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DENISE KAY IVES

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"WE STRANDED IN SCHOOL": SURVIVAL LITERACY THROUGH ADAPTIVE COLORATIONS AMONG HIGH-ACHIEVING AFRICAN AMERICAN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

By

Denise Kay Ives

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ABSTRACT

"WE STRANDED IN SCHOOL": SURVIVAL LITERACY THROUGH ADAPTIVE COLORATIONS AMONG HIGH-ACHIEVING AFRICAN AMERICAN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

By

Denise Kay Ives

This study, which examined the literate participation of high-achieving African American sixth graders in a middle school language arts classroom heavily influenced by the demands of preparing students to pass state assessments, is situated at the intersection of calls to recognize, value, and utilize students' cultural and linguistic resources in classrooms and policy pressures that make doing such a thing seem increasingly challenging. A sociocultural view of learning and literacy was adopted in this research. That is, literacy learning was understood to be a culturally and historically situated, social sense-making activity. Additionally, a critical sociocultural perspective helped reveal how participants in the study negotiated multiple literate identities, employed agency, and exercised power.

Many sociocultural researchers have alluded to or exposed the existence of "hidden literacies" in schools and classrooms. By describing students' unofficial, unsanctioned, and alternative literacies on the margins and in the underlife of classrooms, these studies have rendered visible students' multiple and varied communicative experiences, their use of literacy as a tool for constructing identities and forging social relationships, and their capacity for adaptive flexibility across literate situations and contexts. The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to shed further light on hidden literacies by identifying and describing instances of hidden literacies in full view, or

literacy *hiding in plain sight*. Specifically, this study aimed to uncover and illuminate the role students played in the phenomenon of literacy *hiding in plain sight.*

A theoretical framework of *adaptive colorations* was used to view and articulate the dimensions and dynamics of literacy *hiding in plain sight* in this classroom. *Adaptive colorations* explains the phenomenon of literacy *hiding in plain sight* in terms of students' literate identities in relation to the particularities of the contexts in which they are situated. Students were shown to be actively and strategically hiding literacy in plain sight in order to accomplish a range of purposes. That *hiding in plain sight* was accomplished through a suite of actions, namely, reading and interpreting contexts, selecting a specific mechanism of *adaptive colorations*, and applying appropriate accompanying behaviors. Mechanisms of *adaptive colorations* employed by students to hide included *getting over*, *lying low*, and *covering up*. Another mechanism of *adaptive colorations* that actually functioned to call attention, *standing out*, was also documented.

This study revealed a variety of hidden literacies: double literacies, parallel literacies, resistance literacies, and passing literacies. In addition, survival literacy, or the ability of these high-achieving to read and to act with adaptive flexibility in response to the contingencies of contexts, was uncloaked. This research also offered new insights into the difficulties inherent in identifying and the challenges associated with valuing and utilizing students' cultural and linguistic resources in classrooms. This dissertation calls for further research into the phenomenon of literacy *hiding in plain sight* and the usefulness of *adaptive colorations* for learning to see what may at first be invisible.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

TEACHER: Where did I say? Did I say if you were stranded?

STUDENT: You didn't say nothing.

TEACHER: No one heard me? What did I say?

STUDENT: If you were stranded in the wilderness?

TEACHER: In your life! Are you stranded in the wilderness right now?

STUDENT: No. We stranded in school.

Middle schools, particularly urban middle schools like the one in which the above exchange took place, face an array of daunting and persistent social and educational challenges. Among those are a concern about and a struggle to eliminate differential school achievement between racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups; to curtail waning interest, engagement, and performance in school subjects during adolescence; and to boost generally low levels of school-based literacy achievement among racial/ethnic minority and poor students (J. Lee, 2006). Over the past several decades, a range of theories and perspectives has been proffered related to the nature, cause, and solutions to these educational problems (Wiggan, 2007). Many of the explanations and recommendations generated by sociocultural researchers and literacy theorists regarding these school-based conditions have emerged from studies of learning and literacy practices outside of school contexts (e.g., Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1995).

Many literacy theorists and researchers have appropriated a sociocultural approach in their work. Sociocultural literacy theorists understand literacy learning as a

social process and view the knowledges, experiences, and practices related to literacy learning as being socially, culturally, and historically constituted (Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1987). Sociocultural perspectives on literacy learning have paved the way for new and expansive definitions of literacy (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). Rather than being understood only as an individual, cognitive accomplishment, literacy learning is now often understood as a set of social practices. Literacy viewed as social practice shapes and is shaped by social actors as they participate in literate communities of practice across a variety of domains. It is situated, or context-dependent, and multiple (Street, 1995). That is, literacy is, or literacies are, socially and culturally valued ways of reading and writing across varying across contexts.

Sociocultural researchers assume there are socially and culturally mediated variations in the knowledges and resources across homes and communities and acknowledge that all homes and communities possess valuable resources and are important sites of learning (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Heath, 1983). It is presumed that all learners draw on previous knowledge and experience to construct new understandings and make sense of novel situations across contexts, and that all students bring with them to the context of school useful learning resources and valuable knowledge (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). However, because the knowledges and resources of certain groups of students are less likely to resemble exactly those traditionally valued in school settings, they are frequently misunderstood or undervalued in school contexts (Heath, 1983). Thus, learning and literacy have implications for things like "status, solidarity, distribution of social goods, and power" (Rogers, 2004, p. 33).

Consequently, despite a preponderance of research evidence illuminating the complexity of literacy learning processes and the value and importance of students' social, cultural, and linguistic lives in those processes, not all ways of reading and writing enjoy equal status in school contexts. Additionally, literacy resources and practices that have typically been dismissed or considered less valuable in classrooms tend to be linked to historically marginalized identities. Various studies have revealed how structures, processes, and interactions in classroom contexts function to support, constrain, and reshape students' literacy practices. Several of these studies have suggested that many of students' literacies are effectively *hiding in plain sight* as they are relegated to the literal and figurative margins of the classroom and school.

Many sociocultural researchers have sought to better understand the nature of cultural and linguistic resources linked to historically marginalized characteristics or identities. This research has generated important knowledge related to the specific nature of students' resources beyond school (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), the value of those resources in school spaces (Dyson, 1989, 1997, 2003, 2008), and the means by which teachers and schools might change classroom contexts so as to achieve a more productive and equitable alignment between home and school learning (Moll & Diaz, 1987; Moll & Greenburg, 1990). One subset of this body of qualitative research focuses on literacy learning and teaching, particularly but not exclusively, in urban contexts. These studies influenced by new views of literacy as social practice (New London Group, 1996; Street, 1995), have provided insights into the nature of literacy and a wealth of evidence detailing the sophistication, breadth, and adaptive flexibility of all students' literate practices across contexts.

These studies have contributed to the identification of distinctions between different types of literacies, or sets of literacy practices, across domains and communities of practice. New Literacy Studies (NLS) researchers have identified, labeled, and studied a flock of here to fore named literacies including popular literacies (Dyson, 2003), African American literacies (Ball & Lardner, 2005; Richardson, 2003), "gansta" literacies (Moje, 2000), and hidden literacies (Finders, 1997). They have suggested teachers discuss the ideological nature of literacies explicitly with students (Finders, 1997), urged teachers to create permeable curricula in which students are able to utilize unofficial literacies to learn official ones (Dyson, 2003), and advocated and demonstrated using students out-of-school and vernacular literacies as teaching resources in the classroom (Mahiri, 2004).

At the same time these studies have documented the multiple and sophisticated literacy practices of students both inside and outside of schools, they have often characterized the relationship between in-school and out-of-school literacies as uneasy, even hostile. These studies have illustrated the political nature of literacies by demonstrating how students' literacies are often marginalized, silenced, dismissed, driven underground, and sidelined in schools and classrooms. Students' literacies in these studies are frequently described as other. That is, they are labeled as underground, out-of-school, unofficial, and unsanctioned and are defined in relationship to abstract, vaguely referenced "official" counterparts such as academic or school-based literacies. The sites of study of many of the studies concerned by the reception students' literacies receive in school share common elements. One is a tightly regulated curricular context and another is the presence of literacies "hidden in full view" (Dyson, 2008, p. 120).

Despite a preponderance of research evidence illuminating the importance of students' social, cultural, and linguistic lives and the complexity of learning processes and advocating broader appreciation and inclusion of a range of literacies in classrooms, policies and pedagogical practices related to literacy development and English language arts education have become more narrow, prescriptive, and restrictive (J. Lee, 2006). This constriction of the curriculum is particularly evident in urban schools where a preponderance of students are of working-class and/or racial, ethnic, and/or linguistic-minority origins (J. Lee, 2006). Phrases like literacy crisis, learning failure, and academic underachievement seem now to be synonymous with urban schooling (Noguera, 2003).

In response to this "crisis" in urban education, federal, state, and local policymakers have resolved to improve the educational outcomes of low-achieving students such as the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Policies like NCLB have emphasized, by equating school success with test scores, the literacy knowledge and skills most valuable in high-stakes testing situations (Hillocks, 2002). Intense focus on standardized achievement assessments has had a narrowing influence on the curriculum in many urban schools. Some sociocultural researchers have suggested that this trend has had particularly dire consequences for traditionally underserved student populations (Alvermann, 2001, Dyson, 2003, Heath, 1983, Mahiri, 2004, Morrell, 2004).

The opening lines of this chapter were exchanged between an African American student and a middle school language arts teacher in one such context. As the student says, they are "stranded" in school. In fact, in the language of the No Child Left Behind Act they are stranded in a failing school, where the curriculum is narrowing. Their school has failed, due primarily to low test scores on state tests, to make Adequate Yearly

Progress (AYP) for the last four years in a row. This failing school, like many other failing schools, is attended by students from traditionally underserved student populations. Most of the students are African American and speak African American Language. Many are living below the poverty line. As a consequence of the school's failure to make AYP, the teacher must now comply with a variety of state-imposed regulations designed to improve the quality of instruction in her classroom. Not surprisingly, that instruction is becoming increasingly focused on making sure her students can pass state literacy assessments seemingly with room for little else.

The following research investigates literacy *hiding in plain sight* through an examination of the literate participation of African American sixth graders in an urban English language arts classroom heavily influenced by the demands of preparing students for state assessments. This study intends to address questions at the intersection of calls to utilize all students' learning resources more fully and policies and pressures that seem to make doing such a thing in some classrooms increasingly challenging. Chapter Two first provides a review of relevant research related to differential school achievement and African American students, sociocultural perspectives on literacy, and literacy *hiding in plain sight* followed by an explanation for and description of the theoretical framework used in this study. In Chapter Three the methodology of this qualitative case study is detailed. The object of study, the study design, data generation and analysis procedures, as well as the researcher's social location are all explained. Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven present the findings of the study. Each chapter reveals how literacy is *hiding in plain sight* through one of four different mechanisms of *adaptive colorations—getting*

over, standing out, lying low, and *covering up*. Finally, Chapter Eight summarizes findings and suggests several implications for teaching and research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Situating the Study

In order to situate this study, historically and socio-politically, in previous and current scholarly conversation, a discussion of literature related to differential school achievement, sociocultural perspectives on literacy learning, and hidden literacies follows. Due to the particular nature of this study, this chapter begins with an historical discussion of differential school achievement and African American students. Then, three theoretical frames will be identified, and an explanation will be provided for how those frames of adaptive coloration, sociocultural practice theory, and critical sociocultural theory each informed this study. Finally, the research questions that guided this study will be presented.

African Americans and the Achievement Gap

Though pockets of resistance to legal mandates for desegregation and wide-spread de facto segregation would continue until present day, in 1954 Brown v. the Board officially brought the era of legal, state-sanctioned, school segregation to an end in the United States. But the official cessation of "separate but equal" policies did not end, once and for all, either segregated or unequal schooling. Instead, it simply marked the start of unofficial segregation and unequal schooling for African Americans in this country. The end of legal segregation did, however, begin a new conversation, at least new to some, in educational circles. A recognition and discussion of patterns of underachievement of African American students as compared to their European American peers. Patterns of differential achievement between students in various demographic categories became

known as achievement gaps. Achievement gaps between students of different racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups garnered a great deal of attention and discussion.

Explaining the Gap

During the 1960s these achievement gaps began to be explained in terms of cultural deprivation. It was suggested that African American and low-income students were underachieving in school because of the deficits they had due to the substandard nature of their homes, languages, and outside-of-school experiences. In the literature these students were increasingly being characterized as culturally deprived or disadvantaged (Wiggan, 2007). Labels, such as "at risk" for school failure, sprang up and legislation was written and funded by the federal government (Title I & Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965) in order to better serve the new "culturally disadvantaged" and "at risk." Compensatory education programs like Head Start and Follow Through were created specifically for the at risk and culturally disadvantaged and were designed to counteract the negative effects of low-income, African American students' homes and families (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

By the 1970s, though, the language of cultural deprivation and deficiency was being challenged. Social movements and various researchers were suggesting that what had been constructed as cultural deficiency was in fact cultural difference. In the decades that followed, researchers focusing on a variety of issues contributed to solidifying that shift. Studies by sociolinguists (Heath, 1983; Labov, 1972; Smitherman, 1977, 1999) and educational researchers (Au & Jordan, 1981; Delpit, 1995; Irvine, 1990) suggested that rather than students having cultural deficits there was actually a cultural mismatch between students' homes and schools. Students once perceived as deficient in fact were

simply dealing with differences at school in language use, behavioral norms and expectations, and interaction patterns than they were accustomed to in their homes.

Language use.

African American students, particularly Ebonics-speaking students living and attending school in urban areas, are not achieving school success at the same level as their "standard" English-speaking peers (NCES, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Smitherman, 1999). Much has been said about why this might be the case and what can or should be done about it (Adger, Christian, & Taylor, 1999; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Perry & Delpit, 1998; Ramirez, et. al., 2005). One position is that teachers' (mis)understanding of their Ebonics-speaking students' language, language use, and language experiences is largely responsible for students' academic failure (Labov, 1972; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman & Baugh, 2002; Villanueva, 2000).

Ebonics or African American Language (AAL) is defined by Smitherman (1999), as "a set of communication patterns and practices resulting from Africans' appropriation and transformation of a foreign tongue during the African Holocaust" (p.19). It is a rule-based language whose patterns and styles reflect African language influence. Unique features of AAL include differences in pronunciation, such as pronouncing (th)at as (d)at, and grammar, like showing possession through adjacency (baby toy). There are also differences in rhetorical strategies, for example, using proverbs, and communicative practices, like signifyin'—a game of verbal insult. One or more of these features of AAL is used by 90% of African Americans at some time or another.

All of the following are languages and dialects spoken, in some combination, in the African American community in the United States: AAL, Standard American

English, and Nonstandard American English. Nonstandard American English refers to those language patterns and communication styles that violate the rules of Standard American English and are non-African in origin. Examples of Nonstandard American English include the pronunciation of "ask" as "axe" and the use of double negatives.

Members of the African American community use these languages and dialects differentially. For instance, there are differences between social class groups regarding AAL use. Use differs in terms of frequency, types of features used, and other dialects with which AAL is combined. Middle-class Blacks typically use some features of AAL some of the time, but they also speak Standard American English. Working-class and poor African Americans use more features of AAL, more often, and combine it with elements of Nonstandard and Standard American English (Smitherman, 1999).

Interaction patterns and behavioral norms.

Differences in interaction patterns and behavioral norms of working-class and poor African Americans and their White middle-class peers have also been documented in the research. Heath (1983) described the ways questioning patterns used in homes of African American children differed from those used in homes of White children. She detected differences in the content of questions, how questions were phrased, and the expected responses to questions. For example, in White middle-class homes questions often included naming, "What color is your shirt?" whereas in African American homes the parent was more likely to present a question in the form of a verbal challenge, "What else is like the color of your shirt?" Michaels (1981) studied narrative styles of African American children during sharing time. She noted that African American children tended

to present episodic narratives during this time that were sometimes not recognized as legitimate or acceptable as the narratives of their White peers.

Bridging the Gap

In conjunction with shifting perceptions of and language about low-income and African American students, came new curricular and pedagogical approaches to meeting culturally different students' educational needs. Multicultural education researchers (Banks, 1996; Gay, 2002) and curriculum theorists (Apple, 1982) began to contribute ideas about how curricular and pedagogical changes in schools might mitigate the ill effects produced by a failure to address the cultural differences many students had to negotiate in schools. Teacher educators considered the pedagogical practices of teachers related to culturally different students as well as the problem of preparing teachers to work with culturally different students in classrooms (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter, 2001).

One form of pedagogy based on the construction of low-income and African American students as culturally different rather than culturally deficit is culturally responsive pedagogy. In *Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Ladson-Billings (1994) reported on research into the teaching practices of successful teachers of African American students. In her study she documented the beliefs and practices of eight teachers of African American students who were described as successful by both parents and administrators. Through an analysis of those teachers' pedagogical practices and beliefs about themselves, about their students, and about knowledge Ladson-Billings constructed several principles of a culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP).

According to Ladson-Billings (1994) teachers who practiced culturally relevant pedagogy expected excellence from their students and believed all students could succeed. They saw themselves as part of and giving back to the community. Teacher-student relationships were humanely equitable and extended beyond the classroom into the community. These teachers encouraged students to learn collaboratively. They were passionate about content and helped students develop necessary skills, but they viewed knowledge critically and understood it as continually changing and shared by teachers and students. Teachers who practiced culturally relevant pedagogy nurtured students as intellectual leaders, made room in the classroom for their real-life experiences, and engaged with students in "a collective struggle against the status quo" (p.118). Ladson-Billings juxtaposed these and other principles of CRP with what she referred to as an assimilationist pedagogy, that is, "a teaching style that operates without regard to the students' particular cultural characteristics" (p.22).

Sociocultural Perspectives on Literacy Learning

A sociocultural view of literacy learning is appropriated in this research (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertch, 1985a, 1985b). This means literacy learning is understood to be a culturally and historically situated, social sense-making activity. Over the past several decades, sociocultural literacy theorists and educational researchers have advanced new and expanding definitions and conceptualizations of both literacy and learning. Sociocultural views (Heath, 1982, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981) that emerged from functional approaches to sociolinguistics (Hymes, 1972), have come to define literacy in terms of competencies for achieving social purposes during and through

context-dependent, text-mediated activities. Rather than autonomous and neutral, literacy or literacies are understood as situated, multiple, and always "ideological" (Street, 1984).

Literacy as Social Practice

New Literacy Studies (NLS) has been influential in the conceptual expansion of sociocultural perspectives of literacy and literacy learning. (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995). In New Literacy Studies literacy is viewed as a social practice. A central tenet of the new literacy approach is that literacy, or literacies, are situated. That is, "All uses of written language can be seen as located in particular times and places" (Barton, et al., 2000, p.1). Consequently, New Literacy Studies tend to focus on literacies in use, as they are enacted in people's everyday lives. Close attention is paid to the contexts, or characteristics of time and place, and the links between specific contexts and broader social structuring and processes. This means that all literate activity is understood as being indicative of broader social structuring, norms, and practices. The focus in New Literacy Studies research has been on how people regulate and are regulated by literacy practices. That is, what people do with texts and what it means to them in the various domains of activity in their everyday lives.

Domains of activity, such as home, school, or work are defined as structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is learned and used (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). People participate in distinct communities of practice, or discourse communities, in different domains of life. These communities are groups of people held together by their characteristic ways of talking, acting, valuing, interpreting and using written language (Gee, 1996). In keeping with a shift away from literacy as an individual attribute, ways of doing literacy in and across domains is socially mediated within discourse communities.

NLS scholars have argued that within and across domains literacy is done differently and therefore should be understood as multiple literacies rather than a singular literacy.

NLS has been useful for making links between literacies in specific contexts and broader social structuring. Because NLS emphasizes how literacy activities are supported, sustained, learned, impeded, and what social meanings they have, it is effective for highlighting the ways in which institutions support particular (usually dominant) literacy practices. NLS sheds light on the relationships between literacies and the social institutions and power relations that sustain them. Social institutions, such as schools and prisons, for example, support and structure literacy-related activities and practices through explicit and implicit rules, penalties, and social pressure. New Literacy Studies examines the links between the particularities of local or specific context and patterns in the broader society.

Literacy Across Contexts

Sociocultural literacy researchers operating under the basic tenets of New Literacy Studies, namely, that literacies are multiple and vary across domains, have worked to describe the nature of literacies enacted in various contexts (New London Group, 1996). They have also examined how literate social actors develop multiple literate identities and manage to negotiate the literacy requirements of membership in multiple communities of practice. Many of these studies have been qualitative ethnographies of the literacy practices of school-aged children. Research on the various literacies of school-aged children has focused on children's literacy practices in school (C. Lee, 2006), out-of-school (Mahiri, 2004), and across in and out-of-school contexts

(Dyson, 2003). Looking at literacy in contexts outside of schools has provided new frameworks for thinking about literacies within school settings (Hull & Schutlz, 2002).

One influential corpus of work that investigates the role of out-of-school or "unofficial" literacy resources in school contexts is that of Dyson (1989, 1997, 2003). Dyson's work trains the spotlight on young children's cultural worlds. In so doing she has illuminated the variety and richness of the experiences and resources upon which children draw and the social and textual sophistication and flexibility they exhibit as they learn to write in the classroom. Dyson's body of work with it's focus on students' enactments of literate selves affords a view, that is often overlooked, of students importing content and forms from their lives outside classrooms and using official writing events to accomplish a variety of social and academic purposes.

Hidden Literacies and Classroom Contexts

Dyson's research into the cultural practices and writing development of very young children in the early years of schooling has documented the nature, source, and use of resources students draw upon as they learn to write in classrooms. She argues that one resource all children possess is a literate disposition. A literate disposition, which Dyson (2003a) has suggested is one of the "true childhood universals," is characterized by "an openness to appealing symbols (sounds, images, ways of talking) and a playfulness with this everyday symbolic stuff" (p. 101). In addition to a disposition toward play with appealing symbols, Dyson also referred to the "wealth of textual toys" or "free symbolic stuff" with which the children she studied play. Her studies described in detail how those textual toys were resources for literacy learning. For example, Dyson (2003b) recounted how several fake" brothers and sisters" in one classroom appropriated the words and

images of popular media as they learned to write in the classroom. The children imported and utilized symbolic, thematic, and ideological content from movies, television, radio, and video games both in their writing and play in their "unofficial," or peer-governed spaces, and during "official," or teacher-governed writing practices at school.

As children were shown moving within and among child-governed and teacher-governed worlds, another set of literate resources was illuminated. These were resources enabled children to recontextualize, or stretch, reorganize, and remix, the material and communicative practices of popular media as they participated in official school literacy activities. Those resources included a rich repertoire of well-known symbolic materials, varied models of communicative practice, a capacity for flexible adaptability across practices, and classroom writing opportunities that allowed them to access and utilize familiar, often "unofficial" frames of reference, as they entered into official school literacy.

Dyson stated that the implications of her research for teaching were "deceptively straightforward." She asserted that teachers in order to do this teachers "must be able to recognize children's resources, to see where they are coming from, so they can establish the common ground necessary to help children differentiate and gain control over a wealth of symbolic tools and communicative practices" (Dyson, 2003, p. 107). Dyson contended, though, that a productive interplay between "official" and "unofficial" worlds must be established in classrooms in order for children's "multiple communicative experiences that may intersect with literacy learning" to be "render[ed] visible" for teachers to see (p.101).

Dyson's work has revealed many insights about the nature of the relationship between literacies and the contexts in which they are enacted. One important insight is that contextual conditions or circumstances may contribute to students' literate resources or literacies being overlooked, dismissed, or ignored in classroom. In fact, many studies that appropriate a multiliteracies perspective have referenced the hidden nature of students' literacies (Dyson, 2008; Finders, 1997; Moje, 2000). This has been especially true when enactments of particular literacies, such as children's literacies drawn from popular media, have been juxtaposed with "official," or school-based, literacies. Students' literacies and literacy practices, when enacted in school contexts or compared with academic literacies, have been characterized as unofficial, unsanctioned, or vernacular and been said to be hidden—lurking in the wings, offstage, and in the margins as part of the underlife of classrooms.

A Literate Underlife

Finders (1997) gave an account of the literacy practices of five 12 and 13 year old, academically successful, European American, working and middle-class girls living in the rural Midwest. She observed these middle school girls across contexts, in the classroom and beyond to their homes and private social spaces, in order to examine the role literacy played in their social development. She showed how two social groups "the tough cookies," who lived in a trailer park, and "the social queens," the middle-class girls, used literacy to mark membership in particular groups and to establish social boundaries and demonstrated the important role literacy played in the maintenance of friendship groups and the construction of self. Additionally, Finders illustrated that these girls utilized literacy to claim status and challenge authority.

Finders demonstrated how these girls' their literacy practices were regulated by their group memberships, how literacy was implicated as they complied with or resisted official institutional expectations, and how their participation in school was influenced by the underlife present in the school. She contended that these girls often resisted the official view of who they must be and what they must do and that was resistance sometimes manifested itself through literacy practices. For example, Finders detailed how these girls were active participants in an "underlife"—one beneath the school-sanctioned literacy practices—in which they engaged in a number of "unsanctioned literacies." Unsanctioned literacies, such as writing notes or bathroom graffiti, as well as those simply not considered official, like yearbook signing and reading teen magazines, were described as hidden literacies lurking in the underlife of classrooms.

As the girls in Finders study participated in both sanctioned and unsanctioned literacy practices, sometimes simultaneously, they negotiated multiple literacies. Drawing on Finders, Oates (2001) has suggested the girls' ability to successfully construct and engage in an underlife evidenced "extratextual understandings of social and relational practices...The girls' literate underlife was lived in relation to adult-sanctioned practices" (p.223). Their teacher forbade note writing and passing in class and their parents disapproved of the messages the girls were getting from the magazines. These girls, though, had an awareness and knowledge of both sanctioned and unsanctioned expectations and practices. Through that understanding of the relational nature of literacy practices, the girls achieved various social and material goals. In her work Finders urged more study of the role literacies in the "offstage regions," or hidden literacies, play in classrooms and in the lives of young people.

Literacy on the Margins

Moje (2000) conducted a three-year ethnographic case study of the literacy practices of five boys and girls representing Latino, Vietnamese, and Samoan heritages. All of these urban seventh through ninth graders self-identified as associate or fringe gang members. Moje stated that in discussions about the literacy practices of marginalized adolescents, literacies were typically constructed primarily as acts of deviance or resistance. She argued, though, that if literacy was to be conceptualized as a tool for transforming thought and experience, then that view needed to extend to all literacy practices. In her study, Moje extends the theoretical claim that all literacy practices are tools by investigating what unsanctioned literacy practices allowed these students to accomplish. She demonstrated how these gang-affiliated youth employed a range of sophisticated literacy practices, in school and out, order "to make and represent meaning, to change and construct identities, and to gain or maintain social position" (p. 670). Moje also illuminated how these marginalized youth wove "unsanctioned" or "alternative" literacies together with academic literacies.

Moje found that what constituted "unsanctioned" or "nonschooled" literacies for these students included practices routinely associated with gang affiliation such as tagging, graffiti writing, hand signs, and color codes as well as poetry, journal and letter writing, narrative, and novel reading. She separated students' unsanctioned literacies into three categories of discourse: written, body, and oral. Written discourse included raps, poetry, and parodies; writing gang names, street names, and gang symbols; and composing letters and in journals using print or linguistic gang conventions. Body discourse consisted of clothing, makeup, and hairstyles as well as hand signs, body

movements, and body relations. Oral discourse referred to terminology, accent, and dialects. She illustrated how each of these types of discourse influenced students' literacy practices, or the ways they read and wrote texts. Unsanctioned literacies enabled gang-affiliated youth, who were marginalized in many spaces including in classrooms, to write themselves into their own story rather than be passive watchers or listeners in someone else's story. Gangsta literacies allowed them to be part of the gangsta story.

Despite the sophistication and usefulness of students' gang-related literacy practices for navigating students' positions on the margins, however, there was no room for those literacies within school-sanctioned literacy. Instead, the students were effectively controlled, silenced, or dismissed by school literacy. Though, Moje acknowledges the difficulties of importing "gansta literacies" into the classroom, she advocates helping students develop an awareness of their literacy practices, the marginalization of those literacy practices, and the mechanisms they already possess for navigating, reshaping, and challenging dominant discourses related to school literacy. Moje also urged literacy researchers, theorists, and practitioners to recognize "the power of unsanctioned literacy tools in the lives of marginalized youth and develop pedagogies that draw from, but also challenge and extend, these practices" (p.1).

Literacy Hidden in Full View

Dyson (2008) detailed findings from her ethnographic study of child writing in a racially and ethnically diverse first grade urban classroom "tightly focused on the written language basics" (p. 120). Specifically she had set out to understand students' interpretations and negotiations of official writing practices. In order to accomplish this, she examined children's efforts to regularize their texts in order to do the right thing in

the official world of school. Her descriptions of students' literacy practices illustrated how students' written language use was being shaped by those interpretations and navigations and how children were experiencing the possibilities and constraints of school writing.

Dyson argued that children's attention to official expectations for regularizing texts as well as students' efforts to do so often "pushed to the sidelines" or "left in the unofficial child world" important aspects of their knowledge and know-how. She asserted that the official spotlight, which tended to shine on the written text, failed to capture the full breadth of students' resources—especially because those resources were often most visible in unofficial, off stage spaces such as during interactive verbal planning and writing episodes. Dyson stated that recognizing children's resources would require a re-visioning of textual basics themselves. She suggested that we must learn to create a mutual interplay between the official and unofficial in classrooms. To do so we will need to look beyond the official spotlight to the symbolic and social activity on the curricular sidelines; for it is there we'll find evidence of children's agency, social responsiveness, and symbolic astuteness "hidden in full view" (p.120).

Participants in studies in which literacies are described as hidden, often in full view, have been conducted across demographic variables. Participants have been distributed across categories of age, race/ethnicity, class, gender, social affiliation, and achievement status. Participants range from first grade students, at the beginning of school experience, to high school students, perhaps nearing the end of their association with formal schooling. Settings for the studies have also been varied and have included rural as well as urban contexts. These studies have uncovered the existence of hidden

literacies in classrooms and detailed the nature and purpose of literacies that may be hidden. They have characterized such literacies and literacy practices as being unsanctioned, alternative, or unofficial and described them as existing on the margins, off-stage, or on the sidelines. They have alluded to the relevance of such literacies to school-based literacy, while acknowledging the difficulties of integrating unsanctioned or vernacular literacies. Dyson's study illustrated how the focus of the official in conjunction with students' efforts to participate appropriately in official school literacy worked to sideline, or render hidden, students' literacy know-how.

What this research has not, or in the case of Dyson is just beginning to do, is to focus of the condition of literacy being hidden in full view. In other words, there is much left to understand about this phenomenon that has been spotted in classrooms, a phenomenon I refer to as literacy *hiding in plain sight*. The studies reviewed here have tended to angle the observational and analytic gaze toward the literal and academic periphery of classrooms. They have teased apart and discussed the official and unofficial, the sanctioned and unsanctioned, the center stage and off-stage. There is more to be learned about *hiding in plain sight*. How have literacies come to be *hiding in plain sight*? How is the hiding of literacies accomplished in classrooms? What purposes does it serve? What roles do students play in hiding literacies? How does one observe and describe a phenomenon that is itself hiding? How is something at once hiding and in plain sight?

Framing the Study

This research seeks to examine the phenomenon of literacy *hiding in plain sight*. Like the site in Dyson's study, the school and classroom featured in this study is also intently focused on providing students with the academic basics needed for achieving

school success. Unlike Dyson, though, who illuminates and investigates the phenomenon in a classroom of very young children, making their initial entries into school literacy, this study looks at students farther down the educational road. Here the focus is on sixth grade students who have been learning and negotiating doing the right thing in school for several years now. This study examines *hiding in plain sight* during a novel study unit in a language arts classroom in a middle school. The middle school is in an inner-city area that serves a predominately African American population from poor and work-class backgrounds. Three theoretical lenses, sociocultural practice theory, the metaphor of adaptive coloration, and critical theory will be used to shed light on the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight.*

Sociocultural Practice Theory

Knowledge and insight are gained in New Literacy Studies when empirical data about literacy are examined through the lenses of various social theories. Sociocultural practice theory is one such lens. Sociocultural practice theory provides a useful way of paying attention to, documenting, and thinking about patterned routines of activity students and teachers enact daily as they engage in the sociocultural practices of teaching and learning in language arts classrooms. The term sociocultural practices, as used here, refers to "actions that are repeated, shared with others in a social group, and invested with normative expectations and with meanings or significances that go beyond the immediate goals of actions" (Miller & Goodnow, 1995, p.7). This work draws on sociocultural practice theory. According to this view, all people participate in the daily social life of societies through the appropriation, or borrowing, of sociocultural practices (Miller & Goodnow, 1995, Rogoff, 2003). Individuals appropriate practices from a range of

possible and competing options and recontextualize, or relocate, and differentiate, or alter, those practices according to their unique purposes, perspectives, understandings, and needs (Hanks, 1996).

Literacy practices are sociocultural practices that are connected in some way to text. (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1992; Street, 1984). Teachers and students daily enact patterned routines of activity as they engage in the teaching and learning of literacy in classrooms. These literacy practices are composed of myriad literacy events. Literacy events are observable and can be described by identifying who is interacting, what they are doing and saying, and where it is taking place (Hamilton, 2000). Literacy events are observable. Literacy practices, though, are invisible (Street, 1993); they consist of motives, values, beliefs, attitudes, and power relationships that underlie, and must be inferred from, visible literacy events (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). In New Literacy Studies the unit of analysis is frequently the literacy event where literacy events are defined as sets of patterned, routine actions, where written texts play a role. Following this body of work, literacy events will be the unit of analysis in this study.

Sociocultural literacy practices are useful units of analysis for understanding literacy when it is conceived as social practice. Practices have a visible component—the literacy event—and therefore can be observed and described. That visible action component is linked to an invisible set of values, beliefs, and meanings that can be inferred through attention to the action. Additionally, practices can be observed as they are enacted while still situated in context. Practices are the means through which people participate in culturally valued ways in societies. It is through these practices individuals reproduce and transform society. In order to participate in communities of practice people

must make choices among a range of competing and supporting practices. There are consequences related to the choices. Those consequences create possibilities and constraints for future participation.

Using a Metaphor: Adaptive Coloration

One conceptual tool used in the analysis of this ethnographic case study of *hiding in plain sight.* In this case the theoretical framework that I have appropriated is a metaphor that comes from the novel that was read during class. That metaphor is adaptive coloration. Adaptive coloration traditionally refers to the biological and behavioral accomplishment of achieving camouflage by animals. This construct, however, when applied figuratively, can be useful for exploring the possible dimensions and dynamics of literacy *hiding in plain sight* in classrooms.

Understanding something of the way scientists explain adaptive coloration in nature can be helpful when thinking about how the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight* might be accomplished in this classroom. Consider cuttlefish for example. Cuttlefish are another species that possess the capacity for adaptive coloration. Cuttlefish are a group of animals related to octopus and squid, and they are masters of camouflage, yet scientists know very little about how they disguise themselves so well. One scientist, Dr. Roger Hanlon (2008), is a marine biologist who studies adaptive coloration in cuttlefish. In order to understand how these animals camouflage themselves, Hanlon conducts a series of experiments. His experiments have led him to a theory about how these animals are able to blend in so quickly and perfectly to their surroundings. He found that, "The animal's magic is looking at a complex scene and only picking out one or two visual cues to turn on the right camouflage pattern type" (Hanlon, 2008). In the classroom, I also

found that students were sometimes employing this kind of active adaptive coloration in order hide in plain sight. Like cuttlefish, in order to achieve camouflage through adaptive coloration these students attended to certain aspects of the environment and the others in it. They then turned on "the right camouflage pattern type" in response to contextual influences.

Hanlon's specific findings related to adaptive coloration in cuttlefish have contributed to unraveling some of the bigger principles concerning how animals achieve effective camouflage. Essentially, scientists have found that achieving effective camouflage requires a suite of appropriate actions by an animal. They must sense the local environment (including the animals in it), filter that sensory input, use selected sensory input to make a behavior decision, direct the appropriate effectors (be they muscles/postures/color patterns, etc.) to achieve some form of camouflage, and implement the appropriate behavior to render the camouflage effective.

Manifestations and Mechanisms of Camouflage

For animals, and others who hide in plain sight, or achieve camouflage through adaptive coloration, evading detection through camouflage is a process. First, the environment, and the others in the environment, must be read and interpreted. Then, in response to that reading, a set of behaviors must be selected that will result in the expression of a mechanism of camouflage appropriate for the situation. Successful camouflage through adaptive coloration requires attending and responding to the context in strategic ways. It involves a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of various environments, including a sense of oneself, a sense of others, and a sense of how one may be perceived by others.

All camouflage is basically achieved through this same suite of actions. However, adaptive coloration in the animal kingdom can be conceived in terms of two different types of manifestations. In one manifestation, camouflage is accomplished when animals with certain markings or colorations are positioned in particular ways in relationship to their environments such as the way a brown, speckled bird might seemingly disappear into the underbush. In another manifestation, animals change their color in response to the environment or situation in which they find themselves. Many sea creatures, for instance, can and do alter their appearance in a variety of ways for a number of reasons. Whatever type of adaptive coloration is employed by an animal, though, there seems to be a limited number of mechanisms being used to "trick the eye". Currently, there are at least six mechanisms of camouflage recognized by biologists: general background resemblance, deceptive resemblance (including mimicry), disruptive coloration, countershading/concealment of the shadow, rarity through polymorphism, and cryptic behavior and vigilance.

Functions of Adaptive Coloration

Adaptive coloration can serve a variety of purposes in the animal kingdom. Adaptive coloration is a strategic process used primarily to disguise or distort an animal's appearance in order to avoid detection. Typically, hiding is associated with prey and thought of as a means of evading predation. Avoiding detection can be useful, though, for both evading predation and approaching prey. In addition, functions of adaptive coloration that do not involve hiding include calling attention, warning others, and attracting mates. Chameleons, for example, change colors to express emotional states. This dissertation focuses primarily on literacy practices *hiding in plain sight* due to

adaptive coloration, but adaptive coloration served other purposes in this classroom as well as seen in what I call *standing out* in the "Ghetto Family" vignette.

The biological construct of adaptive coloration has been useful, as a framework of sorts, in making sense of the ways in which students' literacy practices hid or were hidden in plain sight. However, utilizing a biological construct taken from the natural world and applying it even metaphorically to human subjects in classrooms has its limitations. I want to clarify my intentions in including a discussion of adaptive coloration in a presentation of classroom events. I am not attempting to construct students' hiding as a physical accomplishment as biologists would, nor is my intent to detail the cognitive or even a sociocognitive particulars of the *hiding in plain sight* phenomenon as a developmental psychologists might. Instead, I am appropriating the trope of camouflage through adaptive coloration for rhetorical purposes.

I borrow this concept in order to help illustrate and articulate the situated particularities and social complexities of the literacy *hiding in plain sight.* I borrow descriptive language and rely on common understandings of camouflage in order to represent episodes of *hiding in plain sight* in this classroom. I appropriate the terms adaptive coloration, suite of appropriate actions, and mechanisms of camouflage in the text that follows, but again I mean those terms to be figurative and evocative rather than literal.

A Critical Lens

Sociocultural practice theory and the metaphor of adaptive coloration played important roles in the framing of this study. Sociocultural practice theory was helped me identify the links between observable literacy events and literacy practices, or the events

plus the underlying values and beliefs related to those events, and for understanding the mutually constitutive nature of people and their literacies, texts, and practices. The metaphor has provided both a lens and a lexicon for thinking about literacy that is *hiding in plain sight.* In addition to identifying and describing literacy *hiding in plain sight,* however, I also aimed to theorize the sociopolitical motives, means, and consequences related to the phenomenon. Those frames together are still insufficient for theorizing and analyzing the nature and role of power, agency, and identity in the social enactment of the phenomenon of literacy *hiding in plain sight* (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). To accomplish this a critical lens was applied to this research.

In the social sciences, critical theory is the examination and critique of society. It includes a focus on the totality of society in its historical specificity, that is, how it came to be configured at a specific point in time. Taking a critical approach may be conceptualized and utilized in variety of ways across disciplinary communities. Critical sociolinguistics (e.g. Fairclough & Gee), critical discourse analysts (e.g. Foucault & Rogers), critical applied linguists (e.g. Pennycook & Kress), critical pedagogues (e.g. Giroux & McLaren), and critical ethnographers (e.g. Morrell & Cushman) have all explored the political implications inherent in practices. Depending on the discipline or the context, those explorations might have been related to texts, literacy, research methods, language, teaching, and translation. Many of these critical theories share an interest in emancipation from domination and the fusion of sociocultural analysis, explanation, and interpretation with sociocultural critique.

Critical Sociocultural Theory: Identity, Agency, and Power

This research invokes three concepts central to critical approaches—identity, agency, and power. In *Reframing Sociocultural Research on Literacy*, Lewis, Enciso, & Moje (2007) call for a new kind of sociocultural research—a critical sociocultural research They contend that traditional sociocultural perspectives have been insufficient for "demonstrating how children's opportunities to learn are both supported and constrained by the role of power in everyday interactions of students and teachers and by the systems and structures that shape the institution of school" (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p.16). As they explain it, learning provides access to and control over Discourses, or shared and valued ways of knowing, thinking, acting the activity and goods within a community of practice (Gee, 1996). In addition, there is always struggle within Discourse communities over limited resources, identities, and cultural tools that might provide better access to and control over Discourses. Qualities of difference related to gender, age, race, economic status may give some more access and control than others depending on the way such categories of difference are figured in a particular community of practice. In this way literacy learning is influenced and shaped by power relations.

Foucault (as cited in Moje & Lewis, 2007) described power as "productive," that is, an effect of interactions and relationships instead of a thing that is had by some but not others. Power circulates among people rather than resides with people. Instead, of people having power, then, Foucault argued that people exercise power over themselves and each other in the context of history. Drawing on these notions of power, Moje and Lewis (2007) contend that literate participation in a community of practice may include "taking up, disrupting, and transforming" (p.18) existing discourses.

The answers to when, where, why, or how one may go about taking up, disrupting, or transforming discourses in various communities of practice may be bound up with questions of identity and agency. "Agency might be thought of as the strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, relationships" (p.18). Identities may be defined as identifications with particular discourse communities. People are members of multiple discourse communities and move among them, as they do so they enact their various identities in ways that will be recognized by others in given contexts of participation (Gee, 2000/2001). Once again certain characteristics of people, including age, race, and social class, shape how they are recognized by others, and those recognitions, in turn, shape how they view themselves. Despite the constraints placed on agency by the demands of recognitions, as people move in and across discourse communities they have the potential to shape and refashion the discourses there. Through the strategic taking up, disrupting, and transforming of discourses, people can remake themselves and their communities of practice.

The qualitative case study described here in is guided by the following questions:

- What is the nature of literacy *hiding in plain sight* in a middle school language arts classroom?
- How is *hiding in plain sight* accomplished?
- What is hidden or hiding? By whom? From whom?
- For what reasons or purposes?

These questions will be addressed by describing and analyzing the literate participation of high-achieving, African American, sixth graders during a novel study unit of *Hatchet*. In Chapter Two, I have situated and framed my study. I have detailed explanations for

differential school achievement among African Americans, discussed sociocultural perspectives on literacy learning, and summarized studies related to hidden literacies. I have also described how analyses will be framed using sociocultural practice theory, the metaphor of adaptive coloration, and critical sociocultural theory. In the chapter that follows, Chapter Three, I describe my methodology. I present an explanation and rationale for the study design. I introduce the site and participants, detail data generation and analytic procedures, and discuss my social location as researcher.

Chapter 3

Methodology

> But this time, when the bird flew, something caught his eye and it was the secret key. The bird cut down toward the lake, then, seeing it couldn't land in the water, turned and flew back up the hill into the trees. When it turned, curving through the trees, the sun had caught it, and Brian, for an instant, saw it as a shape; sharp-pointed in front, back from the head in a streamlined bullet shape to the fat body...And that had been the secret...He had to look for the outline, had to see the shape instead of the feathers or color, had to train his eyes to see the shape. It was like turning on a television. Suddenly he could see things he never saw before (Paulsen, 1987, p.141).

The above excerpt is taken from, *Hatchet*, the novel sixth graders read in their language arts class during data generation for this study. This young adult adventure novel was written by Gary Paulsen and first published in 1987. In the two decades that have passed since its publication, it has won numerous awards and distinctions and has been read in classrooms by hundreds of thousands of American schoolchildren. *Hatchet* is the story of Brian Robeson, a thirteen year old "city boy," who finds himself stranded in the middle of the Canadian wilderness after a plane crash. In the wilderness, through hard experience and trial and error, Brian manages to survive as he learns to look, listen, and think in his new surroundings.

For Brian, finding food was one essential and on-going task associated with survival in the wild. In the epigraph above Paulsen describes the moment when Brian

discovered "the secret key" to being able to spot the birds he was hunting for food. Because of the way the birds' camouflage functioned, Brian had not been able to spot the foolbirds he sought by focusing on their colorations or plumage. In a flash of insight, though, Brian realized that he could pick the birds out if he attended to their unique shape. This new way of looking turned out to be the secret key to seeing things he had never seen before.

As it turned out, the novel itself became a "secret key" of sorts in this research. For in addition to being the content studied, the story elements inscribed in the pages of the book seemed to parallel, in evocative ways, those of the classroom narratives. For me, then, borrowing metaphors from the novel enabled me to angle my vision in ways that allowed me to see and make sense of students' literate participation in ways I hadn't before. In fact, it was *Hatchet* that helped me identify the object of study itself, ***hiding in plain sight.***

Finding a Phenomenon: Hiding in Plain Sight

Before I even began observing in Room 106, I assumed many things about what was happening there. For one I believed certain students' cultural and linguistic resources were there to be seen, somewhere, in this classroom. I was convinced of this in large part because of the many studies (including doctoral dissertations) I had read in which researchers detailed students' resources in the contexts of classrooms. At the same time, though, because of previous experiences conducting research in this teacher's classroom, I presumed a likelihood that the kinds of resources and practices I hoped to study might not be getting incorporated into classroom literacy activities or noticed or encouraged by the teacher. What I was not prepared for, though, was the difficulty I, as researcher,

experienced in being able to spot students' resources. In the following vignette I recall the moment I realized something about the elusive nature of what I sought.

> One afternoon, as I observed and took fieldnotes in a corner of the classroom, students took turns reading aloud from *Hatchet*. As they read my focus began to shift back and forth between three scenes. The first scene was the one being created by the author, Gary Paulsen, in the chapter being read. The second was the one being enacted at the moment in this particular language arts classroom. The third scene—the one that seemed to run a constant, endless, nagging loop in my brain—depicted the need and the struggle to learn to recognize, value, and utilize all students' cultural and linguistic resources in schools.
>
> In the chapter the author was describing Brian's desperate quest to capture for food the foolbirds that he knew were there, were all around him, and yet continued to elude him because they were so well camouflaged. In the classroom scene twenty-one twelve or thirteen year old, mostly African American, students sat at their desks exhibiting varying degrees of either compliance with the norms, or interest in the topic, of the activity of the moment—the read aloud of *Hatchet*. As I looked out at them I thought of students' cultural and linguistic resources, of the things these twenty-one students, in particular, must know and be able to do, and the relationship between their cultural and linguistic knowledge and resources and the literacy activity in which they were participating right then. And I thought, where are they? Where are these unique cultural and linguistic resources?

How do they figure into what is going on right now in this classroom? Why are they so hard to spot?

In that moment I felt like Brian must have when he was hunting foolbirds. He knew those birds were everywhere, and he was desperate to spot them before they flew off and were beyond his reach, but he simply could not figure out how. As I sat in that room and watched those students, I thought about the things they probably knew and could do and about how many of those things, though closer and more useful than one might ever imagine, often went unnoticed. I considered the unique resources and tools these students possessed that they likely used to learn outside of the classroom and how if recognized as tools and resources they could help students learn new things in classrooms, too. But like Brian I was coming to realize that despite knowing they were there and wanting and trying desperately to see them, actually doing so was not necessarily such an easy task.

Cultural and Linguistic Resources

As this vignette suggests, I was surprised that what I sought to observe was not easily viewable to me. I had set my sights on observing and documenting the role of students' cultural and linguistic resources in this language arts classroom. When I use the phrase cultural and linguistic resources and experiences, I am referring to those resources, including topics, themes, genres, conventions, forms, modes, discursive practices, and the like the literature has suggested tend to be overlooked, ignored, or devalued in classrooms. That is, literacy practices, or culturally specific ways of reading, writing, and speaking, that are linked to certain, typically marginalized, cultural groups. Examples of marginalized cultural and linguistic resources might include the knowledge and know-

how related to using vernacular forms of language such as African American Language or writing in genres associated youth culture such as rap lyrics or reading about and emulating characters from popular media. Though I acknowledge that all students belong to a variety of cultures simultaneously and possess a wide range of resources upon which they draw to learn, I had chosen to focus on a particular subset of African American student's cultural and linguistic resources because of its legacy of marginalization in school settings.

I had for sometime been concerned with understanding why and how students' resources and literacy practices continue to be marginalized and undervalued in classrooms despite a wealth of evidence suggesting students might be more successful in school contexts if teacher would utilize, even center, their marginalized cultural and linguistic resources in order to help them learn. Now, though, I began to consider something that had never occurred to me before. I was starting to wonder what role the difficulty of spotting resources played in classrooms. I had questions like the following: Which resources tended to be overlooked? Under what conditions were particular resources tough to spot? What accounted for resources being hard to see? And, perhaps above all, what might render resources that are not readily apparent more visible?

Before Brian could capture foolbirds, he would need to see them. If he ever hoped to see them, he would have to learn how to look for them. If I hoped to examine the nature and role of students' cultural and linguistic resources in students' literate participation, I would first have to spot those resources and that it seemed would require understanding this phenomenon of being present, but not readily apparent. I came to refer to this phenomenon as *hiding in plain sight.*

Investigating the Phenomenon

Study Design

The aim of this study was to gain insight into the dimensions and dynamics of the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight*. Specifically, I hoped to understand the particulars of this social phenomenon as it was enacted in a naturalistic social unit, one particular middle school language arts classroom (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In order to accomplish this goal, a qualitative approach to case study methodology was employed. Case study methodology was well suited for the purposes of this research because of its tendency toward the naturalistic, particularistic, and descriptive (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). A case study approach is useful for addressing questions like those that guided this study which require: 1) a rich descriptions of people, places, and conversations; and 2) an investigation of topics in context, in all their complexity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). That is, this methodology is effective when research purposes include examining and describing the complexities and particularities of an abstract social phenomenon in situ (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

Site and Participants

The data for this study were generated at Hoyt Middle School[1]. Hoyt Middle is one of four middle schools in an urban school district located in a mid-sized, midwestern city. It is located on the periphery of the city's eastside downtown business district. Like the three administrators and many of the teachers that work at the middle school, the student body is almost entirely African American. Hoyt struggles with challenges faced by many other middle schools serving minority groups in high poverty, urban areas. Rates of

[1] All names of people and places are pseudonyms

truancy and suspensions, limited funds, and staff turn over were constant worries at the school.

Another constantly looming concern was chronic poor performance on standardized measures of student achievement. At the time of this study, Hoyt was in its fourth consecutive year of failure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP, an accountability measure stemming from federal No Child Left Behind legislation, is based in part on student scores on standardized state assessments. Due to repeated failure to meet AYP, Hoyt faculty and administrators were compelled, with the help of a reform group called Making It In the Middle[2], to create an ambitious school restructuring plan, the execution of which was to be overseen by the Department of Education.

Because of repeated school-wide failure to meet federal NCLB requirements, the teachers and administrators at Hoyt were under a great deal of pressure to focus instruction on preparing students to pass state tests. The following excerpt from fieldnotes illustrates something of what it was like in a post NCLB era at a failing school.

> Ms. Wagner [the focal teacher in this study] explained to me that Hoyt Middle was going to be audited by the Department of Education. I was curious to know more about what that meant to be audited. She explained that as a result of No Child Left Behind and Hoyt's failure to make adequate yearly progress for several consecutive years, they had moved through a series of phases. The phase that they were in currently was called the Restructuring Phase. In the Restructuring Phase teams from the Department of Education came to audit them. An audit consisted of classroom observations, interviews with students, staff, and

[2] Pseudonym

administrators; and whole group discussions with faculty. The purpose of the audit was to assess whether or not the school was making the kinds of changes that the group had previously suggested.

I asked her what kinds of changes they had been expected to make. She said one thing they were expected to do was to post and explicitly mention Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs) for each lesson they taught. So the DOE was interviewing students to see if they could articulate the Grade Level Content Expectations, and they were noticing during observations whether or not the GLCE was posted and communicated to students. Then in the general discussion with faculty, DOE auditors would report what they had and had not seen in the classrooms the observed.

I inquired if there had been a lot of professional development as part of this team's association with the school. Ms. Wagner said there hadn't really been any professional development. She added, though, that there was a website where one could go and find out what to do. She said that was how she found out what she was supposed to do.

Ms. Wagner went on to describe the general climate at the school in response to the DOE's visit. "People around here are freaking out," she said. She added that in the whole group discussion teachers were yelling at and arguing with auditors. She said there was even crying and that many of the teachers were very frustrated with the DOE's interference with their practices and critiques of their efforts. Ms. Wagner didn't seem to be one of those upset by the DOE's involvement, however. When I questioned her about her feelings, she explained

that being competent, or appearing to be competent, was very important to her. Therefore, if there was a certain set of expectations then she was going to be proactive and assertive in meeting those expectations whatever they were.

Not surprisingly, managing student behavior and raising test scores were two issues that seemed at the forefront of teachers' and administrators' minds at Hoyt. These were also issues that the district was addressing in many of its other schools as well. The district had recently instructed several (almost exclusively high poverty, low performing) schools to create single-gender classrooms. The option of single sex education was being marketed to parents as a remedy for behavior problems and poor test scores. Hoyt was included in the new district initiative.

In January 2006 just before data generation for this project began, all sixth grade students at Hoyt Middle were assigned to new classes. Most students were now attending classes in same gender groups. The focal class for this study, Ms. Wagner's third and fourth period sixth grade language arts class, was an exception. The focal participants in this study were all members of one class at Hoyt. That class, comprised of both male and female students, was a third/fourth period English language arts class that met in Room 106 three days per week for a total of five hours. There were twenty-four students in the class. Sixteen students were females and eight were males. Of the twenty-four students in the class, twenty-two were African American. The other two students, both girls, were of European American descent.

The students assigned to this class had been judged by the sixth grade teachers to be the most successful learners in the school setting and labeled the "good kids" by both teachers and their peers. They had been chosen for this particular class because of their

good grades or test scores, positive attitudes, home support, and/or motivation to learn. Additionally, Ms. Wagner described this class as a good group because they would do anything you wanted. They were excited about learning and were fun to do things with. Ms. Wagner explained that because teachers were concerned about "losing these kids," they were selected out and placed in a class together.

Ms. Wagner, a petite, blonde, European American woman, was a confident teacher of language arts who was well respected by administrators and colleagues. She had taught at Hoyt her entire twelve-year teaching career and managed many roles and responsibilities there. She served as English language arts team leader in the building, sat on the school improvement committee, and acted as an administrator-designated mentor to struggling colleagues. She was also deliberate about her teaching, working to stay abreast of and align her instruction with current federal, state, and district curricular expectations for sixth grade language arts. In addition to being respected by her colleagues and administrator, Ms. Wagner was also considered a good teacher by Black university professors from the local university where she earned a master's degree in reading.

Though I had not known the students involved in this project previously, I did know Ms. Wagner before beginning this study. In fact, I had conducted a modest research study of her writing instruction in 2004 for a practicum project. Dual interests in writing pedagogy and African American Language propelled me to consider for my practicum project how a White, middle-class teacher of African American students was utilizing students' cultural and linguistic resources in order to teach writing. In selecting a research site, I sought a White writing teacher of Black students with a good reputation among

local African American administrators and university professors. My queries in the district and at the local university led me to Ms. Wagner. I discuss the implications of that previous association and research for this study in detail in the Social Location of Researcher section at the end of this chapter.

The selection of this site and these participants would prove to be fruitful for examining the object of study, *hiding in plain sight.* However, only a small subset of students from the class is featured in this dissertation. Those students include Keiarra, Kristina, Jamal, Tyrone, Anthony, Terrence, and Tatiana. Ms. Wagner is also featured. These students, and their teacher, appear throughout the findings chapters in vignettes crafted in the realist tradition from data carefully selected to illustrate particular dimensions and dynamics of literacy *hiding in plain sight* (Graue & Walsh, 1998). In Chapter Four the vignette "Hot Maids" describes how Keairra is *getting over* during a Silent Sustained Reading session. In Chapter Five *standing out* is illustrated through "Ghetto Family" and "Survival Writing" vignettes featuring Kristina. In Chapter Six Jamal and Tyrone are *lying low* in "Yo Momma." Finally, Chapter Seven illuminates how Tatiana is *covering up* in "We Stranded."

Data Generation

The data set from which I will draw to address my research questions was generated in the winter of 2006 while I was working as a research assistant for my major professor. I was already familiar with this teacher and site as I had generated data in Ms. Wagner's classroom the previous winter. My professor and I selected this site and designed the data generation with the intention of sharing the data. We planned to collect all relevant data related to the teaching of an entire novel/writing unit. After approval was

secured from the IRB, initial contacts at the site were made in order to secure consent for the study from the classroom teacher and the building principal and to explain the consent process students would undergo. Formal data generation began in January and ended in June of 2006. Data sources included video and audio recordings of class sessions, fieldnotes from classroom observations, transcripts of interviews with students and the teacher, instructional artifacts, and students' assigned work and literacy products.

All class sessions where instruction or activities related to the target novel/writing unit were video and audio taped. In addition formal interviews with the teacher, which took place once at the beginning of the unit and once at the end, as well as semi-structured interviews with focal students were audiotaped. In all twenty-five class sessions, two teacher interviews, and eight student interviews were recorded by video, audio, or both. Recordings of class sessions and interviews have also been transcribed. In addition to being video and audiotaped each class session was observed by at least one researcher. Scratch notes were made during the observation period and extensive fieldnotes were written up later. Fieldnotes were also written after meetings and interview sessions with participants. There are twenty-six sets of fieldnotes.

A variety of research, instructional, and student artifacts were collected. Those artifacts included writing prompts, lesson plans, Grade Level Content Expectations, and descriptions of instructional strategies. Other artifacts collected included student goal setting sheets, reading response guides, discussion questions, assignment sheets, literature circle procedure and role sheets, and tests. All assigned work related to the target unit was collected for all students. In addition to assigned work, student literacy products that were generated during the period of the study but were not necessarily assigned by the

teacher or were not clearly in response to the novel/writing unit were also preserved. In light of this study's focus on students' literate participation this category of artifact seemed like it might be especially generative.

Data Analysis

A systematic analysis of these data was conducted in order to gain insight into the dimensions and dynamics of the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight* in this classroom. Consistent with the traditions of qualitative case-study methodology, this analysis was both inductive and reflexive (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Findings for this study were generated through a recursive process of working with the data and reading associated literature in the field. Data were read, organized, coded, and compared. Assertions were formed and tested. Scholarly literature was studied and discussed. New questions were generated. Data were then reread, reorganized, coded further, and so on. In this way I have tried to find coherence in these data, "to hypothesize about apparent consistencies, to lay out best guesses, without hiding the contradictions and the instability" (Wolf, 1992, p.129).

As is often the case in qualitative research, data analysis for this project began in the field during data generation as I made and refined decisions about the nature and purpose of the study. In some cases, the impact of those decisions and the evolution of new insights were captured in the observer comment sections of the fieldnotes. In one case especially relevant to data analysis, a new object of study was identified. I did not enter this site knowing that I would eventually be detailing and theorizing the current object of study, the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight.* As I explain in more detail in a later chapter, I had entered the field intending to examine the nature and role of students'

cultural and linguistic resources in this classroom. The notion of studying *hiding in plain sight* did not become apparent to me until after I had been observing in the site for several weeks.

Despite having a vague awareness of something relevant happening in this classroom that I was not seeing or understanding, beginning cycles of analysis were guided by questions related to how students were participating in the official activities of the novel unit. One of my first analytic tasks in the post data generation period, then, was to identify and characterize the official literacy activities that comprised the Language Arts unit. In order to do this I read and reread the entire data set to identify recurring activities. Some routine activities included sustained silent reading of self-selected reading materials, whole class read alouds of the novel, small group novel reading/literature circles, discussion questions and role sheet completion, and composition and journal writing. After identifying literacy activities, I characterized each category of activity by looking for patterns across instantiations of similar activities. Characterizations focused on the event's official or teacher-designed and sanctioned purposes, content, forms, norms of participation, and interactions. Those characterizations of novel-related activities functioned as a backdrop, or provided the context, against which I examined student participation.

Next I turned my analytic attention to students' participation during those activities. I began by analyzing data related to instantiations of like activities. For example, I looked for similarities and differences across multiple episodes of Sustained Silent Reading. I used open coding methods to develop analytic codes and categories as I reread data anchored in routine activities. During the coding process I paid particular

attention to patterns related to which students were participating, how, and for what purposes. To understand student participation and literacy practices the speech, behavior, and products of students was examined. Similarity and variability of student participation was explored. I also considered similarities and differences in student participation across disparate events. Initial participation codes which were generated inductively through data analysis, included *appearance of nonparticipation that was participation* and *appearance of participation that was nonparticipation.* Subcodes within those categories included: *parallel participation, shared participation, rogue participation, high-jacked participation, and clandestine participation.* These preliminary codes led to the development and investigation of the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight.*

As I read, sorted, and code the data, I wrote initial memos connecting emerging ideas to relevant literature and theoretical perspectives, identified salient themes, and formed assertions. As assertions took shape I searched the data set for both confirming and disconfirming evidence related to tentative claims capturing that process in integrative memos. Through this process of open and focused coding, memo writing, metaphoric framing, and application of theory, I identified and focused on analytically instructive exemplars within the data set. In the presentation of this research generally and in the generation of these exemplars specifically I have attempted to establish validity, as is consistent with this methodology, by drawing on multiple sources of evidence, creating a chain of evidence, and considering personal biases, and generating multiple interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I developed, with the help of the foolbirds from the novel, an awareness of the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight*--of something being perfectly seeable yet unseen. I

thought if an understanding of how the foolbirds managed to hide in plain sight could help Brian learn to see them, then it might help me learn to see what was hiding in this classroom. The foolbirds were managing to hide in plain sight as a result of adaptive coloration. As it turned out, camouflage through adaptive coloration would prove a useful metaphor for making sense of the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight* in this classroom, too. Using the trope of adaptive coloration and other metaphors from Hatchet as frames for thinking about classroom narratives, I too eventually managed to see what had been *hiding in plain sight.*

Social Location of Researcher

This research was conducted in a school and classroom where the majority of students were African American and came from poor or working-class backgrounds. The teacher, Ms. Wagner, was a middle class European American woman. I myself am a European American woman and would probably be considered middle class. Though I am not African American myself, my interest in the education of African American students in general, and in the role of cultural and linguistic resources in schooling in particular, though, is at once personal and professional. I am a resident of the city and a former employee of the school district in which the site of this study is located as well as a parent of African American children.

At almost exactly the same time I left classroom teaching to start the doctoral program, I became a parent. I am one of two White mothers of two adopted African American boys. My children have not yet started formal schooling in public schools, though my oldest son will as he begins kindergarten in a few short weeks. However, both of my children have attended fulltime school-like institutional childcare since they were

born. Negotiating daycare contexts of our children has heightened my level of awareness and concern related to issues of identity-based marginalization that may be faced by African Americans and other minority groups in school settings. What's more, viewing the experiences of schooling from the angle of parent, rather than teacher, of African American children has quickened the urgency I have long felt regarding recognizing and valuing in classrooms a broader range of students' experiences and resources. All of these subject positions, former school teacher, member of an alternative family and White parent of African American children, influence the way I view the world and the kinds of experiences I hope my children and others will and will not have at school.

Teacher Cum Researcher

I worked for five years as an elementary and middle school teacher in the district in which this study was conducted. I taught third through eighth graders at a Westside elementary/middle magnet school that housed the district's Program for the Creative and Academically Talented. Though I knew of Hoyt Middle School, I had never had any formal association with the institution. I first became formally acquainted with the school, after leaving teaching to begin a doctoral program, while conducting a practicum study for a beginning research course.

For my practicum, I did a small scale, single case study of Ms. Wagner's writing instruction. Inspired by works like Ladson-Billing's *The Dream Keepers*, I set out to document a White teacher's use of the cultural and linguistic resources of African American students during writing instruction. I presumed that a recommendation from Black educational professionals of a good teacher of African American students and good teaching of African American students would mean I would find a teacher valuing and

utilizing students' cultural and linguistic resources in a particular way. That is, I imagined such a teacher would be leading lively and interactive discussions and engaging students in open-ended activities that focused students on diverse language registers, styles, and contexts, and included explicit classroom instruction about African American Language and writing. In addition, I expected to see artifacts, like commercial posters, trade books, or student work that evidenced the study of African American history, literature, and achievements as central to, or at least part of, the curriculum.

After my initial visit to the site of my study, I felt certain this was not going to be a place where I could accomplish my original objective, to document a White teacher making use of Black students' cultural and linguistic resources. Though, I didn't see what I had expected or hoped to see at this site, I was intrigued by the contradiction between what I expected to see and what I actually observed so I decided to pursue the research further. I planned to try and understand how Ms. Wagner was making sense of teaching writing to African American students in an "urban" middle school. The findings of that study focused on the particularities of Ms. Wagner's perceptions of and beliefs about her own and her students' language backgrounds played a major part in that sense making.

What I had concluded was that Ms. Wagner was utilizing a discourse of deficiency to think about and talk about her students' linguistic experiences, abilities, and resources. My observations of classroom events and one-on-one interviews with the teacher presented an abundance of evidence to support the assertion. In fact, in one formal interview in which the teacher was asked to talk about the part she thinks who students are and what they come with to school plays in both learning to write and teaching writing she consistently characterized their linguistic backgrounds negatively.

She described her students as poor readers, writers, listeners, and speakers with a lack of prior knowledge, limited vocabularies, a lack of discussion skills, an inability to elaborate, poor conversation skills, and poor listening skills. She also reported that her students lacked adequate resources and appropriate experiences. Though it seemed clear Ms. Wagner was appropriating a discourse of deficiency in relation to those African American students, it wasn't clear to me exactly how she had come to do so, especially so blatantly and to such a great extent, and why she persisted in doing so in the face of what I saw as evidence to the contrary.

The Ethics and Politics of Representation

I had a sense that the teacher's ideological resources, assumptions, and motivations might be the key to understanding her words and behavior at a deeper level, but I had not really had an effective frame for looking at the teacher's language or a useful lexicon for describing what lay beneath the obvious. I was trying to analyze and interpret the data from this classroom, and I was struggling. I needed tools or lenses that could help me understand and represent Ms. Wagner's experiences and the lives of others and support me in identifying the assumptions and ideologies I brought to the project.

My need for a critical lens eventually revealed itself to me as the political dimension of the work I was trying to do dawned on me. Someone once explained politics to me as a matter of foregrounding certain things while backgrounding others. Whether or not Webster would concur with this definition, it became useful for helping me think about the politics, and the ethics of those politics, of representation in my own research. In reference to the politics of representation, Weis & Fine (2000) discuss "the triple representational problem" (p. 53). They describe this as a set of dilemmas

associated with how to present and represent (1) ourselves as researchers, (2) our narrators, and (3) the narrated. One of the challenges they describe is making sure researchers acknowledge and accept their responsibility for the co-construction of narratives. As they explain if as researchers we do not take care to do this, "Our informants are then left carrying the burden of representations, as we hide behind the alleged cloak of neutrality" (Weis & Fine, 2000, p.34). I had come to realize that being critical, and therefore in being political, one ought to be self-reflexive.

Finding Myself in the Research

I was now thinking about the implicit and explicit assumptions and ideologies I was bringing to my interpretations of this teacher's worldview. Two perspectives that informed my understandings and interpretations of the world come from the research and writings on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994) and Funds of Knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). I had always just seen these notions as right and never considered them to be rooted in contested and competing assumptions about the kinds of teaching practices that are "right" for certain group of kids. And so, I never questioned its companion assumption, that certain approaches are "wrong," especially with certain kids.

The cultural and historical landscape in which Ms. Wagner was teaching writing (and I must do research) is politically and ideologically contentious and pedagogically complicated. "Making use of cultural and linguistic resources" is not the only philosophy "out there" about how to teach writing to "culturally and linguistically diverse" students. In fact for this teacher, teaching in post-No Child Left Behind times in an urban middle school this way of teaching constituted a luxury, one neither she nor her students could

really afford. In the research "story" I had been poised to tell, in which I detailed the teacher's deficits and linked them to ideologies of discrimination, I had failed to consider the extreme complexity of the sociopolitical context in which this participant's actions and statements were situated.

As I considered how I was personally implicated in the research study and ruminated on the situated nature of experience and sense making, I recalled with ironic chagrin the event that led to my enrollment in a doctoral program. Before entering the Ph.D. program when I worked in this same school district, I had not had a lot of experience related to African American Language or much knowledge of the political and pedagogical issues related to the linguistic system. Though, the district served a student population that was sixty-percent African American, at the gifted magnet school where I worked less than twenty percent of students were African American. What I hadn't known myself about the language and literacy practices of some African American students became apparent when I was serving on a district-wide committee that was charged with analyzing student performance on state writing assessments.

As part of a racially and ethnically mixed group of teachers representing schools from across the district, I examined samples of student writing. I came across one sample that confused me. It was a piece of third grade writing, but was totally unintelligible to me. Referring to the paper, I asked the group what the policies were regarding special needs students and test taking. An African American gentlemen responded indignantly that he had taught that student, and he knew her to be a very bright, capable student who happened to speak and write in African American Vernacular English. I could not let go of that episode. I was embarrassed by my blunder, of course, but more than that I was

outraged that I worked in a district where more than half of students were African American and I knew nothing about the language many of those students used. I had had a lot to learn.

And I have learned a great deal in my graduate studies about literacy learning and linguistic diversity, especially related to language variation and African American Language. I've read William Labov, Walt Wolfram, John Rickford, Ernie Smith, Lisa Delpit, Joanne Kilgour-Dowdy. I've researched the Ebonics resolution, media coverage, and public outcry. I've written papers about the language/dialect debate. I know about the Standard English Proficiency Program, Bridge readers, and contrastive analysis. In addition, I have now read and thought extensively about issues situated at the intersection of vernacular language varieties and pedagogy. One of the most valuable lessons I have learned, is that I am present in my research and that I must learn to recognize, reveal, and take responsibility for my presence. I think initially I understood being critical as a call to expose other's ways of thinking and being as problematic and then to present as the logical alternative my own worldview. Now, though, I have come to believe my goal as an educational researcher is to describe and theorize "the struggle" of diverse people (including me) to understand one another (Freedman & Ball, 2004).

Chapter 4

Hiding In Plain Sight: Getting Over

> They exasperated him to the point where they were close to driving him insane. The birds were everywhere, five and six in a flock, and their camouflage was so perfect that it was possible for Brian to sit and rest, leaning against a tree, with one of them standing right in front of him in a willow clump, two feet away—hidden—only to explode into deafening flight just when Brian least expected it. He just couldn't see them, couldn't figure out how to locate them before they flew, because they stood so perfectly still and blended in so perfectly well (Paulsen, 1987, p.139).

When Brian's sojourn in the wilderness first began, many important and useful things escaped his notice and confounded his perception. Sometimes his inability to see what was right in front of him, was a result of overlooking a governing principle as was the case when he had difficulty spearing fish because he had forgotten to consider the refraction of light as he took aim. Other times Brian failed to perceive something critical, like a moose watching him from the trees, because he had simply not been attending to it. Still there were occasions when being able to see what was all around him, was made more difficult because it was camouflaged. The epigraph describes one such example.

Here Brian was looking for foolbirds. He had seen many of these grouse-like birds at various times and knew if he could capture one he would have meat, heavy meat, to fill his belly. But the birds Brian sought were essentially *hiding in plain sight*. He could stand in the midst of them, knowing they were all around them, and still not be able to make them out. What's more if he did happen to stumble upon one, their erratic flight

patterns tended to startle or confuse Brian. These birds were managing to survive in this environment by remaining hidden. They were able to hide, in large part, due to their capacity for adaptive coloration. That is, their mottled coloring and strategic behaviors made them tricky to spot, at least against particular backgrounds.

Just as the fool birds' survival in the wilderness was linked to their capacity for adaptive coloration, Brian's survival in the wilderness would also depend on his ability to adapt to his surroundings. Brian's adaptations would not be biological as the fool birds were, nor would his own adaptive coloration be literal; for he was not likely to develop the capacity to literally change colors at will. Instead, his adaptation would require learning to look, listen, think, and act in this environment in novel ways. Just as the fool birds did, he would have to learn to read and interpret the environment and the others in it. He would need to come to understand what the possibilities and constraints for action were for him in this context. He would learn to choose behaviors that allowed him to accomplish his goals. Many times, knowing how to stay out of sight, would be what would best suit his aims.

Uncloaking Literacy Hiding in Plain Sight

In this chapter and the findings chapters that follow the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight*, as the enactment of students' literate selves, is described and analyzed. The intent in these chapters is to expose, through a presentation and discussion of vignettes, student literacies *hiding in plain sight* in this language arts classroom. In this way what was hidden, by whom, from whom, under what circumstances, and for what purposes will be revealed. Also described is how students made decisions about and achieved *hiding in plain sight* as well as the effects it may have produced in the classroom.

As is the case in this chapter, each findings chapter is framed by a carefully selected excerpt from the novel, *Hatchet*. In this way I attempt to provoke a consideration of classroom events in relationship to events in the novel. For example, the epigraph that begins this chapter about the foolbirds offers one useful frame for examining *hiding in plain sight*—the metaphor of adaptive coloration, or camouflage. The metaphor of adaptive coloration provides a useful analytic lens for making sense of and lexicon for articulating students' literate participation in classroom activities.

Drawing on the metaphor of adaptive coloration, I will show how certain literacies are often challenging to spot in classrooms. These literacies are sometimes difficult to see because, though frequently in plain sight, they are hiding. In addition, this *hiding in plain sight* is often the result of purposeful, strategic action on the part of students to conceal or disguise their literacy practices. Students' ability to accomplish *hiding in plain sight* in the classroom reflects a nuanced understanding of context and a sophisticated capacity for flexible adaptation. Also discussed is how students' literacies are hidden as a consequence of being overlooked. The nature of students' unnoticed literacies and any relevance to curricular aims is considered. Finally, conditions in the classroom and school that contributed to a context of survival are examined. First, though, a detailed description of the metaphor of adaptive coloration as drawn from *Hatchet* is provided.

Hiding in Plain Sight Through Adaptive Coloration

I developed an awareness of this phenomenon--of something being all around and perfectly seeable yet still invisible to the eye--with the help of the foolbirds from the novel. It was also through the novel that I eventually learned how to see what was *hiding*

in plain sight. I thought if an understanding of how the foolbirds managed to hide in plain sight could help Brian learn to see them, then it might help me learn to see what was hiding in this classroom. The foolbirds were managing to hide in plain sight as a result of adaptive coloration. As it turned out, camouflage through adaptive coloration would prove a useful metaphor in understanding the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight* in this classroom, too. Though, it can be helpful to borrow adaptive coloration as a conceptual tool I am not applying the concept of adaptive coloration literally explain students' behavioral or psychological strategies or accomplishments. Instead, my use of the concept in intended to be metaphoric, a vehicle to help frame and clarify the dimensions and dynamics of the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight* in this classroom.

Fool birds posses a capacity for adaptive coloration that enables them to escape detection through camouflage. For foolbirds adaptive coloration is a durable set of physical characteristics including colorations and patterning. Those characteristics of physical appearance have developed and been passed on over generations of time. As a result of possessing particular physical features when they are positioned against surroundings with specific characteristics they become difficult to spot. Other animals, such as chameleons, also possess this capacity for *hiding in plain sight*. Though, chameleons might also achieve camouflage through a strategic juxtaposition of physical appearance and background characteristics, they are able to change their appearance to respond in the moment to environmental factors. As I observed students' literate participation during novel study, I came to see *hiding in plain sight* being accomplished through versions these two methods of adaptive coloration as well.

In one manifestation of *hiding in plain sight*, the hiding of literate practices was more an unconscious effect while in the other, hiding literacy practices was a deliberate aim. Manifestations of adaptive coloration, in the animal kingdom, might also be thought of in terms of *hiding in plain sight* as effect or *hiding in plain sight* as aim. Consider, *hiding in plain sight* as an effect for example. This type of *hiding in plain sight* would be comparable to the adaptive coloration of the foolbird--that version of adaptive coloration in which animals have over generations developed permanent markings and colorations that under certain conditions render them practically invisible. Hereout, I will refer to this sort of as historic adaptive coloration. The second manifestation, *hiding in plain sight* as aim, would be more like the camouflage of the chameleon, where the animals changes its appearance to respond to the contingencies of the moment.

Historic Adaptive Coloration: Hiding in Plain Sight as Effect

Hiding in plain sight in this classroom sometimes seemed to share characteristics with the adaptive coloration in foolbirds. That is to say, it was seemed to be more of a condition, or an effect, of a subject's characteristics being positioned against a particular backdrop. In these cases a subject possesses markings and colorations that are durable and viewable. Those colorings are a legacy passed on from previous generations. The effectiveness of achieving *hiding in plain sight* through historic adaptive coloration is context dependent. When a foolbird is in a willow clump it is difficult to spot, but in flight against an expansive blue sky is it easily visible. So historic adaptive coloration is largely an effect of positioning, or the relationship between the subject's colorations and the environment's characteristics. It is achieved by knowing what and how to place oneself in relationship to something else, and is facilitated by engaging in behaviors that

reduce the likelihood of drawing a perceiver's eye. *Hiding in plain sight*, then, is a result of a failure to perceive and is more or less an effect of a subject's position and their silent, stillness.

I argue that in many instances historic adaptive coloration played a role in *hiding in plain sight* in this classroom. That is, students' literacy practices were sometimes overlooked or ignored because of the students' permanent coloration (both literally and figuratively) in relationship to the backdrop of a post NCLB classroom environment. All but two students in this classroom were black. In addition, they are twelve and thirteen year old students. Each of those identities positions them in a particular way in the context of a classroom headed by a white, middle-aged, teacher. Historically, African Americans, youth, and students have experienced oppression at the hands of more dominant groups in racist, ageist institutions like schools. Effects of that oppression have included being silenced and feeling invisible. Students' practices, particularly those linked to students' African American and youth cultural identities, were *hiding in plain sight* not necessarily in the sense that they were not seen but in that they were overlooked or ignored. They were perceived as unimportant or irrelevant, at least in this context, largely because they were linked to particular identities—identities that have been and continue to be marginalized and devalued in schools.

Students' African American and youth practices were left *hiding in plain sight*, not simply because they were linked to marginalized identities, but also because they were being enacted against the background of a particular environment, an environment that facilitated the perception that these practices were not worth seeing. These students were *hiding in plain sight* in a particular place in a specific historical moment in time.

They were learning and doing literacy in a language arts class in a school that was in its fifth year of failure to meet AYP.

Active Adaptive Coloration: Hiding in Plain Sight as Strategic

Just as students' literacy practices could be *hiding in plain sight* as an effect of historic adaptive coloration, students were sometimes actively and strategically hiding practices. When students engaged in deliberate hiding, they were often hiding literacies in plain sight through active adaptive coloration. In these instances students were responding to the contingencies of the moment in order to achieve their purposes. Their purposes were varied, but the strategy selected to accomplish their purposes was hiding out. In order to hide, like chameleons, these students read and interpreted environmental cues and consciously selected appropriate behaviors, that is, behaviors most likely in a given situation to be effective for achieving camouflage. I will refer to these effects of these carefully chosen behaviors as mechanisms.

Mechanisms of adaptive coloration.

The fool birds, for instance, registered Brian's presence. Upon interpreting his proximity as potentially dangerous, they avoided detection by positioning themselves in clumps of willow that had a color and pattern that melded with their own. This suggests an understanding of the relationship between how they are appear and are perceived and what kind of a background renders them less visible. In addition to remaining in areas that were colored and patterned in certain ways, fool birds also acted in vigilant, cryptic ways that helped them blend in more successfully. Through this suite of actions, including sensing the environment, selecting an effective mechanism of camouflage, and

applying appropriate behaviors, foolbirds hid themselves in plain sight, through the mechanism of general background resemblance.

Just as there is wide variety in the forms camouflage takes in the natural world, *hiding in plain sight* through adaptive coloration could be manifest in this classroom in a number of different ways. Like in the wild, though, for all the variety of camouflage displayed, a few patterns were identified relating to the mechanisms of camouflage being employed. That is, just as foolbirds, chameleons, and cuttlefish use coloration to achieve camouflage through the mechanism of background resemblance, students might hide in plain sight through the mechanisms of *lying low* or *covering up*. Or, in the same way, some species of insects, fish, and birds achieve camouflage through deceptive resemblance, or appearing to look like something they are not, students also hid literacy practices by disguising them to look like something they were not. That is, sometimes students were hiding literacy practices in plain sight through the mechanism of *getting over*.

Functions of adaptive coloration.

Both forms of adaptive coloration, historic and active, serve a variety of purposes both in the animal kingdom and in the classroom. Adaptive coloration is a strategic process used primarily to disguise or distort an animal's appearance in order to avoid detection. Typically, hiding is associated with prey and thought of as a means of evading predation such as in the example of the fool birds foiling Brian's attempts to capture and eat them. Avoiding detection can be useful, though, for both evading predation and approaching prey.

Foolbirds are not the only creatures in the natural world that employ camouflage, or adaptive coloration, to hide. Chameleons are also regularly associated with adaptive coloration. Unlike foolbirds, whose colorations are static, though, chameleons posses the capacity to change color moment by moment to both adapt to changing environments and to communicate states such as anger, fear, calm, and distress. A green chameleon is peaceful, calm and serene, whereas a yellow chameleon is surrendering. It takes baby chameleons a year to learn the language of colors and to read the messages portrayed by these colors through interacting with more mature chameleons.

Students managed in Room 106, to survive, to stay in this class, to avoid trouble, to pass because like young chameleons, they had successfully learned the language of colors in the classroom environment. They had come to understand how to attend, interpret, and respond in this classroom environment in ways that facilitated their self-preservation. One thing students understood well was when it was important and how to manage to hide in plain sight. The following vignette reveals that remaining in this particular language arts classroom was not necessarily a given.

> In February on the morning of my first day of data generation, I stopped by the office to get a visitor's pass. In the office there was a young man, a student, working behind the desk as an office aide. "I know who you are," he said to me. I asked him how he knew me and he explained Ms. Wagner had told him about me. "You are doing a project in the class that I used to be in." When I asked why he wasn't in the class anymore he said, "I'm in a different class. I'm in a class for the bad kids." I replied with shock, "What? A class for the bad kids, how come you're in it then?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know." The older girl sitting next

to him and listening in our conversation, though, nudged him with her elbow and said, "Oh, don't lie, you know it is because you have a bad attitude." She was still needling him as I left the office pass in hand.

As illustrated by the story, being labeled one of the good kids was not a fixed condition, nor was remaining in this class a given. Being in the class (and perhaps even being part of this research study) seemed to be a privilege of sorts, one students could have taken away. Students could be and were removed from this special "accelerated" class. A few students, like the young man in the office, didn't survive long at all. Another student, a female named Frankie that I had met during the first few visits, didn't make it either. This young lady was there when the research project was explained. She had received a consent form and returned it signed so she could participate, and she knew the class was to receive pizza as a reward for turning in the forms (signed or unsigned). On the very day the class was to get pizza, though, she was moved out of Ms. Wagner's class because of her behavior.

All of these moves seemed to occur early on. There was only one student transferred in from another class and no students moved out after the middle of February. Students did get in trouble on occasion, Latrell had to stay back during lunch once for messing with the video equipment for the research project and Aaron got sent to an in-school detention room when he refused to participate in a role play activity, but no one got was transferred out permanently. One student, Tyrone, came close, though. Ms. Wagner threatened to switch Tyrone out of the class, but he wrote a note of apology to persuade her to let him stay. Though, Frankie was the last one to be removed, students themselves did sometimes question whether they wanted to stay in the class. For instance,

early on in the study, when Terrence was confused about what to do on an assignment he commented to a peer that he "should have stayed in his old class."

It could be argued that because the students in this third/fourth hour language arts class had been selected by their teachers to be in this advanced class, and because they were able to remain in this classroom for the duration of the study, they were adept survivalists—perhaps the most adept of all the sixth graders, at surviving school. Surviving school for these students entailed, among other things, staying out of serious trouble and passing. Students accomplished those goals through various skills and strategies. One strategy employed by students was hiding out. Just as the foolbirds survived in the wilderness because their camouflaged appearance helped them evade detection and predation, students' used camouflage to escape notice and avoid trouble.

Indeed, it actually occurred to me on several occasions that the fact that these were the students identified by teachers as the "good kids" might make it more difficult to see what I had set out to see. That is, I had hoped to examine the nature and role of African American students' cultural and linguistic resources during novel study in a language arts classroom. As I observed differences between groups of students during the change of classes, I began to notice that students from the other classes tended to display more openly the kinds of practices I thought I would be documenting than the students in the focal class. For example, students in the fifth hour class would use African American Language more frequently, or rap out loud for everyone to hear, or play the dozens openly and boisterously. Students in the focal class, though they were changing classes too and were less controlled than during instructional time, were still more subdued than

their peers in the next class. During these transitions their speech seemed quieter, their movements more subtle, and their activities harder to discern.

It almost seemed as if part of what made these the good kids the successful kids was that they had learned which parts of who they were wasn't appropriate or welcome in school. These students it appeared had accepted or were resigned to the established boundaries of acceptability at school and either didn't push on those boundaries or, as I would learn was often the case, were exceptionally skilled at doing so. It was this willingness to learn the language of the classroom environment and this ability to read and interpret that environment in ways that allowed them to negotiate it successfully.

Essentially, these students like the foolbirds and chameleons, were managing to survive through camouflage, or adaptive coloration. They sometimes employed the survival strategy of hiding in the classroom and when they did it was frequently used to evade trouble. They were passing their language arts class by passing in their language arts class classes. By passing in their class, I mean concealing or distorting the appearance of some element of their literate practice in order to pass that practice off as a more normative or dominant practice. Students were engaged in survival literacy. Survival literacy, then, included knowing when and how to apply this hiding strategy. Students' ability to survive by reading others and the environment kept them alive in this classroom.

I have tried to explain in this chapter what I mean by the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight*, that is, a condition of being overlooked, misunderstood, or misjudged due to a having a camouflaged appearance. I have suggested that this condition may arise as a result of two general types of camouflage which I call historic and active adaptive

coloration. I have described *hiding in plain sight*, whether as the result of historic or active adaptive coloration, as being accomplished through a suite of appropriate actions. That suite of actions includes reading and interpreting contexts in order to select mechanisms of camouflage and apply behaviors appropriate for achieving particular purposes in given situations. Mechanisms used in this classroom and described in the following chapters include getting over, covering up, lying low, and standing out. I will next articulate, beginning with the following vignette, what exactly was hiding or being hidden in plain sight and how I came to see it.

Hot Maids

The first ten minutes of each class session in Ms. Wagner's was Sustained Silent Reading (S.S.R.) time. Students were supposed to, with no prompting from their teacher, enter the classroom, get out something to read, and begin reading silently. They could bring something of their own or select something to read from one of the two or three baskets of books and magazines at the front of the classroom or from the small metal bookshelf located in the back corner of the room. A variety of reading materials were available for students to choose from including young adult novels, popular sports magazines, and Disney-inspired picture books. Though, S.S.R. was not technically a Hatchet-related activity, it was a routine literacy event in which hidden literacies sometimes lurked.

Patterns of participation during S.S.R. in this class were somewhat difficult to characterize because there was quite a bit of variability both across students and from session to session. Overall, however, though students were generally quiet and relatively still during the ten-minute period, the amount of sustained reading that was actually

accomplished across the class each day seemed somewhat minimal. Some students, though, were more likely to read for a greater proportion of the time each day than others. Those students typically brought in their own reading materials, read longer, more sophisticated books, and spent less of the S.S.R. time transitioning in and out of reading. For example, Paris, one of the students who appeared on a daily basis to be the most consistently on-task, once read from the first minute to the last of every session for several days from a one hundred page nonfiction book she had checked out from the public library entitled, *Behind the Eyes of Juvenile Delinquents.* The same day Paris had spent over nine minutes of the period reading that book one of her peers, Keairra, had spent approximately two of the ten minutes reading a Junie B. Jones book--an early reader chapter book series featuring a kindergarten/first grade protagonist.

This was not unusual for Keairra really. On most days she was slow to find something to read. She would spend a long time settling in. She might organize and reorganize her things, touch base with her friends at the table, and lotion up her hands before she would rise and wander back to the shelf where she took an equally long time selecting something to take back to her seat. In fact Keairra often exhausted the entire 10 minutes without ever reading a word. On the occasions she did actually make it to her seat with something to read it was frequently after her teacher urged her to "find something quickly." Her reading choices tended to be picture books based on Disney movies such as, *Little Mermaid* and *Pocahontas,* or beginning chapter books like, *Junie B. Jones.* Once she had a book she would either open it on her desk, slide way down in her seat, and with her elbow on the edge of the desk and her chin in her hand, flip though each page with a disinterested look on her face or she would prop the book up so it was

standing up on its bottom edge and duck her head behind it so she could whisper back and forth to the girls next to and across from her.

One day during S.S.R. at the beginning of third hour, I noticed that Keairra seemed more focused and intent than was typical for her. She had come directly into the classroom, moved right to her desk, and immediately began reading. What she was reading was not visible because she had it carefully sandwiched between a folder and a notebook. Whatever it was, though, she was definitely engrossed. She was sitting up in her chair with her upper body and left arm draped across the desk head resting on her upper arm. She talked to no one. She turned page after page and scanned across the pages with her eyes. She stopped reading only to readjust the folder and to look around seemingly to keep tabs on the teacher's location in the room. When S.S.R. was over and students were asked to put their books away, Keairra just kept on reading. When papers were passed out, Keairra ignored them and read on. She read the entire period, pausing only to deal minimally with what was being asked of her by the teacher. Then the lunch bell rang. She carefully stacked her notebook and folder on top of the book she had left open and face down on her desk. She exited the classroom with the other students glancing back at her desk once as she passed through the door.

I was intrigued to say the least by the profound difference in the way Keairra was participating in S.S.R. on this day as compared to her typical engagement in the activity. I had to know what was motivating this impassioned display of literacy. I had tried to get a look at the title of the book she was reading during class, but was not able to because Keairra had kept it covered up. Now that students were at lunch, though, I walked over to her desk and slid back the folder and notebook to take a peek. Lying on Keairra's desk

was a novel well over an inch thick. The cover had a drawing of two glistening, half-naked, Black lovers wrapped around each other and the title read, *Hot Maids: Erotica noir*. I gingerly placed the folders back over the book so she would not know that they had been disturbed and smiled to myself. "So," I thought, "Keairra was a reader after all.

Hiding in Plain Sight by Getting Over

In the vignette above Keairra was *getting over*. That is, she was actively hiding literacies in plain sight, by deliberately distorting the appearance of the practice in which she was engaged. During S.S.R. time, seated at her desk, she was reading in plain view a book with explicit sexual content. In order to hide in plain sight, she simply monitored the teacher's movements and concealed the book's cover which bore clues to it's salacious content. Keairra meant to hide. And she managed to achieve *hiding in plain sight* by mimicking appropriately the salient features of the activity in which she was hiding in the midst. For in the above vignette Keairra was engaged in silent reading time in many of the ways her teacher and scholarly proponents of the practice would have her. She had self-selected a book at her reading level (about seventh grade) that was of interest to her to read for pleasure. She read intently for a sustained period (although not the length typically recommended by researchers) thereby gradually improving her reading vocabulary, comprehension, and stamina. Keairra's topic of choice was problematic for her teacher, though, who after I shared the incident (which I thought of as fascinating rather than troubling) wondered if she needed to call the girl's mother. Though, I had been naïve about the teacher's reaction, Keairra certainly had not been. She had been careful to keep the cover and spine hidden from view indicating she understood her selection would be frowned upon. What Keairra also seemed to know

about Sustained Silent Reading time was that Ms. Wagner was unlikely to notice what she was reading, and she probably never would have had I not said anything.

Keairra's participation on this day and others illustrated a sophisticated understanding of her context specifically of this activity in this context. Her sense of her possibilities and constraints for action during the activity was based, in large part, on her attention to a particular powerful other—the teacher. Such an understanding was necessary, in order to successfully *get over* in the context of S. S. R. She knew which behaviors were typically monitored by the teacher and therefore needed to be approximated in order to pass her activities off as participation within the bounds of acceptability. She had a well-developed sense from on-going participation and observation what one could and could not get away with during this time, who was or was not expected or allowed to do what, and what the range of possible consequences might be for what and for whom. For instance, talking or not having any reading materials at all might draw the attention of the teacher whereas students had never been confronted about their reading choices that I had observed. Since it seemed reasonable to assume the teacher wouldn't pay much attention to the title of the book, Keairra was able to pass her taboo text off as one not worth a second look. Even though people likely wouldn't pay any attention, Keairra probably also understood that the consequences of discovery could be fairly severe (see calling her mother) and therefore took reasonable steps to keep what she was reading concealed.

Getting Over as Deliberate, Strategic Action

Although this example of Keairra *getting over* on this particular day is an intriguing display of hidden literacies, it was not really an anomalous event. Keairra was

actually *getting over* most days during S.S.R. That is, she routinely used her understanding of the context to conceal or disguise literacies. She knew what passed for acceptable participation in S.S.R. in this classroom. She had learned by attending to others what one could and could not do to escape notice and reprimand. She knew she could whisper a little, but not talk too much or too loud. She knew she could delay or pretend to be reading, but not refrain from appearing to read altogether. She knew it was acceptable to unenthusiastically flip through a book written for first graders, but not to pour over a sexually explicit one written for adults. Knowing these things enabled Keairra to hide her literacies in plain sight. For she obviously could be an interested and capable reader, however, most days one certainly would not get that impression from watching her participate in the twice-daily classroom activity of Sustained Silent Reading.

Ironically, what led to the uncloaking of Keairra's hidden literacies was not something unexpected in a general sense. She was actually reading in a sustained, engaged way—aims for student participation in the activity every day. For Keairra, though, participating in this way was uncharacteristic and for that reason her completely typical-looking participation was noticed. That is, noticed by me. It went unnoticed by her teacher. But Keairra's story demonstrates some of the challenges associated with spotting hidden literacies in the classroom. For one, Keairra was actively trying to conceal the book from Ms. Wagner, and she was doing it by behaving appropriately. Being suspicious of students' appropriate participation is rarely at the top of a busy teacher's list of priorities. Keairra drew on her knowledge of classroom practices in order to achieve *hiding in plain sight.* And she would have completely gotten away with it had

it not been for me, an outsider. It would have been difficult, even for a skillful student of the classroom environment like Keairra, to anticipate how an outsider like me, an extraneous adult with a dubious role, might affect the mix. Certainly, she didn't imagine someone might actually spot her reading during reading time, think it odd, and expose her as a reader.

Getting over As Double Consciousness

The term double consciousness was originally coined by Black scholar W.E.B. Du Bois (2003) to describe the feeling for African Americans of being at once American and excluded from full participation in American society and to explain the condition of needing to know when to act White and when to act Black. It has also come to refer to an individual whose identity is divided into several facets.

Study participants were frequently reconciling multiple identities. Keairra, like all of us, had multiple racialized, gendered, aged identities. She was a sixth grade student in an advanced language arts class. She was female and African American. She was a daughter, a sister, a cousin, and a friend. Many times various identities are not easily reconciled, and identity performance becomes a series of situated choices and trade-offs. Keairra's literacy practices during the *Hot Maids* episode reflected consciousness and negotiation of two identities in conflict: that of sixth grade student and sexually maturing, black woman.

Although, I do not know exactly how Keairra came to have *Hot Maids* or what precisely she appreciated most about the text, it should not be surprising (nor too disturbing in my opinion) that a 13 year-old girl might be beginning to develop an interest in sex. Nor should it be unthinkable that the topic of sex was being explored by

someone Keairra's age at school for this is typically the grade that sex education curricula begins to be presented in schools. But Keairra isn't studying diagrams of the reproductive system handed out by a teacher during health class. Instead, she is reading fictional narrative in which Black men and women have and enjoy sex. This kind of treatment of sexuality is not considered appropriate for someone as young as Keairra at all and certainly not at school.

Historically, subordinated groups like students, youth, and African Americans have had a greater need to attend to dominants. As Fiske (1993) explained, "It is a simple principle: people pay attention to those who control their outcomes. In an effort to predict and possibly influence what is going to happen to them, people gather information about those with power" (p. 624). For Keairra successfully performing both identities—sixth grade student and sexually maturing being--simultaneously in the context of the classroom, required a double consciousness, an awareness of multiple sets of rules and viewpoints and a nuanced understanding of the other, especially the dominant other.

As was the case with Hot Maids, issues of power were part of all the manifestations of and motivations for *hiding in plain sight*. Who has power over whom, when and in what ways, for what reasons, and to what ends? Answers to questions of power are constructed and communicated through a variety of means in classrooms. Sometimes those communications are implicit and subtle and other times they are quite explicit. The following vignette illustrates an episode in which Ms. Wagner articulated the power relations between herself as teacher and the students in this classroom.

Getting Over as Survival

During a session in which the class was reviewing answers to the Chapter 13 study questions, Ms. Wagner asked students, "What did Gary Paulsen mean on p. 121 when he wrote, 'he knew Brian, knew him and owned him.'" When students attempted but failed to produce a satisfactory answer, Ms. Wagner prompted them with, "In the woods, who do you think is higher up, a wolf or Brian?"

The students replied in unison, "The wolf."

"The wolf. So Brian is owned by the wolf because what does the wolf own?"

"The territory."

"The territory. And Brian was in his territory. And so, it's like you coming in this classroom. You're walking into MY territory. Now all of us work in it, and we want to be a team, but I am going to tell you what to do. So, I'm like the wolf. And you are like who?

"Brian," they answered.

This excerpt revealed some of the messages being sent to students about the social organization of the classroom environment and about their position or role in that space. In the situation described above, information about a teacher's place and a student's place was embedded in a discussion about the novel being read. Wortham (2005) describes the same phenomenon, that is, the use of content instruction to shape identities. Ms. Wagner seemed to be trying to facilitate students' understanding of what was happening to the character in the book by connecting his experience to their experience. Instead of simply supporting students in making a text-to-self connection, though, by linking Brian's relationship with a wolf to their relationship with her, she was actually teaching a lesson

about who she was, who they were to be as students in the classroom. By alternating interpretation and comparison, she managed to construct their teacher/student relationship in a particular way.

Ms. Wagner began by interpreting the social organization "in the woods" as a hierarchy with the wolf being "higher up" than Brian. Then she explicitly compared herself to the wolf and the students to Brian, essentially implying that she was higher up than the students in the hierarchical social organization of the classroom. Ms. Wagner then linked the wolf's elevated status to its ownership of territory, and reasoned that because Brian was in territory the wolf owned—presumably the woods—the wolf owned Brian, too. Again she reiterated the comparison of herself to the wolf and them to Brian, this time emphasizing that they were in her territory. She went on to interpret for them what it meant that she owned them when they were in her territory. That is, she was "going to tell them what to do." In addition, like the wolf though she could hurt them, she would not hurt them if they didn't give her any reason to. After all she concluded, like the wolf's territory that is shared by many creatures, the classroom is a space that "all of us work in" and so "we want to be a team."

To be successful in the wild, Brian needed to learn to attend and respond to all of the others around him, from the most powerful to the least, for he was connected to all of them in some way. However, the consequences for inattention varied greatly across the others in his world. If he didn't attend to mosquitoes, he would be itchy and miserable for a few days. If he didn't respond to foolbirds, he would have to eat berries for another meal. But if he didn't keep a close eye on the movements of a bear or a wolf, he might not get a second chance to learn from his oversight. The more serious the consequences

for failing to attend to the other, the more crucial it was for him to attend and respond appropriately. Just as was the case for Brian, interactions with certain others in the classroom as a general rule could have more serious or far-reaching consequences and therefore demanded a higher level of vigilance and care. In Brian's world the wolf was one other of which Brian definitely had to remain constantly aware and wary. As it turned out, "the wolf" demanded students' careful attention in this classroom as well.

Keairra was aware of how her age positioned her socially and aware that because of her positioning she had to be very conscious of the rules and expectations for her of those older than she regarding her expression of an interest in sexuality. So Keairra was at once conscious of her own desire to read for pleasure a book with sexual content and also her teacher's probable disapproval of her choice of topics as well as her power to impose undesirable consequences for doing so. Reading *Hot Maids* during S.S.R., then, was an example of double consciousness because Keairra's literacy practice was shaped by an awareness of both her own mind as well as the mind of the dominant other about her.

It could be argued that because the students in this third/fourth hour language arts class had been selected by their teachers to be in this advanced class, and because they were able to remain in this classroom for the duration of the study, they were adept survivalists—perhaps the most adept of all the sixth graders, at surviving school. Surviving school for these students typically entailed staying out of serious trouble and passing. Students accomplished those goals through various skills and strategies. One strategy employed by students was hiding out. Just as the foolbirds survived in the

wilderness because their camouflaged appearance helped them evade detection and predation, students' used camouflage to escape notice and avoid trouble.

In addition, functions of adaptive coloration that do not involve hiding include calling attention, warning others, and attracting mates. Chameleons, for example, change colors to express emotional states. This dissertation focuses primarily on literacy practices *hiding in plain sight* due to adaptive coloration, but adaptive coloration served other purposes in this classroom as well. In the next chapter I present one example of calling attention through adaptive coloration, what I call *standing out*, in the Ghetto Family vignette.

Chapter 5

Hiding in Plain Sight: Standing Out

> City boy, he thought. Oh, you city boy with your city ways—he made a mirror in his mind, a mirror of himself, and saw how he must look. City boy with your city ways sitting in the sand trying to read the tracks and not knowing, not understanding. Why would anything wild come up from the water to play in the sand? Not that way. Animals weren't that way. It had come up from the water for a reason, a good reason, and he must try to understand the reason, he must change to fully understand the reason himself or he would not make it. (Paulsen, 1987, p. 98)

In Hatchet in order to survive Brian was continually negotiating two identities--a more established city boy identity and an emerging nature boy identity. As a young man at home in upstate New York he knew many things about how to get by. Stranded in the Canadian wilderness, though, he had a lot to learn about how things worked and what things meant. He needed to develop the capacity to discern the relevance of what he already knew in his present situation. Brian soon learned that one skill critical for survival in both contexts was attending and responding to others in the environment. This epigraph from Hatchet, which describes Brian's attempt to interpret some tracks he'd found in the sand, illustrates a budding consciousness of his multiple coexisting selves. That developing awareness of various selves led to greater, and more successful, responsiveness to the environment and the others he encountered there. In this particular case, Brian's new awareness rewarded him with a belly full of turtle eggs.

Some of the others Brian learned to pay attention to in his new world included mosquitoes, fish, foolbirds, porcupines, moose, bear, and wolves. Lessons were learned cumulatively. Each encounter with an other was an occasion for Brian to learn something about his own social positions and the possibilities and constraints for future action in this context. Repeated encounters often gave him the opportunity to adjust his behavior in order to achieve a desired end. For example, initial attempts to catch fish and capture foolbirds would fail, but through careful attention to the other and adaptation of his behavior he eventually accomplished his aim. One day's reflections on the cause of a painful moose attack, for instance, would help Brian avoid coming between a mother bear and her cubs on another day.

While always negotiating his city- and nature-boy identities, he learned to draw on, adapt, and reconcile resources, experiences, and knowledge related to both past and present ways of being. As he reflected on his interactions and experiences with the environment and the others in it and tried to make sense of what things meant in his context, he became increasingly successful at accomplishing his own purposes—such as obtaining food, staying safe, being comfortable. Just as understanding context, attending to others, and adjusting participation were critical to Brian's survival, they were also essential prerequisites for *hiding in plain sight*. There were also times in this classroom, though, when students employed mechanisms of *adaptive colorations* for purposes other than avoiding detection. In the following vignette Kristina demonstrates this by *standing out*.

Kristina's Ghetto Family Stands Out

Before students began reading the novel, they were asked to write an essay on survival, the primary theme in Hatchet. In the middle of February on my first full day observing, students in room 106 were busy composing those essays. As students wrote independently, Ms. Wagner shared with me another piece of student writing. What she showed me were several sheets of three-hole punched, lined notebook paper filled from edge to edge on both sides with the penciled, balloon-like print characteristic of many middle school girls. Ms. Wagner explained that what I was holding was a play written by, Kristina, one of the students in the class. She added that Kristina had written the play on her own, but had asked her if she would type it up. Ms. Wagner said she thought to show Kristina's piece to me because it was written in African American Language and she knew that was an interest of mine.

Sharing Ghetto Family: Revealing What You Know, Who You Are

The play was titled Ghetto Family and included a cast of characters listed in the top margin of the paper. Those characters were the narrator, Tamika, MJ, Grandma Cookie, TaNesha, Ra Tonya, Shonda, Tonya, La'Tonya, Re'Lonya, and Doctor. The play began with the narrator speaking to the audience. "Yo, yo, yo What's dealio well this play is about a ghetto rich family. They is ghetto about everything. Then MJ gets shot." In essence the play is about a family, a ghetto family, to be precise—that is made up of parents, Tamika and MJ, Tamika's mother, Grandma Cookie, 5 teenaged girls, and a two year old. In the play the characters chided, squabbled, teased, and tried to get each other into trouble. They also did homework, attended school (where Ta'Nesha got into a fight over a boyfriend), and held down jobs.

Throughout the first part of the play the reader comes to understand that something is bothering MJ, but when Tamika tries to find out what's wrong by asking him if got somebody pregnant, he hits her and accuses her of not helping out. She reminds him that she cooks, cleans, and takes care of the children during the day and then goes to work at night. The following day Cookie and Tamika discuss what happened. Cookie says he doesn't have the right to put his hands on her. Tamika says she knows but what can she do, she loves him. Before Tamika and MJ have a chance to address the situation, the narrator informs us MJ has been shot by his work partner. MJ is taken to the hospital where he dies from his wounds. The narrator declares an Unhappy Ending, but teases readers with the promise of an upcoming Ghetto Family, Part II.

Kristina's play revealed a great deal about Kristina's literacy competencies, experiences, and interests. Her text showcased her academic literacies as they related to her knowledge of generic writing conventions. That is, it was clear she knew some things about how to write a play. For example, she included features such as a cast of characters and divided the text into acts. She also used a narrator to provided information for readers that framed the dialogue and indicated dialogue by listing the characters' names followed by a colon and then the text of the speech. She also used conventional spellings and punctuation (for the most part).

Kristina's play also represented a set of linguistic abilities related to her racialized identity. She wrote Ghetto Family in African American Language (AAL). Her selection and use of AAL in written form was a reflection of her individualized linguistic experiences, both personal and vicarious (through media, for example), and suggested a sophisticated awareness of the ways and means of linguistic variation. Ghetto Family also

represented Kristina's interests, concerns, and values. Being Black was a central issue for Kristina. She was often reading books that she had brought into the classroom that featured Black characters, themes, and language. For example, one day during S.S.R. she was reading *The Marion Anderson Story*. On another occasion I asked to see the book she was reading entitled *Player Haters* and found it was written in African American Language. I asked her where she got it, and she explained she got her books from the local city library.

Getting it Out There: Standing Out for a Reason

I was intrigued by Kristina's play both because she had written it on her own, it was not the product of a school assignment, and because it was written in African American Language. I told her I was very interested in what she'd written and asked her permission to make and keep a copy of the play. She agreed. On my next visit I returned Kristina's copy of the play to her and thanked her. The way she looked at the stack of loose-leaf notebook paper and then at me and then back at the stack of papers, gave me the idea that this was not exactly what she had expected was going to happen. Upon pursuing the matter I learned that she had hoped I would make and pass on to her several copies of the play. Her plan was to have her friends perform the play using the multiple scripts I would be making for her. So I took the play back and made several copies. Once I realized Kristina planned to perform the play, I began to advocate for her to get some classroom time and space in which to do this. Ms. Wagner didn't see how she could fit the play into the scheduled class hours, but she said Kristina and her acting troupe could practice and perform Ghetto Family in her room at lunchtime.

Initially, I thought I was a central participant in this activity. I viewed myself as having played a major role in negotiating the terms and making this play practice possible. At one point I saw myself as director of the play and writing teacher to a developing playwright. I was going to tape the performance. I soon learned that Kristina saw the play as finished, viewed herself as writer, director, and performer. I also realized that she was perfectly capable of negotiating the event with the teacher and her peers without my involvement. In fact, I was supposed to check with Ms. Wagner to see if Kristina could pass out script in class and get passes to come in at lunch. I forgot, but Kristina simply broached the subject with the teacher and got the ball rolling on her own.

Of all of the students in Room 106, Kristina seemed to overtly display the greatest tendency to have and pursue her own literate purposes. What was on her agenda during class often related to her personal literacy practices. It was not uncommon for Kristina to be an active, central participant in whole class novel-related activities such as discussions, read alouds, and journal sharing. It was also not atypical, though, for her to be uninvolved in class activities. When Kristina was not participating in the central activity, though, she was almost always engaged in a literacy activity of her own. For instance, she might read another book as the class read aloud from *Hatchet* or she would write songs or draw and narrate comic strips when they were supposed to be journaling or answering discussion questions.

In addition, Kristina frequently accomplished material and social purposes through the vehicle of literacy practices. Ghetto Family is a case in point. It seems Kristina originally gave Ghetto Family to Ms. Wagner as a way of accomplishing what she herself couldn't do easily—produce multiple copies of the script. She had plans for

her script. The text was to become the center of two dramas, the one her actors would perform on a makeshift stage, and another in which she would play the starring role as writer and director of that drama. She skillfully managed to procure all she needed for the show to go on. From me she obtained multiple copies of her script and from her teacher she was able to negotiate classroom space and time (albeit during the lunch hour). What's more, she was able to obtain what she need and still retain ownership of the script and leadership of the process.

Kristina probably could have made a go of the play in a corner of the lunchroom and probably would have, but in the end she didn't have to. Instead she was able, with the help of her text, to position herself advantageously by gaining unprecedented access to the teacher-governed space and roles. She was granted class time to select actors and pass out scripts. Such a position afforded her a special kind of power and status among her peers. For being chosen to be in the play meant getting a coveted lunchtime pass, and being in the class at lunchtime meant unique access to the space. Because Kristina's actors were able to experience the classroom space under different conditions than existed during the regular class period. Their self-governed status provided them with a greater degree of freedom in terms of movement and social interaction.

Moving it to the Center: An Aim and an Effect of Standing Out

Interestingly, though Ms. Wagner did not officially make space for the play during class time, the power and special privileges that directing the play during lunch afforded Kristina also seemed to seep into the post-lunch class session. The language arts time was divided into two parts with a fifty-minute period before lunch and another after lunch. As a rule the class period after lunch had more incidences of off-task and

disruptive behavior. The number of these incidents, involving Kristina, rose sharply during the time students were practicing the play. Standing out seemed to have this centering effect. Kristina and her literacies first moved toward the center of the classroom when she brought her play in from outside of the classroom. It moved further toward the center as she shared it with the teacher and asked her to type it up. Ghetto Family found its way into the classroom during lunchtime in the form of play practice and finally into formal class time by way of play-related insider conversations, teasing, and negotiations.

Kristina was willing to stand out, that is she was willing to reveal her marginalized literacies and selves for strategic purposes. She was also skilled at *standing out*; she possessed a sophisticated awareness of what it took to stand out in a particular context and a confidence that she could be successful in achieving her aims. While some of (and perhaps more than) what Kristina hoped to accomplish by standing out likely came to pass in the lunchtime play performances, conditions of the context still remained generally resistant to Kristina's attempts to center African American literacies in the classroom. In this sense Kristina's literacies remained *hiding in plain sight.* In fact, as it turned out, Kristina's Ghetto Family text contained literate resources that would later prove to be directly relevant to a novel-related activity. Yet, those resources would go unnoticed and ultimately untapped.

Kristina's Survival Writing Stands Out

Almost four months after students had written an essay on survival and I was shown Kristina's play, students were again asked to write an essay with the same theme. This composition was to serve as a writing post-test for the *Hatchet* unit. Ms. Wagner passed out an extensive prompt she had patterned after state writing assessment prompts.

That prompt guided students to write five paragraphs, and the teacher reminded students that paragraphs had a minimum of six sentences.

Just not Feeling It: Standing out during survival writing

As I mentioned before some days Kristina could be very active and involved in class activities and other days her participation was half-hearted at best. On this day Kristina just wasn't feeling it. Minutes after the teacher passed out the prompt, Kristina made her way to Ms. Wagner's desk with pencil and paper in hand. I couldn't hear what Kristina said, but I overheard the teacher say to Kristina, "Let's see what you think you should do. Ms. Wagner just said, 'Write an essay'." Kristina didn't respond to this verbally but put her hand on her hip, threw her head back, and rolled her eyes. She then stomped back to her desk.

Kristina's request for assistance, especially so quickly, and especially on a writing assignment, stood out. Asking for Ms. Wagner's help on a writing assignment was not typical for Kristina. Kristina was both a confident and a competent writer. Ms. Wagner also saw Kristina as a competent writer, when she wanted to be. In addition, Kristina had used this kind of written prompt to generate essays before without any trouble at all. Ms. Wagner had suggested at one time that her students sometimes engaged in a kind of leaned helplessness when asked to do something without her guidance, but Kristina did not seem to be one of the students who fit that description. So Ms. Wagner was probably surprised, if not irritated, to find Kristina at her desk asking for help the second the assignment was handed out. Kristina, on the other hand, appeared incensed that her petition had been rebuffed.

Standing Off as Standing Out: Resisting Survival Writing

Back at her seat Kristina began writing as Ms. Wagner circulated answering student questions about the essay. Just a few minutes later Kristina returned to the teacher's desk to staple her finished essay to the prompt handout and asked, "You want us to turn in?" Kristina had written her essay in record time and another girl Sandra, Kristina's cousin in fact, called to her, "You done already? Girrrrl."

Ms. Wagner then said, "Look at it again, Kristina."

Sandra snuck a peek at Kristina's paper as she stood at Ms. Wagner's desk and added, "Girl, that's a essay?"

"That's a paragraph," retorted Ms. Wagner. This made Sandra laugh.

But Kristina replied, "You said as long as you want it to be."

"No," said the teacher, "I said as long as you're supposed to. You've got this whole time to write."

Once again Kristina was *standing out*. She was drawing attention and getting noticed. *Standing out*, in this case, as opposed to the instance described earlier, though, seemed to take on a pall of resistance and frustration. Certainly, Kristina understood the norms and expectations of writing an essay in this classroom. In fact, she understood them well enough she could haven chosen any one of the following: 1) write an essay to Ms. Wagner's satisfaction, 2) appear to write an essay to her teacher's satisfaction while not writing a satisfactory essay, 3) not write any essay but appear to write an essay, or 4) reveal that she does not want to write an essay and write un unsatisfactory essay grudgingly. On this occasion she chose to resist writing the essay, and she was, not keeping it a secret from the teacher or other students.

Again Kristina returned to her seat and to her essay. When she next brought her paper up to Ms. Wagner, she simply dropped it on her desk without a word, but Ms. Wagner said, "Put your name on here." Kristina told her it was on there on the other page, but Ms. Wagner asked her to write it on both pages so when the papers were being handed back her name would be on the front.

It was clear now that Kristina and Ms. Wagner were engaged in something of a showdown. It appeared that was to be the final round, but Ms. Wagner was looking over Kristina's paper and before she could make it back to her seat for the third time, the following transpired:

Mrs. W: So Kristina you made this one big long paragraph. Why?

Kristina: (shrugs her shoulders)

Mrs. W: Why?

Kristina: (does not answer.)

Mrs. W.: Come here.

Kristina: (moves slowly to Ms. Wagner's desk.)

Mrs. W.: Where's the intro? Where's the body? Where's the conclusion?

Kristina: (points to her paper)

Mrs. W.: Okay. Circle your periods. Tell me how many periods you've got.

Kristina: (goes back to her seat with the paper.)

Mrs. W: How many periods?

Kristina: Fourteen.

Mrs. W: Fourteen. I want you to go through and break it up. Six in the intro, six in the middle, six, in the end. I want you to go through and break it up for you to

show me. You know put a slash where your intro ends, say it ends right here. Then show me where your middle and your conclusion. This needs to be three paragraphs. You don't want to write this just to be done then do nothing. This is a grade. This is your last most important one and this is the one you're treating with less. Cause this doesn't even look like three paragraphs and it's probably not totally detailed like you would expect. And you would want a better grade on this one, right, because this is the end one, right? Then you want a good grade on the next one. You see what I mean. You don't want to go from an A to an E. Right? So if you got a six on the first one you want a six on the last one. We don't have anything else to do. Look at it carefully. Here.

Kristina: (returns to her seat and begins reading over the paper. She draws lines to indicate breaks between paragraphs then puts her head down on the desk.)

Kristina was indeed concerned about her grades. She consistently completed, turned in, and received passing scores on her assignments in her language arts class. Today, though, some other motivation seemed stronger than passing grades. Perhaps, the reason Kristina was refusing to demonstrate all of the things Ms. Wagner had just listed—that a paragraph has six sentences or that an essay has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion—had something to do with Ms. Wagner's statement, "We don't have anything else to do."

A Reason for Resisting: Standing Out Against Marginalization

Ten minutes after Kristina laid her head on her desk, Ms. Wagner asked me if I'd had a chance to interview Kristina yet. I indicated that I had not, so I arranged with Kristina (who still had her head down) to talk together in the hall.

I was puzzled by what I had just seen in the classroom. Two weeks earlier Ms. Wagner had given students another essay assignment and Kristina had carefully produced a five-paragraph essay with indented paragraphs of six sentences or more. She had written the piece following a similar prompt and done it without asking for any assistance from the teacher. So it seemed clear Kristina knew what Ms. Wagner was asking her to do and how to do it. It was curious then that she had been so resistant to perform in this instance. I reasoned that it could simply be a matter of mood. We all exhibit variety in the way we behave for a number of reasons. Or it might have also had something to do with the fact that students had already written this essay once. This was the exact prompt to which they had responded at the beginning of the unit. So maybe she was irritated by the repetition. My interview with Kristina, though, made me wonder if there wasn't more to what I had just witnessed than general moodiness or boredom.

I asked Kristina during our interview what kinds of things she had written on her own time and she replied that she mostly wrote about things she's done in her own life and added that she liked to write pieces "about like black people and their things and stuff." She said Ghetto Family was an example of this because when she lived in Chicago she "was in a ghetto neighborhood." Kristina informed me that she and her mother still "talk ghetto" with each other at home, but that her mother switched at work because "she worked with a lot of white people" and she had to switch at school. She explained that she composed Ghetto Family in AAL, though, because that sounded authentic. But she told me she can't write like that at school because "it's inappropriate." When I asked her how she felt about having to switch, she said, "It's okay, because I'm used to that now."

The rest of our conversation made me wonder about the difference between being okay with something and being used to something. How did Kristina really feel about leaving her black language (and other parts of her black literate self) outside the schoolhouse doors? When I asked her how she felt about school in general and Ms. Wagner and language arts class in particular she responded like this:

Denise: OK, so um... so how do you feel about school? You like school?

Kristina: A little bit. It's just some teachers I don't like.

Denise: Yeah? You like Mrs. W----?

Kristina: Just a little bit.

Denise: A little bit? You like language arts?

Kristina: Not really.

Denise: But, it's something that you're good at, right?

Kristina: Mm-hm.

Denise: So what do you think it is that makes you think that you don't like it?

Kristina: 'Cause, 'cause you writing about like... I like stuff that's more like black people and like black slang. But if you mean by like, a black person but it ain't like...

Denise: Real?

Kristina: Yeah.

Denise: That doesn't seem real?

Kristina: Yeah. Like, it does... it doesn't seem like...

Denise: Have you ever, have you ever read about black people?

Kristina: Yeah, I've read a whole bunch of books about black people?

Denise: Well, I mean in school?

Kristina: Oh, no.

Denise: You never read about black people in school?

Kristina: Unless, they edited the books and stuff maybe...

Denise: Kind of think that maybe the language is all.. switched?

Kristina: Switched (unison with Denise "switched")

From this interchange it was plain that reading books with black characters was important to Kristina. It also seemed clear that she was drawn to black literature with certain features. Kristina craved what has been called "authentic" black characters—characters that sounded black, did black things, and cared about black stuff. She wanted Black characters that "rang true" to her as a cultural insider (Bishop, 1997). She was seeking out and reading material like that on her own, but indicated she had not read literature like that at school. I asked her why she thought that was and she supposed, "They don't read a lot of black books 'cause pretty much all black books are about violence and stuff." However, she said she had found a series at the public library for young adults written by Aaron Riddler that she had been reading that wasn't like that. Riddler she said just "put ladies in it and men and like that."

Regarding the difference between her language use and reading preferences at home and at school, Kristina said she was "used to" the way things were. She was both skilled at and accustomed to switching her language at school and locating the kinds of resources she cared about. Although she was used to the status quo, and had learned to be successful at negotiating things as they were, she had ideas about how things could be different at school.

When I asked her how language arts class might be improved and she said, "Uh, I'd like maybe black history stuff (mumble) and a whole bunch of stuff about like black people because we need to learn a lot about our cultures and stuff. So... Not everybody can learn a lot about their cultures and history about our ancestors and stuff..."

"That's pretty important to you, right?" I asked.

"Yeah," replied Kristina.

Despite the fact that black history and black literature was important to Kristina, it did not have much of a role in the curriculum of this language arts classroom. So while Kristina's resistance to the day's essay-writing activity certainly could have been about moodiness or boredom, her resistance might also have had something to do with what she perceived as the limits and limited nature of the curriculum in this classroom. Specifically, Kristina may have been protesting, by *standing out,* the exclusion of African American content, language, and themes.

Resistance Literacies Hiding in Plain Sight

In the Ghetto Family vignette Kristina employed a mechanism of *adaptive coloration* I refer to as *standing out. Standing out* was a purposeful literate accomplishment requiring competence, consciousness, and responsiveness. The function of standing out was to center marginalized literacies by exposing, or calling attention, to them. By sharing her Ghetto Family play, Kristina revealed certain of her literacy understandings, interests, and experiences; they were available for the teacher, her classmates, and the researcher to see. Kristina's cultural and linguistic experiences and resources as a black person were an essential part of her literate identity.

Kristina actively sought out and engaged in African American literacies outside of the classroom. She was a competent member of multiple communities of practices. She possessed literacy knowledge and skills associated with a variety of identities and which she gleaned from participation across various domains. She displayed an awareness of a range of content, conventions, and styles available to her of and an ability to create what some have referred to as hybrid textual productions. She also boldly displayed those literacy practices at school for all who cared to see.

Kristina had a personal and active literacy life outside of the classroom and was proactive about making space for literacies she enjoyed in the classroom even when this was not on the teacher's agenda. In this way Kristina's literacy stood out. She was seen by her teacher as a strong language arts student and a capable reader and writer when she wanted to be, and she was given more room than most other students, with the production of Ghetto Family and on a daily basis, to be literate in ways she chose. Though viewed as competent in many ways, certain African American literacies that Kristina possessed remained *hiding in plain sight*, or considered extracurricular, in this classroom despite Kristina's attempts to call attention to and center them through standing out.

Kristina's display of standing out was a literate accomplishment. Just as adaptive coloration is a process that involves a suite of appropriate actions that begins with sensing the environment, standing out requires one to read, interpret, and respond to the particularities and contingencies of contexts. Students do not play passive roles in *hiding in plain sight*. Through the literacy practice of writing a play Kristina was able to accomplish a number of material and social goals. She was able to gain access to official resources. Originally, she solicited the teacher's time, skill, and resources when she asked

Ms. Wagner to type up her play. She understood the usefulness and power of the literacy practice for being able to garner such resources. She then recognized an opportunity to tap into the researcher's resources: access to a copy machine and influence with the teacher in order to negotiating multiple copies of the script (one better than the single word processed copy she had aimed for at first) and official time and space in which to operate.

Kristina's revelation is both purposeful and skillful. Through her willingness to stand out in the classroom by revealing her proclivity for and prowess related to black literacies, Kristina did have an influence on how literacy was done at school. Ghetto Family, a play about urban survival written in African American Language, was performed in the classroom, but only in the wings—at lunchtime. In spite of the fact that Kristina's African American literacies, her literacies were often in plain view, relevant competencies and experiences were still hidden in as much as they were sometimes overlooked or ignored. Though, Ghetto Family did get the chance to play a role off stage at lunch time, its direct relevance to the in-class, essay-writing activity was overlooked. At times student literacy practices seemed to be hidden because students' social position, both in society at large and in the context of the classroom, rendered them invisible. All but two students in this classroom were black. In addition, they are twelve and thirteen year old students. Each of those identities positions them in a particular way in the context of a classroom headed by a white, middle-aged, teacher. Historically, African Americans, youth, and students have experienced oppression at the hands of more dominant groups in racist, ageist institutions like schools. Effects of that oppression have

included being silenced and feeling invisible, in part by having their interests and agendas relegated to the margins.

What's more, in the case of Ghetto Family, something related to Kristina's play that had been overlooked and that turned out to be quite important to Kristina and relevant to her literate participation in the classroom became visible during the final writing assignment associated with the novel unit. In fact not only had it been overlooked in this particular instance, it was ignored as a matter of course in the year long language arts curriculum. What was being hidden, meaning being ignored or overlooked, were African American literacies. That is, literacy practices that featured Black characters, themes, and discursive patterns. And that, it turned out, mattered very much to Kristina.

Consequently, Kristina's play, Ghetto Family, what was essentially a clever treatise on the theme of survival (the current topic of study) was never really viewed as relevant, by teacher or student, to the Hatchet-related activities. No connection was ever made between a character like Brian trying to survive in the wilderness and characters like Tamika and M.J. trying to make it in an urban ghetto. Nor was any relevance discerned between Brian's fifty-four day struggle to adapt to life in a strange world that made few accommodations for him and Kristina's seven year ordeal of spending every school day in a place where things that she knows and that matter a great deal to her count for very little.

Both Ghetto Family and Survival Writing represent instances of standing out. In each case, standing out was dependent on the relationship between Kristina's identities and the contingencies of the context in the moment. Kristina's enactments were purposeful, strategic, skillful attempts to center African American literacies in her

classroom. Both also illustrate how *hiding in plain sight* occurs despite students' attempts to be seen and seemed to share characteristics with adaptive coloration in foolbirds. That is to say, rather than a deliberate attempt to hide, the *hiding in plain sight* of Kristina's literacies was more of a consequence of an enduring condition, or an effect, of the sociohistorically constructed relationship of a subject's characteristics being positioned against a particular backdrop.

Students' practices, particularly those linked to students' African American and youth cultural identities, were *hiding in plain sight* not always or necessarily in the sense that they were not seen, but in that they were overlooked or ignored. They were perceived as unimportant or irrelevant, at least in this context, largely because they were linked to particular identities--identities that have been and continue to be marginalized and devalued in schools. Students' African American and youth practices were left *hiding in plain sight*, not simply because they were linked to marginalized identities, but also because they were being enacted against the background of a particular environment, an environment that facilitated the perception that these practices were not worth seeing. These students were *hiding in plain sight* in a particular place in a specific historical moment in time. They were learning and doing literacy in a language arts class in a school that was in its fifth year of failure to meet AYP. This teacher, like her students, was trying to survive. Surviving for her included appearing competent through responsiveness to external mandates. Most importantly she survived, and did her part to ensure her students' survival, by preparing them to pass state language arts assessments.

Chapter 6

Hiding in Plain Sight: Lying Low

> Something came, then, a thought as he held the hatchet, something about the dream and his father and Terry, but he couldn't pin it down. He scrambled out and stood in the morning sun and stretched his back muscles and his sore leg. The hatchet was still in his hand, and as he stretched and raised it over his head it caught the first rays of the morning sun. The first faint light hit the silver of the hatchet and it flashed a brilliant gold in the light. Like fire. That is it, he thought. What they were trying to tell me. Fire. The hatchet was the key to it all. (Paulsen, 1987, p. 85)

Brian's mother had given him a hatchet as a gift before he set out to spend the summer with his father who was working in the oil fields of Canada. He still wore it on his belt when the small plane in which he'd been traveling crashed in the Canadian wilderness. Despite possessing the hatchet, though, it was not immediately apparent to Brian the full range of ways the hatchet might be utilized for his survival. In addition to the hatchet Brian had brought with him from home, there were many resources that could be useful all around him in his wilderness environment. His hatchet in combination with certain resources from the environment, though, sometimes held the most amazing potential.

For instance Brian had been desperate to make fire. He had tried many things. It never occurred to him that the secret for making fire lay at the intersection of two resources that he'd possessed all along. That is, until Brian happened to throw the hatchet

in an attempt to ward off a porcupine that had wandered into his shelter in the middle of the night. Brian missed the intruder and the hatchet hit the rock wall of his shelter, spewing a fountain of sparks into the darkness. The porcupine escaped into the night, but not before leaving Brian with a painful wound on his leg. Focused on the immediate, the pain and fear resulting from his encounter with the porcupine, Brian initially failed to register the momentous importance of what had just happened for his future. It wasn't until the next morning, after dreams in which his father, and best friend Terry, had been trying desperately to tell him something: that the incident's relevance to making fire finally dawned on Brian. The epigraph describes that moment when Brian finally got a glimpse of something that had been *hiding in plain sight*.

The morning light flashing on the hatchet like fire, prompted Brian to reenter the shelter to investigate possibilities he may have overlooked at the intersection of the hatchet and the rock wall. He searched for where the hatchet had hit the wall and found a nick in a hard, black patch nestled in a field of chalky, light-colored rock. Tentatively, he swung the hatchet, flat end first, at the black rock. Nothing happened. Then he hit the rock with a firm, glancing blow and sparks flew from the wall and skittered on the floor. Brian had slept for days sheltered by a rock wall he now realized contained flint. All the while he had at his disposal a hatchet made of steel. Yet, the potential at the intersection of those two resources for accomplishing his goal of making fire went unnoticed and untapped. That is, until an encounter with a porcupine in the dark of the night created a set of circumstances that would generate a flash of life-changing insight.

It was like this sometimes in Room 106, too. Just as Brian was not always able to recognize the potential of the resources that were all around him, resources that might

have been useful for accomplishing curricular aims in the classroom sometimes went unnoticed or untapped. Occasionally the relevance to classroom learning goals, of literacy knowledge or skills possessed by students or literate practices in which they were engaged, was overlooked. Given the right circumstances, though, pedagogical possibilities could sometimes be spotted at the intersection of novel-related activities and student literacy practices.

Yo Momma

A case of *hiding in plain sight*, characterized by being in plain view and seen but not judged to be relevant, took place early in March. One activity that was commonplace in this language arts classroom was whole-class read alouds. Although, this routine varied occasionally, this usually meant that the teacher would select students to read, and they would read aloud until the she chose another student to continue. The rest of the class was to follow along in their individual texts.

Figurative Language: Valued knowledge, privileged modes

On this particular afternoon Ms. Wagner stepped in while a student was reading aloud in order to call students' attention to a sentence in the novel. "Okay, wait a minute. Look up where it says, in the middle of that paragraph, 'the tops were all down rotted and gone, leaving the trees pointing into the wind like broken teeth.' A student offered, "That is a simile."

Following the student's comment, Ms. Wagner delivered a mini lesson to the class about figurative language, especially three types of figurative language—similes, metaphors, and idioms. Ms. Wagner had students open their journals and write down the words on a clean sheet of paper. Then she read definitions for each from a dictionary,

simplifying them as she went. Students copied the definitions onto the paper next to the corresponding words. Finally, she summed up by explaining that similes and metaphors were comparisons and that the difference between the two was that similes employed the words "like, as, and than" but metaphors did not.

She went on to say that using figurative language was one of the best techniques for writers because it was so effective for creating vivid visual images for readers. In fact she said she knew Gary Paulsen, the author of Hatchet, must understand that figurative language was an excellent writing tool because, with previous classes, she had counted more than three hundred metaphors and similes in the book. She also assured them that their writing would be improved if they began including similes and metaphors.

It is not uncommon for language arts curricula to include learning objectives related to imagery and figurative language. In the English Language Arts Grade Level Content Expectations for grade six that Ms. Wagner used to plan instruction, there were several. Reading content objectives directed sixth grade teachers to help students develop and "use strategies and authentic content-related resources to determine the meaning of words and phrases in context" (Michigan Department of Education, 2004, p.2) like idioms and similes and to analyze how authors use such figurative language to develop plot. Writing objectives in this curriculum document also stated that students should be able to "write a cohesive narrative piece...that addresses issues of plot, theme, and imagery" (p.4). This minilesson provided students with nominative and declarative (Tompkins, 2006) information, that is, the names and definitions, related to three types of figurative language. Ms. Wagner's comments also communicated to students a specific purpose for using such language by stating it "was one of the best techniques for writers

because it was so effective for creating vivid visual images for readers," and encouraged them to use such language to improve their own writing. However, the teacher did not stop with delivering content-related information to students. She would also offer them an opportunity to participate in a session of teacher-guided practice in identifying and naming the three types of figurative language in an authentic text.

Rules of the Game: Being Fast, Getting Noticed

Next Ms. Wagner told the class that she often played a game with students related to similes and metaphors. As they were reading, she said:

> If you see a simile or metaphor you have to wait until it gets to the end of the sentence. The person has to get to the end of the sentence. And the first person to raise their hand and they guess it correctly and they have to say simile or metaphor and then they have to tell me what it is. They either get extra credit or a prize whatever we do for that day. Is that something you want to look at for now?

The general consensus seemed to be yes, and so Ms. Wagner reminded them, "Raise your hand at the end of a period. Don't let anyone know that you are going to raise your hand and wait for them and raise it. The process will go very quickly if you're ready. All you have to say is simile, metaphor, or idiom and what it is."

Like many other games, this game had a competitive edge and was governed by a set of rules. Ms. Wagner articulated some of the rules for this game before the activity began. A few rules concerned interaction and were supposed to keep the game running smoothly. These rules included raising a hand to signal the desire to answer and waiting until the whole sentence had been read to signal. The competitive nature of the activity revolved around several key mechanisms—keeping score, winning extra credit (or a

prize), and needing to be the first and only to respond. Being first would require attention to the reader and other players and speed, but being competitive it turned out would also depend on the teacher noticing signaling players and declaring them first. This would quickly become an issue for students.

The read aloud continued and the game was afoot. After the final sentence of the fourth paragraph, one or two hands sprung into the air. Ms. Wagner called on Diamond and she identified "*with bark like clean, slightly-speckled paper'* as a simile. Next Devon pointed out the phrase "*a cloud of sparks rained down*" and Ms. Wagner helped him out by providing him with the label, idiom. Another student raised a hand at, *the sparks poured like a golden waterfall.* Students were really getting into the game of identifying similes and metaphors in the text during the read aloud. There was constantly a flock of hands in the air. Because of students' enthusiastic participation Ms. Wagner had some trouble judging who had been first, and students were starting to grumble a little about not being recognized.

The way the activity had been structured initially created some challenges. For one, it rewarded only a single person for each instance of figurative language in the novel. In order to be that one, a student had to have three things happen. They had to be, if not the first, one of the first to raise their hands. They had to be called on by the teacher to identify, and they had to have something text-related to offer up as a response. Each time there was an opportunity to identify at least a dozen hands shot into the air almost simultaneously. Which meant a dozen students met all of the criteria, except being chosen by the teacher to identify. Because not being noticed or picked was the only

obstacle as far as students' could see to being named first and reaping the reward, they grew discontent with the terms of the game.

Stepping It Up: A Response to Discontent, Locating the Problem

The teacher suggested that some students were just raising their hands as fast as they could and not carefully considering whether or not the sentence contained a comparison. "If it's not comparing two things," she said, "it's not figurative language at all. After all, accuracy had been listed as a condition of successful game play—"you have to guess it correctly"—which implied students should be picking out of text the figurative language as well as identifying it with the right one of three labels. Speed seemed to be trumping accuracy, though, as a strategy for students. So, Ms. Wagner suggested "maybe we should step this up one more that if you raise your hand and you are wrong then it can be taken away from you, because some of you are raising on just the word like and just the word as. There is a difference; it has to compare two things. So really think and really look at it before you raise your hand."

In response to students' complaints Ms. Wagner revised the rules of the game. Whereas students may have felt the problem with the game was that they didn't always get a chance to identify when it was warranted because of a failure on the teacher's part, Ms. Wagner located the trouble they were having with the students. She suggested, that from her point of view, what was going wrong in the game was that students who had been called on were not consistently identifying and labeling the figurative language accurately. She implied this was because they were not being careful, perhaps because they were rushing to raise their hands first. As a way to motivate students to proceed

more cautiously and hold them accountable for inaccuracy, Ms. Wagner modified the game to include a penalty for wrong answers.

A Whole New Game: Reasserting Control, Sending a Message

Fashioning a lesson on figurative language as a game and promising extra credit as a prize was undoubtedly intended to make participation more attractive to students, and there was a high level of student involvement with over three quarters of the students volunteering at one point or another. There were a few students who had not raised their hands once during the game, though. Up until that point in the game, Ms. Wagner had called only on people who were raising their hands to identify the figurative language. So the few students who were not raising their hands probably felt relatively secure that they would not be compelled to play as long as they didn't do anything to draw attention to themselves. Stepping it up seemed to change more than the explicit rules of the game, though. Right after stepping it up, for instance, Ms. Wagner shifted from calling on students with their hands raised to calling on students who had not volunteered. Shortly after the novel reading had proceeded, Ms. Wagner called on her first nonvolunteer, Anthony.

Calling out Anthony: Hiding in plain sight by lying low.

Not volunteering was not uncommon for Anthony. He liked to keep a very low profile. For Anthony keeping a low profile, *hiding in plain sight* by *lying low*, routinely included things like not volunteering and refusing to read aloud during whole-class activities as well as positioning himself physically on the margins of the group. In fact, making an effort to position oneself or one's literacy activity on the margins to avoid detection is a primary characteristic of literacy *hiding in plain sight* through lying low.

Anthony accomplished this in a number of ways, one of the most obvious was his choice of seating in the classroom.

In this class students were able to choose their own seats, at least until there were problems. The majority of the desks were typically arranged in table groups of four or five and most students sat in those seats in fairly consistent same-gender groupings. There were, however, several desks scattered throughout the large room that touched the outside walls. These outer desks provided a way for the teacher to physically separate students from the rest of the class without sending them out of the room. No one in the class in which I observed was actually assigned to such a seat permanently, although, a few times I observed students being banished to those seats for the remainder of a class session. However, though students in this class were not actually assigned to these seats, they would sometimes fill them by choice. Anthony was one of those students. But he was also only one of two students, the other being his best friend Aaron, who chose these outer desks as their permanent seats.

Aaron sat in a desk in the front of the classroom in the corner farthest from the door. The side of his desk actually butted up against the front blackboard. He faced the door and was separated from the rest of the class by the teacher's desk, a rocking chair, and often the teacher herself. Anthony sat about six or eight feet behind Aaron with his desk touching an adjacent sidewall. Anthony's desk faced the front, but it was cut off from Aaron by the rocking chair and the rest of the students by a large tan couch.

In fact, in this class Anthony seemed to want nothing more than to be left alone. He tried hard to accomplish this by lying low. As a general rule, Anthony did not disrupt classroom activities. He completed his written assignments and participated in small

group activities such as literature circles, but he also avoided interactions with the teacher and resisted participating in the large group. He also seemed always to have one eye on the teacher. When she was not observing him, he would stealthily engage with his peers—whispering with friends, teasing girls, sharing musical preferences, and the like. When he was being observed or engaged by the teacher, though, he tended to keep still or move slowly. When dealing with the teacher he also spoke softly and typically kept his head bowed and his eyes averted.

Despite, or perhaps because of, his efforts to avoid detection on this occasion and others, Anthony had been noticed by his teacher, and she had called on him to label the figurative language in the chapter.

Mrs. W: Anthony, what do you see?

Anthony: An idiom.

Mrs. W.: An idiom? No.

Anthony: Metaphor?

Mrs. W.: Still wrong.

Ms. Wagner's shift after stepping it up to calling on nonvolunteers as well as her specific first pick of Anthony were interesting decisions. By shifting to nonvolunteers she may have been attempting to reassert control over the flow of game play, perhaps especially to deemphasize speed and to refocus students on accuracy. By choosing Anthony, someone who had not participated the entire game, she might also have been signaling an implicit rule change. That is, that stepping it up also meant stepping up accountability. She seemed to be sending the message, especially to those on the margins

of participation or attention, like Anthony, that now anybody could be called on at any time, and she had her eye on them, so they had better be ready.

Someone else's terms: Consequences of lying low, involuntary participation.

Anthony had been expected to play and he complied in the moment, but he hadn't appeared pleased to be pulled into the game. And, why should he be? His turn in the game hadn't gone especially well. He hadn't been able to label the language correctly despite two attempts and only three labels to choose from. Unfortunately, lying low had its drawbacks. Because Anthony had not volunteered he was compelled to participate on the teacher's terms rather than his own. In this case, involuntary participation had the consequence of being assigned an example of figurative language that had been tricky to identify.

In fact, for whatever reason, this one proved to be difficult not just for Anthony to identify but for many of his peers as well. After the exchange with Anthony, Ms. Wagner solicited two more attempts by other students, in which both identified the same phrase as a metaphor. Finally, Ms. Wagner intervened and guided a fourth student's examination of the sentence. Even in that exchange, the student identified the figurative language, but Ms. Wagner herself actually introduced the simile label and was the one who accurately identified the comparison as being red sparks to size of a quarter.

The metaphor game slowed down, and then almost completely petered out, once Ms. Wagner stopped selecting volunteers and instead began calling on nonvolunteers. Still accuracy had not seemed to improve.

Lying Low Exposed: Jamal Stands Out

Once again, though, Ms. Wagner called on a student who had not been an active participant (or giving the activity his undivided attention) and had not volunteered. This time it was Jamal. The example was relatively complicated. The text had read: *The red glow moved from the sparks themselves into the bark, moved and grew and became worms, glowing red worms that crawled up the bark hairs and caught other threads of bark*...And, again, it was an example that several other students had previously failed to identify correctly.

Mrs. W.: Glowing red? Glowing red worms that crawled up, what is that?

Mrs. W.: Jamal, what do you think it is? Jamal?

Jamal: What?

Jamal like Anthony also often engaged in lying low in order to avoid being noticed or engaged by the teacher. On this day he was seated to my left and situated behind those who were participating heavily in the main event at a table with three other guys Terrence, Tyrone, and Latrell. The novel-related metaphor game had not been the main event at their table for a while now, and so Jamal was probably caught off guard when Ms. Wagner invited his participation. This may explain the way he initially answered Ms. Wagner's query. In this class when a student did not know the answer, it wasn't unusual for them to just toss out a guess or two, much like Anthony had done. Instead of starting off with this standard response, though, Jamal had asked, What? This violated a rule of lying low in this classroom. Wrong answers, even those that were silly or repetitive were typically abided, but other indicators of not paying attention were not as likely to go unnoticed.

Mrs. W.: Look at the first line. He's making tendrils, he's saying they moved and grew and became worms, glowing red worms that crawled up the bark hairs and caught other threads of bark and grew. So it's saying something turned into worms. Is that a simile, a metaphor, or an idiom?

Jamal: I don't know.

Claiming not to know or admitting not knowing was not an effective tactic for lying low either. Students rarely answered that they did not know in here. When they did, though, it usually led to a questioning exchange like the one that followed.

Mrs. W.: What is worms? What is he saying is worms?

Jamal: The sparks.

Mrs. W.: So sparks are like worms, but it doesn't have the words like, as, or than. So, what is it?

Jamal: An idiom?

Now Jamal was getting with the groove. Another answer like this, and under most circumstances he would be allowed to slip back into the shadows.

Mrs. W.: No what's the other one? Similes and metaphors are the opposite. So simile uses like as or than and if it doesn't have it, it's a what? It's a what?

Jamal: Metaphor.

Jamal had answered correctly, but someone else at his table had fed him the answer. It was becoming clear that he had been during the metaphor activity and still was otherwised engaged. Ms. Wagner seemed to be becoming increasingly frustrated that she was having trouble getting and keeping Jamal's attention even though she was focused entirely on doing so.

So now Ms. Wagner enlisted the help of another peer, the class pet (if classroom jeers can be believed), to reteach the concept to him on the spot.

Mrs. W.: You're not listening. You're not listening. Now, who can explain to Jamal what the difference is. Why is an idiom different? Why is an idiom, an idiom sits over here. A simile and metaphor sit over here. What is the difference between an idiom? You need to listen. Paris, what do you think?

Paris: An idiom is a sentence that don't make sense.

Mrs. W.: But it's popular. We all hear it. It's raining cats and dogs. Is this statement popular that sparks turn into worms? Do we all say that?

Student: No.

Mrs. W.: So, it's not an idiom. It's either a simile or a metaphor. One of them uses like, as, or than, and the other one doesn't. Ok? Usually idioms are popular. Jamal, are you listening?

Throughout this individualized, but far from private, tutoring session Ms. Wagner insisted Jamal needed to listen. Her insistence that Jamal listen, needed to listen, wasn't listening seemed to suggest the reason he had not answered correctly was due to inattention. In fact, though, Jamal's issues had more to do with managing the demands and priorities of hyperattention than in did with hypoattention.

Same game by a different name?: Jamal plays the dozens

Jamal had been listening all right. But he'd being listening, attending to, and adjusting his participation in two games at one time. The second game he had been playing was *hiding in plain sight* as a result of lying low. Throughout nearly the entire episode during which many of his peers were identifying and naming the similes and

metaphors of the author, Jamal and the other boys at his table had been hurling an array of ingenious linguistic creations of their own at one another. Essentially, they had been playing in two games at once—the one the teacher was facilitating and a rousing word game of their own at their table. Their game had been on the down low, though. In order to keep it that way, they had been playing with one eye on the whole-class activity so as to stay within the boundaries of appropriate participation in the whole group game and thereby prevent drawing the unwanted attention of the teacher. And, until Jamal's interchange with Ms. Wagner, they had been successful.

The game they were playing was called snappin'. Snappin' is a verbal game of ritual insult played in African American discourse communities. It has been part of the Black Oral Tradition in America for generations. Snappin', as the kids in this class referred to it, included barbs related to mothers or other relatives (also called playing the dozens) as well as those aimed directly at their opponent (sometimes called signifying). Like the novel-related game snappin' is also a competitive, rule-governed activity. "One-upmanship is the goal of this oral contest," and to be good in the game your snaps must be exaggerated, employ metaphorical language, and be delivered immediately and spontaneously (Smitherman, 1999). Another important rule of the game is that insults are not supposed to actually be true. The game is played in front of appreciative audiences who are secondary participants in that they laugh and encourage snappers to increasingly up the ante. Joining in the laughter of the audience provides the loser of the game a face-saving way to end and cede the competition to the winner.

For the love of the game: Play between close friends.

The game Jamal was involved in was the continuation of a session that had begun with Latrell and Tyrone snappin' on one another. I had seen Tyrone and Latrell involved in this kind of play before. Latrell and Tyrone were two of the closest friends in the language arts class. As friends they consistently chose seats next to one another, selected one another for partner and group work, assisted one another with class assignments, stuck up for one another, and, of course, endlessly and mercilessly teased and tortured one another. On this day they were engaged in the latter. From the moment Latrell and Tyrone returned from lunch, they had been at each other. One would mutter something to the other and the other would provide a mumbled retort. After one or two exchanges like that a chase would ensue. Latrell would pop Tyrone with a flat hand on the back of the neck and then sprint way. Tyrone would give chase and return the favor.

Once class began the ribbing became less physical but it certainly did not abate. These two slung verbal insults back and forth throughout the entire class session. Most of these had to do with their mothers and ranged from a rapid-fire volley of whispered "yo mommas" to more expansive, inventive, and sometimes louder retorts like, "Well, yo momma so fat every time she get out the bed she be liftin' weights." Tyrone and Latrell's game might have remained hidden in plain sight, and therefore never have drawn a response from the teacher, had it stayed between the two friends. In order to keep snappin' from breeching the realm of play, it is enjoyed in a spirit of playfulness among those friendly with one another.

To Be the King: Game Play as Social Posturing

Jamal, though, had wanted to play, too. Jamal was not really friends with the other two boys. He was a large mature-looking kid who attended sporadically. When Jamal was in class he tended to hang out with higher status males like Anthony and Aaron. His interactions with the two smaller boys, Latrell and Tyrone, were typically contentious. Latrell was guarded, quiet and suspicious, around Jamal, but that wasn't Tyrone's way. He was volatile and brash. These traits made him an easy and frequent target of his peers. Today, it was Jamal who was having fun, not with Tyrone, but at his expense, while the class was busy identifying figurative language in *Hatchet*.

So while the game had begun as a friendly game of snappin' between buddies by the time Ms. Wagner was asking Jamal if he was listening, the game was no longer something playful between friends. As Smitherman (1999) states "if you take snappin' out of the realm of play, you enter the real world, where ain nobody playin." She adds that occasionally players will go there, though, "especially when they run out of clever snaps" (p.228). And so Tyrone, who seemed to be suffering the brunt of Jamal's verbal slings, outed Jamal, himself, and their game by answering the teacher's question.

Tyrone: (Answering for Jamal) No.

Mrs. W.: (To Jamal) Are you listening?

Tyrone: No, he's talkin' about my momma.

I suspect Tyrone had hoped his admission that they were engaged in a game of their own would bring an end to the game and perhaps get Jamal into trouble in the process. Tyrone's attempts to end the game by involving the teacher may be read as an indication that Jamal was winning the game.

Presumably then he must have been succeeding at trumping each of Tyrone's snaps with his own figurative linguistic retorts. Jamal's success at snaps suggested he did have knowledge related to figurative language. In fact, it belied sophisticated competencies related to the production and use of figures of speech like similes, metaphors, and idioms. However, those competencies he possessed related to using figurative language in an authentic speech situation were certainly not apparent when he was asked by the teacher to label the metaphor in the context of the text-related game. The emphasis on labeling phrases used by the novel's author ultimately disguised what Jamal did know about and was able to do with figurative language.

Instead of intervening in a direct way to end the game, Ms. Wagner responded to Tyrone's revelation by telling Jamal, "We're going to look for you for the next one." Ms. Wagner's warning to Jamal that she would be returning to him to identify another was likely meant to have the effect of putting a stop to their game-play, but it had not been enough to get him to stop which meant Tyrone could not stop either. And so the game continued. But this was no longer a friendly game of snappin' between friends Jamal and Tyrone had entered the real world, both in the sense that the game was no longer friendly and in the sense that it had been brought to the attention and the rest of the class. Now nobody was playing anymore.

Entering the Real World: Ain Nobody Playin' Now

Ms. Wagner tried to ignore their sideline activity and keep the novel-related metaphor game moving along. She called on the next reader. But the boys were getting harder to dismiss. When clipped "yo mommas" from the table in the back punctuated another student's identification of the comparison between balls of bark and gasoline as

an idiom, she told the boys, "End it and we move on." Tyrone protested, but Ms. Wagner continued, "I know but at 11:25, Tyrone, you're going to talk about each other's moms for 15 minutes. So if it's that important to disrupt, you are going to give your time to do it, not our class time. So either you both be quiet or you do it at lunch."

Ms. Wagner had attempted to get Jamal back on task with as little fanfare as possible. She was an experienced teacher who knew exactly what might completely derail a whole-class activity. She had implored him to listen, quickly retaught the essential information to him, and advised him to stay on his toes because she'd be "coming back to him". When those things didn't work, though, she stepped it up. She gave a direct command to "end it" and attached a consequence for failure to comply—talking about each other's moms for 15 minutes at lunch. None of this seemed to be enough. Jamal wouldn't quit, and Tyrone just couldn't let it go.

Tyrone: He lie.

Mrs. W.: I know and he's going to lie at 11:25, so drop it so we can continue on.

But they did not stop, and finally Ms. Wagner was done playing this new game with them.

Mrs. W: Latrell, move over there. I know but you move. Just move.

Latrell: (To Ms. Wagner.) Me? Shut up, Jamal.

Mrs. W.: Hurry up. Jamal, turn your desk that way. I know.

Tyrone: (Laughing)

Mrs. W.: Tyrone, turn your desk around this way. Now go forward. Right where you were. Just turn it around.

Once again Ms. Wagner played the boys' game, while all the other students watched, rather than the other way around. This time, she physically and visually separated them from one another in an attempt to make it more difficult for them to continue their "game".

Going Down in Flames: The Period Ends

Ms. Wagner moved ahead with the lesson, turning next to a discussion of the questions that students answered after reading each chapter. After Jamal and Tyrone's game of the dozens spilled over into the whole-class metaphor and simile game, things would never quite get back on track during this class period. The session ended like this:

Mrs. W: Ok number one, what does Brian need to make fire?

(Students talking.)

Student: Fuel.

Mrs. W: Fuel. Something to get it going. Which would be? He was using the sparks and stone as something to use to make sparks. Then he needs something that can light which we call flammable. Flammable material.

Student: How do you spell flammable?

Student: F-L-A-M-M-A-B-L-E.

TEACHER: They just spelled it for you. F-L-A-M-M-A-B-L-E. What is Brian's friend? Quintae?

Quintae: I can't hear.

Jamal and Tyrone's game had been disruptive. Once it jumped the borders of their table, its effects spread quickly through the class. First it consumed the metaphor game. And eventually it would ravage Ms. Wagner's control of the class as a whole. Students

were talking and facing various directions. They were out of their seats. While Ms. Wagner was dealing with Jamal, Tyrone, et al. the rest of the class had drifted into activities of their own as well. So now as she tried to refocus the students on novel-related activities, she was struggling.

> Mrs. W.: (To the class.) You're being very disrespectful. You need to take your comments and hold them inside. And some of you murmuring, all you are is noise. You are not contributing effectively. You are a distraction. Now, stop. Now, I am not done with my assignment, and I don't care if that bell rings. You are wasting our time. And that means I have to waste yours. Now when we were reading it, Brian's friend was fire. That whole section was one big metaphor. Brian, friend, fire as a friend. It just doesn't happen. It's a metaphor. Sarah, SHHHHH!

In the same way the whole *Hatchet* chapter had been "one big metaphor" made of up many tiny metaphors, this vignette also seemed to be one big event full of smaller events everyone of which seemed to put me in mind of something else it was just like. For instance, the revelation that Jamal and Tyrone were talking about each other's mommas was a steel hatchet thrown against a flint wall in a dark cave. Pedagogical possibilities rained down and skittered across the floor.

Parallel Literacies Hiding in Plain Sight

Many times avoiding having themselves or their literacies spotted or centered was the deliberate aim of students' strategic actions. One mechanism for escaping detection that students employed in this classroom was lying low. In this classroom lying low was often characterized by behaviors such as sitting on the periphery of the group, keeping

voice levels low, avoiding eye contact with the teacher, participating minimally in whole group activities, and communicating with peers through subtle gestures. Sometimes students employed these methods to hide in plain sight a particular activity as in the case of the game of snappin' played during whole group instruction. But in other cases, such as with Anthony, lying low was more of a typical way of being in class that was not designed to cover anything specific, rather was an attempt to keep from being noticed generally. This type of lying low, though, also ultimately had the effect of hiding students' literacies, by withholding what they did know and were able to do.

Lying low often obscured or distorted students' literacies. Students in the act of lying low sometimes appeared, and were perceived by the teacher to be off task, unengaged or uninterested in literacy learning. While sometimes this was true, it sometimes was not true, or at least not the whole truth. Pulling off *hiding in plain sight* by lying low was tricky, uncertain business. It required constant vigilance and a capacity to read and interpret the signs in the context that might signal the need to adjust the way lying low was being enacted or the possibility that exposure was imminent. Even though determined students skilled at lying low were sometimes thrust into the spotlight. When students who were lying low caught the teacher's eye it was sometimes because they seemed unengaged or uninterested. In these instances, lying low actually stood out.

When lying low that had the appearance of nonengagement precipitated a response from the teacher, it was sometimes due to subtle changes in the context rather than in differences in the way a student way enacting lying low. For example, lying low that may have previously gone undisturbed might draw attention, when the focus in the classroom turned to broader accountability and participation. This often meant turning

attention to those on the margins of the classroom and or activity. In situations like this, students who were lying low would frequently find themselves being compelled to participate under less than ideal circumstances. In turn, this could have the effect of confirming the teacher's (and perhaps other students') beliefs about their literacy competencies, motivations, and interests. In this way lying low tended to trick the eye.

This happened during the metaphor game when Ms. Wagner decided to step it up and began calling on involuntary participants. Anthony was given an example of figurative language to label that proved to be difficult for several others in the class as well. But the fact that Anthony was in the position of being the first to be unable to name it, in addition to the fact that he had not shown during game play that he could name any example, may have suggested to the teacher that he did not know the material and implied he was not interested in learning it either.

Lying low also stood out when students who were lying low were perceived as being off-task, or engaged in activity other than or instead of the novel-related activity. But lying low could be deceptive in this way. Lying low was noticed when it wandered beyond or violated some accepted or tolerated participation norm of novel-related activities on the surface. That divergence in norms of participation, though, occasionally camouflaged student literacy practices that converged with the classroom literacy goals in important, though not always immediately obvious, ways. Frequently, what was perceived as unrelated to academic literacies or as having nothing to do with literacy at all were in fact literacies with many shared elements, or parallel literacies. The simultaneous enactment of the Hatchet-related metaphor game and the game of snappin' is an example of such parallel literacies *hiding in plain sight* through lying low.

These two activities had many things in common. Both were goal-directed activities that took the form of a contest or game. Each was governed by culturally constructed rules and norms. Each related to one's knowledge of or competence with figurative language. In the snappin' game students were engaged in a shared culture practice of many African Americans. The game was a social contest that was serving the purpose of creating solidarity and bringing pleasure (at least initially). These students learned to play this game through observation and participation in a community of practice. The competent snapper must be fast, responsive, and clever. Above all, the winner of a game of snaps must know how to use figurative language in a way that impresses and entertains an audience of onlookers. In this game there is only one winner who emerges at the end of the contest as the conquered concedes usually by laughing along with everyone else at the last artful barb. The admiration of others and the satisfaction of out talking another are the spoils of the game.

The metaphor game was also a contest and a shared cultural practice related to competence with figurative language. Students' may have had experience playing games like this in the context of school, in this sense it was a shared cultural practice. Ms. Wagner also explicitly explained several rules related to the game. The goal of this game was to pick figurative language out of a text and to practice distinguishing and labeling that figurative language as one of three types. The stated purpose for practicing with these three types of figurative language was for students to improve their writing by being able to create more vivid images for readers. In this game, the teacher identified a winner for each instance of figurative language encountered in the chapter. Winners in this game also had to be fast. They had to know the three labels of figurative language—

metaphor, simile, and idiom. They had to get identified as first by the teacher so they could give an answer. The rewards which motivated participation in game-play may have included accruing status through academic, enjoying competition, creating solidarity—with teacher and other participating peers, and accumulating extra credit points.

These similarities between the practices Jamal and his friends were engaged in and the metaphor game belie curricular relevance, in seemingly disparate activities, and suggest fruitful pedagogical possibilities *hiding in plain sight* at the site of "off-task" participation. Neither Jamal nor Ms. Wagner seemed to discern any relevance between the game of snappin' and the text-related identification activity. If they had perhaps Jamal might have showcased his prowess by signifying on Gary Paulsen or his metaphors and been able to save face by making Ms. Wagner and the others laugh. Or maybe Ms. Wagner might have insisted that Tyrone share with the class "the lie" he claimed Jamal had told. This would have foregrounded what Jamal could do, and exposed ways in which the two "games" were related. Then she could have guided him to label his own snap as a metaphor, simile, or idiom.

However, students in classrooms often work hard to keep their practices to themselves or on the sidelines. They often do so by engaging in lying low. Many are well practiced and very skilled at doing so. When lying low stands out for some reason, then, it ought to be considered an opportunity, and perhaps a rare one, to understand and appreciate something about those students. Sometimes unexpected, but powerful intersections between students' practices and curricular aims are *hiding in plain sight* when students are lying low. What at first seems like nothing but an intrusive and painful porcupine attack might actually lead to finding a key that makes lighting a fire possible.

Chapter 7

Hiding in Plain Sight: Covering Up

Mistakes.

> Small mistakes could turn into disasters, funny little mistakes could snowball so that while you were still smiling at the humor you could find yourself looking at death. In the city if he made a mistake, usually there was a way to rectify it, make it all right. If he fell on his bike and sprained a leg, he could wait for it to heal...Now it was different, and all so quick, so incredibly quick. If he sprained a leg here he might starve before he could get around again (Paulsen, 1987, p.128).

Brian made a lot of mistakes when was first stranded in the wilderness. It was imperative that he learned what was important and the way things worked here, and he needed to do it quickly. Every mistake could be costly. Any mistake might prove to be his last. Because Brian was often in the position of learning what he needed to know through lessons that could jeopardize his comfort, his safety, and even his survival, he came to pay careful attention to the priorities, rules, and norms in his new surroundings. He became determined to do things right.

Students in Room 106 were also keenly aware of their surroundings. They learned from their own mistakes and the mistakes of others what was possible and what was not. As they observed and participated in the classroom, they were constantly in the process of evaluating and revaluating what was valued, expected, rewarded, tolerated. They had ideas about who to watch and how to respond, and those notions were always in flux—adjusted and readjusted based on the most current or relevant information. For the most

part, these "good students" were interested in following the rules, in doing things right, in passing the class. Sometimes, that required covering up what went wrong. As in "Hot Maids", the following vignette "We Stranded" describes how another student, Tatiana, engaged in active, deliberate *hiding in plain sight*. In this case the hiding took place during a whole class journal-sharing event and was achieved through the mechanism of *covering up*.

We Stranded: Tatiana Covering Up

As part of the novel study unit, students routinely wrote in journals, spiral notebooks provided to them by the teacher at the beginning of the unit. This vignette begins with Ms. Wagner asking students to compose a journal entry.

> TEACHER: Ok turn to a fresh page in your journal. Date it 3/9/06. Underline it and I want you to put chapter 5.
>
> TEACHER: Right now in a nice, neat, well written paragraph I want you to tell me what would be something that you would need in your life right now to survive. That you would feel that you could not survive without. You in your life. Brian has no choice, but you right now, what would you take with you? What would you definitely need to survive in a situation or in your life? Whatever way you want to put it. Something to survive.

Most journal entries were similar to the one above in that they were to be "nice, neat, well written" paragraphs (compositions of at least six sentences), drafted on the spot in class, in response to an oral prompt provided by the teacher.

After giving this prompt, the students set to writing. Once several people seemed to be finished with their entries, Ms. Wagner asked for volunteers to share their writing. Tatiana was the second student, after Terrence, to share her journal entry.

> TATIANA: (reading from journal) I could not survive without paper, pencils, and a pencil sharpener. I said drawing materials because it keeps me calm and entertained. I know other people would say food or CD players or other things like that but this is what keeps me calm. Drawing material is a definite thing I would have to take.

As was routine during journal sharing events in this classroom, Tatiana's presentation of her paragraph was followed by teacher feedback about her writing.

> TEACHER: Ok, was that six sentences though?
>
> TATIANA: That sounded more like three.
>
> TEACHER: Count your periods.
>
> TATIANA: I didn't know I was supposed to read the whole thing.
>
> TEACHER: That's fine. Let me hear the rest of what you have.
>
> TATIANA: You want me to read the whole thing?

Sometimes students were invited to read in-process, or unfinished, writing or a portion of what they had written aloud to the class. However, most often this happened during the in-class composition of longer pieces.

> TATIANA: (Reading) I couldn't survive with out paper, pencil, and pencil sharpener. I also couldn't survive without food too. I said drawing material because it keeps me calm. I said food because food is what I live off of. Food and

drawing material is very important to me. It might sound weird to other people, but it is definitely not weird to me.

Tatiana's second journal sharing, this time of the "whole thing," or the original written text, revealed that Tatiana's first performance had been an oral adaptation, rather than a literal reading, of her journal entry. In the oral iteration she had omitted the sentence, "I said food because food is what I live off of" as well as the word "food" at the beginning of the next line. She also inserted material, "I know other people would say food or CD player," that was not included in the original text. What Tatiana was *covering up* about her written entry, through both omissions and additions in her oral performance, exposed literacy/ies *hiding in plain sight.*

Tatiana chose to employ *covering up* in order to achieve *hiding in plain sight* as a deliberate, strategic response to the classroom context. In order to accomplish *covering up* she needed to understand the way things worked and what mattered during a journal-sharing event. She learned what mattered and determined how to adjust her actions accordingly by paying attention to the context and others in it. In this case Tatiana's decision to engage in *covering up* was motivated and made possible by the "mistake" of her classmate, Terrence.

Learning from the Mistakes of Others

Terrence had raised his hand when Ms. Wagner first asked for volunteers to share their writing. He had been the first student to read his entry aloud.

TEACHER: Is there anyone who would like to share their paragraph? Terrence? Nice and clear so we can hear.

Terrence: I will need liquid to knock off the thirstiness and food to keep my belly from hurting. I will need all type of weapons for protection and warm clothes so I won't be cold. I will need my dog to keep me company. I will need tools so I could make a house. Then I will need a t.v. for entertainment. I will need a radio to listen to music and dance, too.

Immediately before students began to write Ms. Wagner had reminded them, "Don't forget to use the rules—indenting, six or more sentences, capitalization, punctuation, higher vocabulary." Terrence's performance met most of the salient requirements explicitly included in the prompt. He read off, in a clear, audible voice, the text he had composed in his journal—a conventionally accurate and correctly punctuated, if not indented, paragraph of exactly six sentences (see Appendix B). He had listed several reasonable things a twelve year-old would deem critical to his survival, and he had thrown in some "higher vocabulary" like liquid, protection, and entertainment. As it would turn out, though, there were some implicit requirements that it did not quite satisfy.

Just as there were explicit rules about journals and journaling, there were also implicit norms and expectations related to the practice. One of those norms was that the teacher almost always responded to what students shared in some way. Sometimes her comments were brief statements of general approval such as "okay" or "good." More often, though, she would offer feedback related to some aspect of the piece. From these comments, students gleaned clues about what was valued and expected by Ms. Wagner, and in general, about how to be a good student and writer.

Frequently, Ms. Wagner would involve students in the feedback process by structuring her critique as a series of questions addressed to the writer as well as the rest of the class.

TEACHER: Ok, so he gave us a lot of examples didn't he? If that's the way you interpreted that's fine. How many did I ask for though?

STUDENT: One

TEACHER: So, that's fine that you did that, but try to zero in on that one, especially for the LEAP tests. When they ask for one, they mean one. They do mean one. So make sure you zero in on one. If I say make a list that's fine, but if they say one you better stick to one.

As in the example above, feedback given by the teacher was usually related directly to the piece that was shared, but was intended for the benefit of both that student (If that's the way you interpreted it that's fine.) and the rest of the class (Ok, he gave us a lot of examples didn't he?). It was often through this feedback that students gathered and updated information about implicit expectations and requirements. In fact, this seems to be just what Tatiana had been doing.

Learning What Matters

The teacher's feedback for Terrence targeted the number of examples he gave. Terrence had named several things he would need to survive, but Ms. Wagner explained to the class that she had intended for them to choose and discuss one item. She reassured Terrence, and the rest of the class, that it had been okay for him to interpret the prompt as a request for multiple examples even though she really had asked for just one example. She did add, however, add that there would be times when the stakes for misinterpreting

a prompt would be higher, such as on the LEAP, the state writing assessment. She admonished them, in a situation like that, "if they say one, you better stick to one."

Tatiana's original written journal entry demonstrated that Tatiana had made the same mistake that Terrence had. Tatiana had written that she would need two things to survive, drawing material and food. After observing during Terrence's feedback session, though, Tatiana had new information with which to revise her initial interpretation of the prompt. Now it seemed what mattered most was "zeroing in on one" thing. So she volunteered to share, modifying her text in a way that she assumed would meet the newly clarified expectation. She was *covering up*, or leaving out, the text that revealed she had failed to zero in on one thing in her entry. By *covering up*, in an attempt to pass off the adapted oral version as the written version, Tatiana's literacies, that is, her attention and responsiveness to (con)texts, her flexible and strategic textual and oral adaptations, and her knowledge of and attention to what matters in being a good student and writer, were obscured.

Though the implicit expectation and apparent norm for journal sharing was that students read their texts in their entirety and as written, Tatiana's oral performance demonstrated an alternative, flexibly adaptive approach. That is, she did not read exactly what was written in the journal. What's more she strategically embellished the written text with oral insertions as she went. She read the first line as written, but then added a line that was not written down; "I know other people would say food or CD player." She also omitted several sentences related to needing food. Tatiana's oral addition of this one sentence and omission of written text related to food reflected both her awareness of the content of Terrence's piece—"other people would say food or CD players"—and her

deliberate and careful attention to Ms. Wagner, particularly in terms of newly clarified information about the prompt revealed by the teacher's critique of Terrence's paragraph.

Tatiana was actively and presently trying to be a good student and good writer even as the feedback session was in progress. In order to do so, she paid careful attention to the teacher's review of her peer's performance and attempted to adjust her own writing and performance in accordance with the most recent information that evaluation provided her about how to do the task correctly. One way Tatiana adapted her writing to address the prompt, was to consolidate her list of several items into one item by creating a category "drawing materials." She seemed to emphasize the singular nature of the category by dropping the s in the word materials, using the singular verb tense, and referring to drawing material as "a definite thing" in her last sentence: "Drawing material is a definite thing I would have to take." In addition to, and perhaps as a means of, making her entry better in the eyes of the teacher, Tatiana also pointed out through her spontaneous oral commentary disguised as text, that unlike other people's entries (read Terrence's) her entry did not contain multiple mismatched or silly items.

Making Her Own Mistakes

Unfortunately, if what Tatiana had hoped to gain by her vigilance to Ms. Wagner's wishes and skillful adaptations, was praise for her writing she was to be disappointed. Instead her attempts to respond to the newly clarified expectations would be complicated by her momentary inattention to other explicit requirements. Though Tatiana's performance that was part written and part oral may have succeeded in terms of number of examples, in presenting her altered text that focused on one criterion, Tatiana had failed to satisfy another criterion for good journal entries. In this classroom a good

paragraph was always supposed to be at least six sentences, which her original written text was. During her on the spot revising, though, Tatiana had inadvertently reduced the length of her original text. After being tripped up in her attempts to cover up her revising and pass off the oral text as the written text by the six sentence rule, Tatiana had to resort to reading her paragraph in its original form—what Tatiana referred to as the "whole thing."

> Tatiana: You want me to read the whole thing? (Reading) I couldn't survive with out paper, pencil and pencil sharpener. I also couldn't survive without food too. I said drawing material because it keeps me calm. I said food because food is what I live off of. Food and drawing material is very important to me. It might sound weird to other people, but it is definitely not weird to me.

Now, though, just as Tatiana may have expected and was likely trying to avoid, what she had written down in her journal originally, before Ms. Wagner had responded to Terrence's writing, was susceptible to the same critique that Terrence's entry had been. Ms. Wagner responded to Tatiana's rendition of the whole thing with a comment about the number of example she had use.

> TEACHER: Ok, So, she did focus on a couple more too, right?

Though Tatiana had not managed to escape being the subject of this critique about failing to zero in on one thing, the teacher was beginning to recognize that this particular interpretation of her prompt was widespread.

> TEACHER: I'm looking at Kristina's and I'm seeing that she did too. How many of you stuck to one thing? One thing. Three? How many of you listed at least two or more?

As Ms. Wagner polled the class, she saw that like Terrence and Tatiana many other students gave more than one example.

Learning from the Teacher's Mistakes

An examination of the written journal entries indicated that many students had clearly initially understood the prompt to be asking for, or at least not precluding the possibility of, several examples. A closer look at the nature of the prompt reveals possible explanations for the students' failure to zero in on one thing.

In her critique of Terrence's journal entry that focused on the number of examples he had given, Ms. Wagner states explicitly that she had intended for students to write their entries about one thing only. With the text of Ms. Wagner's oral prompt written out, though, it can be seen why there might have been confusion related to how many examples were being solicited by the teacher. In giving the original prompt, Ms. Wagner did not actually use the word one. Instead, she said, "What would you take with you?...Something to survive." The use of the word something especially in combination with the helping verb "would" could reasonably be interpreted as "something" plural, or "something" singular, or either. Ms. Wagner intended for something to mean something singular. Most students, however, interpreted the prompt as allowing for many examples.

The prevalence of this particular interpretation by students may have been influenced by Ms. Wagner's reference to a specific event in the text. Immediately before she asked students to write this entry in their journals they had been reading Chapter Five aloud together in small literature circle groups. She prefaced the writing task she gave them by indexing the event described in the following passage:

Brian changed position so he was sitting on his knees. He reached into his pockets and took out everything he had and laid it on the grass in front of him. It was pitiful enough. A quarter, three dimes, a nickel, and two pennies. A fingernail clipper. A billfold with a twenty dollar bill—"In case you get stranded in the airport in some small town and have to buy food," his mother had said—and some odd pieces of paper. And on his belt, somehow still there, the hatchet his mother had given him. He had forgotten it and now reached around and took it out and put it in the grass [italics added] (p. 50).

Indexing that event from the text seemed to implicitly set up for the students a map of the teacher's/the prompt's expectations and a model for their entries. Perhaps because Brian had listed the several items he had that could be used to survive in the wilderness, most students interpreted the "something" in Ms. Wagner oral prompt as a request to do the same. Deciding how to interpret a word with multiple meanings "something" in the prompt was one challenge all students had to take up as they tried to do what they were supposed to do.

Terrence's journal entry had revealed his particular interpretation of the prompt. Tatiana's original journal entry exposed the fact that Terrence was not the only student who had interpreted the prompt as allowing multiple items. Her revised version, though, obscured from view a clue that pointed toward this being a widespread interpretation among the students and, therefore, might have signaled a misunderstanding of the expectations, or a miscommunication of those expectations, rather than lack of knowledge about how to meet those expectations.

Sorting Out Ambiguity Uncovered

Now that Ms. Wagner saw that students had interpreted the prompt in a way different than the one she had intended, she searched for an explanation for the misalignment.

TEACHER: Did anyone hear me say one?

STUDENT: No.

Ms. Wagner asked, "Did anyone hear me say one?" and the students answered that they had not. But this questioning exchange contained the same kind of ambiguity that was present in the prompt. The students simply answered "no," but that no could also be interpreted in multiple ways. The students' answer to her question was about whether they had heard was, "No." But did that answer mean "no, we didn't hear it because you didn't say it," or "no, we didn't hear it even though you said it"? Or did no mean we heard what you said, but we didn't interpret it that way.

The ambiguity inherent in the question and the limited way in which the students answered the question, prevented the answer to the question from clarifying what might have gone wrong. In some ways the question constrained students' possibilities for telling the teacher how they were experiencing the event. The question, as formulated, actually functioned to construct a particular version of reality. That is, that the teacher did in fact say one. The question supplied students with information that they were expected to accept as a given. Ms. Wagner surely thought she had actually said one, and therefore that students could have and should have heard it. In fact though, she did not say it, yet through her question an alternate version of reality was created. In this version of reality,

the issue became not that the teacher did not say "one thing" at all, but that students did not hear "one thing" said.

Another example of this type of interactional pattern can be seen in the feedback exchange with Terrence. After Terrence presented his paragraph, Ms. Wagner said, "Ok, so he gave us a lot of examples didn't he? If that's the way you interpreted that's fine. How many did I ask for though?" Ms. Wagner posed a question that presumed that she asked for a certain number and Terrence seemed to affirm that she had when he answered "one." Students were able to give the "correct" answer—one—not necessarily because they knew it all along, but because when positioned as in opposition to the many examples Terrence gave, it seemed a reasonable guess that the correct answer was one. In this case the formulation of the question guided the student to provide what had now become clear was probably the right answer and it also question compelled students to agree to her interpretation of the prompt. Though now most students were answering that she had asked for one, an examination of students' responses to the prompt across the class revealed that the overwhelming majority of students must have actually understood the prompt as Terrence did since they too listed several items rather than just one.

Constructing the situation as one in which the teacher said it, but the students failed to hear it, was followed by an explicit restatement of the expectations and an admonition from the teacher to students to listen.

> TEACHER: OK, if we were zeroing in on one, what is it? Why do you want it? How do you use it? Where do you keep it? All those are the details for one. One. Why is it important? How will it make you survive? Listen to directions.

After clarifying the importance of zeroing on one, Ms. Wagner shifted to another aspect of the prompt students also seemed to be confused about. She continued to ask for and the students continued to try to provide her with details about the prompt, presumably guessing in order to do so, since many of those details were never actually made explicit.

TEACHER: And then where did I say I wanted that one survival thing to be for? You can't live with out where?

STUDENT: Anywhere.

TEACHER: Did I say anywhere?

STUDENT: No.

Before giving the prompt, Ms. Wagner indexed and briefly summarized an incident from chapter five of Hatchet which they had just finished reading aloud in small literature groups. Brian had just come to terms with the possibility of not being rescued for a long while, if ever.

TEACHER: All right, towards the end of the chapter Brian was going through his belongings that he had on him, his supplies, and how he was going to survive with what he had.

She indexed the event in which Brian decided he must take action if he is to survive. His first step was to take inventory of all he might happen to have that might be useful to him.

TEACHER: He has no choice does he? No, he couldn't pick and choose what he was going to take on that plane. It crashed and he had to have it with him to survive, so he was stuck with what he has. Correct?

STUDENTS: Yes

Ms. Wagner reminded students that Brian was stuck with only the items he had on his person when the plane crashed. She emphasized that he did not choose those items knowing ahead he would be stranded in the wilderness and have to survive with only those things.

Next Ms. Wagner mentioned that Brian did realize he still had the hatchet on his belt that his mother had given him as a going-away gift.

> TEACHER: And then towards the end, he's saying I do have a hatchet, and I really think without even getting into the book yet when you look at hatchet you can already come up with some ideas that you know you could use and act with a hatchet, especially in the wilderness. There's a lot of ways we could use that.

She pointed out that regardless of whatever else he may or may not have, the hatchet would be a useful resource. She added that this resource in particular would be especially helpful in the wilderness context in which he finds himself.

Then Ms. Wagner asked the class to write about what they would need to survive in their lives. She said it should be something they felt they "could not survive without." She specifically contrasted their situation and Brian's situation, emphasizing that "right now" they had choices about "what they would take," but he had not. Whether she was situating that difference in real life or in the hypothetical writing situation, though, was not clear. Students' entries seemed to suggest they weren't exactly thinking of it as either in the wilderness or in their actual lives. For example, Terrence listed things one might need in the wilderness like tools to build shelter, weapons, and food. But he also mentioned a television and radio which would not serve him well in the wilderness. His entry seemed to assume a circumstance of being alone and without access to certain

resources more than anything else. Tatiana's entry mentioned drawing material, which could be used (if not considered useful), anywhere, but her addition of food seemed to imply that she would not have it if she didn't bring it which was not representative of her actual life.

The students' understanding of what survival implied and where it happened was certainly influenced by the novel they were reading. It was probably also shaped by implicit cues in the prompt. This first part of Ms. Wagner's prompt in which she indexed the novel foregrounded details of Brian's context of survival. Brian's context was one of survival, first and foremost, because he was stranded there. Stranded for Brian meant being where he was involuntarily and being stuck there. It was characterized by a lack of resources or an in accessibility to familiar resources, by capriciousness and unpredictability, by inflexibility and loneliness. It was a place where he was an outsider, a stranger, a visitor. For Brian, survival depended on remaining calm and being able to endure the loneliness, boredom, and fear that accompanied being stranded indefinitely.

At this juncture both teacher and students seemed to be growing frustrated with each other. The teacher seemed to be tiring of students not being able, or willing, to answer her questions correctly and students seemed to be increasingly impatient with the teacher asking the same questions for the same reason.

TEACHER: Where did I say? Did I say if you were stranded?

Student: You didn't say nothing.

Finally, it seemed as if one of the things *hiding in plain sight* during this journaling event would come out. A student responded to Ms. Wagner's question, "Where did I say?" with "You didn't say nothing." It could be argued that that comment

was more of an expression of frustration and resistance from the student than an actual response to her question. However, the student may also have been trying to state the opinion that Ms. Wagner had not said anything about where they should imagine themselves surviving as they wrote their entries. This implied claim that the teacher did not specify where seemed to be supported by the prompt, although, again the prompt is somewhat unclear. The only indication of setting in the prompt was the phrase "in your life." An explicit context was never provided.

The prompt may have provided one clue that could have suggested to the students that the setting for their writing was expected to be somewhere other than the wilderness. Ms. Wagner had, in her prompt specifically contrasted Brian's experience with their own saying, "I want you to tell me what would be something that you would need in your life right now to survive...You in your life. Brian has no choice, but you right now, what would you take with you?" Though the contrast of Brian's life to theirs as well as the use of language like "in your life" and "right now" could be seen as indicators that the prompt should not be interpreted as referring to survival in the wilderness. The addition of the question, "what would you take with you" in the end implies being somewhere other than they were at the moment.

In the face of ambiguities, students seemed to rely on the context of the situation. They were reading Hatchet, a book about survival in the wilderness, and the teacher had segued from their reading of the novel to the journaling activity by referencing the inventory-taking in the wilderness scene. So in the absence of more explicit directions to the contrary many students assumed they were to set their writing in the wilderness, too.

TEACHER: No one heard me? What did I say?

STUDENT: If you were stranded in the wilderness?

TEACHER: In your life! Are you stranded in the wilderness right now?

STUDENT: No, we stranded in school.

TEACHER: You're stranded in school, and you could've thought of one thing.

Passing Literacies Hiding in Plain Sight

In this episode Tatiana was deliberately attempting to hide in plain sight. That is, she hoped to conceal from view the fact that the journal entry she shared with the class was a revised rather than an original response. She was trying to appear to have written a journal entry that met certain criteria her original entry had in fact not met. Her efforts were guided by attention to teacher feedback given to another student, Terrence. Tatiana would try to accomplish hiding this information by *covering up. Covering up* is similar to getting over in that the goal is to hide something beneath the guise of appropriate participation. The difference between *getting over* and *covering up* is that students who are *getting over* are hiding something that is somehow taboo—like the sexually explicit nature of reading material. With *covering up*, students are trying to participate appropriately. What they are hiding is something that might jeopardize the appearance of appropriate participation—like having misunderstood a writing prompt. For Tatiana, blending in required hiding what she came to think of as flaws in her original entry, as well as her efforts to correct them, in order to project the appearance of appropriate participation.

Tatiana's efforts to blend in by covering her mistakes hide passing literacies. In order to achieve *hiding in plain sight*, Tatiana was conscious of her own desires, but she also carefully attended to what the teacher wanted in the moment as well as tried to

anticipate what the teacher would want next. What Tatiana wanted was to perform her identity as a good writer and student well in front of her teacher and her peers. Tatiana had shared in an interview that she truly enjoyed school and saw herself as a good writer. She said she liked doing the writings Ms. Wagner assigned in this class. She also wrote poems and kept a journal at home. She even expressed an interest in being a writer, as well as an actress and a fashion designer, when she was grown. In order to perform good writer and student successfully in the context of the journal-sharing event, Tatiana paid attention to Ms. Wagner's critique of Terrence's writing. She then raised her hand to perform rather than read her text which had been adjusted in an attempt to reflect new the most current information available about the expectations. Tatiana, though, had misunderstood something important about how her teacher viewed this activity. This is where Tatiana's plan began to unravel and how her *hiding in plain sight* was spotted.

Since Tatiana's goal was to perform the identity of writer well, she may have hoped Ms. Wagner's response to her writing would be something like, "Okay, now notice what Tatiana did. She zeroed in on one didn't she?" Though, Ms. Wagner certainly did not want to discourage Tatiana from wanting to perform good writer and student, she tended to see this event as opportunity to provide mini instruction through feedback. Toward this end, she regularly pointed out to students that they needed to add more details, that they could have used higher vocabulary, and that they should have included their feelings. Ms. Wagner did occasionally praise students' writing or use the writing to illustrate what others ought to do during writing sharing events like this one, but she was much more likely to find something for students to improve. This did not mean that Ms. Wagner did not want her students to be good writers, or feel like they were good writers,

but in these instructional events she seemed to see her role as needing to push even good writers to be better through critique. Ultimately, Tatiana, with her goal of appearing to be a good writer and student during a journal sharing session by escaping critique, and Ms. Wagner, with the aim of using these opportunities to critique even relatively good writing, were at crossed purposes.

Tatiana's miscalculation with respect to Ms. Wagner's view of the purpose of writing-sharing events was not the only thing that complicated her efforts to perform good writer. This episode illuminates the difficulties sometimes inherent in responding to both the explicit and implicit messages of others. This episode points up the fact that students' failure to do what they are supposed to in class or on tests, or in school in general, should not be assumed to be entirely the fault of students. Nor is it always a result of not wanting or trying to comply with expectations. Instead, sometimes failure to perform correctly is due to the ambiguity inherent in information students are given or directions they are asked to follow. Though, students try to make sense of what they are being asked to do sometimes it defies common sense. Yet, perhaps because of the nature of power relationship in schools students seem to be unable to communicate their confusion or request clarification and are left with the challenge of continuing to try to sort things out on their own.

We Stranded is a case in point. Students were trying to respond appropriately to Ms. Wagner's prompt. Some students, like Tatiana, were going to great lengths to do so, but being able to do so in the face of ambiguous information and unpredictable responses was ultimately dependent not on ability but serendipity. From the beginning students were in the precarious position of interpreting the ambiguous prompt in a way other than

how the teacher intended. After most of them did misinterpret the teacher's clarified meaning, attempts to be responsive to the teacher's clarified intentions, would go unrewarded. In the end the ambiguous nature of the prompt was not acknowledged as contributing to students' performance, instead they were told to pay attention, to follow instructions, and to listen. In this instance, though, students had been doing all of those things. At least, Tatiana had been. Doing them better would not have helped for they still would not have heard their teacher say "one thing in the city where you live" since it was never actually said.

The final comments exchanged between Ms. Wagner and her students reflected the confusion and frustration of both parties related to the episode that had just transpired. From the teacher's vantage point, she had been unable to make sense of what was happening. She had assumed she had given a clear set of directions that her students should have easily been able to follow had they been listening. The students, on the other hand, had made a reasonable and concerted effort to respond to what the understood to be the expectations of the writing task. In the case of We Stranded, both the ambiguity of the prompt, and the challenges facing students in interpreting the ambiguity inherent in the prompt, as well as their strategic actions to adjust to the situation, were covered from view. Students logical, literate, and strategic actions were *hiding in plain sight* in some cases because students like Tatiana were *covering up*, what they felt were their mistakes, or misunderstandings, in order to pass, or to align their actions or products more closely with emerging information about what mattered.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusion: Summary of Findings

The Dimensions and Dynamics of Literacy Hiding in Plain Sight

In this dissertation I have attempted to illustrate and analyze the dimensions and dynamics of literacy *hiding in plain sight* in one middle school language arts classroom. In order to accomplish this I have presented, analyzed, and interpreted carefully selected, theoretically rich vignettes, what I call vignettes, designed to reveal how literacy hides or is hidden and to explain in what sense literacies are simultaneously hiding and in plain sight. Through vignettes, I have attempted to show who hides or possesses hidden literacies, from whom or what literacies hide or are hidden, and for what reasons they might be hiding or considered hidden. I have detailed how literacies are hidden or came to be hiding and to what effect. Finally, I have tried to expose the nature of literacy and literacies *hiding in plain sight* in Room 106. To assist in the analysis of vignettes, I used a theoretical construct I called *adaptive colorations*.

A theoretical construct of adaptive colorations.

In this work I appropriated the biological construct of adaptive coloration in nature as a metaphor for theorizing and explicating the complex and shifting nature and relationship of the juxtaposition of students' identities and the context of the classroom. Through vignettes, I exposed student actions as literate achievements. That, is I demonstrated how students skillfully and strategically read, interpreted, and responded in flexibly adaptive ways to the (con)text of the classroom in order to achieve, or respond to, *hiding in plain sight* through four different mechanisms of *adaptive colorations*—

getting over, covering up, lying low, and *standing out*. With the help of the lens and lexicon of adaptive coloration, I was able to observe and describe the effects and purposes of *adaptive colorations*. I argued that *hiding in plain sight* through *adaptive colorations* manifested in two forms, *historic* and *active*. Students employed *active adaptive colorations* in order to deliberately hide for a variety of reasons; *hiding in plain sight* through *historic adaptive colorations*, though, tended to be the result of being overlooked or dismissed and was unrelated to, or in opposition to, the students' aims.

Adaptive colorations accounted for the phenomenon of *hiding in plain sight* in this classroom. That is, *hiding in plain sight* was an effect of the situated enactment of identities against the backdrop of a context with certain characteristics. Here, identities were defined as identifications with particular communities of practice. In the vignettes students, Keairra, Kristina, Jamal, Tyrone, Terrence, and Tatiana, all enacted various and multiple identities. Students were members of multiple discourse communities across many contexts. Just a few included African American discourse communities, youth discourse communities, and academic discourse communities. Students enacted and combined identities ranging from young, Black female, sexual being to competent pleasure reader; from playful African American orator to possible author of vivid texts; they were voluntary writers and resistors of involuntary writing; they could all enact identities of good student, good reader, good writer.

They were especially competent readers, writers, and students of the context of this classroom. Contexts in this work meant a naturalistic social unit. Here, the naturalistic social unit, or context referenced was Room 106, a particular middle school language arts class. In this context, like any other, there were routine patterns of

interaction that evidenced valued or shared ways of knowing, doing, and talking—or discourses. There were also idiosyncratic events and struggles over resources, status, and material goods. This classroom was the co-construction of many social actors, including those who passed through the classroom door at the beginning of third period and others who never would.

A literate response.

Hiding in plain sight was often a deliberate, strategic accomplishment on the part of students. The goal was to hide. When they chose to blend in, cover up, lie low, or even stand out, it was often related to an attempt to utilize resources they possessed, but that were considered inappropriate or irrelevant in school during "class time". Though they managed to hide through different mechanisms for varied reasons, success was always a literate achievement. In order to evade detection, students had to read, interpret, and respond in flexibly adaptive ways to the sometimes, ambiguous and capricious, contingencies of the context. They had to be knowledgeable about the salient rules, practices, and priorities. They had to be attentive in order to discern and decipher the overt and subtle cues, direct and indirect directives, and straightforward and mixed messages of others.

In response to readings of the context, mediated by the identities they wished to or were enacting, students selected certain mechanisms of *adaptive colorations* from a repertoire of possibilities. In *Hot Maids*, Keairra employed *getting over* to achieve *hiding in plain sight*. By mimicking the salient features of Silent Sustained Reading she was able to cloak the taboo sexual content of her self-selected reading materials. Also cloaked, though, was Keairra's ability to read, or be conscious of and responsive to her own

desires and someone else's simultaneously, what I called her double literacies. I illuminated Jamal and Tyrone's possible literacies *hiding in plain sight* through *lying low*, and Tatiana's passing literacies *hiding in plain sight* as a result of *covering up*. Also shown was how Kristina's African American and resistance literacies were *hiding in plain sight*. In Kristina's case, though, she had not been trying to cover something up or avoid being noticed—quite the opposite, in fact.

Tricking the eye in order to evade detection was not the only function *adaptive colorations* served in Room 106. Another mechanism, *standing out*, was intended to attract or could result in attracting, rather than deflecting, attention. Occasionally, *standing out* seemed to be the consequence of a failed or aborted attempt at *hiding in plain sight* such as was the case when the game of snappin' was exposed. At other times, being noticed seemed to be the goal, or at least an acceptable cost, of *standing out*, as in the case of Kristina sharing her Ghetto Family play with her teacher. *Standing out*, in both of the cases, had the effect of centering students' identities and literacies and transforming, or rewriting classroom contexts, in the classroom. Jamal and Tyrone's game *standing out*, for instance, greatly influenced the course the whole class metaphor game and class session would ultimately take.

Just as students' attempts to avoid detection could result in exposure, students' attempts to call attention could end in *hiding in plain sight*. I explained this sort of *hiding in plain sight* as an effect of *historic adaptive colorations*. *Hiding in plain sight* through historic adaptive colorations resulted when the nature of the students' identities were overlooked or dismissed due to the background against which they were viewed. For example, Kristina's enactments of African American and youth identities showcased in

her Ghetto Family play effectively disappeared when positioned against a backdrop of writing a survival themed essay in standard English. Though, Kristina did manage to get noticed and to gain access to school and classroom resources, African American literacies still remained on the margins. The play was performed at lunchtime, and the relevance of Kristina's work to an activity considered central, LEAP-like essay writing, was overlooked. Kristina, perhaps as a consequence of this missed opportunity, employed *standing out* once again. This time, though, it was to resist writing about a topic that she had previously, voluntarily, intelligently, and artfully, addressed in Ghetto Family. It is in these two ways, through both active and historic adaptive colorations, students' literacies were *hiding in plain sight* in this classroom.

A Survival Context

Throughout the dissertation I have presented excerpts from the novel students read during the study, *Hatchet*, to frame vignettes. This novel about a twelve-year old boy trying to survive after being stranded in the wilderness with little more than a *Hatchet* was an integral and constitutive part of the context of the study. Themes and metaphors from the book shaped and informed topics of discussion, interactional norms, and daily activities. For instance, Ms. Wagner drew on content from the book as a way of both uncloaking and constructing the relationship between herself and students. That is, as students they were Brian, and as the teacher she was the wolf. The students were in her territory and for this reason she had dominion over them. Students also invoked the novel to simultaneously describe and construct the classroom context such as when one student proclaimed, "We stranded in school." I have used the themes and events in a similar way in this text.

These framing metaphors were carefully chosen to highlight certain aspects of classroom life in each chapter. However, as was the case in the classroom, I realize they also contributed to constructing this classroom in a particular way in this narrative. Stories can be read in many ways. In this reading (and writing), I have shown how Brian's context of survival was similar in some important ways to the classroom context as students experienced it. For example, as evidenced in all of the vignettes, students had learned the necessity and skill of carefully attending to others in their environment. Just as Brian discovered, sometimes through painful experience, it was critical for him to pay attention, to listen, to look, and to proceed strategically and often cautiously. Students had also developed a keen capacity for paying attention to and interpreting, often capricious and unpredictable, situations. Keairra, Kristina, Jamal, Tyrone, and Tatiana all demonstrated a sophisticated capacity to be conscious of multiple actors, including themselves, simultaneously and to accomplish their desired goals by strategically adjusting responses to the contingencies of the context in the moment.

Many times their strategic adaptive responses included *hiding in plain sight.*

On Being Stranded (in School): Learning Survival Literacy

As one student suggested these students could be imagined as being stranded in school. In many ways that strandedness was similar to Brian's. Like Brian, they were in an environment in which they were perpetual outsiders. Their time in that classroom was temporary. When the bell rang at the end of fourth period, they left and when the year ended they would move on to the next grade. Brian and the students would eventually leave, but Ms. Wagner, like the wolf, would stay. Because Brian and the students were in another's territory, they had to be especially conscious of and attentive to others as they

learned the rules and norms of the context and sorted out the limits of and possibilities for action there. They were both vigilant and vulnerable because of the capriciousness and ambiguities of the context, frequently finding themselves in the position of having to learn from "mistakes" that had painful or confusing consequences. Brian and the students in Room 106 were also getting by without access to a full range of possible resources. Brian was stranded with little more than a hatchet. The students, too, experienced restricted access to resources, both those they possessed and could have brought with them or used openly in the classroom, as well as other possible resources, that like the survival pack still in the plane sitting at the bottom of the lake in *Hatchet*, could not be or were not accessed because of the particular priorities and overwhelming obstacles of living in a survival context.

Just as Brian's story of survival is a complicated one where a plane crash was at once bad luck and good luck—bad luck to crash, but good luck to still be alive—the students' story of life in a survival context was also complicated. Brian found himself in an involuntary participant in a difficult situation, unprepared and alone. He experienced fear, panic, despondence, and physical pain. He also endured all of those things and learned to live in a challenging context with limited access to familiar resources. He learned to be brave, to stay calm, to be hopeful, and to endure pain. Overtime, he developed and honed effective strategies for staying safe, providing for his basic needs, and increasing his comfort. Students in Room 106 were seasoned survivalists. They too had acclimated and adapted to the conditions of their survival context. Often they did so with limited or restricted access to their full range of literate resources. They had employed and developed survival literacy, strategies, and literacies utilized for survival.

That survival literacy included multiple strategies for *hiding in plain sight* as well as literacies such as double literacies, passing literacies, and resistance literacies. Their survival literacy would (and had I'm sure) serve them well across a range of survival contexts. These high-achieving African American students had a strong will and a sophisticated capacity for survival. So did their teacher, Ms. Wagner.

In a sense then Ms. Wagner's survival literacy was also *hiding in plain sight*. She would attend to shifting expectations and adjust her practices accordingly. She was confident in her ability to do what was asked of her, regardless of what it was or how many times it changed. Just like Brian and her students she could and would adapt to survive. Like the foolbirds and her students she too sometimes relied on *hiding in plain sight* to avoid trouble and achieve success. As she said, "if they want you to do it, just do it because it will keep them off your back later."

Pressure to produce results, a specific kind of results, that is, passing scores on state tests, and to be accountable for those results contributed to the teacher's belief that time was a scarce commodity in the classroom. In this survival context, she and her students did not have the luxury of devoting class time to things that wouldn't be on the LEAP, things like poetry, student-authored plays, and texts written in African American Language. Despite being stranded in an environment of shifting and ambiguous expectations, permeated by threat, scarcity, rigidity, and hopelessness; Ms. Wagner was determined to survive. Some implications of and for the story of survival literacy told through this dissertation are discussed in the section that follows.

Implications: For Teaching and Research

This study has several implications for teaching and research. One implication for teaching is related to the effects of working in survival contexts, namely becoming overwhelmed and paralyzed by or acclimated to the status quo. It is not unusual to slowly get used to and come to accept the status quo, whatever it may be, as normal, inevitable, or unchangeable. But as Kristina and the other students demonstrated, there are ways to accomplish one's aims even under restrictive and challenging conditions. Teachers can push back against restrictive policies and unfair practices. If they decide, especially together, to resist what they don't like or think is wrong, they will find ways to do so. Sometimes those ways will require patience, hope, and a vision of preferred futures. One place to begin might be for teachers to tell their own stories of survival.

I would also propose that teachers might practice spotting literacy *hiding in plain sight* in their own classrooms. Assume they are there and go looking for them. They may not be easy to pick out at first, but powerful and promising pedagogical possibilities for teaching literacy may be hiding at the intersection of student's personal literate practices and the literacy practices most often valued in school contexts. The findings of this study, and others, suggest students' sometimes actively conceal or disguise those practices. *Standing out*, though, may provide the secret key to spotting such hidden literacies. Look for convergence in divergence. Things are not always as they seem. That is, behavior that appears off-task may in fact be cloaking surprisingly literate behaviors. Teachers would do well to consider multiple explanations for student behavior. Teacher might err on the side of viewing their students as more literate, motivated, interested, or competent than they may perhaps seem—they likely will not be wrong.

Finally, teachers need opportunities to consider the context of their own classrooms. Are the contexts of their classrooms responsive to the multiple identities of their students? Are students able to be literate in classrooms in a range of ways, using a variety of media? What role do kids play in shaping the literacy practices of your classroom? Do teachers know what students like and what they are good at; what is important to them? How does it figure in to the classroom? What are the possibilities and constraints in the range of teaching context for centering students and their multiple literacy practices in the classroom? Are students learning to be literate in a survival context?

This work has several important implications for literacy research. New Literacy Studies has advanced more expansive definitions of literacy. There is an acknowledgment that literacy is situated, multiple, and political. Research efforts have focused on the particularities of enacted literacies. Literacy practices that had not received attention before are being documented and described. People that had been constructed as not literate are being shown to possess literacies after all. Despite a preponderance of research that identifies, describes, and labels people's local literacies, there is evidence to suggest such research has had a disappointingly small impact on policy decisions and teaching practices.

During my doctoral studies I have read numerous studies and attended many presentations that have recounted in great detail the sophisticated and flexible ways in which students are literate, and then lamented the lack of attention to or interest in those literacies in school contexts. Much of that research argues, as my study does, that the failure to notice or make use of certain literate resources students' possess is linked to

marginalized identities of youth, particularly from minority populations. Many studies have critiqued the phenomenon, but fewer have studied it. What is needed and what this research attempts to do is to understand the dimensions and dynamics of that phenomenon. To explain how and why literate resources are overlooked, dismissed, or ignored in classroom contexts. This study has illuminated a specific line of inquiry that bears further study; one that investigates the roles students may play in the phenomenon. Explanations offered by previous research have tended to locate responsibility for the problem with classroom teacher's failure to understand or unwillingness to see the relevance of certain resources to school-based learning. Though, this study discusses that possibility, it focuses on the role students play. In doing so, I have been able to show that literacies may also come to be hidden as a result of deliberate, strategic action on the part of students. In other words, students are hiding literacies through literate action.

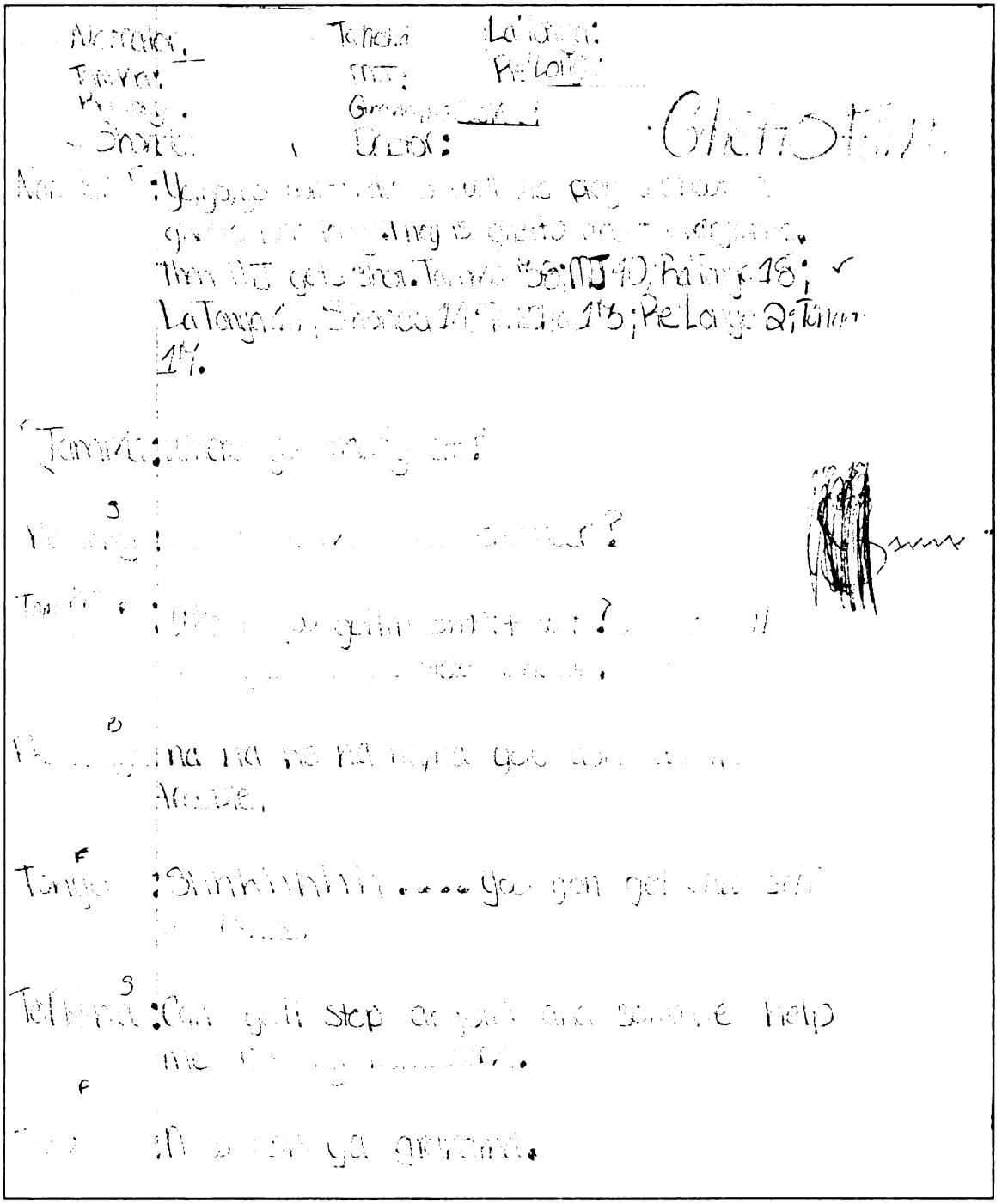
This study was situated in a "failing" school but examined the practices of high-achieving or successful students. Few studies look at the effects of narrowing curricula on high-achieving students in failing schools. Studying seasoned and successful survivalist might provide us with more insight regarding students' strategies for negotiating survival contexts. For instance, findings associated with Tatiana's *covering up* in We Stranded elicit questions about how the condition of hyper-vigilance required in a setting like this from students (and teachers) impacts literacy learning (or teaching).

Finally, this research identifies and names *hiding in plain sight* as a phenomenon that ought to be studied. There have been studies that have gone into students' homes and recreational spaces to document the resources students have access. Studies have suggested how those resources might be utilized at school, or tapped to motivate students.

There has also been work that has suggested how school environments might be altered to resemble students' out-of-school learning environments. This study argues that students carry their resources with them to school; they may not reveal them, but the careful observer who knows what to look for just might catch a telltale glimpse. That spotting might uncloak an intersection of pedagogical possibility that possesses the same latent potential of flint and steel to produce a spark of interest or a flicker of engagement in the classroom.

Appendix A

Student Writing: Ghetto Family



S
RaTonya: [illegible] old [illegible] she can't [illegible] help you.

S
Tenesha: Dun. She [illegible]

F
Tonya: [illegible]

S
Gra[illegible]: [illegible]. What she call me young [illegible].

S
RaTonya: I [illegible]

B
Ra [illegible]: She [illegible]

S
[illegible]: [illegible] you [illegible] on my [illegible],

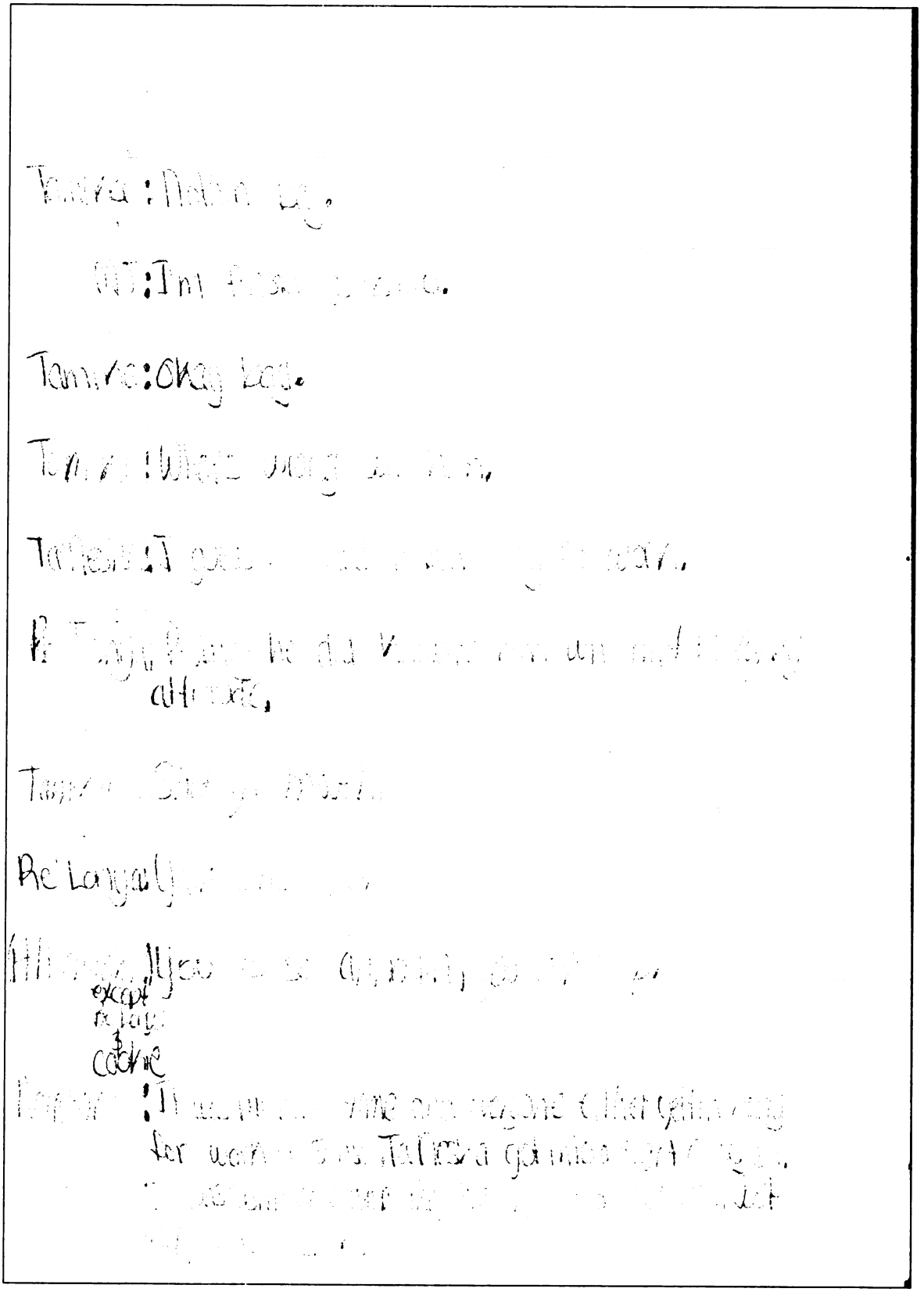
B
Grandma [illegible]: [illegible]

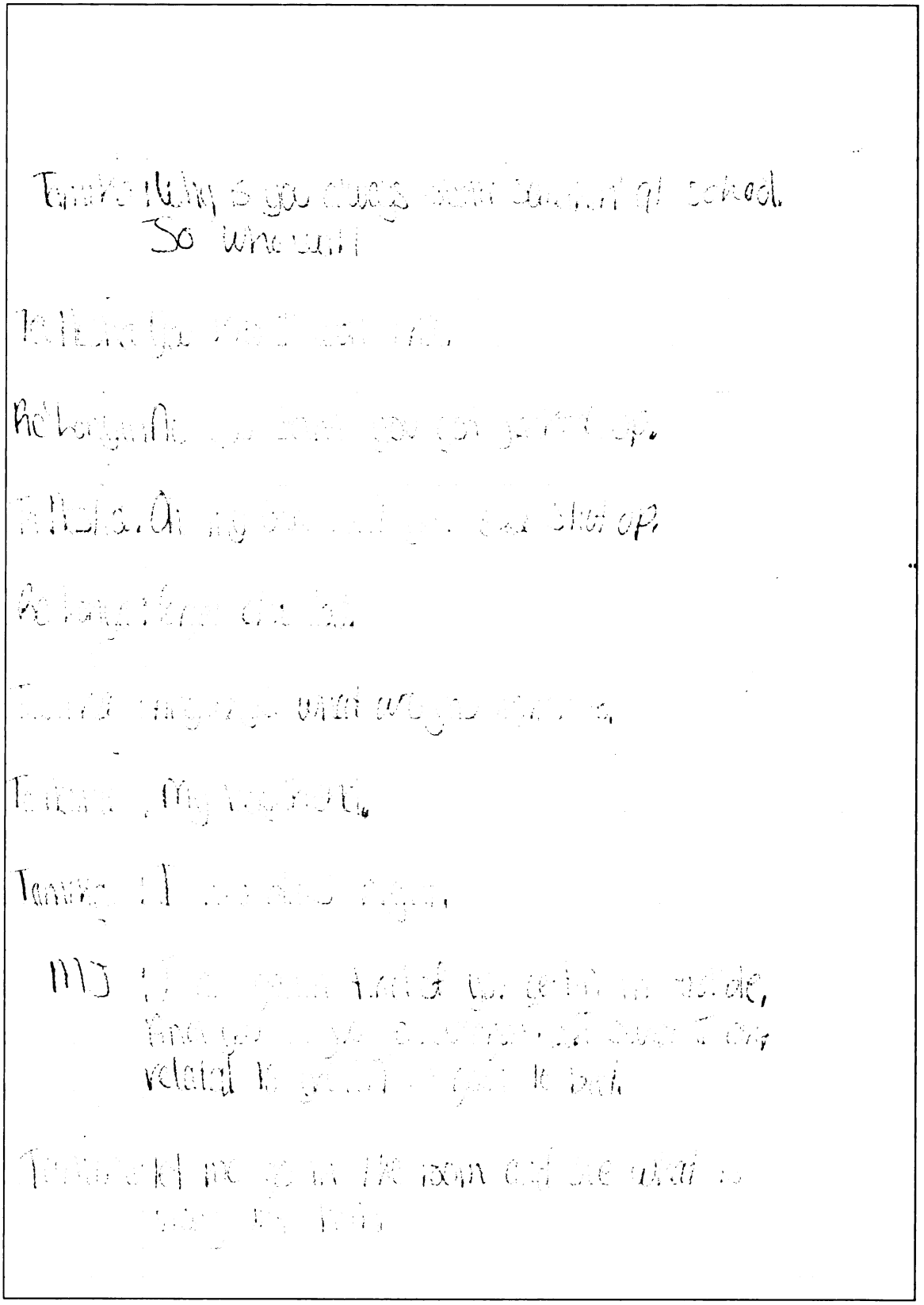
B
Ra[illegible]onya: [illegible]

S
Grandma [illegible]: Don't [illegible] the [illegible] whop. yo butt.

B
RaTonya: [illegible]

B
[illegible]





[illegible] : So Tamra walked in the room, I would [illegible] to get happier.

MJ : hey day.

Tamra : [illegible] you [illegible] go[illegible] you [illegible] pregnant?

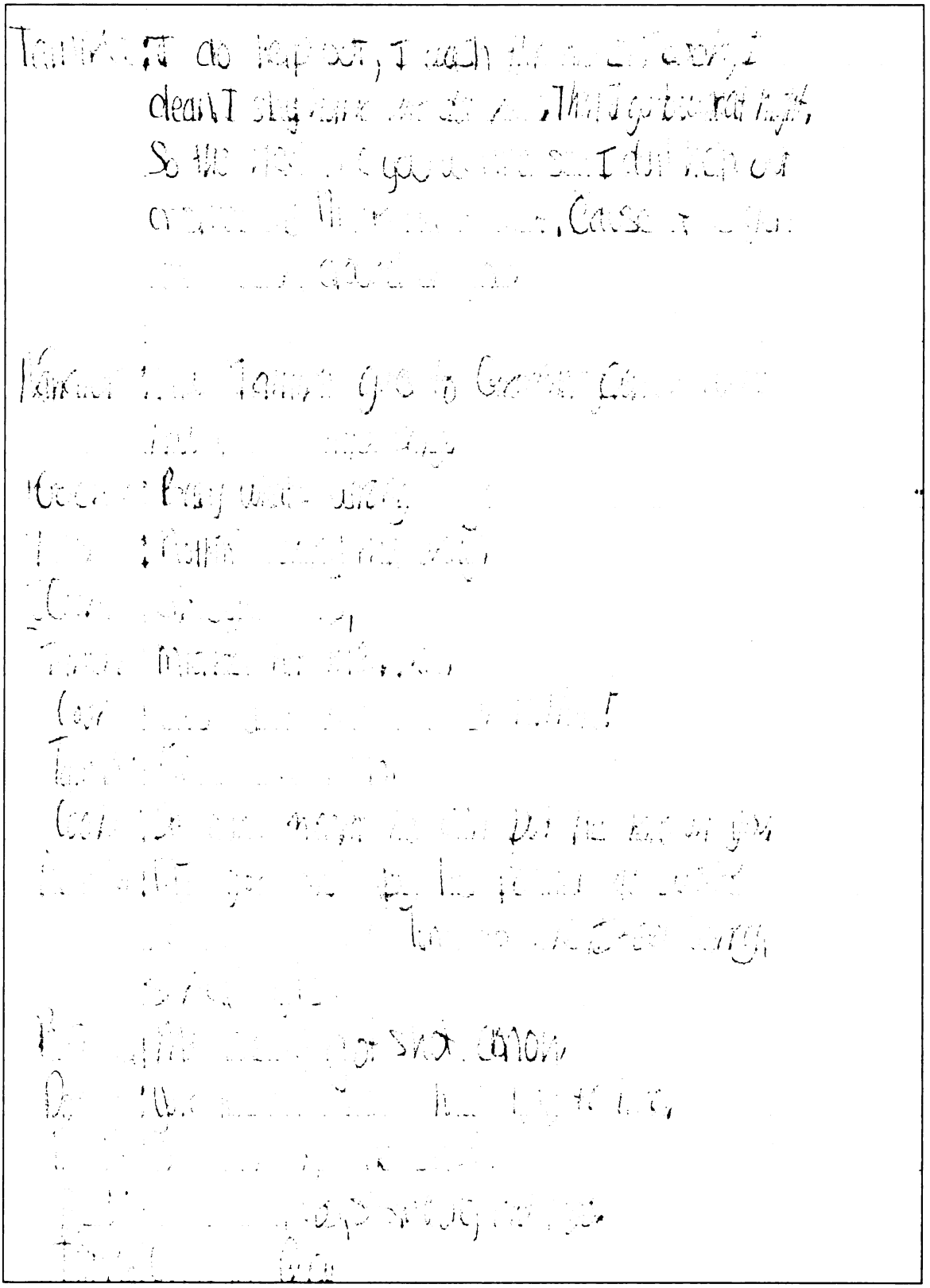
MJ : No, [illegible] make you [illegible] like dat?

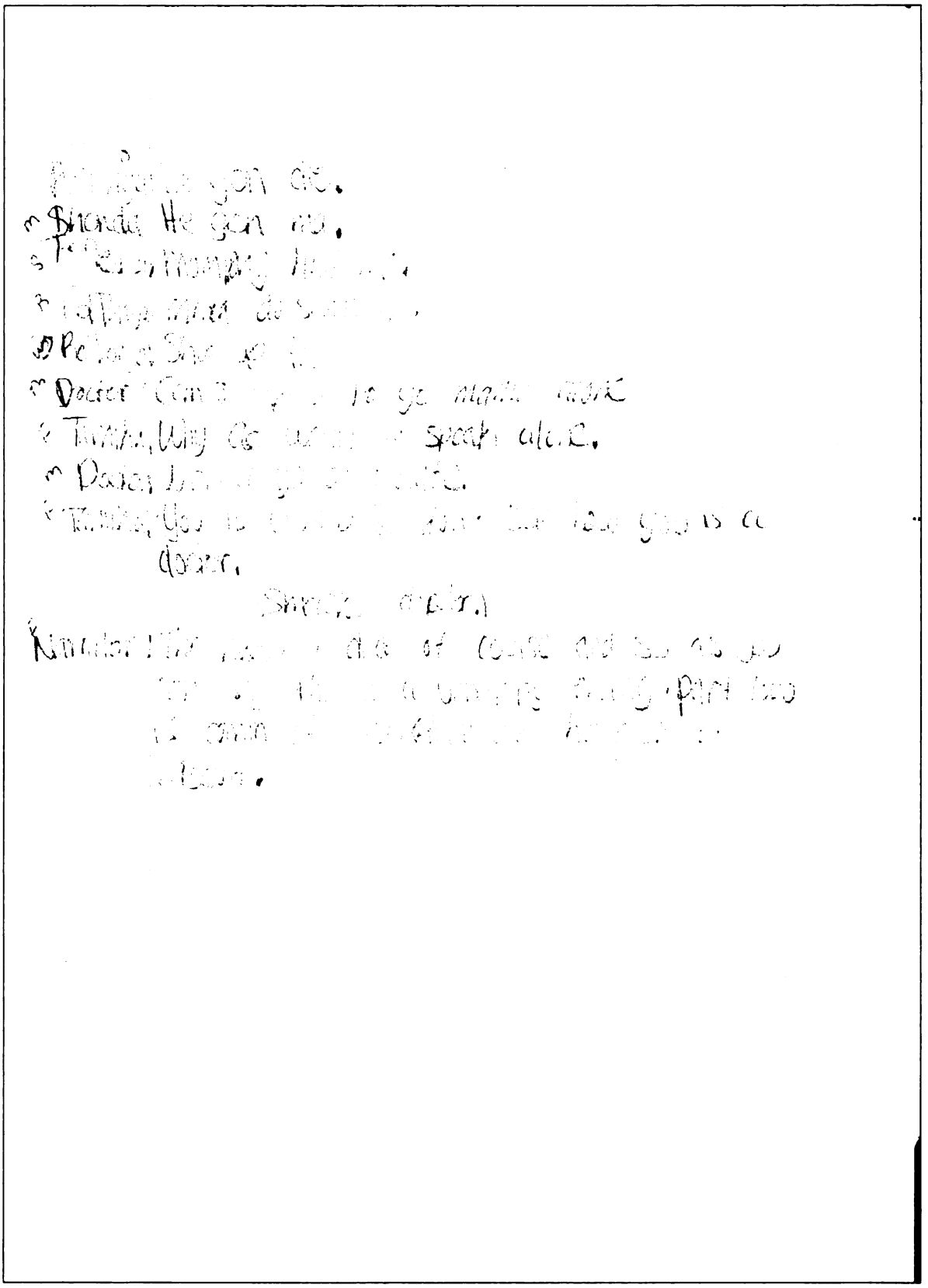
Tamra : C[illegible]

MJ : I can [illegible]
(Smacks Tamra)

Tamra : Oh, [illegible]

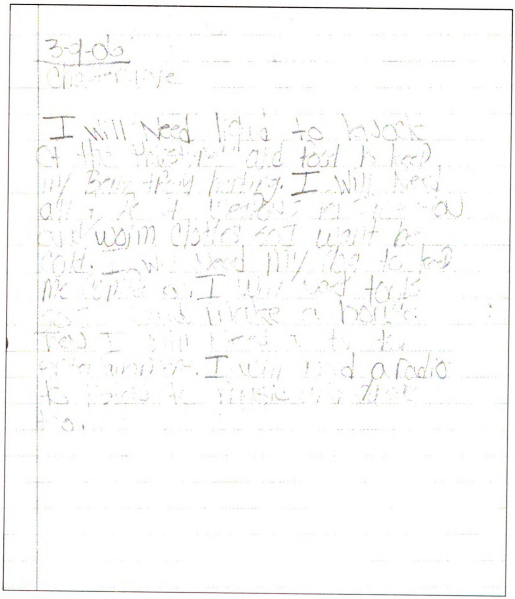
[illegible] you [illegible] [illegible]
Maybe [illegible] I can be
[illegible]





Appendix B

Student Writing: Terrence's Journal Entry



Appendix C

Student Writing: Tatiana's Journal Entry

Chp. 5 3/[illegible]/0[illegible]

I could not [illegible] without paper, pencils and a [illegible]. I also would [illegible] for. I [illegible] drawing [illegible] because [illegible] me calm. I [illegible] because food is what I [illegible]. Food and drawing [illegible] very important to me. I might [illegible] for drawing material, but it's true.

I could not even [illegible] without my [illegible] things. [illegible] are important to. [illegible] important [illegible] because drawing keeps me calm. Drawing is also how I express my feeling and imagination. My [illegible] introduced [illegible] to drawing.

introduced

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