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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, PERFORMING IDENTITIES AS LITERATE FOURTH GRADERS VIA (D)ISCOURSE IN A TESTING-DRIVEN CLASSROOM, by MEADOW SHERRILL GRAHAM was prepared under the direction of the candidates Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

PERFORMING IDENTITIES AS LITERATE FOURTH GRADERS VIA (D)ISCOURSE IN A TESTING-DRIVEN CLASSROOM
by
Meadow Sherrill Graham

Students in every classroom construct a (D)iscourse of literacy that reflects not only who they are but their environment as well. (D)iscourses are more than just dialogues, rather they integrate not only the cultural values and norms of that situation, but also the specific language needs (Gee, 2001). Additionally, (D)iscourses reveal the internal narratives of individuals as they present themselves within context to others (Bruner, 2002). The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) introduced new influences on school and classroom environments. NCLB implemented standardized, high-stakes testing to measure student, teacher and school performance, attaching serious consequences to not meeting appropriate norms (Allington & McGill-Frazen, 2004). Thus the tests, and the need for specific results, frequently influenced classroom practices (Valencia & Wixson, 2004). This research explored these influences upon students' (D)iscourses during classroom literacy events through three research questions: (1) What are fourth-graders' (D)iscourses of literacy in a standards-based/testing driven world? (2) What or whom mediates those (D)iscourses? (3) What do the (D)iscourses reveal about the fourth-graders' developing identities as literacy learners?

Data sources included classroom observations by the researcher, audiotaped classroom dialogues, participant student and teacher interviews, as well as student

artifacts. Constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) viewed through the lens of critical literacy theory (Giroux, 1990) was used to analyze the data. Methodological rigor was established using the criteria of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The students' (D)iscourse was found to be personal, pragmatic and particular. It was mediated principally by their teacher through her role as the filter of knowledge in the classroom. Her role as filter shifted with different classroom requirements (such as standardized testing) to become a project manager, a coach/trainer and a gatekeeper. The students were found to have detached themselves from school literacy, developing self-reliant or ambivalent stances toward literacy. These results illustrate the collision between traditional and progressive philosophies in many schools today.

PERFORMING IDENTITIES AS LITERATE FOURTH GRADERS VIA (D)ISCOURSE IN A TESTING-DRIVEN CLASSROOM

by
Meadow Sherrill Graham

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Walking into an elementary school hallway, most observers expect to see neat rows of children walking up and down in lines, and as they proceed down the hall, they expect to look into classrooms colorful well-lit rooms where children sit quietly in rows, write at desks and listen to teachers. As U.S. citizens, our nostalgic ideals and imagined expectations for school generally involve lots of small girls with blonde pigtails and little boys with freckles sitting in desks and learning, where learning is defined by carefully taking notes and raising hands to answer teachers' questions. In this setting, only the teacher initiates conversation. Children only talk with one another at lunch or at recess. Talk plays little or no role in the business of doing school. Moreover, most Americans tend to believe that talk should not be a part of school, instead learning through listening should be the modus operandi. This notion though is beginning to be challenged by many educational researchers who have begun to see how talk is actually an important learning space in the classroom (e.g. Dyson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Purcell-Gates, 1995)

When I first began teaching, I taught third grade in an urban southeastern school. Talk in the classroom was significantly contested in my school, as my principal believed that any room where voices other than teachers' were heard was not adequately preparing students for the end of grade test. Testing was a major hurdle for my students. Third

grade was a gateway year, meaning that my students, had to pass the test in order to continue into fourth grade. I strongly believed that my students would be best prepared for the test through a collaborative learning environment, which allowed for student talk, constructive learning and exploration of new topics dictated through student interest. My principal didn't agree with me. Nevertheless, I choose to hold onto my beliefs; I closed my door and taught third grade differently than any other teacher at my school. My students choose the books they wanted to read and wrote about them. They wrote creative stories from their own imaginations and published their works. I used their choices as jumping off places for instruction and tailored mini-lessons to the skills they needed. Tossing out our science and social studies textbooks, we researched topics of interest and current relevance making "books" of our findings and sharing them with each other. Working in groups, reading while laying on the floor (or in closets if that was comfortable!), taking nature walks and spreading out our work on tables and the floor was the way we set up our classroom community. On the whole, I was vindicated; my students did very well academically, many of them moving from failing to passing over the year. Almost more important to me was that my students enjoyed third grade, many of them actually understood school for the first time. This sparked my thinking as I considered what made this year different for my students. I honed in on talk. Talk in the classroom facilitated their learning, as for the first time in school, they actually discussed things as they learned them and used those discussions to integrate their new and previous knowledge. We became a community via talk and shared experiences. Being part of Miss Sherrill's class involved an identity we created through our time and talk together.

The space in which talk happens in the classroom can be considered an entity of its own. This *talk space* is where a classroom of children (and their teachers) interact, forming an interactive community (Gilles & Pierce, 2003). Within this space, learning occurs as questions are asked, information is exchanged and understandings individually or communally developed. Additionally, students lean on this process of talk to develop individually as they interact socially and in the interests of learning (Lewis, 1997). Thus talk in the classroom affects not only individuals' learning, but also their internal thinking, as well as helping to develop a communal ethic or lingo.

Discourse Theory

Ideas concerning talk in the classroom lead in the concept of d/Discourse. Many theorists have developed concepts of discourse over the last several decades (Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 1980; Gee, 1996; Van Dijk, 1997). Discourse in fact is a loaded term with many different implications and can be thought of in two major categories (Lewis, 2006; Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui & Joseph, 2005). Discourse with a *little d* can be thought of as any language interactions situated in social encounter (Gee, 2005), though many theorists extend that definition to include more than just the spoken language, but also gestures, relevant texts, pictures and other visual and auditory stimuli (Fairclough, 2003). Gee (1996) defines *big D* discourse as a specific, coherent *little d* discourse which defines a group of people. These types of Discourses act as identifying marks for those who speak and understand them. Their Discourse serves to exclude or to act as a passkey for speakers in social situations. Thus Discourse includes not only the typical terminology used by the speakers, but also the inside jokes, gestures, ways of speaking to superiors versus inferiors, relevant textual or pictorial knowledge and the

general rules of engaging in a encounter with another person (regardless of the other person's knowledge of the Discourse). D/discourse is learned as speakers enter into each new situation. Each time a person enters a new situation they are socialized into the language of that situation, a *big D* discourse, which integrates not only the cultural values and norms of that situation, but also specific language needs for the situation (Gee, 2001). Thus, language is not static for a single situation, but rather changes as different situations require different language uses.

Discourse in Schools

In schools, there is also a standard Discourse, which is often defined as white-middle class (Giroux & McLaren, 1992). When kindergarteners (or new immigrants) enter schools, They are expected to bring with them a set of experiences that prepare them for school (Purcell-Gates, 2002). In this set of experiences is not only content knowledge (e.g., numbers, colors, understanding of books, etc.) but also a set of knowledges that comprise a schema for what school is like such as how to behave, typical school day occurrences, when to talk and not to talk, etc. Oftentimes there is a mismatch in what students know and what schools expect (Giroux, 1992). In fact, when the students' known Discourses do not match to the Discourse of school, they must quickly learn a new social Discourse as well as begin to learn the academic business of school (Janks, 2000). Many times students with this type of mismatch are judged to have lower academic capabilities, no matter the reality of their personal knowledge or intelligence (Stubbs, 2002). The mismatch often causes them to often be labeled as *at risk* (Nieto, 1999) and considered to be culturally deficient (Delpit, 1995).

Examining the Discourses present in schools is important because it reveals not only students' internal ideas about what their culture says school is but also how they interpret any mismatches between the reality of school, their cultural background and their own thoughts. Discourses are often referred to as *identity kits* or a set of knowledges that if properly implemented, a person could appropriately use a Discourse and present themselves as a group member (Gee, 2005). This means that Discourses offer a window into the interworkings of a group or individual. An examination of Discourse shows what items or persons are given significance, what activities are present, what identities or roles speakers take, what sort of relationships are valued, what politics or perspectives on the distribution of power is acceptable, how connections are made between people, places and things and finally what knowledges or sign systems (multiple languages, communications systems, etc.) are privileged in the Discourse (Gee, 2005). Through an analysis of Discourses it is possible to develop not only a picture of a Discourse, but to reveal the underlying themes in a Discourse, thus exposing the participants' identities (Gee, 2005). Discourse is not neutral, but rather politically charged and can be evaluated for political purposes (Fairclough, 2003). As each individual reacts through the lens of a Discourse, they intertwine their knowledge of what is correct for a Discourse, and their own identity (which includes but is not limited to their cultural background, knowledge of other Discourses, personal beliefs about the world and themselves). This research hopes to illuminate the point where all of these influences intertwine.

When Discourse is situated in schools, academic subjects bring in another influence to alter and affect Discourse (Lewis, 2001). Academic knowledge is often part

of a prevailing Discourse (simply think of all the vocabulary knowledge needed even for an elementary math class: addition, subtraction, divisor, dividend, fraction, numerator, to name a few!). Additionally, in schools, most talk, even in talk friendly classrooms, centers around academic subjects in order for necessary learning to be accomplished. Literacy skills are particularly intertwined with Discourses, as literate skills are simply textual embodiments of oral talk (Dyson, 2004). This means that as students interact about literate skills and events (i.e., reading and writing), they are also interacting with a variety of Discourses, the Discourses that they may personally identify with at home or school, a classroom community Discourse, an official school Discourse, represented by the curriculum or teacher, or the various Discourses represented by their classmates. This results in a very complex interaction, where students must negotiate the meanings of multiple Discourses to understand information and also make themselves understood.

This research will examine the Discourses of fourth graders in an American public school. The focus will be on their Discourses of literacy, namely the talk that takes place around reading and writing events in the classroom, in order to gain a greater picture of not only what a Discourse of literacy for fourth graders is, but also to employ grounded theory to elucidate how Discourses of literacy allow the fourth-graders to perform their literate identities. The research questions for this study are:

1. What are fourth graders' Discourses of literacy in a standards-based/testing driven world?
2. What or whom mediates those Discourses?
3. What do the Discourses reveal about the fourth graders' developing identities as literacy learners?

Background and Rationale for the Study

While asking questions in order to describe the discourse of students is not new (e.g., Dyson, 2002; Gee, 2000; Rogers, 2002), these questions situate the Discourses within a specific landscape, thus giving them significance. This landscape is the current U.S. school trend, which features standards and high-stakes testing.

The United States landscape of public schools currently demands that each state develop a system of standards to be taught in schools by highly qualified teachers. The progress of students must be monitored via end-of-grade tests, which are high-stakes in nature, meaning that if students do not pass they do not progress through the school grades. These changes were implemented nationally with the advent of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Ostensibly, the law is to ensure high quality instruction for every child in America. Nevertheless, the high-stakes nature of its implementation can be problematic for schools (Spillane, Reisner & Reimer, 2002). Schools with children progressing at acceptable levels receive funding; those who are not lose funds and can be subject to "reorganization" and takeover by the state in order to remediate the failing school (Ruth, 2003). In order to ensure meeting theses acceptable achievement levels, many schools have emphasized test prep to the degree that teachers must discontinue collaborative teaching styles in favor of rote learning (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005). Time spent learning subjects other than reading and math is often reduced in order to assure the receipt of the holy grail of *adequate yearly progress*, a statistical measure, which determines whether or not a school passes the bar for learning (Dillion, 2006). All of this leads to constantly changing curricula and immense testing pressure on children and teachers.

Some educators postulate that the push for accountability is particularly odious as standardized tests, the most lauded form of assessment in American education, are often unreliable measurements (Linn, 2000). Many believe that standardized test questions do not measure knowledge, but rather measure the opinions of the mainstream, thereby excluding minorities from high scores (Luke, 2003; Meier, 1995). Scholars have asserted that the lack of high scores does not necessarily reflect a poor education, but rather reflects social location, as many minority students are socially located outside the mainstream American society that determines the correct answers due to language, poverty and politics (Allington & McGill-Frazen, 2004; Willis & Harris, 2000). Family income is also linked to scores, as wealthier children can afford coaching through expensive tutoring programs in order to ensure high scores (Corwin, 2001), again excluding many minority children from access to the code of how to unlock the tests. From an educational perspective, standardized tests provide problematic assessment information (Valencia & Wixson, 2004). Many standardized test scores do not correlate across similar tests, thus the reliability and validity of the tests come into question (Linn, 2000). Whether or not test scores reflect actual student learning is also currently debated (Wixson & Yochum, 2004). Nevertheless, standardized tests have been chosen by federal policy makers to become the bar for school success (*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*). Schools are measured for how well they educate students and students are promoted based on their standardized test scores, regardless of the accuracy of the measurement (Allington, 2002). Scores are seen as an easy way to quantify school success and thus have become the main assessment tool for school children (Ruth, 2003; Triplett & Barksdale, 2005). Thus it is important to consider other aspects of educational

success, such as using Discourses to understand children's literate identities, which reveal their relationship with literacy practices.

Fourth grade holds a unique place in U.S. school systems. Standardized testing begins in third grade, as required by *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, though many states begin testing as early as first grade. Fourth graders, therefore, have experienced several years of the pressure of testing. In the fourth grade, typically, in addition to state tests administered to determine annual yearly progress for schools, fourth graders also must take also national exams to assess state progress under *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. These exams test reading and math skills (*National Assessment of Education Progress*, 2006). Thus fourth graders are tested multiple times during the school year, in fact many fourth graders experience up to (and possibly more than) thirteen standardized tests each school year (Dooley, 2005). Additionally, fourth grade also typically contains a formal statewide writing evaluation. Therefore, fourth grade is a grade particularly driven by standardized tests and assessments, which determine how the school, district and state compare with others. Therefore, testing pressure is a very real essence in the fourth grade, for teachers, students and schools.

The current study is important because it sets children's Discourses of literacy against the backdrop of the American school climate currently. Little research has been done to elucidate how students react and shape themselves as learners in this new era of testing and standards, therefore this research seeks to begin to understand how students' perceptions of school, literacy and themselves are reflected in their Discourses amidst the landscape of testing and standards.

Essential Beliefs about Language

Essential in any study about Discourse is an understanding of how language works to reveal the personal, social and communal aspects of situations. This section will describe how I view language, in order to illuminate the theoretical framework that this research draws upon. This framework draws upon theories of language as developed by Bruner, Bakhtin, Bourdieu and several critical theorists.

Literacy Theorists

Bruner (2002) posits that narratives, spoken or written, are one way that people present themselves to others. Their narrations reflect who they believe they are and in fact the process of constructing a narrative helps them to construct their views of themselves. These models are influenced by the societal restrictions and identifications of what is appropriate for self-image. Narratives constantly adapt and evolve according to their circumstances, allowing the speaker to alter how they present and view themselves easily through a simple continuance or addendum to the story, which allows flow to continue uninterrupted. Thus, Bruner believes that people construct much of their identity through narration and story telling. This medium allows them to focus and evaluate their thoughts and emotions as they tell their stories through words or text. Narrative is also flexible, and thus narrators do not feel locked into what they say as a permanent reflection of themselves, rather narratives change over time and through multiple retellings.

For a further examination of narrative that moves past monologue into dialogue, we look to Bakhtin, a Russian literary theorist who wrote during the 1930s and 1940s. Bakhtin (1981) felt that all words hold a significance created together by the speaker and

the context. In fact, out of context, words lose their meaning, as they no longer are oriented towards the object, which gave them meaning, instead they float along without a purpose or fate. Language is a living breathing thing in which different languages, or *heteroglossia*, vie for preeminence in a society, such that no language is spoken without being laden with underlying meaning, for one group or another. Heteroglossia can refer to either actual different languages (i.e., Spanish, English, Russian) or to different Discourses. All of these pieces come together to create a coherent dialogue for the writer or speaker.

Bourdieu (1991) builds on the idea that Bakhtin (1981) began, that language is a political act, and that as people dialogue, they participate in different forms of cultural politics. Bourdieu coined the term *habitus* to describe how individuals typically fall into a pattern of behaviors which reflect their cultural background, family, and life experiences. This leads to a reproduction of typical societal structures as people act out the same behaviors they learned from those around them during their lifetime, thus reproducing the status quo. Language is a form of habitus in which the speaker reproduces the language usage patterns of the society in which they originated. Habitus is formed as language users combine the forces of linguistic rules with the forces of social rules in order to produce appropriate language, in order to reach the results desired by the speaker. Bourdieu explains this concept via an economic model. He contends that speakers choose to use language which will serve their purposes by bringing them specific profits or rewards, or rather their results are a reflection of how well they expressed their needs. This develops into a sense of habitus about what language is effective. Knowing this is important because the correct language habitus confers power

in certain situations, as social situations are dictated by the language patterns or Discourses, used by the speakers. This sense of habitus contributes to a persons' cultural capitol, or the knowledge that they bring with them into each new or old social situation about how to most proficiently negotiate the situation to meet their needs.

Considered together, we learn that through narratives individuals construct views of themselves (Bruner, 2002), which are oriented to the context and social setting they are participating in (Bahktin, 1981). When the narratives they produce are effective for describing themselves and navigating the complexities of a given dialogue situation, a trend will appear in the individuals behavior (Bourdieu, 1991), such that they develop a way of speaking which allows them to both effectively consider their internal points of view, while still efficiently interacting with others in society in a way that ensures listeners and respondents, thus employing a *big D* discourse.

Critical Literacy Theory

Given the above view of dialogue, it is also important to consider how literacy skills or actions affect these spoken interactions. Critical theorists contend that literacy is an important tool for sparking political discourse (e.g. Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1990, 1992; Shannon, 2000). Critical literary theorists hold that learning literacy (reading/writing) allows learners a new stake and voice in their world as they now have skills necessary in order to positively affect change in their surroundings (Giroux & McLaren, 1992). Freire (1970) in fact taught literacy to adults using ordinary everyday words which sparked opinionated discussions from the learners by speaking into the circumstances of their lives. When this happens, more than surroundings change, but rather, the literacy learners develop a new identity as a literate being who has a role as a

change agent in their world. An empowered identity, which is gained through access to literacy skills, is essential to critical literacy. Thus I believe that literacy is a tool for learners to begin to change their unjust surroundings. To do this, literacy learners need not only to learn literacy, but also to develop of a sense of literate Discourse, which is appropriate for their surroundings and a habitus about what is effective for literate Discourse. Only then can they begin to change their surroundings.

Overview of the Study

A study of literacy and discourse in the classroom is valuable to describe not only the speakers' identities, but also to use these events to help illuminate injustice in the lives of literacy learners. Discourse inherently exposes the language that is vying for prominence in a society, as well as the underlying social tensions, which are revealed in how the discourse is conducted by the participants. It is my hope that this study will not only illuminate the Discourse patterns, mediators, and motivations of fourth-graders, but that it will also be useful in showing how the climate of U.S. schools might affect the identities and Discourses of students, in such a way as to make for a call to action that might affect change in school policy.

To that end, this naturalistic study focused on one fourth-grade classroom, which is contextually situated within the environment of testing and standards. I visited the classroom several times a week to observe and record dialogue taking place around literacy events. During these visits, I identified focal children to focus on their particular Discourses during the observations. These children were interviewed several times over the course of the study to understand their perspectives on literacy. Additionally, I interviewed the classroom teacher, as well as administrators and local school district

officials to build an understanding of the greater school, district and state context of the classroom. Using constant-comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) influenced by critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2005), the data was analyzed in order to build an understanding of the Discourses of the fourth-graders, as well as the factors mediating their Discourses, and how they use Discourse to perform literate identities. Trustworthiness was established by ensuring prolonged engagement, triangulation of data, emic perspective, persistent observation, and member checking.

The remainder of this dissertation will present a literature review concerning the relevant literature that has inspired the questions put forth in this introduction (Chapter 2), the methodology for data collection and analysis (Chapter 3), the context for the research (Chapter 4), the analysis of the data (Chapter 5) and a final discussion (Chapter 6).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review was constructed and viewed through the lens of the my essential beliefs about language. I believe that through an individual's words much can be learned about their view of themselves. Bruner (2002) states that oral narratives are ways in which individual's share their stories. Building on this understanding of this, Bahktin's (1981) ideas about the contextual nature of dialogue adds to the picture. Furthermore, Bourdieu's (1991) concept of habitus of language, or how an individual's use of language that is useful and therefore powerful for a situation, dominates what speakers choose to talk about. Finally, critical theorists believe that language is powerful for changing circumstances. Speakers can change their life situation through literacy, as literacy knowledge can help them break into the language that holds power in a given context (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1992). Taken together, these four ideas, frame my understanding of what occurs during Discourse. As individuals interact, they are not only constructing themselves through their speech, but also reacting to context, using language that they feel is effective for their situation and attempting to change their circumstances by tapping into the power structures of the language within their context. This does not mean that what they intended their language and speech to accomplish will work; in fact, much of the literature outlines the mismatch between a person's understanding of what language will change their circumstances and the actual language habitus that they have acquired. Additionally, there can be conflicts between their own voice and identity and

the actual language needed to accomplish their goals. Thus, language use is fraught with complications. Speakers must not only negotiate their own identity and purpose of speaking, but also must consider the context and the power structures of that context in order to achieve their purposes.

Literacy Acquisition

Halliday (2004) asserts that children have three stages of language learning: (1) learning language, (2) learning through language, and (3) learning about language. As children learn language they make connections between what caregivers say and what they do, thus effectively increasing their vocabulary. Once a vocabulary is established, children learn through language, by beginning to use language for pragmatic purposes, employing their limited vocabulary to ask questions, demand care and make statements. Later they begin to learn about language, at which time they begin to develop an elaborate grammar about how language functions, including such mundane matters as subject-verb order and agreement as well as what language is appropriate for certain circumstances. Even from a young age, children will catch onto clues that yelling is appropriate for playing outside and not sitting in church, and frequently they grasp these distinctions without any adult prompting. Thus children develop a complex grammar, which includes the structure of language as well as a sense of habitus about language usage. Typically, their structure and habitus will reflect that of their primary caregiver, as it from them that they learn the majority of their vocabulary and with them that they first experience the world.

Likewise, Cambourne (1995) established several conditions for learning language. He outlined seven conditions, which make literacy acquisition possible for young

children. *Immersion* in language in necessary, learners must be surrounded by language events. *Demonstration* ensures that children have opportunities to connect actions with specific words. When learners are engaged active participants in language, *engagement*, they learn by virtue of trying out the language forms they observe around them. *Expectations* from adults and others around the learner ensure that learners feel a certain amount of pressure to perform and thus, they are more likely to be engaged and to attempt language production. Learners take *responsibility* by making choices about what to engage in, which direct their learning. When young learners are attempting to learn language, *approximations* are acceptable, as no one expects a one year old to correctly pronounce every word in the dictionary. Instead their attempts are rewarded with a *response* from listeners and eventually conventional pronunciations and grammar structures replace their approximations through a natural progression. A similar context is necessary for children to learn literacy.

Typically, the first step in literacy acquisition is developing an understanding that oral language maps onto written language (Purcell-Gates, 2002). When students are able to make that connection, they are on their way to developing literacy skills. Then through teaching and an environment (either home or school, and preferably both) that provides a place for children to experience Cambourne's learning conditions, they will begin to develop literacy skills (1995). Therefore, because literacy acquisition mirrors the process of oral language acquisition, young children's writing and oral reading will reflect their oral language skills. If children's oral language is reflective of a dialect or includes other languages, their written words will typically reflect the same vocabulary and habitus they have in their speech (Heath, 1983). Since, literacy acquisition is so

closely related to a child's oral language acquisition, it is natural that literacy reflects their identity in many ways. Considering Bruner (2002) and Bahktin's (1981) views of language, oral language is often viewed as a window into the mind of the speaker as they negotiate their context, purpose, words and audience, hence literacy also reflects those same considerations. Therefore, literacy interactions are a reflection of a person's identity. Research has repeatedly examined both literate expressions and students' interactions surrounding reading and writing events to develop an understanding of how they construct their identities through literacy interactions (McCarthey & Moje, 2002).

Therefore, this literature review will examine how previous research has shown how identity is shaped through literacy events and practices; then, it will examine how literacy events are shaped by the context within which they occur; and finally, it will provide a review of relevant Discourse studies which bring these two themes together to illustrate how identity is shaped via literacy practices within an overall context.

Literacy and Identity

Significant research has been conducted to illuminate the connection between reading and writing events or interactions around those events and how this plays into the identity construction of the students involved.

Identity and Writing Events

Identity is shaped by writing events. Mahiri and Godley (1998) conducted a case study that chronicled a college student, who was no longer physically able to write due to carpal tunnel syndrome, began to seriously question her identity as a literate being. This experience changed her identity as a literate being, as without writing skills she began to believe that she was not intelligent and actually doubted her numerous other intellectual

achievements, affecting her view of herself as a role model for younger girls. Without writing abilities, major facets of the student's identity, even outside of literacy were shaken.

Moje (2000, 2001) found writing was connected with school identity and literacy processes as adolescent students wrote in the "genre" required for school, even though writings they did outside of school reflected a more personal identity. Moje's example of a seventh grader, Chile, shows a girl who told and wrote vivid, dramatic stories and poems outside of school, which reflected her life and Mexican heritage. In school, though, Chile's writing, while skillful, was unreflective of her larger identity. Chile chose to keep some of her identity away from school, though writing was a continual outlet for her to construct her identity outside of school.

Students, like Chile, frequently use writing to position themselves in relation to others and their schools. LeCourt (2004) examined autobiographical writings of college students and found that throughout their autobiographies the students continually retold their stories in such a way as to reposition themselves in accordance with the assignment, teaching style and expectations of their classroom experiences. The students chose how to position themselves to either accommodate or critique the dominant worldview in which they operated as college students.

Egan-Robertson (1998) used a writing club with eighth-grade girls to examine how they personally and socially enacted their personhood or identity. She found that girls altered their voiced identities depending on the particular setting. Additionally, the social setting also seemed to influence how the girls positioned themselves and each other as they reacted to the values of the wider society.

This same type of reinvention of self is found even in young children. Flint and Cappello (2003) found that elementary school children used writing to enact the person who they wanted to be. Each child established a voice that in many ways reflected their desires for their identity, rather then their actual classroom position. This allowed them to reinvent themselves through writing and to try on new identities and to see how others reacted to those identities via author circles in a writer's workshop.

Purcell-Gates and Waterman (2000) also found that adult women in El-Salvador were able to alter their identity through writing. As the women developed their writing skills, they felt empowered by the fact that they could not only read important documents but that they could also construct them. This helped the women to see themselves as dynamic role-players in their community, as they realized that they could make their voices heard through their writings.

Thus writing is not only a reflection of a person's identity, but through writing a person can choose to enact certain parts of his/her identity as his/her actions are socially mediated, and additionally writing can allow people to reinvent themselves and then use sharing situations to share or try out these new identities on the people around them. My study will not only focus on writing, but will also include reading, which is discussed below. Additionally, these studies took place within progressive classrooms, where students were encouraged to interact and talk together. While many testing-driven classrooms do incorporate elements of student collaboration, the ultimate goal in testing driven classroom is individual achievement on a standardized test. In progressive classrooms, rarely is one event used as a major assessment measure and many assessments may be communal in nature, showcasing the learning of multiple students.

Identity and Reading Events

Reading events can shape a person's identity. Reading and consciously transacting with the text allows readers to develop their identity as they carefully considered not only what the text says, but also what it means to them (Sumara, 1998). Reading is important for identity because books provide readers with a place to interact with characters, who they may admire and then emulate, or who they may dislike and choose to perform their identity in opposition to. Additionally, reading abilities play an important role in how students begin to construct themselves as literate beings who play a role in academic life.

Möller (1999) interviewed first graders about what being a reader meant to them. The first graders in this study showed that reading ability affected their identity by verbalizing how reading made them feel. One said "I get proud when I read" because reading allowed her to feel competent as a student. They found pleasure in reading as well as power in their ability to make choices. These students, though young, were able to not only construct their personal identities, but also to begin to construct identities as literate people.

Reading and discussing books allows older students to construct and refine their identities. Broughton (2002) described a group of Hispanic adolescent girls who engaged in a book club discussion. As the girls discussed the issues presented to the characters in the novel, they were able to reflect upon their own life circumstances, interactions and personalities as the characters offered a mirror to see their own lives through. Likewise, Sutherland (2005) studied a group adolescent African-American girls who used reading to negotiate their identity. These girls viewed book characters in opposition to their own

identities, as the characters represented a white identity, while they chose a Black identity. Literature allowed them to articulate suppressed identities about being minorities in a majority culture. In fact, since the girls in the group shared an ethnic background and many experiences, they were able to jointly construct identities through their dialogue about the book, pushing one another to consider themselves in a different light, according to the situation brought out in the text. Broughton (2002) also found that girls used interactions with each other to negotiate their identities through their discussions.

My study will consider these findings about reading, but in the context of all literacy events, as writing, reading and oral language are intertwined. Furthermore, again the contexts of these studies were small group interactions in a cooperative learning model, which is different in my study. Thus, reading and writing are important on their own for the ways that they encourage students to think differently and construct their identities. But in the context of the classroom, literacy events present a social opportunity for students to not only learn together, but to also begin to negotiate their identities within the context of literacy interactions.

Literacy in Context

Context is key for literacy events, not only because it provides the space in which the events take place, but because students react to the context as they participate in literacy events. Moreover, they also bring with them their experiences from other contexts, specifically their experiences with literacy in other contexts, which can affect how they interact within a classroom.

Family Context for Literacy

The family context for literacy is important to consider because skills and knowledges, which children learn at home, are what they bring to school. First, though, literacy acquisition must be considered as all children's first tastes of literacy come through oral language, which is learned at home.

Children are first socialized is the discourse of home (Gee, 1989). This is important because the discourse of home may or may not reflect the discourse of public institutions and other social situations. Heath (1983, 1989) found that the discourse of home varied by the culture of the home. She found that in poor white homes, oral stories were characterized by straightforward narrative that told a true story, incorporated a moral, and demanded a quiet listening audience, while in poor African American homes, oral stories were marked by exaggeration that elucidated characters and interpersonal interaction in the form of audience participation. Thus these children were socialized to very different oral language discourses as children.

Along with a developed discourse which might not fit into the discourse of school, Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) found that often times student had skills which were not recognized at school, which they referred to as *funds of knowledge*. Funds of knowledge do not have to be academic skills (i.e., reading, writing, numbers) but can be cultural, artistic, business oriented, agricultural, religious, linguistic, etc. These funds of knowledge are skills and groups of knowledge which the children learn from family members or friends at home. While these types of knowledge rarely have a place in school, they do represent a type of social capital that the children bring from their home context into the school context. Recognizing these knowlegdes are important

for teachers, because many children whom teachers believe to have no knowledge to contribute to the classroom, actually have many valuable skills, if only teachers could tap into them. Furthermore, when teachers acknowledge these alternative skills in the classroom, children frequently responded better to specific school knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005).

When considering literacy knowledge that students bring with them to school, virtually every child brings some types of literacy experiences to school with them. Heath (1983) described how culture effects home literacy practices. She found that every child was exposed to literacy, but that the context of exposure differed. In middle class families, children where coached in literacy activities via direct teaching and constant questioning by the parent. Working-class white parents modeled literacy through literate activities such as letter writing and personal reading, as well as reading storybooks to their children. Working-class African American parents instead involved their children in oral situations which might include a literacy event, but did not provide direct literacy instruction to the students, thus their children learned to use environmental print to accomplish tasks for their families and saw formal print used only for church and other sources of news. Heath found that these different types of interactions prepared children for the literacy activities in school differently, such that some were more prepared for the traditional literacy events of school than others.

Rogers (2002) documented an African American mother who negotiated complex literacy tasks, such as constructing a petition and navigating social services, but was paralyzed by the literacy of school, reading only on a 4th grade level in the academic realm. Her literacy skills where only relevant in certain community-based situations.

This was reflected by her daughter who also struggled with literacy in school situations, despite the powerful ways she saw literacy used at home. Likewise, Compton-Lilly's (2003) ethnographic work focused on the literacy of urban first graders and their families, found that these families placed a high value on literacy, a reflection of the mainstream discourses about literacy. Parents described reading abilities as necessary for survival and also as a way to do better economically and socially. These parents considered reading ability a valuable commodity in their communities, even if that emphasis did not always translate into school success for their children. Gadsden (1992) also reported that African-American families emphasized literacy for life in their schools and communities when she interviewed multiple generations of adults.

Purcell-Gates' (1995) examination of a non-literate family found children with a lack of understanding of the purpose of print, thus, while the children had developed complex oral discourses for many aspects of life, they had no reference point for print use in their primary discourse, and thus a literate discourse played no role in their primary discourse. Therefore, the children struggled with literacy skills in school, as without a home model, they saw little overall use for literacy in life.

Cairney and Ashton (2002) found that the ways that families read texts together prepared students for different school experiences, whether their family discourse about text required the children to perform or show their knowledge, whether it was about adult knowledge performance or if it was about mutual meaning making. Each different practice set the children of those families up to experience literacy learning differently in schools. Thus, family spoken discourses and literate discourses learned in the home context, influenced how children experienced literacy learning in school.

Overall, whether through language learning, or family literacy practices, the way children experience literacy at home influences how they will interact within the classroom, as it changes their background knowledge and expectations of literacy (McCarthey, 2000). This contributes to how they develop an identity as a literate being. While, for the purposes of my study, family literacy is not an emphasis, an understanding of how students experience literacy in their families is necessary, in order to truly gain an understanding of what the students bring to school with them as prior literacy experiences. These studies provide a necessary background to studying children's literate identity development in any context.

Classroom Context for Literacy

The context found in the classroom can greatly influence how children experience literacy. Frequently, the context of literacy events in the classroom, or how the classroom is set up for literacy activities, as well as the values of the classroom about and for literacy can greatly influence how children experience literacy events, thus affecting their identity as literate beings. Studies of the discourses within the classroom context typically focus on how teachers construct their literacy classrooms and instructional models though some studies do consider children as part of the context (Cazden, 1986). This model means that teachers' voices are heard over children's voices (Evans, 2002). In fact, much work has been done on how teachers interact with students, through their lesson structure, questioning patterns, and general talk with their students (Cazden, 1986). This section will focus on specific studies where classroom or learning contexts have been examined in relation to how children react and participate within them.

Ares and Peercy (2003) examined how classroom context shaped students' participation in reading and English instruction. They found that the way the teacher presented information and introduced literacy events greatly affected how the students wanted to participate in literacy learning. They analyzed participation according to the three types of teaching structures used by the teacher, whole group instruction, small group work and independent work, and found that most instruction was presented in a whole group situation which focused on talk coming from the teacher. Thus, they found that students were bored and felt that the focus of instruction was basic comprehension, rather than on deeper meaning, therefore, they disengaged from literacy. The structure of the classroom, and its many outside forces (such as state curriculum mandates) affected how the students came to participate in literacy, and ultimately how the saw themselves as literate beings. Nevertheless, this study focused on teacher practice and student response more than student identity construction through talk.

Lewis (1997, 2001) did a close examination of how focal children participated in literature discussion groups in a fifth/sixth-grade multiage classroom. In a classroom climate emphasizing academic excellence, the students took on shifting social roles as they attempted to negotiate that climate, so that they performed their literate identities in ways that brought them attention. Here, the literature discussion acted as a vehicle for their identity performances, by providing a backdrop for social interactions to affect their identities.

Alvermann, Young, Green and Wisenbaker (2004) also found that students negotiated identity during a literature discussion, mostly via social positioning. As the students discussed, they controlled the discussion, its pace, topic, and general order. This

allowed students to take on different social roles, as a leader, or even as the slow reader. In this they were able to try out and familiarize themselves with different identities through their discussions. These frequently had to do with gender relations as well as stereotyping by social classes. The students were able to socially position each other, themselves and absent friends/contemporaries through their talk, thus choosing identities for themselves and others. Therefore, the context of the literacy event (here, the literature discussion) was key in providing the students with a way in which to enact their identities.

Similarly, Evans (2002) found that fifth graders in her study understood the components of a successful literature discussion and knew how to position themselves within their groups for a successful discussion. In fact, Evans found that the children most likely learned more about power relationships within groups, than actual literacy content, despite their evident enjoyment of the groups, which also increased their reading skills. This finding led her, along with other researchers (e.g., Moje, Willes & Fassio, 2001) to call for further research to examine what underlying messages classroom structures are actually teaching children, socially as well as academically.

Likewise, even within an expressive classroom structure, students choose to follow traditional academic norms even if space is allowed for difference (Moje et al. 2001). Moje et al. (2001) examined how a classroom using a writing process approach, which included student choice, did not liberate students to bring many out of school literacy practices into the literacy classroom. Thus, instruction designed to be motivational cannot be taken for granted within the classroom, but must be continually interrogated to ensure that it is indeed drawing out excellent work from students.

Unfortunately, Moje et al. (2001), found that students did much more vivid, dramatic literacy work at home.

Oldfather and Dahl (1994) considered classroom structures designed to provide elementary age learners with motivation. These aspects include a classroom culture which honors voice, shares responsibility for knowledge, and a literacy curriculum that supports meaning making and the opportunity for social interaction. They found that students in classrooms using these structures were more motivated to learn and articulated an identity that situated themselves as learners.

McCarthey (2001) examined how adolescent students perceived good readers and writers in the context of their classroom curriculum. She found that when reading was oriented around a test, good readers were not perceived to have well develop literacy skills, but rather high test scores. Writing, which was not test oriented, produced good writers who were described as creative. Thus, the different classroom structures dramatically changed how the students perceived literacy skills and thus how they enacted them in the classroom.

Overall, classroom context is very important to how students experience literacy. Whether it is through classroom structures, teacher interactions or assignments, how students perceive literacy and choose to participate in it can vary with the classroom context. This also can greatly impact how students construct a literate identity, not only by encouraging or discouraging their skills, but also by helping them to develop their identity through literacy activities. In these studies, progressive educational practices take center stage, as most of the studies centered around literature discussion groups. Additionally, the studies did not truly consider literacy practices a whole, but rather

focused on one aspect of literacy, such as reading or writing. Teachers also were the central players in these studies, whereas in my study, the actual interactions of the students will be central.

Peer Interactions as a Context for Literacy

One final contextual element to consider is the role of peers in shaping how students understand and interact with literacy, as well as negotiate literate identities. Naturally, peer interaction often is determined by context, as seen in the discussion of classroom context, but this section will provide a more in-depth look at what happens when peers interact around literacy events.

Because literacy events are situated around language, they are natural avenues for peers to interact and engage in socially constructed meaning (Smagorinsky, 2001). In fact, Bobola (2003) found that students were able to write more intelligently and exhibit more transfer of knowledge from a literature text if they were allowed to discuss it before having to write about it. Additionally, their writings reflected the discussion over the text, revealing how integral peer interactions were in constructing that knowledge.

Even at young ages, children are able to negotiate literacy events when working together (Korkeamaki & Dreher, 2000). In fact when interacting in groups, even the kindergarteners in this study were able to use facts obtained from informational texts to teach their peers. They found that the children involved in these types of interactions were able to provide mutual scaffolding as they attempted to unravel their text. Important in this also, was the element of motivation, when peers were interested in a topic, they had a vested interest in interpreting the information and therefore drew on all their mutual and individual knowledge sources. In that same vein, Jones (2002) found

that seven and eight year old children took on different roles within learning groups, which allowed them to have separate jobs that made for smoother collaboration, while also playing to individual's talents.

Forman and Cazden (2004) found that pairs of students who worked together multiple times on similar tasks, overtime they gained more complex strategies of peer interaction. As the pairs in this study attempted to solve the successive problem situations, their strategies gained coherence and complexity, moving from random combinations to a strategy using isolated variables and then into a systematic combinations strategy, which was highly efficient for the situation. The pairs learned not only how to most efficiently solve the problem, but also how to work together well from their repeated exposure to cooperative problem solving.

Lewis (2001) highlighted how a peer relationship facilitated learning reading and social skills for one low status, poor reader in a classroom. When the teacher in the room convinced the most popular and academically advanced boy to act as a peer tutor for a much lower status child with academic difficulties, this not only helped the boy academically, but also socially. The high status child transferred some social capital to the low status child via their working relationship turned friendship. Also, the high status child's positive view of literacy and learning, helped the lower status child to consider a positive literacy identity as socially acceptable.

Matthews and Kessner (2003) examined how peer status affected peer interactions, especially within situations that did not include an adult. They found that more knowledgeable and socially powerful peers often control group dynamics, leaving less knowledgeable and less popular students outside of the group. Fifth graders from

Evans (2002) research also voiced similar problems with bossy students. Additionally, Matthews and Kessner (2003) found that group literacy tasks do not necessarily serve individual needs, as slow learners may be overtaxed, while proficient learners are bored. These research studies present the darker side of peer interactions, where instead of serving multiple pedagogical purposes, peer interactions in fact lead to greater social stratification within a classroom and did not serve the academic needs of many children involved.

Peer context, or the way that students interact within the classroom, can greatly affect how they approach and view literacy. Peer interactions can effectively scaffold literacy learning, or they can teach more about social positioning than actual literacy, which can have greater consequences for students both academically and socially. There is a need to continue to consider how peer interactions around literacy events affect the literate identities of other students both positively and negatively. In my study, this is be examined through the lens of Discourse.

Overall, the context within which students are situated both personally and in school can greatly affect their literate identities. Within a specific context, literacy events occur which allow students space to construct their identities both as individuals and as literate learners.

Discourse Studies

Discourse studies bring together both identity and contextual elements as they examine the interplay between students and teachers through classroom interactions. Discourse studies hold that language is “situated action” and “perspective-taking” (Gee, 2001). This means that language use is a cognitive action, which allows a person to

interact specifically with their context, where they learn to communicate different views, within new context or experience, collected via their prior experiences. Thus, speakers actively interact with their context to create their own perspective on a situation, which becomes part of their identity. Once speakers realize that certain contexts and situations have a certain language format associated with them, they have been socialized into a Discourse (Gee, 1989). A specific Discourse integrates not only the cultural values and norms of that situation, but also specific language needs for the situation (Gee, 2001). Studies of discourse consider how language and identity interact to create communities as well as individuals. The studies considered here specifically look at discourses within literacy events.

Cairney (2000) specifically investigated how students construct literacy in schools. He conducted a large qualitative study across four different elementary schools in Australia, observing and interviewing in eight classes. Using discourse analysis of transcripts, he found four different constructions of literacy, "literacy as performance, literacy as knowledge, literacy as negotiated construction of meaning and literacy as 'doing school'" (p.499). Each of these constructions reflected the social-cultural view of literacy construction, which holds that literacy is mediated by social circumstances and by the culture of each participant in the circumstance. Literacy as a performance, meant that children performed for adults; literacy as knowledge, meant that children showcased their knowledge during literacy activities; literacy as negotiated construction of meaning meant that the students and adults interacted to form an understanding of a text based on their mutual experiences and interpretations; and literacy as doing school meant that literacy activities showed that students understood the procedures of schools. Students'

discourses contributed to their identities and how they viewed literacy skills and actions within their context. This was a very broad study, which while offering sweeping generalizations, does not hone in on the intimate practices found in a close examination of one classroom.

Michaels (1981) landmark work on sharing time, or "show and tell" within a kindergarten classroom highlights how different home literacy styles were appreciated in the sharing time interaction, while other were not. The students who did not provide the teacher with the straightforward oral narrative she desired found themselves interrupted and cut off mid-story. These children expressed their frustration to the researcher, as they felt that the teacher asked too many questions and interrupted the flow of their story. They did not feel valued as literate members of the sharing community. This could easily affect their literate identities, as their own modes of story telling, reflecting their home discourses, were not acceptable.

Dyson (2003, 1997) studied groups of first graders, who created a Discourse within their writer's workshop by using elements of their home context including popular media, which allowed them access to literacy learning. In multiple ethnographic projects, Dyson documented how when a teacher allowed elements of popular culture, in the form of stories and songs students experienced in the media, to become fodder for literacy events in the classroom, the children where able to make connections between their home Discourses and school Discourses and thus negotiate literacy learning. Students combined their own thoughts, their school experiences, their home experiences and popular culture texts to make a literacy Discourse that is mixture of their home and school Discourses (Dyson, 2002). This Discourse was what allowed the children to make

the all important connection between their own oral language and print (Dyson, 2004). Dyson believes that allowing students to connect multiple discourses from different sources (i.e. home, media, etc.) will allow students to form literate identities in ways that do not condescend upon their home culture or primary discourse (Dyson, 2001). This study focused on home-school connections, namely popular media, within a progressive classroom, and while considering home/media contexts, did not consider the greater school and political context of literacy events, which my study considers.

Heath (1983) also considered what happened when teachers altered their classroom practices in accordance with their newfound knowledge about the different home literacy patterns found in their students communities. When teachers made allowances for these differing discourses and allowed them into the classroom, she found that the students were significantly more motivated by the school work as well as more successful. Heath (Ball & Heath, 1993; Heath, 1993) continued this work with inner-city adolescents, which found that through arts the students were able to construct an identity, which considers both their home discourse and the school discourses. In these studies, students participated as joint ethnographers as they conducted arts projects (e.g. filming a movie, dance), which served as a venue for synthesis of discourses. This study, like many others, focused mostly on teacher practices to facilitate home-school connections, between the home discourse and the school discourse, without considering the larger political context.

Typically, a schooled discourse is constructed in every classroom, which reflects both the peccadilloes of that room as well as typical school features. Kantor, Green, Bradley and Lin (1992) examined how a preschool teacher taught her students to

appropriately participate in the school discourse of circle time. They found that even within a preschool classroom, students had to negotiate and learn how to participate within multiple discourse communities, based upon the different activities occurring in the classroom. These discourse communities were based solely in the classroom and the teacher taught the students how to participate in them via her discipline of their behaviors and talk. Since school discourse patterns start even in preschool, Kanter, et al. (1992) worried that there could be long term consequences for learners who continually are required to use only schooled discourse patterns in all school experiences without ever considering the other discourses they know (i.e. home, media, etc.). While, this study described preschool discourses, it did not set the school discourses within a larger context, which affects how those school discourses are constructed, as my study will do.

Fang (2003) found significant differences between children's abilities to master traditional academic discourses according to social class. Students from low social class did not do as well as middle social class students when it came to the conventionality, structure and language in their writing in academic genres. Fang believed this reflected the differences in the home discourses of the students.

Similarly, Sipe (2000) examined children's discourse patterns around read-aloud events in the classroom. The classroom setting included significant participation by the first graders which allowed for the interplay of multiple discourses during discussions. Sipe found that the students had three different ways of dealing with the discussion, by interpreting the text, by relating the text to themselves, and by aesthetically responding to the text with an imaginary response. The children made these multiple responses because they were given space to interact around a specific literacy event, which allowed them to

form much more complex interactions and identities within the discourse. This type of complex discourse space is only typically available in certain classroom environments, ones which emphasize talk, hence this study is designed to examine a classroom where talk is not as valued.

Chin, Anderson and Waggoner (2001) also looked at discourse within a literature discussion. Instead of investigating the types of responses, they examined who held the power of responding. They found that when teachers attempted to give students more power, the students gained power to interpret the book as they chose, but that the power for determining turn-taking and other management issues typically still resided with the adult in the situation. This highlights how in the classroom, often times student interactions are highly mediated by teachers, no matter the circumstances.

Phelps and Weaver (1999) also looked at how teachers could transfer power of discussion to students. They ultimately found reasons to caution others as many times students would silence each others voice in how they reacted to their viewpoints. Instead of facilitating identity development, students were stunted in their growth by the discussion within the classroom, as social hierarchies played a major role in whose voice and discourse was valued in the discussions.

Gee (2000) interviewed students from multiple social classes and found that upper middle class teenagers where able to seamlessly shift between discourse styles, which allowed them to place their identity within a world of technology, personal knowledge or achievement via argumentation, while working class students were ruled by social and emotional identities. Gee posits that these differing identities show how the teens are prepared to take part in an ever-changing technological world, with upper middle class

teens anticipating changing the world, while working class teens saw school and technology as permanent authorities. This shows that more than just literacy skills are needed in the world today, but additionally, an identity that helps learners negotiate the challenges of today's society is also essential.

Discourse studies are valuable because they allow for the interplay of classroom context, individual context and other factors upon the literary interaction of students. These interactions provide a window into the identity of the students and how they construct and perform their identity within the situation, especially as a literate being. Given the political context of schools today, as discussed in Chapter One, there is need to consider how students develop discourse and identity within the literacy classroom. Previous literature focuses on how teachers' actions affect students and does not take into account the current political climate affecting schools, focusing on the disconnect between home and school, rather than the disconnect between students in classrooms and the political mandates. Additionally the studies typically take place in progressive classroom, which have plenty of room for talk and interaction among the students.

Nevertheless, the question remains as to what happens to the literate identities of students who do not reside in such progressive classrooms, because despite different classroom experiences, those students still construct an identity through their discourse interactions in school. They still perform as literate beings, just under different circumstances. This is of particular importance as many schools jettison progressive methods for more traditional, scripted approaches to teaching (Ruth, 2003). How students position themselves as literacy learners is important because in the world today that is driven by technology and other social forces, "literacy [skills] won't purchase

much here" rather students must be prepared to interact with a continually shifting world (Gee, 2000, p.419). The type of literate identity students develop in school then is an essential item to consider, particularly against the current backdrop or context of standards-based/testing-driven classrooms. This research study is designed to illuminate these subtleties.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

During this naturalistic study of the literacy interactions within one fourth-grade classroom, several different types of data were gathered. The classroom teacher, Erika Dawson, was interviewed, as well as four focal children. Some additional children and available (and willing) administrators or officials were also interviewed for supporting data. I, as the researcher, also regularly visited the classroom over the period of three month, during which time I took field notes of classroom occurrences and recorded classroom literacy interactions, both in whole group and small group settings. Additionally, I made photocopies of certain student work, which played a role in the literacy interactions. I also took photographs of the classroom as a record of the physical layout. Once all of the data was obtained and transcribed, I analyzed the data using a combination of constant-comparative methodology and Critical Discourse Analysis. First the data was coded for themes, then the themes were collapsed to build larger categories. The data was then carefully coded by category in order to build saturation of data in each category. Within categories, key incidents were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis, which built a stronger understanding of each category. The categories were driven by the desire to answer the three research questions:

1. What are fourth graders' Discourses of literacy in a standards-based/testing driven world?
2. What or whom mediates those Discourses?

3. What do the Discourses reveal about the fourth graders' developing identities as literacy learners?

Critical Discourse Analysis

The methodological framework of this study was strongly influenced by critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis is a data analysis method designed to look specifically at a piece of talk interaction in order to evaluate it for greater meaning within context (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2005). Gee (2005) holds that discourse analysis is best used to determine how language interactions are used to build a social reality. Typically, the activities that take place within the dialogue fall into seven different categories: significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections and significance for sign systems and knowledge. *Significance* pertains to how the interaction has a situated meaning and value within the context, namely, what is important or given importance by the interaction. *Activities* are the social setting or specific task situation the speakers are involved in. *Identities* concern how the speaker's identity or group identities play roles in the interaction, and how those identities are affected or transformed during this interaction. *Relationships* consider how interpersonal relationships affect the interaction and how relationships are socially situated within the interaction. *Politics* deals with the distribution of social goods or cultural capitol. This means that some sort of status or power defined through issues such as class, race or gender plays a role in every interaction, which this analysis attempts to identify. *Connections* involve links between one interaction and another, or different parts of one longer interaction. Additional connections to be identified can be with outside texts, people, ideas, or structures. Finally, the last theme to be considered in a discourse analysis is the significance of *sign*

systems of knowledge within an interaction. This means that sign systems, languages, social behaviors, and specific knowledge sets are considered for their significance to the interaction. Whenever a text is analyzed using critical discourse analysis these seven key areas frame the analysis of the piece.

Critical discourse analysis influenced the frame for the analysis and design of this study due to my essential beliefs about language. Therefore, the talk, especially any narrative stories that may be present in the data will be viewed as reflections of the internal thoughts of the speakers, according to Bruner's views on narratives (2002). As Bakhtin holds, the dialogues were also viewed as reflective of the particular context and social situation in which they are embedded (1981). Also, Bourdieu's theory of habitus, the continual social reproduction of effective behaviors, offered insight into the purposes and goals of classroom dialogue (1991). Furthermore, critical theory advances the idea that literacy knowledge is useful for life change (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Therefore, dialogue around the issue of literacy was important to consider as a political force. Thus, also, an eye toward speakers, as well as the researcher, serving as a change agent in a life situation were considered.

Context

This study was set in a fourth grade classroom within a local public school. Due to job relocation, I found myself moving to a new state as I began my dissertation process. While this made the issue of access much more complicated, it also added interesting dimensions to my study. In order to have access to a public school, the local university was contacted to arrange for an introduction to the school system. Through that contact, I discussed my research requirements with the superintendent who requested

that I prepare a short research brief for his perusal requesting a specific school site. I researched (see Chapter 4 for additional details on school selection) local schools and chose one to focus on. Once the superintendent had received and read the research brief, he forwarded the information onto the principal of the school at which I requested to research. The principal then reviewed the proposal and acquiesced to my research in the school. The principal also assigned me to a classroom for research after speaking privately with the teacher. Then I submitted a university IRB for approval and began research once approval was received.

Position of the Researcher

In this study I found myself in an unusual position. As the researcher, I knew nothing about the context or situation of my study, except for the elements (such as standardized testing), which I can expect due to national legislation. I had no intimate knowledge of the school or school system or even how the state in which the research will take place organizes its educational system. While initially, my lack of familiarity scared me, I realized that many of my own experiences, as I begin to learn about the educational context and situation of the school and classroom I will study, also served as data pieces to be considered. Additionally, while not always ideal, a fresh eye on a situation is certainly productive for research. I can honestly say that I had very few preconceived notions about what my research would evoke. I had ideas based on my previous experiences, but I realized that the context is quite different and therefore, I could not assume that anything I believed to be true about schools will continue to hold true within this new context.

Nevertheless, as a researcher, I brought my own bias to the situation that is not only defined through my theoretical lens. The element of this research project that I am familiar with is fourth grade. I was previously a teacher of fourth grade and therefore, my expectations and experiences can color how I viewed a fourth-grade classroom, fourth-grade students and another fourth-grade teacher. I found though, that instead of blinding me, that this helped me develop rapport with the teacher and the students in the classroom, in spite of my unfamiliarity with the situation, due to the fact that I could empathize with the unique pressures and dynamics of fourth grade. Overall, I believe that my lack of knowledge and my areas of empathy balanced one another out as I sought to paint a picture of the experiences of one classroom of fourth graders through the students' eyes and voices.

Data Collection and Analysis

One fourth-grade classroom was chosen for participation in the study. The teacher agreed ahead of time to participate and all of the students in the class were invited to participate in the research study, under the promise of confidentiality. While I initially intended to visit the classroom informally once a week for several hours each visit for a month before beginning research, this became impractical due to IRB restrictions. Nevertheless, I did informally visit the school as an instructor for the local university, where I conducted a class for preservice teachers in teaching literacy in the elementary school. My university students spent time in the classrooms observing and teaching small groups and I was able to observe most of the classrooms in this capacity. While the principal chose which classroom I would research in, through my work with the local university, I had already met and worked with the teacher I would eventually

partner with for research. My partner teacher, Erika Dawson, acted as the school liaison for my university class during the fall semester (informing school teachers of the schedule, ensuring communication between myself, the teachers and students, etc.) Thus we had already built a working relationship and level of comfort with each other before I entered her classroom as a researcher. I was also a familiar face to the students, who while they did not yet know me, they had seen me around the school and were familiar with my university students. So despite not being able to visit regularly prior to beginning research, a relative comfort had already been established in the minds of the participants thus I was assured that my presence did not affect the behaviors of the teacher or students. In addition to the classroom data collection, I planned to interview school administrators, local school system officials, and if available state school system officials in order to understand the broader situational context of the classroom. I contacted the officials who were involved specifically in testing and literacy curriculum through email and asked to interview those who were willing to participate. I had only one person from these levels of school/system administration express a willingness to be interviewed. I was able to interview the county superintendent of schools in an interview scheduled at his convenience. No state level officials or school level officials were willing to be interviewed. Table 1 lists the participants and their role in the research.

Phase One

When data collection began, I spent one week in the class, staying all day each day, in order to immerse myself in the context. During this week, I identified a group of focal students (4-5 students) who were chosen based on natural classroom groupings to focus my data collection on. This grouping was mostly for easy, effective data

Table 1
Research Participants

Participant Name	Role	Number of Interviews
Erika Dawson	Focal Classroom Teacher	3
Talia	Focal Student	3
Grace	Focal Student	3
Anastasia	Focal Student	3
Allan	Focal Student	2
Chahna	Student	1
Tabitha	Student	1
Ella	Student	0
Maria	Student	0
Josh	Student	0
Carly	Student	0
Student(s)	Student	0
Superintendent	County Superintendent	1
Diana DeWitt	Classroom Teacher	0

collection. I was able to audiotape student small group discussions and easily sit closer to the students to hear their dialogue during literacy events. This group remained static during the research, though additional participants were frequently included in discussions. Field notes and audio taped interviews were transcribed after collection and the resultant data informed the study as it proceeded. Selective transcription of audiotapes was used for incidents that stood out as important in the researcher's field notes, additional incidents were transcribed as necessary.

Phase Two

In phase two of data collection, I spent four weeks visiting the classroom approximately twice a week. These visits coincided with the literacy instructional time in the classroom and lasted one to two hours, according to how long literacy instruction occurred. During this time, data collection focused on whole group interactions (recorded through researcher field notes) as well as small group interactions, where I focused on the focal group of students, both audio taping and taking field notes. Artifacts were also copied from focal students when they were relevant to the interactions of the students. Additionally, I interviewed the focal students and the teacher in order to establish rapport and initial thoughts. These interviews focused on personal and school experiences, and gave the participants time to share their stories. Phase two concluded with another one-week immersion period, where I spent all day in the classroom in order to see how literacy and discourse were involved in other times of the school day.

Phase Three

Phase three of data collection mirrored phase two, with four weeks of twice weekly visits to the classroom and concluded with a week long classroom immersion. A

second round of interviews was conducted during this phase with the focal students and the teacher. These interviews focused more specifically on literacy experiences and practices. Final interviews were conducted with the focal students and the teacher, after the end of year testing week. These interviews were used to clarify points from previous interviews or classroom interactions, obtain details on the testing experience, as well as member checking in response to early data analysis. Any data obtained during member checks was used as additional pieces of data. At this point, I seriously considered if data saturation had been reached and felt that adequate data had been taken to address the research questions. Research then concluded at this point.

Data Sources and Data Management

The data sources for this research came from a combination of observations, interviews, and artifacts. Multiple data sources have been chosen in order to attempt to accurately represent the complexity of the classroom context as I attempt to answer my research questions, as well as to carefully triangulate any findings. Table 2 lists the research questions and the possible data sources anticipated to answer each question. During phase two and three, photographic data sources were added in order to more minutely record the environment. Data sources were carefully recorded in a researcher's log. This log explained the data collected each day and recorded my thoughts and impressions during data collection, which served as additional data source. The data itself was stored in a locked file cabinet in my office, carefully filed by date.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began as soon as the first piece of data was collected and proceeded in an open-ended and inductive format (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, open coding was

Table 2
Research Questions and Corresponding Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Sources
1. What are fourth graders' Discourses of literacy in a standards-based/testing driven world?	Transcripts of classroom interactions Researcher field notes Student artifacts Student interviews Teacher/administration interviews Photographs
2. What or whom mediates their constructions of Student interviews of those Discourses?	Transcripts of classroom interactions Researcher field notes Teacher interviews Student artifacts Photographs
3.What do the (D)iscourses reveal about the fourth graders' developing identities as literacy learners?	Student interviews Teacher interviews Researcher field notes Student artifacts Transcripts of classroom interactions

used to identify preliminary themes. Then, constant-comparative analysis was used to develop and saturate themes. During this pass at the data, discrete literacy events were analyzed to develop themes. Events were delineated for analysis by topic and flow of the conversation, one topic of instruction/conversation made one event. Events varied in length, some were quite short and others rather long. If the event was long, I looked at it first as a larger unit, then I looked closely at the shorter episodes within the larger event (such as a direct dialogue between a set number of participants or a dialogue that encompassed one sub-topic), and finally I returned to the event as a whole, looking across all of the shorter episodes for themes that characterized the entire event. Each event was analyzed along three key axes: event *elements*, event *talk* and event *participants*. The following short event shows how these categories were used to break down the literacy events, initial codes (italics) are shown beside the excerpt, then the information in Table 3 illustrates the three axes and the categories within each axis.

T: What do you know about Rosa Parks, Carly? *question*

C: She uh refused to let, to give up her seat *fact response*

T: On a bus yes, and this was in Montgomery Alabama, and the reason she refused is why? Was it just that she felt like being mean that day? *Expansion, question*

C: No *response*

T: No, why did she refuse, Tabitha? *question*

Tab: She refused because she was doing by what she believed in and she thought it was unfair that the black Africans had to give up their seats to any one person that walked on the bus. *Correct "school" answer—from outside knowledge*

Table 3
Grounded Theory Literacy Event Analysis

Axis	Categories within the axis	Literacy event example
Event elements	Text	*Dear Ms. Rosa Parks*, short story from the basal reader
	Activities	Introduction to assignment Teacher asks questions to cue background knowledge, assigns pages to read and asks students to make mental notes while reading
	Materials	Text—Basal reader
	Structure ▪ Teacher led whole group discussion ▪ Small group- student led discussion ▪ Small group- teacher led discussion ▪ Partner activity ▪ Independent work	Teacher leads whole group discussion. Individual silent reading
	Topic	Rosa Parks
Event talk	Type of statement ▪ Question ▪ Response (fact/guess) ▪ Narrative ▪ Declarative statement	Teacher asks a series of questions, which students respond to. Teacher also provides narrative information and uses the declarative to give assignment.
	Purpose ▪ Assignment logistics ▪ New information ▪ Gauge understanding ▪ Review facts ▪ Provide example ▪ Provide definition ▪ Clarification ▪ Recast of information ▪ Prompt/Hint ▪ Expansion ▪ Behavior management	Teacher elicits/clarifies information about topic and sets assignment. Behavior management talk is also used to direct bathroom exodus

Axis	Categories within the axis	Literacy event example
Event talk (continued)	Purpose (continued) ▪ Humor ▪ Refocus conversation	
	Links within Talk ▪ To text ▪ To this conversation ▪ To other conversations	Teacher references the students responses as she asks next question
	Source of knowledge ▪ Texts ▪ Personal ▪ Media/pop culture ▪ Other class work ▪ Teacher(s) ▪ Adult "canonical" knowledge ▪ Wild guess	Tabitha and Carly use outside/personal knowledge to answer questions—Mrs. Parks has not been discussed before in class. Teacher references text as she makes assignment (it asks you to "take notes")
Event participants	Speakers	Teacher, Carly, Tabitha, Student
	Role	Teacher as director, questioner, source of correct information. Students are responders.
	Reason for speech	Teacher initiates to introduce story. Students respond to direct questions from the teacher

T: Absolutely, very good. Well this was when there were letters… and people wrote letters to Mrs. Parks and she responded. So what I would like you to do is as you're reading, um, its asking you to take notes. I don't want you to do that. In your mind I want you to take notes about these letters and what you learn about Rosa Parks. Is Rosa Parks still alive today? *Narrative, assignment, question*

S: No, she died. *Response*

T: No, yeah she just died a couple of years ago. She was alive for a very long time. She saw a lot of history in her life time and made a big difference in the world. The big part of it was that she was courageous because she was willing to stand up for what she believed in. So I want you to read 552-555. We are going to discuss this afterwards. I am going to be excusing you in groups to go get drinks. Let's not do restroom unless it an absolutely emergency. All right so Allan and Tabitha, will you guys watch the restroom? And let's send group 2 to go get drinks. *Narrative description, assignment, behavior management*

Then key literacy discourse incidents were further analyzed using Critical Discourse analysis (Gee, 2005) in order to flesh out the themes, as well as to develop additional ones. In the following example, first the open codes (italics) are shown for a piece of dialogue, then the themes from critical discourse analysis are considered for the example in Table 4. This example is taken from a discussion on writing fairytales.

S_1: What if you have this from, let's say the queen and king where evil and then the joker happens to be light, that would happen were like the servants were evil and what if evil wins instead of good? *Student defines literacy element, twists*

Table 4
Critical Discourse Analysis Example

Critical Discourse Analysis Theme	Fairytale example
Significance	Facts about fairytales hold the most significance and the focus of the discussion
Relationships	Relationships between the teacher and the students have a role, each student seems to interact with the teacher individually, except sometimes the students act as one group in dialogue with the teacher
Activities	Discussion lead by the teacher of twisted fairytales, teacher provides definitions and examples, students take a supporting role by providing affirmations of understanding to the teacher
Politics	Teacher holds the power by defining the significant items in the discussion, as well as being the only one in the discussion with actual knowledge of the point being discussed, she provides examples that fit her definition and weighs the accuracy of student responses
Connections	Connections are made throughout the discussion to different fairytales, mostly by the teacher, but occasionally by the students, to those things which they recall from the recent past
Sign Systems	Knowledge used here is only verbal, nothing from the discussion was recorded by the students or the teacher
Identities	Teacher here is the rule maker, setting definitions, acceptable practices and the keeper of knowledge Students simply follow along with the teacher, attempt to integrate new understandings, occasionally they are question posers to ensure correct work on an assignment

definition, asks direct questions, would an alternative situation in writing still be acceptable?

T: Okay, do in fairytales, does evil win out over good? *Teacher poses question to answer student question*

S_1: No, sometimes *Student is unsure*

T: Sometimes? Okay, if there's going to a sequel possibly, okay yes, they may do that, we've also had fairytales that you thrown in that are called twisted fairytales, have you ever heard those before? *Teacher answers question, provides definition of literacy elements*

Ss: No *Students respond to teacher questions*

T: The Stinky Cheese Man *Teacher uses literary example*

Ss: Oh yeah!! *Students make connection to example*

T: Alright, that's another one you might want to think on those lines, like that it's a twisted fairytale a take off…*The true story of the three little pigs*, who was framed in that story? *Teacher uses literary example*

Ss: The wolf *Students answer teacher question*

T: The wolf, he was all framed, he didn't eat those pigs, it was actually there fault and he was just trying to read, nothing was his fault about what happened…that's called a twisted fairytale, its when you take a fairytale and kind of slant things in a different way, you know, taking little red riding hood and telling it from the wolfs point of view. Or like the three little pigs telling it from their point of view, one of those, um *Teacher provides definition with literary example*

S_2: Um, like my mom read once um, like, Little Red Riding Hood shot the wolf in the head and a wolf skin coat *Student recasts with literary example*

T: Good, or you can think about is it Snow White, or Sleeping Beauty, maybe it's the apple that's actually the evil thing in there that caused all the problems, you know write the story from the apple's point of view instead of the *Teacher provides examples and twists her examples*

Ss: The apple was poisoned *Students respond to teacher*

T: Oh no the witch was good witch, you want to write it twisted, the witch was actually good and it's the apple that's been doing the thinking here and its been plotting to get the witch framed *Teacher provides examples*

Ss: No, but the witch *Students respond to teacher*

T: What, okay, but I'm saying that if you want to twist the fairytale, when you write your fairytale *Teacher provides directions for assignment*

Ss: Ohh!!

T: If you want to twist it you could write if from a different point of view, do you understand now? *Teacher mentions additional literary element, no definition provided*

Constant comparative analysis was then used to collapse themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This involved comparing discourse incidents and themes across and within categories in order to determine relative importance as well as to integrate categories as closely as possible until the categories reached saturation. The categories were used to carefully evaluate how the data answered each research question. Eventually, after the categories and initial theories were reduced through delimitation and saturation, an

overall picture, focused around answering the research questions, was developed to analyze the effects of school climate and literacy events upon fourth-graders' Discourses about literacy and their developing identities.

An audit trail was constructed during data analysis. Analysis occurred through the careful labeling of codes and then physical organization of the data, in order to develop a visual representation of the data. This allowed for an audit trail of data collection to be developed. A peer debriefer participated in order to come behind the researcher during data analysis to support or disregard findings according to what they also see within the data. A timeline for data collection and analysis is presented in Table 5.

Methodological Rigor

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined four different areas which provide rigor and ensure trustworthiness for naturalistic inquiries: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Trustworthiness ensured that the results of a naturalistic study are actual reflections of reality and reflect the true beliefs, actions, values, and behaviors of the participants in the study. The four areas that ensure trustworthiness will be expounded upon as they relate to this study as follows.

Credibility

Credibility can be defined as the believability of a study. It is important for a study to possess credibility in that both outside readers believe the results are accurate, and the study participants concur with the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to assure the credibility of this study, several steps have been taken.

Table 5
Timeline and Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Dates	Activities
07/06	Prospectus presentation
10/06	Researcher began informal visits to classroom IRB submission (GSU, school district)
01/07	Phase one of data collection began One-week immersion in the classroom Interview 1 with focal students/teacher Email contact to school administrators/officials Data analysis began
01/07-03/07	Phase two of data collection began 4 weeks of twice-weekly visits One-week immersion in the classroom Interview 2 with focal students/teacher Interviews of school administrators/officials Ongoing data analysis
03/07-06/07	Phase three of data collection began 4 weeks of twice-weekly visits Final one-week immersion in the classroom Final interviews with focal students/teacher Ongoing data analysis
05/07-07/07	More intensive data analysis Additional member checks Wrote-up results
08/07-09/07	Revised dissertation
10/07	Presented dissertation

Prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement allows the researcher to ensure that their presence in the classroom will not cause confounding results, as well as ensuring that a wide variety of behavior would be documented. Thus, it can be assured that major Discourse patterns are not missed, due to a paucity of observation. In this study, I was present in the classroom for a roughly three months, and left only once data saturation had been reached.

Persistent observation. Persistent observation ensures that observations take place over a prolonged period of time, as well as that the observations are focused by the research questions. In this study, persistent observation criteria was met though prolonged engagement with the research site, as well as using ongoing data analysis in tandem with data collection to focus data collection in accordance with the preliminarily emerging themes of relevance to the research questions.

Triangulation of data. Triangulation of data sources guarantees that results are not isolated events, but rather are persistent themes of thought and behavior throughout a study. Here, triangulation of data sources was provided through interview transcripts, transcripts of classroom interactions, student artifacts, as well as observer field notes. These four different types of data sources allowed for the assurance that any themes that emerge will be characteristic of the entire data set, and not a random case.

Peer debriefer. A peer debriefer was used to provide the researcher with feedback about the data collection, ongoing methodology of the study and data analysis. The peer debriefer asked me questions about the research in order to challenge my thinking about the implications of the study, and to ensure that my data analysis is indeed

an accurate reflection of the data. My peer debriefer and I met regularly throughout the study to ensure credibility.

Exposure of the researcher's subjectivities. The researcher's perspective is an inherent element in a naturalistic study; therefore, in order to ensure credibility, the researchers' perspective must be transparent. In this study, I have been open about my status as a former fourth grade teacher, as well as leaving my theoretical lens for viewing data open to readers' evaluation. Additionally, my ongoing perspectives and thoughts are recorded in my researchers log and have become part of the data set. Thus, my subjectivities are transparent for readers so that they may carefully evaluate the credibility of the study for themselves.

Emic perspective. Emic perspective is making transparent the perspectives of the participants, and not only showing the view of the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In this study, an emic perspective was developed through the use of extensive interviews, which were designed to be hone in on the actual thoughts and perspectives of the participants, so that their voices are the strongest in the research.

Member checks. Member checks occur when the researcher shows data and data analysis results to participants to see if they agree with the data and conclusions. This ensures that the results do indeed reflect what the participants believe is their reality. In this study, member checks will be used with both the teacher and student participants. The teacher was able to see his/her interview transcripts, as well as data analysis in order for him/her to voice whether or not they believe the data is truly reflective of his/her classroom. I engaged in member checks with the students through probing in their individual interviews, specifically the third interview. I had them verify results by asking

them questions about their thoughts on the emerging themes from preliminary data analysis. This slightly modified form of member checks was used with the students in order to take in consideration their age and level of understanding of the research study.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability to consider the results of the study as relevant for application in contexts other than the site in which the study was conducted. Transferability is ensured through thick description, or a careful and systematic description of the time, place and participants in the study. I achieved thick description in this study by engaging in prolonged engagement and persistent observation. These two elements ensured that I saw a multitude of behaviors in the setting, and that I know what is truly characteristic of behavior in this classroom. Additionally, triangulation of data ensures that any thick description used is truly characteristic of the situation. With greater description, readers are able to envision the environment and thus are more able to judge what elements they believe to be transferable to other situations and to understand how themes might change given a different situation.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the whether or not the data analysis can be considered valid. This means that the data has been systematically collected in accordance with the research plan, that the data is complete and carefully recorded. In this research dependability was ensured via an audit trail. The audit trail acted first as a log of data collected each day and then served to document the data analysis process as all major data analysis activities will be recorded. Additionally, the data pieces acted as parts of

the audit trail, as did each separate cut of the data. The audit trail ensured that the data had been collected and approached systematically by the researcher. The peer debriefer saw the audit trail and used it to help interrogate the research.

Confirmability

Confimability means the results can be confirmed as accurate. This is ensured via several different structures. First member checks ensured that the participants believed that the results are accurate. The peer debriefer also ensured confirmability, by acting as an outside source of interrogation for the results of the study. These two checks, in addition to the assurance of the transparency of the researcher's subjectivities and emic perspective, ensured that the results found in the study are not figments of the my imagination, but are true reflections of the conditions of the study.

Limitations

The limitations of this study lie in several different areas. Critical discourse analysis is occasionally criticized because some scholars believe that there is too great an emphasis on a political and/or social reality, which is frequently constructed out of context (Lewis, 2006; Rogers et al, 2006). In order to ensure that this is not an issue, here constant comparative analysis across all of the data was used to ensure the relevance of findings as well as providing grounding in the context. The data of this study is also highly dependent on the fourth grade participants and while a complex description of their Discourse is certainly possible, questions could be raised about the capabilities of fourth graders to employ the metacognitive awareness necessary to comment upon their identity development, even through carefully constructed interview questions.

Additionally, my status as an outsider in the context of research could have caused me to miss subtleties of behavior and meaning in my participants. Hopefully this was mitigated by prolonged engagement. Finally, it could also be questioned whether or not it is truly possible to notice the trickle down of national policy within one classroom, but I believe that teachers today, do indeed feel pressures unique to the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and that thus this trickle down effect can be assumed.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTEXT FOR RESEARCH

This naturalistic study took place in a small public elementary school in a Northern Appalachian college town. The researcher visited one fourth-grade classroom in the elementary school regularly over the course of five months in order to collect data during the literacy instructional times in the classroom. During this time, I not only visited the school and conducted participant interviews for data, but I also investigated the context for my research by carefully examining the demographic and other related characteristics of the area. Also, I learned all I could about the state and local school systems, focusing on their policies which would affect the literacy experiences of fourth-graders, as well as those that would affect their teacher's decision making processes. In this chapter, I present a description of the environment in which these fourth graders were experiencing their literacy education. First, I describe the physical location of the school, explaining the unique features of the town and state. Then I explain how the state and local education systems work, and describe the testing policies. Finally, I go into depth about the actual school and classroom, before describing each key participant. This information is presented to shed light on the actual data analysis, which will be presented in chapter five in order to provide answers to the three research questions:

1. What are fourth graders' Discourses of literacy in a standards-based/testing driven world?
2. What or whom mediates those Discourses?

3. What do the Discourses reveal about the fourth graders' developing identities as literacy learners?

State Environment

Thornhill Elementary is located in a mountainous Mid-Atlantic state. The state ranks 42nd in the nation with a total population of 1.8 million and it is projected to slowly lose residents over the next thirty years. Demographically, the state is composed of 95 % people of Caucasian backgrounds. Three percent of the population is African American and the remaining 2% is a mixture of other backgrounds (US Census Bureau data, 2000). The major industries are coal mining, logging and tourism. The state has the lowest employment ratio in the country with only 61% of the population employed. Additionally, the median income in the state is ranked at the bottom of the country, in 48th place, with a per capita income of approximately $24,000. The state is fifth in the nation in poverty levels with 18% of the overall population living below the poverty. Twenty-five percent of children live below the poverty line. Education rates are predominately low throughout the state. The state is 43rd in its high school completion rates, with 81% of the population completing high school or the equivalent (American Diploma Project Network, 2007). It ranks 51st in college bachelor degrees with only 16.9% of the population having completed college.

Town Environment

Thornhill Elementary is located one of the northernmost counties in the state in town that is home to the state's flagship university. The town proper boasts 30,000 residents, but the metro area includes roughly another 80,000. It is the fifth largest city in

the state. Much of the town life is oriented around the university which was founded in 1867. The university is designated as a Research University (High Research Activity) by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. With 30,000 students, many of the residents of the town are connected to the university in some way. Distinctly a mountain town, the town is situated by a river, which is used to ship coal out of the state, and built over a series of hills and ravines. The town is one of two towns in the state that is not losing, but gaining in population, mostly due to the presence of the university and the industry that has grown up around it. Accordingly, the population is slightly more diverse than the rest of the state, with 90% of the population having a Caucasian background, 4% are African American, 4% are Asian, with the remainder belonging to a variety of ethnicities (US Census Bureau data, 2000). After the last census, the area was designated as a Metropolitan Statistical Area that brought many amenities in the form of big box stores to the area.

The town is mostly oriented around the university, which has three campuses. Each campus provides structure for its area of town. The downtown campus is the oldest part of the campus and is surrounded by older homes and a boutique-shopping district. The main downtown street is full of shops and restaurants to cater to the college crowd, both university students and local residents. The second campus is two miles from downtown and houses high-rise buildings, which act as large college classroom buildings and freshman residence halls. Chain restaurants and big box store shopping surround this area. The third campus area houses the hospital and other health care buildings. In this area a second private hospital is also located. The university hospital is the state trauma center. The climate is reflective of the town's mountain location, with cold, gray, snowy

winters and warm summers with cool mornings and nights. Many outdoor activities are available in town or nearby, such as hiking, water sports, biking, skiing. Arts are also part of town in which the university brings in many musical and dramatic groups, with the local community is invited to also partake.

Greater Educational Environment

State Department of Education

As a state, the state department of education sets policy for the state, and passes out monies to counties, who then facilitate the education of the students within their county borders. Like most states, the state policies have set out a set of curriculum standards for each grade and subject area which they expect counties to align instruction to (WVDE, 2006). Additionally, their policies encompass dealing with special needs students, pre-K education, 21st century learning (a technological focus) and technical/vocational education. The state spends roughly 2.5 million dollars a year on education, with 63.9 % of that budget being used for instruction and instruction related services. With 280,000 students, approximately $9,000 is spent on each pupil (Zhou, Honegger, & Gaviola, 2007). Finally, the state makes and administers tests to students to judge the achievement of the students, schools and teachers, these results are reported in school "report cards" each fall.

County School System

Thornhill Elementary is part of a county school system. The county operates twenty schools, 12 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, 3 high schools and one vocational school. The mission statement of the school system states that the goals of the

system are to help each child reach their potential, while training them to be productive members of society who value lifelong learning (MCS, 2006). The county is led by a superintendent who is assisted by three assistant superintendents, with little other bureaucracy. The superintendent reports to an elected county school board. Previously an elementary school principal for 20 years, the superintendent of the county works very closely with the principals of the schools in order to ensure the most effective learning environment for the students. Schools in the county are typically ranked very highly against other schools in the state. The high schools generally occupy spots in the top ten high schools in the state and the middle and elementary schools are also ranked highly. The county has 10,000 students and 700 teachers. On average the teachers have 16 years of teaching experience. All teachers are certified, with 96% of classes taught by teachers highly qualified in that area. Even substitutes must be certified teachers, as the local university provides a plethora of certified teachers who are interested in staying in the area. The average class size is 21.7 students, the attendance rate is 98.3% and there is a drop-out rate of 2.2% of students. The county spends $8,000 per pupil each year, with 59% of the budget spent on instruction. Demographically, the county slightly more diverse than the rest of the state, probably because of the university presence (WVDE, 2006). Of the county students, 89.9% are Caucasian (State 93%), 5% are African American, with the remaining 5% divided between other ethnicities. Thirty-eight percent of the county students qualify for free and reduced lunch prices, which is slightly lower than the state rate of 49%. Four percent of county students are limited English proficient and 20% qualify for exceptional children's services (Gifted and Special Education).

Significant power is given to individual schools in how they operate and spend funds, working within the mission of the county as set by the school board. The county offers significant staff development for its teachers and administrators both centrally and at the school based level. Each school may use staff development funds to provide for study aimed specifically at their own needs, or they may attend workshops developed by the county to answer county-wide needs. These are highly thought of and well attended. Over the past year, the system has been consolidating the elementary schools. Despite the fact that in town, there is an urban atmosphere, the county is predominately rural. This has led to school consolidation in order to upgrade facilities and ensure quality instruction by bringing larger numbers of students together in one place. Mid-school year 2006-2007, five elementary schools were consolidated into two new larger schools, dropping the number of elementary schools from 15 to 12.

Hiring in the county happens first at a county level. When positions open up, they are first announced internally to be filled by a lateral move within the system. If the positions are not filled internally, then they are announced to the general public. The positions are highly competitive, mostly because the town is a popular place for university graduates to stay after finishing their degree, so many teachers are vying for a limited number of positions. Several federal programs are part of certain schools. Nine elementary schools receive Title 1 funds. Head Start runs a preschool within the county, and one elementary is part of the Reading First program.

Technology plays an important role in the county. First, the county has adopted the Edline website program to track grades and communicate with parents. On this site, using protected passwords, teachers enter all grades for students, which parents can see

any time they log on. Teachers can also post information to a class website. Many teachers use this method to communicate with parents, and student report cards are automatically generated using the Edline program. Also, the county has subscribed to the writing roadmap program, which allows children to compose essays online and then the essays are scored by the computer according to state directions. This is extensively used in the grades which take the writing tests (4th and 8th grades). Also, they have developed a partnership with ETS which allows them to assess students quarterly to gauge how well instruction is aligning with the state curriculum standards. These tests are taken and scored online, then print outs of results provide teachers with an analysis of where students are proficient and where additional instruction is needed.

Testing Policy

National Policy

When the *No Child Left Behind Act, 2001* was passed by Congress, the federal government began a major foray into education policy. Previously, their had been different laws and pushes which would guide state educational practices, but none had the scope and sweep of No Child Left Behind. This act put into place accountability procedures that were designed to ensure that every child received an excellent education and it demanded sanctions on those schools that failed to provide the aforesaid excellent education. The law had four main ideas which it was based on. These tenets are accountability, local control, proven methods and parental choice.

Accountability. Accountability required states to put end of year testing systems into place to measure student learning. These tests are designed by the states and in alignment with each state's set of curriculum standards. School-wide results are tabulated in addition to each child's individual achievement. The school-wide results are

reported to the public in a school report card, sharing the school's overall testing achievement in reading, math, writing, social studies and science. The results are also disaggregated to show the achievement of minority groups in the school, both ethnic groups and other groups such as children with a low socio-economic status, special education students and limited English proficient students. This disaggregation of the data is to ensure that all groups are receiving an equal education. Each year, the schools must show that their student performance is improving overall, meeting the measure of *adequate yearly progress*. If the school fails to meet that measure, they must provide additional opportunities for the students to achieve, and if over a series of five years the school does not improve, it can be restructured by the state government.

Local control. Local control means that the federal government has set guidelines, but that the states get to determine how to carry those guidelines out, as well as being allowed to spend much of the funding from the federal government for education at their own discretion. Each state devises their own system of testing to correlate with their own curriculum standards. Additionally, each state sets their own levels of adequate yearly progress and designs many of their own interventions into the school systems.

Proven methods. Proven methods is the requirement that the monies coming from the federal government must be spent on programs that have been shown to work over time and through scientifically based research. This requirement calls for highly qualified teachers who hold state certifications in the areas that they teach. It also calls for curriculum materials and instructional methods that are based upon quantitative research, with statistically significant data to prove their instructional effectiveness.

Parental choice. Parental choice allows parents a voice in which public school they send their child too. This is particularly true with failing schools. If a school fails to meet adequate yearly progress for two years in a row, parents may choose to send their child to another school. The law also offers significant monetary support for the development of other school choice options such as charter and magnet schools.

Within these four areas, the states have significant choice into how they may fulfill the requirements. Each state is given significant federal money for instructional materials and programs, testing services and many other areas which might need funding to fulfill the requirement of No Child Left Behind. The state has discretion as to how to spend these funds, through the federal government retains the right to remove the funds if the state is not showing adequate progress and compliance with the law. The only actual testing conducted by the federal government is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). These national tests are given to a random sampling of 4th and 8th grade students in each state. A report card for the state is then developed on these national assessments. These report cards are public information, but do not affect funding or any parts of No Child Left Behind. The NAEP is simply a national barometer of educational achievement across the states. The results of the NAEP are typically quite different from the state assessments. Many states score significantly lower on the NAEP than in their own assessments, which has caused a great deal of debate about the validity of the state assessments. Additional debate is going on currently as No Child Left Behind is up for renewal in Congress this year.

State Testing Policy

The state in which Thornhill is located has devised a testing system for their schools and students. Each year in middle May, reading, math, science and social studies tests are administered to students' grades 3 through 8 and older students take end-of-course tests in specific subject areas. These tests were designed by a group of state teachers, administrators, state curriculum experts and a paid outside testing service (WVDE, 2006). The tests use multiple choice, short answer and constructed responses. The questions are designed to engage with all the thinking levels in Blooms Taxonomy. In 2003, the test was field tested and score levels (novice, partial mastery, mastery, above mastery, distinguished) were set to determine student achievement. These scores are averaged for schools to determine their levels of achievement and whether they meet adequate yearly progress. The results are published in the fall of the next year. The state goal is for all children to be proficient by the 2013-2014 school year and adequate yearly progress is spread out across those years. If schools fail to meet adequate yearly progress, after a succession of years, the state will take over control from the county and restructure the school as they see fit.

County Testing Policy

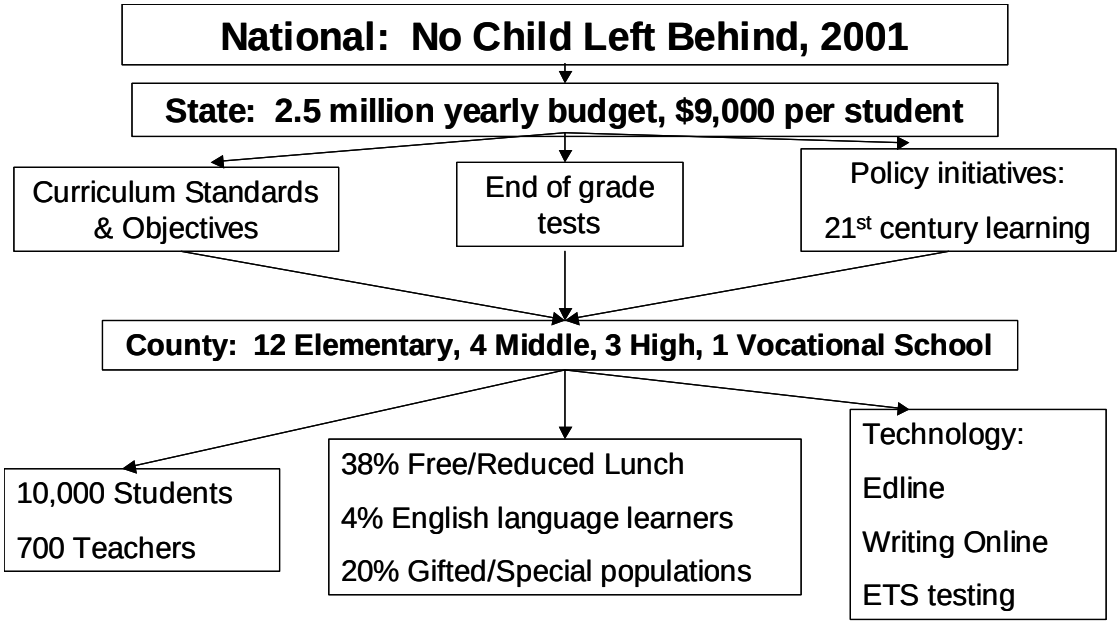
Each county is required to submit to the decisions of the state in the arena of testing policy. Their local choice is made in how they prepare their students for the state testing in May. The county school system in which Thornhill is located has made several choices to ensure that its students succeed on the tests. They have begun a series of testing throughout the school year as a diagnostic tool for teachers. These tests, given three times during the year, before the May tests, allow the teachers to gain an

understanding of how their students will do on the tests. The data is disaggregated according to the state content standards so teachers know where to focus instruction. This also gives students experience with the type of test they will take in May for the state assessment. Additionally, the county chooses their text books via committee that decides which curriculum will best prepare the students for the test, and which one aligns with the state standards most completely. The county also takes a proactive approach to problem management. It does not believe that low scores are the fault of one student or teacher, but rather a problem for the entire school and county to manage together. This philosophy is designed to jointly improve scores and instruction as a team effort is made to ameliorate any problems. Of the five county schools that have not made adequate yearly progress, each one is only deficient in one of the special populations, specifically either special education students or students with a low socio-economic status. Figure 1 highlights the relationships between the multiple elements of the greater educational environment.

Thornhill Elementary School

This research study took place at Thornhill Elementary School. Thornhill is located about a mile outside of the downtown business district, sitting on top of a large hill in a residential neighborhood that is also called Thornhill. Thornhill is the oldest school building in the county currently in use. Built in the early part of the twentieth century as a high school, Thornhill now houses 250 students grades Kindergarten through the 5th grade (MCS, 2006). There are two classes at each grade level, except for fifth grade which has only one class because some children are districted for fifth grade at other schools. I choose Thornhill as my research site because it was the school which

Figure 1. Relationship among elements of the Greater educational environment



most completely met my criteria. While Thornhill has made adequate yearly progress each year since it has been measured, Thornhill has some of the lowest literacy scores in the county with only 67% of students being proficient (WVDE, 2006). Two schools had lower scores (66% and 63%) but those schools were being consolidated in the middle of the year and it was going to be a mixed consolidation with the classrooms mixing across several schools, so they were not a good research option. The only elementary school in the county that did not meet adequate yearly progress (only because of special education scores) was also a Reading First school and since this research was not designed to assess Reading First, which greatly determines all literacy instruction, that school was also ruled out. This left Thornhill as my best option, especially since I had already begun to develop relationships with the teachers and administration through a class I taught for pre-service teachers through the local university at Thornhill. Initially, the principal was wary of having research at her school, but once I had permission from the county superintendent, she was quite willing to have me, though she never found time to schedule an interview with me.

Demographically, the school has 200 Caucasian students, 34 African American students, and twelve students of other nationalities (WVDE, 2006). Sixty-one percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. The school has 13 limited English proficient students and 52 special needs students. All 33 teachers (Classroom teachers, specicalist, Title 1 teachers, etc…) are considered highly qualified under the No Child Left Behind Standards. Thornhill is a Title 1 school and was recognized as a distinguished school by the Title 1 state authorities. Title 1 services are only received K-3 at Thornhill. Thornhill has only one administrator, the principal. The teachers are

organized into several committees that help make school decisions and there are many active parents.

Erika Dawson's Fourth Grade Classroom

The principal assigned me to research in one of the two fourth grade classrooms at Thornhill. At Thornhill, the fourth and fifth grade classrooms are on the top floor. When you enter the school, you enter into the basement where the cafeteria, where a first grade classroom, and the office is located. Each time I arrived, I was buzzed into the school building by the secretary and then I signed in on the visitor board. After that I would climb up to the second floor. While older, the building is well kept with fresh paint and clean floors. On the first floor, there are first, second and third grade classrooms, as well as a hall to the adjacent building which houses the library, computer lab and special education classroom (beyond that the kindergarten classrooms are outside in a large trailer). The walls in the hallways are covered with motivational posters encouraging the students to act responsibly and as part of the community. On the second floor there are two fourth grades, the fifth grade classroom and the counselors office. Erika Dawson's fourth grade is just at the top of the stairs on the right.

Classroom Layout

Mrs. Dawson's fourth grade classroom is a bright, well-lit room full of classroom resources. The desks are arranged in a U-shape, with a few out in different areas for isolating individual students as needed. Mrs. Dawson keeps the same basic desk plan, but moves the students around within the order frequently. The desks take up most of the middle of the room, though one rectangular table is inside the right hand part of the U-shape. Each desk has a student's nameplate taped on, the nameplate includes a cursive

alphabet, number line and multiplication table. The U-shape faces the chalkboard. Along the edges of the room are many different resources. Moving from the right to the left-hand side of the room, there is a coat closet, where children hang their backpacks and coats inside garbage bags to prevent lice. Then there is a computer and smart board. This computer is on the internet and the teacher runs videos from United Streaming (an educational video website) onto the smart board using a digital projector. Next is the reading corner. This corner is filled with books which are in bins according to genre. Students are not allowed to get books out of the reading corner, only the teacher removes books from the reading corner, which she then loans to students. A television and DVD/VCR stood in front of the reading corner, it is used mostly for indoor recess during the cold winter, they alternate between games and movies. Along the next wall are four other computers, which worked about half of the time I was in the classroom. They were occasionally used for educational games, but mostly went unused. Next came the teacher's desk where Mrs. Dawson kept all of her teaching resources. On the outside edges of her desk students supplies are kept. There is notebook paper, pencils, pencil sharpeners and colored pencils available for the students' to use as they need. Behind her desk was a supply cabinet as well as a shelf full of classroom sets of trade books. In front of her desk is several book shelves which wrap around the rest of the classroom all the way to the front chalkboard wall. On these shelves are additional classroom sets of trade books. These text sets have posters hung over them, so that access to them is limited. After the text sets, numerous magazines are on the shelf that students have free access to these. Under the chalk board are several boxes which contain self-selected reading books as well as students' reading logs. Throughout the room, on the walls are posters that

provide information for the students. Some are bought posters and others are ones that the teacher has typed up and laminated. On the board, many posters are hung which talk about writing formats, transition words, paragraph form. All of these were typed and laminated by the teacher. A cursive alphabet runs along the top of the chalk board. Underneath the chalkboard are pictures drawn by the students, this is the only student work on the walls.

Classroom Policy

In the classroom, students are expected to be responsible keeping track of their assignments and belongings. An assignment book is used each morning, students record all the assignments for the day and at the end of the day the teacher checks what has been completed and what needs to be completed for homework. The next morning the teacher collects homework (there is a file for each subject) and sees that the assignment book has been signed by a parent or guardian. Any unfinished work causes the student to miss recess to finish the assignment. The two fourth grades and the fifth grade classrooms have recess together and one teacher keeps a group of students to finish any unfinished work, this is called “reteach”. Behavior is also managed via a school wide system. Each classroom has a bulletin board with a library pocket for every child. Each child has several cards, cards are pulled when behavior standards are not met. Children are expected to raise their hands to speak, follow directions, and to be respectful of the teacher and others. When an infraction occurs, the child is asked to pull a card. The first card is a warning (typically a verbal warning is also given before pulling a card). The second card requires the student to spend 15 minutes in “refocus”, which is timeout from Recess. The third card requires 30 minutes in refocus. The fourth card lost sends the

child to the principal. Lost cards are also recorded in the assignment book for parents to see each night. Teachers also keep statistics on how many cards each child loses per week. Individual behavior plans are also occasionally made to deal with larger problems, three such plans were present in Mrs. Dawson's room. A positive reinforcement system is also in place at Thornhill. Students receive coupons for positive behaviors. Days without lost cards, showing responsibility or other good behaviors at the teachers discretion are rewarded. Coupons cannot be taken away. Students collect the coupons and staple them together in groups of five. A school store is run every other Friday by parent volunteers and the coupons act as money at the store.

Classroom Schedule

A day in Mrs. Dawson's fourth grade follows a predictable schedule. When the students arrive at 8:45, they unpack and begin copying down the day's assignments in their assignment book. Mrs. Dawson comes around and checks to see that all homework is turned in and that the assignment book has been signed. Once the children have copied their assignments, they begin on their morning spelling work. Each day they have an assignment to do with their spelling words for the week. This is a basically quiet time in the classroom, as the students know the routine and quickly get to work. Mrs. Dawson also will ask about information such as hot lunch and collect any forms at this time. At 9:00 they go to specials. Each week they have a PE class, a library day, a music class or art class (it switches every other week) and two days of study skills (test review). These classes last 45 minutes. When the students return at 9:45, they have writing and language skills (all literacy instruction will be described in chapter 5). Writing time is also a quiet time for the most part. What talk does occur is typically a discussion lead by Mrs.

Dawson. Occasionally, inter-student talk will occur at this time. At 10:30, the class goes to the computer lab where they do activities in math or language skills or are allowed to play games on select internet sites according to the teacher's plan. Students do not talk during computer lab time, they wear headphones so that they alone can hear their computer. They also occasionally do small research projects. At 11:00, they return to the classroom for math. At noon, the fourth graders switch classes for science and social studies. Mrs. Dawson teaches social studies to both fourth grade class, while the other fourth grade teacher, Diana Dewitt, teaches science. Mrs. Dawson's class goes next door to Mrs. Dewitt's room for science until 12:30 and then returns to Mrs. Dawson's room for social studies. Science and social studies are two subjects with more inter-student talk than most others. The students frequently may discuss topics or other activities provided by the teacher. At one o'clock, the fourth and fifth grade classes go down to the basement cafeteria for lunch. At 1:30 they have recess. If the weather is good, they go outside to the playground, but if it is rainy or cold (a frequent occurrence) they play board games or watch a movie in Mrs. Dawson's room. Any students who have lost cards or have unfinished work go to refocus/reteach at this time. All three of the classes crowd into the one classroom for recess, while the fifth grade classroom is used for refocus/reteach. At 2:00, whole class reading instruction occurs and from 3:00 until dismissal at 3:30 students engage in self-selected reading. Talk during reading time varies, but it is always guided by questions posed by Mrs. Dawson. Occasionally, students' talk together to answer questions or read –aloud, but most talk is contained in class discussions lead by Mrs. Dawson. Reading time is frequently silent also, as students read alone. During self-selected reading time, Mrs. Dawson also goes around

the room and checks assignment books to tell students exactly what their homework is, any unfinished work from the day is homework.

Key Participants

For the study, my key participants were Erika Dawson, the teacher, and four of her students: Talia, Allen, Grace and Anastasia. The overall demographic makeup of Mrs. Dawson's class is more diverse than most of the school (or county/state for that matter). There are eleven Caucasian students, four African American students, one Asian student and four multiracial students. The focal students were chosen due to their proximity to each other in the classroom, which facilitated the data collection process. Several other students were also minorly involved in the research, but in this section I will only describe the focal students. Any other students will be mentioned during data analysis in Chapter 5.

Erika Dawson

Erika Dawson is petite with shoulder length black hair. She typically wears dark pants and a sweater set to school. She has two children, a girl who is a college junior at the local university and boy who is a ninth grader. Her husband is a pipe fitter and her father also lives with them. She chose to become a teacher because she realized that she wanted to work with students, and she chooses to stay as a fourth grade teacher because she really enjoys the age of the children and the subject matter.

I first met Erika Dawson when she acted as the Thornhill staff liaison for my fall semester literacy class through the local university. From the first, I knew she was highly efficient, she made sure the other participating teachers at Thornhill knew when to expect my students and exactly what to expect from them. At the school, she has a reputation as

a very strict, but extremely competent teacher. In fact, I can only assume that the reason I was assigned to her classroom at Thornhill for research is because of her excellent reputation at Thornhill, as both a teacher and disciplinarian. Her classroom exemplifies the type of teaching and classroom organization most valued by the administration at Thornhill. More than once, the principal and I spoke about Erika's excellence in organization, discipline and her penchant for staff development and trying new techniques in the classroom. The principal saw Erika as a highly successful teacher which she was willing to have as the "face" of Thornhill for outside research.

Once I was assigned to research in her classroom, Erika and I met together again and she was extremely welcoming to me and excited to have me around. Very early on in my observations, she told me that she would completely forget that I was in the room, which I appreciated, since I did not want her to behave differently when I was around. Mrs. Dawson is indeed quite strict with her students, she expects them to behave, to act responsibly and to work hard. But I never saw her be harsh with her students. In fact, contrary to my expectations, she had a close relationship with most of her students. She often joked with her students, even during teaching times and the students genuinely liked and respected her. She has been teaching for twenty years, the vast majority of them at Thornhill. She stated that this class in particular has been quite a challenge to manage. The population at Thornhill has changed drastically in the past five years as school district lines have been redrawn and the Thornhill neighborhood has changed, to include many lower income families. Her class is well behaved when she is around, but struggles whenever a substitute is in the room, which happened frequently this year.

Erika was greatly disturbed by this, especially when one of the students was hit by a substitute (an off-duty police woman).

As a teacher, Erika designs her instruction to not only meet the state content standards, but she also tries to take into account student interest and current events. For examples, she chose to read a story about dog sled racing while the Iditarod race in Alaska was taking place last spring. She has been teaching many of her whole class books for many years, one unit comprised of three different texts around World War II, she has been using for at least eight years. She also regularly seeks out professional development and decision-making opportunities. As a school Thornhill was engaged in a professional development series on bullying among students, which she felt was invaluable in her classroom. She also was participating this spring on the committee to adopt a new reading textbook at the county level. She went to numerous meetings, reviewed many textbooks and talked with the other Thornhill teachers about the possible text. She has also attended several different summertime county and state professional development sessions over her career. During the fall, the principal sent her to a professional development seminar in a nearby city about writing instruction and she used many techniques from that seminar in the classroom. When she actually plans instruction, she considers the state content standards, then the curriculum that she has available to her and then pulls additional resources as necessary.

Grace

Grace is a Caucasian fourth grade girl. She has bangs and shoulder length brown hair and typically wears jeans or Capri pants and t-shirts to school. Grace lives with only her mother in an apartment. During the spring semester, Grace told me with great

excitement about how they were moving to a trailer. She moved into the trailer in April and her mother drove her to Thornhill so she would not have to change schools at the end of the year, as she now lived outside the school district. Grace mentions that she sees her grandmother, but otherwise, it is really just her and her mom. In the afternoons, Grace rides the bus home and lets herself in until her mother comes home from work a few hours later. Grace says that at home she does her homework and then reads books, she has a whole shelf full of books to read. She also likes to write fairy tale stories at home which she shares with her mother, who encourages her. Grace is friendly with many of the other students but is not particularly close to any of them. She frequently gets frustrated by her classmates bad behavior, and her classmates occasionally tease her for wanting to behave well. Grace really likes Mrs. Dawson and frequently tells her what is going on in her life, and shows her new clothes that she gets.

Academically, Grace is a good reader, but struggles with math. Grace says that she didn't know how to read until second grade, but then it just made sense and since then she has been a voracious reader. She has many books at home and always pulls out a book whenever she has chance. Grace's reading test scores are some of the best in the class. Her math scores on the other hand, are some of the lowest. She says that math simply doesn't make sense and was greatly encouraged when I told her that she would relearn a lot of fourth grade math subjects in the fifth grade.

Talia

Talia is a girl of mixed ancestry in Erika Dawson's class. Talia's mother is from Guatemala and her father is a mixture of Cacausian and Japanese. Talia is always dressed in fashionable clothes, short skirts, printed t-shirts and Capri pants; she always

wears her long black hair down. Talia lives with her little brother (a second grader at Thornhill), her mother and her mother's boyfriend. They also have a Chihuahua in their apartment. Another brother and her father live in Louisiana. Her family frequently visits her grandmother (her mother's mother) who lives roughly an hour away. Talia was also looking forward to visiting her father and stepmother in Louisiana during the summer, stating they were getting a room ready just for her (at home she has to share with her brother). Talia is very social. She is friends with almost everyone in the class, both the boys and girls really like her. In the afternoons, she attends the local boys and girls club until her mother picks her up. In the summer, she spends her days there also. When she is at home, Talia likes to watch TV and play video games. Talia had a wide knowledge of popular culture and was frequently heard talking about TV shows or movies with the other students.

Academically, Talia is an average student. Her test scores in both reading and math put her in the middle of the class. Talia does her work, but rarely seems to put much effort into it. Occasionally, she will be interested and try harder, but mostly she seems to do her work simply to get it finished. Social interactions are much more important to her than academics.

Allan

Allan is a Korean boy. He always comes to school neatly dressed in khakis or jeans and a collared shirt. Allan lives with his mother and father and little sister (who is also at Thornhill). His parents are from Korea, but he mostly speaks English, both at home and school. At home he plays with his sister and neighborhood friends outside. At school he is extremely quiet and works very hard. He is very sweet and responsible, he is

the escort for most of the boys when they have to go to the bathroom in pairs. The other students seem to like him, the only time he seems to talk is when he works in a small group with other students, and then he will whisper both on and off topic. His work is completed in meticulous cursive writing, despite the fact that Mrs. Dawson does not require cursive handwriting. He has a large set of markers that he uses to illustrate many assignments and which he graciously loans out to others regularly.

Academically, Allan is at the top of the class both in reading and mathematics. He works diligently and quickly. As the main bathroom escort, he frequently leaves the room to take another boy to the bathroom, yet he still manages to get the vast majority of his assignments finished, leaving him with no homework. Of the focal children, Allan warmed up to me the least. He didn't mind my observations or recordings in class, but he had a hard time talking with me one on one. He was very shy with adults, even ones he knew reasonably well.

Anastasia

Anastasia, or Ana, is a Caucasian girl. She was always neatly dressed, but in a quirky stylish way. Ana is tall and slender, with short wavy brown hair. She frequently wore funky clothes, such as a tweed mini skirt and jacket with tights and platform mary-janes, or jeans with a funky tunic top. She has a style of her own. Ana lives in the Thornhill neighborhood with her parents and older brother (a 5th grader at Thornhill). They have a pool in their yard and her father drives her to school in a classic convertible. Ana frequently plays with friends at her own house or at their house, she also likes to read, ride her bike, walk her dog, watch TV and play sports. She takes violin lessons at school twice a week. Her father is at home when she and her brother walk home from

school each day. She loves to tell stories about things her family does, she is very close to a cousin who she sees in the summer and was looking forward to going to an amusement park together this summer. Ana also has several close friends in the class and in Mrs. Dewitt's class, who she frequently has over to her house.

Ana has an opinion on everything. While she likes Thornhill, she doesn't really like fourth grade. She doesn't dislike Mrs. Dawson, but she doesn't like her either, as she feels she is too strict. She gets frustrated with her misbehaving classmates. Ana often acts like a mother or teacher to other classmates. She helps them with their work, gets them organized and directed, to the point that Mrs. Dawson frequently asks to help other students get on track. Ana, though, has her own mind and occasionally clashes with Mrs. Dawson, when she gets something into her head, such as wanting to clean out her desk, when Mrs. Dawson wants her to do other work. Generally, though, they get along fine. Ana typically gets some of her work done, but frequently she takes some home. While not speedy, Ana works hard and does good work. She is very concerned about grades and when I spoke to her about making copies of some of her papers, her first thought was to ask me if they would be graded yet, she was okay with me making copies once I assured her I would not copy things with grades on them, unless they were good grades.

Academically, Ana is a very good reader and an average math student. She typically does not like the books that they read in the classroom and feels that most of the assignments are boring. Her favorite assignment for the year was writing a fairy tale.

Context for the Research

By describing the key participants, school situation and policies surrounding Thornhill Elementary and Erika Dawson's fourth grade classroom, I have attempted to

build a picture of the context for this research. In the Chapter 5, I focus more intently on the literacy experiences in Erika Dawson's fourth grade and how the data I collected answers my three research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

In Mrs. Dawson's classroom, literacy instruction happened throughout the day during many different subjects in predictable formats. In the following section, I have explained the types of literacy instruction and experiences the children participated in the classroom, so that an understanding of how the students' experienced literacy in the classroom could be developed. I presented the events in the daily order in which they occurred. Then I considered each of the following three research questions in turn:

1. What are fourth graders' Discourses of literacy in a standards-based/testing driven world?
2. What or whom mediates those Discourses?
3. What do the Discourses reveal about the fourth graders' developing identities as literacy learners?

Classroom Literacy Instruction

Spelling

Each week on Monday, the students in Mrs. Dawson's classroom received a spelling list. The words on the list corresponded with words in the novel (or other text) that they was being read together as a class. Mrs. Dawson choose to use words from their reading text because she felt that the words had more meaning when the students also encountered them in context at the same time they were learning to spell them. The list

was generally 20 to 25 words long, though a subset of the classroom students worked off a shorter version of the list, becoming responsible for 10 to 15 words each week. Each morning (roughly 4 mornings a week) after the students unpacked and filled out their assignment books for the day, they had a spelling activity to do. Mrs. Dawson had several different activities that the students did every week, though she mixed up the days in which these activities were done. One activity was *stair step* spelling. In stair step spelling using a piece of graph paper, the student wrote the first letter of the word, then moved to the next line where they wrote the first and second letter. On the third line they wrote the first, second and third letter, and so on until the entire word was written. This was done for each word. Next came *picture perfect* spelling. Here students would fold a piece of paper into 8 sections. Then in each box a sentence was written using a spelling word, then a picture was drawn to illustrate the sentence. Each picture was carefully drawn in pencil then colored with markers or colored pencils. For *word shape,* the teacher provided a worksheet which showed a series of connected boxes. On the paper, the teacher drew boxes to illustrate the contours of the word. Children, then, matched up the spelling words with the appropriate set of boxes. In *see, say, cover, write, check* the children did exactly what the words directed. They looked at the word, said it, covered it, wrote it and then checked if they had spelled it correctly. Sometimes the teacher would also have a worksheet which sentences on it, in which a spelling word was left out, the children needed to fill in the spelling word. They were also expected to study the spelling words at home each evening.

On Thursday, the students took their *first-chance* spelling test. At this time, the teacher handed out a sheet with two columns of blanks. In the first column the student

wrote the spelling word during the first chance spelling test. Then in the second column they corrected any mistakes they made during the test for extra practice. During the test, the students separated their desks into “testing positions” and the teacher announced the spelling words. For the first chance test, Mrs. Dawson said the word, used it in a sentence and then repeated the word. Once the test was done, Mrs. Dawson took up the papes and marked them immediately while the students did seatwork. She then passed back the tests. If students made a 90% or more, they were exempt from taking the actual spelling test on Friday.

On Friday, for the actual test, students again separated their desks to prevent any cheating. Notebook paper was used for this test. This time, Mrs. Dawson said the word twice, without also using it in a sentence. When finished, she took up the tests and marked the tests later.

Writing

Writing instruction had two distinct phases in Mrs. Dawson’s classroom. Since the fourth grade takes a state writing test, the first phase was directed at preparing the students for the state writing test. For the writing test, each child wrote a personal expository essay. Typically the prompt required the students to answer a question using an essay format (i.e. If your house burned down, what would you grab as you ran from the burning building?) Writing instruction through the last week of February (when they took the test) focused on essays of this type. Students were taught to use a *four-square organizer* where they detailed three items for three body paragraphs, in accord with the prompt. Each items was put in a separate square and in each square three reasons for having chosen the items were detailed. The squares also guided the students to use

appropriate transition words. The last square was for a conclusion. The middle of the four squares showed a box where the question was written to act as an introduction. The children planned and wrote roughly two essays a week. First they planned using the four square worksheet, then they wrote a draft and then a final copy. As time went on the children were required to draw their own four square organizer from memory, since at testing time they would not have a worksheet. Mrs. Dawson not only taught the students how to fill out the four square, but she also led lessons on transition words, good endings, interesting beginnings and vivid descriptive words. She had several small posters on the board that she made to remind the students of these lessons, she brought them to the middle of chalkboard whenever the students were writing. The essays were graded by Mrs. Dawson according to the state guidelines which would be used to assess the final test essay.

After the writing test was completed, Mrs. Dawson allowed her students to start on some creative stories. The first unit they did was a fairytale unit. In this unit, the students planned fairy tales by drawing pictures of their main characters, then they completed a story map. After these steps, the students wrote a rough draft, conferenced with other students and the teacher before the produced an illustrated final version. During this time, Mrs. Dawson led lessons on elements of a fairytale and discussed how to plan creative stories with the children. Then a large amount of time was dedicated to planning, drafting, conferencing and publishing. After completing their fairytales, they worked for a while on stories written in partner groups. These stories were based on a deserted island that each group imagined. These stories were not completed while I was visiting the classroom, but instead were put aside for a unit on writing poetry. The

students received instructions about how to write different types of poems and composed their own (ex. Haiku, limerick, cinquain, etc). All of these writing assignments were graded by Mrs. Dawson.

Grammar/Language

Grammar/language instruction was not a large emphasis while I visited the classroom. Most grammar work took the form of a grammar worksheet. Typically these required the students to fill in the correct form of a word or to have inserted the correct punctuation into a sentence. Topics such as plural nouns, subject/verb agreement and correct sentence-ending punctuation were seen. Instruction was sometimes given via worksheets, and occasionally, one or two examples were done as a whole group on the chalkboard, but not for every topic or worksheet. The worksheets were completed individually and turned in for a grade.

Computer Lab Literacy Experiences

Each day in Mrs. Dawson's class, the students spent thirty minutes in the computer lab. Each child logged onto a computer and completed assignments dictated by Mrs. Dawson. These assignments changed daily and encompassed a whole range of subjects. Frequently, these assignments involved literacy. Grammar/language was a frequent topic, where the students did assignments on a program that worked through units on different grammar/language topics. Topics such as verb endings and subject/verb agreement were frequent. The program would provide a short paragraph of instruction, then modeled several examples and last the students completed a series of activities, with songs and computer graphics that appeared as a reward for correct responses. Similar programs also tested reading comprehension and vocabulary

knowledge after reading short passages. Occasionally, the children wrote short paragraphs. Other programs allowed the children to write essays similar to the 4th grade writing test on the computer, the computer provided an instant score for the child (and a report for the teacher).

Mrs. Dawson also used the computers for research. When the students read a story about a sled dog in Alaska, she developed a worksheet with a series of questions for the students to research and answer. She guided them on their research using Google and was quite amazed at how well the children searched for answers and evaluated which websites were helpful in their research. Students recorded their research manually in a small booklet they made in the classroom.

Mathematics

Literacy did not play a large role in mathematics instruction in Erika Dawson's classroom, but it crept in occasionally. Word problems were not used in abundance, as the students worked mostly out of a math workbook, which did not emphasize word problems. Only once during my time at Thornhill, did I observe Mrs. Dawson directly bring literacy into her mathematics class. She read and discussed *How much is a million?* (Schwartz, 1997). This fit into the curriculum topic that concerned understanding large numbers.

Science

For science class (and social studies), the two fourth grade classes at Thornhill switched classes, so that each fourth-grade teacher taught only one of the two subjects. Erika Dawson taught social studies and Diana Dewitt taught science to both classes. In science class, literacy experiences played a large role. Most of the thirty-minute science

classes, included two different types of instruction, reading and discussing the textbook or participating in experiments. Literacy was rarely a part of the science experiments as all directions were given orally and children reported their results orally to Mrs. Dewitt. The class, though, regularly read from the science textbook. Either Mrs. Dewitt read aloud from the text or the children popcorn read from the textbook. During popcorn reading, a child volunteered to read a set amount (usually a paragraph or two), then they choose the next child to read (who volunteered by raising their hands)…this continued until the entire section to be read was completed and no child read twice until every child had read a section. Mrs. Dewitt will frequently stopped the reading and asked questions or explained concepts. Children also usually had few textbook pages to read for homework. Writing only played a role in science class during tests, which contained multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer and longer answer questions. While the children each had their own test, Mrs. Dewitt also read all of the questions aloud for the entire class, to accommodate modification for certain children. Once she read slowly through the test, children continued to work on it and turned it in once they had completed the test to their satisfaction.

Social Studies

Social studies class predominantly used literacy experiences for instruction. Erika Dawson used the social studies time to help students learn summarization skills, specifically with a non-fiction text. In small groups of two to three, the children read a section of their textbook and provided summaries of that section. Throughout the time I visited, the students learned about the American colonies. Every week or two, they constructed a small paper booklet and labeled the pages with certain major topics from

the chapter they were studying in the text (colonial leaders, specific colonies, etc.). Then each day or two, they were assigned one of the topics from the books (i.e. Middle Colonies booklet—Page labels: Pennslyvania, Maryland, etc.). They read the corresponding section in their textbook, then used question words (who, what, where, when, why, how), and built an understanding of the important features of the topic. They wrote an answer for each word on the pages in their book. After the page was completed, Mrs. Dawson went over the answers with the class to ensure that they had all of the information correct. Occasionally, the entire class worked on a page together as Mrs. Dawson led the discussion. Then the students' popcorn read the section aloud, she then led the discussion of how to answer each question and recorded the correct responses on the board. The completed booklets were studied for tests. Like the science tests, the social studies tests consisted of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer and longer answer questions. Mrs. Dawson took students aside to a table if they required testing modifications and read the test aloud to those students.

Reading

Reading instruction each day had two parts, whole group reading and self-selected reading. Small reading instruction groups were also used occasionally.

Whole group reading. During whole group reading, the class read a novel or short story together. Mostly the class read fiction novels, but I also observed them read one short non-fiction book, as well as several short stories. Mrs. Dawson had numerous class sets of trade books that she drew from for these studies. Stories read during my visits to the classroom included: *Number the stars* (Lowry,1990), *Sadako and the thousand paper cranes* (Coerr, 1999), *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (Cleary, 2000), *Akiak*: *A tale*

from the Iditarod (Blake, 1997)*, Dear Ms. Park: A dialogue with today's youth* (Parks & Reed, 1997) *If you traveled West in a covered wagon* (Levine, 1992). For each story, each child had a text of their own and a booklet with printed questions for each chapter. Typically a chapter of reading was assigned each day, though the mode of reading varied. Sometimes students read alone, sometimes with a partner, sometimes the class popcorn read and sometimes Mrs. Dawson read aloud. Most frequently I saw the class read in partners, then the partners worked together and completed the chapter questions. Mrs. Dawson chose the partners, which usually did not require the students to have moved around the classroom, they simply partnered with those who sat near to them. Mrs. Dawson purposefully arranged her desks with these types of learning activities in mind; she assigned students to seats so that she mixed student ability levels throughout the classroom. Students were normally seated such that students with higher intellectual functioning were seated next to lower functioning students, which allowed for the lower students to be coached by higher students during partner activities.

In addition to the printed chapter questions, the class wrote a one-sentence summary for each chapter. This was done as a whole class activity, led by Mrs. Dawson. Mrs. Dawson wrote the question words on the board (who, what, where, when, why, how) and the children provided answers for each of the questions. Once all the questions were answered, Mrs. Dawson erased the question words and any words duplicated across the answers for each question. Then the students (prompted by Mrs. Dawson) provided a one-sentence summary for the chapter using the clues from the chalkboard. Once the summary was perfected and all the students (and Mrs. Dawson) were happy with it, each child copied the summary down onto a piece of paper and drew an illustration for the

chapter. The class also brainstormed what should go into the illustration. Mrs. Dawson always reminded them to include the ground, a background, and not to draw stick figures. The illustrations were to be completely colored in and all of the summaries and illustrations for a text were bound together in book form once the text was completed. At that time, the children were given a study guide that they completed and checked in class and then they had a test. Tests followed the model of the social studies tests with a variety of question formats used.

Small group reading. Once during my time at Thornhill, Mrs. Dawson did a short small-group reading unit. She told me that she felt that she did not do enough small group reading instruction, but that she often found it hard to fit in the time for it. For this unit, she used four different short texts all at different reading levels. She separated the class into groups and met with the groups individually. At the first meeting, she introduced the text and did some popcorn reading to get the groups started. Then she assigned a section for the student to read on their own before the next meeting. At the following group meetings she discussed the previous reading with the students, gave out a copied list of questions to answer and a new reading assignment. She read more of the text with the groups that used easier texts than with the group with the most difficult. Mrs. Dawson continued use of a whole group text at the same time that she conducted small group reading instruction.

Self-selected reading. Each day for the last fifteen to thirty minutes of the day, the students engaged in self-selected reading. Each child had a book to read of their own and a folder with a reading log. These books and folders were kept together in the front of the room in a series of bins. Students recorded the pages that they read each day in the

log. The books were books from the reading corner that Mrs. Dawson helped each child to pick and were only used at self-selected reading time. At other times, if a child wanted to read, they kept a book of their choice from the library in their desk. Self-selected reading took backseat to whole group reading instruction; it was not accompanied by instruction and was often pushed off for children to finish work from their whole group text. Additionally, self-selected reading time was frequently infringed upon by preparations to leave school, as children read after they had packed up for the day and after Mrs. Dawson had checked their assignment books.

Literacy Environment

Literacy played a large role throughout the day in Mrs. Dawson's classroom, the data collected about literacy experiences is drawn from all of these areas. Literacy was incorporated across the school day in this classroom and the students' Discourses of literacy were influenced by the different ways they experienced literacy throughout the school day. In the following sections, I have described how the data analysis answered the research questions.

What are Fourth-Graders' Discourses of Literacy in a Standards-Based/Testing-Driven World?

The fourth-graders in Mrs. Dawson's class developed a specific Discourse of literacy to serve their needs in the classroom, across subjects. Their Discourse of literacy had several distinct features that served specific purposes for the students as they approached literacy events in the classroom. Their Discourse was *personal*, *pragmatic* and *particular*. These characteristics described their Discourse because almost all talk

surrounding literacy events fit into one of these categories. These categories also drove their approach to literacy, as they illustrated their main concerns about all literacy activities in the classroom.

Personal

When the students approach literacy, they frequently brought *personal knowledge* to bear on how they interacted with the literacy event. This personal knowledge consisted of several different types of information: popular culture/media knowledge, knowledge of places, and direct personal experiences. It is different from background information, because it rarely served as direct background information, where the students brought knowledge they had about a specific subject to help them integrate new or additional knowledge about that subject. Rather, this personal knowledge acted as adjunct information that the students pulled out of their memories and attempted to relate to new information that they were received. It was rarely directly related to the actual information at hand, instead the student thought of something that they knew which was tenuously connected to the new information and proposed it as a possible connection, in order to integrate the new knowledge into their existing knowledge more effectively. Unfortunately, this technique did not usually work particularly well, as was evident in the examples for each type of personal Discourse. Typically, it caused greater confusion for the student, but it was effective just enough that the students continued to use it as a method to attempt to integrate new literacy knowledge into their existing knowledge structures.

Popular culture/media knowledge. Popular culture/media knowledge was the most frequently used type of personal Discourse by the students. This happened most

frequently during writing instruction, especially after the writing test, when students were engaged in creating their own stories, specifically fairytales. The use of popular culture here was most obvious, as the students, on the whole, seemed to have very little understanding of fairytales, therefore, they turned to whatever personal knowledge they could muster up to help integrate the new knowledge of fairytales that was being put forth in this discussion. For example, while working towards a list of elements of a fairytale the following exchange occurred:

T (Teacher): Okay what else goes on in the story?

S (Student): There's always like a problem

T: Good so like, like good vs. bad or evil, yes, good. Alright.

S: What does evil stand for?

Ss (Students): Every villain is lemons

T: Every villain is living?

Ss: Every villain is lemons!

T: Every villain is lash?

Ss: Every villain is lemons!!

"Every villain is lemons" was an acronym from Sponge Bob Square Pants, which virtually every student in the class knew and joined in yelling to help Mrs. Dawson understand what they were saying. This did not exactly pertain to the discussion, but it helped the students understand the concept of good v. evil as they remembered a popular culture definition of evil from one of their favorite television shows. Later in that same discussion, when Mrs. Dawson proposed another fairytale element, a student tried to understand the element by connecting it to another popular culture reference:

T: There would be knights, that has to do with the royalty so lets add onto that, white knight in shining that rescues the distressed princess, cause she's facing some serious stumbling block or stress

S: Like on Shrek?

T: What, like on Shrek? So

S: He was like the prince in shining armor

T: So, ok, so there is usually a damsel or a girl in trouble, what do you want to call it, distress or stress

The student struggled with the concept proposed by Mrs. Dawson, a white knight in armor to rescue a princess, so they called on a familiar popular culture reference to try to understand this new reference, Shrek. Shrek was not a direct correlate of the literacy element the Mrs. Dawson was trying to describe, as it was a fractured fairytale, but it was the closest approximation the student came up with under the circumstances (it appeared several times during multiple fairytale writing discussions). It was also unclear as to whether the reference helped the student understand the concept. Mrs. Dawson acknowledged the student's attempt to relate the knowledge, but did not affirm whether or not that the attempt fit what she explained, which left the student hanging.

Many references to popular culture only tenuously fit into the discussion in which they were used. In the transcripts of the fairytale discussions, the students used any popular culture reference that included elements of fantasy, even though fantasy was only a portion of the fairytales characteristics. For example:

S: I got, like, something for magic?

T: What?

S: Umm, like the talking flowers on the Series of Unfortunate Events?

Ss: Oh yeah! (giggles)

T: So umm, wait lets go over here, with fiction, its more than just fiction, you're saying a fantasy element…

S: An element?

T: Something that could not happen in real life.

Here a student proposed a popular culture reference from the popular *Series of Unfortunate Events* books, by Lemony Snickett (2006). The student chose something that he knew could not have happened in real life, that was magical, and therefore he tried to include it with possible fairytale examples and other students agreed with him. While talking flowers could possibly have appeared in a fairytale, Mrs. Dawson only marginally accepted the answer and went on to explain what a fantasy element was and she neglected to draw a connection from that fantasy element to a fairytale. This left the students in the dark as to whether or not their attempt to connect knowledge was appropriate.

Thus the students were almost always tentative when they used their popular culture connections during literacy events. Ana (A) showed how tentative the students where later:

A: Um, well, um, sometimes um I kind of saw this in um, the Barbie movie, its like first I don't know but its like the queen is kinda evil, it might be one of his servants, but I forget if he, if she's the queen

T: What is your question, honey?

A: Well, um, sometimes she turned evil and wanted to get rid of the princesses so she and the king so she could become the queen…

T: Okay so you could take that idea and go with it, now here's the only thing, this has to be original, you know you can't copy somebody else's story, whether you've seen it in a movie, you read a book by it, you can't copy somebody else's ideas, but you can take someone's, another idea that you've seen and kind of put it your own slant on it, so it has to be original, here, both put your hands down and here's my next question.

Ana was quite tentative as she stated her reference to the Barbie movie (*Barbie as Rapunzel*, Durchin & Mitchell, 2002) and in fact, never made clear the goal of that popular culture reference. Mrs. Dawson, since Ana's reasoning was not stated, took the reference and used it for a purpose of her own, to speak about plagiarism. Ana never had an opportunity to clarify her reasoning for mentioning the Barbie movie, thus her reference did not help her gain any understandings, other than the ones which Mrs. Dawson had in mind.

Occasionally, popular culture references were productive to an extent for the students. In the following example, Talia (Ta) proposed another fairytale element and another student turned it into a popular culture reference:

Ta: What are those people that they have come up to the king when he's really sad?

T: The jokers and the jesters, yes they can be involved in the story, that doesn't have royalty, they're not royalty, but they are servants so you could say that there is a possibility servants here, meaning like the jester, what?

S: Joker

T: Joker

S: Joker's the name of a person

T: Yeah, Joker is an evil person, alright, maybe that's a possibility in your fairytale…

Talia dredged a possibility out of her personal knowledge and then another student leapt upon it as a popular culture reference, which was acknowledged by the teacher and connected with what else transpired in the discussion, which provided the students with another concrete example of an evil person, even if he was not actually fairytale character. Thus, this reference served a purpose for the students and allowed them to integrate new knowledge more fully with what they already new.

Popular culture references included many other examples, as the students used many different references (Batman, Bunnicula, Romeo and Juliet, etc.) to gain understandings of knowledge that was being presented. These references were useful just frequently enough that the students continued to use them, despite their uselessness many of the times. Whole class discussions were not the only place that popular culture references appeared. Popular culture references figured prominently in small group discussions, except these references were not designed to develop understandings; rather they were simply discussions of what interested the students when they were distracted from their assignments. These references did not connect with the topic at hand in anyway; they were complete diversions to satisfy the students' need to have talked about something comfortable with their friends. I observed Allan and Talia quietly discussing the movie *Sky High* (Gunn & Mitchell, 2005) and the character of Twitch during a social

studies lesson, when they were supposed to be reading and considering question words for a selection. This brief diversion ended when Grace said "Shh! Allan!" after she noticed Mrs. Dawson watching them before she began a class discussion. Nevertheless, popular culture figured prominently in the students' of Mrs. Dawson's classroom literacy Discourse. They found popular culture was useful in connecting new understandings to other personal knowledge that they had.

Place knowledge. Place knowledge or geographical knowledge was yet another attempt by the students to integrate new knowledge into other knowledge that they already had. Place knowledge figured prominently in their Social Studies work as much of the learning there focused on the American colonies (a place oriented topic) and because their Social Studies work was guided by the question words (who, what, when, where, why, how) thus "the where" was usually the most relatable subject for a fourth grader, who had little in common with the bare facts of colonial life and politics. In the following example, a student drew on his knowledge of the current geography of Maryland:

> T: yeah, he's living over in England, so he leaves England with the charter in his hand and he brings a group of people with him, they come over to the Maryland area and they settle in a place called, that they named what?
>
> S: Kaiser
>
> T: Kaiser, no, that's in West Virginia dear
>
> S: What no, there's a Kaiser in Maryland, too
>
> S_2: St. Mary's (quiet)

T: Yeah, but okay, no, you were told to read about this in your book, I told you to read a big box named what?

S_2: St. Mary's

Here, the first student named a place that he knew in the correct state, despite the fact that Kaiser was not mentioned in their textbook reading passage. Mrs. Dawson recognized the personal knowledge of the student ("Yeah, but okay"), but she also told him that it had no place in this discussion by pointing to what he was supposed to have read in the text ("I told you to read a big box"). Needless to say, the student's place knowledge did not really help him at all, other than the fact that it was recognized that he knew a place in the same state.

The students place knowledge also confused them when places that they knew shared names with places that they didn't know. Yet, they still tried to make the connection with places that they did know, before they realized the confusion.

T: ok, in South Carolina, there was this place called Charles,

S: ton

T: no town, because it was in honor of the King

S: Charleston

T: it, became, yes, like West Virginia only this is South Carolina, Charleston… Alright, Charleston grew into the most important, no its not it's the capitol of West Virginia, but this South Carolina, there's a Charleston in South Carolina, okay

The student knew Charleston, WV but was not highly familiar with Charleston, SC. This confused the students as they tried to relate the two. Implied but not explained in the

discussion, was that Charleston, SC started as “Charlestown”, but slowly the name evolved into Charleston; while Charleston, WV was always “Charleston”. This distinction caused confusion for the students, especially since this was the only explanation of the difference they received.

Later in the same discussion, Talia connected to South Carolina (which she has visited before) by mentioning a place that she knew during a discussion of things sold at the market in Charleston, SC:

S: If they had like fish did they get to?

T: Well what do you think?

Ss: Yeah!

T: Where else did they get it from?

Ta: Fish market, Myrtle Beach then

T: No, there wasn’t a Myrtle Beach then.

Ta: a river?

T: okay, turn to your next page, you should be on your third page

Ta: Myrtle Beach sounds like a turtle beach

T: Talia go pull a card

Ta: I’ve never been

T: you’re yelling disruptive things, Alright!

Talia mentioned Myrtle Beach when the discussion turned to places to get fish. She knew it was in South Carolina and infers it must have been near Charleston. Mrs. Dawson told her that Myrtle Beach did not exist then, so she proposed a river, using her knowledge of place. Later, as she continued to enjoy thinking about this one place

("Myrtle Beach sounds like turtle beach"), she is reprimanded for yelling disruptive things. This was a confusing situation for her, because at one point her place knowledge was somewhat accepted (No, there wasn't a Myrtle Beach then) and then it was not.

Place knowledge also played a role during reading. Once, while a reading group studied a book on the Artic, place knowledge became an issue in a way slightly different from the above examples. Here Mrs. Dawson, Talia and several other students discussed characteristics of certain places.

T: Alright, good, um now, here's what I want you to do. I want you to go to Chapter one which is called "The False Start" its on page 15. And I'm looking at something that's kind of orange and glowing, wonder what that is?

Ss: It's a tent

T: It's a tent, that's right. So look at that, that's camping at night. So as he's traveling he couldn't stay at a hotel, um, why didn't he just stay in a hotel?

Ta: Because there's no hotel around!!

T: Why? There it's a

S: Its like at the top of the world!

T: Exactly, alright, this is a very unpopulated area and that is true.

S: They would fall off the side of the earth!

T: No, no S! You should be back with Christopher Columbus

S_2: What'd he say?

S: He'd like fall off the side of the earth!

Mrs. Dawson asked why the characters in the text were camping, instead of staying in a hotel. The students immediately responded that it was "the top of the world" and Talia

said that there was “no hotel around.” The students used their place knowledge to recall that this was not a place that would have a hotel, despite the fact that none of them had any real life experience with the Artic. Nevertheless their place knowledge informed their experience of this text.

Overall, place knowledge was not a particularly helpful piece of knowledge that the students brought to school. More often than not, place knowledge did not clarify new information or bring them recognition of their attempted connections. Yet, students continued to mention it because place knowledge did at least allow them to categorize some new knowledge into a consistent group of knowledge, geographical places.

Personal experiences. The last type of personal knowledge that was frequently heard in the student’s literacy Discourse was personal experiences. Personal experience stories were used mostly in small group work, as Mrs. Dawson rarely allowed personal stories in class. She quickly shut down personal stories (though she told quite a few as she taught) as in this example of a discussion during Social Studies, while the class went over information recorded in their colony booklets:

S: The first and second Lord Baltimore

T: Its just like the, first and second mean, junior senior, you know when the old, dad has a son, names him the same the son becomes junior, he’s senior, only this time they called them first and second

S: Like the

S_2: My dad calls me…

T: S_2 shh!

Personal stories were not permitted as they offered a tangent from the work at hand. If personal stories occurred, Mrs. Dawson frequently ignored them, as in this except from a discussion of *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (Cleary, 2000):

T: Ok six, name two types of food that Lee's mom had for supper?

S: Microwaved chicken pot pies

T: Yeah, frozen chicken yeah, microwaved frozen chicken pot pies and there is something else?

S: Canned baked beans

T: Chili, canned chili

S: Or something chili

T: Chili out of a can

S: Eww!

S_2: That's sweet stuff, man

T: Seven, what does the school librarian have to give to Lee?

Once the answer was clarified for all of the students that in fact the second dinner item was canned chili, the student ("eww!") expressed his disgust, while another student offered his personal opinion that canned chili was good ("that's sweet stuff, man"). Mrs. Dawson completely ignored this exchange and moved on, thus the personal story and connection had little or no meaning for the students as they tried to relate to the book and characters.

Personal stories did occur, though, during group work, as in this example where Ana and Grace (G) did an assignment from their reading group. Ana told numerous personal stories (R for is researcher, I sat beside the girls as they worked). They read a

book about the Arctic and Antarctica, and completed several typed questions from Mrs. Dawson:

A: Let's see…What animals live in the arctic? I am going to put my own, the polar bear.

G: Polar bears here

A: Yeah polar bear, here, polar bears live in the arctic. Polar bear, that's my favorite animal in the arctic too because it has like…I have stuffed animal polar bear and a stuffed penguin; it's a baby holding it from the ice. It's so cool.

Later

A: I don't like, I, one of my dad's friends went to the Arctic once.

R: Wow that's really cool

A: Yeah he said it's like very cold; you have to wear like 10 coats

R: I'm sure you do

A: 10 very, very heavy coats

R: Umhum

A: And he saw a bunch of polar bears there he said

R: Very neat

A: Did you know that polar bears are going extinct?

R: Um hum, yeah, sad isn't it

A: I have a polar bear that I used to have. It used to tell you exact all the facts about polar bears. You press on it says polar bears eat like 60 lbs a day. Polar bears like eating seals real bad and anything else they can find.

Ana used her personal interest and experience with polar bears to engage with the text and questions. She had reasonably extensive personal knowledge of polar bears, through her talking stuffed animal and a friend of her dad's. She immediately thought of all multiple ideas, which allowed her to engage the book more completely. This knowledge helped her to quickly located answers to certain questions in the text, as her interest in polar bears guided her to answers of questions (What animals live in the Artic?). This was a typical example of how the students used personal experiences in their literacy Discourse.

Students also frequently told personal stories that were off topic, especially in small groups. These stories occurred because the students were distracted from their work. Once during social studies, Allan and Grace had a discussion of Valentines Day (the next day) and how it would be celebrated. Allan and Grace refocused once Mrs. Dawson paused near their desks. While off topic personal stories did little to assist student learning, the stories did indeed permeate the discourses of the students, particularly during literacy assignments as they became bored with the assigned topic. When personal examples were pertinent, they were often helpful because they helped the students locate information for answering questions faster, as their interests guided them to similar information quickly.

Personal knowledge, while wildly used in the students' literacy Discourse, was of mixed effectiveness. Students brought their personal knowledge to bear most frequently on new information, trying to use the personal knowledge to more effectively integrate new knowledge with their prior knowledge. This was only sometimes effective. Using personal knowledge was most effective with personal experiences aspect of discourse, yet

that was the least used element in the classroom, as it was not valued in large class discussions, which dominated the literacy Discourse. Popular culture references were used most frequently because they were occasionally useful and acknowledged by Mrs. Dawson. Place knowledge was also used as it offered a possible way to integrate difficult Social Studies concepts, but it too came with mixed messages. Still, the students' literacy Discourse significantly drew from personal knowledge.

Pragmatic

A second feature of the fourth graders' Discourse was that it was *pragmatic*. Their Discourse had many practical aspects to it, and often they focused on ensuring that they had directions for an assignment correct. Mrs. Dawson typically gave very specific directions on how to complete assignments and the students incorporated her focus on completing assignments in exactly the way she wanted into their Discourse. Frequently, they did this by asking her for clarification on directions, as Ana did in the following instance:

> T: Okay, here's what I want, I want a picture for both of these, I want to see your setting (writes on board) and I want to see your characters or character, I'm going to put it in parentheses, for good vs. evil you usually have to have at least two, your good and your evil, so I want you to label that, now, after you do this, with this for each one of these I want to see a picture, and then I want to see some description, now what do I mean by description? Do you have to write a paragraph, do you have to write sentences?
>
> S: um, well you probably have to write a few sentences

T: possibly, because, but I know I'm a person that needs a lot a detail, I write a lot of sentences, but somebody else may want to just do some notes, so maybe you draw your good character, you draw your evil character, you can start drawing those lines from it, your character can be your web, the picture can be the middle of your web, with their name and whether they are good or evil, you might draw some lines off that and say, ogre, has four teeth, has green wart on its one nose, the other nose is on the back of its head (Ss giggles), lips and a…

S: tree stump

T: tree stump, okay you can use that picture as your web, is there anybody that doesn't understand? So far at this point?…Ana?

A: yeah, um, when we do the character thing, if um we draw the character and we put the details down, um, do we do that on a separate piece of paper?

T: no, I'm going to give you one large sheet of drawing paper, so what you're going to put on the drawing paper are those things you want to draw your setting, you want to draw your characters, if you want to draw all as one giant picture that's fine, if you want to draw one part of the paper being your characters and one being your setting, that's fine too, you can make it out as like two kind of character maps, or two sketch maps, or two webs I'm trying say, that's what I'm trying to say, Ana?

A: do we draw and write?

T: the writing part is you putting some notes down, like I said if I had an ogre as my character what his name was, how old he was, where he lives, what he does that's bad, umm, or maybe he's a good ogre and that's part of his problem…

Mrs. Dawson provided the class with extensive directions on how to plan their fairytale via drawing and taking notes, but Ana still had a question which was highly practical, to ask if the information all went on the same paper and if the students did both writing and drawing on that one paper. These questions highlighted her desire to do the assignment correctly and they were very pragmatic, ensuring that she would do it correctly, according to Mrs. Dawson.

In a Social Studies lesson, another student, Ella (E), struggled to make sure that her information was in the correct place as they checked the answers to the question words in their colony booklets:

T: You have a back side too, you need to write small

E: I used the backside

T: You shouldn't even be writing that much, go onto the next page if you have to and we'll just add another page at the end. Okay, they set up government and then they wrote something in 1669. What'd they write?

S: Fundaments for the Carolinas

T: Yes, good, in 1669 they wrote the Fundamental

E: I got that in when?

T: Does it matter?

E: No?

T: No, just as long as you have the notes.

Ella had previously filled out her colony booklet with a small group of students after they read a section in the Social Studies text. She wrote large and ran out of room for the additional information she needed to add as the class went over the correct answers,

furthermore she had some of the correct information but found it under the wrong question word. First, Mrs. Dawson reprimanded her for using too much room, so Ella seemed surprised when Mrs. Dawson was not fazed by the fact that she wrote some of the information under the wrong question word, instead Mrs. Dawson emphasized that it was more important to have the information. Ella's questions were very pragmatic, she wanted to make sure that that she not only had the right information, but also that she had the information in the right form.

A similar emphasis was noticed when Grace, Allan (Al) and another student were working in a small group during Social Studies to complete another section of question words in their colony booklets:

Al: is there a line on how?

G: I don't know, I'm not in there yet, I'm still on what

S: do you have whys?

G: I'm on what, oh! I wrote it the wrong place!

Grace realized that she had put her information under the wrong question word, thus she proceeded to erase and rewrite her answers in the correct place, as she had internalized belief that it must be done correctly. She was pragmatic in thinking that it was a problem to have written the information under the wrong word, as Mrs. Dawson meticulously went over each word with the entire class. In this next example, when the whole class discussed correct answers, another student asked Mrs. Dawson where they were:

S: I got a question?

T: Okay

S: Which part are we on?

T: Actually I'm moving into the *what* and the *why* kind of, the *what* actually I'm the *what* part.

The student was unsure due to the course of the discussion where they were in the question word answers, in order to make sure he got it correct, he asked a pragmatic question to ensure his success in completing the assignment.

Talia also queried Mrs. Dawson for pragmatic information when she was putting together a book of all of her chapter summaries from *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1990) Talia asked Mrs. Dawson, "Do I need to write out the title? # or number?" Mrs. Dawson replied, "Do you see # signs on titles of books? You need to write it out". Since her booklet was to be turned in for a grade, Talia wanted to ensure that she did everything correctly, thus she even checked before writing the title of the book on her booklet.

Mrs. Dawson frequently asked the students pragmatic questions also and expected the students to consider pragmatic concerns, as in this whole class discussion of the four square organizer, where Grace answered Mrs. Dawson's questions:

T: What to put on each line?

G: Main idea topic.

T: Why not on the first line?

G: Need connecting words.

Since most of the year in writing instruction was devoted to using the four-square organizer, the pragmatic concerns of using one was known to the students. Hence, Grace was able to quickly answer these pragmatic questions from Mrs. Dawson, with concise, specific answers, she knew exactly how to complete the organizer because it was important in her classroom experience to know how to complete the organizer correctly.

The students' knowledge in Mrs. Dawson's class was such that when they had a substitute, they directly guided her through a number of their usual assignments. Once after having read *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1990), Grace coached the substitute in completing their chapter summary assignment. She said, "Now we cross out all of the repeated words. Erase all the question words. Now we have to write them down." Then Grace provided a summary with the remaining words "Midmorning at the farmhouse, Momma tells Kirsti, Annemarie and Ellen (the girls) that great-aunt Birte will be buried at Uncle Henrik's farmhouse, for religious reasons." It was beside the point to Grace (and the substitute) that Grace's summary was not really an appropriate summary for the chapter. Grace had used her pragmatic knowledge to guide her answer, even though it was somewhat incorrect overall.

In another particularly pragmatic turn, during social studies lesson, another student and Ella worked on their question words for a particular section. When Ella was moving too slow for his taste, her partner said to her impatiently, "All you have to do is copy out of the book!" and hurried to finish writing information for a specific date. He realized that the most pragmatic way to get the correct answers for each question was to simply have copied from the book once he located the answer.

The students were continually pragmatic about doing their work, they wanted to do it correctly so that they would succeed and not have to redo or erase when it was time to check the work. Therefore, there was a significant pragmatic emphasis in their literacy Discourse.

Particular

The final aspect of the student's literacy Discourse was that it is *particular*. The literacy discourse of the students' focused on specific facts, almost exclusively, and these facts were highly tied to the text they were working with during classroom literacy events. While numerous examples showed that students were particular in their literacy discourse because they answered questions using specific facts from the text, examples that were most useful here illustrated how both Mrs. Dawson and the students used the text as the ultimate source. The text was always the source for the particular facts, as in this example from a Social Studies lesson where Mrs. Dawson asked who came to the Carolina colony:

S: Citizens are being coming from England and the Caribbeans and H??….

T: And Huguenots, is that what you were going to add?

S: Yes

T: Keep going

S: As well

T: As well as

S: Huggeknots

T: The Huguenots, those were protestants from where? Humm?

S: Carolina?

T: no, keep reading

S: this my book I wrote (*his colony booklet*)

T: Huguenots from where? Oh this is in your book?

S: yeah!

T: oh, I thought you had your other one open! (*his textbook*) Protestants were from France, is where they came from

The student knew that a particular fact was required to answer this question, in fact he copied it word for word from his textbook (I watched him copy it the day before this exchange) and Mrs. Dawson thought he was reading directly from his textbook to give her the particular fact. The text was held up as the ultimate source for particulars.

Again, during reading time, Mrs. Dawson encouraged the students to name particular facts for each of her questions. While the class studied *If you traveled West in a covered wagon* (Levine, 1992), one day they popcorn read the text aloud. Since the text was organized with a question and then a paragraph or two response to that question, each child read a question and the response. Then in a separate booklet the class wrote down the answer to the question posed by the text. This discussion occurred after one child read the text and Ana, Tabitha (Tb) and Chahna (C) answered the question.

T: Okay, packet question #41. What did the pioneers do for fun?

A: Play harmonica or fiddle.

T: Okay, what else? Its okay to look back in your book. Tabitha?

Tb: Dance

T: Yes. Ana?

A: Dance

T: Okay, there's still more. Chahna?

C: make stuff?

T: Yes, like a flag. They also explored and looked at new things on the trail. Okay, next, "How do people make the flag?"

Mrs. Dawson wanted a complete list of all of the particular things that the pioneers might do for fun and the class provided her with specific answers, naming only particular facts that were relevant. The students did not bring in additional guesses, as they knew what was most likely to be correct.

In another small group situation, Ana and Grace focused on particulars again as they sought to answer the questions they were given about a book:

> G: I know I am. Um, I think the Antarctica goes on the bottom and the arctic is on the top and Antarctica is on the bottom
>
> A: What is stuck on the bottom? I think that's really cool how when the temperatures fall as low as 63 F as they do in the polar regions boiling water freezes as soon as it hits the air. It's frozen to a icicle so cool, look how cool that is.
>
> A: Wait a minute what's the difference about them, Grace.
>
> A: I can not keep this open
>
> G: One's on top. One's on bottom. Artic is on the top and Antarctica is on the bottom.

The girls, specifically Grace, realized that the information was divided on the page, with information about the Artic on the top and the Antarctic on the bottom. This helped them find the particular facts that they needed to answer their questions.

Later in another reading discussion about *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (Cleary, 2000) with the whole class, Grace and Ana again demonstrated their focus on particulars in their literacy discourse:

> T: Seven, what does the school librarian have to give to Lee? Grace?

G: Um I didn't get to read this I am just making a little guess, um a new book of Mr. Henshaw's

T: Yeah, *Cold Beggar Bears,* yes Mr. Henshaw's new book called *Beggar Bears*. What's *Beggar Bears* about, Ana?

A: Um, *Beggar Bears* is about when these two bears were young and their mother died and these people came and helped them and taught them how to survive in the woods.

T: Because mom had taught them how to beg food from tourist in Yellowstone National Park, yes. Ok and that's another book that Mr. Henshaw, a type of book that Mr. Henshaw had been writing before.

In this exchange, first Grace, showed that even though she hadn't read a portion of *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (Cleary, 2000), she realized that the text would have the answer. Then, Ana pulled the answer to Mrs. Dawson's next question from the text, offering a specific answer to her question, which Mrs. Dawson accepted and expanded upon slightly.

During a small group writing conference, the main questions posed by the student participants were particular. When Chahna read her story to Ana, Maria and another boy, the boy asked about one of characters saying, "Is it a slave or an indentured servant?" (vocabulary introduced in social studies class). He wanted to know more particulars about the character. Later, after Ana read, Maria asked her, "Do you have paragraphs, Ana?" to check on the particular structure of Ana's story. Thus particulars where even valued by students in small group situations.

In another example, Talia asked a question about a particular fact from a study guide for *Number the Stars*. Talia said "I don't what war this was in?" a question

directly off of the study guide. Mrs. Dawson responded by saying "This is the third book we've read about this war! What is it?" Talia guessed "Two?" and Mrs. Dawson responded with a "Yes!" Thus particular knowledge was needed to answer questions in class, even when students completed the written questions. Recall of particular facts was highly valued by Mrs. Dawson.

Mrs. Dawson again highlighted how particular facts were available from the text in a discussion with a small reading group. She encouraged them to look to the text for answers to their questions, as they discussed pictures from the text prompted by a question from Maria (M). Talia, Tabitha and another student were also involved in the discussion.

M: Does she have frostbite?

T: Yeah, or I don't know if its frostbite? What page is that?

Ta: Its sunscreen!

T: What page is that?

M: I don't know, its like at, its on 40……49. Yeah.

T: 49

Ta: Its sunscreen

T: Did you read the caption?

M: I don't know?

Tb: Not there, there

M: Why would they use sunscreen?

T: Read the caption.

M: Yeah, sunscreen all over her face.

Tb: Why would she want sunscreen?

T: so what did we learn from that, Maria?

T: what should you do? S?

S: Um, like the sunscreen

T: No, no, no, no, no, here's my question: As you're reading, and you have a question about a picture, Maria?

M: Read the caption?

T: Yeah, read the captions with the pictures, and that will help you with previewing that as well. Okay.

Here, Mrs. Dawson pointed the students to the captions of the pictures to learn the particulars of the text. While Maria's original question is answered, Tabitha's follow-up question ("Why would she want sunscreen?") is ignored, as Mrs. Dawson focused on the particulars provided in the text by the caption. Again, the students focused solely on the text to answer the question, Talia indeed shouted out the answer quickly after referring to the text, but the one question that was not answered directly in the text holds no traction in the discussion.

Students also had many particular behaviors in the classroom. In writing class, they were required to recopy many of their writing work several times. Any piece of writing was drafted, edited by the student, recopied, frequently edited by Mrs. Dawson, and then recopied again. Additionally, when pieces were published (such as their finished fairytales) the story was copied once for a final draft, and then recopied once again for publication with illustrations drawn on that copy.

Another example of particular behaviors in the class comes from the chapter summaries the class constructed together for each novel they read. After writing the summary, the students were to draw a picture to go with the summary. Both the behaviors and text were particular:

T: Okay. Details, details, details, alright, don't give me ground, don't give me details, don't give me color, don't give those, your stick figures

S: Obvious things

T: Yes, those obvious things, I like that, don't give me those obvious things,

S: That's what I was telling to the substitute

T: Alright, S?

S: Two girls, one mama

T: Two girls, one mama, yeah, they mention

S_2: Two boys

T: There's a woman, with what?

S_3: Black

Ta: There's a baby!?!

T: A baby, Talia you missed something, you really need to read.

Ta: I've read the book!

T: Okay, mama, there's a woman and a baby. There's what else?

G: Umm, I said mourners

T: Okay, tell me more specifically than the mourners? Grace?

G: Umm…

T: Look at your book,

G: Um, Uncle Henrik brings Ellen a big surprise?

T: Um, well, Uncle Henrik and Ellen's parents, alright who else are in the mourners? You're missing some other people. Who are you missing, Tabitha?

Tb: There was an old man

T: Yeah, an old man with a beard

Mrs. Dawson asked for what to put in the picture (she actually wrote this information on the board, drawing a line below the chapter summary, which signified to the students that she was taking notes for the illustration). She announced "Details, details, details" because she wanted elements that are particular to this chapter, not normal parts of any illustration of which the class had an established list they were supposed to always include (ground, sky, background, no stick figures, no empty space, use color, no pencil lines left, etc…). The students knew these things and hence didn't mention them. Instead, they mentioned the particular items from the chapter, the characters. Mrs. Dawson probed for even more particulars from the text, not just "mourners", but she wanted exact descriptions of the mourners that the students were to depict in their drawing. Here the text was the ultimate authority and the students carefully pulled specific facts from it, which later informed their behaviors as they drew their chapter illustration.

Particulars in the form of specific facts that were directly extracted from the text as parts of literacy events were the last part of the student's Discourse. The students' literacy Discourse was not only tied to the text, but it was very much focused on the specific facts which were taken out of the text. Particulars dominated the entire literacy Discourse of the students in Mrs. Dawson's class, as particulars were the most effective

type of discourse. Particulars ensured success across all of the literacy events in the classroom, they were the most valued commodities for answers in the classroom, thus the students incorporated them into their Discourse in large measures.

Overall, the discourse of literacy the fourth graders in Mrs. Dawson's classroom was characterized by three elements. The Discourse were personal, pragmatic and particular. The students brought a personal element to the Discourse via popular culture, place knowledge and personal experiences. They used these personal elements with moderate success to integrate new information into their previous knowledge and existing schemas. The pragmatic element of their Discourse ensured that they completed assignments correctly and focused on practical questions about the completion of assignments. Finally, the most prominent element of their Discourse was that it focused on particulars. Facts that tied to text were the most valuable commodity in the classroom, and so the students focused their work and answers on finding the particulars necessary to answer questions. These particulars came directly from the text and simply needed to be extracted. Successful extraction of particulars was always rewarded with Mrs. Dawson's approbation. These ideas led into the answer of what mediated the Discourse of the fourth-graders.

What or Whom Mediated Those Discourses?

The Discourse of literacy of the fourth-grade students in Mrs. Dawson's class had truly only one major mediator, Mrs. Dawson, herself. While multiple contextual influences mediated Mrs. Dawson, all of these issues were channeled to the students via Mrs. Dawson and how she approached her students. As Mrs. Dawson was influenced by the multiple contextual influences she took on several different roles, which shifted

according to what was mediating her actions at the moment. These roles though were different manifestations of the main role she took on in the classroom, through which she mediated the students' Discourse. Her main role was that of a *filter*. Within her role as a filter, Mrs. Dawson acted as a *project manager*, a *coach/trainer*, and a *gatekeeper*, all of which illustrate how specific contextual influences mediated Mrs. Dawson's instructional decisions. Each of these roles then mediated the students' experiences of literacy and affected their Discourses.

The Teacher as a Filter

Mrs. Dawson acted as a filter for the knowledge (and behavior) in her classroom. For the students, while they did bring some knowledge and personal will with them into the classroom, all correct and valued knowledge in the classroom was filtered through their teacher, Mrs. Dawson. Filters are selective devices; they carefully separate the "good" and the "bad", as in a water filter that removes pollutants and undesirable minerals from water, leaving only the pure water and desired or healthy additives. Mrs. Dawson did this in her classroom, as she filtered all knowledge for her students.

In her role as filter, Mrs. Dawson revealed her theoretical stance toward literacy instruction in the classroom. Mrs. Dawson did not have a thoroughly articulated theoretical stance when I asked about it during interviews, but it was evident from how she spoke in the interviews and her classroom instructional behaviors and decisions that she approached literacy in a rote manner. She believed that literacy skills were a specific set of knowledges, which she could directly teach through fact driven questions. Literacy learning was also mediated directly through the teacher and every child learned basically the same way. Indeed, one level of books was almost universally used in her classroom,

so while she said that she believed that her students had different literacy levels, in practice she taught to only one level. She also did not require the students to do any reasoning when it came to literacy; they simply used the text and guessed about answers to questions she posed. Thus, she did not believe that the students were truly capable of gaining any literacy knowledge on their own or through experience, everything must have been filtered through her. This theoretical stance was greatly revealed in her role as a filter for knowledge in the classroom.

In her role as filter, Mrs. Dawson asked questions about text and then set the requirements for the sole right answer for each question, which often led the students to indulge in wild guesses when they were unsure about answers. She filtered out any responses that did not meet her requirements and prompted until she received the answer she looked for. In the following example from a discussion of *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (Cleary, 2000), Mrs. Dawson's answer requirements were quite clear:

T: What would you, what kind of genre is that?

S: The bears have…begged a lot?

T: No what type of book is it I'm asking?—S_2

S: It's your turn

S_2: No, no, no

T: What I can't hear you

S_2: I said literature

T: It is a literature book, but what type, S_2, what type?

S_2: I don't know

T: Grace, S_3, Grace?

G: Um it is a um a what was that um I thought it in a second?

T: Josh, help her

J (Josh): It's a historical, I forgot the name to it

T: Which would be what, Talia?

Ta: Nonfiction

T: Nonfiction, now is nonfiction subjective or objective?

Ta: Objective

T: Objective, right, you remember I made the mistake and said it the other way around.

Mrs. Dawson wanted a specific answer and was not going to be satisfied until she got exactly the answer that she wanted. This led the students to make a number of wild guesses based on their Discourse, until Talia finally was able to answer the question correctly. The students did bring their own knowledge to the exchange ("literature", "historical") but as filter, Mrs. Dawson only accepted one answer, which she determined.

As noted in the discussion of the students' Discourses, Mrs. Dawson frequently held up the text as the ultimate authority for knowledge. Yet in her role as filter, she determined what part of the text was important by how she chose to accept a partial answer and how she possibly expanded on it. In another *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (Cleary, 2000) example, Mrs. Dawson accepted some answers and expanded on many of them to make the answers more specific:

T: It's in your questions. No, why doesn't Lee complain to the teacher about someone stealing the good stuff, the good stuff out of his box?…Why doesn't he complain?

S: Because he thinks that he should not be a snitch.

T: Yes, because he is a new boy. You know it is not a good idea for him to start off with that kind of reputation. He doesn't, you know having that reputation as a snitch as S put it. All right. 2, how does Bill get a Christmas package delivered to Lee, um Josh?

J: He mails it to him.

T: No, he doesn't mail it to him…

S_2: Um because –Lee's dad gave the package to Bill B and Bill B gave it to Lee.

T: No Bill B is Lee's dad

S_2: Oh, but,

(Laughter)

T: Carly?

Ca (Carly): Bill B had another trucker deliver it to him.

T: Yeah he called over his CB radio, You know is anybody going to that area and so when he put the call out then another trucker picked up, took, and delivered it the CBer was going to City Grove, California, all right.

Mrs. Dawson chose to accept the answer from the first student, ("he thinks that he should not be a snitch"), but she expanded on that answer by talking about Lee's reputation. Also, she rejected the answer Josh gave to her question about the Christmas present and moved on until she got a partially correct answer from Carly, ("Bill B had another trucker deliver it to him"). Mrs. Dawson then expanded on this answer to include the additional information she believed was important ("he called over his CB radio"). Thus, she not

only filtered what was important in the text through the questions she assigned, but also through how she filtered the correct answers.

Later in this same discussion, Mrs. Dawson, also showed how she filtered all of the background knowledge for the class, even though it was highly colored by her own personal knowledge (which goes unidentified in the classroom):

> T: Ok lets move onto 5, how does Lee fool the lunch thief? Ana?
>
> A: He put um the name of the kid in new??? on his lunch box
>
> T: So he's using a fake name he calls (shh…Talia) it a pseudo, but it is really just short for what's called pseudonym, that means sometimes authors write under somebody else's name especially like way back in the 1800s and the 1900s it wasn't really, people didn't really want to read odd works from women. So women would either use their initials or they would use a man's name. So in this case he thinks that's a way to fool the thief. That was back when the dark ages when women didn't have a lot of privileges. (Several hands are raised), Maria, I know, well, that's another subject for discussion later…

Here, Mrs. Dawson held the key to explain a concept the students didn't understand (though they could find the particular fact necessary to answer the question). She explained pseudonym to the students and provided a highly colored example, which was not particularly true in actual fact ("That was back when the dark ages when women didn't have a lot of privileges"), but the students had no way to know that the knowledge she offered was less than true. Additionally, she determined what was significant and what topics gained purchase in the classroom discussion, shutting down any discussion on women's rights.

This left the students with little power and unsure what of to expect each time they tried to answer, hence they used the Discourse developed to do their best to keep up in the discussions with the teacher. They often made wild guesses as seen in the first example in this section and they never exactly know how their efforts would be received. They had no sense of group identity, each was alone in their learning, and while they occasionally collaborated, that work was not truly done together. Mrs. Dawson related to one child at a time in all discussions, she called on students individually to share their own answers. The pattern of the knowledge mediation process as illustrated here is shown in Figure 2.

This was particularly evident as Mrs. Dawson discussed one question from *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1990) with Grace and Talia. Even once able to give the right answer, it is quite evident that Grace did not truly understand the question or the answer in the following example.

T: So why is the weather good for fishing? We don't know do we, why don't we know?

G: Because we don't…

T: So what is he actually asking?

G: He's actually asking is it safe to bring people

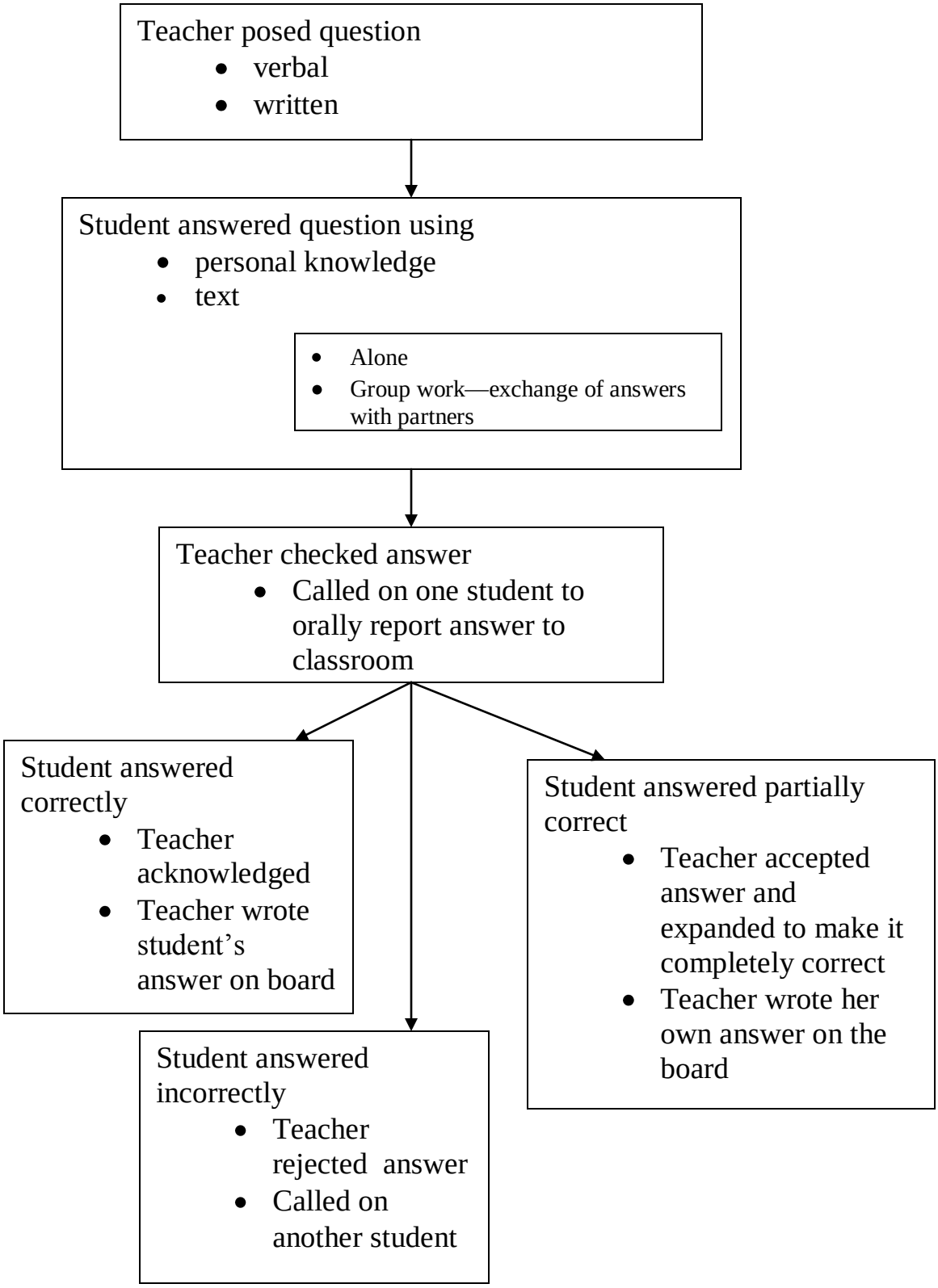
T: Absolutely, that's code for is it safe to let the girls and mama for them to come

G: So what do we?

T: That's what you just said, that's actually that's a code, it means, you just told me what it means,

G: Its about the weather is good for fishing

Figure 2. Knowledge mediation process.



T: What its saying is that it's a signal to tell whether mama and the girls are safe for leaving

G: Huh?

T: It doesn't really mean can we go fishing, you're telling me it means it's a code right? So is he saying yes its safe to come?

G: No

T: Did he tell them not to bring the girls? G: No

T: Are the girls going?

G: Yes

T: Then it is safe

G: Okay!

T: So, we can't really say whether the weather is good for fishing, why? Because that's a code that means it is safe to go

G: So the weather?

T: You just say, do we know whether the weather is good? Why do we want to know that?

Ta: Cause it's a code to say

T: Cause it's a code to say whether its safe to bring the girls and mama

While Grace seemed to initially understand that the question referred to a code, she still was hung up on what the weather was because the particular aspects of her Discourse told her that it is not usually a good idea to ignore part of a question. Her pragmatic knowledge also encouraged her to pursue the dialogue with Mrs. Dawson

because she knew the answer would eventually be revealed. Talia finally entered the discussion to help clarify the particulars of this question, which Mrs. Dawson had been continually demanding from Grace. Her response finally ended the dialogue and Mrs. Dawson then stepped away from the girls, though it is unclear whether or not Grace ever truly understood the answer to the question. Nevertheless, Mrs. Dawson had finally gotten the answer that she wanted from one of the girls, thus the discussion ended.

Another time, when the class was writing a summary for one chapter in *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1990), Mrs. Dawson again acted as the filter, directing the discussion toward the information she deemed important in the chapter and altering answers to her satisfaction.

T: I don't want to you to think about the first part of the chapter where she's having the conversation in the barn, that was just kind of an introduction, we're going to focus on the rest of it, Chahna, what do you want? Alright, Tabitha, who was in that second part of the chapter? Josh?

J: umm, mama

T: mama, okay, Tabitha

Tb: Annemarie

T: Annemarie, alright, S?

S: Ellen

T: Ellen, alright, uh, yes, ummm…S_2

S_2: Peter

T: Peter, and what do we call, what do we call that whole other bunch of people, what do we call them, S_3?

S_3: Others

T: Others, what were they doing? They were there to do what? To pretend to be?

S_4: Umm,

T: Huh?

S_4: Family

T: The family, the mourners. Yeah, lets call them the mourners, okay. Okay, now look at this, this is that word mourn, what does it mean? A sad person, very good, S_5. Its a sad person, usually its because there's been something bad like a death happening. Alright, what S_3?

S_3: Uncle….

T: Uncle Henrik, oh yeah we forgot that didn't we?

S_6: What about Kirsten?

T: well, she was in the first part right, but was she real important to the last part?

Ss: no

T: Okay, so that most important part of the chapter is what we're going to get at, so where were they?

Ss: Ohhh!!

T: S_2?

S_2: Uncle Henriks' farm

T: Okay, Uncle Henriks' farmhouse, can we go even more specifically?

Ss: Outside

T: Outside? You guys think? S_3?

S_3: In the house?

T: Yeah, right in the living room right. So Uncle Henrik's farmhouse, oops, living room. Alright. When? S_2?

S_2: Night?

T: Yeah, its in the evening, yeah its night. What were they doing? Maria?

M: Were they like having a funeral?

T: Yeah, they were having a funeral.

Mrs. Dawson accepted some answers and expanded on others. Once again, the text was the ultimate authority for knowledge, but throughout the entire discussion Mrs. Dawson directed the students to facts she had determined were important in the text. First she had a mental list of every character that should be listed in conjunction with this chapter and moreover, she has a specific word she envisioned for one category of character. She specifically asked about the other people (the mourners) and probed ("Others, what were they doing? They were there to do what? To pretend to be?") until she gave the students the answer she was looked for, "mourners". Later, she clarified where the action took place, asking for a more specific location than the mentioned "Uncle Henrik's farm". The students used their knowledge of particulars but it was never quite enough in this discussion, thus they never quite found the correct answer, until the end when Maria tentatively mentioned the funeral. She was highly unsure of how her answer would be taken as no other answers thus far had been completely correct, according to Mrs. Dawson, the filter of knowledge here.

In a small group reading group situation this pattern was quite evident when Mrs. Dawson asked for the children to choose parts of the text that they found interesting. In the first half of the discussion the group discussed vocabulary from the text that had to do with sled dogs (wheel dogs, lead dogs, team dogs), then when Mrs. Dawson asked for interesting parts of the text, Tabitha, Maria, and several other students responded with these answers:

T: Tell me something that you read about, a fact, you learned that you thought was either interesting or important? Alright, we'll start with Tabitha. Tabitha, do you want to start?

Tb: I learned why lead dogs are called lead dogs because that's important because if you're watching a show and it says leads dogs are just sitting there say what is that?

T: Alright Maria what did you learn?

M: The wheel dogs, cause I never knew that there was such a thing I that you just lined them up in order from the ones that just like um from the best to the least, but there's actually the biggest to the…

T: To how

M: The smartest, yeah

T: That's interesting, good…Alright, S?

S: …..

T: Nothing? You sure? There's lots of things! S_2, what something?

S_2: Wheel dog is one of the faster dogs

Each child that answered mentioned something that had already been talked about earlier in the discussion. Some didn't answer, possibly because most of the previously mentioned facts in the discussion were already taken. Thus the students chose to stick to answers that they knew would meet with commendation, because the facts had already been discussed. While these things may have indeed interested the students, the students did not bring these items up on their own earlier in the discussion, the items were introduced when Mrs. Dawson asked about the vocabulary words. Also, each word was defined in the discussion as Mrs. Dawson probed for the correct answer. Thus, these items related more to Mrs. Dawson than most of the students, they did not truly represent things that the students gleaned from the reading on their own. The students responded to Mrs. Dawson as the filter of information.

This model held true for group work, as in those situations, the students still felt the mediation of Mrs. Dawson, because the work focused on questions devised by her and she always checked the group work in a whole class discussion. During group work, the students did not exchange ideas or thoughts, rather they simply exchanged answers as Allan, Grace and another student did during Social Studies:

S: I don't get it, alright

G: humm, here you can copy what I did

G: here S, here you can copy off my piece…they're right…

G: I know that's one

Al: why did they come here?

G: I don't know

Al: not sure

G: what's why? Allan?

Al: is it on here?

G: oh, um…they want build a colony in America that do not only make money, but also provide freedom for Catholics (reading)…right, America (says slowly as she writes)

Allan and Grace allowed a classmate to copy their answers and they did not discuss their answers to determine the best answer, they simply looked for the particular facts they needed from the text to answer the questions and then told each other the findings. Thus, they continued to model how Mrs. Dawson mediated the Discourse even in a small group, through using her model of just finding the exact answer without any evaluation of the answers. It was a rather stilted collaboration as their collaboration was only in shared answers, they did not find the answers a group, rather Allan or Grace would find one answer and pass it on to their other group members. Hence, an individual focus was maintained even during group work. Mrs. Dawson acted as the major mediator of the students' Discourse of literacy in both whole group and small group situations.

Shifting Roles of the Teacher

In her role as filter, Mrs. Dawson held several shifting roles, depending on what different contextual influences mediated her actions. In these roles, Mrs. Dawson mediated the influences that pressed upon her in the classroom, despite the fact that ultimately the students were required to interact with each of those influences. While as filter, Mrs. Dawson seemed to negotiate all of the knowledge and power in the classroom on her own terms, in fact, she was in many ways influenced by contextual influences just as much as she influenced her students. The larger educational context greatly influenced

the choices Mrs. Dawson made in her classroom, to the degree that in many cases she had few actual choices about her instruction. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Mrs. Dawson was considered an exemplary teacher in her school. Her natural personality was, "To never give up. You've got to try something else" despite (or in spite of) "judging, comparing with my past twenty years of experience, I'm a little concerned about this group." Her concerns about this group of students and the contextual pressures they faced in their school and greater environment were explained though the different roles Mrs. Dawson took on in the classroom: *project manager, coach/trainer* and *gatekeeper*.

Project manager. In her role as project manager, Mrs. Dawson filtered the curriculum for her students. In a business setting, the project manager decided what tasks needed to be completed to reach a goal, handed out those tasks and saw that they were correctly completed. This was how Mrs. Dawson acted as a project manager for her students. An example of this was when she assigned work on a new writing project:

> T: Why I am stopping to give these out to you, because I want you to see, umm, the comments that I made and that when you get into your groups to start working group story today and you start making, finishing up your prewrite, which I would like you to try to do today, finish up the prewriting and start your rough drafts, um, by tomorrow. That way you don't repeat any mistakes, um, for the most part you did very good, you followed everything we talked about, you had your characters in there, your setting was in there, I knew what your problem was, you had a good beginning, middle and end, so we're already done that with your four square for your new story, for your island story, um, so remember to continue include those in your story, I'm going to let you take a look at it.

Mrs. Dawson presented the task to the students (finish prewrite and start drafting) and gave them directions on how to accomplish it (don't repeat mistakes, include certain elements). While she didn't show how it was to be completed in this excerpt, the fact that she was handing out graded papers for them to use as models was enough to let the students know she would ensure that they complete the assignment correctly.

Another time, in a small reading group, Mrs. Dawson carefully set the assignment when she said:

> "Okay, so listen. Again, our goal is 15 to 42 it is a lot. So if you tomorrow when we meet again, umm, I'd like to meet with you in the afternoon, cause Wednesday we can't meet because S's mom is coming to read to us. So I would really like to get to 42, but if you're having a great a deal of difficulty it tomorrow, what I can when I meet with you I'll just give you more time to read, I might be able to give you a couple of days then we could finish up on Thursday and Friday."

Mrs. Dawson not only told the students what to read, but she also gave them guidelines about how to manage their time. In her role as project manager, Mrs. Dawson mediated the curriculum in her classroom and set "where my priority was" through the consideration of several factors: *textbooks*, *tradition* and *student interest*.

When Mrs. Dawson designed her instruction, she considered the *textbooks* that she had at hand. With her literacy instruction, the only textbook she used extensively was the Social Studies textbook. She told me that she considered the text to be difficult for the students to understand so she tried to break it up for them and used the question words (who, what, where, when, why, how) to guide their reading. This way she mediated how her students approached the text, by guiding them with questions and

assigned readings. Thus she acted as a project manager by deciding the task (reading assignment) and how to go about the task (answering the questions, size of group or individual work) and then saw that the task is correctly completed (reviewing the correct answers with the whole class).

Mrs. Dawson extensively used trade books for her reading instruction. This instruction is highly mediated by *tradition*. Over many years, she had built up numerous class sets of trade books for use during reading instruction. For each of these she had developed a unit, which consisted of questions for each chapter of each book. Each student received a booklet of these questions to complete during the reading of the book. She had units that she used every year and others that she occasionally picked and chose to use according to the needs/abilities of her students. These units though did not evolve each time she used them. The chapter questions stayed the same every time the book was read and since, as we've seen throughout the classroom talk examples, the discussion of the books read were highly contingent on the questions. Again, her project manager status dictated how the students experienced the books, as she stuck with what she believed to be effective instruction, because it worked in the past. Mrs. Dawson frequently talked about trying new things in the classroom, "so that's been something that we've been trying to move, you know bring some of that in. Or at least I am, I personally", yet little actual evidence of this was seen in her classroom practice, as every day looked the same and she did not ever actually talk about development of new curriculum, instead relying on tradition.

A final consideration that Mrs. Dawson cited when she plans instruction was student *interest*. Mrs. Dawson said that she tried to consider what books the students

would like and to choose them in conjunction with current events and things of interest. She had the students read a story about Rosa Parks in February during Black History Month. She assigned a story about a sled dog during the Iditarod sled race so that the students could look up information about the Iditarod at the same time, because she thought they might enjoy the topic and current event connection. While she said student interest motivated these choices, she never spoke of having asked students what types of books or topics interested them and I did not observe any discussion of what her students liked during my time at Thornhill. Thus, at least to an extent her choices of readings were mediated by her own beliefs of what she thought her students would enjoy.

Overall, as project manager, Mrs. Dawson mediated how her students engaged with curriculum through her choices about how to approach texts, how to use texts and what were considered successful completion of tasks. Her guides as she acted as project manager were her resources, in the form of textbooks, what had been traditionally effective instruction for her and her ideas of what would interest her students.

Coach/trainer. In her role as coach/trainer Mrs. Dawson mediated the standardized tests for the students as she prepared them to take the test. A coach prepared his team for the big event, the big game and a trainer helped the players hone in on their individual weaknesses and rehabilitate them. This is how Mrs. Dawson prepared her students for the standardized tests that they took in fourth grade. In this role, it was obvious that a testing-driven environment mediated Mrs. Dawson's decision making in the classroom. This reality was particularly evident when the principal of Thornhill visited the fourth grade classroom to hand out quarterly awards. The principal gave the students a pep talk about the tests and stressed the importance that they work very hard

right now. She ended her speech asking for a round of applause for the teachers for working so hard to prepare the students for the tests. While the applause was a nice gesture, the action indicated that overall, while the students need to try hard, it was the teacher's responsibility to actually prepare the students for the tests.

In order to do this, Mrs. Dawson first used the state fourth grade curriculum standards as a guide for what the students needed to learn. Her class subject tests frequently directly reflected the standards, using standards to even word the questions. A major element she used for assessment (in her role as trainer) was the practice tests that the students take three times during the year. The results from these tests were broken out by the state standards, so Mrs. Dawson was able to see exactly which standards the students do not perform well on in questions as she said during an interview "using the ETS system this year, I knew up front what CSO's (State Objectives) my children haven't mastered." The teachers met one afternoon after each test (the principal paid for a classroom substitute) and they evaluated and discussed the test data with a testing representative from the school system. Thus they identified each area of need in their students, and these areas were shared with the school administration. Mrs. Dawson then changed her instruction to accommodate this knowledge, frequently reviewing the concept and spending more time with it in class. She noted "I brought back in the sponge really geared to those" objectives the students needed to work on. This specific testing knowledge put additional pressure on Mrs. Dawson personally, as she realized exactly how her students were going to do on the standardized tests. She considered this class to be significantly lower in academic performance than usual, as she said, "I'm anxious… when I look at this group and their needs they don't need this…It bothers me, you have

children not reading on a fourth grade level, but they still have to be tested, its not fair to them." So she felt highly pressured by the test to ensure that every state curriculum standard was adequately covered in class.

For example in writing instruction, Mrs. Dawson chose to use the four-square graphic organizer because she found it really helped with "paragraphing and transitions." Additionally, she required the students to practice the essay writing process in the exact way in which they would experience the test, including the time limits. Like a coach, she exhorted them to use their time well, and gave them continual updates on how much time was left in the practice essay test. She also graded the essays using the model from the state standards she said, "I try to use the state rubric so that they are familiar with that too" (though she would only hand out the grades, but did not actually explain them completely to the students).

This pressure from the standardized tests changed many of her choices in the classroom. While she prepared the students for the fourth-grade writing test, she focused solely on the type of writing required by the test, but once the test was past, she completely altered her writing instruction. She told the students:

> T: …but my point is this, your job is going to be write your own fairytale, you can choose it to be a straight fairytale, its totally up to you, you're the author, its time to have a little bit of fun, where done with this writing assessment
>
> Ss: YES!
>
> T: We're tired of it! We're sick of the essay writing! We're moving on!
>
> Ss: Yes, we are!

T: There are so many other types of writing, okay? You're going to be the author, its totally your choice what do with your fairytale, but the only guidelines are that you have to stick to what we talked about as far as elements in a fairytale

At the same time, she also told me that she "wished that the officials in the capitol could see the work they are doing now, its so much stronger, more creative writing, and the kids are so much more engaged!" In the weeks just before the end-of-grade testing she said, "And we're still working on those island stories but that's been pushed back" and she noted, "another adjustment is the language book" that she said she pulled out to just meet the grammar CSOs that are present on the test. It had not been used much until the weeks before the test "because I prefer to teach it other ways."

Furthermore, Mrs. Dawson felt the pressure for not just individual students to succeed, but for her entire class to pass well on the test. She worried and said, "Its intense, I really wish they'd just let us teach, you know it's the contingencies that come after the test." Overtime, she had noticed that security had tightened on the test also, which added an extra element of pressure on her, "that bothers me, but I know that in the past it has been a problem. The part that worries me is that I'm going to overlook something in the room, we have to pull name charts, and the kids constantly look at those things and I resent that I have to take it away from them." She felt that the testing environment and the requirements of her to change her classroom for the tests would not allow her students to achieve to their highest potential.

Standardized tests shifted her into the role of a coach/trainer for her students, which strongly mediated her instruction to them, by keeping it focused on the state curriculum standards and how the students were measuring up against those standards.

Mrs. Dawson summed up her thoughts on the test as, "we've never not met AYP, so I don't anticipate that we won't, but I am concerned that our scores will be low. I think that this year we are really, really aware of the gaps for these children." Therefore, the students experienced different instruction than Mrs. Dawson might have chosen on her own, due to the mediation of the standardized test upon her instruction.

Gatekeeper. Mrs. Dawson's final major role as the mediator of her student's literacy Discourses was as gatekeeper. Gatekeepers determine access to specific resources. In this role, Mrs. Dawson decided who moved on and had access to resources in the school. First, she decided who passes fourth grade and who would have access to fifth grade. She joked with Grace once, "you do realize that I decide if you go onto fifth grade or not?" Virtually every paper the students completed was graded with a letter grade, late papers lost points and letter grades were assigned each quarter on report cards. She said that she focused her grades on "vocabulary, skills sheets…key papers, graphic organizers, tests" according to what was relevant in each subject. Grades were also posted on the web for parents to check, which ensured parental support of her work in the classroom, "I don't get a lot of questions about grades, it's there." In this same way, she was the gatekeeper to recess, as students that had not completed their assignments must go to "reteach" during recess to complete their work. Also if Mrs. Dawson believed that a student's work was not being completed at an acceptable level, she chose to bring in a team of experts (curriculum specialists, administrators and parents) at Thornhill to devise academic interventions for the student.

Behaviorally, Mrs. Dawson also acted as a gatekeeper. She demanded a high level of controlled behavior from her students and through the school card system acted

as the gatekeeper to greater punishments than just losing a card, in fact she said, "I think my main concern is their behavior." Throughout the year, she struggled with controlling the behavior of the class at a level that was acceptable to her, towards the end of the year she noted, "its an expectation I have from day one and they're finally getting to that…the behavior has really changed lately, so we've had a wonderful week." At a low level, the students who had behavior problems lost some recess, but as more cards were taken, parents could be notified and the principal called in such that occasionally, "we've brought the counselor in, sometimes we go to a SAT meeting at that point too, depending on how severe it is."

As gatekeeper, Mrs. Dawson mediated the students' literacy experiences by changing their access to different resources and rewards. This role was important because it shows how responsible Mrs. Dawson feels for her students. In one of the discussions of *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (Cleary, 2000), she mentioned this great feeling of responsibility:

S: Ulcers, what that?

T: That is everything that the book said. An ulcer is when inside your stomach you actually get these holes in the lining of your stomach and it is caused by the acid build up that's in your stomach

Ss: Eeww!

T: And that can cause a lot of problems and if you don't eat well and you have a lot of stress that's what sometimes people develop kinda like any time there is a sub in this room I am starting to develop an ulcer cause I know some of you are

> not going to behave well and I have to worry and the stress is doing me in ha, ha, ha.

The class had behaved quite horribly with substitutes, especially during the spring semester and as gatekeeper, Mrs. Dawson felt that it reflected badly on her when the students behaved badly, not to mention that the experience was difficult for the students, who she cared for (one student was hit by a substitute this spring). Thus gatekeeper was a double-edged sword, as gatekeeper, Mrs. Dawson had the power to keep students from resources and rewards, but her feelings of responsibility for her students prevented her from using this role in a vindictive way.

Mrs. Dawson, as the teacher, was the main mediator of the students' Discourse of literacy. Her theoretical stance toward literacy required her to filter every literacy activity for her students, she mentioned that one thing she liked about this age of students was that "their independent, but yet still dependent on you." She not only held all knowledge and authority in the classroom, but she determined how they experienced literacy activities by shaping her instruction through her theoretical stance. Mrs. Dawson believed that literacy knowledge is a definable set of skills that she must teach to her fourth grade students. The students could not develop any of this knowledge without her intimate involvement. Literacy knowledge was actually a set of facts about texts. Mrs. Dawson taught these facts through her role as filter. This role as shifted to fulfill three different purposes of a project manager, a coach/trainer and a gatekeeper. These roles reflected how the different environmental and contextual strictures that Mrs. Dawson felt effected her classroom instructional decisions. While the students did bring some knowledge (in the form of the Discourse they had developed) to the situations, , Mrs.

Dawson still held the power for how literacy is experienced in the classroom. The irony of this was that, while Mrs. Dawson mediated a variety of influences upon herself before they reached her students, the students were still the ones who had to deal with the realities of those influences. As project manager, Mrs. Dawson mediated the curriculum for the students, but the students were the ones who had to actually engage and learn the curriculum. As coach/trainer, Mrs. Dawson prepared the students for the standardized tests, but the students were the ones who had actually perform on the tests. As gatekeeper, Mrs. Dawson made decisions about resources and rewards for the students, but the students were the ones who ultimately had to deal with those decisions whether it means they stayed in from recess or didn't move onto the fifth grade. The students were still ultimately accountable for the work that they did and the actions that they took and they were the ones who felt the consequences of their actions, even if through the teacher's role as filter, she may or may not have adequately guided them. Thus Mrs. Dawson filtered multiple influences that the students ultimately dealt with directly, but she mediated how they approach these influences through her different roles in the classroom. This process had a large affect on the students, beyond their completion of their assigned class work.

What do the Discourses Reveal about the Fourth Graders' Developing Identities as Literacy Learners?

Consideration of the developing identities as literacy learners of the fourth-graders in Mrs. Dawson's classroom was the final question answered in this research project. It was evident from the previous two questions that many elements interacted to form the Discourse of literacy that the fourth-graders in Mrs. Dawson's classroom at

Thornhill have developed. This final question considered how this Discourse affected the students' long-term identity development by looking closely at their identity as literacy learners.

Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain (1998) called identity a process of "codevelopment" (p.270). Identity is the intersection of personal intimate knowledge of self with the interactions of the social worlds in which persons find themselves. Codevelopment occurs as individuals navigate their intimate personal positions within a larger social world. Thus through the discourse that the students developed, they also codeveloped an identity that combines their personal/intimate self with the social world in which they live. While identity encompassed many elements of a person, here only the elements of their identity that pertain with their literacy interactions were considered. As noted in Chapter 2, literacy interactions provided a place for identity expression and identity work or change. The social worlds in this case encompassed more than just the people and the space they inhabit, rather it included the interactions with text, which have been elucidated through the first two research questions in this study.

To reach an understanding of the literacy identities of the students in this fourth grade classroom, the literacy experiences and the created social world of the students must be considered. First, literacy in Mrs. Dawson's room was a lonely business. Students had only themselves and the text to draw upon in literacy events. Additionally, the knowledge they brought to the events had no importance, rather facts that were already present in the text were the emphasis. The students had very few personal interactions with the texts; rather their personal ideas and intimate knowledges were not valued for understanding the text. When they attempted to bring personal knowledge to

the text, it was only sometimes successful and was not designed to help them enjoy or appreciate the text, but rather to simply be better able to understand the facts that needed to be highlighted. The result was that the students were detached from school based literacy learning and school based literacy identity. They disliked most school literacy events and moreover were indifferent to them. This led the students to take a highly pragmatic view of school literacy events, which became simply a means to an end: success in school; as illustrated by the pragmatic and particular elements of their Discourse of literacy illustrate. School literacy events did not connect with their lives, experiences or personal intimate views in any meaningful ways. Since identity is the intersection of the intimate self and the social worlds in which individuals enact their lives, (Holland, et al., 1998) these students had detached themselves from a school based literacy identity by not bringing any personal elements to literacy. An identity cannot be developed without any personal, intimate elements brought into the social world.

Literacy identity was not a part of their soul. The few who did have an understanding of how literacy can affect their whole person and change their identity, only talked of those kinds of literacy experiences at home. Thus the Discourses of these fourth-grade students revealed that their developing identities as literacy learners were not affected in any particular way, simply because a literacy identity does not truly exist for these students. Literacy knowledge did not change them as people or affect their lives in any meaningful ways. Rather the students' engagements with literacy were purely pragmatic in nature; the engagements were acts that are means to an end within their social world. The students had chosen to simply complete their work; their intimate selves played no role in their literacy engagements in the classroom. The detachment

from literacy identity was arrived at via two different paths, which the four focal students illustrated. First there was *self-reliance* as evidenced by Ana and Grace, then there was *ambivalence* as shown by Allan and Talia. The end result of both was detachment from school literacy and a lack of development of a literacy identity at school.

Self-Reliance

Ana and Grace both showed self-reliance when it came to literacy. Each professed to greatly love reading and writing at home, yet mostly disliked all literacy as experienced in school. Literacy that was in any way meaningful on a personal level was done at home. Both girls stated that they read extensively at home, Grace talked about her "shelf full of books" to read at home and Ana liked to read books that included scary stories and history "cuz, I love stuff about wars and old time legends". Additionally, each girl professed to writing at home, specifically fairytales. Grace wrote stories and read them to her mother who always told her how amazed she was that Grace thought up such a story and "hangs em' on the wall. Like if they're really good and are really, like, really interesting..." Ana liked to write fairytales and scary stories at home "it's like you can do anything scary with your mind". Thus, they both hada sense of literacy identity, yet it was home-based. Both girls said they did not like most of the books that they read at school, at most they could name one they enjoyed. Ana professed to liking the book *Number the Stars,* by Lois Lowry (1990), saying, "it was just so cool about how like everybody there was like tricking the Nazis and telling, and making sure the Nazis didn't find out, Ellen was there". Yet, she tempered her praise saying, "I kinda didn't like *Number the Stars*, a little bit less, cuz' I had to write those summaries and draw the

pictures." The school literacy events got in the way of her enjoyment of the book, despite the fact that it contained subject matter she enjoyed. Grace noted that,

> "I think just reading the book fills it in your head. I think doing the questions makes it more harder because you gotta scroll through and they're not even order. So, you can like read the book, then when you answer the questions it's all the different parts and you forget what the story's about. That happens to me a lot when I'm reading chapter books and I have to do questions. Then when I get the tests I'm like, 'Huh?'."

These girls enjoyed literacy outside of school, but school literacy could not touch their identity as the actual literacy events got in the way of books they might possibly enjoy and connect with. Ana named many ways she felt that she could have connected with *Number the Stars* (Lowry,1990) more:

> A: Those things you could maybe do a bunch of stuff...
>
> R: Like what?
>
> A: Like you could maybe do like an illustrated book kinda. Like you can like make the star of David for one chapter and then the next you could make, maybe like, like um the coffin and all that. It's just that she makes us illustrate and write a summary about it. I don't like illustrating, I like illustrating, but I don't like writing.
>
> R: So you didn't like writing the summaries, but you didn't mind doing the illustrations that she made you do?
>
> A: Yeah, I didn't mind those cuz' I like drawing, it's just that I kinda don't, I don't like writing about a book, I like expressing my own ideas.

R: If you want to express you ideas about a book how are you going to do it?

A: I usually write about how other kids can read it and how good it is…

Ana learned to be self-reliant when it came to developing her own literacy identity, yet she found that it had no place in school, so she saved literacy that means something personally to her for home. Grace felt the same saying,

G: Yeah, I love them because *Ella Enchanted* (Levine, 1997) is like, in the ending, I thought it was like a little teeny-weeny sad, but then popped out and got happy and in *Holes*, like the beginning was kinda sad but then it just like, popped out to me. Yeah, that's what I like about books, they pop out to you. They have mysteries, they have like questions for you, you have questions for the book. See, when you're reading a chapter book, like for school, like for those things, you see you read a chapter, like, let's say we have to read two chapter, ok you read two chapters and they have all these mysteries on the last chapter and you're not allowed to go through, but if it was your own book you were allowed to go through and like skim it. So, that's kind of mystery, but when the next day when you go look at those other chapters, when you go looking at three and four, you forget what the questions are. I mean like, uh, and we're not allowed to scroll back, we're not allowed to do anything, you just gotta look at it.

R: That's kind of tough sometimes.

G: But, if it's your own book, you could like go home, and like you could go, "Oh, that's what that mystery was, that's what that mystery was." You'd know everything, but here, it's kinda boring.

Grace and Ana had vibrant literacy lives, yet they did not cross the border from home to school. Their personal intimate interactions with literacy only happened at home. Instead, the girls felt stifled by the literacy activities they did at school and thus developed an identity of self-reliance, building their own values for literacy outside of school, instead in the sympathetic environment of home.

Ambivalence

Allan and Talia showed disinterest about literacy in all situations. Both Allan and Talia said that they did not particularly like literacy activities of any kind and did not do it unless they had no other options. Allan said he occasionally read at home, saying he would read "fun" books, without much of an idea of what they would be. Talia said she would read at home if she couldn't play video games or watch TV. When pressed about a type of reading or literacy that they liked, both choose non-fiction books. Allan mentioned science books with experiments he could try at home and Talia mentioned biographies. Each of them checked these types of books out from the library to read at home (though Talia once read a biography of Madame C.J. Walker during class without Mrs. Dawson seeing, hiding it under her desk). Both cited reading as their least favorite subject. Talia said it was "boring" and Allan couldn't say why he didn't like it, just that he didn't. Both Allan and Talia were proficient readers, who read on or above grade level, and were in fact in Mrs. Dawson's highest reading group (Ana and Grace were one group lower) but literacy events at school were something to that had to be done, therefore they each always opted for the easiest route to finish. When asked to choose a book, Allan chose *Frog and Toad* (Lobel, 2007), because it looked fun and easy. Also, he said that if he was writing at school he liked writing the essays to prepare for the

writing test, “because it’s a little easy.” Talia mentioned the same thing, saying the foursquare planning was boring, but easy. Talia noted that she worked hard on certain literacy items because her mom offered her a reward, such as if she brought up her spelling grade she would get fifty dollars, accordingly, she brought up her spelling grade from a D to a B. During a small group literacy discussion, Allan could not name any fact that he found interesting from a passage in the book they were reading:

> T: Allan what’s something exciting or um important that you learned. Or new? Or interesting?
>
> Al: huh?
>
> T: Nothing you knew at all? I’m just teasing you. Okay, Allan? What’s an interesting fact you learned. It doesn’t have to be on just this page, it can be anywhere in the pages that you read. Do you need another minute Allan? (pause)
>
> Ss: He’s shy
>
> T: Want us to come back to you?
>
> Al: yeah

Allan actually had very little time to answer, but finally, Mrs. Dawson did pause to give him a chance. He still could not name an interesting fact, which his classmates attributed to him being shy, which was true. Nevertheless, this was a characteristic of Allan’s engagement with literacy, if not asked a direct fact, he could rarely give an answer. He simply was not interested in the literacy activities.

Talia specifically used her ambivalence to work the system within the classroom. She did not like literacy activities in the classroom, therefore she frequently worked to make those activities as painless as possible by attempting to change the system. She

regularly blurted out information during class which was sometimes accepted and other times ignored. When the class wrote their fairytales Talia suggested drawing:

T: Talia, say that louder for everybody to hear?

Ta: I said can we draw the castle in the clouds?

T: Okay, so your kingdom, you would want to draw your kingdom someplace. That's good, umm, that's another way to do our plan, we're going to spend a couple of days planning this, so maybe one of things we want to do is you draw that place. I was gonna have you just write about it, but I think it might be much better if you actually drew that place, umm. Drew who your main character was. Drew who your umm, its called a villain or a villainess. Who's your bad person, who's your good person, who's the good, who's the evil?

She made a suggestion, which she would like (she liked drawing much more than writing) and Mrs. Dawson listened. Later during a reading group, she is the only student to actually bring up a fact that interested them without prompting from Mrs. Dawson, Talia noticed the 6000 calories in the text when she read a sentence aloud about another vocabulary word (tandem hitch):

Ta: …6000 calories

T: And what's it called?

S: I don't know?

T: keep reading?

Ta: endurance

T: So why do they eat so much? 6000 calories?

Ss: Oh! Giggles. Dehydrated?

T: To keep them dehydrating?

Ss: No, to keep them from dehydrating

T: What happens if you dehydrate? Talia?

Ta: You die

T: So it says to keep them from dehydrating

Ta: The dogs eat

T: So they make sure they have plenty of water or liquid actually and then food.

Later on in the discussion she mentioned another fact she noticed in the text:

Ta: and this number when I was flipping pages, they the dogs, were on top and the dogs fell into one

T: umhum

Ta: and they had go out

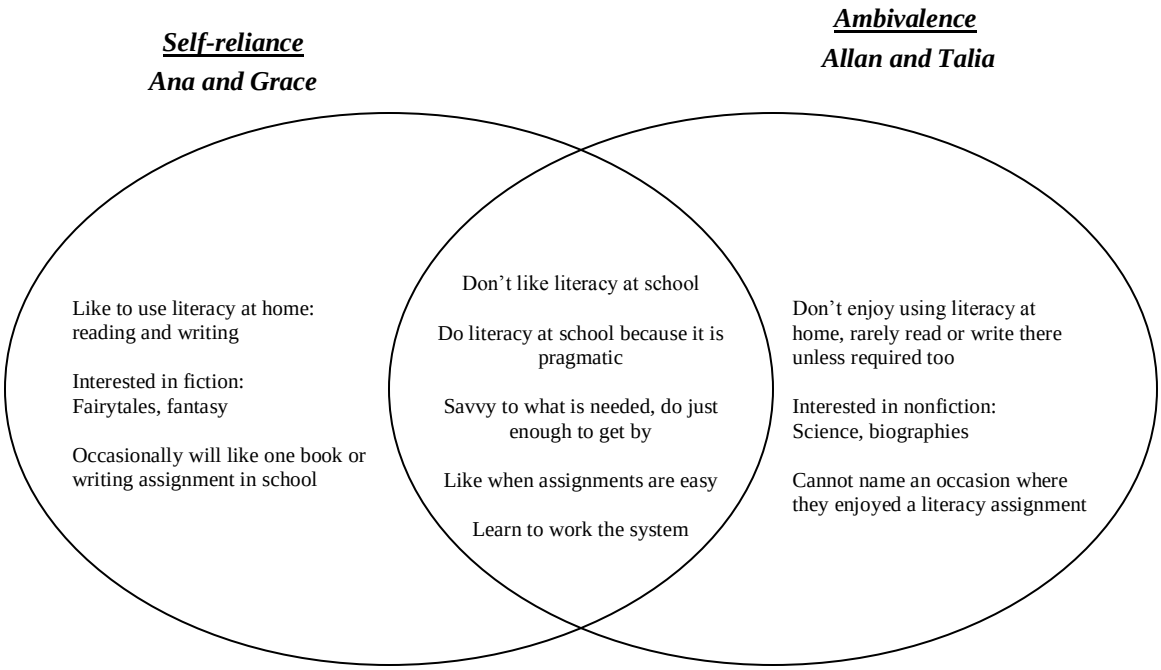
Talia frequently did her best to make literacy as interesting as possible for herself, yet she remained unattached to literacy. She stated that she didn't like it and never chose to engage in literacy at school or home (at least not with any regularity). Instead, Talia continually tried to make school as pleasant as possible by following her own interests. This occasionally backfired on her, as seen in the earlier example where she chanted "Myrtle beach, Turtle beach". School literacy was only a means to an end for Allan and Talia, they wanted it to be as painless as possible, and did not believe it had much relation to them personally anywhere and this view spilled over into their views of literacy at home.

Both stances, *self-reliance* and *ambivalence*, culminated in a similar view toward school literacy events and a lack of a literacy identity in connection with the literacy done at school, as shown in Figure 3. Both groups of students did not like school literacy, in each case they engaged in school literacy events because it was practical, they needed to succeed at school. Therefore, they became savvy to what was needed to succeed, this was reflected very much by the pragmatic and practical aspects of their Discourse. Each student did just enough to get by at a level that was acceptable to their needs. This also encouraged them to learn to work the system to alter it to their own needs, a conclusion which will be discussed in Chapter 6. Nevertheless, they essentially did not develop a literacy identity, at least in relation to the literacy they experienced in school, which was the extent of this research. Literacy was not personal, it did not touch their souls in any way, thus they detached from a literacy identity. They only worked within their social world to complete literacy; they did not bring their intimate selves to interact with the world. Rather literacy events were a necessary hurdle to jump in order to reach their goals. Thus, the Discourses of the fourth-graders in Mrs. Dawson's class reveal that they did not develop a literacy identity at all; rather they remained detached from the school literacy events they completed each day. Literacy experiences were simply activities to be completed in an allotted time frame.

This chapter has presented answers to the three research questions:

1. What are fourth graders' Discourses of literacy in a standards-based/testing driven world?
2. What or whom mediates those Discourses?

Figure 3. Literacy and Identity.



3. What do the Discourses reveal about the fourth graders' developing identities as literacy learners?

These three questions have been considered within the context of Erika Dawson's fourth-grade classroom at Thornhill elementary, the results do not necessarily describe any other fourth-grade classroom, unless similarities in the context can be drawn. In Chapter 6, the conclusions that can be drawn from these results will be explored.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

This naturalistic research study has attempted to build an understanding of how fourth-graders in one specific fourth grade class construct a Discourse of literacy and how that Discourse affects them as students. Set in a college town, in an impoverished mountainous, Middle-Atlantic state, the researcher regularly visited one fourth grade classroom at Thornhill Elementary School over the course of five months, recording classroom conversations, taking field notes and conducting interviews with focal participants. This data was used to answer three research questions:

1. What are fourth graders' Discourses of literacy in a standards-based/testing driven world?
2. What or whom mediates those Discourses?
3. What do the Discourses reveal about the fourth graders' developing identities as literacy learners?

The research questions led to the following results. The fourth-graders' Discourses of literacy within their context reflected three major principles. The Discourse was *personal*, *pragmatic* and *particular*. *Personal* aspects of the Discourse involved popular culture references, place knowledge and personal experiences. These were used to integrate new knowledge into existing knowledge schemas with limited success. The *pragmatic* elements of the Discourse focused on the practical aspects of literacy activities. These statements ensured that students knew how to appropriately complete

their assignments with an assured measure of success. Finally, the Discourse was *particular*. This element was the most prevalent in the classroom conversations. All literacy events oriented around particular facts, which were drawn from a variety of texts and classroom experiences. Thus most of the Discourse usages focused on finding and sharing the appropriate facts as specified by the literacy events. According to Bruner (2002) and Bahktin (1981), dialogue offers a window into the mind of the speakers. The Discourse developed by the fourth-grade students in Erika Dawson's class gave insight into how the students used language to negotiate their classroom experiences. They choose their words in order to best understand the tasks they were given to do and to make them as easy as possible. They developed a Discourse that all of the students adhered to during literacy activities that revealed what and who was important in their classroom. The personal elements brought their own knowledge to the table to work with in activities. Pragmatic elements acknowledged that the teacher set the assignments and was exacting in how they were completed, thus incorporating this into their Discourse helped to ensure their literacy success. Particular elements reflected both the teacher's emphasis on facts, as well as the students need to make literacy as easy as possible. By incorporating these three elements into a Discourse the fourth grade students ensured that they would use their language to their advantage and succeed in school. Their language choices and the development of their Discourse revealed their literacy identities as well as explained many of their motivations in how they approached school.

The Discourses of the fourth-graders were mediated by their teacher. As the *filter* of knowledge in the classroom, the teacher mediated knowledge as she accepted correct answers, expanded partially correct answers and rejected incorrect answers. The students

brought some knowledge (as evidenced by their Discourse) to literacy events, but ultimately their experiences of literacy were filtered by the teacher who determined correct answers and what held significance in the literacy classroom (facts, in this instance). The teacher took on several different roles as a filter. She acted as a *project manager*, determining tasks, sets goals and evaluating the end results of curriculum based tasks and literacy activities. In this she was guided by the textbooks she had as resources, the tradition of her prior experience as a fourth-grade teacher, and her views of student interest (which in fact did not frequently jive with the actual interests of the students). As a *coach/trainer*, she prepared her students for the standardized tests by teaching toward the state curriculum standards. This role was greatly affected by the pressure the teacher felt in preparing the students for the standardized tests from the state, her administration and the benchmark test results of the students. The teacher emphasized the standards, which would be tested and exposed the students to test-like situations in an attempt to prepare the students. Finally, as *gatekeeper*, she determined who had access to resources and rewards within Thornhill and beyond. The teacher mediated the Discourses of the students through these roles, in spite of the fact that in each case the influences that caused the teacher to take on the role (curriculum constraints, testing performance, resource access), was ultimately dealt with directly by the students.

Ultimately, the Discourse played little role in the students' development of literacy identities, as the students were detached from school literacy. Instead, students engaged in school literacy events for a pragmatic reasons, to complete requirements and to make school as painless as possible. Literacy events at school were not connected with their lives, experiences or personal views. For those that developed a stance of *self-*

reliance, they valued literacy for personal experience and development at home, but at school found little to interest or engage them in literacy activities. Others took on a stance of *ambivalence*, where they had little interest in literacy activities at home or school. These students did not like to engage in literacy activities and so choose to always search for the easiest methods to complete assignments, either completely removing themselves from any personal aspects of literacy or trying to always make literacy more interesting so that it was less boring. These stances did not change the end result for how the students viewed school literacy. Both groups of students ultimately learned to work the school system, which is revealed in their Discourse. They used personal, pragmatic and particular language to identify and hone in on key knowledge needed to succeed in their fourth-grade classroom. Literacy had little or no personal meaning for these students; it was only useful in how it allows them to succeed in school. These results lead to multiple conclusions.

The Collision of Traditional and Progressive Classrooms

The collision of *traditional* and *progressive* classrooms refers to a collision of philosophies within one classroom. Mrs. Dawson's classroom had elements of more traditional classrooms as well as elements of progressive classrooms, yet while her students did learn facts, it can be called into question as to whether they developed higher order thinking skills or deeper personal skills in her classroom. This section will explore what happened to cause the students to detach from any type of literacy identity and to focus so strongly on pragmatic and particular aspects of literacy.

Cambourne's Conditions for Learning

In Chapter 2, the literature review set forth Cambourne's conditions for learning (1995). This was a set of seven conditions that need to be present to ensure learning in any situation. Consideration of these conditions revealed interesting conclusions about the literacy events in Mrs. Dawson's classroom. First *immersion*, the students were indeed immersed in reading and writing; these types of activities were found across the school day throughout many subjects. *Demonstration* frequently existed in the classroom, as Mrs. Dawson led literacy discussions, and frequently even gave the answers to questions, for example she provided chapter summaries for students to copy, rather than developing a class summary. *Engagement* was critical, but tenuous in Mrs. Dawson's class. Students did indeed work on the literacy activities they were given, but this did not ensure engagement. Since answers were almost always given before work was turned in, students only had to moderately work on their own, as long as they paid attention when the class went over the answers, they would do fine on the assignment. Nevertheless, many students did make attempts, because they felt a *responsibility* to learn and succeed in school. Thus they made *approximations* that neared the correct answer. This was particularly evident in classroom transcripts, as students rarely gave answers that completely met Mrs. Dawson's *expectations*, rather she continually expanded the answers for the students in her *responses* to their answers. Thus each condition was present, but learning was not compelled by the conditions in the classroom, rather students had to bring their own motivation to the classroom in order to learn.

Student Habitus

The students did bring some motivation with them into the classroom, mostly in the form of habitus, or behavior that was profitable for a situation, specifically here for school. First, the students had a habitus of school behavior. Over their five years in school, they had developed an understanding of what was appropriate behavior at school, especially since they had attended a school like Thornhill, which had fairly consistent expectations across all of the grades. Of course, each classroom had its own quirks, but by the Spring semester when this research took place, the sense of habitus for this classroom was already developed. The habitus of Mrs. Dawson's classroom included rules such as not calling out, not interrupting Mrs. Dawson when she was talking with an adult and other mantras that described behavior, which Mrs. Dawson started and the children finished. Mrs. Dawson said:

T: writing is what kind of time?

Ss: quiet!

T: right, quiet time, its thinking time, there's no…

Ss: talking

Students heard these mantras so regularly that they were ingrained into them as a form of habitus.

In less formal ways, the students developed a habitus of what worked in the classroom. They learned that trying to answer a question, even if you get it wrong completely (or make a wild guess) was probably a good idea, because then Mrs. Dawson would think you had some information written down and that you thought about the work at least somewhat before she went over the answers. It also brought attention from the

teacher, even if it was occasionally negative attention, it showed that you know what you were supposed to do at school (try to answer questions) and that you made an attempt. Thus the students in Mrs. Dawson's class were highly adept at starting assignments, they knew the routines and in the case of most literacy assignments, while topics changed, the format rarely did. Their sense of habitus told them that starting was worthwhile, but that finishing was harder (it required more effort) and may not be worth it, because Mrs. Dawson would go over the answers later and effectively finishing the assignment correctly for you. Therefore, students frequently started assignments and then drifted in and out of them until Mrs. Dawson went over the answers. Since each answer had only one correct answer, there was no reason to think too hard about the answers, as your input may or may not be correct and would not add to any greater understanding either way.

Where is the Mismatch?

Somewhere a mismatch occurred that supported mediocre learning in the classroom and allowed students to detach themselves from any kind of literacy identity. The burden of the mismatch seemed to lie on the teacher, as the students had less knowledge and experience to bring to the table, but the contextual influences that mediated Mrs. Dawson's decisions must also not be ignored.

First, Mrs. Dawson had a lack of knowledge about what the students actually know. She frequently worked from a position that did not take into account the student's prior knowledge. In the fairytale writing discussions, it was apparent in the transcripts that the students had virtually no knowledge of what a fairytale actually was to draw upon to discuss elements of a fairytale. They made wild guesses involving all of the popular culture references they could imagine that might possibly fit based on what Mrs.

Dawson has already said. Thus, building prior knowledge rarely occurred in the classroom. This was an understandable choice given the emphasis on standards-based instruction, as the state standards (and previous test results are the focus on instruction in the school, "at the beginning of the year we look at the responses and gear our instruction to that." Prior knowledge played little role when instruction focuses on the state standards, which are by design generalized across the state. Also, Mrs. Dawson often made instructional choices using her years of teaching experience as a guide. This was rewarded in her school, she had been held up as an exemplary teacher for many years, and that status was the reason I was allowed to research in her class. Her methods were considered proven, which again left little room for the prior knowledge of this particular class of students. Furthermore her life experience and knowledge gained over that time frequently played a role in how she filtered the knowledge in the classroom so she rarely sent the students to original sources which prevented them from drawing their own conclusions and gaining knowledge on their own.

The other part of the mismatch occurred when Mrs. Dawson frequently did not require hard academic work of the students. She demanded quiet, orderly work in her classroom, but difficult academic work was rarely engaged in. Most assignments only skimmed surface knowledge, as the questions were predominately basic fact questions that required answers extracted directly out of the text. Very little thought was needed to answer the questions. Mrs. Dawson mistakenly equated quiet, orderly work with challenging academic work. Again, though, this type of classroom was rewarded within her school setting, and held up as exemplary by her administration that appeared to desire quiet, orderly classrooms.

These elements of mismatch in the classroom, between the students and the teacher, revealed the collision between traditional and progressive classroom philosophies. First it should be noted that Mrs. Dawson did not fall into one camp, while she had many elements of a traditional philosophy in her literacy instruction, she was also open to new progressive ideas, and she did try them out in her classroom. Thus, her classroom illustrated some of the problems teachers faced as they try to integrate and employ elements of both philosophies. When Mrs. Dawson did not build background knowledge, this caused real problems when she tried out progressive philosophies. In more traditional activities, it was not as much of a problem, because less knowledge needed to be brought to the activity by the student; instead it was all extracted from the text. But, as in the fairytale example, the students' lack of background knowledge greatly inhibited their understandings of fairytales, as they had nowhere to gain needed knowledge. The fairytale writing assignment followed a writer's workshop model, which fit into a progressive philosophy. The collision was illustrated again when Mrs. Dawson did not require higher order thinking from her students as they completed literacy assignments. This meant that even when she allowed students to work in small groups and held class discussions to consider answers to questions, greater learning did not result from the experiences. Instead, the progressive ideas were derailed by the more traditional, fact-oriented questions and the activity becomes an example of rote-fact recitations, for which the inputs of multiple minds is not needed. Thus, good philosophical ideas did not actually play out in the classroom in a meaningful way for the teacher and students.

Anxious-Ambivalent Students

The learning mismatches between the teacher and the students, as well as the collision of traditional and progressive philosophies within their classroom served to create anxious-ambivalent students. Psychology literature detailed attachment styles in young children and it became relevant here. Attachment studies considered how young children handled an unfamiliar situation with or without their primary caregiver present in the room (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Several different styles of attachment to the primary caregivers where developed. A secure attachment meant that the child was secure in the love of their caregiver and thus could face a strange situation with relative confidence. An unsecure attachment meant that the child was not secure in the love of their caregiver, and thus was unable to face a strange situation with confidence, either clinging to the caregiver or ignoring the situation altogether.

One type of unsecure attachment can be applied here, the anxious-ambivalent attachment. With an anxious-ambivalent attachment, a child was extremely worried in a strange situation and highly distressed when their caregiver departs, but they were ambivalent when the caregiver returns, resisting providing affectionate responses to the caregiver's return, yet staying close to the caregiver. Many psychologists thought this type of attachment occurs when a young child was cared for on the parents' terms, instead of the child's terms, so care seemed to be haphazard to the child, because they were unsure of when the caregiver would respond promptly and when they would not.

This type of attachment was informative for the fourth-graders in Mrs. Dawson's class. Frequently, the students did not know when Mrs. Dawson would accept their answers or ideas as valid, and it was an unpredictable response. Thus the children kept

trying with their ideas since sometimes they worked, providing them with the rewards of teacher approbation as well as new knowledge, while other times their ideas were completely ignored. Furthermore, since all knowledge was acquired on Mrs. Dawson's terms, the students had very little say in how they went about learning, she chose when and how to provide learning opportunities. This resulted in anxious-ambivalent students. The students were anxious because they never knew what types of response to their learning attempts they would receive in their classroom, and yet they were ambivalent because they had so little success that a lack of success was not overly distressing. Thus they disengaged from learning and divided their sense of personal identity from classroom literacy events.

Mixed Messages to Students

These students received significantly mixed messages about literacy. They saw that it was frequently a practical skill which provided them with a modicum of success in the classroom, yet occasionally there were hints that it could be more, as a personal connection was attempted, or even made at times (such as Ana's personal stories during a small group reading assignment with Grace). While there was an element of realism to these messages, as truthfully it was good for students to understand the practical nature of literacy and not only the personal nature of literacy, the messages were not without problems. Mainly, these students only saw literacy for its practical uses, and did not understand that it could also be a deep personal experience. Rosenblatt (1995) explained the personally transformative experience that engagement with literacy could bring to students, especially those with otherwise limited experiences. These students were

unaware of the wider world that literacy could offer them, beyond its solely practical purposes.

Economic Model of Learning

As the fourth-grade students saw literacy learning as only having practical uses, they viewed learning as a means to a specific end. Economic models rely on inputs and outputs, which are directly correlated to each other. What was input into the system predicted the outputs. The students used learning in the same way. They put in enough effort to ensure that they have success, which was measured by attention from the teacher, other students and their families. For many students, this was a positive cycle, as they put forth enough effort to ensure good grades so that they did not lose privileges. For others this was a negative cycle, where less effort got them more attention, even if they did lose privileges. In Mrs. Dawson's classroom, these models were in full blossom. For example, Ana was particularly concerned with grades, so she put significant effort into her work, and when she didn't quite finish (which was frequent) she paid attention when the correct answers were later stated by Mrs. Dawson. She also frequently helped struggling students, which gave her attention from those students and Mrs. Dawson, who appreciated her helping others. Thus Ana learned and received attention for her efforts. Talia, on the other hand, did not particularly care about grades. She didn't want to do too badly, as she would get in trouble at home, but she was much more concerned with attention from other students. Hence, she only put a little effort into work, preferring to spend more time chatting with friends, under the guise of work, but she knew to pay attention when Mrs. Dawson told the correct answers, so that she maximized her grades. Thus Talia worked the economic system to get what she wanted most, which was

attention from other students, while still managing to make adequate grades. The students had learned the system of learning in Mrs. Dawson's class and more specifically, how to get exactly what they wanted from it.

Lack of Empathy

Since literacy was a pragmatic skill for these students, who mainly used it to work the learning system within their classroom, the students developed a lack of empathy toward others. The economic model of learning was particularly self-focused. The students used it to get what they wanted, whether it was knowledge, status or success in school. Since literacy was viewed in only practical ways, the students were not being exposed in school to literature that might have helped them become more aware of the world around them and more conscious of other's feelings. They never walked in a character's shoes to understand what other's lives were like and thus gain greater empathy toward those around them. Overall, the students in Mrs. Dawson's class were frequently cruel toward one another, unless Mrs. Dawson was hovering over them. Grace frequently cried about other student's comments to her. Ana chose to ignore cruel comments. Allan was quiet and did not engage much socially in the classroom. Talia, one the other hand, frequently made cruel comments to others. Students in the class frequently chose to be cruel to enhance their classroom status. Others, like Ana, chose to help others with their schoolwork and to attempted to gain status that way. Nevertheless, most of the students had very little awareness of the feelings of others. Whenever Mrs. Dawson was absent, the class's behavior was atrocious, as the students were rude to each other, called each other names, yelled at the substitutes and refused to do school work. While all of the responsibility for developing empathy could not lie on a teacher or a

school community, it was disconcerting to realize that a classroom community did not develop empathy in its' members, despite available tools, of which the most obvious ones were literacy tools. Many books were read throughout the school year, which have been used for developing empathy, but as the focus of instruction was on fact and the state standards, empathy was not considered.

While multiple factors have led to this lack of empathy in students, it must be acknowledged that the pressures put on the teacher, which mediated her instruction helped to create the focus on facts. Curriculum restraints, test-driven learning and limited resources all bound the teacher in her instruction. Testing specifically drove the teacher to focus on the facts as defined by the state curriculum standards altering some of Mrs. Dawson's instructional patterns and decisions. While the conclusions about the children's views toward school and specifically literacy activities cannot be linked directly to school accountability laws, such as *No Child Left Behind, 2001*, the implications from this research remain and must reflect upon those laws, especially as *No Child Left Behind, 2001* is due for renewal this year. As pressures grow and create larger collisions in philosophies within the classroom, stronger effects, which are often hidden in plain sight, will continue to affect students in classrooms dramatically, as demonstrated by this research.

Future Research Directions

The conclusions inherent in the data from this study led to many possible new or continuing avenues for research. As illustrated by the collision between traditional and progressive philosophies in Mrs. Dawson's classroom, more research is needed which considers how individuals in school are affected by the changing norms of today's

schools. Teachers, administrators/officials and students are all affected to varying degrees by the ever-changing requirements of modern schools. The disequilibrium this creates for these individuals should be investigated to see how it ultimately affects each group. If ways to positively deal with the disequilibrium can be identified for each group, then many people would be able to learn to more effectively negotiate their environment and maximize their potential.

Continued teacher education should also be an emphasis of research. School such as Thornhill represent a gold mine of information, as they are *fringe* schools, or schools where the collision of traditional and progressive philosophies is strong. Most teachers at Thornhill, as well as the administration, are open to innovation in the classroom, but the school is still bound by traditional school patterns. This type of school is probably the most prevalent in America, but least studied, as progressive schools are most frequently considered in research. At these fringe schools, teachers are often ready and willing to embrace staff development and to try out new ideas, within certain limits. Researchers and universities need to be willing to work with teachers to meet their needs for staff development, rather than demanding certain conditions. Teachers need to be challenged to continually interrogate their practices, especially those entrenched by tradition, as the ever-changing environment of today's schools calls into question where those traditional patterns are still effective. Research into deepening literacy understandings in students, and how students learn to have deeper literacy understandings would be appropriate.

Finally, a continued focus on children's voices is imperative. This research has attempted to illuminate the voices of children through describing their Discourses and experiences in one fourth-grade classroom. The literacy experiences that Mrs. Dawson's

fourth graders had greatly influenced how they approached school and literacy events. The students ended up detaching themselves from literacy and not developing a literacy identity, because literacy did not hold personal meaning for them beyond its practical applications. This led to a lack of empathy, especially within school situations for the students, which is a surprising and disturbing result of the data from this research. Thus, it is necessary that children's voices continue to be illuminated so that the long-term consequences can be considered as we make choices about how we educate students and on what issues hold significance in classrooms.

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APPENDIX

Possible Interview Questions

Fourth-Grade Students

Interview 1

1. Tell me about your family.
2. What are your favorite things to do out of school? In school?
3. What do you do in the afternoon when you go home from school?
4. How did you spend your summer?
5. What do you think of fourth grade?
6. What was your favorite grade in school? Why?
7. What is your favorite school subject? Why?
8. Tell me what a typical day for you is like?

Interview 2

1. Why do people read? Write?
2. How did you learn to read? Write?
3. Who helps you with your reading? Writing?
4. What do you do when you when you have trouble reading text? Writing?
5. What types of things do you like to read? Write?
6. What makes someone a good reader? Writer?
7. Who do you know who is a good reader? Writer?
8. How would you help someone who is having trouble reading? Writing?

9. Where do you like to read? Write?
10. How do you choose what you read? Write?
11. How often do you read, in school, at home? Write?
12. How do you feel about writing? Reading?
13. Do you like to write? Why or why not?
14. Do you like to read? Why or why not?

Fourth-Grade Teacher

Interview 1

1. How did you decide to become a teacher?
2. What do you view as your most important job as a teacher?
3. What made you choose to teach where you do?
4. Tell me about your teacher preparation program and any professional development you have participated in.
5. Why do you teach?
6. What is your philosophy of teaching?
7. What do you believe is key for teaching fourth graders?
8. How did you decide to teach fourth grade?

Interview 2

1. How do you make your literacy instructional decisions?
2. What are your literacy goals for your students?
3. What do you think makes a good 3rd grade writer? Reader?
4. How do you choose texts for use in your classroom?
5. What methods do you use to help struggling readers? Writers?

6. What has been your most effective/exemplary literacy practices this year?

7. What types of reading/writing activities in school do your students enjoy most? Dislike most?

8. How do you use literacy instruction to enhance home-school connections?

9. What do you think makes a good literacy teacher?

10. How do you feel about teaching literacy?

School Superintendent

1. What are the testing mandates for your school/subject area, etc.?

2. How does testing affect your job?

3. What do you believe should occur in literacy classrooms?

4. How do you choose to hire literacy teachers, teachers of grades impacted by testing?

5. What do you do in your school/job to prepare teachers/students for testing?

6. What do you see as the purpose for testing?

7. Does testing change your expectations for literacy classrooms?