the book. With minimal input from Kristin, Arthur demonstrated the ability to think outloud and presented his speculation almost as a work in progress, adding on to his thoughts as he worked them through in his mind.

Although instances such as these did occur, there was not an abundance of student-initiated topics in this final discussion, seven in all, with three of them comprised of Personal Experience and Evaluating the Text. However, perhaps the book The Birthday Thing did not lend itself to a variety of topics to be talked about. One of the hooks into the book for the students did appear to be their identification with Timothy who made a gift for his mother's birthday. A good portion of the discussion, 25 of the conversation turns, concerned what the students themselves had bought or made for their own mothers. It took effort by Kristin to redirect the students to the poster to get them to move away from examples of personal experiences to delve into other topics.

**Student-to-Student Talk**  Examination of the transcript of _The Birthday Thing_ discussion revealed three examples of student-to-student talk.  Although this number was less than the ten that appeared in _Bigmama's_, these three examples comprised sections of lengthy talk among the students.  The following was one of the examples. The talk revolved around gifts for their mothers.

Jose:     At school I used to uh, uh, at my old

          school with only little kids, and so we

          eat when we
          got to go home in the morning too, in the
          class we eat ice cream and stuff
          sometimes,
          and we got our hands all painted and
          stuff and both of them we had to stick
          our(inaudible) in our toes.
          An then I took it home and me and my mom
          hanged it up cuz...
Theo:     On Mother's Day I thought it was my mom's
          birthday.
          I thought it was my mom's birthday.
Jose:     Mother's Day is when you give Mothers...
          On Mother's Day you could give mother
          present, yup, anything, flowers like I
          did I gave my mom.
Theo:     I gave my mom...
Jose:     I gave my mom a vase with a balloon in
          it, a heart balloon and a heart balloon
          hanged up and it said I love you.
Theo:     I gave my mom...
Jose:     It said I love you and she hanged it up
          and then it had a teddy bear that had a
          heart pin that said I love you.
Theo:     And my dad, he said...
Jose:     The balloon said Happy Mother's Day.
Theo:     And uh, and me and my dad and my brother
          we bought my mom a necklace.
          And my dad bought her a card.
Tina:     I gave my mom a...

This passage extended student talk although it was not interactive and Jose dominated throughout.  Theo,

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however, did mention that he thought Mother's Day was his mom's birthday and described what he and his family bought. ("And uh, and me and my dad and my brother we bought...") Tina decided to enter at this point of the dialogue, but Kristin entered and attempted to give the floor to Sally. "Have you ever given your mom a present, Sally?" Sally remained silent and Tina entered with her experience, "Me and Alicia had a good plan but we didn't go, we were going to take our moms out to eat." This stretch of student talk ended when Kristin directed the students to the poster.

Student-to-student talk with a decidedly marked difference occurred later in the discussion. Rather than the unconnected talk of multiple students listing experiences, as in the first example, the students interacted with each other to construct meaning. The illustration of the birthday 'thing' intrigued the students and together they constructed, through 26 conversational turns, the meaning of the 'thing'. Related to this topic engaging illustrations appeared to be a further hook into the discussion and meaning for the students. Throughout the discussion they turned the pages and pointed to the multiple parts of the thing. The students' keen interest in the illustration prompted

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the following extended passage.  The book was opened to

the page with the birthday thing sitting on the mother's

desk during the following student-to-student talk.

Tina:     It looks like a pot.
Jose:     That is a pot.
Arthur:   It's a teapot.
Jose:     He put the pot down and then he put the
          lid on it.
Arthur:   And then this was a tray.
          This was a tray, this was a teapot.
Jose:     That he made.
          This was the cookie thing.
Arthur:   This was the cookie thing.
Theo:     I can't see nothing.
Tina:     That was the girl's, that was the girl's
          finger.
Theo:     Can I see it?
          Can I see it?
Tina:     She was poking the dough back.
Arthur:   It look like a face!
Jose:     It kind of looks like an elephant.
Arthur:   It looks like an, it looks like an
          elephant.
Jose:     Yeah, cuz you can tell by the trunk, it
          looks like a trunk.
Arthur:   And there goes the trash.
Theo:     Then it turned in.
Arthur:   Then cuz he was painting it.
Theo:     Yeah, he was covering it.
Jose:     He painted the, his...
Theo:     Then they said, is it a tray?
          Is it a...
          See it was cool.
          It look like a...
Kristin:  OK, let's see what kind, tell me what
          we've talked about.

This exchange ended only when Kristin announced

that it was time to stop the discussion and review what

topics they had addressed.  Throughout this episode the

four students looked at the book together and pointed to

the parts of the 'thing' as they spoke about them.  None

of the students interrupted each other and the talk was

connected, as each speaker built upon the meanings and ideas of the other speakers. The talk moved from what the thing was, a pot, a teapot, there was a tray etc., to what it looked like. "It kind of looks like an elephant." "Yeah, cuz you can tell by the trunk, it looks like a trunk." The picture of the completed birthday thing could very well be construed as an elephant. The students realistically described what they saw.

Within this passage Theo provided evidence that he understood some discussion processes when he stated, "I can't see nothing." In order to continue to construct meaning with the other discussion members Theo knew that he needed to see the illustration being used as a tool for understanding by the group. When he still could not see the page, he persisted with, "Can I see it? Can I see it?"

## Chapter Five

## Discussion

I conducted this study to learn if and how a group of primary grade students in special education together with primary grade at risk students would evolve from neophytes into full participants in literature discussions.  I was particularly interested in how the students' participation would change over time as they acquired experience in literature response.  Tied to the change in student participation would be the role the teacher would assume in the discussions in supporting the students' developing concepts of literature response.  In this chapter I discuss what I learned after observing the classroom discussions over an extended period, and following the analysis of the transcripts of those discussions.

Research Question 1: How do young special education/at risk students participate in literature discussion groups and how does their participation change over time as they acquire experience in literature response?

Growth in participation of the students was evident from the first to the second of the discussions examined, as well as successive growth from the second to the third analyzed discussion. Three phases of development in student participation seemed to occur

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during the semester of discussions. At the beginning of the study, the first phase, the students struggled with all facets of holding a discussion. During this initial phase, they displayed a willingness to participate but demonstrated definite confusion in what to say and how to say it. A distinct characteristic of this first phase of discussions was the overwhelming need of the students to acquire a discourse for talking about books. Due to the lack of these discursive practices it was nearly impossible for a discussion to take place.

A second feature of this initial phase was the students' struggle with the social processes of holding a discussion. Generally, they followed Kristin's lead, trying to respond to her questions, but they initiated no topics of their own except for the expression of personal experience. Their talk was characterized by one-line utterances that moved between student and teacher, and they were not successful in using communication devices, such as looking at, listening and responding to each other. Extended student-to-student talk proved too difficult a challenge at this early phase of participation.

The second phase was markedly different. By this time, after experience with literature response for two months, the students demonstrated definite appropriation of some of the discursive practices and social processes

of the first discussion. They proved able to employ retrospective thinking and to draw inferences built upon the connections among the meanings of the text. They also showed facility with Author's Intention, providing plausible hypotheses as to why the author may have written the book.

In addition, Students became more capable in the various facets related to holding a discussion that proved so formidable in their initial encounter. With no prompts from Kristin, they introduced response categories into the discussion that were of interest to them. After introduction of a topic, the students were able to extend their talk with each other as well as with their teacher. Even if a topic was introduced by Kristin, such as Author's Intentions, the students often 'jumped in' and carried through with appropriate talk on that topic. They no longer had the severe problems with expressive language, so evident in phase one.

Growth also occurred in their mastery of the social and communicative processes. Students now directed questions and comments away from Kristin and to each other. They built upon information provided by other members, adding their thoughts and producing chains of student-to-student talk. During extended segments of student talk, they showed signs of appropriating 'teacher' roles that began to emerge. Students asked

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each other for evaluation and justification
and demonstrated comprehension of how to hold a
discussion by speaking one at a time without
interrupting each other or engaging in multiple side
conversations at once.

By the third phase, the 'hows' and whats' of
holding a discussion were solidly in place.  Students
did not rely as heavily on prompts from others but
provided justifications of their own as soon as they
provided evaluations of the story.  Instances of deep
understanding of the social processes appeared as the
students asked for the book to be held in an alternate
position because they could not see it as it was, or as
they asked other discussion members to repeat themselves
or to speak louder because they could not hear. These
student comments appeared for the first time in this
third phase, whereas Kristin had provided support for
students by asking other discussion members to speak up
or to repeat so that all members could hear, or she
would ask a child to pass the book so that another could
see it.

The students no longer relied on the formulaic
phrases of "I liked" and "Why".  They had internalized
some of the processes and therefore focused on

constructing conversation together. They were no longer so tethered to following Kristin or relying so heavily on prompts from her and each other.

Research Question 2: What role does the teacher assume in literature discussion groups in supporting the students' developing concepts of literature response?

Kristin's role also evolved through the three phases as had that of the students. Since she supported and scaffolded the students as they progressed in the appropriation of the discussion practices and processes, her participation was one of continuous change. In the first phase, her role needed to be one of intense support for the students. Grappling with the challenges presented by the low abilities of the students in organizing their thoughts and presenting basic facts, coupled with their difficulties in understanding how to hold a discussion, Kristin needed to work intensely every moment of the discussion. She attempted to position her students to justify their evaluations and to anchor their comments about story events to a story timeline. As she engaged in teaching discursive practices she also modeled and led the students in order to make visible and explicit the connections necessary for comprehension. Thoughtfully she directed and guided the students as they slowly proceeded through their

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initial experience with literary response.

Kristin's role was significantly different in the second phase. The students no longer floundered so dramatically in the social processes, and had taken as their own some of the discursive practices. Therefore Kristin focused her support and scaffolding on a larger array of the 'hows' and 'whats' of a discussion. She positioned the students to receive and respond to the ideas of other students to develop their independence in holding discussions.

The third phase, The Birthday Thing found Kristin again assuming a very different role. There was almost no need at this point for any scaffolding or support in the social processes. The students apprenticed one another, spoke directly to each other and generally looked at the person speaking without interrupting. There was little need even for her guidance in these processes. Realizing these processes were in place Kristin worked with the cognitive literary responses.

The front end of the final discussion was filled with personal experiences of the students. They provided multiple examples and spoke in some length about their experiences. This response proved to be a good entry for the students into the discussion. Yet, now, Kristin seemed to feel that it was time to broaden their use of responses. Using the poster of responses

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she worked at securing a larger scope of topics from the students. There was some success in her endeavor, although the book did not avail itself to a wide array of topics for discussion.

**Implications for Literature Discussions and Primary Grade Students in Special Education and those who are At Risk** This study suggests that literature discussions can be an avenue into literacy for the special education/at risk population of young children. There are several possible aspects to the discussions in this study that attributed to the development of the students into discussants. These aspects may be unique to this study but careful study might inform the development of other groups of students into full participants in literature discussions. Several implications can be drawn from this study. One set of implications relate to certain characteristics of the teacher. These can be beneficial to the development of the students into discussants. Although each teacher is unique, these characteristics could be transformed through their own individuality.

A second set of implications relate to the students. This study indicated that students in special education were able to participate after time, quite fully in discussions of literature. This might

encourage teachers considering new methods of helping
their students to introduce discussions into their
classes.

**Teacher**  Kristin brought several characteristics to the
study that enabled the students to progress as they did.
First, she was totally committed to transforming her
reading instruction, and literature discussions were to
be a major part of that transformation.  Her commitment
was sorely tested throughout the semester yet she
persisted until the end of the school year.  Although it
was her initiative to introduce the discussions, after
the first discussion she was afraid they would never
succeed.  Yet, she was so committed to the project that
she did continue, although she periodically despaired
throughout the duration of the study and wondered if
anything at all was being achieved.  Reflecting on the
progress that was attained and her contributing role,
Kristin stated that she believed that a teacher
embarking on implementation of discussions should have
someone to support her.  At the end of the study Kristin
told me that my presence and support along with my
continual encouragement kept her involved in the
project.  Further reflection on her part during the
intervening years, brought forth more insights as to
what kept her going in the face of what appeared to be

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so little growth.  Kristin stated that because each discussion was audiotaped or videotaped she persevered, knowing her work was captured on the tape.

A second important characteristic of Kristin's was her flexibility and responsiveness to students.  Much of her support was embedded within the topics and conversations initiated and sustained by the students.  Therefore, she worked with the students in their level of development, and through the discourse they provided.  She allowed the students ample opportunities to talk about and enjoy the humor that appealed to them.  Humor can be a 'hook' into the story for many young children.  By allowing the students to engage in and enjoy the humor in a book, Kristin helped her students attain and retain interest in the story.  This interest could then lead to reflections on other aspects of the story.

Personal experience can be another 'hook' into the story for young children.  Kristin appreciated her students' enthusiasm in talking about their experiences related in a story.  Although Kristin wanted at times to move the students to other response categories she did allow them sufficient time to fully explore their own experiences and interests.  By doing so, she again fostered a way for the students to get 'hooked' into a particular story.  Once completely engaged with the

story she then guided the students into other directions as well.

**Students**

A second set of implications relate to students. When provided with repeated opportunities in which to express their thoughts and feelings, such as literature discussion, young children in special education were able to rise to the occasion. Many children in special education receive little chance to do so throughout their school day. But with opportunity and support they proved able as well as eager to express their opinions, experiences and feelings. They were able to discuss literature in the same manner as more traditional readers, yet they did so while being able to read only a handful of sight words. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that language is fundamental to thinking. If our classrooms encouraged all students to partake in substantial talk they could develop higher levels of thinking, even if they were not traditional readers.

**Questions for Further Research**

This study examined a small group of children working with a deeply committed young teacher. How would discussions proceed with other groups of children and other unique and individual teachers?

At the conclusion of this study, Kristin referred

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to the student participants as experts who led the other
children in the class. They were sometimes the first to
participate in whole class discussions. Kristin
recently indicated that in subsequent years, the
participants who remained in her class continued their
growth as discussants. Kristin recognized that exposure
to literature discussions made visible abilities and
knowledge otherwise not recognized in special education
and at risk students.

Upon reflection, Kristin stated that she had
changed as far as her perception of herself in the
discussions. She had become relaxed with the
discussions now and participated in them to a lesser
degree. How would the role that the teacher assumed
while *implementing* literature discussions change as she
worked with them over another semester or two?

It is interesting to note that by the end of the
study Kristin no longer depended upon the researcher to
implement the project. She became committed to the idea
and importance of literature discussions. She now felt
able to sustain the discussions in her classroom on her
own. In fact, four years after this study Kristin
continued to implement discussion groups. A question for
further research would examine what it was that enabled
her to sustain the practice and research of literature

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discussion groups.

One area worthwhile of future research would be that of integrating literature discussion groups in teacher preparation.

Also I would propose that future research address the establishment of literature discussion groups, as in this study, but involving more teachers.

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